



ARCHDIOCESE OF ST. LOUIS

Office of Child and Youth Protection

PROTECTING GOD'S CHILDREN WRITTEN ACCOMMODATIONS

Parish/School/Agency: _____

I, _____, have read the provided literature in lieu of attending a Protecting God's Children Workshop. I understand that this process meets the criteria for the Safe Environment Program in the Archdiocese of St. Louis only. I understand that I may be asked to attend the workshop if I volunteer or work in another diocese or if requested by an employer.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

A PLAN TO PROTECT GOD'S CHILDREN

1. KNOW THE WARNING SIGNS

Knowing the warning signs means that we can recognize the early signs of an inappropriate relationship with a child. Warning signs include an adult who:

- discourages other adults from participating or monitoring.
- always wants to be alone with children
- is 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 to children.
- shows children pornography.

2. CONTROL ACCESS

Controlling access means that we are careful about who we allow to work with our children.

- Communicate the Church's commitment to keeping children safe.
- Use written, standard applications.
- Require criminal background checks.
- Complete face-to-face interviews.
- Check references.

3. MONITOR ALL PROGRAMS

All programs for children should be supervised. We should keep a close eye on all programs that involve children.

- 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 children where other adults can have open access.
- Supervisors should have open access to all programs.
- Make sure enough adults are involved in programs.
- Allow parents to have access to all programs.
- Don't start new programs without approval from the pastoral council, the pastor, or the children's ministry committee.
- Encourage parental involvement.

A PLAN TO PROTECT GOD'S CHILDREN

4. BE AWARE

Being aware means that parents should know what is going on the lives of their own children and pay attention to subtle signs of a problem. Parents should **talk** to, **listen** to, and **observe** their children.

- Talk to your children.
- Listen to your children.
- Observe your children.
- Let your children know they can tell you anything.
- Discuss with children where their private parts are and that not all adults or children should see or touch them.
- 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.

5. COMMUNICATE YOUR CONCERNS

Communicating concerns means confronting or telling someone when you are uncomfortable with a situation or discussing suspected abuse with a supervisor or state official. It means paying attention to your own feelings and not waiting until it is too late.

- Note that there is a difference between communicating concern and gossiping.
- Talk to the person involved.
- Speak to their supervisor.
- Notify a church official.
- Call the child abuse hotline.
- Call the police.

If you suspect or know about abuse, you may be legally obligated to report to the police.

BOUNDARIES

A boundary is a personal property line that defines our responsibilities. It defines what we do and what we don't do. Part of taking on the responsibility of working or volunteering around minors is knowing what your job is and what it isn't. You're a teacher, you're a coach; you're not a pal, you're not a confidant.

Setting limits is not selfish; in fact, it serves to enhance the relationship. Whenever we fail to set boundaries, we fail in our responsibility to our children. When our superiors and administrators fail to set and follow clear boundaries with us, they have failed in their responsibilities to us. If a relationship changes from employer-employee to friend-friend there can be very difficult ramifications.

In our work with children we can often find ourselves in interactions where boundaries can easily be crossed. We don't want to hurt a child's feelings or we want to be helpful to them. But we need to be aware of the personal and legal risks these situations may pose for us. Often a seemingly harmless but inappropriate action in regard to a child can put us at serious personal and/or legal risk. A serious allegation may be made against us even if we see it as an innocent situation.

A good way to determine if you are overstepping a boundary is to ask yourself what your role in a child's life is. If you are a Scout leader every interaction you have with a minor in your care must be directly connected to Scouting. Anything else is overstepping.

Social networking can lead to boundary violations very easily. It is so fast, and seems so private, although it's really not, a simple communication about practice or a meeting can turn quickly into personal communication. The whole issue of social networking has been a tremendous challenge to dioceses everywhere. But the issue isn't the communication methodology, it's boundaries, and how easily social networking can lead to crossing and violating these boundaries. Remember that boundaries can be violated in actions, in face-to-face conversations, on the phone, on email and in social networking. And if the boundary violation takes place on electronic communication, it's there forever.

The following are some guidelines that address potential boundary violations when you work or volunteer around children:

1. When a parent or child confides in you that information stays confidential unless you determine that it is in the child's best interest that it be reported to the proper authorities.
2. To avoid any hint of impropriety, avoid being alone with a child behind closed doors unless there is a certain type of opening so that others can see in. If you are in a situation that can be misconstrued as being inappropriate be certain to have another adult present.

