

*April is Child Abuse Prevention Month  
Sunday, April 24, 2022 is Blue Sunday National Day of  
Prayer for Abused Children*

*This resource guide & enclosed posters are a benefit of your BBE membership. Please share these materials as you feel appropriate with your congregation, but especially with parents, grandparents, Christian educators, youth workers & child care providers. All material is new - no repeats from previous years. Also included are three timely information sheets (see numbers 10, 11, 12 below.)*

*Mary Ann Hvizdos  
Program Director*

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*With special thanks to our Quatrini Law Group colleagues for underwriting the duplicating costs of these packets!*



## *Suggested Newsletter or Bulletin Announcements*

### April is Child Abuse Prevention Month

April is Child Abuse Prevention Month. It began in 1983 when former President Ronald Reagan became aware of the scope of child abuse and neglect in America. Sadly, since that first Child Abuse Prevention Month, the number of children who suffer either abuse or neglect has increased - not decreased. According to a U.S. Department of Health & Human Services 2022 publication, during 2020 about 3.9 million referrals were made to child protective services concerning the safety and well-being of approximately 7.1 million children. Last year (2021), an estimated 618,000 children were found to be victims of child abuse or neglect in our country. In Pennsylvania, 73 children died from their abuse injuries during 2020.

(Name of congregation) in cooperation with the faith-based organization, Blessed Be Educators will provide members of our congregation with updated prevention materials and resources; and prayers for your private prayer time.

### Blue Sunday National Day of Prayer for Abused Children

April 24, 2022

On the last Sunday of April, churches across our nation are asked to remember and pray for the millions of children who suffer from abuse or neglect; and also to pray for the educators, child caregivers, social workers, physicians, etc. – everyone who rescues and cares for them. In 2022, according to a federal government publication, 618,000 children were found to be victims of child abuse or neglect here in America. (Name of congregation) will participate in the 28<sup>th</sup> Annual Blue Sunday National Day of Prayer for Abused Children by offering special prayers for healing from the evils of abuse or neglect. One child of God who suffers either is one too many.



# Know the 10 Signs of Child Abuse



*Be aware that some children may show ALL or NONE of these signs.  
Trust your instincts. Suspicion of abuse is enough of a reason to take action.*

- 1. Changes in behavior.** Abuse can lead to many changes in behavior. Abused children often appear scared, anxious, depressed, withdrawn or more aggressive.
- 2. Returning to earlier behaviors.** Abused children may display behaviors shown at earlier ages, such as thumb-sucking, bedwetting, fear of the dark, or fear of strangers. For some children, even loss of acquired language or memory problems may be an issue.
- 3. Fear of going home.** Abused children may express apprehension or anxiety about leaving school or about going places with the person who is abusing them or exhibit an unusual fear of a familiar person or place.
- 4. Changes in eating.** The stress, fear, and anxiety caused by abuse can lead to changes in a child's eating behavior, which may result in weight gain or weight loss.
- 5. Changes in sleeping.** Abused children may have frequent nightmares or have difficulty falling asleep and as a result may appear tired or fatigued.
- 6. Changes in school performance and attendance.** Abused children may have difficulty concentrating in school or have excessive absences, sometimes due to adults trying to hide the child's injuries from authorities.
- 7. Lack of personal care or hygiene.** Abused and neglected children may appear uncared for. They may present as consistently dirty and have severe body odor, or they may lack sufficient clothing for the weather.
- 8. Risk-taking behaviors.** Young people who are being abused may engage in high-risk activities such as using drugs or alcohol or carrying a weapon.
- 9. Inappropriate sexual behaviors.** Children who have been sexually abused may exhibit overly sexualized behavior or use explicit sexual language and may exhibit symptoms of a genital infection.
- 10. Unexplained injuries.** Children who have been physically abused may exhibit unexplained burns or bruises in the shape of objects. You may also hear unconvincing explanations of a child's injuries.



ChildSafe

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*Our mission is to restore dignity, hope, and trust  
to children traumatized by abuse and neglect.*

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## **Warning Signs of Child Abuse & Neglect**

This information is provided by the Massachusetts Department of Children & Families  
Retrieved from <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/warning-signs-of-child-abuse-and-neglect>

