

**Lesson 6 for Grades 9-12**

**Partnering with Parents & Guardians for Safety:  
Boundaries: Feelings and Facts**

**PRINCIPLE**

Youth should be taught tools to recognize what it feels like when adults or other youth do not uphold healthy boundaries. Youth need to understand objective and subjective signs of boundary infringement, how it physically and emotionally might feel and what to do about it.

**OBJECTIVES**

After Lesson 6, youth should be better able to:

- Distinguish the difference between objective situations where boundaries are violated or infringed upon and healthy relationships
- Recognize the range of sensations beginning with feeling “uncomfortable” to potentially feeling unsafe or violated (physically and emotionally).
- Respond appropriately to unsafe situations involving themselves or their friends.

**CATECHISM / SCRIPTURE**

*“Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.”*

—Deuteronomy 31:6

**Background for Parents and Guardians:**

**In preparation for teaching this lesson and to lead the activities, review the *Teaching Boundaries and Safety Guide: Safe Environment Guide for Caring Adults, 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 and gradually moving to the others. You will find it is helpful to have the *Teaching Boundaries and Safety Guide* handy to navigate the lesson material. These activities are intended to empower young people to think about safety issues with you as their partner.

**Interacting with this age group: 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 youth’s online behavior and boundaries may need to be fortified.

**Prior to Teaching the Lessons—A Map for Parents**

1. **Complete the VIRTUS Children’s Programs Lesson Leader Orientation and Certification Training.** This training module will provide the foundational knowledge necessary for any Lesson Leader to successfully lead a safe environment lesson. For access to this training, please communicate with your diocesan coordinator.
2. **Review the *Teaching Boundaries and Safety Guide: Safe Environment Guide for Caring Adults, Parents and Guardians*.** This document (also available in module format) gives a wealth of information regarding boundaries. While adults

are the main protectors of children, there are skills children can learn to better protect themselves and each other when faced with tough situations where caring adults aren't present. For access to this resource, please communicate with your diocesan coordinator.

3. **Review the Key Vocabulary Words for Parents to Know** (below). These key words and concepts should be woven throughout the entire lesson. The lesson leader should read through and understand these terms and apply them to each activity.

### Key Vocabulary Words for Parents to Know

**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. [For example, teach the youth 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.]

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

**Rights**—We are all born free and equal, and have certain rights that are automatically ours. Everyone is entitled to these rights, and they should not be taken away from us. For example, teach youth, “you have a right to be safe, and your body belongs to you!”

**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 youth and a grandparent is different than the boundary between a youth and a teacher or coach.

**Respecting boundaries**—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.]

**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 youth 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.]

**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 youth know that there are no secrets when it comes to personal and physical safety. Tell youth that it's wrong for an adult or another youth to ask a youth 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 youth keep a secret or makes him / her feel frightened, the youth must know to communicate this information right away to a parent or caring adult—and be reassured that the youth will be protected regardless of threats or seeming consequences of “telling”.]

**Feelings**—Your emotional state, such as being happy, sad, excited or nervous. Your feelings help you understand what you like and what you don't like. Feelings can also help you determine whether you like what is happening to you (such as feeling happy when playing with a friend) or you do not like what is happening to you (such as getting upset if you drop an ice cream cone on the ground, or having your stomach feel yucky if someone touches you in an unsafe way).

**Discomfort**—To feel uneasy, anxious, or embarrassed (such as when your face starts to feel hot and get red because you tripped on the playground in front of your friends).

**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.]

**Feeling safe**—When you are with a safe adult or safe friend (someone who listens to you, consistently respects your boundaries, and follows the rules) and you feel happy and cared for. You feel comfortable and calm.

**Feeling unsafe (not right)**—To feel scared, nervous, anxious or uneasy. You might be worried that something bad is going to happen. Your body might start to sweat, or your stomach might feel sick and you know that something is not right. [This could happen if an unsafe adult or unsafe friend puts you in danger for their own purposes, or doesn't follow the rules or respect your boundaries.]

**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.]

**Rude**—describes behavior where someone inadvertently or accidentally does or says something hurtful. Rudeness is usually unplanned, and not *intended* to hurt. [Examples include social awkwardness, such as burping into someone's face, cutting someone off, behaving narcissistically, having poor manners, bragging about an accomplishment, etc.]

