

# Creating Safe Environments for Our Children

Diocese of Grand Island

Child Protection Office

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[www.gidiocese.org](http://www.gidiocese.org)





# Safety

- Safety is a basic human need.
- Basic needs must be met for development to occur.
- If we hope to foster the spiritual development of our children, we must first meet their needs for safety.



# “It Takes a Parish”

- “Children and adolescents are safer and healthier – they ‘do better’ when they grow up in a community where ‘everyone is looking out for them.’
- Children are more resilient to adversity when they have positive, consistent adults in their lives.
- Our parish and school communities can be the sort of community where adults are “looking out for” young people and where young people can encounter positive adults.



# What to “Look Out” for:

- We are accustomed to watching for some signs of risk.

For Example:

- Fire Prevention
  - Accidents / Injury
  - Infection Control / Universal Precautions
  - “Stranger Danger”
- 
- Other risks.
    - Child Sexual Abuse



# The Problem of Child Sexual Abuse

1 in 4 girls and 1 in 6 boys will be  
abused by age 18.

Most sexual abuse occurs at the  
hands of family members or by  
someone that the child knows well.



# Sexual Abuse within the Church

- There have been documented cases of sexual abuse by clergy, volunteers, educators, and other adults who work with children.
- A study commissioned by the USCCB found 10,667 allegations of abuse by Catholic clergy over a 50 year period.
- The number of children abused in a Catholic Church setting each year is a small percentage of the total number of children abused in our country each year.



# The Impact of Child Sexual Abuse

The sexual abuse of a child impacts the child in virtually all areas of development.

Cognitive

Emotional

Behavioral

Social

Spiritual

Physical



# Long Term Effects

If child sexual abuse is not effectively treated, long-term symptoms may persist into adulthood. These may include:

- PTSD and/or anxiety
- Depression and thoughts of suicide
- Sexual anxiety and disorders
- Poor body image and low self-esteem
- Use of unhealthy behaviors to mask emotional pain, (e.g., alcohol abuse, drug abuse, self-mutilation, or bingeing and purging)

**A National Center for PTSD Fact Sheet**  
Jessica Hamblen, Ph.D.  
U.S. Department of Veteran's Affairs





# The Long Term Effects of Abuse Vary by Individual

“In short, the ill effects of child sexual abuse are wide ranging. There is no one set of symptoms or outcomes that victims experience.”

APA Public Affairs




# Resiliency

- Positive outcomes for children who have been victimized by abuse have been found to be related to:
  - The presence of a consistent positive relationship with an adult.
  - A supportive, protective response to the child's disclosure of abuse.




# Defining Child Sexual Abuse



"Sexual exploitation of a child not developmentally capable of understanding or resisting the contact, or who may be psychologically or socially dependent on the offender."

Berlinder, 1977.



"Any inappropriate suggested or actual sexual exposing or touch between an adult and a child. The activity is inappropriate because the child does not understand the nature of the request and/or is coerced into the activity through deceit, threat, or because the activity is offered under the guise of normal affection."

Sandord, 1980.



# Types of Sexual Abuse

- **Physical**

- Inappropriate touching, oral or genital contact, etc.

- **Emotional**

- Viewing of sexual behavior / pornography, sexualized language, intrusive questions, etc.



## What we can do:

- **Reduce Risk** in the environment
- **Recognize** signs of distress and warning signs in relationships
- **Respond** to distress
- **Report** concerns and suspicions of abuse



United States Conference of Catholic  
Bishops

Charter for the  
Protection of Children  
and Young People





# Safety First

“Churches, schools and youth organizations must ensure that children and youth who worship, study or participate in activities therein can do so in the **safest and most secure setting** possible. Parents and caretakers must have **confidence** in these institutions before they will allow their children to become involved with them.”



