



Diocese of Steubenville  
Safe Environment Program

## ***WHAT CAN PARENTS DO TO PROTECT THEIR CHILDREN?***

### ***Ten action steps for keeping children safe.***

- 1. Spend time** with your children; develop **open** and **honest** lines of communication.

*Many argue that the greatest defense against child abuse is the healthy relationship between parent and child itself. Simple information is not enough. Children need the ongoing guidance of their parents to assimilate and apply the information they have learned, as well as to process and deal with the various situations they will encounter in their lives.*

- 2. Teach** your children that they are **loved by God**, have infinite value, and they deserve to be respected. **Model respect** in the way you speak and act. Visibly live out your faith.

*Children learn behavior patterns mostly by example. When parents model civil and respectful behavior by their own words and actions, children learn the proper way to treat other people, and the way they themselves should be treated by others.*

- 3. Teach** your children **safety rules** that you want them to follow.

*Don't simply rely on safety programs or classroom lessons in school or youth programs. Parents need to make safety rules part of their family life. A failure in this subject is more serious than a letter on a report card.*

- 4. Use “teachable moments”** to reinforce and apply safety rules.

*Take passing opportunities to challenge your children to apply your safety rules. On a shopping trip to the mall, you might ask: “What would you do if we got separated in the mall?” or “What would you do if that man over there asked you to help him carry his shopping bags?” etc.*

- 5. Talk** to your children about the choices they face day to day. Offer them **guidance** as they try to make various decisions. Help them to **process** their thoughts and feelings.

*Patently talking about day to day choices with your children will help them to develop good thinking skills, as well as enhance your relationship. Children are not equipped to deal with all the dangers surrounding them in our often unsafe world. They need trusted adults (especially parents) who can help them navigate through the difficulties of growing up. This is crucial when faced with potentially abuse situations.*

*“There is no foolproof profile of an abuser or his strategies. Education cannot adequately prepare children for the variety of locations, strategies and approaches used by offenders. The danger of sexual abuse is far too pervasive to expect that children can be taught through child-empowerment programs to recognize and protect themselves from offenders. This is particularly obvious when considering that too often parents are disarmed by the benign appearance of the offender and failing to recognize the danger to their children, invite the offender into their home.”<sup>1</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> *To Protect and Prevent: The Sexual Abuse of Children and Its Prevention*, The Catholic Medical Association, pages 16-17.

**6. Listen** to your children. **Pay attention** to their behaviors and attitudes. Be vigilant about anything suspicious that might point to a problem.

*In the vast majority of sexual abuse cases, the sexual offender is not a stranger, but rather someone who is known to the victim and the victim's family. And whether the offender is a family friend, a relative, a teacher, or some other person, they often will try many tactics (including lies, manipulation, and force) to keep the abuse secret. Parents need to be vigilant.*

*"Look and listen to small cues and clues indicating something may be troubling your children, because children are not always comfortable disclosing disturbing events or feelings. This may be because they are concerned about your reaction to their problems. If your children do confide problems to you, strive to remain calm, noncritical, and nonjudgmental. Listen compassionately to their concern, and work with them to get the help they need to resolve the problem."<sup>2</sup>*

**7. Be involved** in your child's life. Know their teachers, coaches, and other adults that work with them. Know their friends. Know where they spend their time. Be vigilant and cautious about the people in your child's life, without being paranoid or overbearing.

*Let's face it. Children (and teens) often will make foolish mistakes. They will put themselves in situations where they can get hurt. And they can often be deceived by people that want to manipulate, use and hurt them. When it comes to safety, there is no substitute for the careful vigilance of loving parents.*

**8. Be vigilant with your children's media use.** Be sure your children know safety rules for using the internet, texting, social networking, playing video games, etc.

*The tools, devices, and services for media use have increased dramatically in recent years. While this is positive in many ways, these new methods of getting connected also pose many new threats, especially to the young. Statistics about exposure to pornography, outright sexual solicitation and cyberbullying demonstrate the need to be vigilant.<sup>3</sup> The reality is that **the internet is the biggest threat facing your child right now – and the access your child has to the internet is staggering.** Parents need to be educated and vigilant when it comes to internet safety. The good news is that great resources are available for parents. [Netsmartz.org](http://Netsmartz.org) is an excellent source to become familiar with the risks associated with various media devices and sources, as well as the steps parents can take to ensure the safety of their children.*

*Another danger that is often overlooked by parents is **video games**. Video and computer games are everywhere. Many of them involve innocent entertainment and learning. But a great number (and more than you might think) involve **extremely graphic displays of violence and sexuality**. In many of the most popular games the players are often encouraged (and even rewarded in the game) for brutal displays of violence, even sexual violence. Parents are strongly encouraged to learn about the dangers of video games and monitor their child's exposure to them. *Plugged In* ([www.pluggedin.com](http://www.pluggedin.com)) is excellent source for reviews from a Christian perspective of a great variety of games, movies, music and more.*

**9. Don't be afraid to ask for help** when you need it! Teach your children that it's okay to ask for help.

**10. Don't forget to pray!**

*Pray alone and pray together. Ask the Lord to protect your children. Ask Him to strengthen your faith and the faith of your family. Ask Him to teach you to be a good parent, and to make your marriage and family healthy and holy.  
**Don't underestimate the power of God's grace!***

<sup>2</sup> "Know the Rules: General Tips for Parents and Guardians to Help Keep Their Children Safer," National Center for Missing and Exploited Children.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.internetsafety101.org/Pornographystatistics.htm>