



Building a Safer CHURCH

A look at how the Diocese of Rockville Centre is
working to ensure a safe environment



Office for the Protection of Children and Young People

- * ASSISTING SURVIVORS
- * EDUCATING THE FAITHFUL
- * ENSURING A SAFE ENVIRONMENT

Since its establishment in 2003, the Diocese of Rockville Centre Office for the Protection of Children and Young People has remained vigilant and responsive to the safe environment concerns in parishes across Long Island. It has also grown to reflect the changing multicultural population of the diocese.

Mary McMahon, LCSW, the office's director since 2014, spoke with *The Long Island Catholic Magazine* to discuss the office and its latest initiatives.

BY
TINA
DENNELLY

PHOTOS BY
LIZ & JOE SCHMIDT
PHOTOGRAPHY

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE OFFICE FOR THE PROTECTION OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE?

During the biannual meeting of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops in June 2002, the bishops established protocols to assist dioceses throughout the United States in response to allegations of clergy abuse and misconduct. The Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People — more commonly referred to as The Charter — mandated that each diocese establish specific measures to assist survivors of clergy abuse, to educate the faithful and to ensure protection of the faithful in the future. In response to this directive, the Diocese of Rockville Centre developed the Diocesan Child Protection Policy, which established the Office for the Protection of Children and Young People.

From inception in 2003, the office has remained constant in providing outreach and assistance to survivors of abuse (Mandate 1 of The Charter); developing safe environment programming for clergy, laity and children (Mandate 2); and developing measures for accountability (Mandate 3).

WHAT DOES THE OFFICE DO ON A DAILY BASIS?

Well, first — no two days are ever the same. In addition to myself, the office is staffed by three very dedicated women. We try to start each day together with five minutes of prayer, to remember why we do what we do, to ask for grace to stay strong in our convictions and to pray for the graces of healing for all we will encounter that day. Then, the day starts to roll.

The diocese has 133 parishes that offer many activities, including hosting VIRTUS classes, faith formation classes and other ministries involving youths and adults. On most days there will be messages and emails from participants,



The staff of the Office for the Protection of Children and Young People (left to right): Joanne Winter, Mary McMahon, Arely Mendoza-Cantos, Patricia DiTomasso.

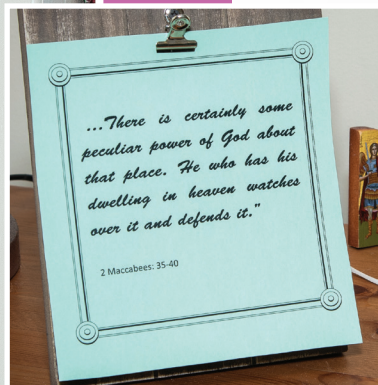
facilitators and ministry leaders. We try to respond to these as early in the day as possible. And then there is the flow of paperwork: VIRTUS attendance sheets to process, meetings in parishes, arranging trainings, outreach to parishes — and always updating records for the annual audit (Mandate 3).

The priority for me is to check for messages on the diocesan hotline and my personal line. Whenever a call comes in from a survivor or anyone reporting abuse, I try to return it as soon as I am able. I want to dedicate as much time as the caller requires when I respond, so sometimes I will reach out later in the day or early evening when I won't be distracted. I also try to schedule a time to meet with the individual; that is not always possible, but it is always offered. More than anything, I want a survivor to know the diocese is listening, cares and is sorry.

HOW MANY CALLS REGARDING ALLEGATIONS OF CLERGY ABUSE DO YOU RECEIVE?

I think this is the good news — reports that come to the office are allegations of abuse that occurred many years ago.

The VIRTUS program, background screening, Think First & Stay Safe (children's program), ongoing clergy



training, annual audits — all these point to the fact that when you offer a solid program and the entire community is educated and engaged, change is possible.

That being said, the diocese remains steadfast and vigilant in its efforts to maintain the standards of safety we have in place.

HOW HAS THE OFFICE CHANGED SINCE ITS INCEPTION?

This is the exciting part! In 2014 the office was one person — now it is four!

When I started visiting parishes in 2014, two issues jumped out. One was that every pastor wanted to be in compliance with the mandates of The Charter — and in fact was trying to be in compliance — but every parish was doing it differently. The second issue was enhancing the presence of VIRTUS within the Spanish-speaking community. We had Spanish-speaking facilitators, but there were only a handful to meet the demands of a very large population.

In 2015, Arely Mendoza-Cantos joined the office as liaison to the Spanish-speaking community. Arely has trained Spanish-speaking VIRTUS facilitators, met with Spanish clergy, translated the Child Protection Policy and has been a tremendous asset in bringing safe environment

awareness to the community.

Next, Arely and I tackled the issue of parish compliance, developing a Safe Environment Binder containing all the required forms, suggested methods of collecting data and a safe environment checklist. Our goal is to meet with each pastor so that we understand the unique needs of each parish. To date we have met with 37 pastors; I must confess this has taken longer than we expected. It's a process, and Rockville Centre is a large diocese.

The reality is that the challenge of safe environment happens on the local level — in the individual parishes. The office recognizes that, and we are very grateful to those on the local level who do the work of keeping accurate records, making sure volunteers in every parish ministry have been background screened and VIRTUS trained. The office would not be at the level it is today without the commitment and cooperation of each parish. Of course, the ideal would be that each parish could have a safe environment coordinator to manage the safe environment compliance.

THINK FIRST & STAY SAFE

Joanne Winter came on board in 2017 as coordinator of the Think First & Stay Safe program. Think First is a program for children that, starting with the 2018-2019 academic year, is being rolled out through the faith formation programs in each parish. During the faith formation orientation meetings in the fall, parents were introduced to the Think First program, received a parent's handbook and were encouraged to reinforce the topic of safety with their child.

