

Office of Safe Environment Diocese of Owensboro Notice to Parents/Guardians

Recognizing the role of parents as the primary educators of their children in the faith, the Diocese of Owensboro requests that parents of children who have not received Safe Environment training, share this material with their children.

Please discuss these safety issues with your child in a way that suits your child's age and level of development. We hope that this material provides an opportunity for children to talk with their parents about safety issues.

Sadly, some children experience things they should not have to. The intent of this material is to teach children that although God is a loving, listening, caring presence in their daily lives, He also listens and speaks to them through special adults whom He sends to children because He loves them. Children should feel secure and safe in sharing information with a trusted adult when problems or people hurt them or cause them to worry.



This booklet was created in response to the crisis of sexual abuse of children and young people by some priests and bishops. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops issued *Promise to Protect, Pledge to Heal: The Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People* (2003). The document states:

Dioceses/eparchies will establish "safe environment" programs. They will cooperate with civil authorities, educators, and community organizations to provide education and training for children, youth, parents, ministers, educators and others about ways to make and maintain a safe environment for children. (Article 12)

Getting Started

- **Reflect on God's gift of your children to you**
- **Express your love to your children**
- **Remind your children that your love expresses God's love**
- **With your children, thank God for the gift of our whole beings: bodies, minds and souls**
- **We relate to our family and friends through our bodies (shaking hands, hugs from those who love us, a pat on the back, a high five, playing games). Help your children think of other answers.**
- **Sometimes people use their bodies to hurt others and make them feel bad (hitting, punching, pushing). Help your children think of other answers.**
- **Explain to your children that certain parts of their body, their private parts, need special protection and care. Only a few people have permission to see or touch the special and private parts of their body. These are people who help them, like parents who bathe them and doctors who examine them. Explain that the special private parts of their body are the parts covered by a bathing suit.**

What Every Parent Should Know About Sexual Abuse

- All children are vulnerable to sexual abuse regardless of ethnicity, cultural background, or economic status.
- All children have an inherent right to feel loved, valued and protected.
- Children are best protected when they have the knowledge and skills necessary for their safety and well-being.
- Many times there are no physical signs of sexual abuse.
- Many cases of child sexual abuse go unreported because the child is afraid or ashamed to tell anyone what has happened.
- Offenders often threaten to hurt the child or the child's family members.
- Many children believe they are to blame for the abuse.
- A victim is never to blame for the abuse.
- There is little evidence that children make false allegations of abuse; what is more common is a child's denying that abuse happened when it did.

Preventing Sexual Abuse

- Supervise! Know whom your child is talking to at all times.
- Parental controls—use them and learn about them!
- Tell your child you will monitor his or her relationships. Be sure to follow up on that claim.
- Talk to your child's friends about what is happening online.
- If you don't know about the Internet and cyber sex, become informed.
- Young people need to know that their bodies are sacred. Talk openly about safe versus unsafe touch.
- Create and encourage your child to develop support and trust with significant adults whom they can trust.
- A good rule of thumb: If someone enjoys being around your child more than you do, there is a problem.
- Nothing is more sacred than communication; nothing is more preventive!
- Open discussion about sexual matters, although it may be uncomfortable, needs to be pursued. If not to you, to whom will your child turn?
- Know the adults, peers, and the families of peers with whom your child relates. Ask about all that happened with your child when you were not with him or her. Be curious.
- Your values are key for your child to know; however, your child needs you most of all. As the saying goes, LOVE, means or is spelled TIME.
- Be there and know where your child is and what he or she is doing. Meet all parents who will be supervising your child in any capacity. Do not assume anything about anyone.
- Show your child that it is okay to say no when someone she or he know and cares about does something he or she does not like.
- Set and respect family boundaries.
- Speak up when you see "warning sign" behaviors.
- Practice talking about difficult topics, such as sexual abuse, with other adults.
- Be sure you are comfortable saying the proper names of body parts before you teach them to your child.
- Teach your child that secrets about touching are NOT okay.
- Set up a family safety plan that is easy to remember.
- List for yourself whom to call for advice, information, and help.
- Remember, one discussion about sexual abuse is not enough.

