

Creating Safe and Sacred Spaces Program – Grades 9 and 10

Session Overview

The urgent issues of child abuse must be addressed with all community members, especially children and teenagers. Young people need realistic tools that will carry them through difficult situations and empower them to take a positive stand for themselves and one another. In this session, the participants will learn the warning signs that signal trouble in a potentially abuse relationship. The activities included will build both awareness and confidence.

Outcomes

1. The child will identify the risk factors associated with sexual abuse
2. The child will develop a plan for responding to and supporting others in a crisis situation
3. The child will be provided with information and tools to identify and steer away from questionable and potentially dangerous situations

Just the Facts

Have your child complete Handout 1 – Quiz Time

After completing, review and discuss the correct answers

How Do I Protect Myself

Have your child complete Handout 2 – Discussion Starters

After completing, review and discuss your child's responses

Where Do We Go from Here?

Read and share your thoughts on Handout 3 – Where Do We Go from Here?

Closing Prayer – Meditation Time

Have your child prayerfully respond to the sentence starters on Handout 4 – Prayer Card

Conclude by praying the final prayer together

Quiz Time

1. Can a person be sexually abused without being touched?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
2. What percentage of the time does a victim of sexual abuse know his or her abuser?
 - a. 50%
 - b. 66%
 - c. 75%
 - d. 90%
3. Who is the most common sex offender?
 - a. a homosexual
 - b. a poor person
 - c. a white married male
 - d. someone who was previously abused
4. What is a person called who is attracted sexually to a child between the ages of 14-18?
 - a. pedimanic
 - b. ephebophile
 - c. araphilic
 - d. pedophile
5. What is the lowest percentage of priests in the United States who are reported sex offenders?
 - a. 0.2-4%
 - b. 3%
 - c. 4-5%
 - d. 8.5%
6. Under Church law, can a priest choose or be forced to resign from being a priest as a result of his sexual offenses?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
7. Do most children readily tell an adult, usually a parent, when something serious like sexual abuse happens to them?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
8. Why is abuse not often reported immediately?
 - a. there are often no witnesses
 - b. children are good storytellers and do not always know what they are saying
 - c. most reported cases turn out to be false accusations
 - d. victims do not want to tell anyone
9. Are most offenders prosecuted and punished?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
10. Of those who abuse, how many were abused themselves?
 - a. 10%
 - b. 22%
 - c. 30%
 - d. 48%

Discussion Starters

1. I think talking about sexual abuse is (circle one word)...

scary uncomfortable gross important
necessary helpful pointless

2. Rank the assets that you need to be a healthy and happy teenager:

_____ caring adults and parents
_____ patience
_____ a relationship with God
_____ a good job
_____ money
_____ friends
_____ trust
_____ an education

3. If a friend told me that he or she had been sexually abused as a child, I would.....

4. If someone asked me how I felt about talking to my parents about sex, I would say.....

5. If I were in a situation with someone where I felt uncomfortable and wanted to get out of the situation for my safety, I could say or tell the person.....

6. If that person were an adult, I would.....

7. If someone in my community were accused of sexually abusing someone, I would feel.....

Prayer Card

For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. (Jeremiah 29:11-12)

Some of my hopes and dreams are...

A person who reminds me to trust God's goodness is.....

Three words that encourage me are.....

Say to yourself – “God loves me and knows me and believes in me.”

Lord, you have created me with specific thoughts, ideas, and characteristics. You know everything about me. You know who I am and who I will become. You have plans for me that are wonderful, plans that I might not even be able to imagine for myself. Help me to trust in your guidance, Lord. Help me to believe that I don't have to do anything by myself. Help me to remember that you are every present, all-knowing and completely loving. Grant me the gifts I need to believe in myself. When I feel discouraged, remind me that I am capable. When I feel lonely, bring friends and family to support me. When I am confused, show me the right path to follow. When I doubt the future, enlighten me to trust in your creative plans. I ask all this with a humble heart and with much gratitude. Amen.

Four Steps to Creating a Safe and Sacred Place

Practice asking questions
Trust your instincts
Be clear about what you want and need
Get involved

Quiz Time Answers and Information

1. Can a person be sexually abused without being touched?

Yes – In reality, sexual abuse can take on various forms. It can be actions involving sexual intercourse to fondling under or over the clothes to the sexual exploitation of children where no direct physical action is perpetrated but where they are in the presence of someone who is clearly becoming sexually aroused by their presence. For example, a perpetrator might expose a child to pornography while watching to see what the child does in response to this exploitation, or a perpetrator might take photos of a naked child for personal sexual stimulation.

2. What percentage of the time does a victim of sexual abuse know his or her abuser?

90% -- Sexual abuse happens most often with people who know the victim. Stranger abuse is fairly rare. Abuse also happens in familiar places. Abusers are most often fathers, stepfathers, siblings, aunts, uncles, baby-sitters, caretakers, or supervisors. Normally the victim of sexual abuse knows his or her abuser.

3. Who is the most common sex offender?

A white married male – Perpetrators of sexual abuse usually know their victims. Most often, sex offenders are white married males, but sex offenders can be found in every socioeconomic classification, every race, every sexual orientation, and every description. Contrary to the impression given by the media, sexual offenders are also found in every religious background.

4. What is a person called who is attracted sexually to a child between the ages of 14-18?

Ephhebophile – an ephhebophile is an individual who is attracted sexually to a pubertal child or adolescent in the age range of 14-18. Ephhebophiles tend to have significantly fewer victims and seem less fixated than pedophiles.

