DATE: March 25, 2020
TO: Pastors, Principals, & Directors of Faith Formation
FROM: Office for the Protection of Children & Vulnerable Adults
RE: April - Child Abuse Prevention Month Toolkit

The Office for the Protection of Children & Vulnerable Adults (OPCVA) thanks you for your continued commitment to the safety and well-being of our children and most vulnerable amidst the COVID-19 outbreak, which has led to unparalleled shifts in our daily lives, from the way we live out our faith to social norms that we are all trying to comprehend and navigate. As we remain united together in prayer, we pray for the health and safety of you and your loved ones as the COVID-19 pandemic affects each of us directly and the world around us on a daily basis.

We also wanted to take this opportunity to share a sensitive reminder as it relates to our current reality. Research and experts alike warn that times of heightened stress and isolation can trigger abuse disclosures or lead to victim/survivors requiring more care and support. Furthermore, children are at a greater risk for abuse and neglect amid the COVID-19 pandemic due to the dangers of isolation, inadequate or non-existent childcare, and increased parental stress triggered by growing economic instability and housing insecurity, which will continue to be exasperated under current circumstances.

Now is the time to remain vigilant in order to protect our youth and so many vulnerable populations. The concerns noted above underscore the need to be able to recognize abuse, especially in our parish and school communities, as well as the ability to report instances or suspicions of abuse to both the diocese and civil authorities. Services critical to children's safety, and victim/survivor’s well-being must continue to be made available despite the outbreak, and we all play a crucial role in this effort in our local communities.

In recognizing the power of prevention, we are reminded that the healing journey for child sexual abuse victim/survivors, and their families, is a long and arduous one. The abuse of our most vulnerable is contrary to our faith in Jesus Christ, and to the teachings of the Church. Each of us, as members of our Catholic community, can contribute to their healing by remembering all those impacted by childhood sexual abuse in our prayers.

As we look towards April and the blessing of Easter, we remind you that April is also National Child Abuse Prevention Month. This is a vital and meaningful time to highlight the importance of youth protection. Let us join in unity as brothers and sisters in Christ by showing our support for protecting God’s children, through our recognition of Child Abuse Prevention Month within our local parish and school communities. To assist you in this effort, we have developed an online toolkit to promote child abuse prevention resources for use by parishes, teachers, and caring individuals or families:

Child Abuse Prevention Website: https://www.dsj.org/april-is-child-abuse-prevention-month/
The Catholic Church has long embraced this nationally recognized movement as a time to uplift the importance of protecting children from abuse and to raise awareness that child abuse is preventable, as we reaffirm our work to help make great childhoods happen locally and nationwide. While dioceses work year-round to prevent abuse, during the month of April, a special emphasis is placed on the importance of learning how to protect all children from the evils of abuse.

For your convenience, a copy of some of the resources available on our Child Abuse Prevention website are available to you in this memorandum. These resources include:

1. Activities to show our visible commitment to preventing child abuse (Pg. 3)
2. Ways to be “United Together in Prayer” (Pg. 4 & 5)
   ▷ Nine Day Novena for Protection & Healing of Abuse April 18th - 26th
   ▷ United Together in Prayer April 26th
   ▷ Rosary for Healing
3. Sample Petitions for April (Pg. 6)
4. Bulletin Inserts (Pg. 7 - 8)
5. USCCB Resources (Pg. 9)

We hope this information will be helpful to you and your community. As always, if you, your staff or parishioners have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact our office without hesitation for further assistance.

Should you need anything, we are available to you by email and by phone - and in person, as appropriate, while respecting social distancing. Please be assured of our prayers for you and your families during these trying times.

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CAP Kick-Off: Wear Blue Day Friday, April 3 - Sunday, April 5, 2020

We observe Wear Blue Day to make a visible commitment to preventing child abuse and in support of making great childhoods happen nationwide by wearing blue.

http://www.thecapcenter.org/help/events/child-abuse-prevention-month-april

Faith Communities!

