

Safe Environment of the Archdiocese

Office of Safe Environment

December, 2017



Dear Friends,

As I sit at my computer, it is hard to believe that I am about to prepare the fourth newsletter of this academic year giving is behind us and we have begun our beautiful liturgical season of Advent. I sit here, too, pondering the message to convey. In perusing past newsletters, I came across the following article which I published in the December, 2013 newsletter. Four years later, I feel this is a good time to repeat the message so wonderfully articulated by Elizabeth A. Heidt Kirsch, Director of the Office of Safe Environment.

From Safe Environments to Faith Environments

In his last formal address to the Victim Assistance Ministry Conference as chair of the USCCB Committee for the Protection of Children and Youth, archbishop Gregory Aymond of New Orleans called for a paradigm shift—"from Safe Environments to faith environments." A key point of his address was clear: our efforts to right the wrong of sexual abuse and to protect the life and dignity of our children are not just about safety, but about our faith. All that we do as Church to respond to those suffering the pain of abuse, to protect children and youth, and to promote right relationships models the Gospel message of Christ.

Our Calling

Often when we hear about the efforts of the Church in regard to sexual abuse, we hear about the importance of compliance with the USCCB Charter. From a faith environment perspective, **the importance is not in our compliance, but in our calling.** As Catholics we are called to respect the life and dignity of every human person from conception to natural death. The Charter guides us in action to our calling. **Our calling furthers the Gospel message of Christ.**

Reverence

When we are bogged down with the requirements of a safe environment program or when we linger on the costs of healing and prevention efforts, we may be tempted to say, "That's not my problem I didn't cause the abuse." From a faith perspective however, this is a matter of looking not for the need of others—their healing, safety, sup-

port and respect. As Christ said, "Whatever you do for the least of my brothers you do for me."

Right Relationship

Safe environment programs are more than "risk management", focusing on the actions to reduce the risk of abuse to reduce further damage to our children and our Church. They involve modeling Christ, creating for children the kind of loving relationships that Christ teaches about in His gospel message. Every protective message to children, from noting their unique and special creation, their dignity as a person, and true meaning of love in relationships furthers the Gospel message of Christ.

Who and How We Are

As we move from the concept of safe environments in to that of faith environments we realize that our efforts are more than a program with requirements to be checked off on a list. Healing those who have harmed, preventing abuse, and modeling right relationships **must be an inherent part of who and how we are with children.**

Facilitators, DRE's, Principals, Youth Ministers and all those involved in parish ministry—the work that you do in your parishes on behalf of protecting children is often so demanding and difficult. However, if each of us can put all that we do in the context of the ideas presented in this article we will be truly spreading the gospel message as we **"Go Make Disciples"**.

Because each new month rolls around quickly, I take this opportunity to remind



you that our policy calls for **4 publications of Safe Environment in the Church/school bulletin**. At this point, you should have completed two announcements—July and October. The next one should appear during the **month of January, 2018**. The full announcement is in your Manual, section VII, page 2.

I am happy to share with you that, as a result of our paper audit for USCCB 2016-2017 audit year, our Archdiocese has been found to be “in compliance with the *“Charter for the Protection of Children and Youth”* “. This determination is a direct result of your good work at the parish/school level.

Thank you for sending your Parish Compliance Reports in an accurate and timely manner. It is this report that is used to compile our total Archdiocesan report which was due on September 1st.



We are now in the 2017-2018 audit year. **Next Fall we will be having an on-site visit!** Yes, three years will have passed since our last one! Please do not wait. Make sure that all our your records are in order and contain all of the proper documentation that our protocol requires.



Survey Monkey

Thank you to all those who took the time to complete the “Survey Monkey” on Safe Environment. I was very pleased that we had **101 responses**. All of the results have been distributed to the members of our Safe Environment Committee and we will be studying them at upcoming meetings. Your feedback will be very helpful as we continue to improve our protocol and program.

There were a few questions and/or comments on the new “Social Media Guidelines”. Therefore, I would like to repeat an announcement that was in a special bulletin sent (June, 2017) to all facilitators, and other ministry people who work with youth. The same message appeared in the September, 2017 newsletter. It read:

The former “Technology Guidelines” have been changed and are now called the “Social Media Guidelines”. It is a whole new document. It is posted on the Archdiocesan Safe Environment web site under “Documents”. **All employees, catechists, youth ministers, aides and volunteers who work with children and youth** must read the guidelines and complete the signature page at the end of the document. The signature page should be returned and placed in the personnel file.

Save the date:

April 19, 2018

**Annual Safe Environment
In-service**

**A blessed
ADVENT
to all!**



Three Strategies to Help Girls Reject Porn

This article is taken from cpyu.org (Center for Parent/Youth Understanding). I written by Cassy Hulse who, as a young girl, became addicted to pc



Since opening up about my addiction, I've had the opportunity to hear from hundreds of women and teenage girls who have silently struggled with pornography addiction. In an effort to prepare parents to protect and guide their children, I offer 4 important strategies that I wish my own parents had known. I want you to be able to counter the dangers girls can face when dealing with pornography (these principles can generally be applied to helping boys as well).