# “Security is in the Eye of the Beholder”

- Being Safe
- Feeling Safe

# To Protect the Faithful

**Article 12.** Dioceses / eparchies are to maintain **safe environment programs** which the diocesan / eparchial bishop deems to be in accord with Catholic moral principles. They are to be conducted cooperatively with parents, civil authorities, educators, and community organizations to provide **education and training** for children, youth, parents, ministers, educators, volunteers and others about ways to make and maintain a safe environment for children and young people. Dioceses / eparchies are to make clear to clergy and all members of the community the **standards of conduct** for clergy and other persons in positions of trust with regard to children.



# Education and Training

- The **training** of parents, ministers, educators, church personnel, volunteers and others regularly involved with minors as to the abuse of children, including sexual abuse.
- The training is to address the **prevention, identification, response** and **reporting** of such cases.



# Reducing Risk



# Safe Environments: Not a Foreign Concept

Adults spend a great deal of time and resources creating safe environments for children.

Examples: “baby proofing,” smoke / fire alarms, security systems, bike helmets, fences / gates, monitors, tornado and fire drills, etc.



# Child Sexual Abuse

## Four Preconditions: A Model

- Precondition I: Motivation to Sexually Abuse.
- Precondition II: Overcoming Internal Inhibitions.
- Precondition III: Overcoming External Inhibitions.
- Precondition IV: Overcoming the Resistance of the Child.

Finkelhor, (1984).



# Conclusion

- Abuse requires the presence of all four prior conditions.

Finkelhor, (1984)





# Levels of Coercion

- The lowest level of coercion is verbal seduction and includes flattery.
- Vague threats - emphasis on the secret.
- Direct threats without a weapon - direct threats with a weapon.



# Types of Coercion

## Reported in the John Jay Study

- Threats

- 835 cases reported use of threats
- Threats most often verbal
- Spiritual manipulation more common than threats of physical harm

- Enticements

- 2,671 cases reported the use of gifts or enticements
- Including gifts, access to alcohol, sleep over, access to recreation / sporting event

- In many cases, the abuser had a close relationship with family of the victim



# Safe Environment Strategies for Prevention of Abuse

- To prevent abuse we can implement strategies to address any of the four preconditions of abuse.
  
- The following safe environment strategies address one or more precondition of abuse:

## Precondition for Abuse

- Adult with a motivation to abuse
- Decreased Internal Inhibitions
- Absence of External / Social Inhibitions
- Breakdown in the Resistance of the Child

## Safe Environment Principle

- References  
Background Checks  
Support of Vocations
- Codes of Conduct  
Supervision /  
Consultation  
Self-Care
- “Safety in Numbers”  
Accountability  
Boundaries  
Parent / Child Education
- Parent / Child Education



Precondition I

## Addressing Motivation to Abuse

### References and Background Checks

- There is no specific psychological test to rule out motivation.
- “The best predictor of future behavior is past behavior”
- “It is not the assumption that we are all **would be perpetrators**, but rather that we all **could be protectors** of a child.”
- If we all agree to the same guidelines it will be easier to identify when something is wrong.



## Addressing Motivation to Abuse, continued

# Support of vocations

- The vast majority of clergy are not abusive.
- Clergy are experiencing increased stress related to public perception
- To maintain a healthy population of clergy / religious, we need to increase support to non-offending clergy and support the calling of healthy young men and women to religious life.



## Precondition II

### Keeping Internal Inhibitions Intact

# Preserve your Ability to Exercise Good Judgment

- **Seek supervision**
  - Sounding Board
  - Accountability
  - "Third Eye" perspective
- **Avoid substance use**
  - Use of drugs and alcohol serves to impair your judgment and decrease your normal inhibitions.



## Keeping Internal Inhibitions Intact, continued

- Tend to your physical and emotional health.
  - Know your own limitations / vulnerabilities.
  - Recognize signs of impairment.
  - Maintain a healthy lifestyle.
  - Seek help when needed.
- When in doubt consult.





