

**KEEPING KIDS**

**SAFE!**

Today  
Tomorrow  
Forever



*2025 April Child  
Abuse Prevention Month  
Resource Booklet*



## CELEBRATING 2025 CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION MONTH & KEEPING KIDS SAFE RIBBON WALL



During *National Child Abuse Prevention Month* in April, we, as the People of God, renew our ongoing commitment to protecting our children and young people from child sexual abuse. In honor of National Child Abuse Prevention Month, April 2025,

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**Display** the “Keeping Kids Safe” Ribbon wall!

**Distribute** the “Keeping Kids Safe” stickers to parishioners during all Masses on Sunday, April 26<sup>th</sup>.

**Distribute** the “Keeping Kids Safe” stickers to school children during the last week of April.

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**Distribute** the 2025 – 2026 *Working Together to Prevent Child Sexual Abuse Brochure* to parishioners and school parents in April. Copies of the Brochure must also be displayed in the vestibule of the church and school office all year.

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**Plan** for the entire Month of April, highlighting your parish/school’s commitment to protecting our children and young people from child sexual abuse by:

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**Include** Child Abuse Prevention Month “Did You Know?” inserts in your parish bulletin & website.

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**Print Parent Handouts** and include them as part of your Child Abuse Booth during the month of April

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# KEEPING KIDS SAFE

## Child Abuse Prevention Month Prayer/Ribbon Wall

- The Ribbons are a reminder to help themselves and their classmates to stay safe.
- Distribute the Working Together brochures, Keeping Kids Safe stickers, etc.
- Create a Healing Garden with Pinwheels (if you have them)
- Publish “Did You Know?” Bulletin Announcements


(Sample – Child Abuse Prevention Prayer/Ribbon Wall)



## 2025 April Child Abuse Prevention Month Order Forms

This year, the Office of Safeguard the Children will offer the Child Abuse Prevention Month Materials for FREE. Please click the links below to order.


If you have any additional questions regarding the materials, please email Brenda [bmelendez@la-archdiocese.org](mailto:bmelendez@la-archdiocese.org)



**2025 - 2026**

**Working Together to Prevent  
Child Sexual Abuse Brochure**

AVAILABLE FOR FREE IN  
ENGLISH AND SPANISH  
AVAILABLE IN OTHER  
LANGUAGES UPON REQUEST



[2025 – 2026 Working Together Order Form](#)

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**Child Abuse Prevention Month**  
**KEEPING KIDS SAFE**

**Keeping Kids Safe**

**2025 Child Abuse Prevention Month Resources**



**Poster**

**NEW KKS  
Sticker**

**NEW POSSIBLE  
TEEN STICKER**

**NEW POSSIBLE  
TEEN POSTER**

[Keeping Kids Safe Resources Order Form](#)