#1. Regularly affirm that your daughter's worth is more than skin deep.

Although my parents never intentionally made me feel bad about how I looked, that was the message that I was receiving on a regular basis. Here's why: **All day, everyday, girls are being reminded of what is "good" about their body or appearance and what's "bad" about it.** The pressure to have a hot body, look sexy, etc. starts as early as elementary school. It's these social pressures that often drive girls to find both interest and temporary refuge in the world of pornography, only to have the social pressures enhanced a hundredfold by the images they see.

For me, that pressure was often too much to handle. Whether I was watching pornography to escape to a world where I could put myself in the "hot girl's" shoes or watching to see what I was "supposed" to look like, using pornography reinforced an unhealthy expectation of how I should see my body and how I should see the bodies of those around me.

It's important for your daughter to have a strong self-image, and in the beginning a lot of that influence lies with you, in both how you treat her and how you treat yourself. Tell your daughter, frequently, how beautiful she is (for example: Daughter: "Did, do you like my dress?" Dad: "That is a lovely dress you're wearing, but you look beautiful all the time")

According to Timothy Rarick, PhD, fathers play a huge role in contributing to their daughter's self-esteem. Daughters will often seek the same kind of love in future relationships that they received from their father. By being emotionally available (like frequently complimenting their daughters), and showing physical affection, fathers can often fill an emotional void that their daughters might end up trying to fill with harmful things like pornography later in life.

It's also important to focus on compliments that are not centered on appearance. Notice her talents and strengths and point them out to her on a regular basis. Help her to see that she has more to offer to the world than what her body looks like.

Finally, be a good role model—treat yourself like you would want her to treat herself. If you are constantly putting yourself down for how you look ("I'm so overweight," "I look horrible in a swimsuit"), then you can expect your child to develop that same attitude toward themselves. Self-love is a necessary trait. If you don't have self-love, it's very likely your daughter doesn't either, and it's very hard to receive and give love to others if you're struggling to feel love for yourself. One place to start is to be vocal about strengths, not insecurities or weaknesses.

#2. Combat isolation and fear by making it easy for your daughter to open up about her struggles or conce



When the time comes that she does open up to you, prove what you said to her in previous conversations by responding with love. You don't need to express punishment or disappointment because she's already expecting it and has most likely been feeling major disappointment and shame on her own. Opening up to you is one of the scariest things she's probably ever done, and the best thing you can do to help her is to:

- ◆praise her for her bravery and trust,
- ◆empathize with her plight, and
- ◆express your unconditional love for her.

No matter how much it feels like your world might be shattering when she tells you, I assure you that that moment will pass, but she will remember your reaction forever, and that's something you can't take back.

#3. Recognize that the many types of pornography girls use may not be the same as what boys use.

It is common knowledge that males are more visually stimulated than females are. Among other things, this has been a major contributor to the current cultural isolation that women and girls who are trapped in addiction to pornography may experience. For years, pornography has been seen as a guy problem but as we now know, it's a human problem. Take apples and oranges, for example—they look different, taste different, have different nutritional value, but in the end, they're both fruit. It's the same for pornography. Pornography can take various forms.

It's likely that your daughters have heard the same message that you've taught to your boys, but girls can still fall into the trap of pornography simply because they've been avoiding only one medium of it. You've taught them to stay away from "bad pictures" but it's very possible that your girls are struggling with "bad words" (although "bad videos" and "bad sounds" are becoming that main medium of pornography use).

Previously, the definition of pornography only applied to visual depictions of erotic acts. **Today, the definition includes all mediums of expressing erotic sexual behavior (Webster defines it here)** In the beginning, "bad words" played a huge part in creating my addiction. I've spoken with countless other women about their struggles with pornography, every single one of them confirmed that this was a shared experience. Whether it's erotica found online, a romance novel picked up in the public library, or a text message (sexting), girls can be exposed and drawn to this form of verbal or textual pornography at an early age, and the best way to combat it is to make it a part of your conversation about pornography. Written pornography can be just as addictive and emotionally damaging as visual pornography, and it is generally far more appealing to women. Eventually, as dopamine levels decrease with repeated exposure to the same "drug" (erotic literature) that type of pornography can lead to a "harder drug".

As a young girl, I often rationalized that there was nothing wrong with what I was doing because I wasn't actually watching "bad" things. Don't let your daughters fall into that same trap. Awareness and communication are key in this battle. If you're aware of this danger, then you can make your daughter aware, and she'll be able to make wiser decisions based on recognition from the open communication and discussions you have with her.

Parents & Church together CAN protect our youth!