

Protecting God's Children: Teaching Touching Safety

Overview and Founding Principles of Our Programs

“The Church has always affirmed that parents have the duty and the right to be the first and the principal educators of their children.” This statement from *The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality*¹ is the core principle upon which two of our programs—the *Protecting God's Children* program for parents and guardians and the *Touching Safety* program—are founded and designed.

Parents are the primary educators of their children.² This right of parents to educate their children, particularly in the area of morals, values, and human sexuality, is also recognized by the Church as “an educational duty.”³ The Church knows that, “In many cases parents have given up their duty in this field or agreed to delegate it to others, because of the difficulty and their own lack of preparation.”⁴

Other parents have made a decision to take their children out of school-based sex education programs. While the Church affirms the parents’ right to approve any education program dealing with this subject matter, it reminds those parents who remove their children from sex education outside the home that they “have *the duty* to give [children] an adequate formation, appropriate to each child or young person’s state of development”⁵ (emphasis added).

The parents’ program establishes guidelines and principles to assist parents in this important task. The program was developed to help parents provide their children with education in this critical area of human development. And, it responds to parents’ concerns about their own ability to accomplish the task.⁶ The job of ensuring children’s safety is a monumental undertaking. In this effort, the Church provides for collaboration between parents and competent educators.⁷ The role of teachers is to assist and complete the work of the parents.⁸

The *Protecting God's Children* programs were developed consistent with these guidelines established by the Church. These programs assume that the primary education of children is in the hands of the parents and that responsible, thoughtful, classroom instruction that enters into “the same spirit that animates the parents”⁹ can enhance and reinforce the parents’ teaching and increase the child’s ability to resist the overtures of potential child molesters.

These programs are not sex education and are not intended to be a substitute for the responsibility of parents in educating their children in the area of human sexuality and love. Rather, through these programs, teachers, catechists, and youth ministers become partners with parents in assuring that all of God’s children have the tools they need to protect themselves and to resist the overtures of persons in the community who want to prey on them.

Teaching children to protect themselves is part of the mandate of the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People* adopted by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops in June 2002. Article 12 of the Charter states:

Dioceses/eparchies will establish “safe environment” programs. They will cooperate with parents, civil authorities, educators, and community organizations to provide education and training for children, youth, parents, ministers, educators, and others about ways to make and maintain a safe environment for children.

The *Protecting God's Children* program for parents and guardians, and *Touching Safety* (our school-based curriculum), are vehicles available to parents and the Church to assist in accomplishing this important mission.

1 *The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality*, Pontifical Council for the Family, Guidelines for Education Within the Family, November 21, 1995.

2 *Declaration on Christian Education, Gravissimum educationis*, Proclaimed by Pope Paul VI, October 28, 1965. Article 3.

3 *Ibid.* at 44.

4 *Ibid.* at 1.

5 *Ibid.* at 117.

6 “It is not easy for parents to take on this educational commitment because today it appears to be rather complex, and greater than what the family could offer, also because, in most cases, it is not possible to refer to what one’s own parents did in this regard.” *Ibid.* at 47.

7 *Ibid.* at 64.

8 “The primary role of parents to educate their children must be upheld in all forms of collaboration between parents, teachers, and school authorities...” *Charter of the Rights of the Family*, Article 5e.

9 *The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality* at 43; APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION FAMILIARIS CONSORTIO OF POPE JOHN PAUL II TO THE EPISCOPATE TO THE CLERGY AND TO THE FAITHFUL OF THE WHOLE CATHOLIC CHURCH ON THE ROLE OF THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY IN THE MODERN WORLD. November 22, 1981.

Protecting God's Children: Teaching Touching Safety

What We Are Teaching

Touching safety follows two general principles:

1. Children must be able to identify and resist any touch that can harm them—sexual or non-sexual.
2. Children must respect their own health and safety and the health and safety of others.

Children should know:

- The names a doctor would use to describe private body parts.
- That their private body parts are “private” for a reason.
- That private body parts are “off limits” to almost everyone.
- That nobody has the right to touch or see a child’s private body parts except for the purpose of helping keep the child clean and healthy.

Specifically, touching safety has six primary points for parents to remember. Children must know:

1. The anatomically correct names for their private body parts (begin teaching these body parts as early as 18 months).
2. How to identify their safe friends and safe adults.
3. The difference between safe and unsafe touches.
4. The names of the few special safe adults in their lives.
5. What to do if a child, adolescent, or adult touches them in an unsafe manner.
6. Do not keep secrets about unsafe touches.

For more information on the *Touching Safety* program, visit the VIRTUS Online™ website at www.virtus.org.

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This form must be submitted with registration.

My child, _____ Circle one: **DOES** or **DOES NOT** ___ Sun. ___ Wed. Grade: _____

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My child, _____ Circle one: **DOES** or **DOES NOT** ___ Sun. ___ Wed. Grade: _____

have permission to attend the *Touching Safety* lesson in School of Religion classes at St. Matthew Catholic Church this calendar year of 2018-2019.

(Print parent name)

(date)

(Parent signature)