<b>Signs of Physical Abuse</b>	<b>Signs of Possible Neglect</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Bruising, welts or burns that cannot be sufficiently explained, particularly bruises on the face, lips and mouth of infants or on several surface planes at the same time</li><li>• Unusual bruising patterns that reflect the shape of the instrument used to cause injury (e.g., belt, wire hanger, hairbrush, hand, human bite marks)</li><li>• Clusters of bruises, welts or burns, indicating repeated contact with a hand or instrument</li><li>• Injuries on the body where children usually do not get hurt (e.g., the torso, back, buttocks, thighs, neck)</li><li>• Burns that are insufficiently explained, e.g., cigarette burns<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◦ Immersion burns including marks indicating dunking in a hot liquid, including “stocking” and “glove” burns on feet and hands, or “doughnut” shaped burns on buttocks and genitalia</li><li>◦ Rope or restraint burns on the arms, hands, neck or legs</li><li>◦ Dry burns caused by forced contact with a hot surface (e.g., a clothes iron, hair curler, heater or stove)</li></ul></li><li>• Lacerations and abrasions of the lip, eye, or to any part of a child’s face</li><li>• Tears in the tissue of the gums, possibly as a result of force-feeding</li><li>• Laceration or abrasion to external genitalia</li><li>• Absence of hair or hemorrhaging beneath the scalp due to vigorous hair pulling</li><li>• Withdrawn, fearful or extreme behavior</li></ul>	<p><b>Child or Youth</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Shows sudden changes in behavior or school performance</li><li>• Is frequently absent from school or child care</li><li>• Has not received help for physical or medical problems brought to parent or caregiver’s attention</li><li>• Has learning problems (or difficulty concentrating) that cannot be attributed to specific physical or psychological causes</li><li>• Is always watchful, as though preparing for something bad to happen</li><li>• Begs or steals food or money</li><li>• Lacks adult supervision</li><li>• Is consistently dirty and has severe body odor</li><li>• Lacks sufficient clothing for the weather</li></ul> <p><b>Parent or Caregiver</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Denies the existence of, or blames the child for, problems in school</li><li>• Shows little concern for the child</li><li>• Is abusing alcohol or drugs</li><li>• Seems apathetic or depressed</li></ul>



Signs of Possible Sexual Abuse	Signs of Possible Sexual Exploitation or Human Trafficking
<p><b>Perceptible Signs of Sexual Abuse</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difficulty walking or sitting</li> <li>• Pain or itching in the genital area</li> <li>• Torn, stained or bloody underclothing</li> <li>• Bruises or bleeding in external genitalia</li> <li>• Frequent complaints of stomachaches or headaches</li> <li>• Venereal disease</li> <li>• Frequent urinary or yeast infections</li> <li>• Pregnancy</li> </ul> <p><b>Behavioral Signs of Sexual Abuse</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Withdrawal or chronic depression</li> <li>• Inappropriate sex play or premature understanding of sex</li> <li>• Feeling threatened by physical contact, closeness</li> <li>• Promiscuity</li> <li>• Running away from home</li> <li>• Child is “parentified” or overly concerned for siblings</li> <li>• Poor self-esteem, lack of confidence</li> <li>• Peer problems, lack of involvement with friends</li> <li>• Extreme weight change</li> <li>• Suicide attempts or threats; especially with adolescents</li> <li>• Hysteria, lack of emotional control</li> <li>• Sudden school difficulties</li> <li>• Unprovoked cruelty to animals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Instability in life functioning:</b> Youth lacks access to basic needs, including stable shelter, and is unable to engage in activities expected of her/his age</li> <li>• <b>Relationships:</b> Youth’s relationships are concerning, placing him/her at risk or in danger</li> <li>• <b>Finances and belongings:</b> Youth has money or material goods that are incongruent with her/his life circumstances</li> <li>• <b>Use of technology:</b> Youth’s use of internet, cell phone or social media involves social or sexual behavior that is atypical for his/her age</li> <li>• <b>Physical health:</b> Youth has significant health problems related to sexual activity and lack of access to basic needs</li> <li>• <b>Risky behaviors:</b> Youth engages in dangerous or risky behaviors, e.g., spending time with abusive partners or in locations where exploitation is known to occur, running away or staying away overnight, using substances)</li> <li>• <b>Trauma exposure/signs:</b> Youth has been exposed to traumatic circumstances and/or exhibits signs and emotional symptoms of trauma exposure</li> <li>• <b>Coercion and grooming:</b> Youth exhibits behaviors or otherwise indicates he/she is being controlled or coerced by another person</li> <li>• <b>Exploitation:</b> Youth has been exposed to sexual exploitation or victimization</li> </ul>

**To report suspected Child Abuse in Pennsylvania, call the Child Abuse Hotline, ChildLine at 1-800-932-0310**

**To report suspected Human Trafficking, call the National Human Trafficking Hotline, at 1-888 373-7888**

*Handout is provided by Blessed Be Educators as part of our Christian outreach.*

*Visit [www.baidos.net](http://www.baidos.net) for more information*

## **Child Abuse & Neglect Overview**

**Updated April 8, 2021 from American Academy of Pediatrics Publication *Caring for Your Baby and Young Child: Birth to Age 5* 7th ed., 2019.** Retrieved from [healthy children.org](https://www.healthychildren.org/English/Pages/default.aspx), an American of Pediatrics sponsored website. <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/Pages/default.aspx>

Child abuse, also known as maltreatment, is common. It is important to understand and reduce the risks of abuse for your child and be familiar with the signs of abuse and neglect.

Approximately 4 million cases of child abuse and neglect involving almost 7 million children are reported each year. The highest rate of child abuse is in babies less than one year of age, and 25 percent of victims are younger than age three. The majority of cases reported to Child Protective Services involve neglect, followed by physical and sexual abuse. There is considerable overlap among children who are abused, with many suffering a combination of physical abuse, sexual abuse, and/or neglect.

### **Types of abuse and neglect**

Physical abuse occurs when a child's body is injured as a result of hitting, kicking, shaking, burning, or other show of force. One study suggests that about 1 in 20 children has been physically abused.

