

St. Martin of Tours Academy
7708 El Cajon Blvd.
La Mesa, CA 91942

Dear Parents of Children in Grades 4, 5, and 6,

The Diocese of San Diego is committed to providing a safe environment for all who worship, work, or participate in education and formation opportunities in our parishes and schools. The problem of child sexual abuse is a serious one; a child suffers sexual abuse somewhere in our country every thirteen seconds.

As the primary educators of your child, you are entrusted with the responsibility of providing appropriate information regarding how to keep your child safe from sexual abuse. Empowered parents can develop and maintain an environment of trust in the home that allows children to discuss any topic, any fear, and any experience they are having. Potential abusers will avoid children who have such an open and honest relationship with their parents because abusers depend upon secrecy to avoid suspicion.

In compliance with the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People, the topic of safe environments will be introduced to your child in the Spring each year in the following manner:

Your child's teacher/catechist will emphasize in class:

- That we are all created in God's image.
- Our bodies are special and sacred.
- Because our bodies are sacred
 - σ No one has the right to touch our bodies in a way that makes us feel weird, uncomfortable, scared or worried.
 - σ No one has a right to touch the private parts of our bodies – the parts covered by a bathing suit – unless it is for health or safety reasons. Your body belongs to you.
 - σ No one has a right to hurt us or to threaten us or someone we love.
 - σ No one has a right to ask us to keep a secret about our bodies from our parents or teachers
- If someone has touched us in a way that makes us feel weird, uncomfortable, scared or worried, we should use the **NO-GO-TELL Rule** (included on the following page).
- It is important to keep telling adults until someone you know listens and believes you and will take care of the situation.
- God helps by giving us the courage to say "NO," by giving us strength to tell someone, and by giving us information to protect ourselves.

Your child will be told that you will continue this discussion with him/her at home. Along with this letter are materials intended to help you with that conversation.

CONVERSATION STARTERS FOR PARENTS OF INTERMEDIATE GRADE CHILDREN:

Discuss with your child how we are all special to God and created in God's image. God created every part of us and our bodies are unique and private. Because we are so special to God, God never wants anyone to hurt you. No one has the right to hurt or abuse you nor do you have the right to hurt or abuse anyone else.

Tell your child that one way for them to be safe is to know about different types of touches. Explain that good touches make us feel happy, loved and comfortable inside. Discuss with your child some examples of good touches.

Explain that some touches are confusing, unsafe or bad touches and are not okay. They make us feel frightened, powerless, put down and exploited because someone we see as more powerful is touching us in a particular way or forcing us to do something we do not want to do. Explain that no one has the right to touch our private parts – the parts of our bodies covered by our bathing suits. Tell your child that a grown-up should NEVER ask a child to keep these bad or confusing touches a secret. Tell them if bad or unsafe touching occurs, it is NEVER the child's fault.

Discuss that private parts are called "private" because they should not be touched or shown to anyone and that no one should touch their private parts except

Doctors – with a nurse or parent present

Parents in the case of injury or concern

When you wash yourself.

Tell your child that their body belongs to them; even relatives do not have the right to touch them in a way that makes them feel uncomfortable.

Explain that it is never okay for an adult or older child to touch a child's private parts or ask a child to touch theirs. It is not okay for adults or older children to take pictures of your child or show your child pictures or movies of people without their clothes. This is NEVER okay; this is against the law.

Tell your child that it is not always easy to tell if what someone is doing is wrong. If a child is confused or not sure they should go to a trusted adult. Discuss with your child who would be considered a trusted adult.

Explain that some adults or older children may try to trick or lure your child into allowing them to touch them in a bad or unsafe way. When discussing the lure remind your child to remember the phrase "check first." Explain that anytime someone tries to get them to do something/go with them, they need to say: "I need to check with my mom/dad/parent first."

Review the NO-GO-TELL Rule that your child was taught in class.

NO – If someone touches your child with a bad or confusing touch, it is important to say "NO" and to tell that person "Stop." YELL if you are really scared.

GO – Get away as soon and as safely as you can.

TELL – an adult that you trust what happened.

To conclude this conversation:

Reinforce the idea that no matter what happens to a child, God loves them and you love them very much. It is NEVER the child's fault if something bad or hurtful happens.

