



## Diocese of Steubenville Safe Environment Training for Adults

# *Recognizing Child Sex Abuse*

## **I. What is considered Child Sex Abuse?**

Child sexual abuse includes touching and non-touching activity. Sexual abuse does not have to involve penetration, force, pain, or even touching. If an adult engages in any sexual behavior (looking, showing, or touching) with a child to meet the adult's interest or sexual needs, it is sexual abuse. Therefore, Child sexual abuse includes harmful contact and non-contact behaviors.

### **Abusive physical contact or touching includes:**

- Touching a child's genitals or private parts for sexual purposes
- Making a child touch someone else's genitals or play sexual games
- Digital or object penetration; i.e., putting objects or body parts (like fingers, tongue or penis) inside the vagina, in the mouth or in the anus of a child for sexual purposes
- Frottage (rubbing genitals against a child's body or clothing)

### **Non-contact sexual abuse includes:**

- Showing pornography to a child
- Deliberately exposing an adult's genitals to a child
- Photographing a child in sexual poses
- Encouraging a child to watch or hear sexual acts
- Inappropriately watching a child undress or use the bathroom
- Making and downloading sexual images of children on the internet
- Viewing sexually abusive images of children
- Making sexual comments to a child; using sexually explicit language
- Voyeurism (peeping)

## **II. Warning signs in children and adolescents of possible child sexual abuse.**

Children often show us rather than tell us that something is upsetting them. There may be many reasons for changes in their behavior, but if we notice a combination of worrying signs it may be time to call for help or advice. Any one sign does not mean that a child was or is being sexually abused, but the presence of several signs suggests that you should begin to ask questions and

consider seeking help. Keep in mind that some of these signs can emerge at other times of stress such as during a divorce or the death of a family member or pet, problems at school or with friends, or other traumatic events that might induce anxiety.

### **What to watch out for in children:**

- Acting out in an inappropriate sexual way with toys or objects
- Nightmares or other sleep problems without explanation
- Becoming unusually secretive
- Seems distracted or distant at odd times
- Has a sudden change in eating habits; refusing to eat, loses or drastically increases appetite, has trouble swallowing.
- Sudden unexplained personality changes, mood swings: outbursts of anger, fear, insecurity or withdrawal
- Regressing to younger behaviors, e.g. bedwetting
- Develops new or unusual fear of certain people or places, not wanting to be alone with a particular person
- Talks about a new “older” friend
- Suddenly has money, toys or other gifts without reason
- Leaves clues that seem likely to provoke a discussion about sexual issues
- Writes, draws, plays or dreams of sexual or frightening images
- Exhibits adult-like sexual behaviors, language and knowledge
- Thinks of self or body as repulsive, dirty or bad
- Physical signs, such as unexplained soreness or bruises around genitals or mouth, persistent or recurring pain during urination and bowel movements

### **Some signs more typical of younger children:**

- An older child acting like a younger child (bed-wetting or thumb sucking)
- Has new words for private body parts
- Resists removing clothes for bathing, bed time, toileting
- Asks other children to behave sexually or play sexual games
- Mimics adult-like sexual behaviors with toys or stuffed animals
- Wetting and soiling accidents unrelated to toilet training

### **Some signs more typical in adolescents:**

- Self-injury (cutting, burning)
- Inadequate personal hygiene
- Drug and alcohol abuse
- Sexual promiscuity
- Running away from home
- Depression, anxiety
- Suicide attempts
- Fear of intimacy or closeness
- Layering of clothing
- Compulsive eating or dieting

### **III. Adult behaviors to watch for or signs that an adult may be using their relationship with a child for sexual reasons.**

The signs that an adult is using their relationship with a child for sexual reasons may not be obvious. There may be cause for concern about the behavior of an adult if they:

- Make others uncomfortable by ignoring social, emotional or physical boundaries
- Refuse to allow a child sufficient privacy or to make their own decisions on personal matters
- Refuses to let a child set his or her own limits or uses teasing or belittling language to keep a child from setting a limit
- Insists on physical affection such as kissing, hugging or wrestling even when the child clearly does not want such physical contact or attention
- Shows an over interest in the sexual development of a child or teenager
- Insists on or manages to spend time alone with a child that cannot be observed or interrupted, or has secret interactions with teens or spends excessive time emailing, text messaging or calling children or youth
- Frequently walks in on children/teenagers in the bathroom
- Turns to a child for emotional or physical comfort by sharing personal or private information or activities, normally shared with adults
- Regularly offer to baby-sit children for free or take children on overnight outings alone
- Buy children expensive gifts or give them money for no apparent reason
- Prefers to spend spare time with children rather than people their own age
- Allows children or teens to consistently get away with inappropriate behaviors
- Treats a particular child as a favorite or making them feel special compared to other children in the group
- Frequently points out sexual images or tells dirty or suggestive jokes with children present
- Exposes a child to adult sexual interactions or images without apparent concern

### **IV. What you can do if you see warning signs**

If any of the above warning signs in children or teens are being observed and you suspect that child sexual abuse might be taking place, or if you become aware of inappropriate behavior in adults who work with children as indicated above, notify your supervisor immediately, or **contact the Diocesan Vicar General at (740) 282-3631.**

**Sources:** *Stop it Now, Preventive Tools*, [www.stopitnow.org](http://www.stopitnow.org); *Child Sexual Abuse Warning Signs*, [www.parentprotect.co.uk/warning\\_signs.htm](http://www.parentprotect.co.uk/warning_signs.htm); *Child Welfare Information gateway*, [www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/usermanuals/sexabuse/sexabuseb.cfm](http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/usermanuals/sexabuse/sexabuseb.cfm)