## Precondition III

### Maintaining External Inhibitions

## “Safety in Numbers”

- Implement a youth "Buddy System" for trips / events
  - Presence of a witness
  - Access to help (potential "rescuer")
  - Strengthened Resistance

# Maintaining External Inhibitions

## “Safety in Numbers”, continued

- Use a team approach in dealing with youth
  - Adequate supervision
    - both male and female chaperones for trips/events
    - high staff to youth ratio (one adult for every 8 - 10 youth)
  - Team decision-making

# Maintaining External Inhibitions

## “Safety in Numbers”, continued

- **Use caution in 1:1 contacts**
  - Keep others informed
  - Avoid Isolation
    - meet in areas that are visible and accessible (e.g., public area, open door open room with window)
    - don't conduct 1:1 meetings in your residence
  - Avoid driving alone with youth (if it is necessary to transport youth, be sure other youth or adults are present)

## Maintaining External Inhibitions, continued

### Acknowledge and respect the power differential in relationships

- Recognize your role as a representative of God and the church.
- Do not use coercion, threats, or excessive flattery.
- Do use descriptive praise, unconditional positive regard, and logical consequences (when necessary).

# Maintaining External Inhibitions

## Power Differential, *continued*

- Clearly define rules / expectations.
  - Provide written rules with pictorial cues for younger children.
  - Be consistent in enforcing rules.
  - Evaluate appropriateness of expectations.
- Avoid dual relationships (conflict of interest).

# Maintaining External Inhibitions,

continued

## Establish Clear Boundaries

- Avoid physical contact that might be misinterpreted / Misconstrued.
  - Avoid roughhousing, tickling, flirtatious behavior
- Avoid any covert or overt sexual behaviors
  - Seductive speech or gestures.
  - Physical contact.
  - Exposure to inappropriate media, etc.
- Respect boundaries established by youth.
  - Be aware of signs of discomfort.
  - Respect each individual's need for personal space.



# Maintaining External Inhibitions Boundaries, *continued*

- Respond to inappropriate boundaries clearly and with sensitivity.
- Clearly state that the contact is uncomfortable for you or not appropriate for the setting (“We don’t kiss in class”)
- Identify an appropriate boundary (“I’d be happy to shake your hand”)
- Convey acceptance / unconditional positive regard

# Maintaining External Inhibitions

## Boundaries, continued

- Keep your focus on the purpose of your interactions with youth.
  - Witnessing the faith.
  - Fostering their spiritual growth.
  - Serving their needs.
  
  - Meet your own needs for affection, intimacy, attraction, and affirmation in your personal relationships.
  
- Be aware of your own and other's vulnerability in regard to sexuality.



# Maintaining External Inhibitions,

continued

## Promote Open Communication

- Encourage youth to communicate their concerns.
  - Empathy
  - Active Listening
  - Unconditional Positive Regard
- Utilize humor without offending others.
  - Don't tease / ridicule
  - Be considerate of topics others may find offensive.



# Maintaining External Inhibitions

## Open Communication, continued

- Respond actively when a child indicates discomfort / uneasiness.
  - Acknowledge observed signs of discomfort.
  - Empathize.
  - Clarify intentions.
  - Apologize if appropriate.
  - Ask for input re: comfortable boundaries.

# Maintaining External Inhibitions

## Open Communication, continued

- Involve parents in discussion of sensitive topics.
  
- **Maintain confidentiality.**
  - Discuss limits of confidentiality
  - Stress that confidentiality is a **one-way** street.  
(you will strive to maintain their privacy, but they are free to share anything that pertains to them with their parents or others in authority)



# Maintaining External Inhibitions

## Open Communication, *continued*

- Differentiate our human failings from the teachings of the church.
  - Strive to exhibit behavior consistent with church doctrine.
  - If our behavior falls short...
    - Be empathic
    - Take steps to repair the relationship
    - Remind them of our imperfection as human beings

# Maintaining External Inhibitions,

continued

## Establish Accountability

- Direct employees and volunteers to report any improprieties or violations of the code of conduct they observe in their colleagues.
- Direct employees and volunteers to report suspicions of abuse.
- Utilize a team approach in decision-making and in the supervision of youth.



# Maintaining External Inhibitions

## Establish Accountability, continued

- Contract with employees and volunteers to follow code of conduct.
- Encourage parents to support adherence to the codes of conduct.