Emphasize that God loves each child no matter what happens. It is never the child's fault if the child was abused. God cannot magically stop abuse, but God helps by giving us the courage to say "NO," by giving us strength to tell someone, by giving us information to protect ourselves.

Explain that no matter what happens, there are many trusted adults to whom your child can talk. Emphasize that it is the trusted adult's job to take care of the situation.

Remind your child that there are so many people in their lives who want them to be safe.

I am created in the image of God. God loves me, I am unique and special.

*God loves me and created me. I am unique and special.
There is no one in the world exactly like me.*

*Because God loves me and made me, God never wants anyone to hurt me.
No one has the right to hurt me and I do not have the right to hurt anyone else.*

*If anyone touches the private parts of my body in a way that makes me feel weird,
or uncomfortable or worried or scared.*

If anyone threatens me or tells me they will hurt me or a member of my family.

If classmates or anyone else asks me to do something that I know is wrong.

If Internet contacts ask me for unusual information or to meet them somewhere.

I will use the

NO — GO — Tell Rule.

NO

I will say words that mean no:

*Stop it
Cut it out
Leave me alone
Quit it
Don't do that to me*

I will YELL if I am really scared

GO

I will get away from the person as soon as it is safe:

*I will go to a room with other people
I will go home
I will go to another adult
I will try and call my parents*

TELL

I will tell what happened to a trusted adult:

*My mom or dad
My grandparent
My teacher*

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I am created in the image of God. God loves me, I am unique and special.

I am created in the image of God. God loves me, I am unique and special.

Parent Resources

Safety Tips for Younger Children

- If we ever get separated at the mall or other public place, go to a clerk and say that you lost your parents.
- Don't ever get into a car with someone unless we have said it's okay.
- Strangers should always ask other grownups for help. If a stranger asks you for help, walk away without answering.
- Don't answer the door if we're not at home.
- If a car pulls up near you, walk away quickly in the opposite direction that the car is traveling.
- Never believe anyone who tells you that we're in trouble and he is going to take you to us.
- Yell, scream, and kick if someone tries to take you somewhere. Shout. "This is not my daddy/mommy!"
- Never go places alone; always go with a friend.
- Never leave the yard or play area without telling us.
- Your body is special and private. No one should ever touch you on the parts of your body that your bathing suit covers. If anyone ever does this, tell us right away.
- Let us know if someone tells you a secret that makes you feel weird or uncomfortable and doesn't want you to tell us.
- Tell us immediately if someone gives you a gift, especially if it is supposed to be a secret.
- Just because someone calls you by name doesn't mean that he knows you.
- Never give personal information over the Internet. Never agree to meet someone you have met on the Internet.

Best Practices for Parents

- Make time to communicate with your children—and don't forget that the most important part of communication is listening.
- Be familiar with your children's friends and activities. Know where your children are—and with whom they spend their time.
- Acquaint yourselves with the family composition of the homes where your children spend time. Is there adult supervision? Are there older brothers and/or male teenagers around? Does the single mom have a boyfriend present?
- Screen babysitters carefully; check references before entrusting your children to anyone.
- Never force children to touch, hug, or kiss someone whom they don't want to. Forcing them to do this teaches them that it is okay for adults to impose themselves on children.
- Perpetrators start young: be aware of any children who violate the boundaries of other children. Older siblings perpetrating on young siblings is a very common form of child abuse.
- Teach your children to trust their instincts and give them permission to say "No" to what they think is wrong.
- Teach your children that a good secret is one that will eventually be told, like a surprise party. Bad secrets are often used to cover up wrongdoing.
- Understand that abusers often build trust with parents for the sole purpose of gaining access to their children.
- Teach your children to tell you if anyone makes them feel uncomfortable, or touches them inappropriately—and believe them if they do.
- Be alert to your child's expressing fear or sudden dislike of someone.
- Monitor your children's Internet use and keep computers in a public area of the house.
- Be sensitive to changes in your children's behavior; talk to them about the changes when you notice them.

Resources

Prevent Child Abuse: 1-800-children

Darkness To Light

<http://www.darkness2light.org>

1-866-367-5444

National Runaway Hotline: 1-800-621-4000

<http://www.nrscrisisline.org>

The National clearinghouse of child abuse and neglect information

<http://nccanch.acf.hhs.gov>

Childhelp USA

<http://www.childhelpusa.org>

1-800-422-4453

Youth Crisis Hotline: 1-800-448-4663