

# APRIL Is Child Abuse Prevention Month

Every April, Catholic parishes and schools across the United States participate in National Child Abuse Prevention Month.



## The Effects of ABUSE

When a child is abused, the effects are grave and can last a lifetime. Some of the most common effects of abuse include:

- Loss of faith and trust in God.
- Post-traumatic stress disorder, psychological distress, and other indirect signs of trauma, such as anxiety, trouble sleeping, chronic stomach pain, and headaches.
- A greater risk of developing behavioral problems, substance abuse, and suicide.

The sense of violation goes deep into a person's psyche and feelings of anger, shame, hurt, and betrayal can build long after the abuse has taken place.

## Steps to Prevent ABUSE

### Communicate with Your Children

It is extremely important to communicate openly with your children. Let them know that they can talk to you about anything that bothers them. This will help you identify warning signs and grooming behaviors perpetrated by offenders before they escalate to abuse.

## Educate Yourself and Your Children on Abuse

Learning how to identify, prevent, and report abuse is key. Parents and guardians should empower their children to protect themselves from harm and to report abuse. Ask your diocesan safe environment coordinator or parish delegate about opportunities for safe environment training.

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## Identify and Report Warning Signs of Child Abusers

Grooming behaviors are the actions abusers take to project the image that they are kind, generous, caring people, while their intent is to lure a minor into an inappropriate relationship. Offenders can be patient and may groom their victim, his or her family, or community for years.

Some abusers isolate a potential victim by giving him or her undue attention or lavish gifts, while others allow young people to participate in activities which their parents or guardians would not approve, such as watching pornography, drinking alcohol, using drugs, and excessive touching, such as wrestling and tickling. Abusers also often try to isolate their victims from family or friends and encourage their victims to keep secrets from their parents or other caring adults.

## Holding Offenders ACCOUNTABLE

To help hold offenders accountable, report all suspected abuse to local public authorities. You can also contact your local diocesan victim assistance coordinator to make a report and seek outreach for the abused. In accordance with diocesan policy, when a single act of sexual abuse is admitted or established, the offender is to be removed permanently from ministry.



"Let it be clear that before these abominations the Church will spare no effort to do all that is necessary to bring to justice whosoever has committed such crimes . . . To those who abuse minors I would say this: convert and hand yourself over to human justice, and prepare for divine justice." —Pope Francis, Dec. 21, 2018



# Keeping Children and Teens **SAFE ONLINE**

Computers and mobile devices can be helpful tools for children and teens to learn and grow in faith and fellowship. Unfortunately, the digital world is also full of unsafe and explicit content. You wouldn't hand a teen the car keys without first teaching them how to drive. The same should be true for using technology—teach them how to keep themselves and others safe while using it.

**You can use the following tips to better protect young people from harm online:**

## **1 Model appropriate online behavior for young people.**

Children look to their parents to teach and show them the ways to appropriately use technology. The Biggest influence on what children see as acceptable or unacceptable is you.

## **2 Teach your children not to share private information or images online.**

Strangers posing as online friends can try to gain the trust of minors. Personal information such as name, address, and phone number should never be shared with an unknown person. Tell your Children to immediately tell a trusted adult if anyone makes them feel uncomfortable.

## **3 Limit usage of computers and mobile devices to public spaces in the home.**

Not only will this help to prevent young people from accessing unsafe websites, it will also help them to develop safe browsing habits later in life.

## **4 Install software that can block or monitor explicit website use.**

Open access to harmful websites, like those that include pornography, is a constant threat to young people. Website filters can prevent access to harmful and explicit sites and some can even alert you when such a site is accessed.



## **5 Review and discuss the websites your child has visited and apps they have used.**

Oversight of your child or teen's Browsing history and app usage can help to keep them safe online. If you notice your child has browsed an unsafe website or app, discuss why that behavior is harmful. Learn about current apps that could be harmful to children and teenagers, especially Those that involve image sharing, private communication, or the illusion of privacy.

## **6 Report online exploitation of Minors to public authorities.**

If you become aware of explicit content involving minors, such as solicitation, explicit images or videos, you should submit a report to law enforcement or through resources like Cyber Tipline from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children.



# Ten Tips for Protecting Children and Offering Outreach to Victims/Survivors

## 1 Sexual abuse is about the victim.

Many people are affected by abuse but the individual most impacted is the victim who has suffered a violation of trust that can affect his or her entire life.

## 2 The residual effects of having been abused can last a lifetime.

The sense of violation goes deep into a person's psyche and feelings of anger, shame, hurt and betrayal can build long after the abuse has taken place. Those who have been abused can heal, but it often takes time, therapy, and the support of loved ones.

## 3 No one has the right to have access to children.

No one, no matter who they are, has an automatic right to be around children or young people who are in the care of the Church without proper screening and without following the rules.

## 4 Common sense is not all that common.

Dioceses, schools, parishes, and especially families, must educate themselves and others on how to protect children.

## 5 Child sexual abuse can be prevented.

It is critical to build safety barriers around children and young people to keep them from harm—such as protective guardians, codes of conduct, background evaluations, policies and procedures, and safety training programs.

## 6 Feeling heard leads toward healing.

Relief from hurt and anger often comes when one feels heard, when one's pain and concerns are taken seriously, and a victim/survivor's suffering, pain, and anger are acknowledged.

## 7 You cannot always predict who will be an abuser.

Experience shows that most abuse is committed by someone who has gained the trust of a victim/survivor and his/ her family.

## 8 There are behavioral warning signs of child abusers.

Some abusers isolate a potential victim by giving him or her undue attention or lavish gifts, others allow young people to participate in activities which their parents or guardians would not approve, such as watching pornography, drinking alcohol, using drugs, and excessive touching, such as wrestling and tickling.

## 9 People can be taught to identify grooming behavior.

Grooming behaviors are the actions which abusers take to project the image that they are kind, generous, caring people, while their intent is to lure a minor into an inappropriate relationship. Offenders can be patient and may groom their victim, his or her family, or community for years.

## 10 Background checks are important.

Background checks in churches, schools and other organizations keep predators away from children both because they scare off some predators and because they uncover past actions which should ban an adult from working or volunteering with children.

