Lesson 1 for Grades 9—12

Partnering with Parents & Guardians for Safety
Physical Boundaries: Safe and Unsafe Touching Rules

PRINCIPLE
Children / youth must learn tools to protect themselves from people who want to harm them through physical touch (sexual or otherwise) and to prevent or reduce the risk of sexual abuse and boundary violations.

CATECHISM / SCRIPTURE
Every human life, from the moment of conception until death, is sacred because the human person has been willed for its own sake in the image and likeness of the living and holy God.—Catechism of the Catholic Church, **#2319 (1997)**

OBJECTIVES

After lesson 1, youth should be able to:

- Know the Touching Safety Rules:
  - Say "No!" when someone tries to touch them in an unsafe or uncomfortable way
  - Try to get away from the situation
  - Tell an adult as soon as possible
- Describe safe / unsafe touches
- Recognize similar boundary rules apply Online
- Understand that if anybody does give them an unsafe touch or shows them inappropriate material, it isn't the child's fault
- Follow a safety plan created in collaboration with their parents

Background for parents and guardians:

Before sitting down with your child(ren) and beginning the activities, read through this entire lesson and view the video. Choose the activities that you are most comfortable with first, gradually moving on to the others. You will find it is helpful to have the *Teaching Boundaries and Safety Guide* handy to navigate the lesson material. The activities listed within this lesson plan are intended to empower young people to think about safety issues with you as their partner.

This age group: Dealing with teenagers—key concept is "searching"

This is the age where all the experiences that began with puberty—the physical changes and the developing emotions—accelerate rapidly as the teenager matures into a young adult. The self-consciousness deepens and matures. The world of "children" is now renounced. Teens believe in their immortality and may tend to be reckless in their behavior—in person and online. Although it would appear that they reject authority while defining their own independence, in reality they rely on the strength and support they find in parents and other influential adults. Feeling supported and understood is important for this age group, as is upholding boundaries while the reasoning portions of their brains continue to develop. Teens have a great deal of personal freedom. This freedom also puts them at risk in various ways. Parents and guardians expect teens to take care of themselves and to ask for the help that they need. Caring adults must know that children's online behavior and boundaries may need to be fortified.

OPTION #1: Introductory Video

Preparation: In preparing for this activity, review the *Teaching Boundaries and Safety Guide: Safe Environment Guide for Caring Adults, Parents and Guardians.*

Directions: View and discuss the introductory video with your child. The introductory video for youth in this age range is designed to open a simple discussion with children about personal boundaries and touching safety. The video is approximately six minutes long and is neither created nor intended as a substitute for the activities. It's merely an intro designed to "break the ice" and assist the transition into completing the interactive Lesson Activity options. It can be used in to introduce any of the following activities. Discussion and practice are the critical components needed to teach children how to protect themselves. They learn best by "doing"; not just listening or watching.

Video links for this age group of Grades 9—12:
English 9 – 12: https://vimeo.com/1180991086/6a69f315a6
Spanish 9 – 12: https://vimeo.com/1181320448/5dfe5c4b60

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OPTION #2: Safety Terminology

Preparation: In preparing for this activity, review the *Teaching Boundaries and Safety Guide: Safe Environment Guide for Caring Adults, Parents and Guardians.*

Directions: Review and Discuss key vocabulary words with your child. Alternatively, Lesson Leaders may utilize this vocabulary framework to have a better baseline of understanding to simply begin a conversation about boundaries, or to assist you in leading the other activities.

