

Safe Environment News

Diocese of Manchester Safe Environment Newsletter

Winter 2010



What is “Sexting” and What Can I Do About It?

“Sexting” means sending nude or semi-nude pictures or videos of oneself to others via cell phone text messaging. According to recent surveys, 20% to 25% of teens admit that they have electronically sent or posted such photos of themselves and approximately 28% of teens say that they have received this type of message on their cell phone. As concerned adults, we need to communicate to teens that this behavior is not only inappropriate, it is dangerous. Talking with teens about this topic can be a continuation of discussions you have already begun with them about morality, values, personal boundaries, and modesty.

Here are some points you can mention:

Anything you text can be forwarded to others.

This can result in extreme embarrassment as well as harassment by peers.

Once a text message is sent, it cannot be taken back. You no longer have any control over it.

You could be in trouble with the law. If inappropriate photos involve underage teens, those who send --and even those who forward them-- could be charged with possession and distribution of child pornography, a very serious crime.

Other consequences may include disciplinary action at school or work. Often, if a school learns that students have been involved in “sexting,” the teens are expelled from sports teams and honor societies. This can impact a student’s future.

Parents should also:

Let teens know that you will check their cell phones periodically to monitor what is being sent and received.

Consider installing blocks on your children’s cell phones so that pictures and/or internet links cannot be viewed. For more information about installing parental controls on cell phones, see the booklet *Cell Phones and Parental Controls: Protect Your Children* found at www.catholicnh.org/child-safety

Encourage teens to tell you or another trusted adult if they receive any electronic messages or photos that make them feel uncomfortable.



For more information about child safety be sure to visit our Web site, www.catholicnh.org/child-safety.

spotlight

Read what one parish is doing to promote a safe environment...

Fr. Marcel Martel, pastor of St. Rose of Lima Parish in Littleton, has appointed a "safe environment team" to administer the safe environment program at the parish. The members of the team each take on tasks according to their strengths. For example, one person distributes, collects, and files paperwork, one updates the Safe Environment Database, and another attends PGC sessions. In addition, each fall, the parish hosts a meeting for all volunteers who serve minors. Parents of religious education students are also invited to the meeting, which includes prayer; an introduction from the team leader; discussion in small groups; distribution of *Renewing Our Promise* refresher training bulletins; and an overview of the NH and diocesan reporting requirements. "Group discussion questions have included: What is one thing you have taught your child about being safe in your home, school, and/or community?" and "What ideas do you have to make our parish and the community safer for our children?" Members from the small groups then report their responses to the larger group. According to Lou Babin, Safe Environment Coordinator, these sessions have been very productive and have served many purposes, including allowing people to get to know one another and fostering a sense of community and a commitment to child safety within the parish.

update

Don't forget to make Safe Environment Database updates.

~*The database is our communication tool*~
www.rcbmnh.org

Updates are due on a **monthly basis for schools** (on the first Friday of each month) and on a **quarterly basis for parishes** (on January 15; April 15; July 15; and October 15). Please make sure each person's status (active or inactive) is correct and that the names of all those working with minors are listed. Please update the AF and Application information so that we will know you have those documents on file! Thank you!

protect

Protecting Vulnerable Adults

Some parishes provide outreach services to the elderly or other vulnerable adults. Volunteers who work with these groups should be informed of how to report suspected abuse. Inquiries and reports should be made to the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services Adults Protection Program at 1-800-949-0474. In addition, this state agency is available to provide free informational workshops to those working with the elderly and homebound. For further information, contact Rachel Lakin at (603) 271-4347. Rachel is a supervisor at the agency and she will refer interested parishes to a local agency representative who can meet with your volunteers.

idea

Conduct a 15- minute safety check in your parish or school building

Consider gathering together a group of adults who are interested in child safety to conduct a quick check around the building and grounds. Bring paper and pen and make note of any areas that may need to be addressed such as unused, unlocked classrooms, meeting rooms without windows, hazards to young children, bathrooms in secluded locations, etc. Discuss how these items can be addressed: Can rooms be locked when not in use? Can motion lights be installed? Is more supervision needed in certain areas? Do volunteers need additional training? Refer to the booklet *Self Inspection Safety Checklist* (a copy is available at each parish and school) for more ideas.

review

Please don't forget to review Volunteer Applications before filing them.