# Child Abuse Prevention Month

# **KEEPING KIDS SAFE**



**Safeguard the Children - Archdiocese of Los Angeles**

Mes de la Prevención  
del Abuso de Niños

# MANTENIENDO A LOS NIÑOS SEGUROS



Juntos, Estamos  
Haciendo Una Diferencia



Protegiendo a los Niños - Arquidiócesis de los Angeles

# NEW TEEN POSTER

**PUT A STOP TO  
CHILD ABUSE**

**SAVE A LIFE**

**STAND UP**

**SPEAK UP**

Safeguard the Children - Archdiocese of Los Angeles

# **PON UN ALTO AL ABUSO INFANTIL**

**SALVA UNA VIDA**

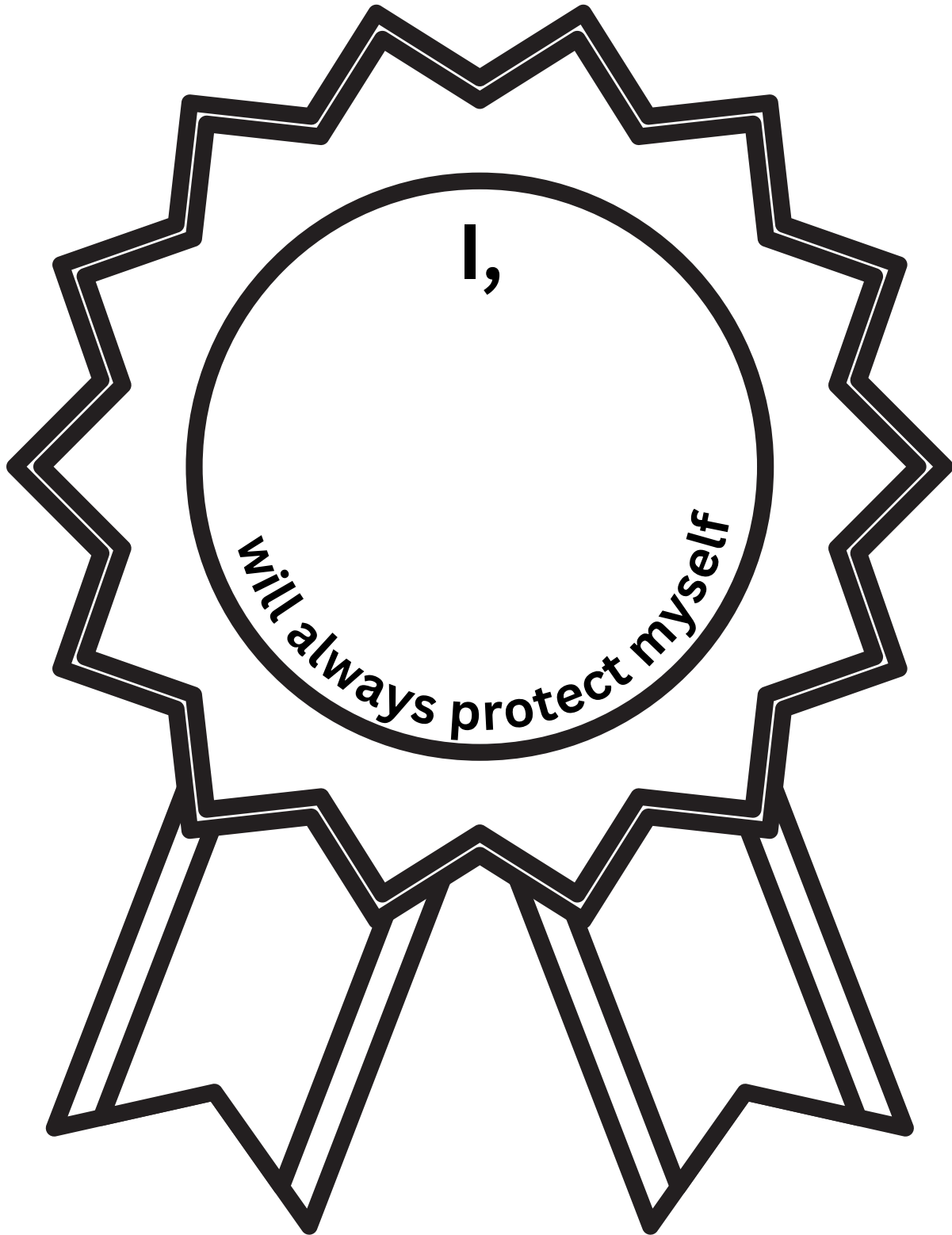
**DEFIENDETE**

**ALZA LA VOZ**

Protegiendo a los Niños de Dios  
Arquidiócesis de Los Angeles

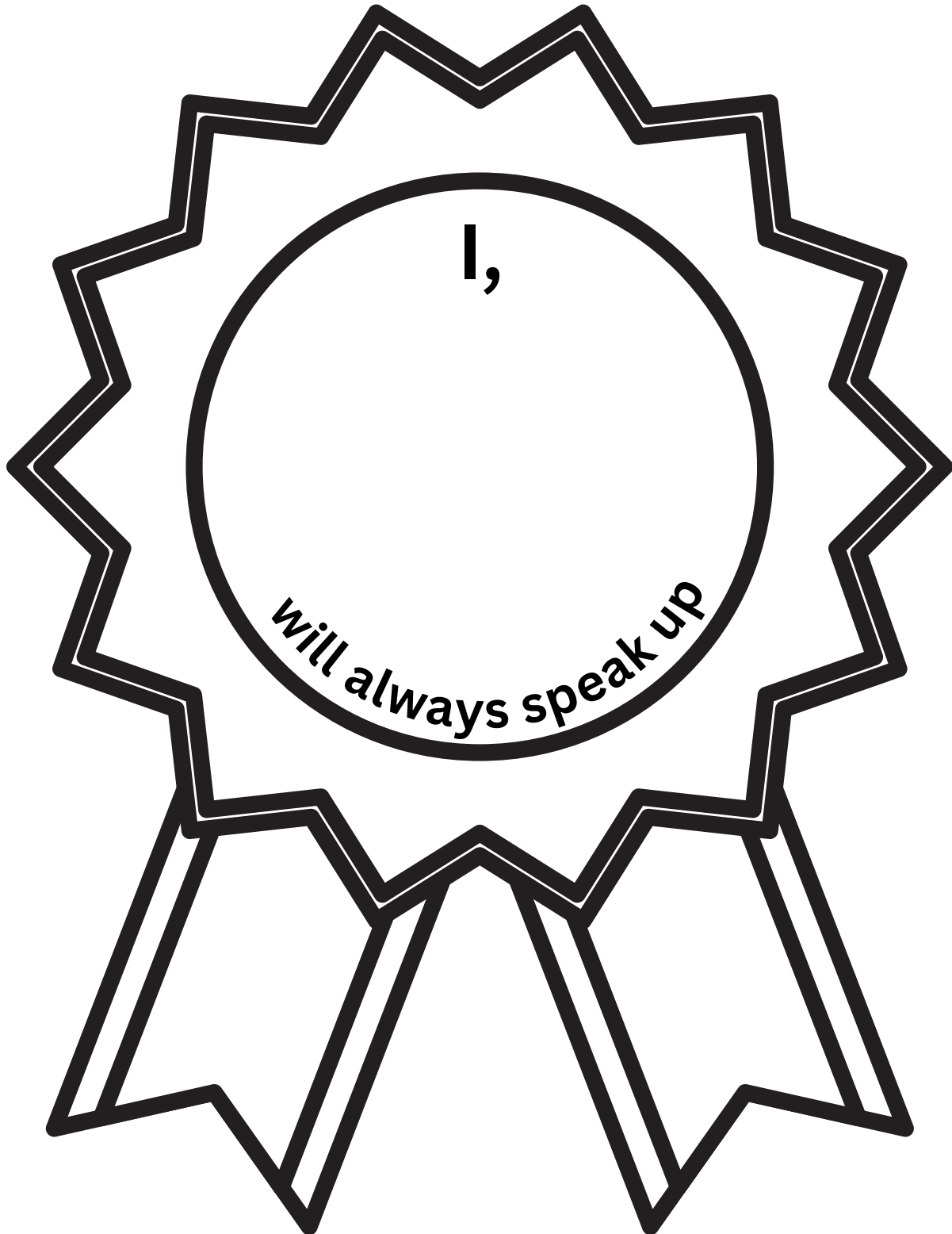
# Keeping Kids Safe

# **RIBBON**



Color and write your name in the center of the Ribbon

Keeping Kids Safe  
**RIBBON**



Color and write your name in the center of the Ribbon

## **ADDITIONAL APRIL CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION MONTH IDEAS:**

Have a “**Keep Kids Safe**” table after every Mass one weekend in April:

- Decorate with Keeping Kids Safe Stickers and Posters.
- Give Working Together brochures, Keeping Kids Safe stickers, etc.
- Create a Healing Garden with Pinwheels or release butterflies as a sign of healing.
- Publish “Did You Know?” Bulletin Announcements
- Print Parent Handouts to be distributed and add them to your booth as resources.

### **Child Abuse Prevention Month Wall**



### **Child Abuse Prevention Month Booth/Table**



### **Blue Roses for Blue Sunday**



### **Releasing Butterflies as a form of healing**





## RECOGNITION AND CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION