



## Office of Child, Adolescent and Adult Protection

# UPDATE

***We think it's important that parents know what their parish and Catholic School are doing to keep children safe from abuse through the Diocese of Tucson Safe Environment Program. This update is about personal safety education for your children.***

### **BACKGROUND**

The U.S. Catholic Bishops encouraged personal safety education for children in the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People ([www.usccb.org/ocyp/charter.shtml](http://www.usccb.org/ocyp/charter.shtml)) that was approved in 2002. Since then, more than five million children in dioceses across the country have been equipped with the skills to help them protect themselves from abuse.

Initially, the Diocese of Tucson used the personal safety education program of the Southern Arizona Child Advocacy Center as its primary curriculum for children in parish religious education programs and in Catholic Schools. While that program is still used, Bishop Gerald F. Kicanas in 2006 approved the Personal Safety Curriculum for Children and Youth for use in parishes and schools as part of the Diocese's Safe Environment Program.

In 2007, a special work group established by the U.S. Catholic Bishops concluded that research on personal safety education for children showed that it had a positive effect, was consistent with the scientific perspective on healthy child development, and was in accord with the teachings of the Catholic Church.

### **THE BASIC MESSAGE**

The basic message given to your children in the Personal Safety Education Curriculum for Children and Youth is simple:

***If you feel unsafe or uncomfortable about what is happening to you...***

- 1. You can say "No!"***
- 2. You can tell a trusted adult and you can ask for help.***

***If you feel unsafe or uncomfortable...***



Children who have been given education in proper behavior and boundaries know when something does not seem right. In their Personal Safety Education, our children receive age appropriate information about actions of others that are not right and that can cause them to feel unsafe or uncomfortable.

Importantly, they receive this information in the broader context of Catholic moral teaching – what is right and what is wrong. Because teaching children about right and wrong is a primary focus of any effective religious education program, it is natural that personal safety education for children should be taught during their religious education classes.

**You can say "No!"**



Predators try to silence their victims. They will try to win them over when possible, encouraging them to believe that what they are feeling unsafe or uncomfortable about is really "OK." If that fails, they will try to intimidate the child by raising fear or shame. They want the child to feel powerless and accept the abuse.

In their Personal Safety Education, our children are learning that they have power – that they can say "No!" when they feel unsafe or uncomfortable. Predators don't like this a bit. It is the rare predator who will not back off when a child says "No!"

**You can tell a trusted adult and you can ask for help.**



In the past, children who were made by predators to feel fear or shame too often held these feelings within, sometimes keeping their abuse secret for many years. It is keeping the terrible secret that leads to so much of the pain and anger that victims carry into adulthood.

In their Personal Safety Education, our children learn that they don't have to keep abuse a secret and that the best person to tell when they have experienced something bad is a trusted adult. They are encouraged to create their personal "list" of trusted adults. They are told that if the first trusted adult they tell does not seem to understand or doesn't take action, they are to go to their next trusted adult.

### **What is your role in the personal safety education of your children?**

Our children depend on us to protect them and to help them sort out complicated situations. You will be high on the list of "trusted adults" to whom your children will learn to come for help when they feel unsafe or uncomfortable.

Prepare yourself to respond as calmly as you can if your child comes to you for help. If what you hear leads you to believe that your child (or any other child or adolescent) has been abused or is in immediate danger of being abused, call 9-1-1 and make a report to law enforcement.

Parents are the primary teachers of their children. They (as well as grandparents and anyone else closely involved in raising a child) play an important role in the effectiveness of the personal safety education provided to their children.

You can help make the personal safety education your child receives to be more effective by:

- Reading the Personal Safety Education Curriculum at [www.diocesetucson.org/SEP.html](http://www.diocesetucson.org/SEP.html).
- Speaking with your children about what they are learning.
- Knowing your responsibility to report any reasonable suspicion of abuse of a child or adolescent to law enforcement.
- Supporting your parish or school in its efforts to provide personal safety education to children and youth and in carrying out all the other elements of its Safe Environment Program.
- Calling the Diocese of Tucson Office of Child, Adolescent and Adult Protection at 520-792-3410 for more information about personal safety education for children.

**Visit [www.diocesetucson.org/ocaap.html](http://www.diocesetucson.org/ocaap.html) for more information.**