

FOCUS: Safe Environment †

Prepared by Catechetical Ministry of St. Athanasius Parish



There shall be eternal summer in the grateful heart.
– CELIA THAXTER

Keeping our promise to protect:

- *Frequently Asked Questions (Page 1)*
- *Separate Project Sheets for children and youth (inside)*
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Have a Great and Safe Summer, See You in the Fall

At the end of the school year, we want to extend our sincerest wishes for a happy and safe summer to you and your families. We are thankful for your child and youth's participation in the Catechetical Program at St. Athanasius Parish this year.

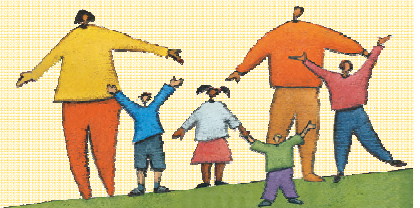
As a parish within the Diocese of San Jose, we are required to comply with the U.S. Bishops' *Charter for the Protection of Children and Youth*. We ask for your cooperation in reviewing the enclosed information with your family about ways how to deal with people who put kids in challenging, confusing or comprising situations.

The prevention of child abuse requires more than adult awareness. We must also offer children and youth ways how they can overcome the advances of someone who intends to do them harm. The Diocese has provided materials designed to assist us through VIRTUS Protecting God's Children. The separate project sheets inside builds upon the basic concepts of maintaining safety as provided by VIRTUS.

We are available to help answer your questions that you may have. Please keep up with the Sunday Bulletin on updates for the catechetical classes in

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

JEREMIAH 29.11



FAQs—Frequently Asked Questions of Parents

Why do I have to be trained? This is a clergy problem.

Child sexual abuse is a widespread societal problem, with any adult with authority over children and youth. The more people who are trained to recognize the warning signs of an offender, the safer our children are.

My children are too young to hear this. Aren't you destroying the 'innocent period' of their development?

Teaching children about boundaries and safe touches is not sex education. There are many safety issues that children learn: bike safety, water safety, fire prevention, driver's training,

etc. Keeping children unaware of the dangers around them does not keep them safe.

Shouldn't morality be taught in the home, not in church? You are right, morality is best taught in the home, but this is personal safety training and not sex education. Catholic moral theology compels us to keep children safe. Parents are the primary educators of their children, and those who do not want their children to participate in the religious education portion of the training may opt out. They should still be offered materials to assist in how to teach their children to be safe.

You can find more answers to Frequently Asked Questions at the website for the U.S. Bishops: usccb.org/ocyp/faqs.shtml



PROJECT SHEET

Name _____

Today you are going to learn some ways how to protect yourself or how to keep a safe environment. See if you can find the words below as you complete this project. Every time you see one, make a circle around it to help you remember how the words are used. Being safe can be fun, too.

surprised secret instincts confused secluded uncomfortable

On which special occasion below did you ever get a gift?

Birthday


First Communion

Confirmation

Graduation

Christmas

Other _____



Gifts and Secrets

Sometimes gifts do not look like presents. Gifts can come in all kinds of ways. They can be snacks that your parents do not let you eat, games your parents do let you play, and extra money that your parents will not give you.

The gift is not the problem. The problem is if someone gives you a gift and wants you to keep it a secret. You should follow the three Safety Rules.

1. NO

Don't be afraid to say no.

2. GO

Walk away.

3. TELL

Talk to a trusted adult about the whole situation immediately.

Sometimes gifts are given to "get something" from you. For example, the gift may be used as a way to get you to do something you do not want to do or are uncomfortable doing.

Gifts given in secret cannot be accepted. You **MUST** tell your parents or a trusted adult if someone tries to give you a gift and wants you to keep it a secret.

One way to tell if you can trust someone is if that person respects your wishes to be safe and if he or she understands the rules set by your parents.

Trust Your Instincts

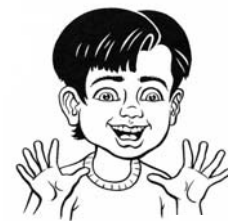
Do people ever give you gifts and tell you to keep it a secret?

Remember that if your feelings are telling you that something "just isn't right" then it probably is not an okay situation. Your instincts will not only help keep you safe, but they can also show others how big and responsible you are becoming.

Our feelings and emotions put us in touch with our instincts. For example when we are feeling:

- Happy
- Confused
- Sad
- Surprised

Connect the moods above with the following expressions:



No Thank You to the Ungift

A gift is given out of love. Nothing in return is expected of you. Who would give you such a gift? We tell this person "thank you." An un-gift is a gift that makes you feel uncomfortable, uneasy, or uncertain. What situations could you imagine an ungift would be given? We say "no thank you."

Make Your Own Map

As a gift for yourself, on a blank sheet of paper, make a map of your neighborhood. Draw in all of the safe areas. Also mark out the places that are not so safe.

It is safe where there are usually people around or is out in the open where everyone can see each other.

It is not safe where there is hardly anyone around or the place is closed off and secluded.





Have you ever come upon a DO NOT ENTER sign? In order to be safe, you shouldn't enter.

There are also situations or people that it would be better to keep away from, even when you're on the computer or cell. Here are some pointers on what you can do.

