

Safe Environment Training
Diocese of Bismarck

In-Parish Training Provides Answers to the Following Questions:

- A. What constitutes child abuse?
- B. What actions, procedures and policies are used to prevent child abuse in any form?
- C. What signs should an adult look for in a child who may be abused?
- D. What signs should an adult look for in a person who may be abusing a child in any way?
- E. What actions should an adult take when they believe that child abuse may be occurring?
- F. What are the laws and policies in North Dakota regarding the reporting of abuse?

What Constitutes Child Abuse?

Child abuse is an act by anyone that is not accidental and harms or threatens to harm a child's physical or mental health or welfare.

Sexual abuse: At one end of the spectrum, sexual abuse includes sexual intercourse and/or its variations. These may only be the last step in a progressive pattern of sexual abuse. For that reason and because of their effects, exhibitionism, fondling and any other sexual contact with minors is also considered sexually abusive.

Other factors for sexual abuse could include personnel not providing for the protection from sexual abuse of a minor. Non-touching sexual abuse may include, but is not limited to:

- Indecent exposure/exhibitionism.
- Exposing children to pornographic material.
- Deliberately exposing a child to the act of sexual intercourse.
- Masturbation in the presence of a child.
- Making sexually provocative comments to a child.
- Child being harassed, encouraged, pressured or propositioned to perform sexually.
- Voyeurism.

Touching sexual abuse may include, but is not limited to:

- Fondling of private areas.
- Making a child touch another's sexual organs.
- Any penetration or attempt at penetration of a child's vagina, anus or mouth by a penis or any other object that doesn't have a valid medical purpose.

Sexual exploitation of a child may include, but is not limited to:

- Engaging a child or soliciting a child for the purposes of prostitution.
- Using a child in the recording, filming, photographing or as a model in the filming or photographing of pornographic material.
- Denying of age-appropriate privacy to a child.

Sexual activity between children should be considered a risk factor in most situations if coercion exists, or if one child is pre-pubescent and the other is post-pubescent. If the acts appear to be more sophisticated than age appropriate, consideration should be given to possible sexual victimization of at least one of these children by a third party.

Emotional abuse: Acts that impair a child's psychological growth and/or development. This often results in a negative self-concept and disturbed behavior. It is also defined as psychological consequences of patterns of behavior by a parent or guardian involving rejecting, isolating, threatening, ignoring, and/or exposing to negative influences, whether through acts of omission or commission. These acts are judged by a mixture of community values and professional expertise to be inappropriate or damaging.

(The definition of "neglect" in NDCC 50-25.1 is used when a decision is made that "Services are Required" and the Maltreatment Type is Psychological).

Emotional abuse includes, but is not limited to:

- Personnel consistently single out one child to use as a scapegoat, criticize or punish, or receive fewer rewards of praise.
- Personnel have consistent unrealistic expectations of achievement for the child that are shown by personnel criticizing, punishing, or condemning when the child does not achieve far above capabilities in school, sports, or social status.
- Personnel regularly denigrate and belittle the child, stating that the child is different and unacceptable, or that the child reminds everyone of a person who is unacceptable.
- Personnel don't allow the child physical contact, nurturing.
- Faults and shortcomings of a child are clearly overemphasized.
- Criticism/disapproval is disproportional to actual behavior or used in an unfair and inconsistent way.
- Personnel use excessive threats of punishment in an attempt to control the child.

Physical abuse: Acts that result in physical injury such as bruises, welts, scars, fractures, burns, lacerations, and abrasions. These acts often happen in the name of discipline.

Risk factors for physical abuse include, but are not limited to:

- Physically punishing an infant.
- Shaking an infant or preschooler.
- Striking children with an object or one's hand.

- Throwing children in such a manner that there is risk of injury.
- Kicking a child.
- Biting a child.
- Forcing a child to ingest a noxious substance, i.e. tobacco, alcohol, soap, pepper, Tabasco sauce, etc.
- Force-feeding.

Personnel have the right to physically restrain or move a minor in a manner that does not subject the minor to injury.

Personnel should only use force in self-defense or to prevent harm to the minor.

Child Sexual Abusers Manipulate Their Victims!

Child sexual abusers can make the child extremely fearful of telling, and only when a special effort has helped the child to feel safe, can the child talk freely.

If a child says that he or she has been molested, parents should try to remain calm and reassure the child that what happened was not their fault. Parents should seek a medical examination and psychiatric consultation.