**Mean**—describes behavior where someone says or does something hurtful on purpose, once (maybe twice). The aim is to intentionally hurt, and is often motivated by anger. [Examples include putting someone down so the mean person looks/sounds better, making fun of how the person dresses or looks, insulting person's skills or intelligence or saying / behaving in an unkind way after a disagreement, saying things like: "why would you wear that, it looks terrible on you" or "you're so dumb, you should quit."]

**Bullying**—is different from being rude or mean. It is cruel; the intentional, repeated exposure of negative and aggressive behaviors to a targeted person over time. The bully will say or do something intentionally hurtful, and keep doing it, without a sense of remorse. A key aspect is the ongoing pattern, involving an imbalance of power where the bully has more control or influence. [Examples include physical, verbal and emotional aggression, in-person and online; social exclusion, hazing others, spreading rumors or inappropriate content, cyberbullying, etc.]

**Sexual abuse** is when one pressures, forces or *tries* to force the other to do a sexual activity—even *kissing*—against their will, or without consent, which means that it isn't wanted (or that the person cannot give consent due to being incapacitated due to drugs, alcohol, fear, pressure, or some other reason, like changing their mind at any time). **Child sexual abuse** is when an adult does these behaviors with a child or youth—even a teen. A minor is legally incapable of giving consent to sexual behavior, and so when an adult does these behaviors with a person who is a minor, it is considered to be child sexual abuse.

**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 youth may have many safe friends and adults. Give youth examples of adult behavior that could hurt them, but may be necessary for the youth's safety, i.e. medical exams, vaccinations, throat swabs, removing splinters, stopping a child from running into the road, etc.]

## DURING THE LESSON

Each lesson should begin with the Introductory Video. Following the video, you are able to choose which activity options you would like to do with your child. There are multiple activities to choose from, and you may choose to do one, or all, of the activities. Each activity can also be tailored to the needs and grade level of your child.

### STEP 1: Play Introductory Video

View and discuss the introductory video with your child. The introductory video for all grades 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.

Grades 9-12 Video links:

English 9 – 12:

[https://www.youtube.com/embed/eY\\_oua646oc](https://www.youtube.com/embed/eY_oua646oc)

Spanish 9 – 12

<https://www.youtube.com/embed/ScP07b62IR0>

### ACTIVITY OPTION #1: Feelings and Boundaries Are a Significant Part of Healthy Relationships

**Background:** This activity will provide opportunities for discussion on the role of feelings and boundaries within healthy relationships, and what it *feels* like [physically, emotionally and psychologically] when a youth is in an unsafe situation, and actions they can take to be safer.

**Discussion:** Begin the activity with a discussion regarding relationships, and what healthy relationships are vs. unhealthy relationships are.

**Say:** Our lives are made up of relationships with everyone around us, including relationships between family members, teachers, coaches, other adults, acquaintances—our friends—and other significant people in our lives.

**Ask:** What makes a relationship healthy? (Key elements include two individuals who are committed to: having mutual respect, freedom to be one's self, honoring each other's boundaries, and communicating in healthy ways.) For example, if a friend asks you to do something they feel is unsafe or they don't like, people who have healthy boundaries would stop that behavior immediately. People who truly care about you want you to be safe and feel safe will behave with respect toward you.

**Ask:** How do I know if a relationship is unhealthy—even peer friendships? (It's unhealthy when there isn't respect, when power is used to manipulate, name-calling, a lack of kindness, when there's dishonesty, when it hurts or is confusing, when someone tries to get you to do something you don't want to do, when there's abuse, etc.)

**Say:** As we can see, there are *objective* standards to healthy relationships and ways that we can define whether it's healthy or unhealthy—these are what we just discussed, which are specific indicators of an unhealthy relationship. And, there are also “subjective” feelings we experience that could help to underscore whether it can be healthy or unhealthy, too. Feelings are “subjective” because they are not the same for everyone and different people may experience different feelings.

While sometimes we may put a lot of emphasis on our feelings, this is not always the best indicator as to whether something is good or bad. While we definitely want to pay attention to our feelings, it's also important to take into consideration the objective, or more tangible, visible, elements of any relationship or interaction.

**Let's talk more about emotions:** First, feelings are normal—they're neither good, nor bad, and everyone has them. Having feelings is a healthy part of being a person.

