

Key Steps for Administrators, Directors of Religious Education, Youth Ministry Directors, and Leaders When There is a Sensitive or Concerning Situation

If a child discloses clear information of abuse and immediate safety is a concern the following steps should occur:

- Assure the child that you will contact people who can help them be safe.
- Ask Director/Administrator for help reporting and with your further interaction with the child/family. (Refer to your diocesan policies.)
- Authorities will be responsible for interviewing the child so keep questions to a minimum.
- Ask authorities who will contact the parents and when this will occur.
- Assure the child that you will be there for them during the process as much as possible.

When a child discloses information that is concerning but not threatening immediate safety, the following steps should be considered:

- Always coordinate with your Director/Administrator when dealing with these situations.
- Decide when and if the parents should be notified depending on relationship with parents and issues around the concern (example: a parent is very sick in the hospital and you become aware that the young grade school child is left home alone). Consider approaching parents to offer assistance.
- Keep written documentation of your concerns.
- Use your best judgment in sharing information with parents regarding your conversation with their child.
- Consider reporting to the authorities (refer to diocesan policies).

There May Be Many Reasons That a Child Approaches You Upset or Discloses Potentially Concerning Information. Only ask enough questions to determine if there is reasonable cause to report. Below are general guidelines when you find yourself in this type of situation.

Open-ended questions are best. These questions help you enter into the world of a child without coloring it with assumptions.

(Child starts crying in class.) Below are examples:

- If your tears had words, what would they say?

- I am here to listen.
- Tell me more.
- And then what?
- I want to understand your hurt.

Directed questions when there is more information:

(Child states they are upset with their Uncle/Aunt)

- Tell me more about your Uncle/Aunt.
- What are the things that are upsetting you?

Avoid Leading Questions:

- Did your Uncle hurt you?
- Did your Aunt touch you in your privates?
- Did they tell you not to tell?

Working with Parents in Sensitive Situations:

Talk in a confidential area and when asking questions remember to keep them open ended and non-accusatory.

When immediate safety is a concern and a report has been made:

- Seek advice from the authorities (CPS and Police) as to who will contact parents. (You may interfere with the investigation if you contact parents before authorities.)
- Always coordinate with your Director/Administrator when dealing with parents in these situations.
- If parents become aware of your report: reinforce that you are a mandatory reporter and need to defer to the authorities during the investigation.
- It is not your role to determine guilt but to report concerns per the law.

When immediate safety is not a concern and a report has NOT been made:

- Share the facts in a calm and nonjudgmental manner.
- Avoid assumptions. For example: Ted was crying in class and told you someone is bothering him. He did not define bother or identify the person. It is important not to assume guilt of the parents.
- Assume parents will be supportive and concerned unless they demonstrate otherwise.
- Offer supportive resources such as counseling.