

Steps from *A Plan To Protect God's Children*™



1

KNOW THE WARNING SIGNS OF ADULTS

Knowing the behavioral warning signs of adults means we can recognize inappropriate and concerning actions adults exhibit—which may also be part of the grooming process.

Step 1—Warning signs of adults:

- Discourages others from participating/monitoring
- Attempts to be alone with, or isolates, children
- Seems more excited to be with children than adults
- Gives gifts, without permission
- Goes overboard touching, wrestling, tickling...
- Uses bad language, or tells inappropriate or sexual jokes to children
- Behaves or speaks as if the rules do not apply to them (ignores policy, bends rules)
- Allows young people to engage in activities parents would not allow
- Tells children to keep secrets from others
- Takes, posts or shares photos without the parent's or the organization's approval
- Shows young people sexual content or pornography (*which is also abuse*)

Step 2—Screening measures:

- Create procedures to determine who has access to children
- Regularly review and distribute guidelines and policies for adults working with minors
- Use standard employment/volunteer applications
- Identify any history or known conduct that could create future harm
- Obtain previous experience with youth-serving organizations



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SCREEN AND SELECT EMPLOYEES AND VOLUNTEERS

Adopting proactive screening procedures makes it more difficult for people with bad intentions—or problematic behavior—to have access to youth.

- Complete face-to-face interviews
- Require criminal background checks (initial and refresher)
- Check personal and employment references
- Attend safe environment training
- Ensure compliance with the rules and policies
- Communicate the organization's commitment to keeping children safe
- Apply all of these measures consistently



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MONITOR ALL ENVIRONMENTS, INCLUDING ACTIVITIES INVOLVING TECHNOLOGY

We closely supervise the entire environment with careful oversight, whether it is on-site or online.

Step 3—Monitoring environments:

Employees & volunteers can monitor in-person environments:

- Maintain a healthy caution about any environment in which children are entrusted
- Identify secluded areas, lock empty rooms
- Develop and follow policies regarding the use of any area (open, secluded, off-site, etc.)
- Don't permit children to enter staff-only areas
- Only meet with children where other adults have open access
- Perform consistent and random status checks
- Ensure enough adults are involved in programs

- Don't start new programs without approval
- Encourage parental involvement to evaluate safety, giving parents proper program access

Employees & volunteers can monitor technology, too:

- Always use sanctioned devices/accounts to communicate with youth
- Never “friend,” “follow,” or communicate with youth using personal accounts
- Always communicate with youth during appropriate timeframes
- Never take or post photos of youth without the proper approvals
- Install and use appropriate blocking/filtering software



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BE ATTENTIVE TO CHILDREN AND YOUTH

We need to be attentive to concerning behavioral cues that children might exhibit when experiencing abuse.

And, as protectors, we need to teach them how to partner with us for their safety.

Step 4—Being attentive to youth includes:

Recognizing the concerning behavioral cues children and youth may exhibit when experiencing abuse, such as:

- Sudden behavioral change(s) (likes/dislikes, health, eating habits)
- Appearing increasingly moody or aggressive, withdrawn or depressed
- Losing interest in school, or having a sudden shift in grades/school activities
- Becoming secretive or defensive (including with technology or online activities)
- Becoming fearful, anxious, or uncomfortable around certain people
- Bathing excessively or discontinuing personal hygiene
- Showing regressive behavior, such as bed-wetting, thumb-sucking, etc.

And, we can teach children and youth the following when advocating for their safety and boundaries:

- The *Personal Boundary Safety Rules*: Say “no,” try to get away, and tell a safe adult right away
- What to do when they feel uncomfortable, violated, unsafe, or if someone tries to force them, or their friends, to see, touch, or show their private parts
- Youth have a right to be safe; it’s OK to speak up
- Being abused/victimized is never the youth’s fault
- Youth always have safe adults who will advocate for their safety and protection
- When it comes to their safety, we will believe them and work to protect them



COMMUNICATE YOUR CONCERNS

Communicate—especially when you see or hear something that looks suspicious, questionable, inappropriate or that simply makes you feel uncomfortable.

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Step 5—Ways to communicate concerns:

- If you see or hear of a potential warning sign of inappropriate behavior, do not hesitate—speak to a supervisor right away
- If you continue to see inappropriate behavior, communicate again, or go to another supervisor
- If abuse has been disclosed to you, or you suspect that a child is being, or has been, abused, contact the child protection agency in your state
- If the suspected abuse involves a church volunteer, employee or member of the clergy, first contact civil authorities, and then also notify a church official
- If you are aware a child is in danger of imminent abuse, call emergency services right away (dial 911 immediately)
- When youth are being sexually exploited online, make a report to www.CyberTipline.org, or you can also contact law enforcement

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To report abuse in Montana:

If you suspect a child is in imminent danger from abuse, please call **911** immediately.

To report *known* or *suspected* child abuse, contact:

Child and Family Services
(866) 820-5437
dphhs.mt.gov/cfsd/

For more information:

Diocese of Helena Safe Environment Office
(406) 442-5820 or (406) 389-7070
www.diocesehelena.org/home-2/offices-and-ministries/safe-environment/

Diocese of Helena Victims Advocate
(406) 459-0513
victimassistant@diocesehelena.org



Protecting God’s Children®

4.0 Program for Adults



VIRTUS Online™
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