As Safe Environment Coordinators are well aware, each new volunteer who will work with minors must complete an application. It is important for the coordinator to review each application before it is filed away. Here are some tips on what to look for when reviewing Volunteer Applications:

- Has the person resided in a state other than New Hampshire during the past 5 years? If so, additional criminal checks must be completed.
- Has the person been registered at your parish for at least 6 months? (This only applies to parish volunteers). If not, he/she must provide a written recommendation from the pastor or a parish supervisor at his/her former parish. If the person is unable to provide such a reference, then he/she must wait 6 months before working with minors.
- Did the person answer "yes" to any of the screening questions? If a volunteer answers "yes" to any of the questions at the bottom of the form, then he or she must provide a brief, written explanation and the coordinator should forward the form to the Office for Ministerial Conduct for further review.
- Did the person answer every question and sign and date the form?

Thank you for your attention to these important details!

Responding to Suspicions of Abuse

When a child discloses abuse, it is important to respond in a kind, gentle manner. Here are some suggestions:

- Listen
- Avoid expressing shock, outrage, or disappointment
- Tell the child that he/ she was right to tell
- Assure the child that the abuse is not his/her fault
- Do not promise to keep the abuse a secret
- Avoid asking a lot of questions; this is best left to professionals
- Remember that the child may have been threatened; assure the child that you will keep him/her safe and that he/she is not in trouble
- Do not threaten or condemn the perpetrator
- Avoid questions that make the child feel guilty or responsible, such as, "Why didn't you say anything sooner?" or "Why didn't you say no?"
- Report the suspected abuse to the proper authorities - See www.catholicnh.org/report

Q&A

Dear Safe Environment Office:

We have someone from a religious order working in our parish. Does he/she need to fill out the safe environment paperwork?

Each religious order community has its own screening and training procedures which are separate from the diocesan requirements. If a member of a religious order works or volunteers with minors in a diocesan parish, school or institution, he/she must also complete the diocesan safe environment requirements. Religious order priests who are assigned to minister in a parish (for example, as pastor or associate) will be screened through the Office for Ministerial Conduct. Sisters and brothers who work or volunteer at a parish should complete all requirements as would any other employee or volunteer.

I have seen different versions of the same form. How do I know which is the right one?

The most up-to-date forms are available on the diocesan Web site. It is always best to print forms from the Web site to ensure that you are using the correct version. Safe environment forms can be found at: www.catholicnh.org/child-safety/forms

How often should a criminal record check be repeated for an individual?

Our current protocol requires a one-time criminal check at the beginning of service. Employees and volunteers must self-disclose if they are arrested at any time after completing the initial check. In addition, the Office for Ministerial Conduct rechecks each person's name against the national sex offender registry at least once every 3 years.

The diocesan *Screening and Training Protocol for Church Personnel* contains the minimum requirements for our diocese, but each pastor, principal, and administrator has the option to go beyond these guidelines. For example, a pastor may wish to have a criminal record check on all parish employees whether or not they work with minors and a principal may decide to repeat criminal checks on the school's volunteers every few years.

Calendar of Important Dates

March 2010

Check your database list to make sure spring coaches are listed and in compliance with safe environment requirements

March 20, 2010

Sixth Annual Safe Environment Conference

Location: Bishop Brady High School, Concord

Keynote Speaker: Detective Jennifer Frank

Facebook, Cyberstalking, and Cyberharassment

8:30am - 1 pm

A continental breakfast and lunch will be provided

April 2010

April is Child Abuse Prevention Month

Check the diocesan Web site Child Safety section for materials that can be distributed at your school/parish. Consider placing child safety information and materials in your bulletin, newsletter, and on your Web site.

April 30, 2010

Circles of Care/Netsmartz needs to be taught to all students by this date. Tally Sheets must be sent to the safe environment office on or before May 1, 2010.

[Click here for lessons and tally sheets.](#)

New Resources Available

Some new lending materials are available for any interested schools or parishes:

The Ant Bully book and DVD- the book and DVD address the topic of bullying. The book is referenced in the *Circles of Care* grade 2 lesson.

Unless a Death Occurs, a PBS documentary about hazing. This DVD is most appropriate for staff who work with teens and for older teens/young adults.

Hazing articles- We have a collection of articles about hazing which can be used with the *Circles of Care* high school hazing lesson.

If you would like to borrow any of these items, please call or e-mail the safe environment office.

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