Just recently, Patricia DiTomaso joined our team. Patricia assists parishes with the task of updating their VIRTUS records. This is an enormous task, one in which all of us are involved. When the phone isn't ringing — and one of us has a free moment — we grab a parish report and begin the tedious and time-consuming task of checking the volunteer list against the VIRTUS database.

All these changes really point to the vision of the office: to be vigilant and responsive to the safe environment needs of the diocese and to remain open to direction from the Holy Spirit.

I have a plaque in my office with a quote from Scripture that reminds me that we are not alone in our efforts: "There is a peculiar power of God about that place. He who has his dwelling in heaven, watches over it and defends it" (2 Maccabees 3:39).

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5 FIVE WAYS

to protect your children from sexual abuse

Parents play the primary role in educating their children about sexual abuse. Here are 5 tips for teaching safety to the little ones God has entrusted to you.

1

Keep it practical. Teach your children the differences between safe touches and unsafe touches.

2

Tell your children that saying “no” is okay. Empower your children to say “no” if anyone makes them feel uncomfortable or touches them inappropriately.

3

Give your children a way to alert you. Tell your children they can use an excuse or share a special “code-word” with you to alert you about an unsafe person or situation.

4

Tell your children to report an unsafe touch. Let your children know they should tell you if they feel uncomfortable or unsafe around any adult or peer. You can also identify other adults they can tell about unsafe touches.

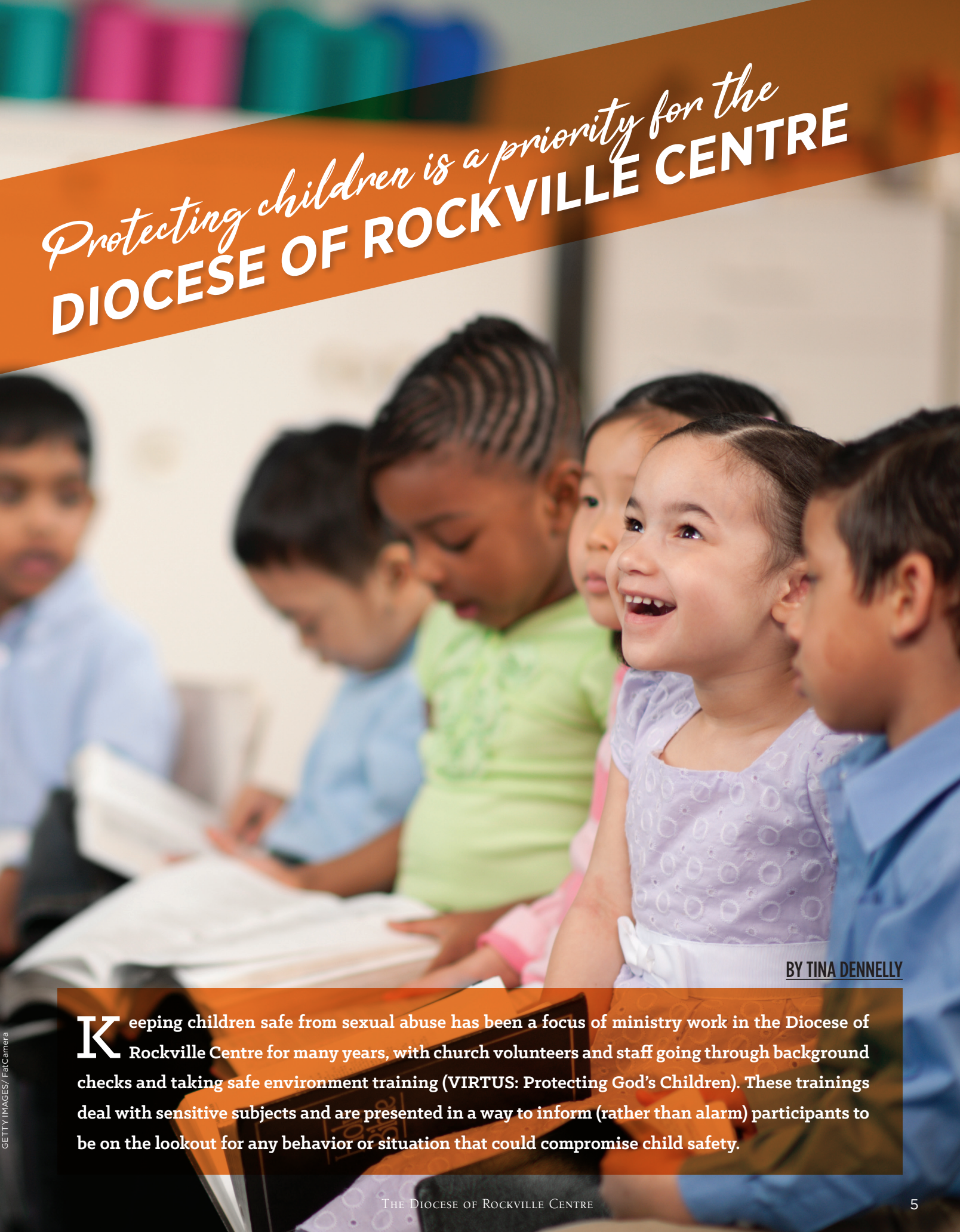
5

Tell your children you trust them. If your child makes a report to you, believe him or her. Tell them it is not their fault and that you love them. Immediately bring the allegation to the attention of public authorities.