Sexual abuse is any sexual activity that a child cannot understand or consent to. It includes acts such as fondling, oral-genital contact, and genital and anal intercourse. It also includes exhibitionism, voyeurism, and exposure to pornography. Studies suggest that up to one in five girls and one in 20 boys will be sexually abused before they are 18 years old. More than 90 percent of child sexual abuse victims know their abuser.

Child neglect can include physical neglect (failing to provide food, clothing, shelter, or other physical necessities), emotional neglect (not providing love, comfort, or affection), and medical or educational neglect (not providing access to needed medical care or education), or supervisory neglect (failure to appropriately supervise). Psychological or emotional abuse results from all of the above, but also can be associated with verbal abuse, which can harm a child's self-worth or emotional well-being.

### **Risk factors**

Most child abuse occurs within the family. Risk factors include parental depression or other mental health issues, a parental history of childhood abuse or neglect, parental substance abuse, and domestic violence.

Child neglect and other forms of maltreatment are also more common in families living in poverty and among parents who are teenagers or who abuse drugs or alcohol.

### **Signs and symptoms**

It is not always easy to recognize when a child has been abused. Children who have been maltreated are often afraid to tell anyone, because they think they will be blamed or that no one will believe them. Sometimes they remain quiet because the person who abused them is someone they love very much, or because of fear, or both.

Parents also tend to overlook signs and symptoms of abuse, because it is hard to believe it could happen or they fear what might happen if people found out. However, a child who has been abused needs special support and treatment as early as possible. The longer children continue to be abused or are left



to deal with the situation on their own, the harder it is for them to be able to heal and develop optimally physically and mentally.

Here are physical signs and behavioral changes in children who may have experienced abuse/ neglect.

### **Physical signs**

- Non-mobile infant with any injury
- Bruises to the torso, ears, or neck in a child less than four years of age
- Any injury (bruise, burn, fracture, abdominal or head injury) that is not consistent with the way the injury is said to have happened, that cannot be adequately explained, or that is inconsistent with the child's developmental capabilities
- The child discloses abuse or neglect
- Failure to gain weight (especially in infants) or sudden dramatic weight gain
- Genital pain, bleeding, or discharge
- A sexually transmitted disease

### **Behavioral and mental health changes that raise concern about possible abuse/ neglect**

It is important to remember that the following changes are seen in many children as a result of many different kinds of stressful situations and are not specific to child abuse and neglect. The reason for the appearance of these behaviors should always be investigated.

- Fearful behavior (nightmares, depression, unusual fears)
- Unexplained abdominal pain, sudden onset of bed-wetting, or regression in toileting (especially if the child has already been toilet trained)
- Attempts to run away
- Extreme sexual behavior that seems developmentally inappropriate for the child's age
- Sudden change in self-confidence
- Headaches or stomachaches with no medical cause
- School failure
- Extremely passive or aggressive behavior
- Desperately affectionate behavior or social withdrawal
- Big appetite and stealing food

### **Getting help**

If you suspect your child has been abused, get help immediately through your pediatrician or a local child protective agency. Physicians are legally obligated to report all suspected cases of abuse or neglect to state authorities. Your pediatrician also will detect and treat any medical injuries or conditions, recommend a therapist, and provide necessary information to investigators. The doctor also may testify in court if needed to secure legal protection for the child or criminal prosecution of the person suspected of perpetrating the abuse or neglect.

If your child has been abused, you may be the only person who can help them. There is no good reason to delay reporting your suspicions of abuse. Denying the problem will only make the situation worse. It allows the abuse or neglect to continue unchecked and lowers your child's chance for optimal physical and mental health and well-being. In any case of abuse or neglect, the child's safety is of primary concern. They need to be in a safe environment, free of the potential for more abuse and neglect.

Handout is provided by Blessed Be Educators as part of our Christian outreach. Visit [www.baidos.net](http://www.baidos.net) for more information.



# 10 Common Myths about Child Abuse

## 1 Child abuse only happens in some parts of society.



Rates of **PHYSICAL ABUSE AND NEGLECT** are affected by socioeconomic status.<sup>2</sup>

It is **CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE** perpetration/victimization that occurs in all parts of society.<sup>8</sup>

## 2 Children are victimized by creepy psychopathic strangers.

**91.6%** In 2015, 91.6 percent of victims (all types) were maltreated by one or both parents. Other perpetrators known to victims included foster parents, other relatives, neighbors, and daycare providers.<sup>1</sup>

**90%** For **CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE**, about 90% of victims know their abuser.<sup>3</sup>

## 3 Children usually tell someone they are being abused.



Research has found that most child victims delay or never disclose **CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE** to friends, family or the authorities.<sup>4,5,6</sup>

## 4 Many children lie about being abused.

**<10%** False allegations of **SEXUAL ABUSE** by children and adolescents are statistically uncommon, occurring at the rate of 2 to 10 percent of all cases.<sup>7</sup>

## 5 If a child has been sexually abused, there will be medical evidence.



Medical evidence is found in less than 5% of substantiated **CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE** cases.<sup>9,10</sup>

