

ARCHDIOCESE of BALTIMORE

April 22, 2020

Dear Parents and Guardians,

Since 1986, the Archdiocese of Baltimore has been committed to providing our children and their parents/guardians a holistic catechesis for family life. According to the curriculum updated in 2011, “This catechesis includes an understanding of the call to live a chaste life, developing an understanding of the dignity and value of all human life.” In accord with the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*, since 2002, safe environment training for children and education about child abuse prevention has been integrated into family life curriculum in our parishes and Archdiocesan schools. Experts recognize this kind of training as an important component of keeping children and young people safe.

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, school and parish communities will not be able to complete the entire *Catechesis for Family Life* curriculum in virtual settings. However, schools and parishes will continue to partner with parents and guardians to convey the following important “Messages that Protect”:

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, schools and parishes focus 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 video lessons, along with conversation starters. Parents are asked to review weekly, the brief video lessons with their children. Parents may find those lessons, along with the conversation starters, that will be used in virtual classroom discussion led by qualified school personnel, at: <https://www.archbalt.org/messages-that-protect/>. The password is: **protect**.

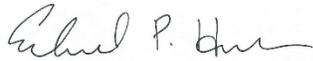
We look forward to gathering in person as school and parish communities. The regular Catechesis for Family Life curriculum will resume at the beginning of the next school year.

If you have questions or concerns about the implementation of this curriculum, please reach out to the school principal or Director of Religious Education at the parish.

Sincerely,



Dr. Donna Hargens, Superintendent
Division of Catholic Schools



Edward Herrera, Director
Office of Marriage and Family Life



Jerri Burkhardt, Director
Office of Child and Youth Protection