We all know when we are happy, joyful, excited, content or calm... Some typical events that spur these types of feelings include: a birthday party, attending a large event, going to a friend's house, going on vacation, hearing a favorite song, playing a sport, etc.

Then, explain that sometimes, things might happen to us that might cause us to feel ways that our bodies don't like as much. *Sometimes our bodies might react in a way we don't expect.* Sometimes our bodies show us about the reality of a situation, which is why it's important for us to recognize the objective standards of healthy relationships, and these feelings that show us when our bodies might feel unsafe or uncomfortable.

The feelings we have in our body are telling our brain something—whether it is for something happy or for something wrong, uncomfortable or unsafe. **Feeling uncomfortable or unsafe might feel like the following:**

- Your body might want to take flight—wanting to run away or get away
- Your body might freeze—feeling like you can't move, like your body feels like concrete
- Your body might feel heavy or stuck
- Your body might want to strike out and hit something
- Your stomach might feel sick, like you want to throw up
- You might feel confusion—not knowing what to do, or understanding what is happening
- And, you might feel disconnected, like you're watching something happen to you—and maybe not even feeling it physically

**Activity:** Discuss each scenario with your child.

You may need to guide their responses in some of the scenarios. When the question of “what might your body be telling you” is asked, the youth should be led to say that their bodies are showing them that they feel discomfort, uncomfortable, unsafe, as if their boundaries are being impacted, etc. And, when their bodies feel that way, they have to do something healthy to address it!

**Scenarios:**

**Scenario #1:** *At an outdoor event, you see a recently-graduated former student that you used to have a crush on. The person tells you how attractive you look. You tell your friends that you are fine, and push them away so you can spend one-on-one time with this person. You're having a ton of fun! But, by the end of the event, the person starts rubbing your shoulders and saying things that make you feel uncomfortable and embarrassed. They're starting to*

*touch you in ways that you aren't ready for and they kiss you. Even though you were having fun at first, you realize that you don't like the way this person is acting anymore. This makes you embarrassed so your face starts to feel hot and gets red and your heart starts beating faster because you are uncomfortable. Since you invited their attention in the first place, you feel stuck and like you have to let them keep touching you, even though your body wants to get away. **Is this a healthy or unhealthy situation? What is your body telling you? Do you have to stay? What can you do?***

- **Explain: Sexual abuse** is when one (even a boyfriend) pressures, forces or *tries* to force the other to do a sexual activity—even *kissing*—against their will, or without consent, which means that it isn't wanted (or that the person cannot give consent due to being incapacitated due to drugs, alcohol, fear, pressure, or some other reason, like changing their mind at any time).
- You have the right to stop any type of behavior that you don't like at ANY TIME, even if you seemed to give consent in the beginning; and, your boundaries should be listened to.
- Say "NO! I don't like it when you do that."
- Shrug your shoulders and move away so they stop.
- Leave and go somewhere else.
- Tell a safe adult, or, a friend who can help you speak to a safe adult.
- Call your parents to come and pick you up.

**Scenario #2:** *You are very excited that you have a soccer tournament coming up in another state, which your whole team has been planning for months. Since your parents have to work, they said you could go on your own this time, since they trust your coach and know that there should be other chaperones. Before the trip, you were told that all of the players would have their own room. However, once you arrive at the hotel, the coach tells you the hotel messed up the room scheduling and now you'll have to room with the coach on a different floor from everyone else; coach winks at you and starts handing out keys and ordering the other chaperones to specific rooms. At first, you feel special because you think you might get to play more by getting special treatment. Then, once you are in the room with the coach by yourself, you see that there's only one bed and you start to feel like this is a bad situation. You are nervous about making a big scene and causing trouble, and potentially losing your ability to play in the tournament that you've been working hard for. You feel like you can't breathe well and your heart starts beating really fast. **What is your body telling you? Is this a healthy or unhealthy situation? What can you do?***

- Remember, it doesn't matter if you initially decided that you felt like you were in a healthy or safe situation. You can always change your mind, especially when you feel uncomfortable or unsafe. It's important to speak up for yourself if you can—and a safe person will always listen to you when it comes to your boundaries. Remember the boundaries safety rules:
  - Say, "no!", tell the coach you would rather room with one of your teammates.
  - Leave, if you can, and immediately get help from an adult. Find another adult chaperone, another parent or another safe adult, and ask them for help.
  - Communicate everything to your parents or another safe adult. Ask a friend or safe adults to help you talk to them if you need extra courage.

