

National Child Abuse Prevention Month: Things to Do During April

The U.S. government has abundant resources and links on preventing child-abuse. They are collected on a [National Child Abuse Prevention Month](#) web page.¹

Revelation of child abuse in the Catholic Church and technological advances in the first decades of the 21st century demand more of parents and communities to keep our children safe. In particular, Cyber Safety, School Bullying, and Safe Environments in our parishes are focus areas that require our active attention. Here is helpful information on each area that can enhance our learning on how to keep children safe.

Cyber Safety

Keeping youth safe on the Internet means talking to our children about online safety. Parents, grandparents, and caregivers are urged to set clear expectations and guidelines, and to communicate regularly about how to recognize and respond to bullying as well as to inappropriate or unsafe activity online. [Learn what to do.](#)²

Safe Schools & School Bullying Prevention Programs

Preventing bullying in schools starts with appropriate policies and procedures for staff who need to know the right way to work with students involved with bullying. The second step focuses on developing Social-Emotional skills in children.

Use information from the Committee for Children in Washington State, [Bullying Prevention in Schools](#), to learn how effective bullying prevention requires a multi-pronged effort.

Safe Parish Environments

Create awareness of the need to maintain a “culture of protection” in our parishes by setting up a “Safety Corner” in the parish bulletin. Then use a series of bulletin blurbs in April to highlight Child Abuse Prevention Month.

¹ The URL string is <https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/preventing/preventionmonth/resource-guide/>

² URL is <http://www.cfchildren.org/bullying-prevention/related-articles/keeping-youth-cyber-safe>

National Child Abuse Prevention Month

Here are some sample blurbs you can edit and use for your parish:

April 4-5 (Easter Sunday)

Our diocese has policies and procedures to create a safe environment and protect children. Read the policies and learn how you can help create a culture of protection.

[insert link to diocesan website]

April 11-12

Our diocese has codes of conduct adults must follow to create safe environments and protect children. Reading and following the code in all situations creates a culture of protection and keeps our children safer. [insert link to Code of Conduct]

April 18-19

The best way to protect our children and our church is for adults to learn red flag behaviors and to report concerns to supervisors. This creates a culture of protection. Sign up for a safe environment training even if you are not required. [insert link to training schedule]

April 25-26

Knowledgeable and caring adults who are committed to protecting children can also protect our Church. Learn how to report child abuse [insert link to reporting requirements]

Also ask if you can distribute a blessing that can be prayed anytime, but especially during April Child Abuse Prevention Month, or perhaps ask the pastor to include this blessing during the Masses in April:

Dear Lord,

We ask You to bless these Your holy people who have participated in the Church's efforts to help stop child sexual abuse. Open our hearts to Your call to be the "ears, eyes and voice of children and young people" everywhere. Give us the vision and grace needed to fulfill the special commitments each of them has made to making our homes, churches, schools, communities, and world a safer place for all God's Children. Amen.

Expect Bishops to Be Accountable

As the recent Catholic News Service report on the Vatican child protection commission highlighted, accountability is key concern for this commission. Pope Francis has stated that the protection of children, and not the avoidance of scandal or bad publicity for the Church, must be the priority for the way all bishops deal with accusations of sex abuse by all priests and church personnel. There have been far too many instances where bishops have covered up abuse; there have been far too many clergy protected and moved from place to place.

A February 9, 2015, statement from this advisory commission noted their work to develop a process to ensure accountability for everyone in the church who works with minors. Two commission members have said that prompt and firm action on accountability and the implementation of child-protection policies is required. Commission members Peter Saunders, who is a survivor, and Marie Collins, an Irish survivor of clerical abuse, told reporters they would leave the commission if no progress is seen soon.

Ask your bishop to support such prompt action—they do pay attention if letter after letter and conversation after conversation focuses on the need to be accountable and transparent.

Two Special Notes

Marie Collins will be the keynote speaker at the VOTF April Assembly in Hartford CT Saturday, April 18th. [VOTF 2015 National Assembly](#)

Look for the “Blue Ribbons” at the Assembly and help raise awareness of National Child Abuse Prevention month!