

Lesson 4 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: Learning when and who to tell—discussion.

Activity #4: Learning when and who to tell—scenario.

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: Empowering young people to tell a *safe* adult when something bad, uncomfortable, or confusing happens is an important aspect of child safety.

Catechism: As long as a child lives at home with his parents, the child should obey his parents in all that they ask of him when it is for his good or that of the family. "Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord." (*Col. 3:20*; cf. *Eph 6:1*) Children should also obey the reasonable direction of their teachers and all to whom their parents have entrusted the child. But if a child is convinced in conscience that it would be morally wrong to obey a particular order, he must not do so. #2217

Goal: 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: 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 young people complain of being either too physically mature or too physically immature. Peer groups play an important 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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Special preparation exercise for teachers

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:

Trust—To place confidence in or depend on.¹

Safe adults and friends—People who won't hurt, confuse, or scare a young person intentionally or without a good or honorable reason.² Safe friends and adults also respect young people's wishes and the rules of their parents and guardians.¹

Activity #3: 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.

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

² *Teaching Touching Safety Guide for Parents and Guardians*, National Catholic Services, © 2004.

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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 #4: Learning when and who to tell—scenario:

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 and who to tell when something bad, uncomfortable, scary, or confusing happens to them.

Next, begin the story about the drama teacher (Mrs. Stark) and a 14-year-old student (Sam).

Scenario Part 1: "Your friend Sam's family immigrated to the United States about two years before he was born. Sam is very smart but he is also very shy. He wants to attend one of the military academies when he graduates from high school. Sam wants to overcome his shyness, so this year he enrolled in drama class with Mrs. Stark. She has been teaching drama for several years and everyone loves her—students and parents. In fact, she is a favorite teacher at school. Since Sam started going to drama class he is notably less shy and more outgoing. His plan to get over his shyness seems to be working. However, he now spends all his free time in the drama department with Mrs. Stark. He no longer hangs out with you and doesn't have time to play video games or hang out the way he used to hang out with you after school. He doesn't seem to have time for you at all any more."

Ask the students—*Is there any reason to be concerned about Sam?* (Discuss Sam's work with Mrs. Stark. Does anything about the time he commits to Mrs. Stark seem strange? Does her student's opinion of Mrs. Stark have an impact their level of concern?)

Scenario Part 2: "In time, you notice that Sam seems to be taking more interest in his appearance. He never seemed to pay much attention to how he looked before, but now he dresses much better than in the past—and in what seems to be *new clothes*. He is even using cologne. You know that Sam's dad lost his job last month, so you are wondering how Sam can afford to buy new clothes and cologne. When you ask him about his change in appearance, he tells you that Mrs. Stark helped him get some new clothes."

Ask the students—*Is there any reason to be concerned about Sam? Should you talk to anyone about what's happening?* (Discuss whether there is anything strange about Sam's involvement with Mrs. Stark. How does a student's opinion of Mrs. Stark have an impact on his or her level of concern?)

Scenario Part 3: "One afternoon you see Sam leaving school by himself, and you invite him to come over to your house, just like it used to be. He agrees and for a few minutes it seems as though nothing has changed. Then Sam starts telling you that he is not interested in going to college any more. He wants to be an actor, and he is concentrating his attention on developing those skills. When you ask him what happened, he says that Mrs. Stark really inspired him to get outside of himself and to see new opportunities. He doesn't want to miss anything in life."

Ask the students—*Is there any reason to be concerned about Sam? Is there anything you should do or anyone you should talk to about what Sam is saying and apparently thinking?* (Has Mrs. Stark's influence on Sam gone beyond the bounds of an acceptable teacher-student relationship?)

Scenario Part 4: "One Friday night about two weeks later, you get a call from Sam's father looking for Sam. He tells you that Sam said he was going on a school-sponsored field trip to Chicago with several drama students to see some plays. He says that although Sam said that all the students were going, Sam's father just got a call from one of the other drama students looking for Sam. The student knew nothing about a school-sponsored field trip. The student told

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Sam's father that Mrs. Stark told them that she was going to Chicago to see some plays over the weekend, but she did not invite the students to come with her. Sam's father is looking for him and thought you might know where he is or what is happening. Earlier in the week, Sam told you he was going on a school-sponsored field trip with Mrs. Stark."

Ask the students—*Is there any reason to be concerned about Sam? Should you tell his dad what you have noticed over the last several weeks? What is your responsibility to Sam and to Sam's father?* (Discuss whether there is anything strange about Sam's relationship with Mrs. Stark and what specific warning signs you've noticed about the ever-changing relationship.)

Ask your students to now think back and see if they can identify some of the warning signs that indicate this relationship between Sam and Mrs. Stark is violating the boundaries of what's appropriate between teachers and students.

What could Sam have done differently?

If you were Sam, what would you have done? Where would you have drawn the line?

What, if anything, could you have done to help Sam recognize the risks he was facing?

How many of you had an uneasy feeling about what was happening with Sam and his teacher? When did you first start to feel it?

Let the students know that you and their parents and teachers realize that it is sometimes hard to know when someone's motives are not good—particularly when you already like and trust the person. However, one of the best gauges for whether something is wrong is that uneasy feeling that we get when something just doesn't seem right.

If we trust that instinct, we can speak up and take action before there is any real damage done. You could say that instinct is God's voice speaking to us, letting us know that there is something wrong, and we need to take action to be safe and to protect ourselves and others.

Speaking up is not "telling on someone." It is acting in service of someone's safety—even when he or she doesn't understand it in that way. It is vital to tell a trusted adult if you suspect that an adult is developing an inappropriate relationship with a child or young person.

Reaffirm to your students the importance of Sam or Sam's friend telling a trusted adult what was happening. Address their concerns about speaking up by using the points made earlier in the discussion.

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?

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.

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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) prayer to end the lesson:

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.