Friday, April 3 – Sunday, April 5, 2020

Wear your blue suede shoes and anything else blue to your place of worship in honor of Child Abuse Prevention Month. Be a part of the national movement just for kids, and don’t forget to post a photo of you and your family, friends, and colleagues wearing your true blue attire on Facebook and Twitter all month long using #wearblue4kids.

Additional Activities - Make a Visible Commitment to CAP at Parishes and Schools

Pinwheels for Prevention: In 2008, Prevent Child Abuse America introduced the pinwheel as the new national symbol for child abuse prevention. Show your support for our nation’s children and help get your children involved in the movement by making your own pinwheel display! You can go all out and create a Pinwheel Event, which can be anything to bring a solemn reminder of child abuse prevention efforts, such as a prayer service, or the planting of a Pinwheel Garden. Download Pinwheel Template & Instructions | Pinwheel Coloring Sheet

Create a “blue ribbon tree” at your parish or school, encouraging children and adults to tie a blue ribbon around a specific tree (the trunk and the branches) in honor of child abuse prevention. You could also have each person say a prayer for those who have been abused as they tie on their ribbon.
“United Together in Prayer”

**Novena for Protection & Healing of Abuse April 18th - 26th**

*English Download | Spanish Download*

Every April, Catholic parishes and schools across the United States participate in National Child Abuse Prevention Month. While dioceses work year-round to prevent abuse, during this month a special emphasis is placed on the importance of learning how to protect the vulnerable from this evil.

Together, for the next nine days, let’s pray that the vulnerable are protected from abuse, and that survivors of abuse may be accompanied on their paths to healing.

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**Novena for Protection and Healing from Abuse**

**Intercessions**

**Day 1:** May the most vulnerable be protected from all types of abuse and exploitation.

**Day 2:** May those who have been sexually abused receive comfort and healing.

**Day 3:** May those who work with children and young people be vigilant in protecting them from harm.

**Day 4:** May those who provide help for the abused act with wisdom and compassion in their healing ministries.

**Day 5:** May all families strive to provide safe and nurturing environments for children and young people.

**Day 6:** May all those who have committed abuse acknowledge the harm they have done, repent, and accept justice that ultimately comes from God.

**Day 7:** May those who have been abused receive the courage to tell their story, and may they be believed and supported.

**Day 8:** May Church leaders, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, promote justice and healing for survivors of abuse.

**Day 9:** May our Holy Father, Pope Francis, fulfill his role as good shepherd and protect the most vulnerable in his flock.

**Prayers**

*Solemnity of Pentecost (Year B)*

*Our Father, Hail Marys, Glory Be, Prayer for Healing*

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God of endless love, ever caring, ever strong, always present, always just: You gave your only Son to save us by his blood on the cross.

Gentle Jesus, shepherd of peace, join to your own suffering the pain of all who have been hurt in body, mind, and spirit by those who betrayed the trust placed in them.

Hear the cries of our brothers and sisters who have been gravely harmed, and the cries of those who love them.

Soothe their restless hearts with hope, steady their shaken spirits with faith. Grant them justice for their cause, enlightened by your truth.

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 in justice. We ask this through Christ, our Lord. Amen.
Blue Sunday - April 26, 2020

On April 26, 2020, churches of all faiths are asked to join together in a day of prayer to demonstrate their appreciation to those who help abused or neglected children, and to support children and families who have been affected by abuse.

Please join in solidarity to pray for victim/survivors of child sexual abuse on Sunday, April 26, 2020. You may wish to use the prayer, “A Prayer for Healing,” to be prayed together with your congregation on Blue Sunday. You may make copies of “A Prayer for Healing” from the sample below:

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.

Rosary for Healing and Protection

Together, we can ensure that all are safe from sexual abuse and provide assistance and support to survivors who are on the path to healing. You can help in these efforts by offering your prayers for healing and protection. This rosary will help you to lift up their needs in prayer, offering them to God through Mary who offers her loving protection to all her children.

