

Modeling Healthy Behaviors

By The VIRTUS Programs

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Our work as safe adults to protect children and youth is ongoing and never ending. We are called to this mission—to protect God's most precious gifts—children, youth and the vulnerable. It is the message of the Gospels and the clear and certain teaching of our Lord: "Jesus, however, called the children to himself and said, *"Let the children come to me and do not prevent them; for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.*

—Luke 18: 16.

For adults, living out the message of Christianity is a way of life. It is more than just words—more importantly, it is our actions. We feed others through nourishing them with our good words, actions and deeds.

It is a good way to look at how we live—do your actions mirror those of the saints (even in small ways)? Do we feed the people we encounter? Even when we have a difficult duty or obligation to perform, we can always do so with kindness. With just a little reflection and thought, we can change the way we affect others.

Being a witness for our Faith in many ways makes us first responders to the situations we encounter along the way. By modeling appropriate behavior and healthy interactions, we are also teaching children and youth what type of behavior to expect from adults. Protecting children and the vulnerable is one of those ways in which we all take part. While we may not always think of the ways in which this happens, the small things that we do make a big difference. Consider the following times you may be protecting children each and every day:

- Following rules, without trying to break them or go around them in places where children and minors gather. This sets a good example and goes a long way in offering kids safe environments.
- Watching and being alert to the behaviors of other adults when there are gatherings of children.
- Listening to the children in your life, attending to the details, being interested in their stories—this form of paying attention gives them confidence in the way they communicate with you.
- Talking to kids about safety rules, modeling good behaviors: putting your seat belt on, respecting the environment, being safe when crossing streets—all lead to good practices for kids to follow.



- Helping children who appear lost and getting them to a safe person in charge, and waiting with them until their parents come forward (lost children in stores, etc.).
- Having another adult present with you when you are in a position of trust with kids.
- Being the other safe adult for someone who is ministering to children.
- Making sure you don't curse or act inappropriately in the presence of children and within their earshot.
- Speaking positively about the efforts and programs the Church and other groups are undertaking to protect children.
- Supporting child protection efforts by participating and volunteering.
- Sharing what you learned in the *Protecting God's Children* or other safe environment training with others. This can include with your family, friends, neighbors and work colleagues.
- Educating children, teaching them and being positive in the way you help them.
- Offering to help parents when they have their arms full of their children, baby strollers and other things.
- Smiling, nodding with understanding and a kind look when a parent is in a tough situation with their kids and trying to manage.
- Communicating any concerns you have about inappropriate behavior to the program supervisor.
- Communicating any suspicions or concerns of abuse to the appropriate civil authorities.
- Participating in continuing safe environment training.
- Being present, not ignoring others in need.
- Coaching kids' sports in a respectful and kind manner.
- Donating money to agencies that support children and families.
- Praying for the safety of all children and vulnerable persons.
- Being involved in family activities where you can show your leadership.
- Acting on the adage, "if you see something, say something."
- Being trained in safe environment programs, first aid classes, emergency drill protocols, etc.

Proclaiming the Gospels isn't left only to those ordained to the priesthood and diaconate. Each person who hears God's word and takes it into their heart and acts on it, does this effectively and boldly—no matter how small the gesture may seem. We contribute to the good of the world and the safety of those entrusted to us by being fully alive and present to God working within us. You don't have to be certified in anything to do this.

Why not lend a little support by being aware of how we, as individuals and collectively, can make their world happier, safer and brighter?