

High School – Safe Environment Plan

Note: It is essential to read *The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality* by the Pontifical Council for the Family before presenting this material.

The dignity of the human person is laid out in the primary grades is the foundation of our Safe Environment Program.

Prayer

Psalm 139:1-18

O Lord, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O Lord. You hem me in-behind and before; you have laid your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain.

Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast. If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me," even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you.

For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand. When I awake, I am still with you.

Objectives

- Students will understand their dignity as children of God.
- Students will understand virtue and vice.
- Students will know practical steps for protecting themselves and others from sexual abuse.
- Students will know how to react to abuse and to the possible threat of abuse.

Teaching Points

Note: While an understanding of the dignity of the human person, as well as the nature of virtue and vice are foundational, it is in no way to be implied that those who are the victims of abuse are to blame – or that they have been abused because they were not behaving in a chaste, virtuous manner. (See the 3rd bullet under step 3 below.)

Our Dignity as Children of God

Every human is created in the image of God. This amazing dignity bestowed on the human race was raised even higher when God became man and died out of love for the salvation of every person. Because of the dignity with which we were created, and the love by which we were redeemed on the

cross, all people deserve to be revered and treated with dignity. We have an obligation to uphold the dignity of ourselves and of one another, especially the most helpless among us (children both before and after birth, the sick, the poor, and the elderly).

Virtue and Vice

Virtue

Virtue Defined

“Virtue is an habitual and firm disposition to do the good” (= good moral habits) (CCC – glossary) The virtues make self-mastery possible, which leads to joy in leading a morally good life. (CCC 1804)

The Cardinal Virtues

The Cardinal Virtues are the virtues of Prudence, Fortitude, Justice, and Temperance. The word Cardinal comes from the Latin word *cardine*, which means hinge. They are called the “hinge” virtues because every other natural virtue (not the Theological Virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity) is based upon and grows from the Cardinal Virtues.

- Prudence – discovering our true good and choosing the right means of achieving it
- Fortitude/Courage – firmness in the pursuit of the good
- Justice – giving the proper due to God and neighbor
- Temperance – moderating the attraction of the pleasures of the senses (CCC 1805-1809)

The Virtue of Chastity

The virtue of chastity grows from the virtue of temperance, “which seeks to permeate the passions and appetites of the senses with reason” (CCC 2341). “*Chastity is the spiritual power which frees love from selfishness and aggression*” and is needed due to the effects of original sin (*Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality* 16). In developing the virtue of chastity through a proper understanding of the dignity rather than as an object for sexual pleasure (lust). Chastity is a life-long process of self-mastery involving training in modest behavior, protection of the senses, fidelity to prayer, reception of the sacraments and wise guidance. In youths and unmarried adults, it involves a firm commitment to avoid situations that are likely to inflame sexual desire. Purity in thought, word and deed is essential for chastity.

The sacred gift of marital union is to be reserved for spouses in the Sacrament of Marriage. Until the point of committing themselves totally to one other before God, any pre-marital sexual activity amounts to using the other person for personal gratification and pleasure. Therefore, these sins against purity and chastity are not expressions of genuine love, even if they “feel” loving. The usual consequences of sins against chastity include guilt, loss of innocence, greater selfishness, damage to a future marriage, risk of disease, teenage pregnancy, rift in relationship with parents, depression and loss of our relationship with and love for God. (CCC 2337-2351, 2514-2533) God has given us a plan for authentic love and chastity that guards against using other persons and that protects marriage, family and the dignity of the human person.

Vice

“A vice is a bad moral habit. Technically a vice is the strong tendency to a gravely sinful act acquired through frequent repetition of the same act. Qualities that characterize a vice are spontaneity, ease, and satisfaction in doing what is morally wrong” (*Modern Catholic Dictionary*, John A. Hardon, S.J., pg. 561). While virtue forms a person, vice “de-forms” a person.

"Repentance for sin and confession may restore grace to a soul, but the removal of the ingrained disposition to sin or vice requires much effort and self-denial, until the contrary virtue is acquired" (CCC Glossary Definitions). Spiritual direction and counseling are essential for abandoning some vices. A total and permanent separation from the near occasion of sin is necessary for some who has struggled with a vice that can significantly damage his/her life and the lives of others.

3 Steps Young People Can Take to Create a Safe Environment

Step 1: Know the Warning Signs

Knowing the warning signs means that we can recognize the early signs of inappropriate relationships. If we know the warning signs, then we can identify potential abuse before it happens. If we know the warning signs, we do not have to rely on a child/peer to report an incident. Any one sign doesn't mean that abuse is occurring, but several of them mean that you should go to step 3 listed below.