Parents can prevent or lessen the chance of sexual abuse by:

- Telling children that “If someone tries to touch your body and do things that make you feel funny, say no to that person and tell me right away.”
- Teaching children that respect does not mean blind obedience to adults and to authority, for example, don’t tell children to, “always do everything the teacher or baby-sitter tells you to do.”
- Encouraging professional prevention programs in the local school system.

Sexually abused children and their families need immediate professional evaluation and treatment.
(American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry – 11/98)

Possible Indications of Sexual Abuse in Children

- Unusual interest in or avoidance of all things of a sexual nature.
- Sleep problems or nightmares.
- Depression or withdrawal from friends or family.
- Seductiveness.
- Statements that their bodies are dirty or damaged, or fear that there is something wrong with them in the genital area.
- Refusal to go to school.
- Delinquency/conduct problems
- Secretiveness.
- Aspects of sexual molestation in drawings, games, fantasies.
- Unusual aggressiveness, or suicidal behavior.

(American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry 11/98)

Warning Signs of a Sexual Predator

The following list describes some signs that a person might be a sexual predator:

- Insists on hugging, touching, kissing, tickling, wrestling with, or holding a child even when the child does not want this affection.
- Is overly interested in the sexuality of a particular child or teen (e.g., talks repeatedly about a child's developing body or interferes with normal teen dating).
- Manages to get time alone or insists on time alone with a child with no interruptions, such as weekend sleepovers, vacations, or camping trips.
- Spends most of his or her spare time with children or teens and has little interest in spending time with someone his or her own age.
- Regularly offers to baby-sit or takes children on outings alone.
- Buys children and teens expensive gifts or gives them money for no apparent reason.
- Frequently walks in on children or teens in the bathroom.
- Allows children or teens to consistently get away with inappropriate behaviors.

(Material taken from "Creating Safe and Sacred Places, Identifying, Preventing and Healing Sexual Abuse" St. Mary's Press, Winona, MN)

What To Do If You Become Aware of or Suspect Child Abuse

When a child tells someone about sexual abuse, a supportive, caring response is the first step in getting help for the child and reestablishing their trust in adults.

1. Report any suspicion of child abuse. If you suspect or are aware of child abuse by a cleric, report it to the chancellor of the Diocese of Bismarck – phone: 701-223-1347 – and to the local county child protection agency or protective services division.
2. If you suspect or are aware of child abuse by any parish personnel or parish volunteers, report it to your local pastor and to the local county child protection agency or protective services division.
3. Any other suspected cases of child abuse should be reported to the local county child protection agency or protective services division and/or the local police department.
4. The agency receiving the report will conduct an evaluation and will take action to protect the child.
5. Parents should consult with their pediatrician or family physician who may refer them to a physician who specializes in evaluating and treating sexual abuse. The examining doctor will evaluate the child's condition and treat any physical problem related to the abuse, gather evidence to help protect the child, and reassure the child that he or she is all right.
6. Children who have been sexually abused should have an evaluation by a child and adolescent psychiatrist or other qualified mental health professional. This process will help the experts to find out how the sexual abuse has affected them, and to determine whether ongoing professional help is necessary for the child to deal with the trauma of the abuse. The child and adolescent psychiatrist can also provide support to other family members who may be upset by the abuse.

(American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry. 11/99 Five Basic Principles in Dealing with Accusations of Sexual Abuse)

(The Diocese of Bismarck is in compliance with these guidelines)

Responding to Child Sexual Abuse

When a child tells an adult that he or she has been sexually abused, the adult may feel uncomfortable and many not know what to say or do. The following guidelines should be used when responding to children who say they have been sexually abused:

What to say if a child even hints in a vague way that sexual abuse has occurred:

- Encourage him or her to talk freely. Don't make judgmental comments.
- Show that you understand and take seriously what the child is saying.
- Child and adolescent psychiatrists have found that children who are listened to and understood do much better than those who are not. The response to the disclosure of sexual abuse is critical to the child's ability to resolve and heal the trauma of sexual abuse.
- Assure the child that they did the right thing in telling.
A child who is close to the abuser may feel guilty about revealing the secret. The child may feel frightened if the abuser has threatened to harm the child or other family members as punishment for telling the secret.
- Tell the child that he or she is not to blame for the sexual abuse:
Most children in attempting to make sense out of the abuse will believe that somehow they caused it or may even view it as a form of punishment for imagined or real wrong doings.
- Offer the child protection, and promise that you will promptly take steps to see that the abuse stops.