BLESSING



**The Safeguard the Parish Committee Chair Priests asks the following people to please stand up to be recognized for their role in protecting children and young people:**

- 1) Members of the Safe Environment Committee (Ask some members to be at each Mass);
- 2) All the VIRTUS® Facilitators and Teaching Touching Training Trainers
- 3) All the Adults who have attended the VIRTUS® Protecting God's Children for Adults;
- 4) All the Children who attended Empowering God's Children and Young People programs for Children;
- 5) All the Youth who attended the Empowering God's Children and Young People programs.
- 6) All Adults who have participated in fingerprinting or participated in other Safe Environment efforts;

**The priest then asks the congregation to raise their right hand and join in giving them a special blessing.**



## CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION BLESSING

**Gracious and Loving God, We ask *You* to bless these *Your* holy people who have participated in the Church's efforts to help stop child sexual abuse. We thank *You* for opening their hearts to *Your* call to be the "ears, eyes, and voice of children and young people" everywhere. Continue to give them the vision and grace needed to fulfill the special commitments that each of them has made to making their homes, churches, schools, communities, and world a safer place for all God's Children. We make this prayer through Christ, Our Lord. Amen**

## CANDLE LIGHTING

If you still have your Child Abuse Prevention Month Candle from 2021, please place it near the altar and light it during all liturgies in the month of April.



