

Year Two Lesson for Grades 6, 7 and 8

- Preparation:** Educators, catechists, youth ministers, and other caring adults should prepare by reviewing the entire lesson plan and by reading *Teaching Touching Safety: A Guide for Parents, Guardians, and Other Caring Adults*. Then, follow the instructions to complete as many of the activities as possible in your allotted amount of time.
- Activity #1:** Play the introductory video to begin the lesson.
- Activity #2:** Review the vocabulary words and definitions with your students.
- Activity #3:** Discovering the boundaries in your life—a discussion.
- Activity #4:** Learning when and who to tell—discussion.
- Activity #5:** Identifying trustworthy adults.
- Prayer:** A suggested (optional) prayer is provided at the end of the lesson. If you wish, you may use this prayer to conclude this lesson with your students.
-

Preparation for completing this lesson:

- Principle:** Setting limits and honoring them can help keep young people safe from harm.
- Empowering young people to tell a *safe* adult when something bad, uncomfortable, or confusing happens is an important aspect of child safety.
- Goal:** To assist parents, guardians, and other caring adults in teaching young people how to prevent or reduce the chance of sexual abuse.
- To assist parents, guardians, and other caring adults in teaching young people how to know that they have the right to say “no,” to tell a trusted adult when they feel uncomfortable, and to help them recognize who to trust when they need to communicate their concerns.
- Objectives:** To help young people develop their ability to identify, define, and honor appropriate boundaries in different types of relationships:
- They can say “no” when they feel uncomfortable or confused by how another person is acting or when they are asked (or encouraged) to do something they know is wrong—even if the person is a friend or someone else that they love and trust.
 - They should honor and respect the wishes of others who don’t want to be touched even when it feels like rejection and hurts their feelings. Learning that others have the right to say “no” and have their “no” respected is fundamental because it affects their actions as they grow older.
- Upon completion of this lesson, young people should be better able to:
- Identify those adults in their environment who can be trusted.
 - Understand that they should tell a trusted adult when something seems improper or *not quite right*, even if the person or people involved tell the young person not to tell.
 - Trust their own instincts when they think that something’s wrong, even if it is happening to someone else. And, to know to tell a trusted adult and, if necessary, to keep speaking up until someone listens.

Dealing with the adolescent age—key concept is “transition”

The middle school child is experiencing a period of rapid growth. The emergence of interest in the opposite sex is occurring. These young people are concerned about physical change, body size, skin, and hair length. Concepts depend a great deal on body image as

Lesson 3 for Grades 6, 7 and 8

young people complain of being either too physically mature or too physically immature. Peer groups play an import role in shaping attitudes and interest. Caregivers need to regularly assure youngsters that changes are normal though the rate varies from person to person.

Parents, catechists, teachers, youth ministers, and other caring adults must also listen to children and observe what's happening in their lives. Let young people be themselves. Let them explore their self-expression. Know who they are with, what they are doing, and remind them of the importance of protecting themselves during this time in their lives. During this time, children are completely self-absorbed and many are naturally less communicative.

Additional preparation for teachers

Many things make each of us different from the person next to us. The more we know about these things, the more self-awareness we have. And the more we know about ourselves and how we operate, the more we can empower others. Boundaries are the limits that define one person as separate from another or from others. A boundary promotes and preserves personal integrity. Boundaries give each of us a clear sense of self and how to function in relation to one another. Boundaries are unique to each individual and they are based on perceptions, personal histories, values, goals, culture, and concerns.

For the most part, we are not consciously aware of the personal boundaries in our lives. We don't think much about how they were established. We just *know* when someone steps over them. However, boundaries bring order to our lives and help us determine how others treat us. With clear boundaries, we are assured that we can protect ourselves from the ignorance, meanness, evil, or thoughtlessness of others.

Boundaries exist in the context of a particular relationship. For example, an appropriate boundary between a husband and wife is not necessarily an appropriate boundary between friends or acquaintances. And, an appropriate boundary between a parent and child is not necessarily the same as an appropriate boundary between a priest, teacher, or counselor and a child. Most people will accept and respect our boundaries if we are clear about them. But, with some people, we must actively defend our boundaries time and time again.

