

# What to do • What to do • What to do

As parents, we try to guard our children from information and interactions that maybe upsetting. Your children may have questions about the current abuse stories involving the Catholic Church. Be confident that you know your child better than anyone. This includes how to approach them regarding sensitive topics. With that in mind, you might consider the below points when having this conversation with your child.

## Strategies for Effective Family Communication:

### First Step:

- ✓ Know your own concerns about the topic and how they contribute to your reaction. Process/dialogue with someone you trust and decide your approach before speaking with your child/youth. This support will help you stay calm, firm and compassionate.

### Utilize Non-Verbal Communication Cues

- ✓ Use open body gestures.
- ✓ While emotions provide valuable information, try to keep them from overwhelming conversations.
- ✓ Volume often affects the meaning of your words.
- ✓ Use positive facial expressions– smile and nod affirmations. If needed, sit or kneel to be at eye-level with your child/youth.
- ✓ Kids listen to how we say things more than what we actually say.
- ✓ Children/youth look to parents and their behavior about how to cope with any stressor.
- ✓ Children/youth of parents who choose not to have the situation be the focus of their lives will follow their example.

### Realize that your child/youth's perspective may be different than your own

- ✓ Don't assume how your child/youth will interpret information.
- ✓ Answer honestly and stick to the question asked.
- ✓ Asking open ended questions can help you see the situation from their perspective.
- ✓ Reassure them of God's love and that you will keep them safe.
- ✓ Listen and avoid interrupting. Comment on what you heard.

## Potential Questions

These questions are going to challenge you to dig deep into your faith. Potential answers are not provided because the answers depend on the context, development and age of the child/youth. Answer honestly and reassure them that you will keep them safe. This is a good time to talk about how your faith is in the person of Jesus Christ and that His love is bigger than any hurt or crisis.

- ✓ Why did the priest/priests hurt these children/youth?
- ✓ Did the children/youth do something wrong?
- ✓ How could God let this happen?
- ✓ How can I trust another priest?
- ✓ Are they going to be punished?
- ✓ Why should I go to Church when they have done such bad things?

## Resources

### Parish/School

Utilize the excellent and compassionate parish/ school team that is ready to help. The pastor, principal, school counselor and pastoral minister are available to help you process this situation so you can move forward as a family. Sometimes families are in need of counseling outside the parish/school system. Your parish/school may have recommended therapists for you.

### Other

**USCCB (Catholic Bishops) have several sites that have valuable information:**

[www.foryourmarriage.org/parenting-family](http://www.foryourmarriage.org/parenting-family)

[www.faithandsafety.org](http://www.faithandsafety.org)

*Our Power to Love* by Ruth S Taylor, M.D., Ann G. Nerbun, M.S.N., and Rev. Richard M Hogan, Ph. D is an excellent book to assist parents when talking about God's gift of sexuality.

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