SCOLIOSIS

Diocesan guidelines require that parents of students in grades five through eight be informed about scoliosis, a developmental abnormality of the spinal column that can occur in children and adolescents. It is important to diagnose and treat this condition early. The information below explains scoliosis and an in-home screening method for parents/guardians.

Scoliosis is a musculoskeletal condition in which there is a sideways curvature of the spine. It can occur in otherwise healthy children and can be a serious health problem if it becomes severe. This condition generally occurs during the growing years, especially during the growth spurt from ages 10 to 17. Scoliosis is more frequently noted in females and in those when there are other affected family members. It is not caused by anything a child or the parents did or failed to do, although some cases may be associated with other medical conditions. Early detection is essential to help avoid complications that may include back pain, fatigue, reduced exercise tolerance, deformity, and, in severe cases, problems in heart and lung function.

To do an in-home scoliosis screening, observe your child while doing the following in a swim suit:

A. Direct your barefoot child to stand up straight with both arms hanging freely at the sides.
   1. Is one shoulder higher than the other?
   2. Is one shoulder blade more prominent?
   3. Does the spine seem to curve sideways?
   4. Is one hip higher than the other?

B. Direct your child to bend forward at the waist with arms extended toward the floor.
   1. Is there a hump in the rib region?
   2. Is there an imbalance of the chest?

If the answer is "yes" to any of these questions, the child may have an abnormal spinal curvature and should be evaluated by the primary health care provider. The Fairfax County Medical Society provides physician referrals at 703-934-8818 or www.msnva.org. Treatment for scoliosis may involve bracing. Severe curvature may require spinal surgery. A trained medical professional best determines the need for treatment.

For more information on this condition, go to http://www.niams.nih.gov/Health_Info/Scoliosis/.