**Scenario #3:** *An adult, who is well-liked in your community, gives your 15-year-old best friend \$300 to spend any way your friend wants, and you suspect there must be a catch. But, your friend ignores your warning, and spends it quickly! In fact, your friend seems to be spending a lot of time with that adult and lying to their parents about it. Your friend seems obsessed with this person! Your friend suddenly wants to talk to you, and asks you to keep it a secret before they'll say anything. You agree, and your friend confides to you that they're now in a relationship with the adult, that they love each other—and that the person respects them and that it's a really healthy relationship. You feel like this is wrong because the other person is an adult while your friend is only 15, but your friend says it's not a big deal because they'll be 16 in a few months. Your friend reminds you that you promised confidentiality and that you can't break a promise. You're so worried about it that you're having a hard time sleeping and you feel anxious. You're torn to the point of feeling sick about it, because you don't want to ruin a friendship with your best friend, and you feel like you need to be there for them for anything, because, isn't that what friends do to support each other? Plus, part of you just wants to let your friend be happy, and your friend seems happy right now, even though the situations seems wrong. **What is your body telling you? Is this a healthy or unhealthy situation? What can you do?***

- **Ask:** Is it every okay for an adult to be in a romantic relationship with a child or youth, even if it seems healthy and they say they are in love?

It is never okay for an adult to be in a romantic relationship with a child or youth, no matter the circumstances. It is unhealthy. It is illegal and this is considered sexual abuse. **Sexual abuse** is when one pressures, forces or *tries* to force the other to do a sexual activity—even *kissing*—against their will, or without consent, which means that it isn't wanted (or that the person cannot give consent due to being incapacitated due to drugs, alcohol, fear, pressure, or some other reason, like changing their mind at any time). **Child sexual abuse** is when an adult does these behaviors with a child or youth—even a teen. A minor is legally incapable of giving consent to sexual behavior, and so when an adult does these behaviors with a person who is a minor, it is considered to be child sexual abuse.

- Our friends are the ones who are most likely to recognize when we are in an unhealthy situation. As a friend, even a “peripheral one,” this is why it’s important to listen, and be kind, even if you aren’t very close.
- **Ask:** Can you promise confidentiality to a friend about abuse? (No, you, as a friend, *cannot promise* complete confidentiality when hearing about abuse, because there may come a time where you will need to communicate with a safe adult on their behalf—to protect them.)
- **Ask:** So, what if you’ve *already* promised to keep it a secret—can you—or... *should* you—share the information with the right person who can help? (Yes. *Because, there are unsafe secrets that harm others and cannot be kept. Sharing information regarding an unsafe secret is actually the safe and right thing to do to keep our friends healthy and safe.*)
- **Ask:** Does sharing it betray the person and their confidence? (No. It’s *helping* them—when they can’t get the help they need themselves. That’s being a good friend, even if it doesn’t *feel* like it, because you are watching out for someone else’s safety.)
- **Conclusion:** In any case, regardless of who it is, or why they’re doing the behavior, or even the circumstances involved, unsafe situations have to get to a safe adult. A **safe adult** is one who prioritizes safety.

**Note:** Be careful to communicate to youth that they are not responsible for each other. Misinforming youth by saying that one person’s welfare is a youth’s responsibility could make a child feel more guilt if they weren’t able to prevent or stop abuse from occurring for themselves or a friend. The distinction for this lesson is that there are times when youth are being abused, or they know a peer is in need of help, but, they don’t always know the best way to assist. Being a safe friend means that children do the “right thing” for themselves, and for each other—meaning that they perform action, or intervene in safe ways when they are aware of a problem.