Warning Signs in Children & Peers

- A child/peer who clearly says, “I just don’t want to be around X anymore.” For no apparent reason.
- Any avoidance that is confusing or of concern
- Sudden mood or behavioral shifts, both before and after an encounter with an adult
- Hyperactivity
- Too much sleep, too little sleep, difficulty sleeping, nightmares, or sleep disturbances
- Changes in eating habits (loss of appetite or trouble eating or swallowing)
- Fear of previously likable places and people; fear of making friends; fear of situations, such as being in the dark or being alone; startled responses to loud noises or voices; possible paranoia about being watched or chased
- Aggressive (verbal or physical) defiance, delinquent behavior, excessive risk-taking behaviors
- For children – new words for private body parts
- For children – difficulty at bath time
- For children – Regression in behavior (i.e., an older child behaving like a young child by doing such things as wetting the bed or sucking a thumb)
- Depression, withdrawal, isolation, self-mutilation, suicide attempts
- Changes in academic performance
- Talking about a new older friend
- Refusing to talk about a “secret” that she or he has with an adult or older child
- Unexplained bruises
- Unexplained urinary infection or sexually transmitted disease
- Frequent headaches, stomachaches, or body aches
- Fatigue or feeling overly tired or unmotivated
- Heart palpitations or difficulty breathing
- Being overly fearful of any touch
- Promiscuity
- Unintended pregnancy at an early age

- In younger children, constant rubbing or irritation of genitalia
- Persistent sexual play with other children, themselves, toys, or pets
- Displaying sexual knowledge through language or behavior (beyond what is normal for a child's age)
- Drug or alcohol problems
- Self-destructive behaviors such as scarring arms with razor blades, needles, or cigarettes
- Spacing out at odd times

Warning Signs of Potential Predators

- Discourages other adults from participating or monitoring
- Always wants to be alone with young people
- More excited to be with young people than adults
- Gives gifts to young people, often without permission
- Goes overboard touching. Is not respectful of a young person's comfort zone
- Always wants to wrestle or tickle
- Thinks the rules do not apply to them
- Allows young people to engage in activities their parents would not allow
- Uses bad language or tells dirty jokes to young people
- Shows young people pornography

Beware – most molesters:

- Look like everyone else.
- Try to gain the trust of parents.
- Gain the trust of children.
- Use their own children to gain access.
- Are often in a trusted role with young people.
- Try to find jobs that involve young people.
- Sometimes use their church association to gain trust.
- Can be very patient while they plan the abuse.
- May begin molesting children when they are children themselves.

Step 2: Avoid Potential Danger

Avoiding potential danger means that we must be careful to avoid situations, and be persistent in helping our friends to avoid situations that could make us vulnerable to harm.

- Use the “2 by 2” principle – when with an adult or even out with people your own age (including “dates”), always be with a friend who you can depend on. Commit to looking out for one another's well-being and always knowing where the other person is.
- Make sure your parents know of any regular meetings or correspondence (email, etc.) with an adult, school counselor, priest, youth minister, etc.
- Talk to your parents. Let them know where you are at all times.
- Avoid drugs and alcohol. You are never less safe than when you are intoxicated. Avoid others who are intoxicated. Even people you know well cannot be trusted in that state.
- Dress modestly.
- When you are with an adult, other people should be able to easily see you.

- Under no circumstances should a person who has abused a child be working with young people. If you know of someone who has abused, they should not be near you.

Step 3: Communicate Your Concerns

Communicating your concerns means telling someone in authority when you are uncomfortable with a situation or a person, and most especially if you have abused or you suspect that someone else may have been abused.

Pay attention to your own intuitions/feelings. Even if abuse is not occurring, it is still important to let others know when you have concerns. Only by communicating concerns can we use our knowledge to create a safe environment. Remember the following:

- If you are worried that a friend is being/has been abused tell someone in authority. Be a true friend even at the risk of upsetting him/her by “overreacting”.
- If you have sought help from someone in authority and that person does not take action, tell another person in authority.
- If you have been abused, it is not your fault, even if you have not followed the steps listed above to avoiding potential danger. Do not fear being blamed. You will not be.
- There is a network of help at home, in friends, at school, in the Church, and in various other organizations. There is always someone to turn to no matter who has victimized you or someone you know. Specifically:
 - Always talk to your parents about your concerns
 - Notify a church official, principal and/or
 - Call your county’s Child Protective Services hotline, the County Prosecutor and/or the Diocese of La Crosse and/or
 - Do not hesitate to call the police
- If you or someone you know has a tendency to sexually destructive behavior – contact someone in authority (anyone mentioned above) for help before you or someone else gets hurt. There is no shortage for help for those who seek it.