**Mandatory Reporting / Professional Boundaries**

**Child Sexual Abuse:** The World Health Organization, WHO, and the International Society for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect, ISPCAN, defines it as:

*…the involvement of a child in sexual activity that he or she does not fully comprehend, is unable to give informed consent to, or for which the child is not developmentally prepared, or else that violates the laws or social taboos of society. Children can be sexually abused by both adults and other children who are—by virtue of their age or stage of development—in a position of responsibility, trust, or power over the victim.*

**Mandatory Reporters**

Chapter 39 of the Florida Statutes (F.S.) mandates that **any person who knows, or has reasonable cause to suspect**, that a child is abused, neglected, or abandoned by a parent, legal custodian, caregiver, or other person responsible for the child’s welfare shall immediately report such knowledge or suspicion to the Florida Abuse Hotline of the Department of Children and Families.

Although every person has a responsibility to report suspected abuse or neglect, some occupations are specified in Florida law as required to do so. These occupations are considered “professionally mandatory reporters”. **A professionally mandatory reporter of child abuse/neglect is required by Florida Statute to provide his or her name to the Abuse Hotline Counselor when reporting.** A professionally mandatory reporter’s name is entered into the record of the report, but is held confidential. This includes but is not limited to a professional child care worker, school teachers, school officials or other school personnel.

*--Florida Department of Children and Families*

**Vulnerable Adults**

The Florida Department of Children and Families is also responsible, as mandated in Chapter 415, (F.S.) to provide services to detect and correct abuse, neglect, and exploitation of vulnerable adults who, because of their age or disability, may be unable to adequately provide for their own care or protection.

*--Florida Department of Children and Families*

The Archdiocese of Miami’s Safe Environment Policy also applies to vulnerable adults.

**Facts About Child Sex Abuse:**

* Child sexual abuse occurs when an adult or an older child coerces a child into sexual activity.
* A child is sexually abused in this country every two minutes.
* One in four girls and one in six boys will be sexually abused by their 18th birthday. This does not include teenagers having consensual sex. The median age for child sexual abuse is nine.
* As many as 90% of abusers are known and trusted by the child and his or her family.
* Child sexual abuse may include fondling a child’s genitals, masturbation, oral-genital contact, digital penetration, vaginal and/or anal intercourse, exposure, voyeurism, and child pornography.
* Child sexual abuse occurs in all racial, ethnic, socioeconomic groups, ages, and neighborhoods.
* Abusers and victims can be either male or female.
* Victims of child sexual abuse are at far greater risk for residual emotional, behavioral, cognitive, and social symptoms that can persist and contribute to a host of psychiatric problems throughout life. These include Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), depression, high-risk sexual behavior, substance abuse, relationship problems, and suicide.
* A National Institute of Justice study estimated that each year child sexual abuse in America costs the nation $23 billion in medical, mental health, special education, and legal costs.

*--Exchange: The Early Childhood Leaders’ Magazine*

**WWYD, What Would You Do?**

1. After attending a CCD or parochial school class where the Virtus Teaching Touching Safety lesson was given on “Identifying Your Safe Adult,” a child comes forward to say her father hurts her in her “private area.” WWYD?
2. During a Youth Group retreat, in a group setting, a teen confesses to being sexually abused by her step-father, who is no longer married to her mother or in her life. She has never told anyone, including her mother. WWYD?
3. During a summer camp day program, a teen counselor reports inappropriate behavior of a 5 year old camper. She acts in a provocative manner, makes suggestive comments, and even becomes somewhat physical with other counselors. The behavior is not age appropriate and suggests she has been exposed to inappropriate behavior. WWYD?
4. During a Youth Group meeting, a teen from a family, who are very active in the parish, comes forward to say she is being abused by a family member. You notified the pastor and he tells you he knows the family very well and is sure there is a misunderstanding. He says he will take care of it and talk to the family himself. WWYD?
5. A child comes forward to say a classmate is always following him into the bathroom and is aggressive and touching his private parts. He tries to go alone but the other student always volunteers to be his “buddy” and the teacher “okays” it because no one is supposed to go alone. WWYD?
6. A four year old is being sexually abused. He cried with pain when using the bathroom, had bruises on his upper legs and around his rectum, and was unable to focus on school tasks. He told a teacher what was happening at home and she said she would help. The teacher told the director who said that she would report it. But she kept putting it off. WWYD?
7. Twice in six weeks a child came to school complaining of pain when she sat down. You saw some bruising. In the past, when child protective services was called in, they had intervened much too vigorously, often damaging what seemed to be a basically positive relationship between the child and the parents. You are worried whether it would do more harm than good to contact the authorities. WWYD?
8. A child in pre-school has been abandoned by his mother and is staying with his mother’s brother and his girlfriend. The school personnel suspect that they are drug dealers. Staff has documented numerous instances of neglect and emotional abuse and fear there may be more. They have reported this to the authorities but nothing changes. WWYD?
9. Teachers noticed that a five-year-old boy in their class seemed to have a preoccupation with sexual matters. His drawings focused on sexual organs and he knew a good deal about sex, even getting into suggestive positions during play with other children. He spoke of having seen X-rated movies on his parents’ TV. WWYD?

