

To Protect

**Office of Victim Assistance
& Safe Environment
Archdiocese of San
Antonio**



Special points of interest:

Christmas & the child of Divorce

Children's Safety during Christmas

Holiday Events for Children in SA

Keeping Jesus in Christmas

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Christmas and the Emotions of a Child of Divorce

Christmas is a hard time of year for children of divorce. Many are splitting time between homes causing their schedules to be disrupted and many are losing their family traditions. What should you expect as you interact with one of these children in the context of your ministry?

If it is a child's first Christmas after the separation or divorce of their parents, you should be prepared for a variety of feelings to be exhibited. Depending on how recent the divorce was, the child may appear to be in shock, or the child may be confused, not sure what their feelings are.

If it has been some time, and the child has begun to process the divorce, you may find some anger feelings emerging in your classes. If the child feels safe with you, then don't be surprised if a lot of anger comes out. Some children will hold their anger in when they are around their parents. They don't want to upset their already stressed and/or angry parents. But, when they get to a safe place and if you have developed a relationship with them, then they will let it all out and express themselves.

With Christmas coming up, help a child in your church pinpoint what anger looks like, sounds like and feels. You will be doing them a big favor when you can help them before Christmas Day. Hopefully they will be ready and able to really enjoy the true meaning of Christmas.

For children who are not struggling with a family breakup, Christmas is an exciting time of the year. Christmas may be a time when they can stay up late, they don't have to go to school, there are visits with relatives (who often spoil them), not to mention presents and candy. As people who work with children from all backgrounds, we want them to find the true meaning of Christmas. Most of you will go overboard trying to relay the story of the baby Jesus and his humble birth with special lessons and activities. There will be special Christmas musicals; special holiday parties or celebrations.

We want ALL kids to come to church and enjoy the specialness of this time of year. If you are aware of what is happening in the life of a child of divorce, you are better equipped to make it a special time for him or her as well.



Keeping Children Safe during the Holidays

The holiday season is a joyful time of year, but it's also a time of year when you need to be extra-cautious when out and about with your child. Between frenzied trips to the mall for holiday shopping, crowded airports, and holiday parties, it can be hard to keep track of your little one in the crowds. Safely Ever After, Inc., has provided a list of holiday tips to help keep track of your little one in the crowds.

1. Talk to your kids before a family outing. Make a rule that you must always be able to see them & they must always be able to see you.
2. Use the "two giant steps" rule—your kids can never be more than two giant steps away from you. Turn it into a fun game!
3. Teach your kids that if they ever become separated from you, they should look for a "safe stranger" for help. Maybe another Mom with children of her own, a person at a cash register. Designate a meeting place for older children.
4. Tell your child never to leave the mall or store to go looking for you, no matter what anyone tells them. Remind your child that you would never leave until you are reunited.
5. Dress your child in brightly colored clothes to make him easy to spot. Be sure to remember what they are wearing.
6. Establish the "check first" rule with older children. They must always check with you before going anywhere in a public place, even the restroom.
7. Don't treat public facilities as a "convenient babysitter." Do not leave your children alone at video arcades, movie theaters, play areas, or other public places. Predators are known to look for unsupervised kids.

8. Always bring young children into the restroom with you. Look for well-lit restrooms in high traffic areas, or Family restrooms where everyone can enter together at the same time.
9. Statistically, the men's room isn't the safest place for a child to use alone. If you feel comfortable letting your older child, at least 9 years old and older, use the men's room alone, stand outside the door and call in as your child enters, "I'm right out here if you need me." It's a clear signal that there is a parent close by.
10. Discuss age-appropriate safety issues with your child in a calm, non-fearful manner. Replace the word "strangers" with "tricky people".
11. Make sure that your child knows both your cellphone number and, if there is one, your home phone number.



Holiday Events in San Antonio



SANTA'S RANCH : New Braunfels, TX—thru December 30

A drive-thru Christmas Light Park with over 1 million lights, and 100 displays & animations, the one mile drive thru park is seen from the comfort of your vehicle.

SeaWorld's Christmas Celebration : Thru January 6

See San Antonio's favorite park get dressed for the Holidays. Themed shows, hot cocoa, Santa Claus and More! Enjoy SnowWorld, with snowball fighting and sledding. Price included with admission.

LIGHT THE WAY: Univ. of the Incarnate Word— thru Jan.

6 The University comes alive with millions of twinkling lights, drive around or park and walk to enjoy!

A Charlie Brown Christmas: December 20-24

The Magik Theatre returns with the 4th annual production with a faithful stage adaptation, in which The Peanuts Gang discover the true meaning of Christmas.

ZOO LIGHTS: San Antonio Zoo—thru December 31

Stroll under hundreds of thousands of twinkling lights, sipping hot cocoa, roast s'mores and enjoy a light show! Plus visit Santa and enjoy camel rides and an ice skating rink.

San Antonio Riverwalk: thru January 6

Christmas in San Antonio would not be complete without time spent seeing the River Walk dressed in twinkly lights. Enjoy River Boat Caroling thru December 21st.

A Wonderland Christmas: On weekend nights leading up to Christmas, head to Morgan's Wonderland for a special lights and music show, a petting zoo, Santa Claus, and more. Every Thursday—Tuesday evening, the week before Christmas.



