

Safe Environment Training

Barbara Landregan

Director of Safe Environment Program
Diocese of Dallas, TX



Sexual Abuse is intolerable. When will it end? How does it begin? It might be a touch. Teaching your child what touching is appropriate and what touching is not is a key element to keeping them from falling victim to sexual abuse.

Parenting is one of the most important and at the same time most difficult challenges we face. Teaching values, virtue and respect to children constantly bombarded with images and ideas from outside the family is both daunting and necessary.

Handling relationships is an important aspect of the challenge. What is appropriate? What is not? How do you know? What do you do about it? It is important that the values taught in the home be reinforced by the church and the school.

Coordinating these efforts in the parochial schools, faith formation programs and youth activities is the responsibility of the Safe Environment Program of the diocese. In cooperation with parishes, schools and youth ministers, we have launched a new initiative to support parents in teaching children what touching is appropriate, what touching is not and what to do about it.

A program commissioned by the Diocese of Dallas and other dioceses in response to the U.S. Bishops *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People* has been approved for training our children and young people about appropriate touching.

The initiative, which will start this spring, is named Virtus, Latin for virtue and is called “Protecting God’s Children.”

The need is unquestionable. A comprehensive approach is necessary, but a key element is making our children aware of the possible dangers and how to handle them.

Of course the primary responsibility for the education and protection of our children and young people rests with parents, but the responsibility for the safety of children and young people within the Church belongs to the entire adult community under the leadership of our bishops.

The program includes a six-minute presentation on DVD followed by an age-appropriate lesson about safe touches. Teachers will download a lesson plan which contains: prayer, references to the Catechism, definitions and an activity.

The lessons are designed to help the child discern what is appropriate and empower them to say no, back away and tell someone.