5. What is the lowest percentage of priests in the United States who are reported sex offenders?

0.2-4% in the low range; 4-8% in the high range. The Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate at Georgetown University estimates the total number of priests in the United States to be about 47,000. It estimates that 79% of these priests are diocesan, with the remaining 21% being religious order priests. Some estimate that 0.2-4%, or minimally between 100-2,000 priests, are sex offenders.

6. Under Church law, can a priest choose or be forced to resign from being a priest as a result of his sexual offenses?

No – Theology surrounding the priesthood changed after the Council of Trent in the sixteenth century. The priest's very being was defined as forever changed as a result of simply being ordained into the "order" of "priest". In this Catholic framework, ordination to the priesthood is such a significant and altering event that even if a priest decides to renounce his duties, he can never technically resign from being a priest. "He cannot become a layman again in the strict sense, because the character imprinted by ordination is forever." (Catechism of the Catholic Church – Number 1583) In being ordained, the priest, as stated in Hebrews 5:6, is considered a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.

7. Do most children readily tell an adult, usually a parent, when something serious like sexual abuse happens to them?

No – children frequently do not tell about being sexually abused, especially if the abuser is a member of the family. Those who have broken their silence are very often not believed as children or as adults. Abused children often struggle with the thought that they must be very bad for God to allow the abuse to happen in the first place.

8. Why is abuse not often reported immediately?

There are often no witnesses – The key to understanding why sexual abuse is not reported immediately is recognizing that so often the abuse happens in a secluded place. The abuser most often is someone who has power and influence over the child and who has used that power and influence to both groom and silence the child. Victims often want to tell and want to have the abuse stopped. As children, victims do not possess the mental capacity to break away from the power of their abuser to report what is happening.

9. Are most offenders prosecuted and punished?

No – only a few of those who commit sexual assaults are apprehended and convicted for their crimes. Most convicted sex offenders are eventually released into the community under probation or parole supervision.

10. Of those who abuse, how many were abused themselves?

30% -- most sex offenders were not sexually assaulted as children, and most children who are sexually assaulted do not sexually assault others. Not all abusers are acting out of revenge for their past victimization. Adolescent sex offenders do not always become adult offenders. Factors that may influence a victim to become an abuser include when the abuse happened, what kind of treatment the victim received, how the family reacted to the abuse, how many times the abuse took place, and what kind of abuse was inflicted on the victim.

Where Do We Go from Here? Tips and Tools for Staying Safe

Practice Asking Questions

Spend one entire day thinking of a question for everything you do in that day. Do not rule out any questions. Try to think of everything, from how orange juice is squeezed from oranges to why math was created, from whether you should believe a rumor you heard to how a person is affected by participating in extra-curricular activities. After an entire day of asking questions, you will find that you do not need to ask questions about everything all the time, but certainly you take some things for granted and blindly accept as truth yet do not always know why you accept them. There is often more information to be gained than what you have immediately available to you. Practicing asking questions will get you into the habit of seeking all available resources to help you learn more about something, a habit that will be especially beneficial when a serious situation arises and you need to make an informed decision.

Trust Your Instincts

As you mature into young adulthood, you are becoming more and more aware of the opportunities to make choices for yourself. Along with this opportunity, comes the responsibility to surround yourself with people – peers and adults – who will help guide you in making healthy choices. Through prayer and conversation, you can learn about the ways your decisions impact other people – either positively or negatively. You must also trust in the gifts God has given you. Your intuition alerts you when something is not right, your complex mind makes sense of a complicated situation, and your spiritual connection with God provides you the perseverance and strength to carry through difficult times. Practice trusting your feelings by discussing how you feel about something with another person you trust – a parent, sibling, friend, or significant adult. Use journaling to voice your thoughts on paper, and allow the tool of writing to help you unfold and clarify your daily thoughts.

Be Clear about What You Want and Need

How simple is it to ask for a new game, a new bike, a new car, or new clothes for your birthday or as a holiday gift? What if you were able to voice your internal needs and wants just as clearly and easily? It is okay to tell someone that you feel uncomfortable or want to get out of a situation because it doesn't feel right, whether the situation is lying, stealing, gossiping, or putting someone down. You don't have to do something that goes against what you believe is right just because someone else says you should – even if that someone is an adult. Practice being clear about what you need to be healthy in everyday life situations – how much sleep you need, communicating how you are feeling, wanting to have time alone, or needing help with homework. Communicating what you need has nothing to do with being selfish. In fact, it is self-care to think about and to articulate what your body, mind, and soul need to stay healthy and happy. Look to the significant adults in your life, such as your parents, teachers, or trusted family and friends, to help you balance the difference between need and greed.

Get Involved

Being involved in the community does not have anything to do with being popular or being the most active or voted the friendliest or most outgoing. Do not limit yourself because you don't think you deserve to be an active community member. Educate yourself about the different ways you can be involved in the community. Find something that is interesting to you. Take piano lessons outside of school, meet your neighbors, volunteer at a local shelter, baby-sit for family and friends, walk in a benefit race, teach Bible stories to children at your church, tutor peers, or participate in a team or club. Choose something that inspires you or is interesting to you. Being involved serves two main purposes: (1) you get to know other teens and adults who can potentially support you and whom you can potentially trust, and (2) you build your own character, set examples for others, and gain insight into who you are and who you want to be. Community involvement gives you an opportunity to think about your future and your goals.