



## **Child Abuse Prevention Month**

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April is national Child Abuse Prevention Month. It is most appropriate that Child Abuse Prevention Month is held during the Easter season. There is no better time than Easter to celebrate the protection of our most valuable gift from God—our children.

Source: [www.childwelfare.gov/preventing/preventionmonth](http://www.childwelfare.gov/preventing/preventionmonth)

### **God's Call to Love and Respect Others**

To know that we are children of God is to live in complete love with deep abiding security and the ability to dream, to sing, to create, to laugh, and to play without worry. It is a freedom to love—with full trust and confidence—the creatures whom God has sent to us in our world. As we grow older, we face a new reality. We cannot approach all God's creation with the same trust and confidence. We learn, through sometimes hurtful and damaging experiences, that some people reject the ability that God gave them to love and respect others—they ignore God's call to love and respect others.

### **Keeping God's Children Protected and Safe**

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## **Inspire Others to Participate in Abuse Prevention**

You can help create a safer environment for children by inspiring others to participate in your community's abuse prevention efforts. This could be as simple as identifying one person each week who hasn't participated in your parish's awareness sessions or other abuse prevention activities, and offering them information about how they can help. If you focus on the baby steps—in this case, identifying and inviting one person per week to get involved in preventing abuse—during the next 12 months you could realistically recruit more than four dozen people to your community's abuse prevention efforts. Wow! That could have some real impact. But remember . . . baby steps. Otherwise, the long-term goal may become too overwhelming to keep you inspired.

## **Five Steps to Safer Environments**

The Archdiocese of Milwaukee mandates that all people who work and volunteer with children and youth in our parishes and schools must undergo safe environment education. The education details five steps to prevent child sexual abuse: Know the warning signs of an inappropriate relationship with a child.

1. Know the warning signs!
2. Control access to children by carefully selecting the adults who work with children and youth.
3. Monitor all programs for the safety of children and youth.
4. Be aware of and sensitive to what is going on in the lives of children.
5. Communicate concerns to the appropriate person in authority.

Source: [www.virtusonline.org/virtus](http://www.virtusonline.org/virtus)

## **Preventing Child Abuse Is Everyone's Responsibility**

It is every adult's moral responsibility to protect possible victims by reporting the suspected abuse or neglect to the responsible authorities. Sexual abuse of minors is a pervasive societal problem, and only concerted and sustained efforts by all adults in every segment of society can help to protect children and youth. ***To report suspected abuse of a minor, call your local authorities or Child Protective Services.***

## **Know Your Kids' School**

Parents and guardians have the primary responsibility for protecting their children from all potential harm. When choosing a nursery, daycare center, or school, parents should inspect the building and grounds to make sure there are no areas where children play or work that are “off limits” to parents. Such facilities should have a policy that welcomes parents to visit the center or school without prior appointment.

Source: Philip J. Lazarus, “Characteristics of Safe and Responsive Schools,” VIRTUS, January 14, 2002.

## **Ensuring Your Child's School Is Safe**

Every teacher, coach, and volunteer who works with children in the Archdiocese of Milwaukee's parishes and schools must have a background check before he or she is permitted to work in any school- or parish-related job or activity that involves contact with children. But what about the children who attend non-Catholic private or public schools? Talk with school administrators and find out what steps they take to protect children from harm. Suggest that they review other abuse prevention programs to ensure that their policies and practices are up to date. And demand that all employees and volunteers who work in the school be properly screened, including background checks, before they are allowed to be near your children.

## **Keeping Your Child's Personal Information Personal**

If your children give out personal information over the Internet, not only is it easy to track, it's tough to completely remove. Emphasize to them how important it is that they keep personal information private. Make sure that they have a strong (ideally, alphanumeric) username and password that don't reveal anything personal. Encourage them not to give out their e-mail address, if they have one. If your children tell you that they have given out personal information online, contact your Internet service provider or the site where the information is posted to see what you can do to have it removed. For more information, visit [www.netsmartz.org](http://www.netsmartz.org).

## **Parents and Guardians: Get Involved**

Parents and guardians play a key role in the success of parish programs for young people. Parents and guardians who are involved in parish programs and events will be in the best position to protect their own children as well as all the children in the parish community. Involvement and communication are important factors in helping to ensure safe environments for all of our children.

## **Be Vigilant**

It is vitally important that we are constantly vigilant—that we always observe the behaviors of those who interact with children. And we must always communicate our concerns to the appropriate parties. Sometimes this means communicating our safety concerns to our children. And sometimes this means communicating our concerns about seemingly inappropriate behavior to those who are in a position to intervene. Parents must also listen carefully to their children and observe both their children's activities and the behavior of older children and adults who interact with them. When children exhibit dramatic behavioral changes, adults must find out what caused the changes. Being aware of what's happening with our children means talking to, listening to, and observing them—at every opportunity.

Source: [www.virtusonline.org/virtus](http://www.virtusonline.org/virtus)

## **Where Do Your Kids Spend Their Time?**

Child safety tip: You can help keep your children safe by knowing where they spend their time. Get to know the adults who show up at the various locations in the community where children gather and where they play together. Be wary of any adult who seems more interested in creating a relationship with a child than with other adults. Pay attention when an adult seems to single out a particular child for a relationship or for special attention. Warning signs include treats, gifts, vacations, or other special favors offered only to one specific child.

Source: "Know the Rules . . . After-School Safety Tips for Children Who Are Home Alone," [www.missingkids.com](http://www.missingkids.com).

## **Safety Rules Bear Repeating**

Research reminds us that teaching children how to resist the overtures of a potential molester requires repetition and reinforcement. Children and young people need to know the rules, and they need to hear them over and over and over again so that the rules become part of a thought process. This is done in the same way we teach the rules about looking both ways before crossing the street and the danger of getting too close to an open flame. Empowering children to speak up and resist the overtures of potential molesters can stop a child molester in his or her tracks. Molesters who fear being caught—and being labeled a molester—may decide it is not worth the risk and back off.

## **Know the Warning Signs of Abuse**

Child molesters look like everyone else. They don't look like scary people that anyone should know to avoid. Rather, they live with their families in our neighborhoods. One of the most important ways to ensure the safety of children in our environments is to know the warning signs of adults who present a risk of harm to children. Among these signs are when the person (1) always wants to be alone with children in areas where no one can monitor the interaction, (2) allows children to do things their parents would not permit, (3) is always more excited to be with children than with adults, and (4) discourages others from participating in activities involving kids.

Source: Paul Ashton, "Know the Warning Signs, Part 2," featured November 19, 2007, at [www.virtusonline.org/virtus](http://www.virtusonline.org/virtus).

## **Resources to Help Keep Kids Safe**

The Web site of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children offers dozens of well-produced informational brochures covering a broad range of child safety topics. Go to [www.ncmec.org](http://www.ncmec.org) and click on "Resources for Parents & Guardians" to find these brochures and other helpful information about child safety.

Source: [www.ncmec.org](http://www.ncmec.org)

## **Make Your Parish or Community Safer for Children**

You can help create a safer environment for children by leaving your parish or community environment safer each day than when you started. This could be as simple as training yourself to do a more effective job of keeping your eye on those around you when they interact with children. It sounds overly simple; but most of us don't really do it, and it can be an easy habit to develop. It just takes persistence and a way to measure your success. For example, in order to make yourself notice those who are interacting with children, you could try counting the number of children you see each day interacting with non-parental adults. Okay . . . so this would be a little unrealistic for a schoolteacher . . . but for the rest of us it could be a very big learning experience. To learn more about parish efforts to create safe environments for our children, please contact the parish office.