



Protecting God's Children for Adults

Why Do I Need Continuing Education on Sex Abuse Prevention?

"Okay, I came to the session. I spent my three hours going through the awareness session and, as much as I resisted going, it was very informative. But, this is the Church's problem. Why do I need continuing education?"

Comments similar to this are not uncommon among *Protecting God's Children* program participants. Although participants are generally supportive of the program, some are not convinced that continuing education is necessary to accomplish the program's objectives.

Continuing education can be the most challenging aspect of the *Protecting God's Children* program. If you are reading this article, that statement probably does not apply to you, and you might think this article is "preaching to the choir." However, even those of you who regularly complete the continuing education occasionally ask why it is necessary. Understanding the reason for the continuing education can impact your commitment to pursue more knowledge about child sexual abuse prevention and inspire you to encourage others to also participate in the available online training.

Awareness vs. training

The *Protecting God's Children* session is an awareness program. It provides knowledge and information that raises awareness and begins to shift people's attitudes about the nature and scope of the child sexual abuse problem. However, awareness is just the beginning. Training is the means by which participants are able to actually put the things they have learned to use in their daily lives.

The dictionary defines awareness as: "Having knowledge or cognizance of." Training is defined as: "To coach in or accustom to a mode of behavior or performance."

One way to see the need for continuing education is by asking yourself—at the end of the *Protecting God's Children* session—could you name the five steps without looking at your materials? Virtually 100 percent of the time the response is, "no." Awareness is definitely a good starting place, but becoming a *protector of children* requires more than that. We must learn how to put this information to good use in our everyday lives, and training is the key.

Training is continuing education

Although we don't think about it much, training is almost second nature to us. We take "lessons" so we can learn to swim, play golf, or drive a car. We learn (and teach) multiplication tables by reinforcing them in small bits over time. We learn new habits by repeating them daily for a period of at least 14 days—so they become an everyday way of doing things. We want to improve our physical fitness, so we hire a personal trainer. We go to work at a new job, and the first thing on the agenda is training.

We train others too. When we want to teach our children safety rules of any kind, we repeat and reinforce the information over and over many times to train them what the rules are and how to follow them. We know that the foundation for learning about safety is the repeated reinforcement of the rules until they become second nature.

Over time we have seen that training is the way to learn new things and change certain behaviors. Therefore, it is logical that reinforcing training with continuing education is one of the keys to becoming protectors of the children in our families and our communities. Training through the continuing education available on *VIRTUS Online* is the necessary coaching needed to assure that the warning signs and the steps presented in the *Protecting God's Children* videos become an integral part of the way we view people's activities with children and situations involving children.

Without that reinforcement, *Protecting God's Children* is a great program that deals a serious blow to our preconceived notions about child sexual abuse. But, one session, alone, cannot provide the practical application and reinforcement we need to be able to effectively recognize and respond to the many ways that child sexual abuse may show up in our

communities and homes. The goal is prevention, and continued training is the key.

How can you help?

At mass this weekend I was approached by a teacher who receives the weekly email notices about new articles and training bulletins. He asked whether continuing education was *really* necessary. He wanted to know if he was supposed to complete this continuing training.

I told him that the diocese had paid for him to receive the continuing education, and I talked with him about the value of learning new ways to prevent child sexual abuse. He said that he would complete his training and he would pass the word to the other teachers at his school. *Nobody ever told him how important it was for him to complete that training.*

This is where you can make a difference. Talk with others in your community about the VIRTUS *Online* continuing education. Share the benefits of reading the training bulletins. Encourage everyone to take advantage of VIRTUS *Online*—the unique, economical, and effective learning tool available to all of us who care about children and young people. Together we can create safe environments and make a significant difference to the people and children in our communities.

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