

TALKING ABOUT THE CATHOLIC CHURCH SEXUAL ABUSE SCANDAL

A Resource Guide for Parish and School Staff FOR INTERNAL USE ONLY

GENERAL POINTS TO KEEP IN MIND

Here are some ideas to assist you in communicating with parents, staff, and youth:

- The recent scandals elicit a wide range of emotions and it can be helpful to talk about one's feelings and reactions and to ask questions.
- Sexual abuse is not only a grave sin, it is a crime. The Diocese of Manchester reports all allegations of sexual abuse to the civil authorities, regardless of when the abuse occurred.
- The majority of incidents of sexual abuse about which we are hearing occurred decades ago. The Catholic Church has changed a lot since then and has put many measures in place to prevent and respond to allegations of abuse.
- Specifically, the Diocese of Manchester conducts criminal record checks and provides special training to everyone who regularly works with children and teens, including all clergy, parish staff, and Catholic school staff.
- The Diocese of Manchester has a Code of Conduct that prohibits grooming behaviors and other inappropriate interactions with minors and adults. Violations of the Code of Conduct are taken seriously and are investigated.
- The Diocese of Manchester was audited by the NH Attorney General's Office from 2005-2008 and is audited by the USCCB every year.
- No one who has admitted or is found to have sexually abused a minor is eligible to work or volunteer in our diocese.
- Use our infographics (available in the Additional Resources section of this document) as handouts or post them to your website.

WAYS TO TAKE ACTION IN YOUR PARISH OR SCHOOL COMMUNITY

- Host a Mass or prayer service to pray for victims of abuse and the future of our church.
- Start planning for Child Abuse Prevention Month (April) now. Plan to display pinwheels and provide parents with information about our diocesan child safety measures.
- Integrate the *Cry to Heaven* prayer program into existing prayer groups or Eucharistic Adoration. See www.catholicnh.org/pastoral-care
- Plant a Healing Garden to promote peace and prayer, and act as a living tribute to all survivors of abuse.

PRAYER INTENTIONS



- For those who are in abusive situations, may they find the courage to tell someone and may our ears be open to listen to them and assist them.
- For all those who have experienced abuse in their lives, may they find healing and support.
- For the families of abuse victims and the caregivers and professionals who provide support and treatment to victims of abuse, may God provide them with strength as they assist those who have been harmed.
- For those who have been sexually abused, may they receive loving support from those around them, may they heal from the scars that were left, and may they find peace in God's love and comfort.
- For those who have abused others, may they repent and find forgiveness through God's healing love.

COMMUNICATING TO YOUR AUDIENCES

PARENTS

- Suggest that parents learn to identify the warning signs of abusers, talk to their children about appropriate boundaries, and encourage their children to tell them about inappropriate behavior.*
- Provide all parents with [Appropriate Boundaries: A Guide for Parents](#) pamphlet
- Encourage all parents to complete the Safe Haven training available at: <https://manchester.cmgconnect.org>
- Let parents know that questions are welcomed.

*See *Additional Resources* section for relevant infographics.

STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS

- Hold a staff meeting for interested staff to discuss the recent events in our Church.**
- Emphasize with staff and volunteers that appropriate boundaries with minors are extremely important. Consider viewing and discussing the video, *Safe Side of the Line*, at a staff meeting. The video is available at <https://manchester.cmgconnect.org> in the “Optional Trainings” section.**
- Review the safeguards in place in the Diocese of Manchester, such as training and background checks for adults who work with minors, a Code of Conduct, and mandatory reporting.
- Let staff know that all reports are taken seriously. The diocese reports all allegations to civil authorities and cooperates with investigations.

**Joseph Naff, MSW, Director of the diocesan Office for Healing and Pastoral Care, and Mary Ellen D’Intino, Bishop’s Delegate, are available to attend these sessions upon request.

YOUTH

- To assist in communicating with youth on this topic, adults may want to read [this article](#) about talking with children and youth about the clerical sexual abuse scandal.
- Let students know that all adults are expected to maintain appropriate boundaries with students. Review with them what this means (refer to appropriate boundaries handout).
- Emphasize to students that they should report any concerns to trusted adults.
- Let them know that part of being a good friend means telling a trusted adult if your friend discloses that he or she is being abused or feels uncomfortable around an adult.
- Remind them that the Church is the entire people of God. Even when some Church leaders let us down, we need to live our faith.
- Focus on the fact that most clergy are good and should not be judged by the “bad apples.”
- Focus on good works done by the Church and its people.
- Watch with students and discuss: Bishop Barron’s video: “Why Be Catholic?” https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=1&v=-ani_hnN8Fs

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

INFOGRAPHICS (ATTACHED)

- *A Culture of Safety: By the Numbers* and *Do you know the warning signs of abusers?*

PRAYER RESOURCES FROM THE FEDERATION OF DIOCESAN LITURGICAL COMMISSIONS:

- [English](#) | [Spanish](#)

FURTHER READING

- Hendricks, Kathy. *The Parish Emergency Kit: Responding with Compassion When Tragedy Strikes*. New London, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 2018.
- Also by Hendricks: *Responding to the Sexual Abuse Crisis* (Attached)