Following are some activities you may do with your children. Select the activities that are appropriate for your child's level of development.

God created a beautiful world. Color the picture of God's creation.



One of God's most beautiful creations is YOU!

My name is _____

My favorite food _____

My favorite color _____

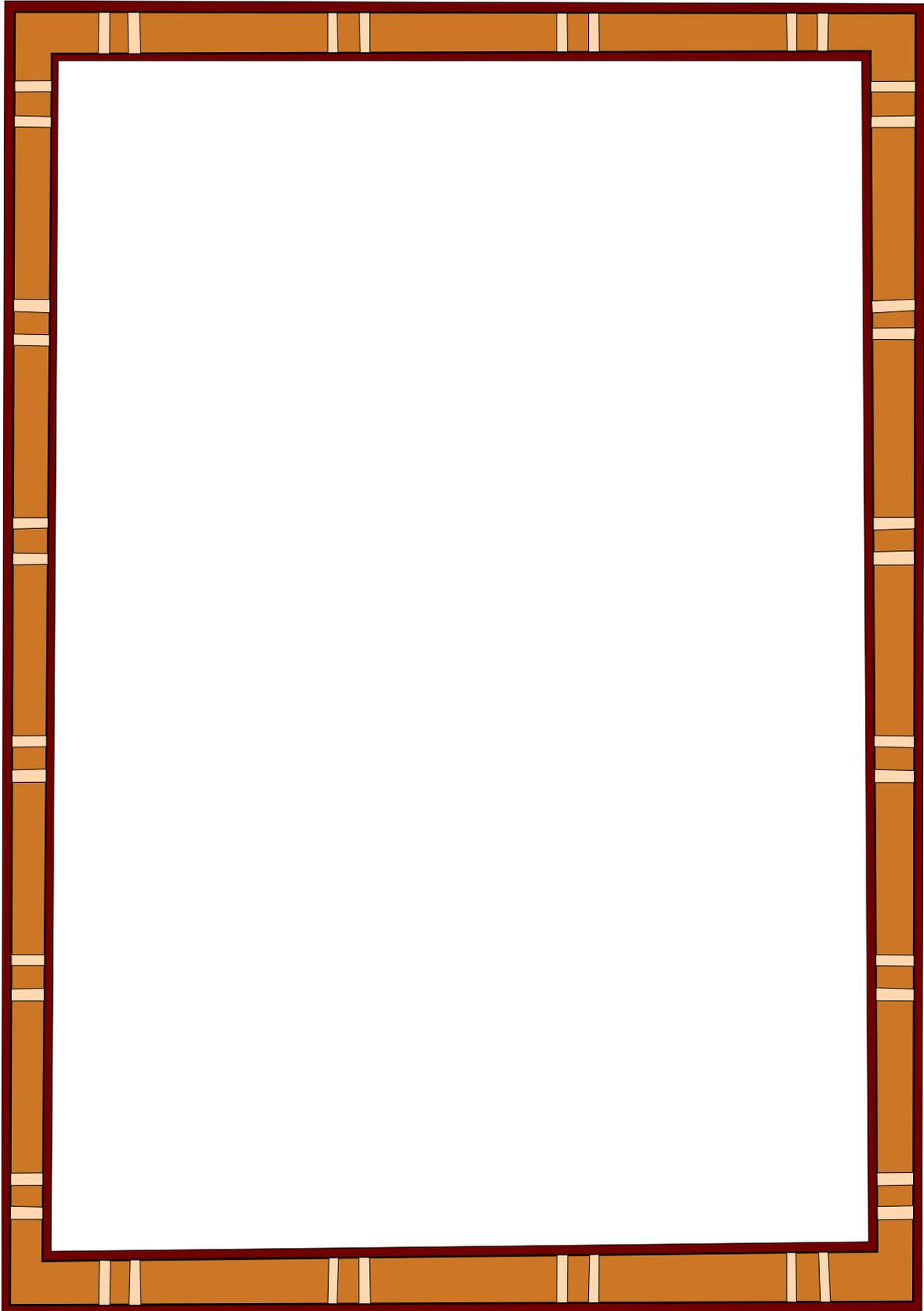
My favorite saint _____

My favorite book _____

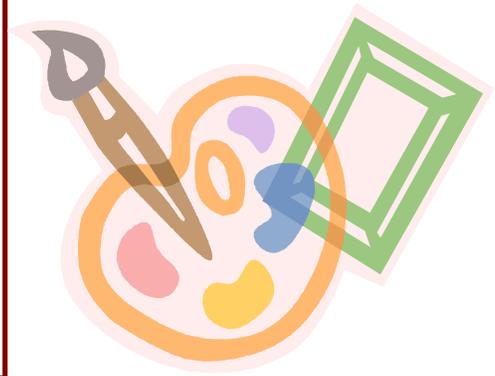
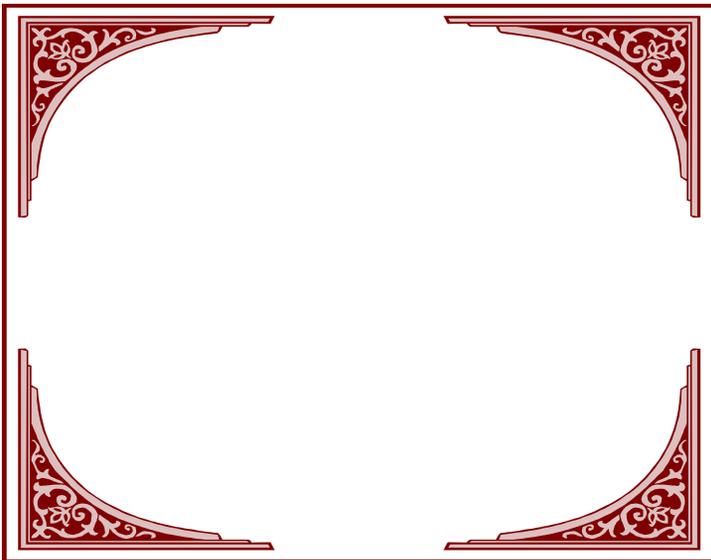
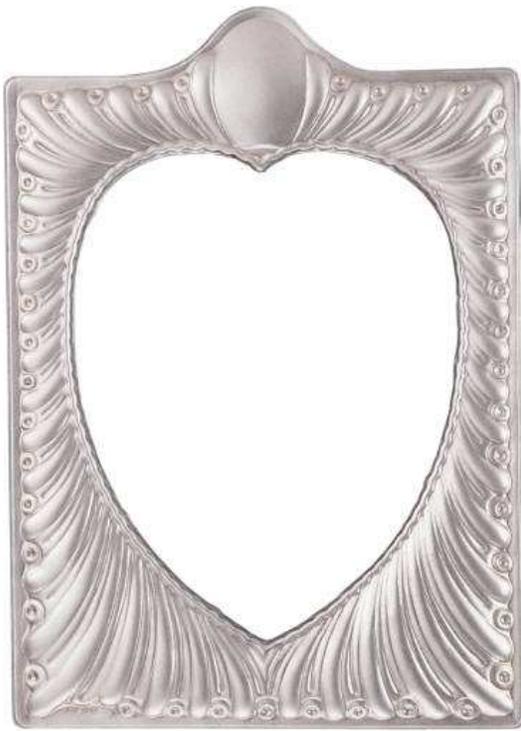
My favorite prayer _____

My favorite song _____

Draw a picture of yourself.



God loves you. God gave you people who love you and protect you and help you take care of your body. Draw a picture of some of the grown-ups who care for you and protect you.



When bad things happen to you or you are worried about something, it is best to tell a person you trust who can help you. God sent special people into your life to remind you that He is always there for you.

If a grown-up or an older child asks you to take off your clothes or touches your private parts in a way that makes you feel uncomfortable or bad, ask for help from someone you trust.

There are three important rules to remember if this should ever happen to you:

1. Say no. **NO**
2. Get away. **GO**
3. Tell someone you trust. **TELL**

Print these rules below.

1. ____ ____ .
2. ____ ____ .
3. ____ ____ ____ ____ .

(Keep telling until someone listens.)