## 6 The most common type of abuse children experience at home is sexual abuse.



**CHILD NEGLECT** is the most common type of abuse experienced in the home.<sup>11</sup>

## 7 Males who are sexually abused as boys all grow up to sexually abuse children.

Male sexual abuse victims rarely go on to become perpetrators of sexual abuse.<sup>12,13</sup>



## 8 Only men sexually abuse children.

At least 20% of substantiated child sexual abuse cases are perpetrated by females.<sup>14, 15, 16</sup>

## 9 Boys are less traumatized as victims of sexual abuse than girls.

The severity of traumatization among male victims of sexual abuse is equal to that of female victims.<sup>17, 18, 19, 20</sup>

## 10 Children with disabilities are less likely to become victims of abuse than children without disabilities.

Children with disabilities are two to three times more likely than children without disabilities to experience abuse.<sup>21, 22, 23, 24</sup>

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## 10 Facts about Child Abuse



1

### Child abuse happens in every part of society.

Rates of **PHYSICAL ABUSE AND NEGLECT** are affected by socioeconomic status.<sup>2</sup>  
It is **CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE** perpetration/victimization that occurs in all parts of society.<sup>8</sup>

2

### Children are usually victimized by someone they know.

**91.6%** In 2015, 91.6% of victims (all types) were maltreated by one or both parents. Other perpetrators known to victims included foster parents, other relatives, neighbors, and daycare providers.<sup>1</sup>  
**90%** For **CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE**, about 90% of victims know their abuser.<sup>3</sup>

3

### Children rarely tell someone they are being abused.

Research has found that most child victims delay or never disclose **CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE** to friends, family or the authorities.<sup>4,5,6</sup>

4

### It is extremely rare for a child to lie about sexual abuse.

**<10%** False allegations of **SEXUAL ABUSE** by children and adolescents are statistically uncommon, occurring at the rate of 2 to 10% of all cases.<sup>7</sup>

5

### Medical evidence is rarely discovered after a child discloses sexual abuse.

Medical evidence is found in less than 5% of substantiated **CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE** cases.<sup>9, 10</sup>

6

### While all types of abuse are possible in the home, child neglect is more common than sexual abuse.

**CHILD NEGLECT** is the most common type of abuse experienced in the home.<sup>11</sup>



7

### Children who are sexually abused are not destined to continue the cycle of abuse as adults.

**SEXUAL ABUSE** victims rarely go on to become perpetrators of sexual abuse.<sup>12, 13</sup>



8

### Men and women are both capable of sexual abuse.

At least **20%** of substantiated child sexual abuse cases are perpetrated by females.<sup>14, 15, 16</sup>

9

### Boys and girls react in similar ways to sexual abuse.

The severity of traumatization among male victims of **SEXUAL ABUSE** is equal to that of female victims.<sup>17, 18, 19, 20</sup>

10

### Children with disabilities are more likely to become victims of abuse than children without disabilities.

Children with disabilities are two to three times more likely to experience **CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE** than children without disabilities.<sup>21, 22, 23, 24</sup>





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# Blue Sunday Prayer

## HOW TO PRAY

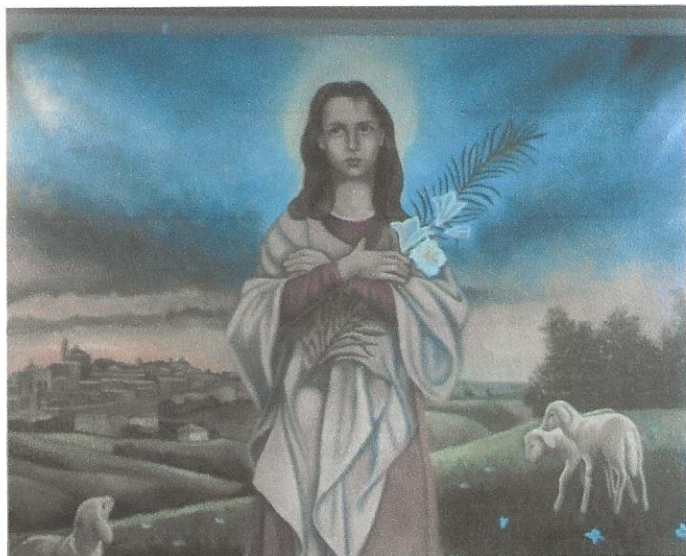
1.) **For investigators** (CPS & Law Enforcement): for *discernment*, *wisdom*, and *decisiveness*; for *empathy* and *ability to connect* compassionately with the victim; for *protection* of their well-being and spirit in light of what they hear and see every day; for *restoration* of spirit.

2.) **For decision-makers and those providing aftercare** for children who have been abused (foster care workers, judges, CASA workers, GALs, therapists, and foster parents): for *wisdom*, *empathy* and *patience* with the child who has been abused, as well as their family of origin; for *attentiveness to detail* and *discernment* in perceiving symptoms and patterns of the aftereffects of a child's abuse; for a *creative and persevering spirit* in innovating solutions for a child or family; for *strong support networks* to come around each of these individuals to provide guidance and restoration as they execute their role; for *renewal of spirit* and *continuing passion* for their work.

