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ARCHDIOCESE OF SEATTLE  
710 9th Avenue | Seattle, WA 98104

# Reporting Suspected Abuse or Neglect of Minors and Vulnerable Adults



GUIDELINES FOR  
CLERGY, STAFF  
AND VOLUNTEERS  
OF THE  
ARCHDIOCESE  
OF SEATTLE



## OUR POLICY SAYS:

The Archdiocese of Seattle deeply cherishes the bond of sacred trust between its people and the clergy and lay ministers of the Church. As a faith community, we acknowledge the inherent worth and dignity of every person as created in the image and likeness of God. Sexual abuse, sexual misconduct and sexual harassment are abusive and harmful actions that have no place in the Church community, or in society at large.

Pastoral care, compassion, healing and reconciliation are the special hallmarks of the Catholic community. When anyone has been injured or the bond of sacred trust has been violated by those in positions of responsibility, the Archdiocese of Seattle is committed to address these matters in a sensitive, open and straightforward manner. These important values will always guide our response as we address the tragedy of sexual abuse of minors or misconduct by clergy, employees or volunteers.

For more information, go to:  
[www.seattlearchdiocese.org/SEP/Default.aspx](http://www.seattlearchdiocese.org/SEP/Default.aspx)  
Archdiocesan Hotline: 1-800-446-7762





## HOW IS ABUSE DEFINED?

Abuse refers to an intentional act committed by a person in a position of trust which harms or threatens to harm a minor's (under age 18) or vulnerable adult's physical or mental welfare.

## WHAT ARE THE FOUR BASIC TYPES OF ABUSE?

1. **Physical Abuse** occurs when an adult injures a child or vulnerable adult and it is not an accident.
2. **Neglect** is any maltreatment or negligence that harms a child's or vulnerable adult's health, welfare or safety.
3. **Emotional Abuse** occurs when an adult subjects a child or vulnerable adult to verbal assault or emotional cruelty.
4. **Sexual Abuse** involves sexual contact between a child or vulnerable adult and an adult or significantly older, more powerful person.  
This may include direct sexual contact as well as other exploitive behaviors such as:
  - inappropriate verbal stimulation;
  - taking or showing sexually explicit photographs of or to a child or youth;
  - exposing a child or youth to pornography or adult sexual activity.

## WHO ARE VULNERABLE ADULTS?

- Any person over 60 unable to care for him or herself
- Certain individuals with developmental disabilities
- Anyone over 18 who has a legal guardian
- Individuals receiving in-home care through a licensed health, hospice or home health care agency or from an aide hired on their own

## WHAT IS A MANDATED REPORTER?

Washington State law requires the reporting of suspected abuse within 48 hours if there is reasonable cause to believe/suspect abuse has occurred. Persons in helping professions—teachers, doctors, counselors, police officers, social workers, health professionals—are legally mandated to report suspicions of abuse or neglect to Washington State abuse authorities (RCW 26.44.030).

It is the policy of the Archdiocese of Seattle that all of the following groups (church personnel) are required to follow the mandated guidelines for reporting suspected abuse of children and vulnerable adults:

**Priests** (outside of Sacramental Confession)

**Deacons**

**Employees:**

- All school personnel
- Pastoral staff who work with minors or vulnerable adults:
  - Children's choir masters
  - RCIA and RCIC instructors
  - Religious education staff
  - Youth ministers

**Volunteers:**

- Catechists
- Coaches
- Scout leaders
- Youth leaders
- And, any other individuals who have regular, ongoing, unsupervised access to minors or vulnerable adults.

*Individuals making a good faith report to the Washington State Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) or local authorities are protected from retaliatory actions.*

## WHAT TO DO:

Church personnel who have reasonable cause to believe that a child or vulnerable adult has suffered abuse or neglect, shall report such incident, or cause a report to be made, to proper law enforcement agency or to Washington State Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) at 1-866-END-HARM (1-866-363-4276) at the first opportunity, but no later than forty-eight hours after they decide reasonable cause exists.

Be sure that you have as much information about the victim as possible including:

- **Name**
- **Age** (approximate is OK)
- **Address**
- **Telephone number**
- **Name of parent or guardian**
- **Nature of the abuse**
- **Name/address/telephone of abuser** (if known)

*(If your report was made in good faith, you are immune from civil or criminal liability regardless of the outcome of the investigation.)*

**If you are calling about an immediate life-threatening emergency, call 9-1-1.**

**Please Note:** Anyone who has knowledge of sexual abuse or misconduct by a member of the clergy, Archdiocesan employee, or volunteer is also urged to call the Archdiocesan Abuse Hotline within, or no later than, 48 hours of learning of alleged abuse.

**Archdiocese of Seattle Hotline:**  
1-800-446-7762

**Or, you may write to the Archbishop at:**  
710 9th Avenue, Seattle, WA 98104