

**Special points of interest:**

Signs of Child Abuse  
Tips for Positive Parenting  
News from the Director

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# To Protect

Office of Victim Assistance & Safe Environment

## APRIL IS CHILD ABUSE AWARENESS MONTH

### STOP THE HURT. BEGIN THE HEALING!

April is National Child Abuse Awareness and Prevention Month. The Archdiocese of San Antonio is dedicated to raising awareness about child abuse and neglect by encouraging individuals and all our community to support children and families.

National Child Abuse Prevention and Awareness Month is an opportunity for communities across the country to keep children safe, provide the support families need to stay together, and raise children and youth to be happy, secure, and stable adults.

During the month of April, the Office of Victim Assistance & Safe Environment asks that you renew a commitment to prevent child abuse



# Signs of Child Abuse

Child Abuse is defined as any deliberate harm or maltreatment to a child under the age of 18, and while we are familiar with signs of Child Abuse such as bruises or scars, there are more warning signs to look for. When we are able to recognize these signs, we can better intervene in the life of an abused child. General, overall symptoms of Child Abuse include:

- Changes in behavior – the child may suddenly be aggressive, angry, defiant, hostile or even hyperactive
- The child withdraws from friends, or activities they once loved
- The child appears depressed, anxious, develops sudden fears or an abrupt loss of self-esteem
- The child appears hesitant to go home

Signs of Physical Abuse include, but are not limited to:

- Suspicious injuries that are difficult to be justified by a simple accident:
  - ◊ Injuries could include bruises, fractures, burns, consistent pains and/or aches
  - ◊ Injuries to parts of the child's body that are generally covered by clothing; buttocks, top and inside of legs and arms, the child's back, and the child's genital areas.
  - ◊ Injuries in the shape of a circle, straight line, or in a pattern
- Injuries where the explanation changes
- Lack of medical or dental attention for the injury

Any sexual activity with a child is considered Sexual Abuse. Activities such as fondling, kissing, oral-genital contact, intercourse, or exposing the child to pornography. Signs of Sexual Abuse consist of:

- A child who hesitates or refuses to use the bathroom
- Knowledge of or sexual behavior that is inappropriate for the child's age
- Exhibiting signs of discomfort or pain when sitting, or complaints of genital pain
- Genital discharge or bleeding through pants

Signs of Emotional Abuse include:

- Loss or a lack of self-esteem or self-confidence
- The child appears suddenly socially withdrawn
- The child appears more angry, sad or fearful than before
- The child regresses, or there is a loss of previously acquired developmental skills
- Failing grades and/or a change of behavior at school
- Increase of headaches or stomachaches with no medical reasoning
- Depression

Failing to provide for a child's basic needs such as adequate food, shelter, affection, supervision, education or medical care is considered Neglect. The following are common signs of Neglect:

- Poor hygiene
- Poor growth or weight (either be under or overweight)
- A child who is sick or tired all the time
- Lack of proper clothing or clothing that is inappropriate for the weather
- Hiding food, stealing food, or eating a lot
- Poor school attendance
- Lack of appropriate medical attention

If you observe any of these Signs of Child Abuse or believe a child is in immediate danger, call 1-800-252-5400, [www.txabusehotline.org](http://www.txabusehotline.org), or 911.



# Healing the Hurt

Due to the long lasting and devastating effects of child abuse, many survivors feel isolated. However, survivors are not alone in this experience. Though the effects of abuse may vary from individual to individual, there is a shared experience. That shared experience, if used the right way, can become a tool for healing. For that reason, the Archdiocese of San Antonio is proud to have become a partner with the Maria Goretti Network, a support group for all victims of abuse.



The Maria Goretti Network was co-founded by Miguel Prats, a survivor of clergy abuse, to provide a spiritual approach towards healing. The group believes that the healing powers of Jesus is essential for a full recovery from abuse. Miguel's journey towards healing led him to several support groups that fed off of the participant's anger and rejected the idea that the Church can assist in the healing process. Through spiritual direction and support by Fr. Gavin Vaverek, Miguel developed the idea for the Maria Goretti Network.

