

**Special points of interest:**

Virtus: New Training Program for Adults

"News from the Director"

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# To Protect

Office of Victim Assistance &  
Safe Environment

## October 2016: Safe Environment Education Days

Every October the Archdiocese of San Antonio promotes Safe Environment Education Days (S.E.E.D.s). SEEDs is an opportunity for all parishes and Catholic schools to promote child abuse prevention through education.

As an OVASE facilitator remember to always utilize educational materials that are fun, enthusiastic, and joyful for our youth. The Office of Victim Assistance & Safe Environment has many materials that can help with teaching the youth about child abuse prevention. Utilizing DVDs, coloring books, workbooks, and music help our teachers educate our children and youth. Making the information we teach relevant to all youth and parents will make the curricula most effective. Virtus bulletins can also provide additional information on topics such as bullying, abuse, and violence. These bulletins are sent to all facilitators on a monthly basis. Starting early helps kids to feel confident as they grow to reach out to trusting adults in their lives. Listen to children and address fears providing helpful safety tips. Always create an open environment, where kids feel free to express themselves. Communicate your Catholic values and be honest, patient, and use everyday learning opportunities to talk to youth.

Lastly, place your orders with Norma at [ovase@archsa.org](mailto:ovase@archsa.org) or call (210) 734-7786 for a free item for each student enrolled in religious education or Catholic School.



## Virtus-Protecting God's Children for Adult Training Implemented

The Archdiocese of San Antonio Office of Victim Assistance & Safe Environment has implemented the nationally recognized program Protecting God's Children for Adults from Virtus. This new system will give all Safe Environment Facilitators the tools to maintain better records of adults who are trained on child abuse prevention. This program contains live training as well as online training. This will help to ensure that everyone gets trained. Virtus contains two videos which include real life stories of victims of sexual abuse as well as stories of sex offenders. Many facilitators have commented that the videos gives the audience a true connection to the impact of abuse on children. This training program makes the education process very easy for the facilitator. In the future, OVASE will be able to implement the training for children as well as combine the Virtus records with the Criminal Background Check records and Sexual Misconduct records. This will give volunteers a one stop shop to ensure compliance with the *The Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*. OVASE has had several trainings on Virtus for facilitators and have several upcoming trainings. Please log on to [www.archsa.org](http://www.archsa.org) click on Child Protection and follow the registration process as a new Virtus user. You can sign up for a facilitator training and we will give you all the details on how to implement the new program. Thanks again to all of our dedicated volunteers who continue to minister our community on child abuse prevention.

## Monitoring Ministries to Keep Youth Safe

Several years ago a Safe Environment Coordinator noticed a man sitting in the parish courtyard. She simply said hello and asked if he needed prayer or anything she could help him with. He became very nervous and began to walk away as she asked his name. The next week a child approached the Coordinator who was also the parish DRE and told her a man approached her and tried asking her a few personal questions. The teen did not respond and went to tell her teacher. The teacher then told the DRE. They realized after asking the teen to describe the man that he was the same person the DRE had seen the week before. The DRE and Father walked the parish grounds and found the person again sitting in the same area near the classrooms. They decided to report to the authorities and the police were able to search the persons name and he was a registered sex offender. He was told that he could attend mass but could not hang out outside before or after mass as a safety measure. The coordinator had all the teachers speak to the children about child safety and to report any further incidents. It was the precautions taken by the DRE and teen to speak out when they saw a situation that did not seem safe. With this story in mind it is important to always monitor ministries and report any suspicious activity in order to keep our youth safe. If you have any questions about monitoring ministries safety tips please contact OVASE and we are happy to assist.

# Stop Victim Blaming and Shaming

In today's world it is very hard for people to realize that we are at risk of abuse especially our children. Therefore, many parents cope with the issue of abuse by putting the blame on the victim so that they can feel safer. Trying to find an easy answer to such horrible things happening to innocent children, we point the finger at those who are suffering the most-the parents of the abused child or the child. We are quick to make public judgments which tends to re-victimize the child.

Working with parents of abused children and children who are victims of abuse you realize that not every person responds to abuse the same way. All parents make mistakes and don't always take the appropriate action in these circumstances. We always assume that parents will ALWAYS protect their child from harm. However, when the abuser is living in the home of the child, the relationships can cause decision making to be much more difficult. Regardless of the decisions that children make or their parents it never gives an adult the right to abuse them in any situation. The focus really needs to be on the person causing the abuse. Always remember that abusers are usually master manipulators. They are skilled at developing relationships and building trust from families and children. You can be the best parent in the world and your child is still at risk of abuse.

