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How to speak with your children about difficult subjects

The topic of sex abuse, particularly child sex abuse, is a daunting one for parents. Every parent must consider many factors, including the best age-appropriate way to discuss the subject. Below are some points to consider provided by the Office for the Protection of Children and Youth of the Diocese of Erie.

1. **Make sure you are composed** before you talk to your child.
2. If you believe your child is aware of news concerning abuse in the diocese, **start the conversation**. Not talking about a difficult topic can make it even more threatening in your child's mind.
3. **Listen carefully** to what your child is asking or talking about.
4. **Clarify any concerns before you answer**. Sometimes we make assumptions and give far more information than what the child needs.
5. **Keep your answers simple and brief**. Don't answer questions that have not been asked. Do not overload your child with information that is beyond his/her level of understanding.
6. Assure your child that **you and other adults who are in charge are doing everything possible to make sure they will be safe**. This will give them a sense that adults are actively taking steps to protect those who are currently suffering.
7. Don't make guarantees that such a thing can never happen again. **Words like "never" and "always" should be used very carefully** because small children trust that this is a promise from you.
8. Explain that **we do not know why people treat other people badly**.
9. **Try to limit your child's exposure to media coverage**. A child believes what he or she sees on television or in the newspaper is always true.
10. Let your children know about successful community efforts. **You may want to share positive media images**, such as reports of individuals helping those in need.