For Young People:

How Do I Determine the Right Kind of Relationships and What Are Signs of Abuse?

(Chapter 5 of “Sexuality and Relationships in Teen to Teen: Responding to Peers in Crisis” by Bob McCarty and published by St. Mary’s Press)

One of the most important factors for preventing abusive experiences and relationships is educating young people on the signs and characteristics of “right” relationships and those that are “not right.”

“Right” relationships foster the personal, spiritual, and emotional growth of both persons.

The qualities of healthy relationships include, but are not limited to the following:

- Ability to communicate. To be able to talk about anything; sharing feelings, dreams, hopes, and fears; to know that the other person is really listening.
- Ability to show affection. To be able to express one’s feelings and show that one cares about the other by the way one treats him or her.
- Forgiveness: To be able to forgive the mistakes of the other; to be able to trust in the forgiveness offered by the other and let the past go; to not hold a grudge.
- Honesty. To be able to be truthful about everything, including feelings.
- Vulnerability. To feel comfortable being one’s self; to let down one’s guard; to be able to risk being known personally and honestly; to feel safe.
- Dependability. To be there for each other when needed; to keep commitments.
- Humor. To be able to relax, laugh, and have fun together.
- Romance. To be able to be romantic without pressuring the other into an uncomfortable physical relationship.
- Patience. To realize that relationships go through rough times, but that doesn’t mean the relationship is poor; to be willing to work through rough times.
- Freedom. To not be possessive or jealous; to feel comfortable about the other having friends; to be able to spend time apart.

How Do I Determine the Right Kind of Relationships – and What Are Signs of Abuse?

(Chapter 7 of “Sexuality and Relationships in Teen to Teen: Responding to Peers in Crisis by Bob McCarty and published by St. Mary’s Press)

Relationships that are “not right” are obviously very different from “right” relationships.

Often they may seem at the beginning like healthy relationships, but after the initial ‘honeymoon’ stage of the relationship is over, they become harmful and hurtful.

Abuse occurs when someone does not respect another’s boundaries; uses power, tricks, threats, or violence to cross or change another’s boundaries; or inflicts hurtful or unwanted behavior (physical, verbal, emotional or sexual) on another person. According to the Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence, abuse in relationships can take various forms:

- Emotional Abuse: Putting down the person, making the person feel bad about him/herself, excessive criticism.

- Coercion and Threats: Making or carrying out threats to do something physically hurtful, threatening to expose embarrassing secrets.
- Sexual Abuse: Coercing a person to engage in sexual acts against her or his will, physically attacking the sexual parts of one's body, treating a person like a sexual object.
- Economic Abuse: Destroying one's property, using money or gifts as leverage in return for sexual favors.
- Isolation: Maintaining surveillance, controlling what a person does or who a person sees or talks to.
- Blaming, Denying: Refusing to accept responsibility for abusive behavior, blaming the victim for causing the abuse.
- Intimidation: Acts designed to frighten a person such as frightening gestures, displaying weapons, smashing objects, driving crazily.

Although violence and abuse have numerous causes, underlying or accompanying many of these is the abuser's need for power and control. Often times, the victims of abuse appear as a threat to that need or serve as a scapegoat to fill that need.

To the abuser, violence may often appear to be acceptable behavior for maintaining power and control over others. Being in control may seem to increase self-esteem, reinforce an individual's beliefs about masculinity or femininity, or relieve the feelings of loss of control in other areas of the abuser's life.

Date rape is a prevalent form of dating violence to which many young people are exposed. The abuser is a product of deep-seated problems that do not make him or her an evil person, but do make him or her a person in need of professional help. In an abusive relationship, the immediate concern is the person being abused and how to enable that person to break the cycle of abuse in order to prevent it from occurring again.

There is also a secondary concern for the abuser and enabling that person to receive the help they need to change their pattern of behavior. It is not uncommon for a victim of abuse to experience some of the following: fear, guilt, shame, loneliness, anger, rage, denial, repression, self-punishment, alcohol and drug abuse, continued involvement in abusive relationships, an unhealthy view of sex, a loss of faith, or fear in seeking help.

The reaction of other family members may not be much different and may demonstrate a lack of knowing how to respond appropriately to a victim of abuse.