## Precondition IV

# Building Resistance to Abuse

## Educating Children and Parents

- Teach youth about the signs of a "right" relationship versus an "abusive" one.
- Discuss safe boundaries.
  - Identify physical boundaries
  - Help youth identify their feelings
  - Affirm children's right to set personal boundaries.
  - Encourage communication when boundaries are violated
- Affirm children's right to say "no" to unwelcomed contact.

# Maintaining External Inhibitions

## Building Resistance, continued

- Inform parents, children, and staff of parish policies regarding safe environments, intervention, and reporting of abuse.
  - Review policies together.
  - Make written policy available
  - Contract for compliance
- Educate parents and staff regarding signs of abuse and steps to take if they suspect abuse of a child.





## Precondition for Abuse

- Adult with a motivation to abuse
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## Safe Environment Principle

- References  
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Self-Care
- “Safety in Numbers”  
Accountability  
Boundaries  
Parent / Child Education
- Parent / Child Education



# Recognizing Signs of Abuse



# Signs of Abuse

- Children have a limited number of ways to express inner distress. Under the age of eleven, feelings of distress are most likely to be seen as changes in behavior.
- Behavioral changes often occur immediately.
- Behavioral signs of abuse serve as flags for caretakers of the child's inner struggle to come to terms with it.

Monahan, (1993)

# Fears and Anxieties

- pervasive fears
  - daily life as a minefield
  - specific fears
  - sudden panic or distress
  - separation anxiety
  - physiological reactivity
  - "hyper vigilance"
  - fear denial
- Monahan, (1993)

# Physical / Behavior Symptoms

- Behavioral regression
  - Toileting accidents
- Retelling and replaying of the abuse
  - Post-traumatic play
- Withdrawal
- Bodily aches and pains
- Excessive sexual play
  - Inappropriate touching
  - Frequent masturbation
  - Simulated intercourse
- Acting out behavior
  - Opposition/Defiance
  - Physical Aggression



# Emotional Symptoms / Personality Changes

- Unwanted images and thoughts
- Loss of pleasure in enjoyable activities
- Guilt / Misinterpretation of the cause and meaning of the abuse
- Constriction of emotion
- Poor body image
- Self-centeredness
- Limited frustration tolerance
- Mistrust



# Sleep-related Difficulties

- Difficulty falling or staying asleep
- Nightmares
- Night terrors
- Sleepwalking

# Red Flags

## In Adult / Child Relationships

An adult who:


- Displays poor boundaries (hugging, patting, or touching youth more than is appropriate)
- Spends majority of social interactions with children vs. adults
- Shows great charm and charisma around young people, awkwardness with adults
- Singles out a child or group of children with special privileges, (gifts, trips, attention, affection, etc.)
- Isolates child from others
- Photographs or videotapes children and young people exclusively
- Has items at home or in a vehicle that are of interest to young people (e.g. videos, music, posters, alcohol / drugs)
- Manipulates young people easily

Diocese of Orange





# Responding



# Responding to Signs and Symptoms

- Report all signs and symptoms to parents.
  - Clearly describe the behavior of concern
  - Don't make inferences
- Signs and symptoms don't confirm abuse, but do suggest a need for attention from a caregiver.

# Responding to “Red Flags”

If you observe “red flags” in an adult / child relationship:

- Consult with immediate supervisor
- Continue to observe and watch for other concerns

## Supervisor

- Discuss concerns with individual
- Provide increased supervision / monitoring



# Responding to Code of Conduct Violations

- Document concerns
  - Complete “Incident Report” (see policy manual p.52)
- Consult with immediate supervisor
- Supervisor / Pastor
  - Assess seriousness of violation
  - Warning and problem solving
  - Direct supervision
  - Reassignment