The support group is named after Maria Goretti, who in 1902, was an 11 year old girl living near Rome. She was approached by her 20 year old neighbor who attempted to sexually assault her. She was able to prevent the rape but was brutally stabbed several times. As she lay dying, in a sign of great compassion, she forgave her attacker and stated "I forgive him... and I want him with me in heaven forever."

While in prison, her attacker received a vision of Maria forgiving him for his attack. From that moment on he turned his life around repented for his crimes. After serving 27 years in prison, he begged Maria's mother for forgiveness and eventually became a Franciscan lay brother. In 1950, Maria Goretti was named the youngest saint.

The power of forgiveness is the foundation for the Maria Goretti Network. Forgiveness does not excuse the abuse, but forgiveness is the way towards healing. Hate and anger feed off of each other and prevents a full recovery. Forgiveness is not an easy process, it takes time and prayer. That is the purpose of the support group; to assist in the healing process through Jesus Christ.

Within the Archdiocese of San Antonio, the Maria Goretti Network meets on the third Wednesday of the month at St. Peter Prince of the Apostles located at 111 Barilla Place. Meetings begin at 7:00pm. For more information you can contact the Office of Victim Assistance & Safe Environment at 210-734-7786, or Miguel Prats at 713-851-3708.



## Blue Ribbon Awareness Campaign

Show support and share awareness by **STANDING UP FOR CHILDREN!**

Please place your order from OVASE for one free promotional item for each child at your parish or school. We have pencil bags and backpacks from previous years for children, and Fiesta Medals for Teachers, Educators, Catechists.

# Tips for Positive Parenting

Positive Parenting focuses on parents communicating clear, reasonable expectations to their children. Parents utilize praise and reinforcement to get the desired behaviors from the child. When Parents utilize this “positive” view, it helps foster a child’s individual personality and creates an environment where the child is viewed as a unique individual, just like Mom and Dad! Positive Parenting shifts the focus from using shame as a means of shaping behavior and controlling children, to a new perspective where Parents help guide children to control themselves.



So now that you know what Positive Parenting is, how do you get started? The following are some simple tips for Positive Parenting:

**Be a good Role Model** – Your child learns from the example you set. Children are natural observers. They are constantly soaking in their environment and will easily re-enact what they see those closest to them do.

**Give your child praise and hugs, and say, “I love you” often** – Children never get tired of affection from parents or caregivers! Praise them, and praise them often. Catch them being good! Hugs and “I love you” are worth their weight in gold to children. Fill their cups with love, every chance you get!



**Set simple rules and consequences, and enforce them consistently** – Children crave structure. Provide simple rules appropriate for the child’s age, and consequences for when rules are broken. Enforce these simple rules and consequences every time. Your child will understand that rules are a part of life and are needed to ensure order and safety.

**Discipline fairly, firmly and from a place of Love** – They key to discipline is to help the child understand to obey rules or a code of behavior. Figure out which discipline techniques work for your individual child and use positive, loving, firm methods.

**Always show respect for your child’s thoughts and feelings** – Children learn respect and how to respect from parents and caregivers. Show them that the thoughts and feelings they have matter. Listen to them, allow them to healthily express any and all feelings or thoughts.

**Spend a lot of time with your child, no matter how busy you are** – We are busy! Between work, family, and life in general, it is chaotic. Slow down and color that coloring sheet with your child. Play a

board game. Go on a walk. Have that ice cream cone, or simply laugh and giggle with them on the couch!

**Know what’s going on in your child’s life, both at school and with friends** – Be involved. Know who your children’s friends are, their teachers, coaches, anyone! Create an environment where your children share daily details of their lives.

**Work on challenges as a family** – Conduct regular family meetings. Allow children to voice any concerns or add their input. This lets them know that they are a valued member of the family.

**Hold your child accountable** – If your child gets in trouble, let your child deal with the consequences. The only way anyone can grow is if they are able to make mistakes and learn from them. Sit and talk with your child throughout the situation.



**Focus on the goal** – In Positive Parenting the emphasis is on focusing on what you want the child to do. Instead of saying, “Don’t run!” try, “Walk slowly”. Just a simple matter of changing our tone as parents. Focus on the positive desired behavior.