3.) **For the children who have been abused**: for *caring, stable adults* in their lives who will nurture and pour into them; for *well-trained and knowledgeable professionals* to be part of their care team and assist in their recovery; for the *bravery and resilience of spirit* to open themselves to new relationships and relationship patterns, and to disclose and work through past abuse; for their *hope to be strengthened*, and for their *hope to be fulfilled* for good things to come for their life.



**St. Maria Goretti,**  
**Patroness of Abused Children**



Maria Goretti is the patroness for abused children. She is a role model in her willingness to forgive her abuser. She found peace in the love of Jesus Christ.

Children who have been hurt by someone sometimes need help to feel safe again. Jesus can help them feel safe and loved. We can pray for them, and be nice to them.

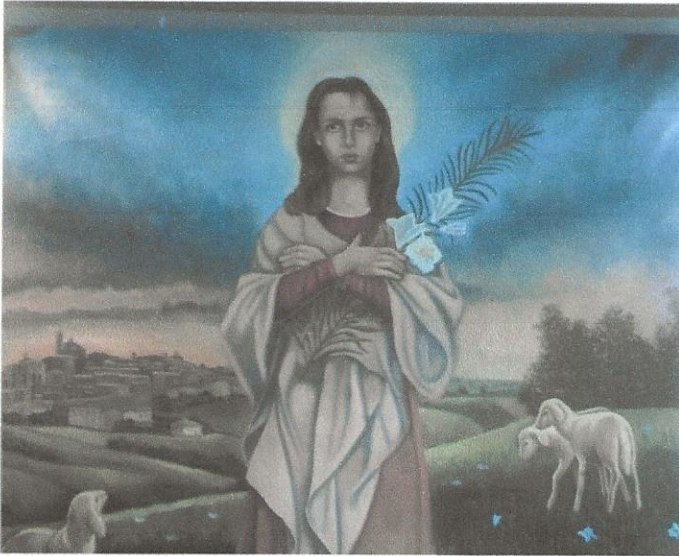
## Child's Prayer for Those Hurt by Others

Loving Father,  
you love us  
and you give us life  
and ask us to love each other.  
The Saints remind us how to act.  
Please keep all your children safe.  
When a child is hurt by someone,  
help them find safety and hope.  
We ask this in the name of Jesus.  
Amen

Prayer approved by Most Rev. Alvaro Corrada, SJ

If you know of someone who is abused, tell your parents, or your teacher, or another trusted adult.

## St. Maria Goretti, Patroness of Abused Children



Maria Goretti is the patroness for abused children. She died as a result of her abuse. She is a role model in her willingness to forgive her abuser. She found peace in the love of Jesus Christ. Many victims of abuse have difficulty finding such peace. Particularly for those who were abused by people in the church or by close family members, it is often very hard to be open to the healing love of Jesus Christ. Victims need help in their journey toward healing. Besides the immediate victim, there are often parents or loved ones who suffer along with the victim.

The Maria Goretti Network offers peer support to victims and those who care about them.

[www.mgoretti.org](http://www.mgoretti.org) or contact Miguel or 281-392-0222

If you know of someone suffering from abuse of neglect contact the Department of Family and Protective Services 1-800-252-5400

### Survivors Prayer

Dear God, we ask you to help us find healing and peace in our life.  
Grant us hope in these times of trial.  
May Maria Goretti who was strengthened by Your Grace join with us in prayer  
for healing of all victims of abuse, particularly those abused as children or young adults.  
Fill us with your Love so that as Maria prayed for her attacker,  
we too might have the courage to pray for the true conversion of our abusers:  
that they might seek Your Mercy through prayer and penance.  
Loving God,  
pour into our hearts and lives your healing Spirit,  
that the sacredness of every human person might be respected and protected  
as the precious image of God.  
Help us to live in the peace which Maria Goretti had found in Christ and in the love of his mother Mary.  
We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

Maria Goretti Network: [www.mgoretti.org](http://www.mgoretti.org)

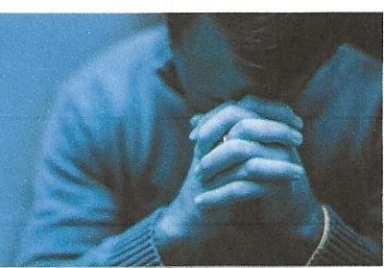
### Prayer for those suffering from abuse

Dear God,  
we ask you to help all those who suffer from abuse.  
Help them find healing and peace in their life.  
May Maria Goretti  
who was strengthened by Your Grace  
join with us in prayer for healing of all victims of abuse,  
particularly those abused as children or young adults.  
Grant us your Love that we might reach out to them in Your Name with hope in times of trial.  
As Maria prayed for her attacker,  
grant us the grace to pray for the true conversion of all involved with the abuse: that they might seek Your Mercy through prayer and penance.  
Loving God,  
pour into our hearts and lives your healing Spirit,  
that the sacredness of every human person might be respected and protected  
as the precious image of God.  
Help us to live in the peace which Maria Goretti had found in Christ and in the love of his mother Mary.  
We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

Prayers approved by Most Rev. Alvaro Corrada, SJ



# 7 SCRIPTURES TO PRAY FOR THE CHILD IN YOUR LIFE



## Day 2: Protection

*"You hide them in the shelter of your presence, safe from those who conspire against them. You shelter them in your presence, far from accusing tongues." —Psalm 31:20 NLT*

I believe it is one of our sacred duties as adults, and especially as parents, to protect the children in our lives. They are weak, vulnerable, and impressionable and God has given us the responsibility of guarding them. Unfortunately, I have witnessed too many instances of when that duty to protect has been neglected or betrayed. The physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual damage that occurs when this happens can be catastrophic. It is no wonder that Jesus taught his disciples to pray, "Deliver us from the evil one" (Matthew 6:13 NKJV). Let's recommit ourselves to standing as guardians and protectors of children—and for the times we cannot physically be with them, let us commend them in prayer to the one who is their fortress and defender. Pray for his perfect protection of the children in your life!

