

## *Creating Safe and Sacred Places*

*Concept: This session must be offered to youth in grades 7-12 who are involved in parish-based youth ministries.*

**Goals: Youth will participate in a presentation and discussion on safe relationships with other children/youth and adults. Youth will identify trusted persons in their lives that they can talk to about problems with inappropriate behavior.**

**Facilitator's Role:** The facilitator can be the youth leader or another member of the core team. The facilitator's role is to allow for an open discussion where all can participants share (only if participants so choose). The facilitator should introduce the purpose of the session and the guidelines for the discussion. It is essential that the facilitator of this session have excellent listening skills. The facilitator should not be a member of the clergy. This program can be co-facilitated, and often should be if there are a large number of teens. The presence of, or co-facilitation by, a professional psychologist or social worker is suggested. At a minimum, a professional should be readily accessible if needed.

The facilitator must be candid and honest with the participants from the onset. A ratio of one adult for every four young people is suggested. Adults should be seated with the youth, so that they can become aware of any problems that might arise, but this is not a forum for the adults to present their views. Adults should be honest and respectful at all times. Adults should fully understand the importance of listening. All adults present should have already been through the workshop "Creating a Safe Environment" for volunteers, and should be reminded of the portion of the workshop regarding responding to a disclosure from youth.

**Notes to the facilitator:** Assume that some in the group have been abused. Thus, you should be prepared to deal with potential issues. During the small group discussion, assure the teens that you want them to share only if they feel comfortable doing so. Tell them that some of the material may make them feel uncomfortable. Ask the teens to respect each other's comfort levels, and not make comments that will make others feel forced to share. Tell the teens that if they have something they would like to share, but they don't feel comfortable sharing in the group, they are free to have a personal discussion with the core team at a later time. Ask the teens to be respectful of all who are present, and not use sarcasm or make judgmental comments about any part of the program.

Prior to the session, read through entire session to assure that you are comfortable with material. Also, review the material and the video with the small group leaders prior to the session to ensure that they are well prepared. Have any resources for assistance on hand, and plan to stay after the session for possible follow-up with teens who may need assistance. Know who might be available for referrals for teens who have difficulty, including local counselors or therapists.

Know the steps to take if a disclosure is made. A handout is provided for the parent sessions that will be useful for the coordinator to review prior to the youth sessions. Assure that the core team and small group leaders are also prepared to handle a disclosure.

### **Opening Prayer (5 minutes)**

(Suggested prayer session provided) Possible resources for additional prayer components: *Creating Safe and Sacred Places*, St. Mary's Press, also available from the Diocesan Resource Center).

### **Welcome and brief overview of the session (5 minutes)**

### **The Quiz (15 minutes)**

Quiz Time: Just the Facts

(Provided on Powerpoint, or could be provided as a handout to teens)

1. Can a person be sexually abused without being touched?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No

**Answer:** Yes. In reality, sexual abuse can take many forms. It can be actions involving sexual intercourse to fondling under or over the clothes to the sexual exploitation of children where no direct physical touching occurs, but where the child is in the presence of someone who is clearly becoming sexually aroused in their presence. For example, a perpetrator might expose the child to pornography, or take pictures of the child while naked.

2. What percentage of the time does a victim of sexual abuse know his or her abuser?
  - a. 50 percent
  - b. 66 percent
  - c. 75 percent
  - d. 90 percent

**Answer:** 90 percent. Sexual abuse happens most often with people who know the victim. Stranger abuse is fairly rare. Abuse also happens in familiar places. Abusers can be fathers, stepfathers, siblings, aunts, uncles, baby-sitters, caretakers, or supervisors and others. Normally the victim knows his or her abuser.

3. Who is the most common sexual offender?
  - a. a homosexual
  - b. a poor person
  - c. a white married male
  - d. someone who was previously abused

**Answer:** A white married male. Most often, sex offenders are white married males, but they can be found in every socio-economic classification, every race, every sexual

orientation, and every description. Contrary to the impression given by the media, sex offenders can be found in every profession and in every religious organization.

4. Who is more at risk for sexual abuse?
  - a. Kids who don't know the rules of personal safety
  - b. Kids who do not go to church
  - c. Kids who are from an ethnic group other than Caucasian
  - d. Kids who are from upper income families

**Answer:** A is the correct answer. Children are at risk for sexual abuse whether they live in rural or urban settings, whether they go to church or not, whether they are white, black, Hispanic, Asian or some other ethnic group, and whether they are from lower or upper income families. Abuse cuts across all socio-economic boundaries. But children are more at risk if they have not been taught about personal safety, so that they don't know how to protect themselves against abuse.

