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## Know the Facts About Sexual Abuse\*

Sexual abuse includes any sexual activity between a child and an adult, older child, or adolescent. Sexual abuse includes touching as well as non-touching behaviors such as exposure, voyeurism, and child pornography.

Most perpetrators are acquaintances, but as many as 47% are family or extended family.

1 in 25 youths report receiving an online sexual solicitation in which the person tried to make offline contact.

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Disclosure of sexual abuse is often delayed.

Over 90% of sexual abuse is committed by someone who is known to the child and his or her family.

Perpetrators often “groom” the child and his or her family. Grooming is a method of building trust in an effort to gain access to and time alone with a child.

\*Sources: [www.nsopw.gov/en-US/Education/FactsMythsStatistics](http://www.nsopw.gov/en-US/Education/FactsMythsStatistics)  
[www.ptsd.va.gov/public/types/violence/child-sexual-abuse.asp](http://www.ptsd.va.gov/public/types/violence/child-sexual-abuse.asp)

## Talking With Your Children About Sexual Abuse



### Open Communication...

**Starts early.** Often as children grow into teenagers they will look to others, such as their friends, for advice. Talking with your children when they are young is crucial in creating an open and trusting relationship that will last through the teen years.

**Is honest, patient and incorporates our Catholic values.** We need to let our children know that they can come to us with anything. Let them know that you are listening with respect to their questions or concerns. Guide them in finding Christian responses to contemporary issues. Children look to us for moral guidance and direction. As Catholic parents, we have an obligation to provide this guidance.

**Starts with parents.** Sometimes, the adult is the one who needs to initiate conversations about tough topics. Many teachable moments arise each day. For example, when watching a television show or reading an online news story that touches upon personal safety, you might engage your children in a conversation that pertains to their own lives. Some of us were raised in families where we didn't talk about sensitive topics like human sexuality, healthy and unhealthy relationships, alcohol, drugs, or violence. We need to look for moments when we can share our beliefs on these topics with our children.

### Warning Signs of Abusers

- Prefers the company of children and youth over the company of adults
- Goes overboard with physical touching
- Bends established rules; encourages youth to break their parents' rules
- Takes photographs of minors for no apparent reason
- Showers a child or teen with gifts or special attention
- Goes out of their way to be around a child or teen
- Shows preference for a particular child or adolescent
- Tries to meet up with the child outside of school or church
- Sends personal messages to a student through text, phone calls, emails, etc.
- Provides alcohol, drugs, or pornography to minors
- Gains the trust of children, adults, and even the community through the grooming process

**A Guide for New Hampshire Catholic Families**  
Diocese of Manchester  
(603) 663-0125  
[catholicnh.org/safety](http://catholicnh.org/safety)

## Keeping Children Safe

The Catholic Church in New Hampshire is committed to providing a safe environment for children and youth. We strive to keep children safe in our parishes, schools, and camps, and we also hope and pray that our child safety efforts will have a positive effect on a larger scale - helping to keep children safe in our neighborhoods, communities, and beyond.

The effectiveness of our child abuse prevention programs and policies is dependent upon many people working together toward a common goal. Parents are the most important teachers of all, and this guide is meant to serve as a resource for parents to learn more about the problem of sexual abuse and to assist them in communicating with their children about this topic.

Child sexual abuse is a crime in the State of New Hampshire and the Church. If you suspect that a child is being abused, you should immediately report your suspicions to local police and to the Division for Children, Youth & Families (DCYF) at 1-800-894-5533. Any person who suspects child abuse on the part of a priest, deacon, employee or volunteer of the Diocese of Manchester is encouraged to make a report to the Delegate for Ministerial Conduct at (603) 669-3100. Church personnel are required to do so.

## If Your Child Tells You...

Remain calm and listen. Avoid asking too many questions.

Tell your child that he/she was right to tell and you believe him/her.

Affirm the child's courage in telling you about the abuse.

Assure your child that you will do everything you can to protect him or her.

Tell your child that the abuse is not his or her fault.

Make a report to the local police and the Division for Children, Youth & Families (DCYF). They will handle the abuser. Your strength and energy should be spent loving, supporting, and giving care to your child.

Make sure your child receives proper medical treatment. Counseling may be indicated for your child and your family.



*You may also contact the Office for Healing & Pastoral Care at (603) 663-0125*

## Signs of Sexual Abuse

- Behavior changes, such as becoming withdrawn
- Does not want to be around a particular adult
- Copying adult sexual behavior
- Sexualized play or has advanced sexual knowledge
- Swelling or bleeding around genitals or mouth
- Urinary tract infections
- Sexually transmitted disease

## Additional Signs in Adolescents

- Depression or mood changes
- Poor self image
- Running away
- Suicide attempts
- Alcohol or other drug abuse
- Showering excessively
- Manipulative or secretive behavior

## What You Can Say

Teach your children the proper names of body parts. Teach them that the parts of the body covered by a bathing suit are private.

God created our bodies to be respected, private, and special.

No one should touch our private parts except the doctor at a check-up (with mom or dad present), or if you need help with cleaning, again with mom or dad's permission.

Help your children to identify good, bad, and confusing touches.

Talk with them about keeping secrets: some (such as a surprise party) are okay and some are not. "Touching secrets" are never okay.

Help them to identify adults they trust.

Tell them that they should always check with you before going anywhere.

Explain that if they are ever contacted online by someone who wants to share inappropriate pictures or to meet up with them, they should come to you right away.

Tell them that they have a right to say no to touch that is confusing or unwelcomed.

Let your children know that it is never their fault if an adult touches them inappropriately.

Let them know to come to you right away; you will believe them and will protect them!

## Role Play Scenarios with Your Children:

What would you do if an adult neighbor asked you to come to their house to see a puppy?

What would you do if a teenager or adult touched you in a way that made you uncomfortable, and made you promise not to tell?

What would you do if someone asked you to send an inappropriate picture of yourself to them via texting or social media?

