



Archdiocese of Dubuque

Office for Protection of Children

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Ten Prevention Practices You May Not Have Considered

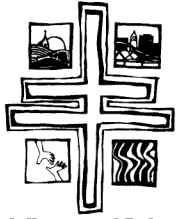
Parents and other caring adults play a crucial role in keeping kids from abusing substances. You probably know all the basics: monitor where your kids are after-school, no locked bedrooms, etc. But surely a problem as big as this deserves deeper thoughts and more expansive practices! Consider adding the following ten ideas to your list of parenting practices...



1. First and foremost, you have to set a good example for the children in your life. Of course, if you have a substance abuse problem, get help. But also be careful about sending a more subtle message that drugs—a glass of wine, prescription medicine, diet pills—are an easy solution to a problem or even an integral part of a fun time. And be aware of the substance abuse opportunities in your own home—for your kids and their friends. Know exactly what alcohol, prescription drugs, and other potentially risky substances you have in the house, so you'll know as soon as some is gone.
2. Kids need to be armed with scripts for saying no. Kids should practice what they would say in their own words. Kids need to know that they may have to repeat themselves in response to peer pressure, and if the situation becomes uncomfortable, that, in and of itself may be reason to leave.
3. Young people need to have a reasonable plan for saying “no.” Parents too often only teach their kids to be a hero: Say NO, condemn the activity and the participants and immediately leave the party. From a parent’s perspective, that is the best outcome. But is it realistic? Young people need to have a way to say no in ways they might really say it—otherwise, refusal isn’t going to feel like a real option when the time comes.”
4. When talking about substances, set rules with clear limits and consequences. Kids need to hear more than just “drugs are bad.” Be specific: tell children that they are not to attend any parties where alcohol will be served. Moreover, if they do, they will be grounded or whatever your meaningful punishment will be. These rules have to be reasonable and consistently enforced.

5. Kids need to be recognized and praised for following drug-related rules. For example, it is a big deal if a teen leaves a party when he or she figures out that friends are drinking. The child ought to be rewarded.
6. Family rules about drug use are more effective when they are in the context of broader family values. Does your family have a mission statement? Do you have regular times like weekly meetings in which you talk about what is important to your family? It's not too late to begin these practices. Consider making a note in your calendar or otherwise to discuss drugs once each month or so.
7. Find "teachable moments" in the media and everyday life to talk about substance abuse. Point out alcohol, drug, or tobacco-related situations portrayed on the shows you watch or the stories you read. Use news headlines as a discussion point. Make sure you give your kids the chance to voice what they think about drugs in the media, too. The more often a child says out-loud that drugs are bad, the more likely he or she will maintain that position.
8. Let your child know that you will always help them out of a tricky situation: lovingly, without compromising their "cool." And let them know you'll be willing to help friends who get stuck in a bad situation, too. Young people have enough to worry about when they are taking a stand, make sure that they are confident and know that they have your support.
9. Don't be afraid of answering "Did you do drugs?" —whatever that answer is. Your kids deserve an honest answer. Moreover, your answer gives you a great chance to show your child that you understand the forces that encourage drug use. And you can talk about the hazards from personal experience. And don't worry, part of your story can and should stay private.
10. Don't forget the role of grandparents. More than half of grandparents spend time with their grandkids weekly or bi-weekly. Their stories can be important, too. And grandparents can help implement all of the protective factors we've been reviewing.

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Technology Safety

Learning the details about how the social networking sites that are popular with teens and young people work is becoming “required” education for responsible adults. Learning about the positive aspects of the sites and the opportunities they provide for communication, growth, and development of social skills is only one aspect of that education. Parents also have to learn the risks of participating in this type of online communication. In addition to educating themselves, they must teach their children about the sites and the risks involved with participating.

