

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.

TEEN-TALK, TAKING TIME TO HAVE A CONVERSATION WITH YOUR TEEN

Discuss with your teen 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 us. No one has the right to hurt or abuse you and you do not have the right to hurt or abuse anyone else.

Tell your teen that one way for them to be safe is to know about different types of touches. Explain that some touches make you feel uncomfortable, unsafe 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.

It is not okay for adults to take pictures of your teen 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 teen is confused or not sure they should go to a trusted adult. Discuss with your teen who would be considered a trusted adult.

Discuss self-esteem and build their confidence making smart choices and decisions.

Talk about peer pressure and any unusual friendships with older teens or adults. Never do something that a classmate asks them to do if they know it is wrong.

Remind your teen that silence is not a solution; secrets are a powerful tool for sex offenders and they may instill fear into victims who are ashamed admitting what has happened.

Review the NO-GO-TELL Rule

NO - Any request or demand that makes you feel uncomfortable Say NO.

GO - Get a way from the person and situation

TELL - Never keep Secrets. Tell an adult that you trust what happened.

Discuss with your teen the proper use of the Internet. Tell them never to provide unusual or private information to internet contact and never meet anyone in person if asked.

To conclude this conversation:

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

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

Remind your teen 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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Safety Tips for Teen

- Contracts signed by minors are not legally binding without parent consent
- You must get our permission before you accept a job from anyone.
- Walk with confidence and purpose in public. Be alert and ware of your surroundings and who is in the vicinity.
- Dating should be a fun experience and you should never allow yourself to be coerced into doing anything that you know is wrong.
- It is Okay to be rude to someone who is trying to get you to do something that is wrong.
- “Date Rape” accounts for the vast majority of teenage rapes. Just because you are on a date does not mean that you cannot say “No”. When you say, “No” that response should be respected.
- Never leave an opened can of soda some place where you can’t see it. If you start to feel sick or dizzy, tell a friend to call us immediately and we will come and get you. No questions asked.
- Perpetrators rely on our tendency to avoid making scenes in public, it is okay to make a scene to stop someone from taking advantage of you.
- If you are ever in an uncomfortable situation and need a ride home, call us and we will pick you up– and you will not get in trouble.
- Never do anything with your peers that you would not do if we were present, or if you were alone. “Group think” is usually not wiser than an individual’s independent thinking.
- Never give personal information over the internet. Never agree to meet anyone you have me through the internet.

Best Practices for Parents

- Make time to communicate with your teens- and don’t forget the most important part of communication is listening.
- Be familiar with your children’s friends and activities. Know where your teen’s are- and with whom they spend their time.
- Acquaint yourselves with the family composition of the homes where your teens are spend time Is there adult supervision? Are there older brothers and /or sisters? Does the single mom have a boyfriend?.
- Never force teens 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 .
- Perpetrators start young: be aware of anyone who violates the boundaries of other teens.
- Teach your teen 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 teens.
- Teach your teens to tell you if anyone makes them feel uncomfortable, or touches them inappropriately- and believe them if they do.
- Be alert to your teens expressing fear or sudden dislike of someone.
- Monitor your teens Internet use and keep computers in a public area of the house.
- Be sensitive to changes in your teens 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