BOUNDARIES

3. Use extreme caution when appropriately touching a child on the arms, shoulders or head. Never touch a child when it can be interpreted as being punitive.
4. Guard against becoming overly involved with any one child. If you think a child in your care needs some special attention, talk to the program director, or to the parents, don't take that responsibility on yourself. If it becomes noticeable to others then the boundary probably has been crossed.
5. The following situations could be construed as inappropriate given the nature of the situation:
 - Taking a child home without parental permission
 - Visiting a child's home without the parent present
 - Frequent telephoning or texting, blogging, or emailing a child
 - Sharing your problems with a child
 - Going on unauthorized trips with children
6. Adults need to be aware of when too many of their emotional needs are being met in their work with children. If you work with children all day, you need to be with adults in the evening.
7. Being liked by those whom we have authority over is not the end-goal. Our concern should be in treating them respectfully and requiring that they treat us with appropriate respect. When we're worried about being liked, it keeps us from having to carry out our duties.
8. Healthy boundaries as an adult include enforcing rules and policies that should be in effect. When we allow a child to break a rule while in our classroom or office, it sends a message that rules are optional and boundaries are flimsy.
9. In order to maintain appropriate boundaries, it is recommended that a form of peer supervision be established so that questionable situations can be appropriately resolved.

We need to remember that being aware of appropriate boundaries is in our best interest, the child's best interest, and the best interest of the whole community.

REFERENCES

Dr. Henry Cloud, Dr. John Townsend, *Boundaries* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992)
Sr. Mary Angela Shaughnessy, SCN, J.D., PH.D., *Selected Legal Issues in Catholic Schools*
(Washington D.C. National Catholic Education Association, 1998)
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TECHNOLOGY SAFETY INQUIRIES

By Robert Hugh Farley, M.S.

Editor's Note: The following information is comprised of the answers to several common questions regarding technology safety.

Regarding technology, what is the best way to protect a child from sexual abuse?

As electronic technology changes daily, a parent or caring adult must do the following:

1. Monitor a child's Internet use at home and on the cell phone consistently.
2. Decide on a reasonable amount of time that a young person can spend online each day and be prepared to enforce it.
3. Keep the computer in a public area of the house such as the living room or kitchen and never in the child's bedroom. (Doing this is not a violation of the child's privacy; it is a safeguarding measure and part of your responsibility as a parent or caring adult.)
4. Never allow a young person to be online immediately after school, without a parent or caring adult in the house.

Regarding technology, is there anything that we as a family can do to protect our children?

Every family should establish "family Internet rules." As soon as young people begin to use the Internet on their own, it is a good idea to come up with a list of rules that everyone in the family can all agree upon. These rules should also include whether your children can use or visit social networking sites and specific rules for utilizing them. Immediately establish the fact that you will monitor the site and its contents. Proactive parenting techniques regarding social networking sites are needed today not only to protect your child or teen against child molesters but other social networking dangers such as online bullying by other children.

Should I allow my daughter or son to join an Internet social networking site?

Prior to making this decision, you should first educate yourself about the social networking site. Once you have identified the social networking site that is most popular in your area, you must evaluate the site that your child plans to use and carefully read the privacy policy, code of conduct, and the rules. The recommended age for signing up for most social networking sites is usually 13 and over, although many underage young people still join by simply claiming that they are older. If your children are under the recommended age for these sites, do not let them use the sites. Most importantly, if you have allowed your child or teen to join and create a profile you should periodically review your child's page and their friends' pages for content. In schools, social status is based upon how many "friends" one has listed on one's profile or home page. It is, therefore, essential that caring adults not only understand how these sites work, but also that they remain actively involved in monitoring how children and teens are using the sites.

TECHNOLOGY SAFETY INQUIRIES

What personal information should I allow my son or daughter to post on a social networking site?

It is always best to restrict the posting of personal information. As a young person creates a profile page, verify that he or she does not use a full name. Only allow the use of a first name or a nickname, but never an inappropriate nickname that would attract the wrong kind of attention by an online predator. Also, do not allow your children to post the full names of their friends on their profile page. In addition, prohibit posting identifiable information in your child's profile such as home address, cell phone number, and date of birth. It is important to be aware that some social networking sites allow members to join public groups that include everyone who goes to a certain school, or claims that they attend the school. Be careful when your children reveal this and other information that could be used to identify them, such as the name of the town they live in, especially if it is a small one.