The difficulty in establishing and maintaining boundaries with this age group is that they are moving from dependence to independence and they are confused about who they are. They often define themselves by their friends, activities, accomplishments, looks, and the way they are accepted by others.

Telling these young people that there are boundaries will not be enough. They need to understand where the boundaries are and how those boundaries affect everyday life. They need to process this information for themselves—and that can require some time. The adults involved are primarily concerned with safety issues that adolescents may be too self-absorbed to see clearly. And, parents can, and often do, find this learning process difficult and stressful. As parents and caring adults, we must be patient if we want to teach our middle school students how to expand their ability to protect themselves from harm.

Special preparation exercise for teachers

During the week before delivering this lesson, begin to notice the ways that people around you let you know that there is a boundary between the two of you. You will see everything from the child who constantly clings to your leg to a drive-through window at the bank that allows for no physical contact of any kind. Also, notice how uncomfortable you become when someone is invading your "personal space" by getting too close or asking too many questions. Observe how it makes you feel and then notice the way that you respond.

Also, pick one day this week and notice every time that you are touched by another person. Ask yourself:

- Did I want that person to touch me?
- (If no) How did I react to let the person know that I did not want to be touched?
- (If yes) What was it about *that* person and *that* touch that made it acceptable?
- (If unsure) What is it about *that* person and/or *that* touch that has me questioning whether it was acceptable?
- How did I either communicate or *not* communicate my response to the touch?

Noticing our own reactions and instincts as we interact with other people helps us begin to recognize the appropriate boundaries for all of our relationships and learn to trust our instincts in guiding our boundary decisions. While human instincts and reactions are a seemingly spontaneous physiological response, by paying attention to the different ways that different people react to the same situations, we can see that each of us has the power to define our boundaries and to choose our response when someone violates a

Lesson 3 for Grades 6, 7 and 8

boundary. By observing your own boundaries and responses, as well as the boundaries and responses of those around you, you can be better prepared to give children some concrete examples for how people define their boundaries in order to protect themselves from being harmed.

In our video introduction that you'll play for the children in your class, we talk about people who do things that make children uncomfortable or confused, or make them feel yucky. When we say "uncomfortable," for example, we're not talking about sitting in a chair that's not soft, or "sitting up straight" in class, or waiting until the end of class to go to the restroom. Instead, we're talking about the more abstract use of the term "uncomfortable"—where uncomfortable means "something isn't right."

Ultimately, we all must learn to listen to that guiding voice inside our head and to trust "that uneasy feeling in our gut." That little voice or uneasy feeling is a warning sign that something is wrong. It's one of the great gifts that God gave to each of us to help us live a safe, healthy, and happy life. That's what we're talking about when we tell children to respect their own feelings or when someone makes them feel uncomfortable, or confused, or yucky. It's a key distinction we must make clear to children. When we listen to that uneasy feeling—and treat it as if it is God talking to us—we are better prepared to pay attention to those around us and to take action to protect ourselves from those who may hurt us.

Also, during the week prior to teaching this lesson, notice the varying levels of trust that you have for the people in your life. Look to see who you trust with your deepest feelings and fears and why you trust that particular person or those particular people. Notice when you are reluctant to share personal information with certain people and stop to think about why you consider that person to be untrustworthy. Use the week to begin to discern how *you* know who to trust and to what extent. Examine how it is that you know when to speak up, because the issue is important enough to warrant the effort, and when to simply let something go, because it's an issue that's not important enough to pursue. This thought process will help you be better prepared for your interactive discussion with your students during the activities portion of this lesson plan.

Activity #1: Play the introductory video to begin the lesson:

Note to Teacher: The introductory video for grades 6 through 8 is designed to open a discussion with young people about touching safety and personal boundaries. The video is approximately five (5) minutes long and is neither created nor intended as a substitute for the lesson itself. It is merely an introduction designed to "break the ice" among those in this age group and to get everyone talking about the relevant personal boundary and personal safety issues. Importantly, the video will get young people focused on the topic matter, which will help the teacher to facilitate an easy transition into the interactive activities within the lesson. These interactive activities are the critical components where students have a real opportunity to learn how to protect themselves.