5. Who is more at risk for sexual abuse?
  - a. Boys
  - b. Girls
  - c. About the same for both boys and girls

**Answer:** The reported statistics indicate that girls are abused more often, but experts say that the actual number is probably quite even. Thus, if you said "girls" that is the correct answer according to statistics of children who have reported their abuse. However, c is probably the more correct answer.

6. Do most children readily tell an adult, usually a parent, when something serious like sexual abuse happens to them?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No

**Answer:** No. Children frequently do not tell about being sexually abused, especially if the abuser is a member of their family. Those who have broken their silence may not be believed. Abused children often struggle with feeling that they must be bad if God allowed this to happen to them. They might also feel like they will get in trouble if they tell.

7. Why is abuse not often reported immediately?
  - a. Kids make it up, it did not really happen
  - b. The abuser threatens them
  - c. Kids don't know they have the ability to make it stop and tell

**Answer:** C is the most correct answer, but there are lots of different reasons why abuse is not reported immediately. There are often no witnesses. The abuser is often someone who has power and influence over the child, but most children are not threatened with

physical violence. Victims may be told to keep it a secret, or sometimes do not understand that they have the right to tell. They may not be capable of understanding that they have the power to break away from the abuse.

8. Are most offenders prosecuted and punished?  
a. Yes                      b. No

**Answer:** No. Only a few of those who commit sexual assault are caught and convicted for their crimes. There are many reasons for this, sometimes relating to the legal system, sometimes relating to the inability of the victim to testify, or many other reasons. Most convicted sex offenders are eventually released into the community under probation or parole.

9. How do kids react to abuse?
- a. They refuse to be around the abuser                      b. They engage in self-destructive behaviors  
c. They may be depressed or suicidal                      d. They may have all or none of these symptoms

**Answer:** D is the correct answer. A particular child could have symptoms a-c, or none of the above. Each child reacts differently. We have a handout of some of the common signs and symptoms that a child might experience if they have been abused. But the symptoms may mean that there is a problem other than abuse; and there may be no symptoms at all.

10. Of those who abuse, how many were abused themselves?
- a. 10 percent                      b. 90 percent                      c. 30 percent                      d. 70 percent

**Answer:** 30 percent. Most sex offenders were not sexually assaulted as children, and most children who were sexually assaulted do not sexually assault others. Not all abusers act out of revenge for their past victimization. Adolescent offenders do not always become adult offenders.

### **Large Group Discussion (10 minutes)**

*Facilitator:* How did you do? (a show of hands how many got more than seven right?)

*Facilitator:* Were there any answers that surprised you?

*Closing statement:* There are many common misconceptions that even adults have about sexual abuse, so the important thing is not how many you got right, but whether you learned something new, and leave with a better understanding of abuse and how it happens, so you can dispel some of the myths about abuse among your friends, and so you know what to do about it if it happens.

**Video: *A Time to Tell* (30 minutes)**

*Facilitator:* Introduce the video by letting the youth know that while the video shows boys in the situation, it applies equally to boys and girls. Refer back to the questions on the test that talk about gender of the possible victims. Ask them to think about how the circumstances that the boys are faced with applies to them in their situation.

**Discussion Small Group (15 minutes)**

**Leader:** Talking about sexual abuse can be awkward and uncomfortable. You will want to remember that fact as you begin your discussions. There is no right or wrong answer to any of the questions. The purpose of the discussion is to give voice to your own concerns, as well as to listen to the thoughts and concerns of others in hopes of better understanding and becoming more aware of the issues.

**Divide the large group into small groups of five, gender specific. See Notes to the Facilitator at the beginning of this presentation outline.**

**Questions for boys**

1. In *A Time to Tell* do you think these examples actually could happen? Why or why not?
2. Do you have a trusted adult you could tell if something happened to you or a friend? What kinds of people in your life might be a trusted adult? Why would it be important to disclose to a trusted adult, and not just one of your friends?
3. What did the kids in the video do right?
4. What are the reasons you think boys might hide sexual abuse and not tell as often as girls?

**Questions for girls**

1. In *A Time to Tell* do you think these examples actually could happen? Why or why not?
2. Do you have a trusted adult you could tell if something happened to you or a friend? What kinds of people in your life might be a trusted adult? Why would it be important to disclose to a trusted adult, and not just one of your friends?
3. What did the kids in the video do right?
4. What types of situations might place girls at risk for sexual abuse?