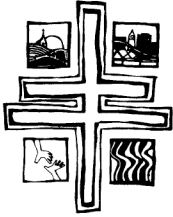
In addition to screening information for the site before posting it in order to assure that there is no personal information or identifying information on the site, parents need to pay particular attention to details in photographs that could provide a predator with clues about where the teen lives, goes to school, or works. They also need to talk honestly and openly with their young people about the risks of expressing emotions online. Responsible adults have probably already discouraged children from communicating with strangers online. However, you, and they, may not realize that the thoughts, feelings, and ideas that they share through online journals or poetry posted on their social networking site can be accessed by anyone on the Internet. This means that predators can and do read their private communications—even when they are marked private. Predators use this information to target specific children or young people as possible victims. Social networking sites are a great source of information for predators. Make sure children and young people are fully aware of the risks and dangers attached to putting information on these sites and using them for communication with their friends.



An essential part of Internet education and the “house rules” about using the Internet is consistent reinforcement of a very important message. “Never agree to meet in person with someone you met on the Internet.” In a cyber communication, strangers can become like “friends” rather quickly. They have the same interests. They seem really nice. They seem to really care about the young person and what is happening in his or her life. Young people have trouble seeing that these people are still strangers. They are not people known by the family or the young person. Remind your teens and young people that those they meet online are strangers and they would never willingly go off with a stranger in any other venue. Online conversation does not make this person less of a stranger.

Eliminating social networking sites from a child’s life is an unrealistic expectation. As caring adults it is more important than ever to understand these sites and communicate with young people about the benefits, risks, and dangers of this form of communication.

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How will you know if you are being groomed?

You met some new members of the parish neighbors with children the same age as yours. They seem like a very nice family. Later that week you see them at soccer practice. It turns out their seven year old boy is on the same soccer team as your son. Their situation is a bit different from yours because Mom goes to work at an office everyday and dad works from home. His schedule is more flexible than most dads and he apparently played soccer in college. It is soccer season and dad has offered to take the boys to and from practice. How do you tell if the offer is genuine or the beginning of a grooming process?



Identifying the motives of adults that are new to a child's life can be difficult but we know that assessing the motives of new people in children's lives is not only reasonable, it is critical.

The bigger challenge is to maintain that vigilance and continue paying attention to the people we have grown to trust and be mindful of members of our families who have been in and out of our lives for a long time. How do you tell the difference between a compassionate adult who genuinely cares about children and a predator who only cares about his or her needs?

Child molesters are often appealing, charismatic people with a tremendous ability to win over parents, neighbors, and other adults. They use their skills and abilities to gain children's confidence and to obtain parents' trust in order to fulfill their own sexual desires. They work hard to create trusting relationships with parents and others as part of the grooming process. At the same time, they make children feel special.

A major part of the grooming process is to con parents into seeing the molester as a kind, caring, and generous person who genuinely cares about children. However, to protect children, parents must remain vigilant about all adults who are part of a child's life. This means being alert to all the warning signs of potential molesters. Regardless of the person's apparent good intentions or the fact that he or she seems like a good person, the key is to pay attention to behavior. When an adult exhibits potentially risky behaviors don't ignore it. Put a stop to it at once.

If the person seems to disregard or discount the rules and wishes of the parents regarding the things children are allowed to do or eat and the places they can go, call attention to it and make sure it stops. If an adult always seem to want to be alone with the kids, join in and change the

dynamics of that group setting. Everyone that loves children prefers to spend time with them from time to time. The liveliness and joy of children can brighten a dark day. People that are a risk to kids prefer the company of children to that of adults all the time. Make sure that the responsibility for being with the children is rotated through all the parents.

Genuinely caring adults wait for children to reach out to them for comforting touch. They attend to the child's needs—and that is healthy interaction. Notice adults that initiate unnecessary touching or seem to coax children into situations where accidental intimate touching might happen.

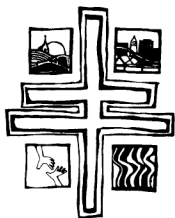
The only way to know whether any adult is a child molester is to remain on alert. Pay attention to all the adults in a child's life. Notice risky behavior. Ask questions. Listen to children. Don't be seduced by your own tendency to overlook actions by people you want to trust. Take action to disrupt the flow if anything seems odd or out of place.

Interrupting behavior patterns requires action. It does not require hurling accusations or making threats. Join in games or conversations between adults and children. Notice when children are uncomfortable and give them a way out of those situations.

