



# Safe Environment Newsletter

## DIOCESE OF FORT WORTH

2017 Volume 3

### Understanding Child Abuse



#### Reflection

Child abuse is the physical or mental injury by a parent or other person who has responsibility for the supervision of a child, under circumstances that indicate that the child's health or welfare is harmed or is at substantial risk of being harmed.

Protection of children and young people is a special concern for the Church as we are called to see the face of Jesus in the vulnerable and needy neighbor (*Matthew 25:31-46*). **We can't let this go in silence any longer.** We need to educate ourselves about this topic, know the facts, start to know the depths of how bad it is, and start doing something about it. Learning to recognize and respond to potential acts of abuse is in fact a response to Jesus' call to love our neighbor, especially those who may need protection.

*"And He will answer them, saying, 'Truly I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers or sisters of mine, you did for me.'"*

*Although a highly sensitive issue, Child Abuse and Neglect are currently leading concerns impacting our country and world.*

### Busting Common Myths About Abuse

**Myth: Children are usually abused by strangers.**

**Fact:** Most children are abused by someone they know and trust and the assault often goes unreported because of shame and fear. People who abuse can even be family members, babysitters, coaches, teachers, doctors etc.

**Myth:** Child abuse typically means sexual abuse.

**Fact:** There are many forms of abuse, broadly categorized as physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse and neglect. Each can have lasting, devastating effects.

### How Can We Help?

**Talk about it:** Child abuse should be treated no different than how we speak about other safety concerns. Have regular conversations about safety rules, what is acceptable behavior, body parts etc.

**Safety Nets:** Kids should have at least 5 adults in their "safety net" who they can speak to about anything. Every parent should know who is in the safety net and the child should be able to identify them. Encourage the child to "check in" with at least one of these adults when a safety rule is broken.

**Saying No:** Let children know they can say "No" to other grownups or older kids who may be trying to break a safety rule. Most kids don't know this is OK to do.

**Mock Drills:** You can have fun mock drills with children, teaching them to **yell** and **catch attention** of another adult in certain situations such as "911, FIRE, HELP ME!"

**Be Supportive:** It is important for children to understand that the abuse was not their fault. Praise the child for showing the courage to report the abuse. A simple statement: "You did the right thing by reporting," can be very encouraging.

**Report immediately:** You can report abuse as long as there is a "reasonable cause".

*Special attention must be devoted to the children by developing a profound esteem for their personal dignity, and a great respect and generous concern for their rights.*

Saint John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 26