Promise to Protect

Pledge to Heal



Protecting children is a priority for the **DIOCESE OF ROCKVILLE CENTRE**

BY TINA DENNELLY

Keeping children safe from sexual abuse has been a focus of ministry work in the Diocese of Rockville Centre for many years, with church volunteers and staff going through background checks and taking safe environment training (VIRTUS: Protecting God's Children). These trainings deal with sensitive subjects and are presented in a way to inform (rather than alarm) participants to be on the lookout for any behavior or situation that could compromise child safety.

“this is another way of teaching and helping them to understand that as a community we have to be proactive in protecting against sexual abuse.”

As the population of Latino families living on Long Island has grown, there has been a greater need to reach out to the Spanish-speaking community on this topic. That’s where Arely Mendoza-Cantos comes in as the Safe Environment Coordinator with the responsibility of meeting the needs of the diocese’s Spanish-speaking parishioners.

“We have really made a lot of advances for the community,” Mendoza-Cantos said, pointing out the over 50 bilingual VIRTUS facilitators she has trained who go into parishes to administer the safe environment training.

“But it’s more than just ensuring the Spanish-speaking parishioners and volunteers follow the diocesan guidelines,” she said. “It’s also bringing that next level of education, where being bi-lingual and bi-cultural helps a lot to understand the needs of the community. And I’m very blessed to have that type of opportunity to be of service to the Latino community.”

Navigating both cultures is a particular skill that Mendoza-Cantos brings to her work. She can often open doors and engage people in the Latino communities because of her bi-cultural competence and ability to speak Spanish. She is aware of how to address issues differently with her audience.

“When presenting the topic of Safe Environment, we talk about culturally relevant things that sometimes within the community people think are ok... but they are not ok,” said Mendoza-Cantos. “So, this is another way of teaching and helping them to understand that as a community we have to be proactive in protecting against sexual abuse.”

Mendoza-Cantos finds the benefits of her lessons are often brought into neighborhoods, families, and other social situations once people become aware of potentially unsafe situations for children.

Though the family is often central to the lives of Latino Catholics, many sensitive topics aren’t discussed in their families. Naturally, these conversations can be difficult, and the VIRTUS training sessions bring up an uncomfortable subject.

“The topic of sexual abuse is often taboo,” she said.

Sometimes people are disappointed that they must address these uncomfortable topics, especially in the context of church activities and ministries, but Mendoza-Cantos said, “the community is more open when the presentation and material is available in their native



ARELY
MENDOZA-CANTOS

LIZ & JOE SCHMIDT PHOTOGRAPHY



GETTY IMAGES/ gradyreese



language. Being able to understand their culture, language and customs helps them feel acknowledged.”

All the documents required by the Office for the Protection of Children and Young People in the diocese have been translated into Spanish by Mendoza-Cantos and are available on the diocesan website and in the parishes.

Mendoza-Cantos constantly looks for ways to bring information about Safe Environment to the Spanish-speaking community. She writes a monthly article for the Spanish language diocesan newspaper *Fe Fuerza Vida* on topics about Child Safety and Sexual Abuse prevention. She is often invited to speak about these topics at conferences, congresses, retreats, pastoral council meetings and other church events.

“the community is more open when the presentation and material is available in their native language. Being able to understand their culture, language and customs helps them feel acknowledged.”

“I take advantage of any church gathering to inform about Safe Environment,” Mendoza-Cantos said.

These events usually take place in the evenings and on weekends, but she said, “It is my job to ensure the community gets this information - the more knowledgeable the community becomes at recognizing the signs of child abuse the more confident we are that all of the church activities can be safer for our children.”

For many Latino families, going to Mass and getting involved in a parish is a family affair, with everyone from grandparents and parents, to uncles, aunts, and siblings participating within the church community. There is a real sense of belonging for Latinos in parishes throughout Long Island, and for many, a pride in their parish.

For these reasons, it’s more important than ever to make sure volunteers are trained and people who spend time in parish ministries can be confident they are contributing to a safe environment for children.



“Ever this day, be at my side ...”

Office for the Protection of Children and Young People - Diocese of Rockville Centre

Confidential Hotline Number: 516-594-9063

VIRTUS Training and Child Lures Program Deployed in Parishes to Ensure a Safe Environment

As the Diocese of Rockville Centre Office for the Protection of Children and Young People works to oversee that the mandates of The Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People (The Charter) are being followed throughout the diocese (see related story), dedicated staff and volunteers at the parish level have stepped up to ensure young people remain safe.

BY
PAUL
MCAVOY

The diocese uses the safe environment program called VIRTUS, which was created by the National Catholic Retention Group, Inc. and “is the brand name that identifies best practices programs designed to help prevent wrongdoing and promote ‘rightdoing’ within religious organizations,” according to virtusonline.org. The word *virtus* comes from the Latin meaning valor, moral strength, excellence and worth.

“VIRTUS is a very solid program with a good track record,” said Mary McMahon, LCSW, director of the diocesan Office for the Protection of Children and Young People. All clergy, employees and volunteers in the diocese are required to take a VIRTUS class, she said.

VIRTUS classes are offered at parishes throughout the diocese every day, in English and Spanish. The classes offer presentations on the prevention of child sexual abuse, making participants aware of the signs of abuse, the methods and means of how offenders commit abuse, and steps used to prevent such abuse.

“We receive inquiries every week from individuals asking if they are required to attend VIRTUS because they have already attended New York State training for mandated reporters,” McMahon said. “The answer is ‘absolutely yes!’ and here’s why: VIRTUS offers the perspective that child safety is the responsibility of the entire community; all of us need to be watchful, responsible and vigilant.”