Several years ago I worked at a rape crisis center and my job was to educate adolescents in schools about abuse. As an advocate and educator I have always raised my children to be aware of the dangers of abuse and how to react if they ever find themselves at risk. A coworker also spoke to his children about the dangers of abuse. His daughter and niece were at a sleepover with a friend and the friend's dad fondled them and threatened that if they told anyone they would be killed. My coworker's daughter came home and told her father and mother. He was devastated and questioned how this happened. He felt that he had failed his daughter. Unfortunately, we can not prevent every situation from happening. This story is sad, however, the positive is that this young girl knew to tell her parents. She is now a very successful and a loving young women. She is a very positive role model for other children that staying silent is not okay. You must find the courage to speak out and get help. Her parents are strong role models that talking to your children is very important and may not always prevent the abuse but will give our children the skills to stop abuse.

As adult member of the faith community , we must educate ourselves on child abuse. We can create safe environments where child abusers have no place to hide!

# Online Gaming: Beware of Trolls!

Trolls! What is a troll? As a parent, many of us are clueless when it comes to the world of online gaming. Atari and Nintendo were so different than the game systems and online gaming of today.

The term "troll" is someone who instigates arguments or upsets others online by making inflammatory or off-topic comments with the intent to provoke the readers of the comments. According to Virtus, research conducted in 2015 indicated that 76 percent of youth surveyed own a gaming console, 58 percent of those kids play online every day. Youth can have an enjoyable online gaming experience but parents do need to be aware on how to promote healthy interactions through gaming and prevent their children from negative ones.

The best way to help your children is to develop interest in their online activities. Engage in conversations about the games they play online. Also playing with your child can help promote quality time as well as you can explore their world and monitoring without them getting defensive.

Parents can also set limits on the number of hours a child can play online. Having children in other activities is also very important. Children should have other opportunities to socialize not depending on online experiences only. Youth should also be aware that they should always report any behavior to parents that makes them feel bad or uncomfortable. Parents and youth can report at [www.cybertipline.org](http://www.cybertipline.org) or 1-800-843-5678.



# Scheduled Training

## August September October

**30th** St. Paul Community Center-Annex  
1pm-4pm Virtus Facilitator Training

**1st** St. Paul Community Center-Annex  
9:30am-4pm Virtus New Facilitator  
Training

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

**21st** St. Paul Community Center-Annex  
6pm-7pm Safe Environment Training

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

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

## THE DIRECTOR'S CUT

With the start of the new catechetical year, it is time to get Safe Environment training rolling. As a reminder, all those who have consistent contact with children/youth must be trained on abuse prevention. That includes, catechists, cyo coaches, teachers, youth ministers, etc. In a school setting, all adults must be trained.

With Virtus, training is easier and more convenient. Virtus allows for all training to be done online. That has been a major timesaver throughout the Archdiocese. Training can also be done in a more traditional/classroom environment.

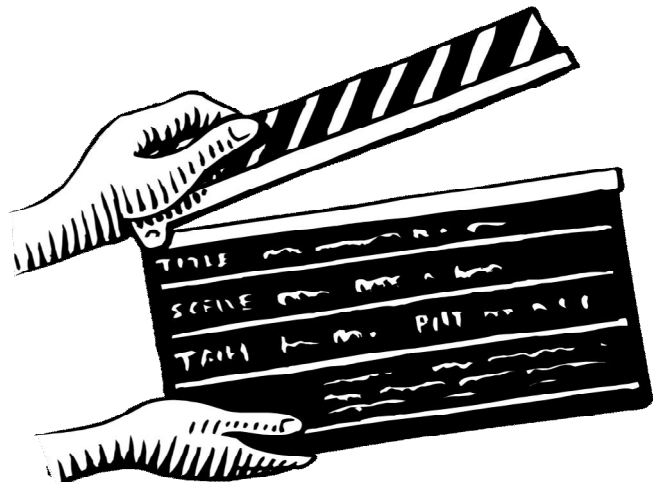
If you are a Safe Environment Coordinator for your parish/school and have not received the Virtus curriculum, contact our office. We have an updated training curriculum and you must be trained in that program. Contact us and we will set-up a training for you.

This year we will be having our onsite audit by the USCCB. Each year every diocese is audited by an independent group to ensure that we are following the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*. The audit dates will be from October 17th through the 19th. Parishes and schools will be audited. Make sure that your location has completed its training and its background checks. Give us a call if you have any questions.

It is sad to announce that Tracie Enriquez has stepped down from her role as the Associate Director for the office. Her last day for OVASE was on August 12th. We thank her for her hard work within this ministry and we wish her well in her new endeavor.

Thank you,

-Steve Martinez





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