## A PRAYER FOR HEALING VICTIMS OF ABUSE

On the weekend of April 27, 2025, join parishes across the Archdiocese of Los Angeles in praying “A Prayer for Healing” for victims of abuse.

**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 and justice.**

**We ask this through Christ, our Lord. Amen.**

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## UNA ORACIÓN DE SANACIÓN VÍCTIMAS DE ABUSO

**Espíritu Santo, consolador de corazones, cura las heridas de tus hijos e hijas y devuelve la integridad a lo que ha sido quebrantado.**

**Concédenos el valor y la sabiduría, la humildad y la gracia, para actuar con justicia.**

**Sopla tu sabiduría u la gracia, para actuar con justicia.**

**Que todos los que han sido heridos por el abuso encuentren paz y justicia.**

**Te lo pedimos por Cristo, nuestro Señor. Amén.**



## **CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION MONTH PETITIONS**

### **ENGLISH**

- **For those affected by abuse in any way, that God may bring healing within a loving, nurturing, and sincere environment, we pray to the Lord...**
- **For those who have suffered abuse, that they may experience God's profound love for them and God's healing power of the Holy Spirit, we pray to the Lord...**
- **For those affected by abuse, in all of its forms, that they may find the courage and strength and continue to grow and trust in the love of our Lord, we pray to the Lord...**
- **For survivors of abuse and for their families and friends who support them, that God's providence will lead them to peace and wholeness, we pray to the Lord...**
- **For families who are the first to show God's love, that they may have the necessary support to provide safe and nurturing environments for children and young people, we pray to the Lord...**
- **That children and youth may experience and value the genuine love of caring adults around them.**



## PETICIONES DEL MES DE LA PREVENCIÓN DEL ABUSO INFANTIL

- **Para aquellos afectados por el abuso en cualquier forma, que Dios pueda traer sanación dentro de un ambiente amoroso, nutritivo y sincero, oremos al Señor...**
- **Para aquellos que han sufrido abuso, que puedan experimentar el profundo amor de Dios por ellos y el poder sanador del Espíritu Santo, oremos al Señor...**
- **Para aquellos afectados por el abuso, en todas sus formas, que puedan encontrar el valor y la fuerza y seguir creciendo y confiando en el amor de nuestro Señor, oremos al Señor...**
- **Para los sobrevivientes de abuso para sus familias y amigos que los apoyan, que la providencia de Dios los conduzca hacia la paz y a la plenitud, oremos al Señor...**
- **Para las familias que son los primeros en mostrar el amor de Dios, para que tengan el apoyo necesario para proporcionar ambientes seguros y llenos de apoyo para los niños y jóvenes, oremos al Señor...**
- **Que los niños y jóvenes sientan y valoren el amor autentico de los adultos a su alrededor, oremos al Señor...**

**“DID YOU KNOW?” BULLETIN ANNOUNCEMENTS FOR APRIL 2025**  
**ANUNCIOS ¿SABÍA QUE? PARA EL BOLETÍN DE ABRIL 2025**

**April 5-6**

**DID YOU KNOW?**

**2025 Child Abuse Prevention Month Resource Booklet**

In recognition of April as Child Abuse Prevention Month, the Office of Safeguard the Children has created the 2025 Child Abuse Prevention Month Resource Booklet. This useful Resource Booklet will help parishes and schools plan and prepare for Child Abuse Prevention Month. It is also available to individuals who wish to know more about Child Abuse Prevention Month. For more information please visit, [lacatholics.org/child-abuse-prevention-month](https://lacatholics.org/child-abuse-prevention-month).

**¿SABÍA QUE?**

**Folleto de Recursos para el Mes de la Prevención del Abuso Infantil**

En reconocimiento a que abril es el mes de la Prevención del Abuso Infantil, la Oficina de Protección a los Niños ha creado el folleto de recursos. Este útil folleto de recursos ayudará a las parroquias y escuelas a planear y prepararse para el Mes de la Prevención del Abuso Infantil. También está disponible para personas que deseen saber más sobre el Mes de la Prevención del Abuso Infantil. Para obtener más información, visite [lacatholics.org/child-abuse-prevention-month](https://lacatholics.org/child-abuse-prevention-month).