**People of Trust**

As employees and volunteers in the Archdiocese of Miami, we are considered people of trust. To a child, we refer to this as a “safe adult.” Therefore, we must put our ethical commitment to children before convenience or comfort. In the previous scenarios, tough decisions need to be made. Sometimes predicaments present themselves and it will seem difficult to find a balance between our obligation to a child and respect for the family or even maintaining a good relationship with a supervisor. When faced with dilemmas such as these, always put the welfare of the child first. Keep in mind the following:

* Children are vulnerable and dependent on adults
* Be familiar with the symptoms of child abuse.
* When there is a healthy suspicion of child abuse, report it to the legal authorities. (See contact card for numbers and keep it handy.)
* When another person has a suspicion of child abuse, assist them in taking appropriate action in order to protect the child. (Give them the contact numbers necessary.)

**Professional Boundaries**

As caregivers of children it is incumbent on us to be kind, welcoming and friendly. These qualities are well received by children and provide for a safe and comfortable environment. However, keep in mind that preferential treatment or choosing favorites is not beneficial to anyone. In fact, it can be detrimental. Consider a predators first steps in the predatory process. When grooming a child-- that is gaining the trust of a child-- a predator’s behavior is not unlike that of a warm and friendly caregiver, who has chosen favorites. It includes being complimentary, spending extra time with them, giving them privileges and perhaps even small gifts. The abuser slowly gets closer to the child so when the physical abuse finally takes place it is after a relationship is long established and no one sees it as out of the ordinary. Now look at the two scenarios: a caregiver that picks favorites and a predator grooming a potential victim. The only difference is the final intent.

Maintaining professional boundaries and avoiding behavior that mimics grooming, will ensure that children are not desensitized to the potential danger of predators exhibiting grooming behaviors. Professional boundaries will also ensure that when grooming behaviors occur, it will be readily recognized and addressed.

**Signs of Boundary Invasions**

* Taking an undue interest in a student such as a special friendship.
* Giving gifts or money to a student for no legitimate educational reason.
* Engaging in peer-like behavior with students. “He’s the cool teacher.”
* Favoring certain students and giving them special privileges.
* Inviting favorite students to the classroom at non-class times.
* Getting favorite students out of other classes to visit the teacher.
* Talking to the student about problems that would normally be discussed with adults, like marital problems.
* Telling the student “secrets” or having “secrets” with the child.
* Talking with the student about the child’s personal problems.
* Allowing the student to get away with inappropriate behavior.
* Being alone with the student behind closed doors.
* Taking the student on outings away from other adults.
* Giving students rides in personal vehicle without administrative approval.
* Initiating or extending contact with students beyond the school day for personal reasons.
* Using e-mail, text messaging, or websites to discuss personal topics with students.
* Invading the student’s privacy like walking in on the child in the bathroom, locker-room or even asking about bra sizes or previous sexual experiences.
* Going to the student’s home for non-educational purposes.
* Taking the student on personal outings with or without parent’s permission.
* Inviting students to the teacher’s home without proper chaperones.
* Telling sexual jokes to students.
* Engaging in talk containing sexual innuendo or banter with students.
* Talking about sexual topics that are not related to curriculum.
* Showing pornography to the student.

**Prevention**

* Avoid even the appearance of impropriety
* Recognize the limits of your position
* Team with other staff when providing personal assistance to students
* Don’t play favorites
* Link vulnerable students to professional assistance
* Staff recognition of personal vulnerabilities and need for professional assistance
* Self-report questionable or uncomfortable interactions with students
* Support and guide fellow staff members
* Immediately report suspected maltreatment and other questionable parent-staff interactions

*-- Tim Palmatier specializing in Education Law at Kennedy and Graven in Minneapolis, MN.*

**Sports Boundaries**

Coaches represent a position of specific concern because of their varied background and the physical nature of sports. Coaches also have a high turnover making aggressive compliance necessary. They can be an employee or a volunteer. Often schools have peer coaching where recent graduates come back to coach. This scenario is challenging as the appropriate coach-student relationship must be promoted as opposed to the peer relationship.

