A Critique of

Talking About Touching

(A Personal Safety Curriculum - 3rd Edition)

Critique Presented By:

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1. The Teachers' Guide for preschool/kindergarten (age 4 to 6) asks: "Are there negative effects of personal safety instruction?"

At the same time they say: "In their nationally represented study of youth, Finkelhor and Dziuba-Leatherman found that some respondents reported that exposure to personal safety training resulted in more worry about abuse and more fear of adults." They further say: "This data suggest that the level of worry and fear induced by the programs were appropriate to the subject." This approach begs the question, namely, whether children this age should be exposed to this in-depth kind of sex education.

If you believe they should, at this tender age, then, of course, you will say: "Well, yes, some kids get very worried about it, but that's the way life is." And: "Once the children get used to the worry and fear, they really like the program."

2. The question that is begged is about the period of latency which the Committee for Children does not recognize and, in fact, supposes is non-existent.

There are numerous child psychologists who know well the developmental stages of children and are appalled at this lack of recognition of the importance of the latency period in a young child's life.

In other words, those who adopt this program need to understand that they are running roughshod over the convictions of very, very many parents whose children will be exposed to this program without their prior knowledge or consent.

Their children are being subjected to an experiment favored by the Committee for Children which has, as its agenda, to change the way American children are raised by their parents regarding sexuality.

3. For centuries the Catholic Church, together with many other Christian denominations, has rightly taught that: "The right and the duty of parents to educate their children are primordial and inalienable." (Catechism of the Catholic Church, N. 2221)

To impose Talking About Touching on children in our schools, whether private or public, without prior permission of parents is a violation of these rights of parents.

It is a specious argument for TAT to say: "Committee for Children recognized the critical role of family involvement in teaching children personal safety skills (page 44) while at the same time they have not asked parents' permission, but simply said this is going to happen." It is tantamount to saying: "We're going to do this to your children, parents, whether you like it or not, and, of course, we recognize the important role you have to play in our doing this to your children."
4. TAT says that laws throughout the country specify that certain people who "have reasonable cause to believe" that a child is being neglected or abused has to report it.

   TAT never says what reasonable cause means. It's a legal term. It refers to two things, namely, a person of ordinary care and prudence (not someone prone to suspicions), namely, one who has some facts and not fanciful conjecture. It is the difference between a regular soldier who can read the jungle twilight and a new recruit.

What is quite disturbing is in the Teachers' Guide for both preschool and kindergarten as well as grades one through three, is the admonition "resolve doubt in favor of the child."

At first glance that seems like a simple idea that is so good because it looks toward the good of a child. A better idea is this: **Believe the child until your investigation gives reasons for the contrary.**

By this we mean that in order to keep all children safe, we must follow the injunction of the Lord Jesus who says of those scandalizing children: "It were better for him if a great millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea." (Mt. 18:6) This is the primary admonition. Failure to heed it results in unspeakable things. We must vigorously uphold it against all opposing forces.

At the same time there is a secondary admonition, much less important, but still important, which is: "Avoid false accusations." So at a time when the people of America are rightly calling on the greatest vigilance against child abuse, at the same time we need to guard against the misuse of this vigilance by false accusations.

There is an old saying: For every complex problem there is a simple solution and it is always wrong.

5. The "Touching Rule" is only one way and surely not even perhaps the best way to teach children about these matters. One thing, however, is sure: Teaching this rule will not prevent abusers from achieving their end. They are far more clever and can turn the rule against a child. It is far better to start with the recognition of a period of latency and to begin to teach children about God's rules for right and wrong.

6. The Committee for Children has its origins and inspiration in a group which used to be called COYOTE which stands for "Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics." COYOTE works for the rights of all sex workers: Prostitutes, strippers, porn phone operators, porn actresses.
So at issue here is an organization which is part of the cultural movement to give our children a "healthy" outlook on sexuality, free from all puritan hang-ups and Catholic guilt which they believe has plagued parents and grandparents for generations.

Their view is opposed to the traditional Judeo-Christian teaching on sexual morality. They certainly oppose the Catholic Church's insistence on premarital chastity and fidelity in marriage.

7. This is the denial of original sin. It is the insistence that all guilt is bad for us. Why any Catholic school, parish or other organization would allow these people in their doors is either based on lack of knowledge of who they are, or embracing of their position in the culture wars.

It is the naïve belief that somehow or other human sexuality, created by God as such a good thing, has not been tainted by the fall of Adam. It is the goal of these groups to "liberate" us from the view that human sexuality as well as all of creation is in need of redemption by Christ Jesus.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church says: "It is a privation of original holiness and justice, but human nature has not been totally corrupted: It is wounded in the natural powers proper to it; subjected to ignorance, suffering and the domination of death; an incline to sin an inclination to evil that is called 'concupiscence.' " (CCC n. 405)

8. The major issue here involves how to best protect children from the actions of others that would damage them both now and in the future. Children are hardwired to connect. They have a healthy sense of trust, of naivete. They are not little adults who reason well or use logic to separate issues. They have an innate sense of openness, of caring, of reaching out to those around them ...until, of course, we teach them otherwise.

Children should not have to be the primary guardians of their own safety. This is the role of parents, caretakers and involved communities. To infuse children with the level of caution and reluctance to trust, or to teach them to gain power over others by falsely accusing, is to start them on a life of suspicion, fear, anger and in many cases, of failed relationships.

So parents and communities must take more seriously their role as the protector of each child's safety. To do their part, children should be given facts, but only those that match their age, maturity level and interest. For example, very young children may need to be taught that no touch applies to where their bathing suit fits. They should be encouraged to ask questions and to tell someone they trust should anyone do something wrong to them. As they get older, and express more interest and curiosity, having caring adults to provide more factual, relevant information allows them to develop healthy views about safety and sexuality. And, when the natural sense of modesty begins to be manifested, we can continue
to support the growing responsibility that older children and adolescents have in ensuring their own safety. Supporters of programs like TAT would argue against this approach. We believe they are wrong. We believe that concerned parents and "communities" can and will assume the primary responsibility for protecting their children and ours. We have to give them a chance. We have to help them and not impose upon them from on high programs like TAT.
Many parents and community members truly do want to help ensure the safety of our children in ways in accord with our traditional Judeo-Christian and Roman Catholic morals and values. They are often looked down upon by groups trying to liberalize our cultural expectations about what is right and what is wrong. Groups such as COYOTE are trying to rescue us from our "old, tired ethics."

While there is no easy answer, there are a number of things parents and "community members," interested in protecting children, can do. Some of them involve:

- Establishing a healthy, trusting relationship with your young children.
- Talk with them often and answer their questions briefly and to the point. Let them be children - don't force them to grow up faster than they should.
- Join together with others so someone always knows where the child is, who they are with, and what activities they are engaging in.
- Teach them right from wrong, what is virtuous and what is not. Model healthy boundaries with them and with others. Minimize exposure to inappropriate language, pictures, music that presents children dealing with adult content or adults modeling content and actions that are inappropriate for children. Teach them to respect themselves and others. Don't be afraid to say no. Be involved and be the caring adult who guides them safely through the perils of childhood.
- In short, "train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it." (Proverbs 22:6)

In summary, St. Paul says: "I am not ashamed of the Gospel." (Rom. 1:16) Neither should we be ashamed of the Gospel.