

Lesson 3 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:** Understanding the boundaries in your life—an evaluation.
- Activity #5:** Homework assignment during the coming week.
- 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.
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Preparation for completing this lesson:

- Principle:** Setting limits and honoring them can help keep young people safe from harm.
- Catechism:** Freedom is exercised in relationships between human beings. Every human person, created in the image of God, has the natural right to be recognized as a free and responsible being. All owe to each other this duty of respect. The *right to the exercise of freedom*, especially in moral and religious matters, is an inalienable requirement of the dignity of the human person. This right must be recognized and protected by civil authority within the limits of the common good and public order. **#1738**
- Goal:** To assist parents, guardians, and other caring adults in teaching young people how to prevent or reduce the chance of sexual abuse.
- 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.

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 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.

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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 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."

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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.

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.

Secret—Something that is hidden from others or that is known only to one or to a few.¹

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?

¹ The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition Copyright © 2000 by Houghton Mifflin Company.

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- 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.
- 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: Understanding the boundaries in your life—an evaluation:

Supplies: Journal sheets that accompany this lesson plan. You'll need to make a copy for each student. This set of sheets serves as the handout for activities #4 and #5. Plus, you'll need to make sure each student has a pen or pencil.

Directions: Have your students spread out through the room so that, standing, they are far enough apart that with arms extended, they are no closer than fingertip-to-fingertip to the next person (approximately six feet apart in all directions).

Now, have each student stand in the center of his or her imaginary circle and imagine that everything inside that circle makes up his or her life.

Here's what you'll say to the students:

What are the things that fill up your circle? Think about the things that you care about, the things that upset you, the things you believe, and the things you dislike. *(Pause)* Think about what's most important to you and what you value in others. *(Pause)* What things are attractive to you and what do you find disgusting?" *(Pause)*

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Answer these questions on the first page of the Journal ... the page entitled "Who I know myself to be."

Give your students approximately five minutes to write their answers to the questions on the handout, and then move to the next set of questions on the next Journal page.

Next, think about the other people in your life. What do they think about you? *(Pause)* What do they like about you? *(Pause)* What do they not like about you? *(Pause)* What would they say is most important to you? *(Pause)* What would they say are your beliefs about yourself? *(Pause)* What would they say you value most in life, and what would they say you find most disgusting? *(Pause)*

Answer these questions on beginning on the second Journal page ... the page entitled, "Who others think I am." In fact, these questions cover the next three pages in your Journal, so you'll have approximately 10 minutes to answer them.

Give your students approximately 10 minutes to write their answers to the questions on the handout, and then resume the discussion.

There are many things that make each person unique and distinct from everyone else. Recognizing these differences can help us to better understand our relationships with others in our lives. This kind of knowledge helps us establish and reinforce appropriate boundaries.

Take a few more minutes to notice what you think and believe about yourself, and what you believe that others believe about you. Are they similar or are they different? How are they different? Do you recognize anything special about the areas where everyone agrees? What about the areas where you believe that others *just don't get it*? How do these areas affect your relationships with the other people in your life? Take a few minutes now to answer the analysis questions that compare your own beliefs to what you think others believe about you.

Give your students another two to three minutes to complete the "Analysis" section of the Journal.

What you think and believe about yourself—the things you wrote on the first page of your Journal—are the boundaries you have already set for yourself. After this exercise, you might see some areas where the boundaries you have set are too loose and undefined. On the other hand, there may be areas where your boundaries are too inflexible or rigid. Can you also begin to see how the things you believe about yourself can have an impact on how others treat you, and whether they violate your boundaries?

Give your students an opportunity to share anything they are comfortable sharing that they've learned from the exercise and encourage them to talk this over with their best friend, their parents or guardians, or another trusted adult. Remind them that being clear about their boundaries and insisting that others honor their boundaries, is a powerful tool in keeping themselves safe.

Activity #5: Homework assignment during the coming week:

Directions: Ask your students to select one of the following four practices and to try to make it a habit during the next few weeks.

1. Answer honestly, when someone asks his or her opinion, even if it is a different opinion than that of the person asking the question.
2. Don't go along with any activity in which you don't honestly want to participate.
3. Stop agreeing or disagreeing with others based on what you think they want to hear.
4. When friends and family ask you for your preferences—such as food, movies, activities—tell the truth.

Throughout the next week, use the additional Journal pages we've provided to write your observations about what happens when you answer these kinds of questions honestly and stand up for your own beliefs and values. Notice where your boundaries are clear to others and where they are fuzzy or confused.

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Suggested (optional) prayer 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.