**April 12-13**

**DID YOU KNOW?**

**Working Together to Prevent Child Sexual Abuse Brochure for 2025-2026**

The Office of Safeguard the Children of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles annually publishes the *Working Together to Prevent Child Sexual Abuse* Brochure, which provides an up-to-date listing of safe environment policies, programs, resources, contact numbers and other important information about how the Archdiocese of Los Angeles is working to prevent child sexual abuse. Copies of the brochures in English, Spanish, Chinese and Korean are available in the parish vestibule or online at [lacatholics.org/departments-ministries/safeguard-the-children](https://lacatholics.org/departments-ministries/safeguard-the-children).

**¿SABÍA QUE?**

**Folleto “Trabajando juntos para prevenir el abuso sexual infantil” del año 2025-2026**

La Oficina de Protección de los Niños de la Arquidiócesis de Los Ángeles publica anualmente el folleto *Trabajando juntos para prevenir el abuso sexual infantil*, que proporciona una lista actualizada de políticas, programas, recursos, números de contacto y otra información importante sobre un entorno seguro en el que la Arquidiócesis de Los Ángeles está trabajando para prevenir el abuso sexual infantil. Copias de los folletos están disponibles en inglés, español, chino y coreano en el vestíbulo parroquial o en línea en [lacatholics.org/departments-ministries/safeguard-the-children](https://lacatholics.org/departments-ministries/safeguard-the-children).

**April 19-20**

**DID YOU KNOW?**

**The Archdiocese continues helping survivors of sexual abuse and their families**

During National Child Abuse Prevention Month, and on behalf of Archbishop José H. Gomez, we affirm our continued commitment to [report](#) allegations of sexual misconduct to law enforcement, [support survivor-victims](#) in their healing journey, and [protect](#) children and the vulnerable. The Archdiocese created a website, [lacatholics.org/protect](https://lacatholics.org/protect) that serves as a comprehensive tool containing resources, programs and services for protecting children and reporting abuse. If you, or someone you know, is a victim of sexual misconduct by someone

affiliated with our Church, please contact law enforcement and the Archdiocese's Victims Assistance Coordinator at (213) 637-7650 or visit [lacatholics.org/reporting-child-abuse](https://lacatholics.org/reporting-child-abuse) for help and support.

### **¿SABÍA QUE?**

#### **La Arquidiócesis sigue ayudando a sobrevivientes de abuso sexual y a sus familias**

Durante el Mes Nacional de Prevención del Abuso Infantil, y en nombre del Arzobispo José H. Gomez, afirmamos nuestro compromiso continuo de [denunciar](#) acusaciones de conducta sexual inapropiada a las autoridades policiales, [apoyar a las sobrevivientes-víctimas](#) en su camino de sanación y proteger a los niños y a los vulnerables. La Arquidiócesis creó un sitio web, [lacatholics.org/protect](https://lacatholics.org/protect), que sirve como una herramienta integral que contiene recursos, programas y servicios para proteger a los niños y denunciar abusos. Si usted, o alguien que conoce, es víctima de conducta sexual inapropiada por parte de alguien afiliado a nuestra Iglesia, comuníquese con las autoridades policiales y con la Coordinación de Asistencia a las Víctimas de la Arquidiócesis al (213) 637-7650 o visite [lacatholics.org/reporting-child-abuse](https://lacatholics.org/reporting-child-abuse) para ayuda y apoyo.

**April 26-27**

### **DID YOU KNOW?**

#### **Gardens of Healing for survivor-victims in all five of the Archdiocese's pastoral regions**

The Archdiocese of Los Angeles has created gardens of healing in each of the Archdiocese's pastoral regions, dedicated to those harmed by sexual abuse, in their family, church or community. Located at St. Camillus Pastoral Center in Boyle Heights (San Gabriel Pastoral Region), Our Lady of the Assumption Parish in Ventura (Santa Barbara Pastoral Region), St. Francis de Sales Parish in Sherman Oaks (San Fernando Pastoral Region), St. Bernadette Parish in Los Angeles (Our Lady of the Angels Pastoral Region), and Our Lady of Refuge in Long Beach (San Pedro Pastoral Region) these gardens offer a sacred space for all those impacted by abuse to seek comfort and solace. In each garden there is a weeping wall and a plaque with a reflection by Archbishop Gomez, which starts with: "Dedicated to all those impacted by sexual abuse in the Church, their communities, their families – may all who visit find some measure of renewal, peace and comfort in doing so." For more information, visit [lacatholics.org/healing-gardens](https://lacatholics.org/healing-gardens).

