



**Training Reflections**  
**Protection of Minors**  
**February-March 2019**

**Points of special interest:**

- What is child abuse?
- What are the signs that indicate a situation of sexual abuse?
- What are the effects of child abuse, especially when the aggressor is a priest, religious person or seminarian?
- What is the extent of sexual abuse?
- What are the risk factors that facilitate abusive behavior?
- What are the protection elements that we can utilize in order to prevent and avoid child abuse?

# SEXUAL ABUSE OF MINORS WITHIN THE CHURCH AND OTHER CHALLENGES FOR AIC

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# Orientation:

We want to inform you that in June 2018, the Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life, wrote to AIC (which is officially recognized by the Vatican as a private international association of lay faithful) and requested our active collaboration in joining in the efforts promoted by the Pope in order to eradicate the abuse of children and adolescents.

Yes, it is an honor to have been invited to join in the efforts of the Catholic Church to guarantee the protection of minors. At the same time, however, it is a great challenge for our volunteers: to be guardians who are attentive to every threat against life and its integrity.

## VISUALIZE (See)

Even before he was elected, the protection of children was a fundamental concern for the Pope. One of his first initiatives as pastor of the universal church was to create a Pontifical Commission for the protection of minors. This commission was charged with promoting the commitment of the laity, men and women religious, priests and bishops so that the abuse of minors would come to an end within the Church.

The Pope is aware of the fact that this task needs the active participation of civil society, of all the churches and of all religious inspired movements and organizations. The Pope affirmed that reality in his August 20th, 2018 letter that was addressed to all the People of God: *Without the participation of all the Church's members, everything being done to uproot the culture of abuse in our communities will not be successful in generating the*

*necessary dynamics for sound and realistic change.* The role of committed lay people is therefore indispensable, and so we say, "we are here!" We are willing to mobilize ourselves on behalf of children and to incorporate this theme in the various services that our volunteers provide (services which often involve children).

## AIC recognizes the vital importance of:

1

Training and making all the members of the parish community aware of the risks, effects and extent of sexual abuse.

3

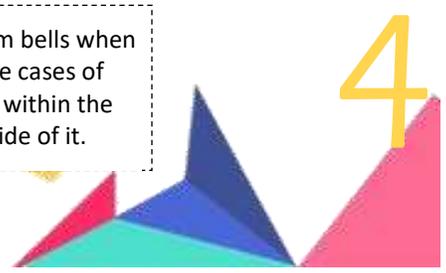
The urgency to know and to create parish and diocesan structures in order to attend to cases of possible sexual abuse

Creating a safe environment within the church, making people aware of the seriousness of the situation, educating people so that such situations are prevented.

2

The need to ring alarm bells when faced with possible cases of sexual abuse, both within the Church and outside of it.

4



## UNDERSTAND (Judge)

Awareness of sexual abuse within the Church has provoked anger and sadness among people throughout the world, but especially among Catholics. Even though 70% of the cases of abuse are committed within the family environment or by someone who is close to the family, this does not mean that priests and religious people are exempted from such situations.

As Vincentian volunteers, we have an obligation to safeguard the environment of the minors who have been entrusted to our care (for example, in day care centers, catechetical programs, youth ministry). Let us discuss the following cases:

### CASE #1

During catechesis with boys and girls, a catechist was playing hide and seek with the children. When each child was discovered he/she had to show his/her underwear. The catechist told the children they had to keep this game secret because it was part of their preparation for the First Communion.

### CASE #2

As part of the formation process of the youth ministry, a group of 20 adolescents participated in a retreat at a house with a swimming pool. In the midst of the activities, three boys walk away with a young girl who becomes the victim of sexual assault.

### CASE #3

A boy told us that the parish priest did things to him that he did not like, things like touching his private parts. He does not know what to do or if he should accuse the priest. He thinks he will not be believed.

**Discuss with the members of your Vincentian group:**

**Do you view these situations as sexual abuse?**

**Why?**

**Do you know some similar case?**

**What would you do if confronted with such a situation?**

## Let us attempt to understand the phenomenon:

### What is child sexual abuse?

Activity aimed at providing sexual pleasure to an adult, who uses a child (**under 18 years**) to do so, taking advantage of his or her situation of superiority.

#### What is abuse?

*"Touching, caressing, obscene actions, forced to watch scenes of high sexual content, etc. are also considered sexual abuse."*

### What are the elements that indicate the possibility of a situation of abuse?

**Power:** The attacker uses his/her power, influence and authority in order to interact sexually with a minor.

**Age:** The attacker is older than the victim... this also applies to minors who abuse other minors.

### What are the effects of child sexual abuse when the aggressor is a priest, religious, or seminarian?

- The bond of trust that the community ecclesial community has given the priest because of his closeness and familiarity with God is broken.
- The sacred character of the priest/faithful relationship (expressed by his ordination and his mission as God's minister) generates mistrust and ambiguity.
- The priest's abusive conduct creates in the victim confusion, fear, anger, rejection and isolation.
- **The Church loses its credibility and its spiritual dimension is undermined.**
- Harmful effects on the religiosity of the child and his/her family, who cannot understand, nor accept that a good, provident God who cares for and loves their children, is represented by a minister who has violated their child.

### What is the extent of sexual abuse?

Cases of sexual abuse are frequent, but they are usually not talked about for several reasons: the victims (who often have guilt feelings) are threatened by their aggressors).

Cases within the Church are less frequent, however, for the reasons noted above, the impact is greater both inside and outside the faith community.

## What are the risk factors that facilitate abusive behavior?

### Personal:

In the case of minors, low self-esteem, abandonment and lack of affection in the family, experiences of abuse and loneliness. In the case of the aggressor, although it is difficult to identify abusers due to their heterogeneity, some warning signs may be:

Difficulty relating to others of their age. Search for close friendship with girls, boys and adolescents. Addictions (alcoholism, drug addiction, pornography). Intolerance to failure and feelings of frustration... inability to handle stressful situations.

### Institutional:

Because of their power, authority, and/or abusers can gain the trust of children, become involved in their lives and then abuse them.

### Family

Experiences of intra-family violence; abandonment of one of the spouses, dysfunctional families, tense and authoritarian relations within the home.

## How can we protect children and adolescents and thus prevent abuse?

- Discuss this topic with parents and caregivers in our various services.
- Listen to the children.
- Accompany the victims as they denounce their abusers.
- Create a climate of dialogue and trust with the children and teach them to express their feelings.

## REACT (Act)

### 1. Read the letter of Pope Francis

[http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2018/documents/papa-francesco\\_20180820\\_lettera-popolo-didio.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2018/documents/papa-francesco_20180820_lettera-popolo-didio.html)

**See attached file**

**2. Form two groups:** The first group will discuss the role of the Vincentian volunteers in the struggle against child abuse in the services that they provide. The second group will discuss possible strategies to prevent child abuse in the services that they provide.

### 3. Promote the formula of the Catholic Church:

- Learn from one's mistakes
- Confront the problem: denounce the aggressor
- Implement prevention policies
- Care for victims

### 4. Understand the problem and confront it with the use of some slogans such as:



**Silence is consent.**  
**The pain of one child is my pain.**  
**The rights of children are the duties of adults.**  
**If you see something, say something.**



**5. Write a message of support to the Pope... thank him for inviting AIC to participate in this effort and express to him your commitment to use every means in order to prevent the abuse of minors in the services that you as volunteers provide.**

Send your message to the International Secretariat ([info@aic-international.org](mailto:info@aic-international.org)), which in turn will be sent to the Holy Father.

***One watchman is enough in order  
to warn the city!***