- You can say no when you feel uncomfortable or confused by how a person is acting—even if you thought you could trust him or her.
- You should not go with or meet alone with someone in an isolated or out-of-the-way area where no one else is around.
- You have been chatting online through a social networking site. You have never met the person, but by a picture the person seems friendly and about your age. You should not accept an invitation to meet unless you have a parent with you.
- You call the wrong number by mistake and instantly disconnect the call. You then get a text from that same wrong number. The text is asking your name, gender, age, what you look like, and where you live. Never give away this information online or in a text.

Be Safe!



☒ UNEASY SITUATIONS

Remember to trust your own instincts about what is "okay" and what is "not okay." Always tell your parents or a trusted adult about any situation that makes you feel uncomfortable. Cross out, like this ☒, the uneasy situations below. You should only have two remaining boxes clear.

A teacher invites you into the teacher lounge when others are not around.	An adult volunteer with the youth group asks you to come alone to a secluded area to help load or unload something.	A bus driver offers to take you to a drive-thru restaurant after school for a shake after all of the other kids are dropped off.
A coach asks you to stay late after everyone else is gone home for some one-on-one practice.	After Mass, you are standing in line outside church for donuts and lemonade. Your family is close by.	A religious education teacher offers to give you a ride home every week after class.
After class, you are waiting with other students to be picked up. The Director asks you to help straighten up the class room.	A friend of your parents always seems to want to touch you. This person reaches for you every time you are within reach.	A neighbor is constantly giving you things like candy bars and soda. Sometimes even Wii games and gift cards with expectations.

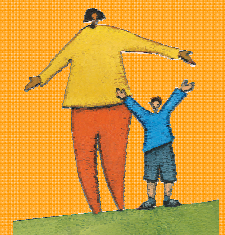
Your Plans in Life

It is so important to talk with your parents about all situations in your life. Your parents love you and want you to be safe and make wise choices. Good communication with your parents will help keep you safe and give you the good sense to recognize risky situations.

You need to trust the safe adults around you to keep you away from harm. We need to trust one another to be safe. And we need to trust that God will always be by our side to help us through tough and confusing times.

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

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What did you learn?

List three things that you found helpful and would like to remember from this safe environment project.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Let us pray

Good and gracious God,
you are constantly with us, wherever we go.

Guide us through risky situations and help us to trust our own instincts.

We ask this through Jesus Christ,
our Lord.

Amen.



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How is the Catholic Church Combating Sexual Abuse?

The Catholic Church has done more to protect children than almost any other organization in the United States. Consider:

- 1) Safe Environment training is taking place in 193 dioceses/eparchies of the country. Over 2 million adults have been trained to recognize the behavior of offenders and what to do about it.
- 2) Over 5 million children have been equipped with the skills to help them protect themselves from abuse.
- 3) Background checks are conducted on Church personnel who have contact with children. Over 2 million volunteers and employees; 52,000 clerics; 6,205 candidates for ordination have had their backgrounds evaluated.
- 4) All dioceses/eparchies have Codes of Conduct spelling out what is acceptable behavior. This serves to let people know what can and cannot be done as well as letting others know what behavior can be expected. It encourages the reporting of suspicious behavior.
- 5) All dioceses/eparchies have Victim Assistance Coordinators, assuring victims that they will be heard. In 2009, \$6,536,109 was spent on therapy for the victims of clergy sexual abuse.
- 6) All dioceses/eparchies have Safe Environment Coordinators who assure the ongoing compliance to the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People.
- 7) Bishops are meeting with victims.
- 8) Dioceses/eparchies have Healing Masses, retreats for victim/survivors and other reconciliation events.
- 9) There is a Zero Tolerance policy on abusers since 2002. When even a single act of sexual abuse by a priest or deacon is admitted or is established after an appropriate process in accord with canon law, the offending priest or deacon will be removed permanently from ecclesiastical ministry, not excluding dismissal from the clerical state, if the case so warrants.
- 10) Dioceses/eparchies require intensive background screening as well as psychological testing for those wishing to enter the seminary.

The Catholic Church has worked hard to protect children. Much has been done but more needs to be done. Until child sexual abuse is no longer a part of society, the Church will continue its efforts to stop it. —Office of Child and Youth Protection, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops

Diocese Remains Committed to the Protection of Children

The recent revelations of sexual abuse of minors by clergy of various countries throughout the world have reminded us of those particularly painful events, beginning in 2002, when the Church in the United States was rocked by reports of the same kind of horrific acts against children and young people. I am deeply saddened by these revelations and by the fact that they have happened, that more young people have been victimized, and that trust has been betrayed. I know that you are also saddened and, yes, outraged by these reports.

There can be no excusing or rationalization of the efforts on the part of some in the Church's leadership to ignore or cover up the terrible misdeeds by priests and others in authority. Once a member of the clergy (deacon, priest or bishop) is credibly accused and, after a

full investigation, found to be guilty of any such act of abuse, that cleric must be forever barred from any form of ministry in the Church. The Diocese of San Jose remains committed to the Safe Environment programs that are in place in all of our parishes. (Excerpt from letter, April 20, 2010)

Pray for our Church that it will weather the current storms and that humbled, perhaps, it will be better able to be a sign to all people of the goodness of God, made manifest in Jesus, the Christ, and abiding with us in the power of the Holy Spirit.—BISHOP MCGRATH



BISHOP PATRICK J. MCGRATH