### **¿SABÍA QUE?**

#### **Jardines de Sanación para sobrevivientes-víctimas en cada de las cinco regiones pastorales de la Arquidiócesis**

La Arquidiócesis de Los Ángeles ha creado Jardines de Sanación en cada una de las regiones pastorales de la Arquidiócesis, dedicados a aquellos perjudicados por el abuso sexual, en su familia, iglesia o comunidad. Ubicados en el Centro Pastoral San Camilo en Boyle Heights (Región Pastoral San Gabriel), Parroquia Nuestra Señora de la Asunción en Ventura (Región Pastoral de Santa Bárbara), Parroquia San Francisco de Sales en Sherman Oaks (Región Pastoral de San Fernando), Parroquia Santa Bernadette en Los Ángeles (Región Pastoral Nuestra Señora de los Ángeles), y Parroquia San Pancracio en Lakewood (Región Pastoral de San Pedro), estos jardines ofrecen un espacio sagrado para que todos aquellos afectados por el abuso busquen consuelo. En cada jardín hay un muro de llanto y una placa con una reflexión del Arzobispo José H. Gomez que comienza con: "Dedicado a todos aquellos afectados por el abuso sexual en la Iglesia, sus comunidades, sus familias – que todos visitantes encuentren alguna medida de renovación, paz y consuelo al hacerlo". Para obtener más información, visite [lacatholics.org/healing-gardens](https://lacatholics.org/healing-gardens).

# 5 Keys to Monitoring Kids Online Activity

By Caitlin Bootsma

Technology is here to stay. Not only is it here to stay, it's everywhere! Televisions, mobile phones, iPads, interactive video games, smart watches, you name it and it's hooked up online.

The following are five starting points for guiding kids to use the internet and technology safely and well. Each family may come up with their own limits around technology use, but every family should think through how they want to approach these areas of monitoring online activity.



**Use Protective Software:** One of the most foundational things you can do to manage what your kids access online is accountability and filter software on all of your online devices. Systems like Covenant Eyes, Bark Home Web Filter, Circle, and options on your router or with your internet provider can help you not only limit what sites and apps kids access and when, but also allow you to see their online activity.

**Share Passwords and "Friend" or follow Your Kids' Accounts:** Many parents establish some ground rules when their kids are old enough to have their own email and social media accounts. These rules may include friending or following them so that you see what's happening on their pages and/or sharing passwords—though it's important to know that many platforms allow them to block some people from seeing everything. Other rules can include only connecting with people they know in real life and not sharing any personal information such as address, phone number, email, or banking information. You can go through their accounts with them to ensure they are as safe as possible.

**Discuss Photo/Video Sharing:** Photo/video sharing should only be done with people they know in real life. Let them know any images they choose to share remain online permanently, and that once they share a photo or video, they can't get it back. If anyone ever asks them to send photos or videos of a sexual nature, they should immediately inform a safe adult.

**Keep Online Activity Visible:** Consider only having your kids use technology in public spaces in the house. This can help reinforce the message that they should not be accessing anything inappropriate and also make it easy for them to talk to you if they encounter anything questionable. Another option to consider is to remove access to electronic devices during bedtime hours. However, keep in mind that children may take electronic devices with them, or may use technology in places apart from your home, which means that regular conversations are important!

**Regularly Talk about Online Activity:** It can be easy for adults and kids to become isolated in their online activity; it can easily become their own world, separate from the family. Make technology use part of your dinner table conversation—did they hear from any friends today? Read an interesting article? See something new they want to watch? Like any other area of their lives, technology is a sphere where you can provide invaluable guidance and feedback.

As we know from our own lives as adults in the digital era, the internet has a lot to offer. It also has a number of risks, including safety, online addictions, wasting time, and more. We have the opportunity to help guide our kids how to use the internet safely and well!

# Artificial Intelligence - Deepfakes and Child Abusers

By Robert Hugh Farley, M.S.

## *Introduction*

Law enforcement has established that preferential-type child abusers, and sometimes situational-type child abusers, almost always maintain a "collection." Those collections generally consist of pornography, child pornography (better known as child sexual abuse materials, or CSAM), and "trophies," or "souvenirs" of the sexual abuse of a child.



Abusers, while perusing their collections, will often manipulate some of the photos or images of children for their own sexual purposes. Sadly, the abuser manipulation or editing of images of children has increasingly become more problematic with the use of technology. In fact, this abuse changed dramatically in 2023/2024 with the use of artificial intelligence, or what is commonly known as "AI."