Schedule a time throughout the month of April to say a Rosary in support of victims/survivors of abuse through prayer:

❖ Rosary for Healing and Protection - Printable Booklet (English)
❖ Rosary for Healing and Protection - Printable Booklet (Spanish)

The following is an example of a reflection from the Rosary’s Sorrowful Mystery, the Agony in the Garden:

“Many victims of child sexual abuse suffer in silence for years, wrestling alone with the agony of their memories and pain. We pray that the Church may always be a place where they can come to share their stories, be received in love and compassion, and be supported on the path to healing.”
Sample Petitions

First Sunday of April 4-5

As we celebrate National Child Abuse Prevention Month, may our commitment to protecting our children and young people from child sexual abuse grow ever stronger in our churches, homes, communities and the world. We pray to the Lord...

Easter Sunday April 11 – 12

That the Easter promise of new life will fill the hearts and minds of those who suffer in body, mind or spirit. We pray to the Lord...

Third Sunday of April 18-19

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...

We pray that our bishops, church leaders, and the faithful will promote justice and healing for victims and survivors of abuse; as we commit to protect the most vulnerable among us, our children, young people and vulnerable adults. We pray to the Lord...

Fourth Sunday of April 25-26

That victims of abuse, in the embrace of the Church, find the joy and peace of the risen Christ. We pray to the Lord...

For all who have suffered sexual abuse; may they find in Jesus the healing comfort they seek. We pray to the Lord...

Additional Petition Ideas

We pray for all victims of abuse around the world, within the church and beyond, that the healing Spirit of God move among them and within them. And that the Church – the People of God – be filled with the same healing spirit, we pray to the Lord...

For parents, mentors, teachers, coaches and all who work with children and young people, that they may look after them with the watchful eye of the shepherd, 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...

For those who have suffered abuse, that they may experience God's profound love for them and God's healing powers, we pray to the Lord...

For those affected by abuse in anyway, that they may have the courage to tell their story, to reach for healing, we pray to the Lord...
April is Child Abuse Prevention Month

Every April, Catholic parishes and schools across the United States participate in National Child Abuse Prevention Month.

The Effects of Abuse

When a child is abused, the effects are grave and can last a lifetime. Some of the most common effects of abuse include:

- Loss of faith and trust in God.
- Post-traumatic stress disorder, psychological distress, and other indirect signs of trauma, such as anxiety, trouble sleeping, chronic stomach pain, and headaches.
- A greater risk of developing behavioral problems, substance abuse, and suicide.

The sense of violation goes deep into a person’s psyche and feelings of anger, shame, hurt, and betrayal can build long after the abuse has taken place.

Steps to Prevent Abuse

Communicate with Your Children

It is extremely important to communicate openly with your children. Let them know that they can talk to you about anything that bothers them. This will help you identify warning signs and grooming behaviors perpetrated by offenders before they escalate to abuse.

Educate Yourself and Your Children on Abuse

Learning how to identify, prevent, and report abuse is key. Parents and guardians should empower their children to protect themselves from harm and to report abuse. Ask your diocesan safe environment coordinator or parish delegate about opportunities for safe environment training.

Identify and Report Warning Signs of Child Abusers

Grooming behaviors are the actions abusers take to project the image that they are kind, generous, caring people, while their intent is to lure a minor into an inappropriate relationship. Offenders can be patient and may groom their victim, his or her family, or community for years.

Some abusers isolate a potential victim by giving him or her undue attention or lavish gifts, while others allow young people to participate in activities which their parents or guardians would not approve, such as watching pornography, drinking alcohol, using drugs, and excessive touching, such as wrestling and tickling. Abusers also often try to isolate their victims from family or friends and encourage their victims to keep secrets from their parents or other caring adults.

Holding Offenders Accountable

To help hold offenders accountable, report all suspected abuse to local public authorities. You can also contact your local diocesan victim assistance coordinator to make a report and seek outreach for the abused.

In accordance with diocesan policy, when a single act of sexual abuse is admitted or established, the offender is to be removed permanently from ministry.

