

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.

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



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.



Watch for These Warning Signs of Abuse in Minors

No longer wants to see a **particular person** they had been close to

Declining **academic** performance

Tries to hide use of **technology**

No longer interested in **activities** they used to enjoy

Changes in **personality**

Demonstrates **aggressive behavior** or constantly angry

Tries to get minors **alone**



Commits physical and emotional **boundary violations**

Withdraws from family or friends

Keeps **secrets** with minors

Gives lavish **gifts** to minors

Allows or encourages minors to **break laws** or rules

Has **inappropriate** or suggestive conversations with minors

Is overly interested in **spending time** with minors

Does not believe the **rules** apply to them (or, does not follow rules or protocols)

Takes **photos** without approval, or asks minors to send them photos

... and These Warning Signs of Perpetrators

Every April, Catholic parishes and schools across the United States participate in National Child Abuse Prevention Month. While dioceses work year-round to prevent abuse, during this month a special emphasis is placed on the importance of learning how to protect the vulnerable from this evil.

Together, for the next nine days, let's pray that the vulnerable are protected from abuse, and that survivors of abuse may be accompanied on their paths to healing.

Novena

for Protection and Healing from Abuse

Intercessions

- Day 1:** May the most vulnerable be protected from all types of abuse and exploitation.
- Day 2:** May those who have been sexually abused receive comfort and healing.
- Day 3:** May those who work with children and young people be vigilant in protecting them from harm.
- Day 4:** May those who provide help for the abused act with wisdom and compassion in their healing ministries.
- Day 5:** May all families strive to provide safe and nurturing environments for children and young people.

Day 6: May all those who have committed abuse acknowledge the harm they have done, repent, and accept justice that ultimately comes from God.

Day 7: May those who have been abused receive the courage to tell their story, and may they be believed and supported.

Day 8: May Church leaders, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, promote justice and healing for survivors of abuse.

Day 9: May our Holy Father, Pope Francis, fulfill his role as good shepherd and protect the most vulnerable in his flock.

Prayers

Our Father, 3 Hail Marys, Glory Be, Prayer for Healing

Prayer for Healing

God of endless love,
ever caring, ever strong,
always present, always just:
You gave your only Son
to save us by his blood on the cross.

Gentle Jesus, shepherd of peace,
join to your own suffering
the pain of all who have been hurt
in body, mind, and spirit
by those who betrayed the trust placed in
them.

Hear the cries of our brothers and sisters
who have been gravely harmed,
and the cries of those who love them.

Soothe their restless hearts with
hope,
steady their shaken spirits with
faith.

Grant them justice for their cause,
enlightened by your truth.

Holy Spirit, comforter of hearts,
heal your people's wounds
and transform brokenness into wholeness.

Grant us the courage and wisdom,
humility and grace, to act with justice.

Breathe wisdom into our prayers and labors.

Grant that all harmed by abuse may find peace in justice.
We ask this through Christ, our Lord. Amen.



