

Dear Parent,

Preparing a teenager to become an independent and responsible adult requires an ongoing commitment of love, guidance and attention by you as parents as well as by an extended support system. In response to the USCCB's *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People* the Diocese of San Diego continues to support you in this effort through safe environment training with your child.

Teenagers may demonstrate signs of being sophisticated and capable while remaining vulnerable in many ways. Statistics reveal that 90% of all sexual abuse cases in the U.S. are committed by someone who is known to the victim. By using a process called grooming, a primarily psychological process, a sexual predator tries to win the trust of not only the child, but also of parents. In this way, it becomes more difficult for the child to be believable when he/she attempts to disclose real concerns or attempts of sexual abuse. Here are some points to consider:

- Abusers seek victims they have access to, and over a period of time “groom” them by offering gifts and emotional support, displays of what they call deep love. This special friendship, often exclusive of others, lures the victim into a sexual contact. This sexual contact is often not overtly forced. The groomer emphasizes sex as a natural part of their relationship.
- Secrecy is an essential part of this relationship. Often youth are embarrassed or ashamed of their responses to the sexual predator. They find it difficult to break away from the abuser, because the abuser emotionally controls them, through intimidation and manipulation.
- Groomers seek to establish a sense of trust with their victims as well as with their parents and close friends. They may bestow gifts on the family such as buying a dinner for the victim's family, offer to tutor a teen who is struggling in an academic subject, or provide transportation for the teen when the parent is busy.

Warning Signs of a Sexual Predator: There is no one way an abuser manipulates his or her victim.

There are certain behaviors that should raise a “red flag” or caution:

- Prefer the company of young people to adults
- Find ways to spend time alone with a youth, especially overnight
- Provide gifts, trips, favors or affection to a specific youth or select group of youth
- Hugs, pats, or touches youth more frequently than is appropriate
- Invites youth to private locations
- Insists that youth share deep personal feelings with him or her

What you can do as a parent:

- Listen to your teen's concerns, offering reassurance of his/her importance
- Remind him/her that there is no situation, however painful or embarrassing, that you can't help him/her with
- For additional help, consult with a trusted parish staff person or contact the diocese

Useful Websites for further reading:

1. The National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information: www.nccanch.acf.hhs.gov
2. National Center for Missing and Exploited Children: www.netismartz.org www.missingkids.com
3. Prevent Child Abuse America: www.preventchildabuse.org

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