

Tips for talking to children about difficult subjects/news reports

The topic of sex abuse, particularly child sex abuse, is a daunting one for parents. Every parent must consider many factors including the best age-appropriate way to discuss the topic. Below are some points to consider adapted from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, the National Child Traumatic Stress Network, and First Things First.

1. Make sure you are composed before you talk with your child.
2. If you believe your child is aware of news concerning abuse in the diocese, start the conversation. Not talking about a difficult event can make the event even more threatening in your child's mind.
3. Listen carefully to what your child is asking or talking about.
4. Clarify just what any concerns are before you answer. Sometimes we make assumptions and give far more information than what the child needs.
5. Keep your answers simple and brief. Don't answer questions that have not been asked. Do not overload your child with information that is beyond his/her level of understanding.
6. Assure your child that you and other adults that are in charge are doing everything possible to make sure they will be safe. This will give them a sense that adults are actively taking steps to protect those who are currently suffering.
7. Don't make guarantees that such a thing can never happen again. Words like "never" and "always" should be used very carefully because small children trust that this is a promise from you.
8. Explain that we do not know why people treat other people badly.
9. Try to limit your child's exposure to media coverage. A child believes what he or she sees on television, or in the newspapers is always true.
10. Let your children know about successful community efforts. You may want to share positive media images, such as reports of individuals helping those in need.