Should I allow my son or daughter to post a photograph on the Internet?

Once a photograph is posted on the Internet, it is there forever. One never knows who has viewed the photo or has copied it and sent it to someone else. If a photo is posted it is best to be cautious about details in photographs. It is best to explain to a child that photographs can reveal a lot of personal or private information. Children should be encouraged not to post photographs of themselves or their friends with clearly identifiable details such as street signs, license plates on cars, the home address numbers, or the name of their school on their clothing.

How does an online predator use a social networking site to locate a vulnerable child?

As a caring adult, you've probably already encouraged young people not to communicate with strangers online. However, young people utilize social networking web sites to write journals and poems that often express strong emotions. Explain to children that these words can be read by anyone with access to the Internet, even if they have been marked private and that predators often search out emotionally vulnerable young people. Once a vulnerable child is located online predators attempt to become first a friend and then a confidant of the intended victim.

My children have many online friends that they talk with, is there any danger in that?

Children and teens should be encouraged to electronically communicate only with friends or people they actually know in person—not the virtual world. Young people are in real danger when they actually meet "Internet friends" who are in fact strangers that they've only communicated with online. As a caring adult, you must remain adamant that children never physically meet anyone in person that they've communicated with only online.

REPORTING CHILD ABUSE & NEGLECT IS EVERYONE'S RESPONSIBILITY

What should you do when you suspect child abuse or neglect?

CALL THE HOTLINE at 1-800-392-3738—The Children's Division staff this hotline 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. They will take information from you and respond to child abuse and neglect. If you live outside Missouri and want to report abuse or neglect of a Missouri child, call 573-751-3448.

Any person may report suspected child abuse, neglect, or exploitation. **Anonymous reports are accepted from individuals who are not mandated by occupation to report**, but please consider identifying yourself. Being able to contact you later helps the Children's Division staff complete a more thorough investigation. They may also need to ask you for more information during the investigation process.

Members of certain occupational groups, such as teachers, social workers, and physicians are mandated by law to make reports to the hotline and are considered **mandated reporters**. Effective August 28, 2004, Missouri law requires all mandated reporters to identify themselves when making a report.

When making a report, be sure to have the following information:

- the name of the child
- the name of the parent(s)
- the name of the alleged abuser
- where the child can be located

You will also be asked:

- What are the worrying behaviors that you are calling about today?
- What happened to the child/children as a result of the worrying behaviors?
- What are you most worried will happen to the child/children if nothing in the family changes?
- What actions have been taken other than making this call?
- Is there anything going on in or around the family that makes this situation more difficult to handle?
- What are the best aspects of the adult's care for the child/children?
- What needs to happen differently for you to be confident that the child/children are safe enough?
- On a scale of 0-10 where 10 means the child is completely safe right now and 0 means that if no action is taken, the child could be seriously hurt or injured in the next 24 hours, where would you rate this family?

REPORTING CHILD ABUSE & NEGLECT IS EVERYONE'S RESPONSIBILITY

What if I'm not sure it's abuse or neglect?

You can call the local Children's Division office to discuss your concerns. They can advise you whether or not to call the hotline. They can also give you advice that might help you help the family in crisis.

Err on the side of over-reporting. If you have the thought, "Maybe I should call..."—DO! Not all calls to the hotline are determined to be abuse or neglect. However, the Children's Division can often provide services and assistance that can help families prevent abuse.

IMPORTANT TELEPHONE NUMBERS

To make a report of current or past allegation of abuse:

Missouri Division of Social Services, Children's Division Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline:
1-800-392-3738

To make a report of current or past allegation(s) of abuse by clergy, employees, or volunteers of the Archdiocese, please report to the Missouri Division of Family Services at the number above and contact the Executive Director of the Office of Child and Youth Protection at:
314-792-7271

Missouri Department of Health & Senior Services Adult Abuse and Neglect Hotline:
1-800-392-0210

Additional helpful contact numbers:

National Center for Missing and Exploited Children Cyber Tipline:
1-800-843-5678

Office of Child and Youth Protection General Assistance:
314-792-7704

Have you or a loved one been affected by sexual abuse as a child? Would you like to receive a follow up call from our Victim's Assistance Coordinator or a referral for counseling? Please contact:

*Sandra Price
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314-792-7271 or sandraprice@archstl.org*