

## Some resource and guidance when talking to children and parents about the clergy sexual abuse crisis

### **Key Points to Consider**

- **Parents should never be surprised by discussions others have with their children** about delicate and important topics. Giving the parents a prior heads up is always best.
- Children should **always be encouraged to talk to their parents** and parents to their children. If a conversation is had with a child/children the parents need to be made aware as soon as possible that the conversation took place.
- Ensure all conversations with children are age appropriate.
- Ensure as best you can that the conversation does not traumatize those involved. Be prepared to respond to emotional situations before having any conversation. You never know who is in your group or audience and what experiences or trauma they have gone through.
- Determine the topic focus of the conversation. For example, if you are talking about the clergy abuse (because there are things out there in the public domain) it is recommended that you let the child/youth direct the conversation by asking “what have you heard? How do you feel about what you have heard?” Younger children may have overheard their parents or other family members talk about things. Older children may have already had discussions among themselves.
- Once you find out what kids have heard and how they feel, ask them what questions they may have. Let them direct the conversation and respond accordingly.
- Stay away from graphic details regarding any abuse.
- It is important to always remember that everyone wants to feel safe.

### **Messages Regarding the Clergy Abuse**

- As noted, if a conversation must take place, it is important to let the conversation be guided by what kids have heard and the questions they may have.
- If the question is what abuse took place, a simple response is best.
- It is important to share with children that most of the cases of abuse that they are hearing about happened a long time ago and before they were even born (providing distance to the abuse for children can be comforting). For older kids, they are able to better place things in context knowing a timeline.
- Ensure children that their parents, police, church officials, and others are doing everything they can to make sure abuse does not ever happen again. If you are asked about specifics you can share that Bishop is working hard to make sure that there are no priests in our churches that hurt others. You can share things like Safe Environment, volunteer screening, Virtus training, etc. in a way children may understand what they are.
- Share that they can help too, by telling an adult that they trust anything that makes them feel uncomfortable or doesn't seem right when they are with another person.
- If the subject regards Bishop Morneau, it is suggested that the message be that Bishop did not hurt any children. What happened is he did not tell someone else that a priest hurt a child and he should have. He tried to help the priest and the child and the child's family, but it didn't work and the priest hurt other children.
- If talking to parents on the topic of clergy abuse, it is important to also allow them to guide the conversation through feelings and questions that they may have. It is important to share Bishop's attempt at understanding where people are at through the listening sessions. It is important to establish a timeline regarding when the abuse occurred as well as Bishop Morneau's voluntary

stepping away from public ministry. Referring to Bishop's 7 point plan provides a framework for next steps. Specific questions should be gathered regarding the overall situation and forwarded to the Communications Office. If questions are presented regarding how the diocese handles abuse allegations, folks should be referred to the Safe Environment office.

The question may come up as part of the conversation as to "why" someone abuses another person. You can only say, you don't know why this happens.

### **Messages Regarding Sexual Abuse**

As noted above, this really is a topic for parents to discuss with their children. If a discussion is needed, it is suggested that caution be used as to not get too deep into an area of message delivery that folks are not trained in dealing with.

- Keep the conversation simple and age appropriate if it must be had at all. This is not the time to have any type of "big talk" on the subject, but to address questions kids may have and ask them to speak with their parents about their questions.
- For younger children a simple message sharing that nobody should touch or look at their private areas and they should not touch or look at anyone else either. Maybe their mom's or dad's help them wash up or get dressed, or a doctor or nurse with their parents present may be necessary. If anyone else does this or does something to them that makes them feel uncomfortable, they should tell their mom or dad as soon as they can. Sharing with other trusted adults is encouraged as well...teachers...school counselors...principals, etc.
- If others ever want to do something inappropriate, it is always okay to say no.
- Kids also need to know that they will not get in trouble for telling and it is never their fault.
- For older children, the same age appropriate messages can be adjusted and given.

Additional resources:

Safe Environment Lesson Plans for Children and Youth:

<http://www.gbdioc.org/protectingourchildren/lesson-plans-for-children.html>

How To Report Abuse

<http://www.gbdioc.org/ministry-formation-portal/safe-environment/reporting-abuse.html>

Insert from the Compass

[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Df9a2gNIZlOuqncsBWkFVXn\\_gELPjS0n/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Df9a2gNIZlOuqncsBWkFVXn_gELPjS0n/view?usp=sharing)

Talking points regarding Bishop Morneau

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/19N8Px1N72JQ3XZw1rvKoEbqHgpnH0Ky/view?usp=sharing>