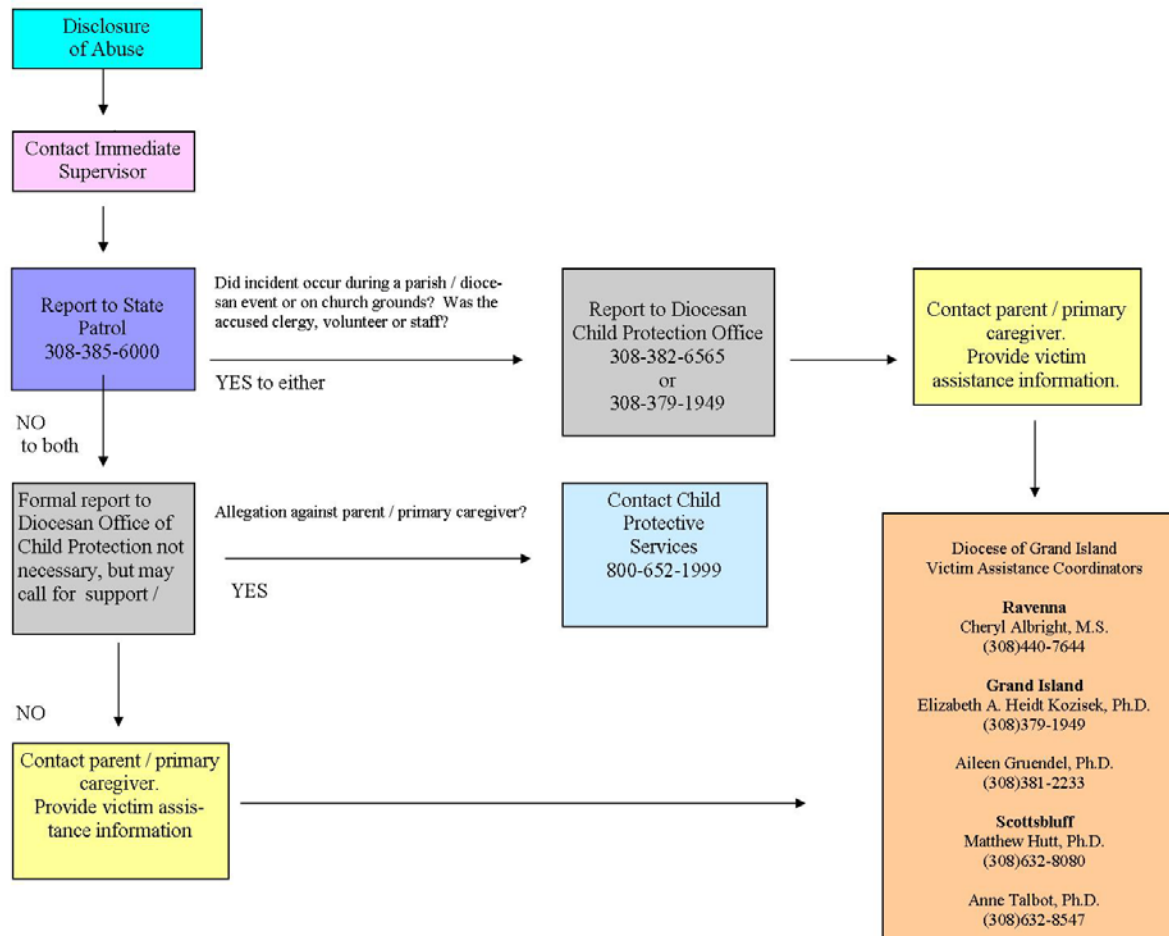
# Reporting



# Responding to Disclosures / Witnessing Abuse

- The state of Nebraska is a mandated reporting state.
- Citizens are required by law to report to legal authorities if they have reasonable cause to suspect abuse of a child
- Failure to report abuse of a child is a misdemeanor

# Procedure for Reporting Suspected Abuse





## Response

### At the Time Child Discloses Abuse:

- Believe the child.
- Remain calm.
- Go with the child to a place where you can talk without other children overhearing.
- Listen without interrupting.
- Reassure child that he or she is loved and cared for.
- Respond to child's questions or feelings with calm, matter-of-fact attitude, but don't pressure child to talk more.