EMPOWERING CHILDREN

“Did you know that the Bible writes about you?”

Kathy Knott of the Church of St. Joseph in Babylon begins all of her Think First & Stay Safe Child Lures

Prevention presentations to children in Grades 1 through 6 with the same question.

“Yes!” she continues, holding up a Bible as they ponder the question. “In the Psalms, the Bible says you are fearfully and wonderfully made by the God who loves you.”

She tells them God gave them a heart, which tells them how to be compassionate and kind. It also tells their mind what to do: “It tells you to Think First & Stay Safe,” she says.

The Think First & Stay Safe program, which the diocese mandated starting this year for all parishes, educates grade-school children in age-appropriate, non-frightening ways about bullying, child abuse, child luring, child abduction and other forms of child victimization, according to the Child Lures Prevention website, childluresprevention.com.

Knott said she strives to empower children to make good decisions.

“One of the tools your brain uses is your gut,” she tells them. “If the gut tells you there’s danger, there’s danger. Your gut is never wrong! It never fails! Never ignore your



GREGORY A. SHEMITZ



KATHY
KNOTT



ED CASEY



gut feelings.”

“The expression on the little faces says, ‘I’ve got this, I know what my gut feels like. I can say ‘no!’ I can say ‘stop!’” she said.

Knott attended a VIRTUS class more than 12 years ago as a catechist for children with special needs. “I knew I wasn’t part of the problem,” she said, “but I heard the call to be part of the solution.” In addition to presenting the Child Lures Prevention program in her parish, she is also a VIRTUS facilitator and travels to other parishes to present both programs.

A team of volunteers and catechists at the Church of St. Hugh of Lincoln in Huntington Station worked together to present the Child Lures Prevention program to the students and included a presentation for parents as well.

On a Saturday in January, the team presented Think First & Stay Safe to the students with their parents present; then as the students enjoyed bagels and juice, the parents were given a separate presentation on abuse prevention by the Safe Center of Long Island.

“It was very well received, and the day wasn’t too long for busy families,” said Helen Schramm, director of religious education at St. Hugh. “It also gave parents an opportunity to hear the information their children are receiving in our program in regard to their safety on this very important issue.”

At the Church of Sts. Philip and James in St. James, Rita Byrne has managed to stay on top of all the paperwork required for the parish’s 400 to 500 volunteers in her position as coordinator of volunteers.

Byrne upholds the diocesan and parish policy that every new volunteer at the parish is required to fill out a packet of forms before he or she can volunteer. “If there’s no VIRTUS certificate attached, then they can’t volunteer,” said Byrne. After a volunteer’s packet is complete, Byrne enters the information into the parish and diocesan data system for background screening.

All volunteers in the diocese undergo a background check

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and are rescreened every five years. They also sign a form stating they received and read a code of conduct outlining expected, acceptable behaviors. The VIRTUS training, background screening and code of conduct all meet Mandate 2 of The Charter.

“It’s a lot of detail,” Byrne said of her job.

“I’m getting it down to a science now. People know what to expect. The purpose is to protect kids. I tell people, ‘It may be more paperwork for you, but it’s a good thing.’ Some people will say, ‘But I’m not doing [any volunteering] with children,’ but it doesn’t matter – everyone is required to go through this process.”

Byrne’s work is only part of her volunteer position at the parish, but she said it pays to devote the time to it.

“I think I’ve got a pretty good handle on it, but it’s a learning curve,” she said. “I’m learning something new every day. It’s manageable once you get it into a system.”

Cindy Marsh, youth administrator/director at the Church of St. Patrick in Smithtown, has coordinated VIRTUS training for more than 10 years. This year, St. Patrick’s also piloted the Think First & Stay Safe program for students in its religious education program.

“Both of these programs are great because they’re faith-based,” Marsh said. “Our body is a temple. I like that part because it emphasizes [that Church teaching] with the children.”

Every summer, St. Patrick’s hires about 50 young people as staff to work with the 200 to 300 campers in its summer-long camp program. The ones who are over age 18 are required to attend VIRTUS training; younger teens are required to attend another awareness training class.

Also, about 35 preteens volunteer to assist at Vacation Bible Camp, a weeklong program, and are prepared per parish and diocesan protocols and standards prior to working with the younger children. This program has certified adults in each group as well.

St. Patrick also has one of the largest CYO and intramural sports programs in the diocese. Marsh coordinates the required VIRTUS training for the coaches, which is often organized by sport. “We bring coaches in before intramural basketball, and it’s run with basketball in mind,” she said.

“I’m a real advocate for kids and I’ll say things on their behalf,” said Marsh. “We do everything here that we can to make sure every child is protected. ‘God first, kids first’ is our mantra.”



HELEN SCHRAMM



RITA BYRNE



CINDY MARSH

In The Face Of The Abuse Scandals, WHAT CAN YOU SAY TO RESTORE MY FAITH?

Q DEAR FATHER JOE: I am sickened by the news reports I've been reading about the clergy abuse scandals. It makes me ashamed to be Catholic – what can you say to restore my faith?

A Your question seems to summarize the innumerable other questions I have received on the topic of the recently revealed scandals in the Church. To be clear, by "scandals," I mean the crimes and sins committed by some priests and covered up by some bishops. Person after person has written me, sat down with me, called me and asked what to do in the face of such abject evil. They are dismayed and disillusioned that some of our leaders not only don't seem to "get it," but worse, may have actively covered up illegal and immoral behavior. As a priest, I find myself unable to communicate my anger and my sorrow about this. I'm sick of it. I'm weary. I'm heartbroken. And if you are someone who has been abused by a member of the clergy, then I am so sorry that happened to you, and I share your pain. I have been filled with doubt in the people God has appointed to lead us, guide us and show us by word and example what is right.