We recommend that you watch the video in advance at least a couple of times prior to showing it to your students, so you'll be able to more easily anticipate when the video will end. The video really needs no introduction. Just put it into the machine, and hit "play." If you're using a DVD version of the video, you'll select the English or Spanish version and the appropriate age group from a menu screen. If you're using a VHS version of the video, you'll need to "cue" the tape to the correct version prior to your class time.

Activity #2: Review and discuss the vocabulary words and definitions:

Boundaries—the limits that define one person as separate from another or from others. There are boundaries you can see (like a fence around a yard) and boundaries you can't see with your eyes (like the comfort zone around us that we call our "personal space"). Boundaries vary depending on the relationship with the other person. For example, a boundary between a child and a grandparent is different than the boundary between a child and a teacher or coach.

Limits—The point or edge beyond which something cannot go. The furthest edge of something.

Safe adults and friends—People who won't hurt, confuse, or scare a young person intentionally or without a good or honorable reason.¹ Safe friends and adults also respect young people's wishes and the rules of their parents and guardians.¹

Secret—Something that is hidden from others or that is known only to one or to a few.²

Trust—To place confidence in or depend on.³

¹ *Teaching Touching Safety Guide for Parents and Guardians*, National Catholic Services, © 2004.

² The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition Copyright © 2000 by Houghton Mifflin Company.

³ The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition © 2000, Houghton Mifflin Company.

Lesson 3 for Grades 6, 7 and 8

Activity #3: Discovering the boundaries in your life—a discussion:

Directions: Remind your students that these lessons are designed to give them the tools to protect themselves when uncomfortable, difficult, or even dangerous situations arise. Tell them that in today's lesson, the class will be talking about boundaries—what they are and how they can help protect us from harm.

Note to Teacher: Notice how your students are seated. For example, did they move their chairs closer together or further apart than the chairs were originally arranged? Or, did certain individuals decide to sit farther from the group than to take the last open chair in a row? This is all material you can refer to during the discussion of boundaries. Every one of those actions is related to a self-determined boundary issue.

Getting Started: Open the discussion with the students by asking them if they know what a “boundary” is. Create some scenarios that will give them ideas about “boundaries” and “limits” and how great a role boundaries and limits play in our everyday lives. For example:

- What kinds of rules must be followed at your house:
 - What are your family rules regarding when your homework must be completed? Are there other activities that aren't allowed until your homework has been completed?
 - How long and how late are you permitted to be on the telephone?
 - Where are you allowed to have food in your house?
 - What are your family's rules regarding computer access?
 - What are your family's rules regarding video games?
- Does your family limit who can come into your room and when they are allowed to be in your room?
- Do you expect your best friend to sit next to you at lunch every day?
- Do you want your parents to pretend that they don't know you when you are together at a party or at the mall?
- Can you explain why you moved the chairs, sat closer to some people and away from others, left empty chairs between you and others, etc. when we started this class?

Boundaries define how others treat us and how we let ourselves be treated. For example, ask your students:

- Have you ever pretended to agree with something or someone when you really did not agree?
- Have you ever chosen not to tell on someone who broke the rules because that person asked you not to tell?
- Have you ever gone along with an activity even though you didn't really want to go along with it?
- Have you ever declined to join in on an activity that you really wanted to do because someone else talked you out of it?
- Have you ever concealed how you really feel about something because of a fear of how other people would react?
- Have you ever spent too much time doing things for other people and been frustrated that you don't spend enough time doing things to support yourself?

Ask your students why they do these things and how it makes them feel?

During the discussion of their reasons, make the following points:

- When you don't speak up, you hide your true self and allow others to violate your boundaries.
- When you disregard your personal beliefs, values, wants, and feelings, it causes you to feel diminished.

Lesson 3 for Grades 6, 7 and 8

- Boundaries are the invisible lines we draw around ourselves for self-protection and self-preservation.
- Most people will respect our boundaries if we let them know what they are. However, with others, we must actively defend our boundaries.