—Albert Reyes

### **Praying the Scripture:**

"Father, I pray Psalm 31:20 now for \_\_\_\_\_. I ask that you would hide him/her in the shelter of your presence. God, please keep every child safe from those who would conspire against them. Help me to do my part in keeping them safe—physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. Give me the strength to be their guardian, defender, and shepherd—as I imitate you in those roles. I pray this in your son's holy name. Amen."



## *Looking Back and Moving Forward: 9 Tips on Navigating the Impacts of Covid-19*

Retrieved from <https://www.childrenandscreens.com/media/press-releases/looking-back-and-moving-forward-9-tips-on-navigating-the-impacts-of-covid-19/>

**About Children and Screens** - Since its inception in 2013, **Children and Screens: Institute of Digital Media and Child Development**, has become one of the nation's leading non-profit organizations dedicated to advancing and supporting interdisciplinary scientific research, informing and educating the public, advocating for sound public policy for child health and wellness, and enhancing human capital in the field.

Unfortunately, we can't pause the pandemic—indeed, COVID-19 numbers are still fluctuating and there is still a high amount of uncertainty—but we can take a moment to reflect on the impact it has had on our children and families, especially in terms of how digital media use has affected young people. What does the increase in screen time mean for kids' long-term development, and their mental, physical, and emotional health? What COVID-era practices should we continue even after things return to "normal"? Are there any silver linings from the pandemic that can enrich family life? (The answer is: yes!). After a year and a half of living through pandemic, scientists, parents, educators, and kids have learned many valuable lessons. Check out their top ten tips below

**1. SCREEN TIME BLUES** - "The pandemic greatly shaped youth relationships with digital media," reports Susan Tapert, PhD. "The Adolescent Brain Cognitive Development study examined thousands of 11–14-year-olds throughout the pandemic. Screen time increased, especially the use of social media and multi-player gaming, and this accelerated usage was linked to a poorer sense of well-being. The biggest predictors of youth depression during the pandemic included exposure to racism or discrimination and, for girls, having pre-pandemic depression or anxiety. However, maintaining exercise and routines, relationships, and sleep helped promote resilience during stressful times."

**2. PERSIST WITH PANDEMIC POSITIVES** - One intriguing result of the pandemic is how this experience has fostered meaningful familial interactions through video chat platforms. "Consider continuing this with regular digital-visits with loved ones, like weekly FaceTime meet-ups with grandma or morning Zoom playdates with a cousin," suggests Stephanie M. Reich, PhD Professor of Education at the University of California, Irvine. "Another fruitful change has been the slow-down from the busyness of school, activities, work, etc., and the increase in family time surrounding mealtime and playful interactions. As the world opens up, strive to safeguard this family time, and utilize more of the new digital helpers to free up time, like online shopping, video-conferencing for work meetings, and food delivery services."

**3. TAKE A BREAK** - "Even though it has been more than a year and a half since the pandemic began, families are still learning how to adjust to this new reality," comments Robin H. Gurwitsch, Ph.D. psychologist and Professor at Duke University School of Medicine. "As such, families are making new rules around the use of screen time. Be sure that screen time breaks are built in for movement activities (e.g., taking a walk, playing with pets, family dance party, etc.), quiet time (e.g., drawing or writing, listening to music, reading, relaxation or meditation), and family time (e.g., eating together, playing a game or completing a puzzle, cooking together, or taking a walk). It's also good to remember screen time is never a substitute for quality time with caring adults and friends."

**4. CREATE DEVICE FREE ZONE** - Now that in person activities are possible again, it's time to evaluate just how much devices have taken over daily routines and activities that would be better done without devices. "An example would be family meals, which benefit everyone much more when devices aren't present," offers Licensed Psychologist Nicole Beurkens, PhD, CNS. "Get back in the habit of leaving devices in the other room when everyone comes to the table – this includes adults! Other examples include no devices in the bedroom (a definite no-no during the night), while playing outside, or during homework time (when a device isn't required)."



**5. CH-CH-CH-CHANGES** - "Over the past eighteen months, children's technology usage has nearly doubled," reports Brenda K Wiederhold, PhD, MBA, BCB, BCN, Editor-in-Chief of CyberPsychology, Behavior and Social Networking. "Even the American Academy of Pediatrics, who had previously endorsed strict limits on screen time, recommended rethinking the rules secondary to pandemic restrictions," Wiederhold adds. "Using screens to connect with people is a positive aspect of technology use during social distancing. As we emerge from the pandemic life, however, it may be helpful for parents to revisit rules that guide children's screen time, like setting time limits. Parents can also model healthy behaviors and usage to help their children understand that technology isn't a replacement for social connections."