# Response to Disclosure

## Continued:

- If child expresses concerns for his safety or his family's safety, tell him that all that can be done to keep him safe will be done.
- Reassure the child he/she did the right thing in telling you.
- Tell the child it is not his or her fault.
- Instruct child to tell you right away if offender attempts molestation again or bothers him or her in any way.
- Repeat appropriately.

# Do's and Don't's

- Don't ask leading questions
- Do keep in mind your role is to listen and report your concerns – not to serve as investigator
- Do refer to an investigator as soon as possible
  - Multiple interviews following disclosure can actually interfere with the investigation.



## Meeting the needs of others involved:

- Other children who may have overheard disclosure.
- Family and friends of abused child.
- Adult to whom disclosure was made.
- Other staff who are involved.

Source: Caring for Sexually Abused Children—A Handbook for Families & Churches, Dr. R. Timothy Kearney (2001)

Girls & Boys Town Center for Adolescent & Family Spirituality 2003



## Children who may have overheard:

- Do not provide details of alleged abuse
- Tell children that adults are helping a child who has been hurt.
- Comfort them by saying that it is hard to hear about a friend being hurt.
- Be alert to children who seem unusually upset—they may have their own abuse issues.

Dr. R. Timothy Kearney (2001)



# What happens after a report?

..within our Diocese

- Written report is forwarded to the Chancellor
- The Bishop notifies the Diocesan Review Board
- Diocesan Review Board conducts internal investigation
- If an allegation is credible or it appears it can be substantiated, the accused shall be placed on administrative leave pending results of investigation

# What happens after a report?

...to legal authorities

- Allegations are investigated by law enforcement
- If there is sufficient evidence, legal charges are filed by the County / District Attorney
- If the child is **unsafe at home**, they may be placed in an alternative family placement or foster home.



# Scenarios for Group Discussion

# Scenario 1

Tommy is an 8 year old boy who has been looking forward to being an altar server since starting religious education classes in pre-school. He has always enjoyed religious education class and was a good student. In the past he took it upon himself to remind his family to pray at meal time and would speak aloud his nightly prayers. Now that he has made his first communion, he has attended several server meetings, including some private instruction with his religious education teacher and private meetings with his parish priest. His parents were thrilled when he was chosen to complete “special projects” at the rectory. Since becoming a server, Tommy has complained frequently of stomach aches. He sometimes refuses to go to religious education classes, asserting he is ill. His parents notice that he no longer reminds them to pray and no longer says his bedtime prayers aloud. Sometimes he awakens in the night and has difficulty going back to sleep. They come to you puzzled by this change in his behavior. What do you do?



## Scenario 2


Susie is a 6 year old girl who attends religious education. She has been a delight to teach, as since pre-school she has had no trouble separating from her parents to come to class. She tends to bond quite readily to her teacher each year. This year Susie's teacher is Mr. Brown. Mr. Brown also finds Susie to be affectionate...at times too affectionate. Mr. Brown has been taken by surprise on a number of occasions when Susie jumps on his lap as soon as he sits down. Today Susie tried to kiss him goodbye. He quickly turned his head aside and found an open mouth kiss planted on his cheek. Mr. Brown has a stomach ache. He feels ill when he thinks of returning to religious education class. He comes to you with doubts about his ability to manage his class (particularly Susie). What do you do?


## Scenario 3


Charlie is a middle school student who has always been a bit of a challenge. He is disruptive in class, disrespectful of church / school property, and mean to his peers. Despite significant financial duress he recently seems to have cash / new things. You suspect he acquires it unlawfully. Today you find Charlie in tears. His peers have been teasing him, calling him names questioning his sexual orientation. When confronted, one of his peers reports that they “saw him kissing Mr. Jones.” What do you do?





# Post Training Review

- 
1. According to leading theory, which preconditions must be present for sexual abuse to occur?
    - a. An adult with a motivation to abuse.
    - b. Decrease in the adult's internal inhibitions.
    - c. An environment which allows unsupervised access to children.
    - d. Break down in resistance of the child.
    - e. All of the above.

