

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.

90% of all sexual abuse is perpetrated by someone the child knows. Even persons your child is dating can be perpetrators of sexual abuse. As your child nears adulthood, the boundaries of those adults they encounter become more blurred as to what constitutes appropriate relationships. Results from recent surveys show that an alarming rate of teens accepts abusive behavior in dating relationships.

- **1 in 3 girls** who have been in a serious relationship say they've been concerned **about being physically hurt** by their partner.
- **1 in 4 teens** who have been in serious relationships say that a boyfriend or girlfriend has tried to prevent them from **spending time with friends or family**; the same number have been pressured to only spend time with their partner.
- **1 in 3 girls** between the ages of 16 and 18 **say sex is expected for people their age** in a relationship; half of teen girls who have experienced sexual pressure report that are afraid the relationship would end if they did not give in.
- Nearly **1 in 4 girls** who have been in a relationship (23%) reported **going further sexually than they wanted** to as a result of pressure.

Parents play a very important role in ending abuse. Teens in abusive situations truly need the support of their parents. The control or power that an abuser exhibits in your child's life may paralyze their will through fear. Be vigilant to the following **warning signs of abuse**:

- Changes in his/her daily routines
- Retreat from school or activities; failing grades; a sudden loss of enthusiasm in things s/he enjoys
- Isolation from friends
- Clothing inappropriate for the weather (in order to hide marks of abuse)
- Visible marks or bruises with excuses that s/he fell
- Excessive amount of time spent with that person

What can you do to help protect your teen from sexual abuse?

Be proactive. If you notice something has changed, approach your teen with a tone of loving concern. Do not be put off by any resistance, excuses, minimizing concerns or outright denial.

- Listen to your teen's concerns, offering reassurance of his/her value as a person.
- Remind him/her that there is no situation, however painful or embarrassing, that you can't help him/her with.
- Identify behavioral changes or observation in a non-confrontational manner.
- Consult with a trusted parish or staff person.
- Contact legal authorities when sexual or physical abuse has occurred.

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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