

PROTECTING GOD'S CHILDREN  
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The Importance of Child Abuse Prevention Month—All Year Long  
by The VIRTUS® Programs

Every April, many organizations and communities observe Child Abuse Prevention Month, a time devoted to renewing our shared commitment to safeguarding children and youth. For churches, schools, sports programs, and other youth-serving environments, this month serves as a tangible reminder that keeping young people safe is not just about “checking off a box” for compliance or meeting minimum standards. Rather, it’s about cultivating and maintaining cultures of safety within each program serving children and youth. Even if you’re reading this outside of April, the message of Child Abuse Prevention Month remains just as important every single day – *protecting children and youth from harm is an ongoing privilege for all adults, regardless of our individual roles.*



Child Abuse Prevention Month matters because it highlights the reality that abuse is often hidden or overlooked. Awareness efforts during April (and beyond) bring needed attention to the behavioral indicators of abuse in children and youth, the warning signs of inappropriate behavior of adults (which may be part of a grooming process), and the responsibility adults share in recognizing and reporting concerns. While April shines a spotlight on these efforts, the need for vigilance extends far beyond a single month. Abuse does not follow a schedule, and children require safe, attentive adults throughout every day of the year.

### **Being a Safe Adult**

This month can also be an opportunity for all adults to pause and reflect on their own behavior, and whether it contributes to a safe environment for children, the vulnerable and anyone else we may serve in our ministries. Even if your role does not involve directly teaching, coaching, mentoring, or supervising children and youth, *you still play a vital part in creating and maintaining a safe environment.* Every adult within an organization—whether an employee or a volunteer—helps shape the culture that protects children.

Children are safer when all adults understand the importance of boundaries, recognize signs of concerning behavior and most importantly communicate when they have any concerns or when something seems amiss. All adults can also serve as role models for healthy and appropriate behavior. When adults act appropriately by maintaining appropriate boundaries, children and youth learn what safe behavior looks like, and how it feels to be around a safe person. Appropriate conduct not only protects young people, it also shows, through consistent behavior that follows the rules, that the adults around the children can be trusted. If you are unsure of what types of behaviors are healthy and appropriate, refer to your organization’s policies and procedures, or ask someone in leadership for guidance. It’s not enough just to have policies and procedures in place, it’s up to all adults to not only be aware of them, but to implement and follow them. Policies alone cannot keep

children safe; people who follow the policies do.

## **Resources**

For additional information regarding what you can do to help protect children and youth during April and all year long, please visit:

Prevent Child Abuse America<sup>1</sup>

Child Welfare Information Gateway<sup>2</sup>

Thorn<sup>3</sup>

National Children's Alliance<sup>4</sup>

The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children<sup>5</sup> (NCMEC)

## **Conclusion**

Ultimately, Child Abuse Prevention Month is far more than a once-a-year reminder. It is an invitation to strengthen a community-wide commitment to protecting children and youth. Whether it is April or any other month, every adult—whether directly involved with youth or not—has an essential role to play in fostering a culture of safety and accountability. By staying vigilant, maintaining boundaries, supporting one another, and speaking up, we contribute to an environment where children can grow, learn, and thrive without fear.

## **References**

1 <https://preventchildabuse.org/>

2 <https://www.childwelfare.gov/preventionmonth/>

3 <https://www.thorn.org/>

4 <https://www.nationalchildrensalliance.org/national-initiatives/>

5 <https://www.missingkids.org/home>

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