## *Background*

Child abusers manipulating the images of children in their collections is not a new phenomenon. One early technique was the "cut and paste" method. With scissors, the abuser would cut a child's face or particular body part from a photograph. The clipping would then be pasted onto another photograph, which created a sexually suggestive depiction.

Another image manipulation technique involved child abusers filming videos of themselves in sexually suggestive poses or during a self-sexual activity. The molesters would then edit and combine the suggestive video of themselves into a second video with children, which essentially resulted in a video depicting child sexual abuse.

Additional image manipulation techniques were developed as an unintended consequence of the Internet and social media. By way of example, for many years, parents should be aware of the danger of posting innocent images of their children on social media. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the term "sharenting" was dubbed to describe parents who "over-share" and frequently post numerous images and videos of their children's lives and interactions online. Unfortunately, child abusers troll social media, and the Internet in general, looking for images of children to capture and modify into something lewd and pornographic.

## *Artificial intelligence*

Artificial intelligence, or AI, is technology that enables computers and machines to simulate human intelligence and problem-solving capabilities. AI can perform tasks that would otherwise require human intelligence or intervention.<sup>1</sup>

The Logic Theorist was a program funded by Research and Development (RAND) Corporation, and initially designed to mimic the problem-solving skills of a human. It is considered by many to be the first artificial intelligence program and was presented in 1956 at the Dartmouth Summer Research Project on Artificial Intelligence (DSRPAI), which was hosted by John McCarthy and Marvin Minsky. In this historic conference, McCarthy, imagining a great collaborative effort, brought together top researchers from various fields for an open-ended discussion on artificial intelligence, the term which he coined at the very event.<sup>2</sup>

From 1957 to the 1980's, AI continued to grow and flourish. Computers could store larger amounts of information and became faster, cheaper, and more accessible. Machine learning algorithms also improved, and people got better at knowing which algorithm to apply to their problem. Today we live in the era of "big data," an age in which we have the capacity to collect and sift through huge quantities of information too cumbersome for a person to process. Digital assistants, GPS guidance, autonomous vehicles, and generative AI tools, like Open AI's Chat GPT, are just a few examples of the AI that is exploding in world news, business and in our daily lives.

Of course, people with inappropriate, unsafe or abusive intentions are also taking advantage of the exploding AI technology. This was seen recently in January 2024, when innocent images taken of Taylor Swift were manipulated using an AI tool into "deepfake" sexually explicit content and were then posted online, and viewed over 45 million times before they were taken down. In this same way, new AI technology has become more accessible and made it easier for child abusers to create and share explicit images of children.

### ***AI - Deepfakes and child abusers***

A deepfake is an artificial image or video (or a series of images) generated by a special kind of machine learning called "deep" learning, hence the name, "deepfake."<sup>3</sup> This is much different than the use of apps like Photoshop, Face swap, Snapchat, etc., some of which are designed for amusement and clearly fake. Deepfakes are far more dangerous, as the application of deep learning that is used to produce the false image creates an environment in which humans frequently cannot discern whether the images or videos are real or fake.

Today child abusers are increasingly using publicly-available AI platforms to create and then distribute deepfake CSAM, which is criminally referred to as child pornography. For instance, in May 2024, the FBI arrested a Wisconsin man for creating and distributing approximately 13,000 "hyper-realistic images of nude and semi-clothed prepubescent children," several of whom were involved in sexually explicit conduct. Evidence from the Wisconsin man's laptop allegedly showed he used a popular "Stable Diffusion" AI model, first released in 2022, which turns text descriptions into photo-realistic images. This is only one example of many.

According to a U.S Department of Homeland Security publication, AI allows for the creation of CSAM in a variety of ways:

- Abusers can use AI to take an image of a child and make it appear as though the child is nude or the child is engaged in sexual acts.
- Abusers can use AI to create an image of a child being sexually abused via text prompts.
- Abusers can use AI to teach other abusers how to engage with children online (i.e., grooming).
- Abusers can re-victimize CSAM victims repeatedly, by using AI to edit previously created and shared CSAM to create new CSAM.

### ***Conclusion***

Over the years, law enforcement has repeatedly found that child abusers are on the cutting edge of technology and use that technology for the sexual exploitation of children. If you become aware of any sexually explicit images or videos, please contact the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children's Cyber Tipline at <https://report.cybertip.org/>. You can also contact law enforcement.

