



# Annual Child Protection Briefing



## Warning Signs of a Victim

Patrick McGuire, MSW

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Tragically, most abuse is discovered when a child either voluntarily discloses the activity or when an adult inquires about noticeable changes in the behavior of a child. So among other precautions that must be taken, we must also remain alert to any of those “changes in behavior” and make certain to discover their root cause so that we may act accordingly. Over time, these “changes” have come to be known as “warning signs.”

### What Should I Look For?

Depending on the age of the child, whether they are pre-pubescent or adolescents, the effects of the abuse may manifest themselves in different ways.

In younger children, changes in behavior can include:

- Noticeable fear of a person or certain places
- Sudden awareness of genitals and sexual acts and words
- Attempting to get other children to perform sexual acts
- Drawings that show sexual acts
- Abrupt changes in behavior such as bedwetting or losing control of bowels
- Physical signs of abuse may include sexually transmitted diseases that may be noticed by a pediatrician.

Older children present many of the previous signals as well, but may also exhibit more complex

behavioral changes such as:

- Poor self esteem, aggressive, or anti-social behavior
- Sudden change in grades and/or loss of interest in hobbies and activities
- Gender identity confusion
- Sexual promiscuity
- Wrist cutting or other types of self-mutilation
- Suicidal ideas or gestures

### What Should I Do?

It is vital to remember that the identification of any warning sign does not necessarily mean that the child is the victim of abuse. However, any warning sign should tell us that the child is in need of adult guidance and compassion. An appropriate response is going to vary depending upon circumstances and the severity of the warning sign. Most often, a child simply needs guidance on appropriate behaviors.

However, more serious issues require somewhat a more serious response.



The first step is to inform your supervisor, and then inform the child's parent or guardian (unless that would expose the child to further risk).

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*If the child has been abused in an Archdiocesan institution/program, you should:*

- Advise the child's parent or guardian to notify the county District Attorney
- Notify the Archdiocese by calling the Safe Environment Office (646-794-2810)

If the abuse took place outside of the Archdiocesan program (e.g., in the home):

- Make sure that a report is made to the N.Y.S. Child Abuse Hotline (1-800-342-3720).
  - If the child is in imminent risk of further abuse, call 911.
- Notify the Archdiocese by calling the Safe Environment Office (646-794-2810)

The longer it takes authorities to become involved, the longer a child may be left in an abusive environment. So, you should NEVER conduct your own "investigation" of an allegation. Too many times, well-meaning adults have delayed contacting the authorities until they were certain, in their minds, that it was necessary -- inadvertently allowing children remain in a dangerous situation. Please -- do not hesitate to report the

incident to the proper authorities.

*How Should I Respond to the Child?*



And now, one last, but VERY important thing: if a child does reveal sexual abuse to you, the most important point is to take what the child says seriously. Many children who report sexual abuse are not believed. But studies show that fewer than five percent of disclosures from children were intentional fabrications. In other words, children rarely lie about this topic. Make sure you report the abuse and help the child to understand that the abuse is not his or her fault. Give lots of love, comfort, and reassurance. Let them know how brave they were to tell you and that you understand how frightened and scared they feel.

In the end, it really comes down to being responsible for our children. Caring for them is, after all, one of our most instinctual drives.

This sense of purpose springs from the divine love planted within each of us by God to love and care for our young. It is a gift, not a burden. As in all things, when we approach our duties with love foremost in our hearts, our responsibilities cease to be chores and become ministry, God's work on Earth.

May God bless all of you in your families, your jobs, your vocations, and of course, your ministries!

*Safe Environment Office  
Locations and Contact Information:*

Web Site:

*[www.archny.org/pastoral/safe-environment-program](http://www.archny.org/pastoral/safe-environment-program)*

E-Mail Address:

*[safe@archny.org](mailto:safe@archny.org)*

New York Office:  
Terence Cardinal Cooke Catholic Center  
1011 First Ave.  
New York, NY 10022  
212-371-1000 extension 2810  
Fax 212-421-1801

Poughkeepsie Office:  
Poughkeepsie Catholic Center  
218 Church St.  
Poughkeepsie, NY 12601  
845-452-1171 extension 4218  
Fax 845-473-9497

*Note: The Poughkeepsie Office deals primarily with training program issues.*