

5 Steps to a Safe Environment

Step 1: Know the Warning Signs

Knowing the warning signs means that we can recognize the early signs of an inappropriate relationship with a child. If we know the warning signs, then we can identify potential abuse before it happens. If we know the warning signs, we do not have to rely on a child to report an incident.

- Discourages other adults from participating or monitoring
- Always wants to be alone with children.
- More excited to be with children than adults.
- Gives gifts to children, often without permission.
- Goes overboard touching.
- Always wants to wrestle or tickle.
- Thinks the rules do not apply to them.
- Allows children to engage in activities their parents would not allow.
- Uses bad language or tells dirty jokes.
- Shows children pornography.

Step 2: Control Access

Controlling access means that we are careful about whom we allow to work with our children. It also sends a message to potential child molesters that we are alert about child sexual abuse.

- Communicate the church's commitment to keeping children safe.
- Use written, standard applications.
- Require criminal background checks.
- Complete face-to-face interviews.
- Check references.
- The "2 by 2" principle – No driving teens or "hanging out" at teen events alone, and Ccing all email correspondence with teens.

Step 3: Monitor all Programs

Child molesters look for ways to spend time alone with children. If they know someone is watching, they have more trouble finding opportunities to abuse without getting caught.

- Identify secluded areas, lock empty rooms.
- Develop policies regarding use of secluded areas.
For example, staff should check bathrooms before sending children in alone.
- Do not permit children to enter staff-only areas.
- Only meet with children where other adults can pass by.
- Supervisors should look in on activities.
- Make sure enough adults are involved in programs.
- Allow parents to drop in on programs.
- Don't start new programs without approval from your pastor and parish council or staff.

Step 4: Be Aware

Being aware means that we pay attention to subtle signs of a problem. This pertains especially to parents.

- Parents should:
 - Know the red flags of abuse and abusers.
 - Talk to your children.
 - Listen to/observe your children, watching for danger signs & sudden changes in behavior.
 - Let your children know they can tell you anything.
 - Teach your children where their private parts are.
 - Talk to your children often about protecting themselves.
 - Teach your children what to do if someone tries to touch them.
 - Teach your children what to do if someone makes them uncomfortable.

- All Youth Workers must know the red flags of abuse and abusers and how to maintain a safe environment.

Step 5: Communicate Your Concerns

Communicating your concerns means telling someone when you are uncomfortable with a situation or if you suspect abuse. It means paying attention to your own feelings and not waiting until it is too late.

Only by communicating concerns can we use our knowledge to protect children. Even if abuse is not occurring, it is still important to let others know when you have concerns.

- Talk to the person involved and/or
- Speak to their supervisor and/or
- Notify a church official, principal and/or
- Call your county's Child Protective Services hotline, the County Prosecutor and/or the Diocese of La Crosse
- Call the police.

Resource adapted from the Archdiocese of Detroit