



## **PROTECTING OUR CHILDREN**

The Diocese of Brooklyn now requires everyone who comes into contact with children to take a course of recognizing and handling possible incidents of child sexual abuse.

It is estimated that in more than 90% of the cases a child molester is not a stranger but one who wins the trust of the child and the parents. So detecting such a person requires a special awareness of certain common factors.

While we are unaware of any such incidents involving any of our coaches or volunteers, we think it prudent to pass along this sound information provided by the Diocese. What follows is taken from their guide which is presented in training seminars given to those who coach children.

### **Step 1: Know the Warning Signs**

Knowing the warning signs means that we can recognize the early signs of an inappropriate relationship with a child. 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 to report an incident.

- 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 children pornography

### **Step 2: Control Access**

Controlling access means that we are careful about whom we allow to work with our children. It also sends a message to potential child molesters that we are alert about child sexual abuse.

- Communicate the church's commitment to keeping children safe.  
Use written, standard applications.

- Require criminal background checks.
- Complete face-to-face interviews.
- Check references.

### **Step 3: Monitor all Programs**

Child molesters look for ways to spend time alone with children. If they know 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. For example, staff should check bathrooms before sending children in alone.
- Do not permit children to enter staff-only areas.
- Only meet with children where other adults can pass by.
- Supervisors should look in on activities.
- Make sure enough adults are involved in programs.
- Allow parents to drop in on programs.
- Don't start new programs without approval from the pastoral council, the pastor, and/or the children's ministry committee.

### **Step 4: Be Aware**

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

- Talk to your children.
- Listen to your children.
- Observe your children.
- Let your children know they can tell you anything.
- Teach your children where their private parts are.
- 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.

## **Step 5: Communicate Your Concerns**

Communicating concerns means telling someone when you are uncomfortable with a situation or if you suspect abuse. 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.

- Talk to the person involved, and/ or
- Speak to their supervisor, and/or
- Notify a church official, and/or
- Call the child abuse hotline, and/or
- Call the police.

In the context of the 78<sup>th</sup> Precinct Youth Council programs, please be vigilant and make sure that your children are never alone and unsupervised with any of our coaches with whom you are not thoroughly familiar and that you report to us and the police any behavior that is suspicious.