



Honor Thy Children

Archdiocese of Louisville continuing education for the awareness and prevention of child abuse

CHILD ABUSE - THE HIDDEN BRUISES

Recognizing the signs early is essential

The statistics on physical child abuse are alarming. It is estimated hundreds of thousands of children are physically abused each year by a parent or close relative. Thousands actually die as a result of the abuse. For those who survive, the emotional trauma remains long after the external bruises have healed. Communities and the courts recognize that these emotional "hidden bruises" can be treated. Early recognition and treatment is important to minimize the long term effect of physical abuse. Whenever a child says he or she has been abused, it must be taken seriously and immediately evaluated.

Children who have been abused may display:

- a poor self image
- sexual acting out
- inability to trust or love others
- aggressive, disruptive, and sometimes illegal behavior
- anger and rage

- self destructive or self abusive behavior, suicidal thoughts
- passive, withdrawn or clingy behavior
- fear of entering into new relationships or activities
- anxiety and fears
- school problems or failure
- feelings of sadness or other symptoms of depression
- flashbacks, nightmares
- drug and alcohol abuse
- sleep problems

Often the severe emotional damage to abused children does not surface until adolescence or even later, when many abused children become abusing parents. An adult who was abused as a child often has trouble establishing lasting and stable personal relationships. These men and women may have trouble with physical closeness, touching, intimacy, and trust as adults. They are also at higher risk for anxiety, depression, substance abuse, medical ill-

ness, and problems at school or work. Early identification and treatment is important to minimize the long-term consequences of abuse. Qualified mental health professionals should conduct a comprehensive evaluation and provide treatment for children who have been abused. Through treatment, the abused child begins to regain a sense of self-confidence and trust. The family can also be helped to learn new ways of support and communicating with one another. Parents may also benefit from support, parent training and anger management. Physical abuse is not the only kind of child abuse. Many children are also victims of neglect, or sexual abuse, or emotional abuse. In all kinds of child abuse, the child and the family can benefit from evaluation and treatment from a qualified mental health professional.

Archdiocese of Louisville

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If you need support or someone to talk to:

- ☉ Prevent Child Abuse Kentucky or Indiana:
800.CHILDREN/
800.422.4453
www.pcaky.org
www.pcaain.org
- ☉ Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline
800.4.A.CHILD
800.422.4453
www.childhelp.org

By The Numbers

- 3 Million** - the number of child abuse cases reported each year.
 - 21%** - The percentage of abuse cases reported that are sexual in nature. Second most behind physical abuse at 28%
 - 10** - Every 10 seconds a case of child abuse is reported.
 - 36%** - The percentage of women in prison who were abused as a child
 - 1,640** - Number of children who died in 2012 as a result of child abuse
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BULLYING - A FAMILIAR FORM OF ABUSE

Bullying is a common experience for many children and adolescents. Surveys indicate that as many as half of all children are bullied at some time during their school years, and at least 10% are bullied on a regular basis. Bullying behavior can be physical or verbal. Boys tend to use physical intimidation or threats, regardless of the gender of their victims. Bullying by girls is more often verbal, usually with another girl as the target. Bullying has even been reported in online chat rooms, through e-mail and on social networking sites.

Children who are bullied experience real suffering that can interfere with their social and emotional development, as well as their school performance. Some victims of bullying have even attempted suicide rather than continue to endure such harassment and punishment.

Children and adolescents who bully thrive on controlling or dominating others. They have often been the victims of physical abuse or bullying themselves. Bullies may also be depressed, angry or upset about events at school or at home. Children targeted by bullies also tend to fit a particular profile. Bullies often choose children who are passive, easily intimidated, or have few friends. Victims may also be smaller or younger, and have a harder time defending themselves.

If you suspect your child is *bullying others*, it's important to seek help for him or her as soon as possible. Without intervention, bullying can lead to serious academic, social, emotional and legal difficulties. Talk to your child's pediatrician, teacher, principal, school counselor, or family physician. If the bullying continues, a comprehensive evaluation by a child and adolescent psychiatrist or other mental health professional should be arranged. The evaluation can help you and your child understand what is causing the bullying, and help you develop a plan to stop the destructive behavior.

If you suspect your child may be the *victim of bullying* ask him or her to tell you what's going on. You can help by providing lots of opportunities to talk with you in an open and honest way.