"Let it be clear that before these abominations the Church will spare no effort to do all that is necessary to bring to justice whosoever has committed such crimes . . . To those who abuse minors I would say this: convert and hand yourself over to human justice, and prepare for divine justice."

—Pope Francis, Dec. 21, 2018
Ten Tips for Protecting Children and Offering Outreach to Victims/Survivors

1. **Sexual abuse is about the victim.**
   Many people are affected by abuse but the individual most impacted is the victim who has suffered a violation of trust that can affect his or her entire life.

2. **The residual effects of having been abused can last a lifetime.**
   The sense of violation goes deep into a person’s psyche and feelings of anger, shame, hurt and betrayal can build long after the abuse has taken place. Those who have been abused can heal, but if often takes time, therapy, and the support of loved ones.

3. **No one has the right to have access to children.**
   No one, no matter who they are, has an automatic right to be around children or young people who are in the care of the Church without proper screening and without following the rules.

4. **Common sense is not all that common.**
   Dioceses, schools, parishes, and especially families, must educate themselves and others on how to protect children.

5. **Child sexual abuse can be prevented.**
   It is critical to build safety barriers around children and young people to keep them from harm—such as protective guardians, codes of conduct, background evaluations, policies and procedures, and safety training programs.

6. **Feeling heard leads toward healing.**
   Relief from hurt and anger often comes when one feels heard, when one’s pain and concerns are taken seriously, and a victim/survivor’s suffering, pain, and anger are acknowledged.

7. **You cannot always predict who will be an abuser.**
   Experience shows that most abuse is committed by someone who has gained the trust of a victim/survivor and his/her family.

8. **There are behavioral warning signs of child abusers.**
   Some abusers isolate a potential victim by giving him or her undue attention or lavish gifts, others allow young people to participate in activities which their parents or guardians would not approve, such as watching pornography, drinking alcohol, using drugs, and excessive touching, such as wrestling and tickling.

9. **People can be taught to identify grooming behavior.**
   Grooming behaviors are the actions which abusers take to project the image that they are kind, generous, caring people, while their intent is to lure a minor into an inappropriate relationship. Offenders can be patient and may groom their victim, his or her family, or community for years.

10. **Background checks are important.**
    Background checks in churches, schools and other organizations keep predators away from children both because they scare off some predators and because they uncover past actions which should ban an adult from working or volunteering with children.
Additional Resources from the USCCB

A Prayer for Healing
Prayer Card Download: BILINGUAL

Keeping Children & Teens Safe Online
Download: ENGLISH | SPANISH

Five Ways to Protect Your Children from Sexual Abuse
Download: ENGLISH | SPANISH

Warning Signs of Abuse in Minors
Download: ENGLISH | SPANISH

USCCB Youth Protection Norms
Download: ENGLISH | SPANISH

Reporting Abuse & Sexual Misconduct

Anyone who has reason to believe or suspects that a child has been or is being abused should report their suspicions to civil authorities and then to the diocese’s Office for the Protection of Children & Vulnerable Adults (OPCVA) at 408-983-0113. Parish and school personnel, including clergy, are “Mandated Reporters” and are required by state law to report abuse, even a reasonable suspicion of abuse, to civil authorities (Law Enforcement or Child Protective Services).

If an adult victim/survivor is looking to report a case of Clergy Abuse, we encourage them to:
1. First contact their local civil authorities (Law Enforcement)
2. Once a report is filed with the local civil authorities, individuals are encouraged to contact the diocese’s Office for the Protection of Children & Vulnerable Adults at 408-983-0113.

Online Reporting - Available in English, Spanish, & Vietnamese Languages

For online submission, please click on links below, by preferred language, to access our secure third-party reporting server designated for this purpose: https://opcva.ethicspoint.com or contact our toll-free 24-hour reporting hotline at 844-372-1691. Reporting Links: English | Español | Tiếng Việt

Reports to the diocese are accepted by either online submission or by phone. All reports are confidential to protect the rights of the victim.

Thank You for Your Support!