# Social Media Rules to Follow with Children

By The VIRTUS® Programs

As an employee or a volunteer within your diocese or organization, there may be times where you need to communicate via technology with children and youth within your ministry or program. This brings us to a question we frequently hear at the VIRTUS® Programs: Do we need to treat in-person interactions more carefully than electronic interactions?



You will certainly hear a different answer to this question depending on whom you ask. When it comes to transparency and monitoring interactions—it's just as important to follow appropriate standards for electronic interactions as it is for in-person interactions. It's important to have transparency and monitoring in our actions as we follow appropriate standards in online environments—because they involve situations that are already inherently more isolated than face-to-face communication. In this way, our in-person interactions serve as our baseline approach, and we incorporate more checks and balances in environments involving technology. Technology such as social media, email, text and texting apps can be great tools that help us as we serve others in ministry, and they can be beneficial in expanding avenues of communication. However, like any tool, communication through technology must be used appropriately and safely, or it can cause significant harm.

Below are some general guidelines for safe adults in ministry, whether you are communicating with youth who are involved in your ministry, or who are simply associated with the ministerial environment. Reviewing these guidelines encourage us to engage with healthy boundaries, help us to be proactive with any type of technology, and help us to model appropriate online behavior for the children in our care.

## DO NOT

- Do not use your personal social media accounts to "Friend" or "follow" children in your ministry.
- Do not email from a personal email address.
- Do not create a ministry-specific account without your organization's permission.
- Do not "troll" any child or youth's personal social media accounts, comment on them, or try to obtain more information about the child based on what they post.
- Do not take or post photos or videos of youth upon any social media account, unless you have approval from the organization (such as for inclusion in a parish or school newsletter), signed, parental permission, and subsequent permission from the child himself/herself.
- Do not "chat" or "private message" or "text" children one-on-one.

## DO

- Read and follow the rules regarding social media usage from your parish, school, diocese or overarching organization. Speak with your organization if they do not have any policy or rules, or if the policy needs to be strengthened.
- Contact children and youth only utilizing social media platforms approved by your organization.
- Request that your organization create a ministry-specific email address that you can utilize to communicate with youth, instead of a personal one.

- Behave with transparency in all electronic interactions, which can mean copying a parent listserv to all interactions, or utilizing an app (approved by your diocese) to text youth so that the content is not coming from your own phone number nor your personal account.
- Keep your own social media profiles and pages tidy and clean; be aware of clothing, what is portrayed by the images you share or are tagged within, perceptions that you could lend to others, be mindful of removing images/jokes involving alcohol, etc. (This is simply a good practice in general, and most useful in case kids do come across your accounts).
- Set your personal accounts to "private" so it isn't as easy for children to "stumble" across your personal material. Your relationship with people in ministry is predicated upon your role, and not your personal life.
- Communicate with youth during appropriate timeframes—the same timeframes that you would generally call a "landline."
- Refer children to your office hours if they contact you "after hours." It helps to clearly state this in advance, that you are available between "xy" hours, and that messages will not receive responses until those office hours.
- Be "friendly" with minors in social media interactions, but avoid being a "peer" type of friend.

Additionally, if you receive a "friend" or "follow" request on a personal social media account from a child or youth, do not accept it. Instead, refer them to the parish, school or program social media account. If you are meeting with a child or youth via a video-based option (such as Zoom), take steps to keep it transparent, such as inviting another adult to participate in the meeting, or having yourself within the sight and hearing of other adults.

One of the most important ways to protect children and youth is to maintain an ongoing dialogue with them about healthy social media interactions. It is also helpful to familiarize yourself with current trends and popular apps, as youth may come to you (one of their safe adults) with questions. Sometimes children may come to you with a disclosure of abuse that happened to them in the past, or that is currently happening—or perhaps is about to happen. We always believe children when this occurs and report it to the appropriate entity. To report any disclosed or suspected sexual exploitation of a child or youth, call the child protective services<sup>1</sup> within the state. If a child is experiencing abuse via social media or other electronic means, you can help them to make a report to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children's CyberTipline<sup>2</sup> or make a report on their behalf. You can also contact law enforcement.

## **Conclusion**

Social media can be a wonderful tool that can enhance communication within a parish, school or other program—as long as it's used appropriately and in a way that promotes healthy boundaries. If you have any questions about your organization's social media policy, please reach out to them directly for more information.

## **Available Resources**

For additional information on technology safety, please visit:

NetSmartz <https://www.missingkids.org/netsmartz/resources>

Common Sense Media <https://www.commonsensemedia.org/articles/social-media>

National Center for Missing and Exploited Children <https://missingkids.org/home>