

Protecting God's Children®

Child sexual abuse is a worldwide public health issue. Child abuse, particularly child sexual abuse, is reprehensible—especially when the wrongdoer is affiliated with the Church. The VIRTUS® programs assist the Church in being a safe haven for children and a messenger for preventing child sexual abuse within the Church and society in general. We seek to achieve this lofty goal through our child sexual abuse prevention program: Protecting God's Children®.

The Protecting God's Children Program

Most organizations that work with children have some sort of child safety program. Through the Protecting God's Children program, we maximize those efforts by helping churches and religious organizations refine their roles as child-safe environments and empowering caring adults to protect children.

Why Does It Work?

Child abusers seek to operate and abuse their power within nurturing, child-friendly environments where it is assumed that nobody would want to harm a child. Religious organizations of all faiths are an easy target. The Protecting God's Children program implements safety mechanisms that send a message to all abusers and potential abusers:

- Child abuse is not tolerated,
- Children are vigilantly protected,
- Victims are listened to, heard, and shielded from further abuse, and
- Offenders are identified and punished.

By utilizing best practices for training and loss prevention, the Protecting God's Children program helps make churches safe for all people—especially children.

How Does It Work?

Maximizing a church's role as a child-safe environment begins with making adults more aware of the ways children and adults interact with each other. The Protecting God's Children program educates and trains adults (clergy, religious, teachers, staff, volunteers, and parents) about the dangers of abuse, the warning signs of abuse, the ways to prevent abuse, the methods of properly reporting suspicions of abuse, and responding to allegations of abuse.

All VIRTUS training programs, including the PROTECTING GOD'S CHILDREN programs, are comprehensive and multi-dimensional—incorporating proven best practice standards for the prevention of child sexual abuse by clergy, staff, volunteers, and others who interact with children within the church environment. Our training programs incorporate live training, train-the-facilitator education, awareness videos, and ongoing web-based training through online training bulletins and training modules via our VIRTUS *Online* system.

Using The Church To Protect Children

For any organization, the best practice to prevent wrongdoing, including child sexual abuse, is to have an organization use its own people to facilitate awareness of the issue. The Protecting God's Children program begins with the training of internal facilitators—individuals selected by the archdiocese, diocese, or religious organization to train other adults and parents on how to best protect children. We use facilitator-led awareness sessions and continuous online training so that participants learn the best methods for delivering their message, including the training for the Protecting God's Children program.

Training Adults To Protect Children

We begin by making adults of the Church that interact with children aware of how to protect children. Our Protecting God's Children program for adults is a three-hour live awareness session instructing adults of the Church that to protect children you must have continuous awareness and vigilance. This awareness session makes trainees understand the signs of child sexual abuse, the methods and means by which offenders commit abuse, and five empowerment steps one can use to prevent child sexual abuse. Continuing online training is a valuable component of the Protecting God's Children program for the continued awareness of child abuse.

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