As a priest, I am not perfect, but dear God, I haven't committed any crimes – and the fact that I even have to type that sentence shows how far we have fallen. I'm sick of it.

I love children. I love their smiles and their joys and here I am, hesitating to type that for fear that it will be misinterpreted.

I have no power to change the system. No pope or bishop has ever asked me for my ideas, and I can't imagine one who would. But I can share with you what I am doing to work through it all:



FATHER JOE KRUPP

is a former comedy writer who is now a Catholic priest.

FIRST, I'M PRAYING AND I ENCOURAGE YOU TO DO THE SAME.

Pray for the victims of abusive priests. Pray for the victims of neglectful shepherds more interested in climbing a ladder than being holy.

Pray for the clericalism in some of our clergy that seems to be at the root of a lot of it.

Pray for the people who want to take this evil and use it as an opportunity to advance their own agenda.

Pray, fast, call out to God, ask St. Michael to help, do whatever the Lord calls you to do in order to purge from our Church the abusers and the protectors of abusers.

Pray that our bishops listen to the voice of the Shepherd over that of the attorneys.

SECOND, REACH OUT TO HELP THE ABUSED.

If someone comes to you with their story, pray with them. Take them to the appropriate civil authorities and walk with them as much as you can.

Encourage victims to contact the victim assistance coordinator in their diocese. Every diocese has one, and they are there to make sure victims get the assistance and counseling they need.

FINALLY, DO NOT LET THIS GO.

We've done enough of that. Don't accept "rules" as the newest answer to this crisis. Hammer at this until it is addressed in a real way that focuses on the major problem here – the priests and bishops.

Don't tell people this is all in the past because it's not. The report may be detailing old information, but people are just finding out the depth of the cover-up now – and that is a new hurt. Don't tell people "this isn't the Church" because it is and it will be until we do something to clean this up.

Don't ignore a priest's actions if you know they are not keeping their vows or are being abusive. Do not tolerate in a priest behavior that is abusive on any level. You have the right to push us to be saints.

Most of all, do not give up. Jesus has already won this fight and I am proud of how many people have affirmed their love of and commitment to him, and not any specific person. This is a Church by, for and about Jesus and he will guide us, protect us and help us be the people God made us to be.

We currently live in dark times, but by the grace of the Holy Spirit, the Church has weathered other dark times. For this generation of Catholics, a lot has been and is being asked of us. I urge each of us in our heart to ask ourselves this question: Why Am I Catholic?

If, like me, you discover that the answer is "because it is true," then we have nothing to fear. No lies, no cover-ups, no darkness can obscure the Truth.

I conclude by assuring you all that I love you, that I am committed to you and that I will continue to pursue holiness with my whole heart, soul, mind and strength.



GETTY IMAGES/richardwatson



Since 2002, the Catholic Church in the U.S.A. has followed a set of rules initiated by the bishops of the country and approved by the Vatican for dealing with sexual abuse of minors by priests or deacons: The Essential Norms for Diocesan/Eparchial Policies Dealing with Allegations of Sexual Abuse of Minors by Priests or Deacons.

Every U.S. diocese/eparchy is required...

- To have a **written policy** for dealing with sexual abuse of minors by priests, deacons and other Church personnel
- To appoint a **victim assistance coordinator**, who is available for the immediate pastoral care of persons who report having been sexually abused as a minor by a priest or deacon
- To **report** allegations concerning child sexual abuse to **civil authorities** and to cooperate with the civil investigations
- To establish a **review board** of at least five persons, mostly members of the **laity**, who counsel the bishop on allegations and review local policies dealing with sexual abuse of minors
- To investigate **promptly** and **objectively** any allegation of sexual abuse of minors by a priest or deacon
- To **remove** offending priests or deacons **permanently** from Church ministry
- To **prohibit the transfer** of offending priests or deacons for ministerial assignment in another diocese or eparchy
- To receive necessary **background information** before permitting a priest or deacon to exercise ministry in a diocese or eparchy
- To **protect** the rights of accusers and of the accused

For more information and to read the full text of the norms, visit:

<http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/child-and-youth-protection/charter.cfm>

BUILDING A SAFER CHURCH

CYBER SAFETY TIPS:

Technology is both hyper-visible and invisible ...

Children between the ages of two and five are more likely to be able to navigate and play smart phone applications than tie their shoelaces. By the age of three, 25 percent of children are online each day!

The exception to the rule: a child who doesn't have a phone!

Before you give your child a phone, be aware:

- > Wireless companies offer safety controls and privacy features. Know what your phone carrier provides.
- > Phones offer web access and apps: put a web-filtering program on the phone.
- > Phones with GPS: turn off location settings.
- > Restrict the content to age-appropriate material/apps.
- > Set a password so apps can't be downloaded without it.
- > Turn off WiFi and keep the phone in airplane mode.

Model the appropriate use of technology for your child. Communication between you and your child is essential — tell your child what you expect, what you value and set limits as to what is and what is not acceptable online behavior. Never allow cellphones during dinner. To demonstrate how important your child is to you, turn off your phone when speaking with your child.

Be interested in your child's online activity. Talk to your child about the online games they are playing — or play games online with them.

Online gaming has some 'up-sides.' Teens interact with each other, it provides some down time and offers opportunity to build skills related to success: focus, determination and creativity.

However, do set limits. Remind your child that online not everything is true, not everyone is who they say they

are and once an image or information is posted online: "YOU HAVE NO CONTROL OVER WHERE IT GOES AND WHO SEES IT!"