Say words that mean NO: Quit! Stop! I want you to Stop! Stop now! Don't do that to me! Cut it out! No way!

Get away as soon and as safely as you can and:

Go into a room where others are gathered, Go home if you can, Go find a mother with kids if you are in a public place, Go in the other direction, Go anywhere there is another adult or police office who can help.

Tell an adult you trust what happened:

Tell your mother and/or father, Tell your grandparents, Tell your aunt or uncle, Tell a priest, Tell a teacher, Tell an adult you trust.

Bullying

Talk to your children about bullying. Explain that bullying is a form of abuse some children do to other children. It might be physical, emotional or physical. When children act like bullies, they deliberately do mean things to other children. The child who is the victim can be hurt, frightened, or threatened by another child who is bigger, stronger or older. Read the following list to your children and ask them if they have seen this behavior or if it has happened to them.

- **A child pushes others out of the way to be first in line.**
- **A child tattles on someone just to get them in trouble.**
- **Children laugh at someone who makes a mistake.**
- **A group of children gang up on someone and beats up that person.**
- **Children say “you can’t play” to someone they don’t like.**
- **Children make fun of what one child is wearing to school.**
- **One child calls another child mean names like “chicken” or “baby.”**
- **Children mimic or make fun of a child who is different.**
- **One child purposely trips another child.**
- **One child won’t let another child have a fair turn at a game.**

Ask the children if they have ever done any of the above to another child.

Help your child write a prayer to God, asking for forgiveness if they have been mean to others. Ask God to take special care of children who are bullied and to make our world a place where everyone can feel safe and loved.

Who might be a sexual abuser?

Explain to your child that you can’t tell by looking at someone if they are a sexual abuser. They might act kind, nice, fun, and even loving. They might be a close family member, a relative or an adult leader. They might be a friend or a stranger.

What do sexual abusers do to children? Sometimes they:

- **Try to get the child alone**
- **Give the child alcohol to drink**
- **Promise to give the child presents or privileges**
- **Tell the child that he or she is very special**
- **Show the child sexual pictures, movies, videos**
- **Take naked or sexual pictures of the child**
- **Touch the child in a sexual way**
- **Ask the child to touch them in a sexual way**
- **Threaten to hurt the child or someone else if the child tells**
- **Tell the child that the sexual abuse is really the child’s fault.**

How will the child feel?

- **Confused**
- **Scared**
- **Embarrassed**
- **Ashamed**
- **Guilty**

Myths and Facts

Myth: Child molesters typically use physical force and/or threats to gain compliance from their victims.

Fact: *Only 10-15% of child molesters use force or threats.*

Myth: Most Child molesters find their victims by frequenting such places as school yards and playgrounds; therefore, all parents should be extremely concerned for their children's safety in such places.

Fact: *Most child molesters offend against children they know and/or with whom they have a relationship.*

Myth: Most child molesters are "dirty old men."

Fact: *The majority of sex offenders are men, typically in their late 20's to early 30's and lead average life styles.*

Myth: Child molesters are only attracted to children, and therefore, are not capable of engaging in appropriate sexual relationships with consenting adults.

Fact: *Most child molesters fall into 2 categories: Regressive offenders are primarily interested in adults but regress and seek inappropriate comfort from a child. They represent the majority of molesters. Fixated child molesters (about 35%) are attracted to children as their primary sexual interest.*

Myth: Victims of child molestation are harmed only when offenders use force to make the victim have sex with them.

Fact: *Victims can suffer many forms of physical and emotional harm including fear, shame, guilt, embarrassment, and rejection.*

Myth: Children often lie by making up stories of sexual abuse.

Fact: *Cases of children making up stories are rare.*

Myth: If a child doesn't tell anyone about the sexual abuse, then he/she must have liked it.

Fact: *Children won't tell because they are ashamed, afraid, protective of parents, afraid they will be blamed.*

Myth: Children generally recover from the effects of abuse on their own. It is best to keep abuse a secret, so that they don't have to endure talking to anyone else about it.

Fact: *The level of trauma that is incurred is based on many factors. With appropriate support, children can work through their trauma. However, it is important that children get help as soon as possible.*