**Where do we go from here? (20 minutes)**

Nothing that we will learn in these sessions will prevent all young people from ever being harmed in any way. However, there are some tools and tips that we can practice that will be beneficial in creating safe and sacred places and that will offer some coping skills necessary to move through a time of crisis.

Crisis can touch our lives in the form of something such as a failing grade on a test or in a class, a broken friendship, minor mistakes or accidents, or something more serious such as a devastating accident or illness or even physical, emotional or sexual abuse. Here are some tips you will want to keep in mind for staying safe and dealing with tough times.

### **What if it happened to you?**

Tell a trusted adult immediately. That adult will help you in reporting the abuse to professionals who understand how you feel and can help you heal.

### **If it has already happened to you:**

- ✓ It is never too late to tell
- ✓ It is okay if you did not tell, you will not get in trouble if you did not tell

### **It is Never the Child's Fault**

You are not to blame if you did not tell, or if you were abused. The person who is older or stronger or more powerful is always the one who has the responsibility to avoid the inappropriate behavior.

### **Why Wouldn't I Tell?**

Reasons a person might not tell:

- ✓ I enjoyed it (Our bodies sometimes respond to touch in ways that our minds might disapprove of)
- ✓ Feels involved (If the child participated in the activity they may feel that they did something wrong too)
- ✓ Loves the perpetrator (Does not want to get them in trouble)
- ✓ Fears not being believed (Fear that they will tell and no one will believe it)
- ✓ Fears not being loved (The child may fear that they will be rejected by someone they love if they tell)
- ✓ Feeling guilty (The child may feel guilt at having engaged in the behavior)
- ✓ I must be misinterpreting what is happening (The child is often confused)

### **What Would I do? (10 minutes)**

Brainstorm on ideas for what words a teen could use if they wanted to tell a trusted adult about inappropriate touching or sexual activity that was happening to them.

### **I have rights? (10 minutes)**

- ✓ I have the right to say no to unhealthy behaviors.
- ✓ I have the right to tell if something makes me uncomfortable.
- ✓ I am not responsible for the inappropriate behavior of others.
- ✓ When others engage in unhealthy behaviors, it is not my fault.
- ✓ I have the right to safety and security and privacy of my own body.

Other things teens can do:

- ✓ Practice asking questions. (Practicing asking questions will help you get used to getting more information and making informed decisions about things in your life, and this is a skill that will help you if you are faced with a serious situation.)
- ✓ Trust your instincts. (Youth have many more opportunities to make choices in their lives, and along with this opportunity comes the responsibility to pay attention to your God-given gift of knowing right from wrong, by using your intuition.)
- ✓ Be clear about what you want and need. (Voicing feelings about uncomfortable situations is one of the best ways to stay safe—recognize that it is okay to tell someone you are uncomfortable and need to get out of the situation.)
- ✓ Get involved. (Being involved in the community makes you a better person, and gives you an opportunity to explore your own individuality, and your own gifts, and increases your self-esteem.)

### **Prayer Service: You Know Me (10 minutes)**

Distribute a copy of the prayer card (provided in the materials)

*Facilitator:* Be sensitive to emotional needs at this point in the session. This is the beginning of awareness for some youth. Introduce this session with a message that pain and suffering may occur, but there is always an opportunity to healing through awareness, and action.

Invite a volunteer you have selected to come forward and proclaim Jeremiah 29:11-12. Allow a few moments of silence after the reading.

Share the following points with the participants:

- Although many things in life may challenge us, God has great things in mind for each of us.

- God knew us before we were born and desires for us to follow God's lead and be guided by God's love.
- God's plans for each of us involve growing spiritually, seeking goodness, and trusting in God's all-knowing power.
- With God's guidance we can persevere through difficult situations.

Invite participants to prayerfully consider each sentence. Remind them that this activity is for silent personal reflection. Play some instrumental music to help in the contemplation. Allow about 5 minutes.

Conclude by inviting the participants to pray the closing prayer together:

*Closing Prayer:* Lord, you have created me with specific thoughts, ideas and characteristics. You know everything about me. You know who I am and who I will become. You have plans for me that are wonderful, plans that I might not even be able to imagine for myself. Help me to trust in your guidance, Lord. Help me to believe that I don't have to do anything by myself. Help me to remember that you are ever present, all-knowing, and completely loving. Grant me the gifts I need to believe in myself. When I feel discouraged, remind me that I am capable. When I feel lonely, bring friends and family to support me. When I am confused, show me the right path to follow. When I doubt the future, enlighten me to trust in your creative plans. I ask all this with a humble heart and with much gratitude.

*Amen.*

***Handout—PTBG  
Care Enough to Call brochures***