Social networking is now the main vehicle to connect with peers. And connect, they do!!!! Everything is shared — very little remains private.

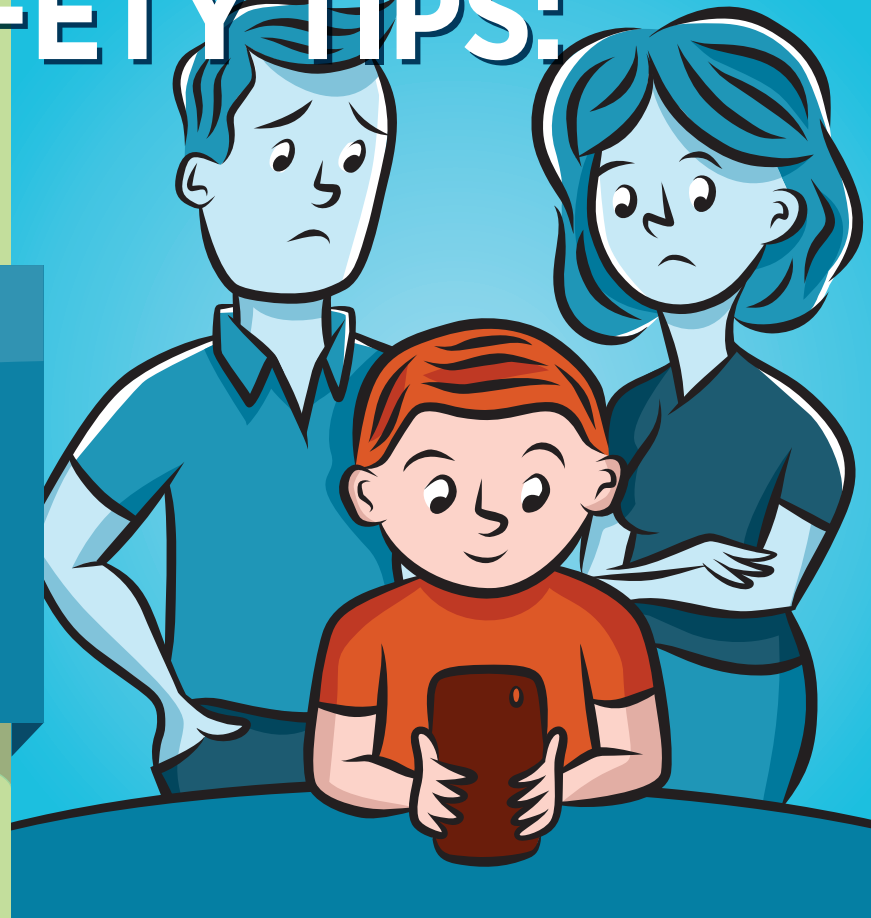
Caution your child on the dangers of 'oversharing' — only post what they are comfortable sharing.

CHILDRENS' ONLINE PRIVACY ACT: COPRA

Did you know you can control the personal information children under 13 years put online? A website or service must receive parental consent before collecting information from a child under age 13.

Sites and services must contact parents directly for permission to collect, use or disclose personal information about a child. This includes phone numbers, name, address, e-mail, location, photos, videos, audio recordings. To file a complaint, go to www.ftc.gov/complaint.

Be proactive: review your child's friend list and ask who they are 'talking' to when they are online.



GETTY IMAGES/ darenwoodward

BY
MARY
MCMAHON

Did you know?

The Dallas Charter for the Protection of Children/Young People (The Charter) was issued by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) in 2003. Copies of The Dallas Charter and the Diocesan Child Protection Policy are available in your rectory.

The Charter mandates that specific practices be implemented in all dioceses in the United States to assist victims of clergy abuse, provide best practices for safe environment in each parish, and conduct annual independent audits to monitor compliance.

The Diocese of Rockville Centre has in place robust standards to ensure compliance with The Dallas Charter for the Protection of Children/Young People. These standards include:

- **Mandatory Safe Environment Training:** all clergy, employees and volunteers are required to attend the VIRTUS class: Protecting God's Children. VIRTUS classes are offered in English, Spanish, Polish, Korean and Creole. Monthly online training is provided through VIRTUS and required of all those who have ongoing consistent contact with children.
- **Background Screening** of all clergy, employees and volunteers. The request for an individual to be screened is initiated on the parish level and is conducted by ADP. Rescreening occurs if an individual remains active as employee or volunteer at five-year intervals.
- **Codes of Conduct** for all clergy, employees, volunteers and youth, with the understanding of what is and is not acceptable when interacting with children and young adults.
- **Rigorous psychological screening** of all men discerning vocations to the priesthood.

VIRTUS in the Diocese of Rockville Centre

- Approximately **107,000** staff and volunteers have attended the VIRTUS program since 2003.
- During the 2017-2018 Audit period: **6,200** people attended VIRTUS classes.
- Background Screenings were performed on:

167	32	2,977	11,610
Educators	Deacons	Employees	Volunteers

- *All clergy* were rescreened in 2016.

SAFE ENVIRONMENT TRAINING:

- VIRTUS: Adults
- Think First & Stay Safe: Children
- Background Screening
- Codes of Conduct
- Boundary Workshops
- Internet Safety Workshops



STEPS TO TAKE AFTER DISCLOSURE OF ABUSE

Most certainly, it is every parent's fear: What do I do if my child discloses abuse?

