

**Catholic Social Services
Fall River, MA**

ABUSE PREVENTION and REMEDIATION INFORMATION

1. It's a good idea to keep a copy of the Policies and Procedures book (green book) in your desk if you have one. If not, you may want to keep the book in your car, briefcase, etc.
2. Remember that you are a mandated reporter and if you have any reason to suspect that a minor is being abused or neglected, you must call Catholic Social Services (CSS) IMMEDIATELY and report your concerns. CSS has trained professionals who will determine the best course of action. It is your legal obligation to report! If you are a school employee/volunteer, be sure to report the suspected abuse or neglect to the principal, or whoever is the reporting agent for your school. If you are a parish employee/volunteer, find the reporting agent for the parish and advise that person immediately.
3. For your convenience, there is a copy of the Code of Conduct that you signed in the green book (p. 22) and a copy of the MA Form 51-A (p. 23), which is the form we will assist you in filling out when reporting abuse or neglect to the Commonwealth.
4. Please remember that while you should care about your students, proper boundaries protect everyone. Give them a high five rather than an arm around the shoulder; take note of how much time you spend with any given minor so that there is no concern of favoritism or worse; and be cautious about friendships with students. A good teacher/student relationship has caring and shared goals, but not undue personal contact.
5. In addition to your own boundaries and behaviors, please be mindful of colleagues' interactions with students as well. If you see something that makes you feel uncomfortable or that you know isn't right, please report it. Even if abuse hasn't happened yet, the colleague may (knowingly or unwittingly) be engaging in grooming behaviors and if there is a report, abuse can be prevented or stopped.
6. NEVER engage in a sexual or emotional relationship with students, even once they turn 18 and are off campus. This is still a violation of healthy student-teacher boundaries that can result in a report against you. Feel free to contact CSS with questions about negotiating healthy boundaries. We can assist with clarification or counseling, if needed.
7. Be mindful of Internet and social networking boundaries as well. Good rules of thumb are as follows:
 - Do not become friends or buddies with students on sites such as MySpace, Facebook, etc. unless you have to. If it is required in order to communicate with minors, keep the posts business-like and to the point.
 - Communications with students should be only in the context of the ministry or education which you have been hired to perform. Be careful about allowing communications that violate professional boundaries;
 - Pay attention to the time of day that emails are sent. Late night emails, however innocent, can signal to a student that the sender has a special interest in the student. It's always better to be safe than sorry;
 - Remember that if you have students as friends on your social networking site, they can see what you post, and those posts can impact how students, their parents, and your supervisors perceive you;
 - If a student you have denied as a "friend" on a social networking site is repeatedly trying to access your personal social networking site, alert CSS; and
 - If possible, only use diocesan screen names when communicating with a student. If not, please make sure your screen name is an appropriate one and not one that has sexual connotations.

8. **Please note:** if you see nudity or anything objectionable on a student's computer or a colleague's computer, call CSS IMMEDIATELY! Forwarding to anyone, even a supervisor for guidance on what to do, is a federal offense. Once that material has been sent, there is nothing we can do to help you.
9. **Always** monitor children's access to the Internet and social networking sites. This is a prime hunting ground for predators and the slightest piece of information can lead a predator right to the child's front door. Don't let a child in your care be at risk because a predator gained access. Better to be unpopular with a child who is alive and well!
10. Be proactive if you learn of any bullying incidents! Adults are the caretakers and role models for our children. If they see trusted adults putting an end to bullying, children are less likely to engage in it themselves and more likely to report it if they are victims of bullying.
11. If a child tries to disclose abuse to you, follow these rules:
 - Remain calm; do not react with great emotion, even if it is sympathy or compassion;
 - Let the child tell the story in the child's words. Do not correct terminology or language, as that may cause the child to shut down;
 - DO respond in age-appropriate ways. For young children, use simple words and concepts. As children get older, they are capable of asking and understanding more, so be careful to use words that the child will understand at his or her age.
 - DO NOT ask questions about the story. This can cause a myriad of problems down the road. Only professionals who are trained in abuse investigation should ask questions. Otherwise, you could ruin any chances of the perpetrator facing charges, and you may confuse the child so that healing is made more difficult;
 - DO NOT lie to the child. If the child asks if you have to tell anyone else; if the abuser will get in trouble, etc., tell the truth. Tell the child that you have to tell someone else about the abuse so that it won't happen again. Tell the child that you don't know if the abuser will get in trouble, but you have to tell the police and then you'll find out what will happen next.
 - DO report the incident to CSS immediately!
12. If you are a caretaker, watch for signs of possible abuse or neglect and respond appropriately!! Don't assume that a child is trying to get out of doing something. Take the time to sit down and talk with the child. You may learn that the child is avoiding an activity because of someone else involved in that activity who makes the child uncomfortable, or worse. Never assume that someone is safe if your child is showing signs of discomfort around the person. Make the effort to find out why!

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact:
Debora Jones, Coordinator, Office for Child Protection (djones@cssdioc.org)

Catholic Social Services: 508-674-4681

Website/Resources: www.cssdioc.org/OCF - Did You Know monthly articles; signs of neglect and abuse; Diocesan Abuse Prevention Policies & Procedures book; USCCB Charter and other information.