

# Catholic school children learn body safety rules

— 18th in a series. —

Child abuse prevention includes empowering children by teaching them body safety rules and steps they can take to ensure their own safety.

Sadly, according to the American Humane Association, the average age of a sexually abused child is 9.3 years.

The Good Touch/Bad Touch® body-safety program for pre-school and Kindergarten through six grade students is designed to prevent abuse before it ever occurs. It also empowers young people to stop abuse that might be occurring, and minimizes the damage of abuse which may have happened in the past by emphasizing to children that it is never their fault.

Good Touch/Bad Touch® meets many State Departments of Education health/safety education requirements and is used in 44 states. In Catholic schools and parish religious education programs in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, it is being presented through the Office of Safeguard the Children by carefully trained and certified teachers, counselors and volunteer facilitators. The Office of Safeguard the Children was established by Cardinal Roger Mahony to coordinate numerous sex-abuse prevention programs for adults and minors at parishes and schools.

Prior to a Catholic school or parish undertaking Good Touch/Bad Touch®, parents are invited to a program presentation; letters are also sent home asking permission for their children to attend. Parental involvement also encourages parents to reinforce body-safety rules and to answer their child's questions.

During Good Touch/Bad Touch® students are taught that touch can be separated into three types — good, bad or confusing. *Good* touches make children feel good about themselves and can include thoughtful hugs, holding hands, cuddling and pats on the back. “Most touches are good touches,” says facilitator Patti Laney, who emphasizes this in her presentations so that children do not become afraid of good touches.

*Bad* touches feel like an “ouch” and can include kicks, punches, pinches, pulling hair and bullying. *Confusing* touches are those that are inappropriately sexual and generate in children an “uh-oh” feeling. The program teaches children to pay attention to such “uh-oh” feelings, and to ask questions of an adult they trust.

Sexual abuse touch is defined as forcing or tricking a child into having their private parts touched or touching another person's private parts. Private body parts are

those covered by a bathing suit in girls or swimming trunks for boys.

There are five body safety rules which children learn during age-appropriate presentations tailored for each grade level which includes classroom instruction, an animated video, and learning a body-safety song. The body safety rules include the following:

1. It's my body! I am special and unique in this world. I deserve to be safe.
2. I can notice when I have an “uh-oh” feeling. If I feel like something's wrong, I need to ask questions of an adult I trust.
3. I have the right to say No! and get away from an abusive situation.
4. I need to tell grownups until someone believes me.
5. Abuse is never my fault.

During one recent presentation at Holy Trinity School in San Pedro, 27 second graders gathered on the classroom carpet and eagerly raised their hands to answer questions posed by facilitators Patti and Grant Laney. The children quickly understood the common sense difference between good touch, bad touch and sexual abuse touch. They practiced saying “No! It's my body” in loud, crisp, confident voices, and they danced to the jingle of a body safety tune.

“The program offers kid-friendly information at a level that is safe and comfortable for the students,” said Tina Wilson, a teacher at Holy Trinity School.

Wilson said she reinforces the Good Touch/Bad Touch® presentations with her religion curriculum, along with concepts such as love of self, love of others, and showing respect. While acknowledging that it can feel awkward to talk about sex abuse with children, Wilson adds, “But we did it.”

The Archdiocese of Los Angeles believes that empowering young people to recognize and interrupt abuse, to tell a trusted adult and to not blame themselves will have beneficial affects throughout society towards the long-term goal of eliminating child abuse.

*Editor's note: To contact the Office of Safeguard the Children, contact Joan Vienna at [jvienna@la-archdiocese.org](mailto:jvienna@la-archdiocese.org). To learn more about the Good Touch/Bad Touch Program®, visit [www.goodtouchbadtouch.com](http://www.goodtouchbadtouch.com).*

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