Think of the many times you have soothed your child who is crying or upset. You comfort and reassure your child, you bind up their wounds and in effect, you are offering your child a safe space to bring the pain. Emotionally, you stand with your child, contain their fear and pain. Your child is able to move ahead knowing that you, the adult, are holding the discomfort with them. This is true when a child discloses abuse.

1 STAY CALM – now is not the moment to panic! Take a deep breath and allow yourself to be in an emotional state of 'open acceptance.' Now is not the time to blame or criticize the child or the abuser.

2 Tell the child you want to HEAR WHATEVER THEY WANT TO SHARE. Saying, "Can you tell me what happened?" communicates that you are available to listen and believe what the child is telling you. If your child is struggling, suggest they draw a picture of what happened.

3 REASSURE your child that talking about the abuse is the right thing to do. Reinforce that the abuse was not your child's fault and you will keep your child safe from harm.

4 Let your words and actions SHOW LOVE AND UNDERSTANDING to your child. A hug and soothing words of reassurance are so important – use words your child understands like:

- > "I've got this, and we will figure it out."
- > "I love you and will do everything I can to keep you safe."
- > "I'm sorry this happened."

5 FOLLOW YOUR CHILD'S LEAD – they will communicate verbally and non-verbally what they need from you.

6 The next step is to NOTIFY LOCAL LAW ENFORCEMENT – immediately. Get the professionals involved so your focus can be in supporting your child.

RESOURCES:

- Kids In the Know: www.kidsintheknow.ca
- Net Smartz: www.NetSmartz.org
- Center for Missing/Exploited Children: www.missingkids.com
- United States Conference of Catholic Bishops: www.usccb.org
- Stop It Now!: www.stopitnow.org
- VIRTUS: www.Virtus.org
- Kid Smartz: www.KidSmartz.org
- Child Lures Prevention: www.Childluresprevention.com

THINK FIRST & STAY SAFE:

Child Lures + Safety Prevention: 16 'tricks'
children should know! STAY SAFE!

During the 2018-2019 academic year, the Think First & Stay Safe Child Lures Prevention Program has been integrated into the faith formation program in each parish of the Diocese of Rockville Centre. Children learn about the different tricks that can be used to 'lure' them into a potentially dangerous situation.

The 16 lures are divided into age-related categories with increasing sophistication based on the age of the children. In addition, parents and guardians receive a handbook and are encouraged to reinforce these safety concepts at home.

THE 16 LURES AND PROPER RESPONSES

AFFECTION LURE: Be aware – sometimes even people you know can do hurtful things.

ASSISTANCE LURE: "Oh no ... I need help.": Leave and find an adult who can help.

PET LURE: "Help me find my lost pet!": Just say no!

AUTHORITY LURE: "Do what I say because I'm an adult.": Children are taught to obey adults, but if it doesn't seem right, say NO!

BRIBERY LURE: Toys, Games, Candy, Money: Teach your child to say NO!

EGO LURE: Compliments from people are nice to hear, but only from people you know and trust.

EMERGENCY LURE: Someone they love is hurt/injured, but it's a trick!: Only someone who is known and trusted would be sent to the child.

HERO LURE: This is always fake! A sports star/music star/movie star would not contact you.

GAMES LURE: Only play online games with friends that the child and parent know.

NAME LURE: This person knows me because they know my name.: Remember that children's names are often on their backpacks, lunch boxes, or even their jackets. Did the person use the Code Word?!

JOB LURE: "I can pay you money if you work for me.": Commonly used with older children. Be on the lookout! Promises of money and more are not real.

FRIENDSHIP: "I've got cool stuff you can play with.": Kids can bring friends into bad situations with the latest video games. Watch out!

PORNOGRAPHY: Watch what your child is sending and receiving online!

DRUGS/ALCOHOL: These are used to seduce and manipulate.

THREATS/WEAPONS: Children cooperate out of fear – particularly with gangs.

E-LURE: More ways children are exposed online to cyber-bullying, sexting, harassment, pornography.

RE-THINKING

"STRANGER DANGER"

The Center for Missing and Exploited Children reports that 93 percent of sexual abuse cases involve someone the child and family know! It's time to re-think Stranger Danger when we teach our children about safety!

- > Stranger Danger instills Fear
- > Focus instead on empowering your child!
- > Teach your child to recognize that "feeling inside" when something just isn't right.
- > Build your child's confidence – teach them it is OK to say NO! particularly if someone ever tries to hurt them or touch them!
- > Practice saying NO!
- > Help your child identify adults who can help them, like: police in a uniform, parents with children, their teacher or school nurse.
- > Code Word: Select a special 'code word' for your child. In case plans change and someone else is picking your child up from school or an activity; that person will use the 'code word' so your child will know that person is 'safe' and sent by you!
- > HINT: Safety should be a routine topic of discussion in all families!

**Best way to protect your child — TEACH CHILDREN TO SAY NO!
REINFORCE SELF-ESTEEM!**

Watch for These Warning Signs of Abuse in Minors

No longer wants to see a **particular person** they had been close to

Declining **academic** performance

Tries to hide use of **technology**

No longer interested in **activities** they used to enjoy

Changes in **personality**

Demonstrates **aggressive behavior** or constantly angry

Tries to get minors **alone**

Commits physical and emotional **boundary violations**

Withdraws from family or friends

Keeps **secrets** with minors

Gives lavish **gifts** to minors

Allows or encourages minors to **break laws** or rules

Is overly interested in **spending time** with minors

Has **inappropriate** or suggestive conversations with minors

Does not believe the **rules** apply to them (or, does not follow rules or protocols)

Takes **photos** without approval, or asks minors to send them photos



... and These Warning Signs of Perpetrators

DIOCESAN PROTECTION

SUMMARY OF DIOCESE OF ROCKVILLE CENTRE PROTECTION EFFORTS

All priests, deacons, educators, diocesan and parish employees, and volunteers are required to attend the Virtus course: *Protecting God's Children.*

1

All priests, deacons, educators, diocesan and parish employees, and volunteers are background screened. Rescreening is done at five-year intervals.

