

Ensuring A Safe Environment Both In and Out of Church

Parents, family members, teachers, youth ministers, pastors, and even children themselves should be aware and ready to protect themselves and others from instances of physical or sexual boundary violations or abuse. This is particularly important when children are at risk. The Diocese of Cheyenne offers this information to help promote healthy relationships and the safety of all.

Children and Youth

Child abuse and neglect are serious societal problems. The number of cases reported has increased each year since 1976, when statistics were first kept. Brief discussions of the forms of abuse follow.

Neglect: A child is neglected if the persons this child depends upon fail to provide food, clothing, shelter, medical care, education, or supervision. When these basic needs are deliberately withheld not merely because the parents or caregivers are poor, it is considered neglect.

Physical Abuse: Physical abuse is the deliberate injury of a child by any person. Physical abuse sometimes stems from unreasonably harsh punishment. Sometimes abuse is the result of a caretaker's reaction to stress. Drinking and drug abuse by caretakers are common contributing factors in physical abuse. Even children who are well-cared-for experience minor injuries as a normal part of childhood, usually in predictable places such as the shins, knees, and elbows. When the injuries are in soft-tissue areas on the abdomen or back, or do not seem to be typical childhood injuries, physical abuse is a possibility.

Emotional Abuse: A child suffers from emotional abuse when constantly ridiculed, rejected, blamed, or compared unfavorably with brothers, sisters, or other children.

Sexual Abuse: When an adult or an older child uses his or her authority over a child to involve the child in sexual activity, it is sexual abuse. Abusers frequently use tricks, bribes, threats, or force to persuade the child to join in sexual activity. Because children often do not report their own abuse, adults should watch for other indications that abuse is occurring. Such indications might include refusal to go to a friend's or relative's home for no apparent reason, unusually seductive or provocative behavior, including language, on the part of the child, physical symptoms such as irritation of the genital or anal areas, or unusual emotional behavior such as undue anxiety, crying, sleep disturbances, loss of appetite, sudden drop in grades, truancy, or self-destructive behavior.

Suspicion that a child or youth is or has been abused or neglected must be reported based upon the individual situation, keeping the safety of the child as the paramount concern. The Diocese of Cheyenne has a Sexual Misconduct Policy that applies in certain situations when the offender is

a Church worker. Reporting procedures under this policy are summarized on the Diocesan website at www.dioceseofcheyenne.org. In situations that do not involve a Church worker, the Wyoming Child Protective Services may be contacted to make a report.

Adults

The Diocese of Cheyenne is also committed to providing a safe place for adults to seek guidance and care. Adults in need of ministry or healing frequently make themselves vulnerable by sharing personal information about their situations, for example those seeking personal or relationship counseling and those seeking grief support. Adults also may be vulnerable because of their physical condition, for example the sick, the elderly or the disabled. These adults may not be able to make healthy judgments about their own physical or emotional safety.

Abuse of the Counseling Relationship: A counselor who initiates or participates in a sexual or an intimate personal relationship with the person being counseled is abusing the trust placed in him or her by the counselee.

Elder Abuse: Those who are elderly have the right to expect that those who enter their homes will behave respectfully. Verbally berating an elderly person, enticing him or her to give substantial gifts, or invading their privacy without their consent, are all forms of elder abuse, and can be just as harmful as physical or sexual abuse.

Abuse of the Sick and Disabled: The Church teaches the sanctity of life because it is a gift from God. Consequently, no one who depends upon others for personal or health care should be made to feel a burden. When a care giver implies that an individual who needs care is not “worth the effort” he or she is abusing the gift of life given to all. As mentioned above, this type of abuse can be just as harmful as verbal, physical or sexual abuse.

Disregard of the Vows of Commitment (Marriage, Celibacy and Chastity): When married persons, priests, deacons, or members of religious orders engage in actions contrary to their vows or sacred bonds of faithfulness, they disregard the important commitments and put at risk the safety of individual families as well as our Church family.

Suspicion that an adult is or has been abused or neglected must be reported based upon the individual situation, keeping the safety of the potential victim as a paramount concern. The Diocese has a Sexual Misconduct Policy that applies in certain situations and when the offender is believed to be a Church worker. Reporting procedures under this policy are summarized on the Diocesan website at <http://www.dioceseofcheyenne.org/protect.html>. In situations that do not involve a Church worker, reports can be made to the offender’s supervisor, pastor, or legal authorities.