5 ways to Keep Jesus in your Christmas Celebrations

Christmas is a magical time of year when decorations line the streets, children are suddenly

behaving and the Post Office struggles to keep up as thousands of gifts move through the mail—but beneath the shiny, flashing winter festivities, Christ quietly calls out to us—Will you respond?

Christmas is not only a time to celebrate family, love and renewal—it's also a time to honor Christ's miraculous birth. Remember, Jesus' birth was a gift to all humanity, thus the reason we offer presents to each other during his birthday celebration.

So how can you keep Christ in Christmas this year? Consider the following suggestions:

Celebrate with Advent Prayers

There are so many reasons to pray each day but pull your family together and share a quick prayer each day as we get closer to Christmas.

Attend Mass

It's hard to find extra time while juggling work, kids, Christmas shopping, meetings and Life in general but it's important to remember to attend Mass. Too many make excuses to avoid Mass but Christmas, the season dedicated to Christ's birth, should be celebrated with Christmas services, Midnight Mass and fellowship with other Catholics.

Listen to REAL Christmas Music

The radio is full of great songs about Jolly Old Saint Nick, flying reindeer, talking snowmen and spreading good cheer.

While there is nothing wrong with these songs, it wouldn't hurt to bring up Jesus' birth and some good Christian vibes with "O Magnum Mysterium," "Salvation is Created" or the classic, "Mary, Did You Know?"

Say "Merry Christmas"

In an ever-growing secular world, many employees are not allowed to say, "Merry Christmas."

Take a stand, enjoy your religious freedoms, and wish people a very Merry Christmas this year. Not everyone may be allowed to respond in kind but your energetic words can more than make up for their silent responses.

Don't be afraid to stand out and wish everyone your interact with this December a Merry Christmas.

Display a Nativity Scene

You don't need to spend hundreds of dollars for a 6-pc blow-up Nativity scene complete with lights and music to display on your lawn. Simply walk into the nearest store and you are guaranteed to find a miniature Nativity, window decal, toy, display or other ornamentation. For more family fun, share the story of the Nativity while making one with your kids! Shoebox scenes are classic bonding activities that will not only help your kids remember the story of Christ's birth, but will serve as a beautiful memory for years to come.

A New Year, A New Commitment

With 2019 approaching, we look back on 2018 and recognize that being a Safe Environment Coordinator is a huge job! Many of you are not full time employees, only part time volunteers. We do recognize that we all have a full plate. We just ask for everyone to take the time during the New Year to re-evaluate their own lives. Ask yourself the following questions: Am I committed to the mission of this Ministry? Do I have the personal and emotional energy that it will require? Do I have the passion to help others? Praise God if you answered YES! We ask that you pray for our Ministry's continued support and strengthen your commitment in 2019. If you answered NO, to any of the questions, then we ask that you pray for guidance. The Lord will help you make the decision if this is the Ministry for you. You can even call our office and we will offer guidance. We ask those who are in this Ministry to "re-commit" to the mission of protecting children as we start a new year.

Our office will support each and every one of you in 2019 in any way possible. We will continue to be available by phone, email, or by personal visits. Whatever your needs are, we will do our best to meet them. That is our commitment to you this New Year!

Scheduled Training

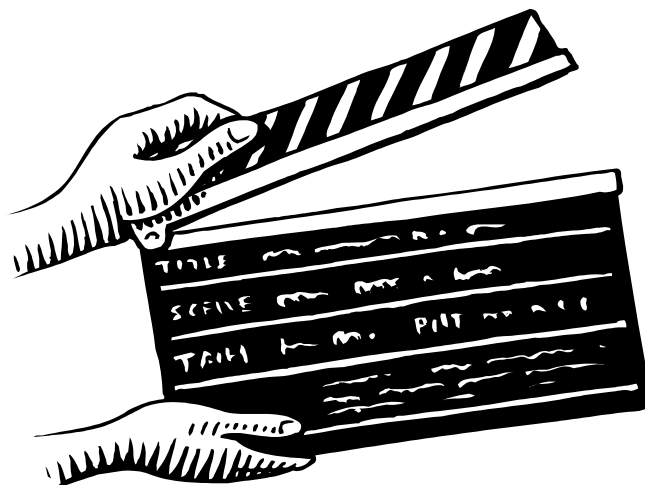
Please contact your Safe Environment Coordinator at your Parish for a list of Scheduled Training.

THE DIRECTOR'S CUT

This has been an amazing and busy year. It took us a while but we have finally settled into our new location. There were a few rough months in the beginning, however, we have finally got everything in working order. In 2018, we saw the growth of our training program through Virtus. As of now, over 20 thousand people have been trained using Virtus. Those are great numbers. Through Virtus, clergy are being trained using Critical Conversations while employees and volunteers are being trained using Protecting God's Children.

As Virtus has taken the bulk of training, OVASE has been able to focus on pastoral services. We have been able to provide individual, family, and couples therapy to those in need. Please pass along our information to anyone you come across who need someone to talk to. We have a male and female available to provide services and all of our services are free.

This year also saw another scandal within the church. This one occurred in Pennsylvania, however, the effects were felt throughout the country. Within the Archdiocese, we saw the number of survivors of clergy abuse skyrocket. The Archdiocese announced that in January that we will be going public with every validated accusation.



As we look forward to 2019, we have a lot of ideas brewing. There will be changes to the training program and the new Sexual Misconduct Policy will be approved. We will keep you informed of all changes and updates as soon as they are ready. Thank you so much for all of your hard work and determination through this ministry.