There are a great number of supportive, caring adults in our families and communities. Being alert to potentially risky behaviors does not require us to become paranoid and anxious about everyone that expresses interest in our children. Protecting our children from sexual predators necessitates that we stay alert to the behaviors of adults. Be diligent and take nothing for granted. Keep your eyes and ears open; remain alert to the potential risks. These are our best defense against the grooming practices of child molesters.

This is how we create and maintain safe environments for all God's children!

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Keeping Kids Safe at Amusement Parks

Alright, I have a confession: On no less than two separate occasions, I have lost a small child at a theme park. And they were both really, really little at the time—we lost my older son when he was just three; we lost the younger one when he was all of four. We did find them, I am relieved to tell you, but only after 20 minutes of mind-boggling terror.

Now you are probably asking how in the world did otherwise responsible parents (we are) who were spending a delightful day focused on their two small children (we were) manage to lose one of their children. Well, in our own defense, amusement parks are tough settings for the best of caring adults: meandering walkways, crowded with people, and a thousand attractions to keep your child—and you—from paying close attention. So if you are heading to a theme park this summer, learn from my own mistakes by considering the following.



Know where the rides end—A few years ago, we lost my older son at Sea World under the most confounding of circumstances. He crawled into a simple plastic tube-maze—the kind of contraption now at every other fast-food restaurant play-place. My husband and I, not keen ourselves about crawling through the maze, headed around to the bottom of the slide at the end and waited. And waited. It was only when our son failed to emerge after 10 minutes that we realized that there were two slides leading out of the maze. Twenty minutes later, with the help of three security guards and about a dozen compassionate parents, we found him playing happily in another part of the park all-together.

The lesson here is simple enough: Know where the rides end. Even with contained rides, such as a log flume, there is often more than one exit. Make sure you have all the bases covered or with older kids, agree to where you will meet.

Discuss the rules—Make sure you have talked with children about what to expect at the park and what to do in an emergency. For younger kids, you may want to explain that while there will be a lot to see and do, they also need to stay close with you. As part of this conversation, make sure

that your kids know what to do if you get separated. For older kids, this may be as simple as having the child call your cell or meet you at an agreed-upon spot.

Brightly-colored shirts—At any crowded place, I make my young kids wear the same shade of a bright-colored shirt—orange, aqua, etc. If possible, my husband and I wear the same color ourselves. I know, I know, it's not the coolest move in the book. But not only will it make your kids easier to spot in a crowd, a distraught young child can point to his or her own shirt to say that “mommy is wearing this color, too.” Once again, this very plan helped us connect with our lost younger son that fateful day at the theme park.

Bathroom safety—Public bathrooms make me really nervous, especially with six and eight year old boys. That said, knowing that my kids will need to use group facilities gives me the opportunity to review lessons about staying safe from sexual predators. More than being strangely paranoid—although I do hope that my fears are never founded—this is just a natural circumstance in which to talk about privacy and safety.

Any child old enough to enter a public bathroom alone should know a few basic safety rules. Your child should know to take care of business and come right out—no playing around, especially with his or her pants down. Your child should know that he or she should not talk with anyone in the bathroom. And, of course, you should have spoken with your child about basic steps to stay safe from sexual abuse—that private parts are covered for a reason and that no one should ask to see theirs, etc.

Make sure your kids can reach you—At an amusement park or any crowded place, make sure that your kids can reach you by phone or walkie-talkie. Slip a note in their pocket or backpack that has your name and the cell phone you have with you that day. With the number of phones parents have these days, even older kids may need to know which number will reach you. And, if your older child were to have a health issue or was crying very hard for some reason, he or she may not be able to provide the number.

We have given each of our boys a necklace that has our cell phone number on it. It is a simple “dog-tag” style that is easy to find on-line or at many larger pet stores. One side has our name and number and the other has a neat design that makes them cool enough to wear.

Well, I wish you a lot of fun at the amusement park, or wherever your summer takes you. Perhaps my own experiences will suggest some practices that will keep your kids safe and your travels as stress-free as possible.

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