**6. GET IN THE GAME** - Like many screen time rules, video gaming parameters may have been relaxed during the pandemic. As we pause to reflect on the pandemic so far, take time to understand what video game play looks like for your children, and adjust as needed. "Talk with your children about what they do in the game and how they think about the content, and make sure your children understand rules about online safety," recommends Jennifer Manganello, Professor at the University at Albany School of Public Health. "Consider setting rules about when your child can play and for how long. You may also want to listen in on game play to find out if there are any bullying or other issues occurring."

**7. BRIDGE ONLINE AND OFFLINE WORLDS** - Beyond avoiding violent, harmful content, good screen time enhances a child's life. One tip that doesn't require time trackers, rules, rewards or punishments, is a method called 'bridging,' explains Jean Rogers, M.S.Ed., CPE. "Bridging uses screen time to get kids off screens, and it includes 'how-to' videos and online classes. For instance, kids can go online to learn to teach their dog to roll over, and then they go offline to try. Bridging can start either online or off, and it's defined by activity that has a real-world component."

**8. TRAIN RESILIENCE** - According to Vicki Harrison, MSW, Program Director at the Stanford Center for Youth Mental Health and Wellbeing, supporting our kids to endure adversity will be more beneficial to them than attempting to shield them from it. "The resilience and coping skills that they were forced to develop over the past 18 months will serve as emotional immunity, hopefully helping them to be more successful in overcoming future adversity that they encounter," Harrison posits. However, division and verbal assaults increased over the past year, especially in online spaces. Parents must actively monitor and engage with their children to help them process what they are being exposed to; and to choose and model kindness for their children as much as possible."

**9. SAVOR LIFE IN THE SLOW LANE** - It is important for families to slow down and spend time together each day, allowing time for kids and parents to communicate and check in. "This can be 10-15 minutes, where our kids have our undivided attention, and we have theirs," adds Jennifer M. Katzenstein, PhD, co-director of the Center for Behavioral Health at Johns Hopkins All Children's Hospital. "During this time, there are no screens, no distractions, but rather an open-ended question asking how things are going, then sitting in the silence and being present with our kids. The goal here is to sit quietly and let our kids share with us what is going on."

As the world re-opens, it is important for parents to be thoughtful about new and continuing routines for their families, and know the power of screen time as it relates to your children. Harness the positives like video calls with your extended family; use the bridging technique to get your children active; and find ways to use digital platforms to foster real-time connections. Also, be mindful of the dangers of digital overload; create device-free zones and enticing screen breaks; and engage in meaningful familial connections away from those devices.

*Handout is provided by Blessed Be Educators as part of our Christian outreach.*

*Visit [www.baidos.net](http://www.baidos.net) for more information*



## *Four Things Teens Should Keep Doing Post-Pandemic*

By Elyse Salek

Center for Parent & Teen Communication

Retrieved from: <https://www.childrenandscreens.com/media/press-releases/looking-back-and-moving-forward-9-tips-on-navigating-the-impacts-of-covid-19/>

Elyse Salek, M.S.Ed. is an Administrative Director of Research at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia. Her degrees are in Psychology and Human Development from Middlebury College and the University of Pennsylvania School of Education.

There are many things about the past year we are ready to leave behind. For teens who have been hit hard by the pandemic, it's hard to imagine wanting to keep any reminders of quarantine around. But it's worth pausing before we dive back into the way things were. Here are just a few things your teen should consider keeping around in post-pandemic life.

### **1) Keep a Slower Pace**

For many teens, pre-pandemic life was fast-paced and overscheduled. Widespread closures and canceled events in 2020 forced us all to slow down. This new pace provides an opportunity to think about priorities. So, encourage your teens to set boundaries and not overcommit themselves. Before they jump right back into their old routines, discuss which activities they missed most and least. Ensure they have time to pursue hobbies, relax, and get enough sleep (8-10 hours for teens, 9-11 for tweens). Regular breaks from structured activities can help improve brain functioning and mental health. Help your teen find a balance, so they don't burn out running from one activity to the next. Dr. Christine Koh, co-author of *Minimalist Parenting* and co-host of the *Edit Your Life* podcast, suggests doing a family calendar check. Review your calendar before the start of a new week and "edit out" unnecessary items to create space for downtime. This skill will serve teens well as they continue to gain more responsibilities in the future.

### **2) Have Uncomfortable Conversations**

During the pandemic, deeply rooted social injustices came to light in new ways. Young people were watching. They continue to watch and want to talk about it. Dr. Joanna Lee Williams, Associate Professor in the Graduate School of Applied and Professional Psychology at Rutgers University says, "We have to be aspirational when it comes to racial identity, racial pride, and moving towards a world with equity. We've got to leverage who adolescents are. Adolescents get injustice, and they want to fix it. Talk to them about it." It's ok not to have all the answers. There are plenty of books and movies to help fuel discussions. Encourage your children to ask questions and express their feelings about what they see in the news. Check out this article for how to approach the topic of racial injustice with teens. While these conversations can be difficult, we must continue to have them.