**Scenario #4:** Lately at school, Olivia, one of your really good friends has been really down because of problems at home and school. Recently, Olivia started talking to a guy on the Internet through her favorite social media app. Everything she has told you about him and their conversations seemed okay at first, and it seemed like she was really into him. Olivia said they were only talking, but then she told you she sent him pictures of herself without any clothes on. You know that you’re not supposed to do this, but you know other “cool” kids at school who have done it too, so it doesn’t seem like a big deal. After that, the online guy started demanding more and said if Olivia really loved him she would keep sending him pictures. Following this, Olivia said she wanted to be in charge of the relationship, and wanted to meet him in person, but she knows her parents won’t let her. Olivia asked if she could tell her parents that she was going to your house, when really she was going to meet him for a “date.” You don’t want to agree, but Olivia says that she will never forgive you if you don’t help her, so you rationalize your worry away because her date is in public and others will be around—and really, how bad could it be? But, later, you receive a text from Olivia that he is a lot older than she expected (like, her dad’s age!), but that he is “really cool” and they have a lot in common. Olivia then sends you a picture of flowers and jewelry he brought her, and excitedly tells you he is taking her a hotel room for an even bigger surprise that she can’t wait to see, at the hotel over an hour away. Once you hear this news, you immediately get goosebumps and feel chilled. You text her back that it’s a bad idea and that she should leave, but she isn’t answering. Sometimes she doesn’t answer so this isn’t immediately alarming, but you can’t help imagining horrible things that could happen and you feel like you can’t even let the phone go because your hands are gripping it so tightly. **What is your body telling you? Is this a healthy relationship? Is it a safe situation? What can you do?**

- Immediately tell your parents or another safe adult—even the police. This could be an emergency, so calling 911 is the right choice to make to get someone there as quickly as possible. You can always call 911 yourself, or ask another safe adult to do this for you, because there is a possibility Olivia is in danger. However, don’t wait and don’t hesitate! It’s always better to call 911 right away than to wait.
- **Child exploitation:** In many cases, when a youth shares sexual or naked images of themselves over the Internet (even through sexting), most youth don’t realize that this can be considered distributing child pornography—which is illegal. Even worse, these images can be shared without the original person’s knowledge, and they often add to the pool of sexually exploited images of children. If you encounter any situation while on the Internet of the sexual exploitation of children (including naked images), it’s important to call the CyberTipline, which is a safe reporting system.
- Call Olivia’s parents, or ask your parents to, and tell them where she really is.

**Conclusion:**

1. If someone makes you feel any of these [physical, emotional or psychological] feelings, your body is telling you that something is the matter, that something is wrong.
2. If you ever feel this way, it is not your fault! Remember, feelings aren't wrong, but if you feel unsafe, worried, uncomfortable, etc., then it's your body is giving you a response that needs attention! If *you* have ever been mistreated in a relationship, it can be really confusing. It's easy to blame yourself. If someone hurts you physically, emotionally, sexually or in some other way—you *did nothing to cause the abuse*. A lot of people don't know what to do when they experience unsafe or unhealthy relationships. They might feel like there's no way out, or be afraid to ask for help. It has nothing to do with your level of intelligence or strength. It's always the fault of the person who is abusing.
3. You deserve to be in a healthy relationship with healthy boundaries and safe friends. If you can recognize problematic behaviors or abuse, try to do the right thing by finding a way to help yourself—it's never too late for this. And, help your friends, too—this involves courage. You don't deserve to be treated poorly—no one does. If you, or someone you know is in an unhealthy relationship, try to say "no!" to the person, do whatever you need to do to get away as soon as possible, and tell a safe adult right away.

**ACTIVITY OPTION #2: NetSmartz Video: "Split Decisions"**

**Background:** This short video is shared with permission from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) and can be played for youth. It is designed to open a simple discussion with youth about cyberbullying and alternate ways they can work through issues.

**Description:** In "Split Decisions," Lily and Gabriela aren't getting along, on- or offline. They each have to make choices on how they will interact with one another both in person and online.

Click here for the video link and then look through the videos under Middle and High School to find "Split Decisions:"  
<https://www.missingkids.org/netsmartz/videos#middleandhighschool>

**Discussion:** Before showing the video, ask, "How would you feel if someone said something mean to you, or about you, online?"

Say: "Sometimes these things can happen when we are online, when talking to others, using social media, playing games, or any other online activity. If it does happen, there's a really important safety plan that we need to know about—and we're going to talk about it after watching this video."

**After the video,** ask "How did they feel, physically and emotionally, when their friend said something mean about them online? What should they do?"

Discuss what we should do when we feel upset, confused, scared, upset, or angry about something that we see online, or regarding something unkind or mean that someone says or writes to us when online, while playing a game or just simply watching videos. Here are the options we can do when something upsets us online:

- Block the person
- Report any cyberbullying to the website or app.
- You can also save the message or visual, and show it to a safe adult.
- Always bring safe adults into the conversation when you feel unsafe or uncomfortable, or when you know something isn't right—there are lots of safe adults in your life!