



Office of Safe Environments  
of the  
Diocese of Kansas City ~ St. Joseph

**What the National Review Board Learned from Child Sex Abuse Victims  
July 2010**

**Victims and Survivors Need to be Heard  
Abuse Affects Faith Life, Ability to Trust  
Effects of Abuse on Victims and Survivors Vary**

Diane Knight, MSW, chair of the National Review Board of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, shared ten points that she and fellow board members have learned in dealing with victims and survivors of sexual abuse of minors by clergy.

Knight, a native of Milwaukee, is a social worker with 30 years experience in child protection. She was named to head the Review Board in 2009.

**Ten Things Victims and Survivors Taught Us**

1. We have learned that it takes great courage for a victim or survivor to come forward with his or her story after years, sometimes decades, of silence and feelings of shame.
2. We have learned that to the victim or survivor it is so important to finally be believed.
3. We have learned that, in spite of their own pain and suffering, many victims and survivors are just as concerned that the Church prevents this abuse from happening to more children as they are about themselves and their own needs for healing.
4. We have learned that, while each individual's story is different, what is common is the violation of trust; some survivors trust absolutely no one, to this day, while others have been able to work through this pain with the help and support of loved ones.
5. We have learned that today there are methods of therapy that work particularly well with and for survivors of childhood sexual abuse and that individuals can be helped even after many years of unsuccessfully trying to simply "forget about it."
6. We have learned that very many victims and survivors have lived for many years with the belief that they were the "only one" to have been abused by a particular priest.
7. We have learned that the abuse has robbed some victims and survivors of their faith. For some this means loss of their Catholic faith, but for others it means loss of

any faith in a God at all.

8. We have learned that, while some victims and survivors have been unable to succeed in various areas of life — marriage, employment, education, parenting, — as a consequence of the great emotional and psychological harm, others have gone on to lead very healthy and productive lives. We have learned that between those two “ends of a continuum” there is as much variation as there are numbers of victims.
9. We have learned that to be privileged to hear a victim or survivor’s story is a sacred trust, to be received with great care and pastoral concern.
10. We have learned that we still have much to learn.

The National Review Board is an advisory group of 13 laypersons with expertise in such areas as law, education, media, and psychological sciences. The board was established in 2002, when the U.S. bishops adopted the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People* to oversee efforts of the Office for Child and Youth Protection. The National Review Board is responsible for a three-year *Causes and Context Study* being undertaken by the John Jay College of Criminal Justice and due for release in 2011. The study looks at the clergy sexual abuse of minors to ascertain what factors led to it and how it can be prevented going forward.

For more information about diocesan safe environment programs, [click here](#).