**Encourage daily learning outside of school** – Utilize every “Teachable Moment” you can! Have children who are learning to read, read billboards out loud as you drive. Have children count how many trees they see on your walk. Let them help prepare meals, children make excellent measurement helpers and recipe readers!

**Make sure your child gets enough healthy foods, exercise, and sleep daily** – Set out healthy, nutritious snacks. Ensure well-rounded meals are served. Encourage at least 30 minutes of activity daily for you and your child. Send your child to bed at a decent hour to ensure they get the proper amount of sleep for their age.

**Keep your sense of humor and manage stress in healthy ways. If you feel overwhelmed, arrange for some outside help** – We cannot survive the stressors of parenthood if we can’t laugh about it!



Find ways to cope with stress; exercise, read, go for a drive with the radio on full blast! Take care of yourself to ensure you’re caring for your child. We cannot raise children without our Village. Utilize your Village, whether it is family, friends, Church family, Sports family, just be sure to ask for help when you need it.

# Scheduled Training



**5th** St. Paul Community Center-Annex  
6pm-7pm Safe Environment Training

**19th** St. Paul Community Center-Annex  
6pm-7pm Safe Environment Training



**3rd** St. Paul Community Center- Annex  
6pm-7pm Safe Environment Training

**11th** St. Paul Community Center—Annex  
9:30am-4pm New Facilitator Training

**17th** St. Paul Community Center—Annex  
6pm-7pm Safe Environment Training

## THE DIRECTOR'S CUT

I would like to introduce everyone to Storie Arredondo, the new Associate Director for The Office of Victim Assistance & Safe Environment. She started in early March and has a great deal of experience working with abuse survivors and training. Storie has a great attitude and is willing and able to take on the challenge of working in this ministry. If you get an opportunity, please welcome Storie to the team.

Once again we are in the Easter season and Child Abuse Prevention Month. It's incredible that these two important events fall at the same time. This time of renewal gives us an opportunity to reflect on the sacrifice that our Savior made and the strength of his rebirth.

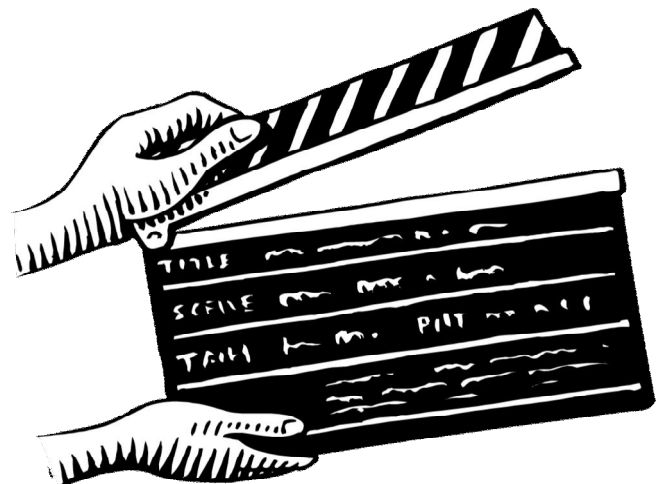
Yet, during this happy time we also have to reflect on the children that have sadly paid a price due to abuse and neglect. This renewal of faith and spirit is also a time for us to continue our fight against child abuse. Use this month to get the word out on abuse. Take advantage of the resources we have available. We have posters for your parish/school and we have other items to give to the children and youth.

Take time to look at this website from the USCCB:  
<http://usccb.org/issues-and-action/child-and-youth-protection/resources/child-abuse-prevention-month-resources.cfm>

Look through those resources and add a few lines to your parish bulletin or your school newsletter. Make a handout to parents. Be Active!!! This is your month to shine. If you need help, or suggestions do not be hesitant to call or email.

We are very proud to announce that we just received \$35,000 from the Archbishop's Appeal. We will use these funds to enhance our resources to train adults and children on abuse prevention. So give us a call to find out what new items we have for your parish or school. If you know of any other materials you need, please let us know.

The Archdiocese of San Antonio continues to grow and flourish because of your work in this ministry. We are all working towards a goal where everyone is safe from harm.





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