It's also important to respond in a positive and accepting manner. Let your child know it's not his or her fault, and that he or she did the right thing by telling you. Other specific suggestions include the following:

- Ask your child what he or she thinks should be done. What's already been tried? What worked and what didn't?
- Seek help from your child's teacher or the school counselor. Most bullying occurs on playgrounds, in lunchrooms, and bathrooms, on school buses or in unsupervised halls. Ask the school

administrators to find out about programs other schools and communities have used to help combat bullying, such as peer mediation, conflict resolution, and anger management training, and increased adult supervision.

- Don't encourage your child to fight back. Instead, suggest that he or she try walking away to avoid the bully, or that they seek help from a teacher, coach, or other adult.

- Help your child practice what to say to the bully so he or she will be prepared the next time.

- Help your child practice being assertive. The simple act of insisting that the bully leave him alone may have a surprising effect. Explain to your child that the bully's true goal is to get a response.

Encourage your child to be with friends when traveling back and forth from school, during shopping trips, or on other outings. Bullies are less likely to pick on a child in a group.

If your child becomes withdrawn, depressed or reluctant to go to school, or if you see a decline in school performance, additional consultation or intervention may be required. A child and adolescent psychiatrist or other mental health professional can help your child and family and the school develop a strategy to deal with the bullying. Seeking professional assistance earlier can lessen the risk of lasting emotional consequences.

HONOR THY CHILDREN TRAINING

Those employed or volunteering with youth must undergo a background check every 5 years as well as attend the "Honor Thy Children Training" that addresses child abuse, how to recognize it and how to report it. See your parish/school Safe Environment Coordinator if you have not sat-

isfied either of these requirements. The "Honor Thy Children" training is a one time requirement and is normally completed within 30 days of beginning service. The background check MUST be completed BEFORE any service/employment begins.

UPCOMING TRAININGS

(All begin at 6:30 p.m.)

- 1.26.15 - St. Nicholas Academy
- 2.23.15 - St. Joseph (Bardstown)
- 3.9.15 - Holy Trinity (Louisville)
- 3.23.15 - St. Rita (Louisville)

A current listing is always available at www.archlou.org/safe

Archdiocese of Louisville Office of Safe Environment

Martine Bacci Siegel, MSN, RN, CNS
Maloney Center
1200 South Shelby Street
Louisville, KY 40220

Phone: 502.636.1044

Fax: 502.634.3381

E-mail: msiegel@archlou.org

No child or adult should ever experience abuse by anyone, especially a church minister. We all have the right to be treated with dignity and to expect our church to reflect the goodness of God in all of its dealings.

We hope that this information is helpful to all in our communities who are working to prevent and respond to childhood sexual abuse. Please let us know if you need further assistance or information by calling or emailing our victim assistance coordinator, Ms. Martine Siegel, at 502/636-1044; victimassistance@archlou.org or the Chancery at 502/585-3291.

We must heed God's call to care for the most vulnerable among us and to continue our efforts toward wholeness and health in dealing with sexual abuse.

WHAT TO SAY AND DO

If a child even hints in a vague way that sexual abuse has occurred, encourage him or her to talk freely.

Don't make judgmental comments.

- Show that you understand and take seriously what the child is saying.

Child and adolescent psychiatrists have found that children who are listened to and understood do much better than those who are not. The response to the disclosure of sexual abuse is critical to the child's ability to resolve and heal the trauma of sexual abuse.

- Assure the child that they did the right thing in telling. A child who is close to the abuser may feel guilty about revealing the secret. The child may feel frightened if the abuser has

threatened to harm the child or other family members as punishment for telling the secret.

- Tell the child that he or she is not to blame for the sexual abuse. Most children in attempting to make sense out of the abuse will believe that somehow they caused it or may even view it as a form of punishment for imagined or real wrongdoings.

Finally, offer the child protection, and promise that you will promptly take steps to see that the abuse stops.

Always report any suspicion of child abuse. If the abuse is within the family, report it to the local Child Protection Agency. If the abuse is outside of the family, report it to

the police or district attorney's office. Individuals reporting in good faith are immune from prosecution. The agency receiving the report will conduct an evaluation and will take action to protect the child.

Parents should consult with their pediatrician or family physician, who may refer them to a physician who specializes in evaluating and treating sexual abuse. The examining doctor will evaluate the child's condition and treat any physical problem related to the abuse, gather evidence to help protect the child, and reassure the child that he or she is all right.