Activity #4: Learning when and who to tell—discussion:

Directions: Remind your students that these lessons are designed to give them the tools to protect themselves when difficult or even dangerous situations arise. Tell them that in today's lesson we will be talking about *when* to disclose a dangerous event or situation and *who* to tell when something bad, uncomfortable, scary, or confusing happens to you. Remind them that knowing what to do when someone intrudes upon their boundaries or violates the touching rules can mean the difference between staying safe and getting hurt.

One of the essential elements your students must learn is the touching rule that states: you must tell a trusted adult if someone violates the touching safety rules.

Sometimes reporting this type of inappropriate behavior is the hardest part. Ask your students why disclosing this sort of behavior is so difficult. Listen for the following reasons:

- I don't want to get anyone in trouble.
- I think I can deal with it myself.
- I don't want to upset my parents and teachers.
- I'm not sure *exactly* what happened.
- The person asked me not to tell, and I don't want to be the one who told.

After students have given a number of reasons, continue the discussion by making the following points:

- Telling a safe adult about someone's inappropriate behavior does not get the person into trouble. The person's own inappropriate behavior is what gets them into trouble.
- Even if you can deal with the way the situation affected you, telling a safe adult means that the violator has to deal with his or her own inappropriate behavior. And, perhaps, by revealing an incident, you'll be helping to protect someone else from harm.
- The people who love you will always be upset when bad things happen. It is not your job to protect the adults in your life from being upset. They're not upset at you. They're upset because they love you and someone did something to you.
- Even if you don't know for sure what happened, it is important to tell an adult you trust.

Activity #5: Identifying trustworthy adults:

Directions: The next question for the students is, "Who do you tell?"

Ask your students to think of some of the adults in their life that they trust. Ask them to make a list in their minds, but tell them not to write it down because this is a very private issue and is a matter of personal safety. When your students are looking for people to include on their lists, they should consider the following questions:

- Who are the people who proved they were trustworthy in the past?
- Who are people they know that others have trusted with serious subjects, problems, and events?
- Who are the people who listen to them and treat them with respect?
- Who are the people that respect their wishes and their parent's rules?
- Who are the people they know will have their best interests at heart?

 Lesson 3 for Grades 6, 7 and 8

It is important for your students to begin to confront the challenge of speaking up when something like this happens—regardless of how they feel. In situations like this, the offender will work very hard to convince the student that the student is responsible for the relationship and that nobody will believe the student if the student says otherwise.

Note to Teacher: Many young people believe that when it is their word against that of a teacher or another adult, the adult will always be believed. It is extremely important that you help dispel this myth and help foster an environment where young people feel empowered to report this sort of behavior when it first occurs.

In conclusion, explain to your students that it is imperative they never stop trying to get help. If the first adult they tell does not intervene in a situation, they should tell someone else until someone *does* listen to them and *does* take action to protect the young people involved.

Suggested (optional) prayers to end the lesson:

Note to Teacher: This prayer is a variation of an old Catholic traveler's prayer to be said before beginning a journey. Remind your students that, as they grow up, they are on a journey through life. Each time they leave their home and go out on their own or with peers, they are traveling. Prayer can help prepare them for the journey and guide them along the way.

My holy Angel Guardian,
 Ask the Lord to bless the journey that I undertake,
 That it may benefit the health of my soul and body;
 That I may reach its end,
 And that, returning safe and sound,
 I may find my family in good health.
 Guard, guide, and preserve us throughout the day and night.

Amen.

Teacher: "God wants us to be safe and healthy. God even gives us a special angel to help look after us. When we think about how hard it is to remember the touching rules and to be sure that others honor our boundaries, we can ask our Guardian Angel for help. So, let's pray together for our Guardian Angel to look after us and help keep us safe."

Angel of God,
 My guardian dear,
 To whom God's love entrusts me here.
 Ever this day be at my side.
 To light, to guard,
 To rule, to guide.

Amen

References:

Liberia Editrice Vaticana (1997). *Catechism of the Catholic Church (2nd Ed.)*. Washington DC: United States Catholic Conference.

United States Catholic Conference (1990) *Human Sexuality: A Catholic Perspective for Education and Lifelong Learning*. Washington, DC: Office for Publishing and Promotion Services.

ⁱ *Teaching Touching Safety*, © 2004 National Catholic Services, LLC. Page 5.