

ARCHDIOCESE of BALTIMORE

April 22, 2020

Dear Colleagues,

In kindergarten through 12th grade, in accordance with the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*, all children enrolled in Archdiocesan schools and parish faith formation classes are taught safe environment education. In kindergarten through eighth grade, this important education is integrated in the *Catechesis for Family Life*. The goals of safe environment education included in the *Catechesis for Family Life* in the Archdiocese of Baltimore are: to encourage children/youth to speak freely and frequently with their parents and other trusted adults; to teach children/youth to express their feelings appropriately; to teach children/youth that abuse is never the fault of the child/youth. During the COVID-19 crisis, parish communities might not have been able to complete the entire *Family Life* curriculum in virtual settings. However, parishes should ensure that the “Messages that Protect” have been communicated to parents and their children:

LANGUAGE TO COMMUNICATE CLEARLY: Children must be equipped with the language and communication skills necessary to ask for help.

ASKING FOR HELP: Children should know that when they are feeling “mixed up” or confused about anything- including touching, secrets, or their bodies—they can ask adults for help. If we encourage children to ask for help when they feel confused or mixed up about things, we may be able to remove the secrecy surrounding abusive situations.

FEELINGS: Everyone has all kind of feelings. Feelings are neither good nor bad. Children should learn appropriate ways to express and act on their feelings.

PROMISES: Children are not obligated to keep promises about something that is wrong or about a person being hurt or in danger.

PRIVACY/BOUNDARIES: Each person has the right to refuse unwanted touches.

SECRETS: Children should beware of anyone who asks them to keep secrets, especially secrets about things they know are wrong or make them uncomfortable. Secrets about touching are dangerous.

RESPECT FOR THE BODY: Boys and girls have bodies that are different and equally good. The body is spoken of respectfully.

REDUCING SHAME: Abuse is *never* a child’s fault.

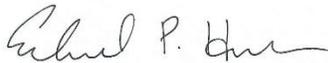
Each week, parishes will be provided with materials focusing on one of the important “Messages that Protect”. The Division of Catholic Schools and Office of Marriage and Family Life, in consultation with the Office of Child and Youth Protection, have developed brief, age-appropriate lessons for parishes to use, along with conversation starters for parents/guardians and catechists. Video lessons and conversation starters for parents/guardians can be found online at: <https://www.archbalt.org/messages-that-protect/>. The password is: **protect**.

If your parish was unable to complete the Family Life curriculum during regular faith formation classes, please invite parents/guardians to allow their children to join their classmates for brief online discussions led by you or a pair of trusted catechists. There are discussion questions provided that are based on the videos that are intended for students to watch with their parents/guardians. If your parish has already completed the curriculum, you might consider offering these lessons as supplements for interested parents/guardians.

We look forward to gathering in person as a parish community. We hope that at that time, the materials developed during this crisis will be useful supplements. However, they do not replace the regular *Catechesis for Family Life* curriculum that is scheduled to resume at the beginning of the next school year.

If you have questions or concerns about implementation of this curriculum, please call the Office of Child and Youth Protection at 410 547 5599. We are working remotely and continue to check messages. We appreciate all that you do, even during this unprecedented crisis, to keep the children in our communities safe.

Sincerely,



Edward Herrera, Director
Office of Marriage and Family Life



Jerri Burkhardt, Director
Office of Child and Youth Protection