- 
2. The Diocesan Safe Environment Program reduces the risk for abuse through all of the following strategies except:
    - a. Background screening of clergy, staff, and volunteers.
    - b. Training of clergy, staff, and volunteers in safe environment principles.
    - c. Education of children and parents.
    - d. Adherence to a Code of Conduct by all who have regular contact with children / youth.
    - e. Requiring direct parental supervision of children while on church / school premises.

- 
3. Background screening and training is required of all adults who work with children for all of the following reasons except:
- a. Keeping our children safe is a priority.
  - b. Children and parents must not only be safe, but must feel safe in our programs.
  - c. Everyone is suspected to be a perpetrator.
  - d. Consistent practices help identify when something “isn’t right” before a child is harmed.
  - e. Children and adolescents “do better” when they grow up in communities where everyone looks out for them.


- 
4. Which of the following is likely to impair an adult's use of good judgment in dealing with children?
- a. Regular consultation with a supervisor.
  - b. Use of alcohol / drugs.
  - c. Maintaining a healthy lifestyle.
  - d. Knowing one's limitations / vulnerabilities.
  - e. Seeking help for emotional problems.

- 
5. Sexual abuse can directly impact the development of child victims in which of the following areas?

Circle all that apply.

- a. Cognitive / decision-making
- b. Emotional
- c. Social / relationship
- d. Spiritual
- e. Physical







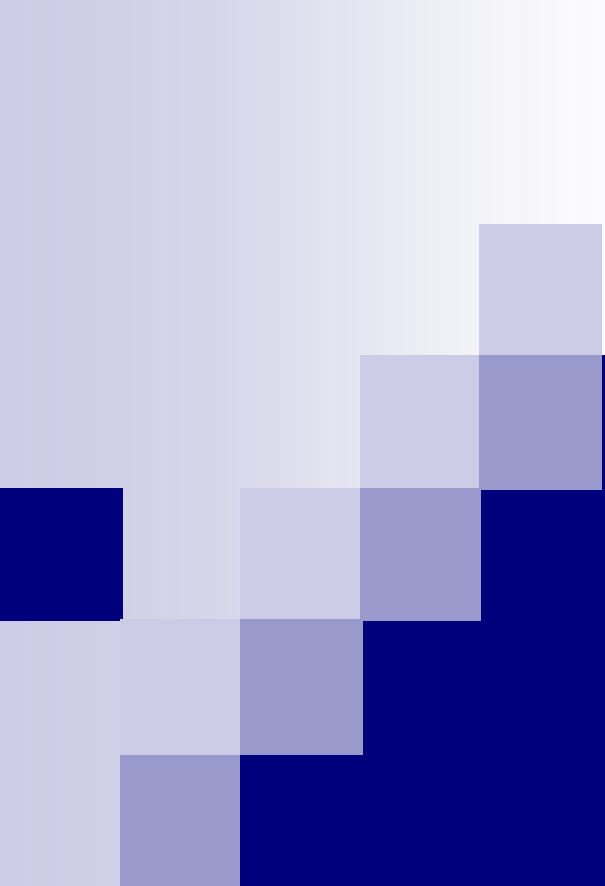
6. To maintain appropriate boundaries in our interactions with children and youth we must do which of the following?

Circle all that apply.

- a. Avoid physical contact that might be misinterpreted.
- b. Avoid any covert or overt sexual behaviors.
- c. Respect boundaries established by youth.
- d. Respond effectively to inappropriate boundaries of youth.
- e. Maintain focus on the purpose of interactions with youth.

- 
7. Because of our position of authority, when working with youth it is important that we:
    - a. Recognize our role as representative of God and the Church.
    - b. Avoid use of coercion, including excessive flattery.
    - c. Use descriptive praise and logical consequences.
    - d. Avoid dual relationships / potential conflicts of interest.
    - e. All of the above.

- 
8. If a child discloses abuse, it is important that we:
    - a. Remain calm and respond in a supportive manner.
    - b. Communicate that the child is not at fault.
    - c. Listen without interrupting.
    - d. Report the abuse to appropriate authorities.
    - e. All of the above.



# Safe Environment Programs

Diocese of Grand Island  
Child Protection Office

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