

## **Back to School Protecting God's Children Reminder for Parents**

Parishes and schools within the Diocese of Grand Rapids participate in the VIRTUS Protecting God's Children program. If you volunteer in any capacity with children or young people within the diocese, you are familiar with this program. At the beginning of a new school year it is important to review the five step plan that has been put into place to ensure a safe environment for children and young people.

*Step 1: Know the Warning Signs*

*Step 2: Control Access*

*Step 3: Monitor All Programs*

*Step 4: Be Aware*

*Step 5: Communicate Your Concerns*

Parents play a key role in this plan! Children and young people naturally tell their parents when interactions with other adults are uncomfortable or make them feel uneasy. In addition, through the Teaching Touching Safety Program children and young people are trained to report their discomfort or uneasiness with a parent or another trusted adult. It is then up to the adults to communicate these concerns to the school. This plan works very well, but it can break down if the parents and other trusted adults do not **communicate concerns**.

At the beginning of this school year ask yourself..."Are there things you have overlooked? Have you talked yourself out of a concern about some interaction because you know the person or you can't imagine that he or she would do any harm?"<sup>[i]</sup> The question that many adults struggle with is what constitutes a "concern?" Simply put, a concern is anything that you observe that gives you an uneasy feeling. The VIRTUS program defines concerns as: *Situations that give rise to uneasiness, uncertainty, apprehension, or an anxious state of mind. Concerns arise when a person is troubled by an observation that may affect the welfare or happiness of someone* <sup>[ii]</sup>.

**Parents - please do not hesitate to Communicate Your Concerns!** If you become aware of a situation that makes you uneasy, uncertain, apprehensive, or anxious; please contact your school principal and he or she can help you determine how to best address your concern. Together, we can ensure a safe environment for children and young people.

[i] Doty, S. *Practical Reminders About the Plan*, VIRTUS Online.

[ii] *Protecting God's Children™ for adults, Facilitator Manual*, p. 68, VIRTUS © 2001