

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **Catechesis for Family Life and Child Safety Education**

#### **As a parent will I be involved in the process of teaching my child about Catholic moral values and healthy relationships?**

Yes. All of the approved textbook programs recognize parents as the primary teachers of their children in faith and morals. The curriculum authors, as well as your parish and school, seek to assist you as a parent or guardian in conveying the fullness of life in Christ to your child.

#### **Does the Catechesis for Family Life present a clear moral teaching that reflects the value system of the Catholic Faith?**

Yes. All the approved textbooks are in conformity with the teachings of the Catechism of the Catholic Church and therefore present the moral theology of the Catholic Faith.

#### **What is included in the program?**

The lessons flow from understanding oneself in relationship to family community, social community and Church community. Family Life teaches essential Christian living themes:

- Living as a member of a family
- Healthy moral, physical, sexual and spiritual development
- Human dignity
- Life choices and vocation
- Responsible living in society

#### **Will my children be learning specifics about human sexuality before they are ready?**

No. Each grade level is specifically geared to age appropriate lessons. In grades 5 and 6, an additional family resource is sent home which parents may use to teach their children simple and direct information about human reproduction. Details about human anatomy are sent home to the parents to teach. If parents agree, the lesson on puberty and reproduction may also be taught in the classroom in 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> grades.

#### **What will my children learn that will help protect them?**

Making the Catechesis for Family Life an integral part of the Faith Formation program insures that each child receives education for protection from sexual abuse and exploitation in the context of the positive message of the Gospel. The child protection topics integrated into these faith themes, in age appropriate ways, include

- Appropriate relationship boundaries
- Sharing love appropriately
- Gender equality
- Understanding and appropriately expressing feelings
- Independence
- Dealing with uncomfortable situations
- Appropriate touching
- Touching should never be a secret
- Identification of 3 or 4 trusted adults
- Reporting abuse to trusted adults
- Asking for help
- Proper understanding of forgiveness, obedience and trust
  - Forgiveness takes time and help from trusted adults
  - Children are not required to obey adults who make sexual advances/requests
  - Trustworthy people will not act in a sexual manner toward a child

**Q: Abuse prevention, especially sexual abuse prevention, is such a personal issue – why is it being taught in the school and parish?**

Child abuse prevention must be a community wide effort that involves children, parents, schools and other community agencies. It is the job of the schools to educate and to help ensure that our children are available, physically and emotionally, to learn. Children who are being maltreated often suffer a variety of emotional, behavioral, and cognitive problems that often result in poor academic functioning. We cannot expect to educate children successfully who are not having basic needs met in their personal lives.

**Q: I do not want to talk to my children about sexual abuse, because I do not want to frighten them. Is this really the right thing to do?**

- You, as the parent, are probably more uncomfortable or frightened by this than your children.
- The catechist/teacher provides safety information to our children in a number of other areas. For example, you teach them to look both ways when crossing the street to avoid being hit by cars, and we teach them to “stop drop and roll” if clothes catch on fire to prevent burning.
- The best way to reduce the risk of abuse is to nurture healthy sexual development in our children so that they recognize when boundaries are being violated and ask for help. We can do this by sending positive, protective messages without scaring them unnecessarily.

**Q: I am concerned that I really cannot tell who is and who is not a sex offender.**

- You are exactly right. There is no such thing as a typical sex offender. In fact, many sex offenders are very charming people. As adults we must be vigilant, take precautions around people who have “red flags,” and create homes where our children feel comfortable asking questions about sexuality and abuse.

**Q: How will I know if I can believe allegations about sexual assault – do people/children make false allegations?**

- Many victims tend to minimize sexual assault or do not disclose the abuse out of self-blame, fear, or shame. This is particularly true of child victims. Research indicates that sexual assault is no more falsely reported than any other crime. The best approach is to believe the victim, listen to his or her allegations, offer your support, and support the victim in getting the help that she/he needs.

**Q: Can I protect my children?**

- You can minimize risk by listening to their concerns and questions, working with them on the lessons in the Catechesis for Family Life, talking to them about healthy relationships and sexual abuse, and ensuring an openly communicative family lifestyle where your children know they can come to you if they have questions, fears, or concerns.

**Q: I have heard that sometimes children willingly participate in sexually abusive activities, and are partly to blame.**

- Because of their age and the age difference between children and their perpetrators, children are unable to truly consent to sexual activity. They are NEVER to blame for their own abuse – although they are often made to FEEL as if they were willing participants due to the manipulative behavior of their abusers. This further contributes to their blame and guilt. One of the most healing responses is to assure the child that they bear absolutely NO responsibility for what an adult has done to them or made them do.