

Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn

Ten Points in Safeguarding Children, Young People
and Vulnerable Adults

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“We are not living an era of change but a change of era.” Pope Francis

Ten points in safeguarding children, young people and vulnerable adults

1. Sexual abuse is about *the victim*

Many people are affected when a priest or other person working with children abuses a child or vulnerable person, but the individual most impacted is the victim who has suffered a violation of trust that can affect his or her entire life. The abuser, the family of the abused, and the church community are all affected by this sin and crime; but the primary person of concern must be the victim/survivor.

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

If people wish to volunteer for the Church (eg, in a Parish or school) they must follow Archdiocesan guidelines on background checks, safe environment training, policies and procedures, and codes of conduct. 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

It is naive to presume that people automatically know boundaries, so organisations and families have to spell them out. For example, no youth minister, cleric or other adult leader should be in a child's bedroom or alone with the child. The Archdiocesan Institute for Professional Standards and Safeguarding (IPSS) can assist in providing specialised professional development tailored to the needs to a specific agency, religious group, parish, school, community or other Archdiocesan community.

4. Child sexual abuse *can be prevented*

Awareness that child sexual abuse exists, and that it can exist anywhere, is a start. It is then critical to build safety barriers for children and young people to keep them safe from harm. These barriers come in the form of protective practices, codes of conduct, background evaluations, policies and procedures, wholehearted commitment to safety as a priority and safety training programs.

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

Those who have been abused seldom just get over it. The sense of violation goes deep into a person's psyche and feelings of anger, shame, hurt and betrayal can build long after abuse has taken place. Some have described the feeling as if it has scarred their soul.

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. Not being acknowledged contributes to a victim's sense of being invisible, unimportant and unworthy; and so they are in some way re-victimised.

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

Experience shows that most abuse is at the hands of someone who has gained the trust of a victim/survivor and his/her family and others around. While most abuse occurs in the family setting, it also occurs in institution settings. Sometimes the nicest person in the world is an abuser, and this niceness enables a false sense of trust to be created between abuser and abused.

8. There are behavioural warning signs of child abusers

Training and education help adults recognise *grooming* techniques that are precursors to abuse. Some abusers isolate a potential victim by giving him or her undue attention or lavish gifts. Another common grooming technique is to 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 or inappropriate touching, these include wrestling and tickling. It is also critical to be wary of age-inappropriate relationships, for example, as seen in the adult who is more comfortable with children than with fellow adults. It helps that Church institutions, schools and parishes set up rules to guide interaction between adults and children.

9. People can be taught to identify grooming behaviour (crossing professional boundaries)

Those grooming behaviours are the actions which abusers take to project the image that they are kind, generous, caring people, while in fact they may be luring a minor into an inappropriate relationship. An abuser may develop a relationship with the family (and also an institution) to increase his credibility and trusted access to the child/ren. Abusers might show attention to the child by talking to him/her, being friendly, sharing alcohol with a minor and giving the child status by insinuating that the child is their favourite or special person. Abusers might increasingly test the boundaries. 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 organisations help to keep predators away from children, both because they scare off some predators and because checks may uncover past actions which should ban an adult from working or volunteering with children. If an adult has had difficulty with some boundaries in the past, he or she may have difficulties with other boundaries, such as not abusing a child's trust and hurting a child. Never forget that offenders lie.

Adapted from a document *Ten Points To Create Safe Environments For Children* by U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops

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