2

Children attending parish faith formation programs are taught safety awareness through the program: *Think First & Stay Safe: Child Lures Prevention.*

3

Youth enrolled in diocesan elementary and high schools receive safety awareness training beginning with nursery school and continuing throughout high school. Programs utilized include *Too Good for Drugs, Second Step and Bullying Prevention.*

4

All allegations of sexual misconduct received by the diocese are reported to the appropriate District Attorney's Office through collaboration with legal counsel and the Diocesan Office for the Protection of Children and Young People.

5

Clergy, deacons, educators, employees, and volunteers are provided with Codes of Conduct detailing both specific, expected behaviors and prohibited behaviors. Young people and youth who volunteer in any manner are provided with a Youth's Code of Conduct.

6

+

Background Screenings: During the 2017-2018 Audit period, background screens or rescreening was conducted on 32 deacons, 167 educators, 2,917 employees and 11,610 volunteers. Priests were rescreened in 2016.

VIRTUS TRAINING

The VIRTUS Program: Protecting God's Children is a three-hour program divided into two parts. Part one educates participants to the signs of the grooming process abusers employ to desensitize children to abuse. Part two provides a plan to protect children offering specific, proactive suggestions to secure the safety of all areas whenever children are involved. The VIRTUS program is offered at different locations throughout the diocese every day. A calendar of scheduled VIRTUS classes can be found on our website: www.drvc.org. VIRTUS is available in English, Spanish, Korean, Polish and Creole.

**APPROXIMATELY 107,000
STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS
HAVE ATTENDED THE
VIRTUS PROGRAM SINCE
INCEPTION IN 2003.**

**6,290 VIRTUS CLASSES
HAVE BEEN OFFERED
THROUGHOUT THE
DIOCESE SINCE 2003.**

**ON AVERAGE, 6,500
INDIVIDUALS ATTEND
VIRTUS EACH YEAR.**

EFFORTS

OTHER INITIATIVES:

1 Partners in Protection: The diocese works with other faith communities on Long Island with the goals of strengthening the response to child sex abuse, to reducing incidents and to increasing preventive efforts.

2 Seminary Applicants: In addition to attending VIRTUS, background screening and subscribing to the pastoral code of conduct, all seminarians undergo rigorous psychological screening and training in diocesan child protection policies.

3 Catholic Faith Network programming: The Office for the Protection of Children and Young People has participated in three shows for the Catholic Faith Network highlighting issues specific to child safety.

4 Fe Fuerza Vida: articles appear in the Spanish-language publication each month.

5 New Pastors seminar: Each year in June the Office for the Protection of Children and Young People participates in a seminar for members of the clergy becoming pastors for the first time. During the seminar, information is presented outlining safe environment compliance required for each parish. Pastors receive a Safe Environment Binder containing all required forms.

6 The Office for the Protection of Children and Young People hosted five workshops for parents on the topic of Internet Safety. Robert Farley, an internationally recognized expert, facilitated each workshop.

7 Outreach to the Spanish-speaking Community.





Ten Tips for Protecting Children and Offering Outreach to Victims/Survivors

1 **Sexual abuse is about the victim.**

Many people are affected by abuse but the individual most impacted is the victim who has suffered a violation of trust that can affect his or her entire life.

2 **No one has the right to have access to children.**

No one, no matter who they are, has an automatic right to be around children or young people who are in the care of the Church without proper screening and without following the rules.

3 **Common sense is not all that common.**

Dioceses, schools, parishes, and especially families, must educate themselves and others on how to protect children.

4 **Child sexual abuse can be prevented.**

It is critical to build safety barriers around children and young people to keep them from harm—such as protective guardians, codes of conduct, background evaluations, policies and procedures, and safety training programs.

5 **The residual effects of having been abused can last a lifetime.**

The sense of violation goes deep into a person's psyche and feelings of anger, shame, hurt and betrayal can build long after the abuse has taken place. Those who have been abused can heal, but it often takes time, therapy, and the support of loved ones.

6 **Feeling heard leads toward healing.**

Relief from hurt and anger often comes when one feels heard, when one's pain

and concerns are taken seriously, and a victim/survivor's appropriate sense of rage and indignation are acknowledged.

7 **You cannot always predict who will be an abuser.**

Experience shows that most abuse is committed by someone who has gained the trust of a victim/survivor and his/her family.

8 **There are behavioral warning signs of child abusers.**

Some abusers isolate a potential victim by giving him or her undue attention or lavish gifts, others allow young people to participate in activities which their parents or guardians would not approve, such as watching pornography, drinking alcohol, using drugs, and excessive touching, such as wrestling and tickling.

9 **People can be taught to identify grooming behavior.**

Grooming behaviors are the actions which abusers take to project the image that they are kind, generous, caring people, while their intent is to lure a minor into an inappropriate relationship. Offenders can be patient and may groom their victim, his or her family, or community for years.

10 **Background checks work.**

Background checks in churches, schools and other organizations keep predators away from children both because they scare off some predators and because they uncover past actions which should ban an adult from working or volunteering with children.





DIOCESE OF ROCKVILLE CENTRE

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DRVC.org

Catholic Faith Network
(Optimum 29/137,
Verizon FiOS 296, and
Charter Spectrum
162/471)

www.cfntv.org

LICatholic.org

