A Plan To Protect God's Children™

Step 1: Know the Warning Signs

Knowing the warning signs of adults means we can recognize the early signs of an inappropriate relationship between adults and children and can identify potential abuse before it happens.

- 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 to children
- Shows young people pornography
- Takes photos without approval

Step 2: Control Access through Screening

Controlling access means that we are careful about who we allow to work with our children, and include the items that must be completed prior to ministry.

- Create procedures to determine who has access to children
- Use standard applications
- Obtain previous experience with youth serving organizations
- Require criminal background checks
- Complete face-to-face interviews
- Check personal and employment references
- Regularly review guidelines and policies for adults working with minors
- Ensure compliance with the rules
- Develop and employ an acceptable use of technology policy
- Communicate the Church's commitment to keeping children safe

Step 3: Monitor all Ministries and Programs

Once adults have been screened, all ministries and programs should be supervised to ensure that proper policies and procedures are being followed to keep children safe. If an abuser knows that 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
- Do not permit children to enter staff-only areas
- Only meet with children where other adults can have open access
- Supervisors should have open access to all programs
- Make sure enough adults are involved
- Allow parents to have proper access
- Don't start new programs without approval
- Encourage parental involvement
- Encourage the monitoring of all youth Internet activities
- Install and use appropriate blocking and filtering software for electronic devices

Step 4: Be Aware of Child and Youth Behavior

Being aware means that parents and caring adults should know what is going on in the lives of the children within their care and pay attention to the subtle signs of a problem. Communication is key. When we observe and communicate with our children, we are more likely to detect the signs if they are in danger. We can notice a sudden change in behavior (if they get moody or aggressive), lose interest in school, or stop taking care of their personal hygiene—all potential symptoms of child sexual abuse.

- Talk to your children
- Listen to your children
- Observe your children, including Internet and phone use
- Let your children know they can tell you anything
- Teach your 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, including when using the Internet or technology
- Teach your children what to do if someone tries to touch them
- Teach your children what to do if someone makes them uncomfortable
- Teach your children what to do if they have an uncomfortable communication or experience online

Step 5: Communicate Your Concerns

Communicating concerns means confronting or telling someone when you are uncomfortable with a situation, or discussing suspected abuse with a state official and supervisor. 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. This is one of the most difficult, but important, steps in the process of eliminating abuse.

- If aware of a potential warning sign:
  - Speak directly to person involved, *and/or*
  - Speak to the supervisor

- If you suspect or know a child is being, or has been abused:
  - Call the child abuse hotline for the area

- If you suspect or know a child is being, or has been abused by a diocesan employee or volunteer:
  - *First* call the child abuse hotline, *then*
  - Notify the diocese

- If aware that a child is in immediate danger:
  - Call the police

VIRTUS *Online*™
www.virtus.org

To report abuse in Tennessee:

If you suspect a child is in imminent danger from abuse, please call 911 immediately.

To report *known* or *suspected* child abuse, contact:

Tennessee Department of Child Protection
1-877-237-0004

For more information:

Director of Child Protection
(901) 359-2027

Diocesan Victim Assistant Coordinator
(901) 652-4066

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Protecting God's Children®
For Adults

Quick Reference Guide