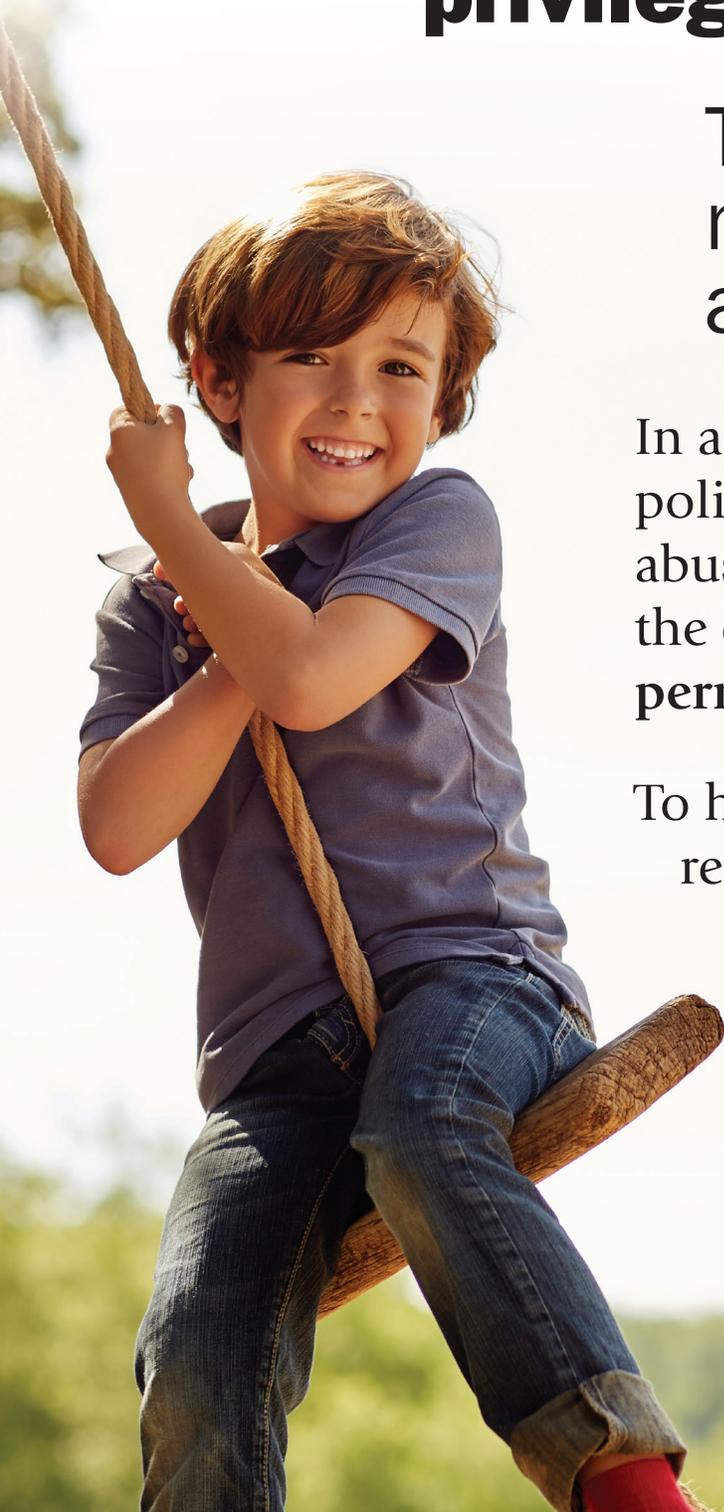
Every child deserves a **safe environment.**

Ministry to children and young people is a **privilege**, not a right.

The sexual abuse of minors is a **crime** and a **grave sin.**

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.

To help hold offenders accountable, report all 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.



PROMISE TO PROTECT



PLEDGE TO HEAL

BELIEVE IN THE POSSIBILITY OF HELP AND HEALING. THERE IS HOPE.

Your local Victim Assistance Coordinator is available to help you or anyone who has been abused or victimized by someone representing the Catholic Church. We will listen to your needs and support you. We will help you make a formal complaint and arrange a personal meeting with the bishop, or his delegate, if desired. We encourage you to come forward and speak out.

The Victim Assistance Coordinator in your diocese is:

Kelly Gollick, MSW

1-800-626-1608 or reportabuse@hbgdiocese.org



To report suspected abuse of a minor, please follow these two steps:



Call the toll-free PA Child Abuse Hotline at **1-800-932-0313**



Report suspected abuse of a minor by a church official, employee or volunteer by calling the diocesan toll-free number at **1-800-626-1608**

IT IS IMPORTANT THAT YOU REPORT SUSPECTED ABUSE WITH BOTH LAW ENFORCEMENT AND THE DIOCESE.

Email: ReportAbuse@hbgdiocese.org



**Diocese of Harrisburg
Youth Protection Program** www.YouthProtectionHBG.com