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.

Lesson 3 for Grades 6, 7 and 8—Journal Sheets for Activities #4 and #5

Who I know myself to be! (Activity#4)

The three things that I care about most are:

_____, _____, _____

The three things that upset me most are:

_____, _____, _____

My core beliefs about myself are:

_____, _____, _____

I believe that life is:

_____, _____, _____

I believe that God is:

_____, _____, _____

The three things I most dislike are:

_____, _____, _____

My three most important values are:

_____, _____, _____

The three things I value most in others are:

_____, _____, _____

The three things I find most attractive are:

_____, _____, _____

The three things I find most disgusting are:

_____, _____, _____

The three things I like the most are:

_____, _____, _____

Who others think I am!

My parent(s) or guardian(s):

The three things my parents or guardians most like about me:

_____, _____, _____

The three things my parents or guardians would say that I believe:

_____, _____, _____

The three things that my parents or guardians would say that I most value:

_____, _____, _____

Three things about me that irritate my parents or guardians:

_____, _____, _____

Three things that my parents or guardians will say are most important to me:

_____, _____, _____

Three things my parents or guardians will say that I believe about myself:

_____, _____, _____

My friends:

Three things my friends like about me:

_____, _____, _____

Three things my friends would say that I believe:

_____, _____, _____

Three things that my friends would say that I value:

_____, _____, _____

Three things about me that irritate my friends:

_____, _____, _____

Three things that my friends will say are most important to me:

_____, _____, _____

Three things my friends will say that I believe about myself:

_____, _____, _____

Who others think I am!

My church (e.g., my youth minister, pastor, or religious education director)

Three things my Church likes about me:

_____, _____, _____

Three things my Church would say that I believe:

_____, _____, _____

Three things that my Church would say that I value:

_____, _____, _____

Three things about me that irritates my Church:

_____, _____, _____

Three things that my Church would say are most important to me:

_____, _____, _____

Three things my Church would say that I believe about myself:

_____, _____, _____

My school (e.g., my teachers, coaches, band and orchestra directors, etc.)

Three things my school would say that I believe:

_____, _____, _____

Three things that my school would say that I value:

_____, _____, _____

Three things about me that irritate my school:

_____, _____, _____

Three things that my school would say are most important to me:

_____, _____, _____

Three things my school would say that I believe about myself:

_____, _____, _____

Who others think I am!

The media

Three things the media would say that my peers and I believe:

_____, _____, _____

Three things that the media would say that my peers and I value:

_____, _____, _____

Three things about my peers and me that irritate the media:

_____, _____, _____

Three things that the media would say are most important to my peers and me:

_____, _____, _____

Three things the media would say that my peers and I believe about ourselves:

_____, _____, _____

Analysis

Ways my beliefs about myself are similar to what others think that I believe:

Ways my beliefs about myself are different from what others think that I believe:

How do the areas where we differ affect my relationships with the people in my life?

Homework Assignment (Activity#5)

Instructions—Part 1: Select one of the following four practices and try to make it a habit during the next few weeks. But, to begin with, try to practice it very seriously for the next week and see what happens.

1. Answer honestly, when someone asks his or her opinion, even if it is a different opinion than that of the person asking the question.
2. Don't go along with any activity in which you don't honestly want to participate.
3. Stop agreeing or disagreeing with others based on what you think they want to hear.
4. When friends and family ask you for your preferences—such as food, movies, activities—tell the truth, even if it is different from those around you.

Instructions—Part 2: Throughout the next week, use the additional Journal pages we've provided (beginning immediately below) to write your observations about what happens when you answer these kinds of questions honestly and stand up for your own beliefs and values. Notice where your boundaries are clear to others and where they are fuzzy or confused. And, notice how being clear about your own boundaries affects the quality of your own life.

DAY 1:

What happened? _____

How I responded: _____

Where do I see that my boundaries are fuzzy or confused? _____

DAY 2:

What happened? _____

How I responded: _____

Where do I see that my boundaries are fuzzy or confused? _____

DAY 3:

What happened? _____

How I responded: _____

Where do I see that my boundaries are fuzzy or confused? _____

DAY 4:

What happened? _____

How I responded: _____

Where do I see that my boundaries are fuzzy or confused? _____

DAY 5:

What happened? _____

How I responded: _____

Where do I see that my boundaries are fuzzy or confused? _____

DAY 6:

What happened? _____

How I responded: _____

Where do I see that my boundaries are fuzzy or confused? _____

DAY 7:

What happened? _____

How I responded: _____

Where do I see that my boundaries are fuzzy or confused? _____