- **Safety rules**—Any time an adult (or other youth) makes a child feel uncomfortable or unsafe, there are simple safety rules so the youth know what to do: the child should say words that mean "No!," try to get away from the person, and tell a safe adult as soon as possible.
- **Private body parts**—those body parts covered by a bathing suit.
- **Saying "No"**—to say "no" means to refuse, deny, reject or express disapproval of. This word is used to express a boundary and communicate that you do not want something to happen or continue. [Let children know it's OK to say "No" to an adult if they make you feel scared or uncomfortable, or if they touch your private body parts.]
- **Rules**—a prescribed guide for conduct or action. We follow the rules to make sure we are safe—just like how we have a seatbelt rule to keep us safe in the car, or the safety rules before we cross the street. [I.e., we teach the child a simple rule for what to do if someone tries to touch him / her in an unsafe way, which is to say "No!", try to get away, and tell an adult as soon as possible.]
- **Uncomfortable**—experiencing discomfort that leaves one feeling uneasy, sometimes causing anxiety or feelings of nausea. [It might be a feeling in the "pit of your stomach" or it could be the hairs standing up on the back of your neck. You may freeze, want to fight or feel like running away from the situation.]
- **Confusing**—is something that is hard to figure out because it doesn't make sense, it is unclear or puzzling. To cause confusion is to cause an inability to think clearly or to be misleading. [An example is a big, messy knot—it can be confusing because it's hard to figure out where each part goes how to straighten it all out.]
- **Boundaries**—the physical and emotional limits that define one person as separate from another or from others. Boundaries promote and preserve physical or emotional personal space in our relationships. Boundaries give each person a clear sense of "self" and a framework for how to function in relation to others. Boundaries bring order to our lives and empower each of us to determine how others will interact with us.
- **Respecting boundaries (and when they're violated)**—we should have respect for ourselves, and respect for others. Respect for ourselves means we understand our dignity and value as a person, and work to create or maintain boundaries to protect ourselves. We feel upset or uncomfortable when someone doesn't honor our own boundaries, and we communicate with the right person if we need help. Respecting another's boundaries means you care about them, and won't do anything that would bring them harm, and that you communicate with the right person to get them help if they are being harmed by someone else. [Give children examples of respecting others, i.e. not calling people mean names, not hitting others, following rules at school or at home, stopping an activity when someone asks, letting an adult know when someone is in pain or hurt, etc.]
- **Safe friends and safe adults**—safe people won't hurt you without a good reason and won't intentionally confuse you. They listen to and consistently respect boundaries, and follow the rules. [Explain that a child may have many safe friends and adults. Give children examples of adult behavior that could hurt them, but may be necessary for the child's safety, i.e. medical exams, vaccinations, throat swabs, removing splinters, stopping a child from running into the road, etc.]
- **Unsafe friends and unsafe adults**—unsafe friends and unsafe adults put a child at risk for emotional, spiritual and physical harm. These are people who place a child in danger for their own purposes without concern for the welfare of the child. They also do not consistently listen to the parents' wishes or the child's boundaries. [Tell children we can know when someone is unsafe if they do not follow the rules or listen to our boundaries.]
- **Safe touches**—touches that have a good purpose, aren't intended to hurt and should be familiar. They're safe and can also be meant to keep you healthy, even if the person isn't known well, as long as the touches are appropriate for the particular relationship, such as when mom kisses your forehead at night, when you high-five your teammate, etc. [Avoid saying safe touches that *feel* good are "safe, loving or show someone loves you" since sometimes touches are safe and necessary, but can also hurt—although they hurt for a good reason to keep children safe, such as stiches, a doctor shot or dental cleanings.]

Note: It is important to invite questions and comments from students at this point. Clarifications of some of the language, such as "harmful touches" might be necessary. Lesson Leaders should be ready to answer clearly and honestly.

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- **Unsafe touch—**harmful touches committed by an individual or group that physically, sexually, or psychologically harms a child or young person. This touch is often from people who either cannot or choose not to see the harm in their actions.[Unsafe touches include hitting, punching, tripping, kicking, spitting, touching private parts, etc.]

- **Secret**—something kept hidden, never told or unexplained. Secrets exclude others and have potential to harm, sometimes causing the person involved to feel frightened or uncomfortable. [For example, let children know that there are no secrets when it comes to personal and physical safety. Tell children it's wrong for an adult or another child to ask to keep a secret about safety—especially unsafe touches—because that's a way for people to get hurt. If an individual tries to make a child keep a secret or makes him / her feel frightened, the child must know to communicate this information right away to a parent or caring adult—and be reassured that the child will be protected regardless of threats or seeming consequences of "telling".]

- **Peer Pressure**—the strong influence of a group—especially of young people—on members of that group to behave as everyone else does.

OPTION #3: Boundary Safety Rules (Review and expand the boundary touching rules)

Preparation: In preparing for this activity, review the *Teaching Boundaries and Safety Guide: Safe Environment Guide for Caring Adults, Parents and Guardians.*

Directions: Discuss with your child the reasons why touching safety rules are important. Make sure to reinforce the following points.

- Knowing the rules helps teens deal with potentially threatening situations and, in the process, helps them maintain their own safety and the safety of their friends.

- Being aware of potentially harmful situations, and discussing how to deal with them in advance, are vital to a teen's personal safety. (Ask your child to give you examples of harmful situations).

Discuss with your child the various reasons why there are rules in your family. Emphasize created them to ensure the safety of all family members. Remind your teen of specific rules regarding what they may or may not be allowed to do. This could include:

- Guidelines teens *know* are there because parents and guardians let them engage in certain activities while saying "no" to other activities.

- Behaviors that parents and guardians expect from their teens and young people, even though they (parents) may have never actually verbalized those expectations.

Remind your child that while most touches are safe, some are unsafe and may pose serious risks to those involved. There are a variety of reasons for physical touching. Discuss some of the reasons for human touch, and note which touches are safe and which are unsafe.

- Touch can be appropriate, Inappropriate and sometimes confusing. It can be received positively or negatively, and it can be safe or unsafe.

    - For example, touch can indicate:

        - An attempt to communicate
        - Affection
        - Loving and consensual sexual activity between spouses in the context of a Christian marriage
        - Use of power and control
        - A demonstration of anger and hostility
        - A vehicle for victimization—sexual and physical

- Discuss different examples of safe / unsafe touches or behavior, and confusing behavior, as well as ways to deal with negatively perceived or confusing touches.

- Discuss ways to say "no" or to otherwise refuse unwanted advances or uncomfortable / unwanted touches.

- Talk about whether there is ever a time when "no" doesn't mean "no." And, if there is such a time, discuss some ways to help determine whether "no" really means "no." **Hint:** If someone says "no" in the context of a human touch, you should always respect "no" as the final answer. Always!

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