

Office of Victim Assistance & Safe Environment
Archdiocese of San Antonio



Parent Handbook

Protecting all of God's Children
from Abuse and Providing them
with a Safe Environment.



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Dear Parents,

This guide was created by the Office of Victim Assistance & Safe Environment through the Archdiocese of San Antonio to teach parents how to identify child abuse, how to respond to abuse, how to help protect your child and encourage a safe environment. As parents we are the primary educators of children and hope that this booklet will help you to begin a conversation with your child on safety issues according to their age and level of development. For further information, comments or questions please contact the Office of Victim Assistance & Safe Environment @ 210-734-7786.

Child Abuse

Any behavior directed toward a child by an adult that harms a child's physical or emotional health and development. The four categories of abuse are:

- ◆ Neglect
- ◆ Emotional/Verbal Abuse
- ◆ Physical Abuse
- ◆ Sexual Abuse



Neglect

Neglect is the most reported form of child abuse in Texas and occurs when a caretaker fails to provide for a child's basic needs which include the following:

- Physical Neglect (food, clothing, shelter, etc)
- Neglectful Supervision
- Medical care (Head lice, special needs of child)
- Abandonment
- Refusal to accept parental responsibility

Emotional/Verbal Abuse

Psychological abuse is a pattern of behavior that retards a child's development and sense of self worth by conveying to the child that they are worthless, flawed, unloved, or unwanted.

Psychological abuse may include the following:

- Constant name calling/ Criticism
- Degrading/ Insults
- Tormenting/ Yelling
- Terrorizing/ Threats

Physical Abuse

Physical abuse occurs when a caretaker allows or inflicts non accidental physical injury that causes a substantial risk to the child's physical well being and health. Physical injuries may include the following:

- Welts Kicking
- Burning Pushing
- Slapping Biting
- Hitting Black Eyes
- Fractured/Broken Bones
- Bruises that are not appropriate with the age development of a child

Sexual Abuse

Child Sexual Abuse is any sexual contact by force, trickery, or bribery where there is an imbalance in age, size, power or knowledge. Texas Penal Code states that no child under the age of 18 can consent to sex. Example of sexual abuse include:

- Pornography
- Masturbation
- Fondling, kissing, or holding a child that is uncomfortable
- Forced to perform oral or anal sex

Signs, Symptoms & Behaviors

Children who are experiencing trauma many times experience emotional and behavioral changes. Children who are sociable and outgoing become withdrawn and moody. Quiet children often become very angry and violent. It is extremely important to talk to your child and reaffirm you love them and that they can talk to you about their feelings. Communication is key during this time and a caring approach allows the child to open up to what is causing them distress. Children may find it difficult talking directly to their parent, don't take this personal. Allow the child to confide in a grandparent, uncle, teacher that can help support the family.



Internet Safety

The internet predator takes on many roles, but the goals are the same: to either set up a meeting or to have the child send an inappropriate picture of him/herself. Here are some basic rules to follow:

Have the computer in an open area, not the child's room.

Have rules for the computer: sites to visit, times to use, etc..

Be present when your child is on the computer: if you are there he/she will not be doing anything they are not supposed to.

Do not allow your child to use any specific personal information on any social networks.

Talking to Children About Sexual Abuse

It is difficult to think about your child becoming a victim of sexual abuse. However, 1 in 3 girls will be sexually assaulted before age 18 and 1 in 5 boys. Most children love and care about their abusers, 90 percent of the time the abuser is a friend, coach, teacher, etc. In 65% of sexual abuse cases the perpetrator is a family member. The best way to reduce your child's risk of becoming a victim is to talk and know your child.

Utilize teachable moments to begin the conversation with your child. Always begin the conversation during a calm time while you are watching television, making dinner or they are on the internet. Always express that you care about your child as well as their safety is very important to you. Do not be afraid to teach a child the correct names of all body parts. Point out that their body belongs to them and they always have the right to say NO! to unwanted touching, even if the person is an adult. If a person makes them uncomfortable they can always talk to you.

Reporting Sexual Abuse of a Minor

If you suspect or a child discloses abused you should:

*Believe your child.

*Stay calm. Intense reactions tend to frighten the child and may keep them from opening up to you.

*Do not blame the child. Most children feel guilt, shame and embarrassment after they have been abused. Let them know it is not their fault.

*Thank the child for sharing this difficult information with you.

*Report to law enforcement and Child Protective Services with 48 hours.

*Seek medical attention for your child. Counseling services are also very helpful for victims and their families during the healing process.

Office of Victim Assistance & Safe Environment

Mission

To serve communities of faith where every person is safe from harm and respected throughout life.

Goals

No More Victims.

Offer immediate pastoral care to those who have been sexually abused by clergy, archdiocesan staff, or church volunteers.

Provide educational leadership training for chancery and parish clergy and staff regarding the effects of abuse on victims and appropriate ministerial boundaries.

Educate children and adults about preventing abuse, encouraging behaviors that keep children safe, and acting to protect children if abuse occurs.

Services

Intakes (where victims report clergy abuse)

Assessments

Counseling on sexual abuse

Spiritual support groups

Referrals

Development, training and implementation of abuse prevention program within the diocese.

Making A Call

Please call OVASE if you need assistance reporting abuse, seeking guidance about a situation in a school or parish, if you acquire information about reporting laws, need a referral for a service provider or to discuss any concerns. Every call is handled personally and confidentially.

OVASE

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[Www.archsa.org](http://www.archsa.org)

Email: ovase@archsa.org

IMPORTANT PHONE NUMBERS

Emergency:

911

Police:

311

Child Protective Services:

1-800-252-5400

OVASE:

210-734-7786 or 1-877-700-1888