**Establish Physical Boundaries**

Minimize physical contact with the student/athlete as much as possible. Only touch the child if the contact is relevant to the skill being developed or you’ve asked their permission to do so. Keep in mind the Virtus guideline for touch: **PAN**. Touch should be **P**ublic, **A**ppropriate and **N**on-sexual.

**Establish Location Boundaries**

Make sure you are never alone with the student/athlete like in a car or locker room. Avoid entering locker rooms but when necessary always knock and announce your entrance. Have another adult with you. If the peer coach is also a minor, they need to be with an adult who has been fingerprinted and Virtus trained.

**Sports Scenarios, WWYD?**

1. One evening after practice you notice one of the other coaches giving a student/athlete a ride home. You know it is against the rules so you mention it to him and he responds, “Yeah, I know but this is just a one-time thing because her mom was late at work.” WWYD?
2. One of the volunteer coaches insists that there is nothing wrong with giving hugs to all the athletes on the team when she sees them. She says, “everyone knows I am a “huggy” mom/coach so if they see me coming they know they are getting a hug. They get used to it” WWYD?
3. The Athletic Director just hired a new walk-on volleyball coach from another state. Although he doesn’t teach, he comes with a reputation for being able to “relate” well to the kids. In casual conversation with him you mention the strenuous process of the background check, Virtus training and signed Pledge. He says, “Oh. I didn’t have to do any of that because the AD said he was really in a pinch and needed a coach right away.” WWYD?
4. One of the volunteer coaches, who is in compliance, starts bringing his 16 year old son to help coach the 7th graders. When asked about his son being at all the practices, he tells you that he is free after school and he wants to train him early so he can be a coach when he turns 18. WWYD?
5. As a new director you take a tour of the facility and notice quite a few unlocked doors to the gym and open fences around campus. The school is located in close proximity to the freeway and backs up to a commercial area with a high volume of activity. WWYD?
6. You and your high school coaching team have been exploring how to best communicate with your athletes through the use of technology. You find out during one of your meetings that one of your coaches has already been communicating with some members of the team through Facebook. When you go onto the page you find pictures of some of your athletes in settings other than the athletic program. WWYD?
7. You notice one of your athletes, who is typically outgoing and social, staying to the back of the group and not saying much. When you walk up to him, while raising your hand and saying, “Hey, high five!”, he is completely startled. You know this behavior isn’t normal and it continues over the next couple of weeks. WWYD?
8. One of your colleagues is behaving in an inappropriate manner with a specific student/athlete. You know it isn’t right, and you want to talk to her, but she’s the head coach. Not only is she the head coach, but she is also the one who helped you begin your coaching career over 15 years ago. WWYD?
9. One of your athletes tells you that she is late for practice because one of her male teachers is making her stay after school with him to be tutored. The teacher has promised her an A, which she needs to play varsity if she agrees to work one-on-one with him. WWYD?

**Maintaining and Managing Sports Boundaries**

Boundaries aren’t always easy to maintain, especially if there’s only a few years difference between you and the young people you are coaching. Yet the role creates a power imbalance that by itself dictates behavior rules. You are in a position of authority and need to maintain professional boundaries, even if only a volunteer. Consider the following when maintaining those boundaries.

1. Am I treating all children/young people in a similar manner or do I act differently towards one particular child?
2. Do I talk, dress or act differently when I’m with a particular child?
3. Would I behave this way if other adults were present?
4. Would I feel comfortable if I observed this behavior in another adult?
5. Could my actions have negative consequences?
6. If I were a parent, would I want an adult behaving this way toward my own child?

Occasionally a child or young person may attempt to initiate an inappropriate relationship with you by asking you out, sending you flirtatious messages, behaving provocatively. If this happens you need to keep in mind that despite a closeness in age (and even if the student is 18 as in the case with some seniors) the relationship of coach to athlete prohibits this type of relationship. You should gently but clearly dissuade them immediately. If you feel the situation is out of your control speak to your supervising coach and ask that additional action be taken such as contacting the parents or having the child or yourself transferred to another team.

*--Joan Vienna, Archdiocese of Los Angeles*

**Social Media Boundaries**

Social media forums such as Facebook create an environment that is both intimate and impersonal. Users can share their innermost feelings, with the screen creating a buffer and a false sense of privacy. In communications with minors the forum makes it extremely easy for teachers and coaches to form intimate and boundary crossing relationships with students. That being said, it is important to note that social media is the best way to reach kids. Perhaps the best use of the forum then is with some guidelines.

* All contact with minors should be done on a parish/school site, not a personal site.
* Parents and administrators are notified and have full access to the site.
* Do not personally message anyone on the site.
* Keep the Virtus acronym in mind with regard to social media as well as physical touch:

**PAN** contact should be **P**ublic, **A**ppropriate, and **N**on-sexual.

**Archdiocese of Miami Contacts**

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