### **3) Seek Joyful Moments**

Positive moods have a big impact on both mental and physical health, especially during challenging times. Happiness can boost your immune system, lower your heart rate, and reduce stress. The widespread closures during the past year forced us all to find creative ways to have fun. From drive-



through birthdays to virtual book clubs, and parent-child TikTok routines, families found ways to cheer one another up or share a good laugh. Kind gestures like the “hearts for healthcare workers” initiative or sending cards to the elderly brought joy to others with the added benefit of lifting the giver’s emotions. There was also a spike in outdoor activities like hiking, biking, and bird watching — and spending time in nature is known to have a range of health benefits. So whether you pick up a new hobby or reinstate a good old fashioned family game night, teens and adults alike will benefit from continuing to find joyful moments moving forward.

#### **4) Connect With Others**

Social interaction with peers is an essential part of development during the tween and teen years. But opportunities to connect were limited during the pandemic. The good news is that a recent report from Common Sense Media reveals many teens went online to connect with friends, get health information, or find comfort. According to CPTC’s Director Dr. Ken Ginsburg, this is a moment in time for young people to recognize that connection to others is critical to their ability to get through tough times. “The seeds are in place for this generation to understand the power of human connection,” he shares. As youth return to school, faith communities, sports, and after-school programs, they will come with a renewed appreciation for the people in their lives. And this recognition is a crucial element of resilience. In every generation youth are shaped by what they’re exposed to during their formative years. This generation has lived through an unprecedented time. Many of them experienced tremendous loss and still need our support to deal with it. This may include helping them grieve the loss of loved ones or guiding them toward professional help. Teens can begin to mend and move forward with purpose if we are there when they need us most. Turn lessons learned into action and model resilience for your teens. And before you kick all aspects of pandemic living to the curb, incorporate a slower pace, conversations about injustice, laughter, and appreciation for others into post-pandemic life.

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## *Ukraine, 5 Ways to Talk to Children about Conflict*

Prepared by the staff of Save the Children; dated February 25, 2022. Retrieved from <https://www.savethechildren.net/news/ukraine-5-ways-talk-children-about-conflict-0>

As hostilities in Ukraine escalate, children may see and hear things about the crisis in the news, leading to feelings of uncertainty, anxiety and fear, which parents and caregivers need to address, Save the Children's psychologists warn.

Ane Lemche, a psychologist and child counsellor with Save the Children, said children around the world might not fully understand what is happening in Ukraine and may have questions about the images, stories, and conversations they are exposed to.

Previous Save the Children research in conflicts such as Iraq and Syria has revealed heartbreaking accounts of children terrified by the shelling and airstrikes, anxious about the future, and distraught at not being able to go to school. The majority of children showed signs of severe emotional distress.

*"What is happening in Ukraine can be frightening for both children and adults. Ignoring or avoiding the topic can lead to children feeling lost, alone and more scared, which can affect their health and wellbeing. It is essential to have open and honest conversations with children to help them process what is happening," said Ms. Lemche.*

Experts at Save the Children share five tools and tips that caregivers can use to approach the conversation with children:

### **1. MAKE TIME AND LISTEN WHEN YOUR CHILD WANTS TO TALK**

Give children the space to tell you what they know, how they feel and to ask you questions. They may have formed a completely different picture of the situation than you have. Take the time to listen to what they think, and what they have seen or heard.

### **2. TAILOR THE CONVERSATION TO THE CHILD**

Be mindful of the child's age as you approach the conversation with them. Young children may not understand what conflict or war means and require an age-appropriate explanation. Be careful not to over-explain the situation or go into too much detail as this can make children unnecessarily anxious. Younger children may be satisfied just by understanding that sometimes countries fight. Older children are more likely to understand what war means but may still benefit from talking with you about the situation. In fact, older children will often be more concerned by talk of war because they tend to understand the dangers better than younger children do.

### **3. VALIDATE THEIR FEELINGS**

It is important that children feel supported in the conversation. They should not feel judged or have their concerns dismissed. When children have the chance to have an open and honest conversation about things upsetting them, it can create a sense of relief and safety.



#### **4. REASSURE THEM THAT ADULTS ALL OVER THE WORLD ARE WORKING HARD TO RESOLVE THIS**

Remind children that this is not their problem to solve. They should not feel guilty about playing, seeing their friends, and doing the things that make them happy. Stay calm when you approach the conversation. Children often copy the sentiments of their caregivers – if you are uneasy about the situation, chances are your child will be uneasy as well.

#### **5. GIVE THEM A PRACTICAL WAY TO HELP**

Support children who want to help. Children who have the opportunity to help those affected by the conflict can feel like they are part of the solution. Children can create fundraisers, send letters to local decision-makers or create drawings calling for peace.

Save the Children has been operating in Ukraine since 2014, delivering essential humanitarian aid to children and their families. This includes supporting access to education, distributing winter kits and hygiene kits, and providing cash grants to families. Our specialists support children to overcome the mental and psychological impacts of their experiences of conflict and violence and increase their ability to cope with stress in their daily lives.

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