

Middle School Level, Grades 6, 7, 8 (ages 11 to 14 years)

Lesson Plan: Touching Safety Rules/ Safe Friends, Safe Adults, and Safe Touches

Principle: Children must guard against those who may harm them through touch (sexual or otherwise). Young people must respect their own health and safety and the health and safety of others.

Scripture: *God created man in his image; in the divine image he created him; male and female he created them. God looked at everything he had made, and he found it very good. ... — Gen 1:27, 31*¹

Goal: To assist educators, catechists, youth ministers, and other caring adults in teaching children how to prevent or reduce the risk of sexual abuse.

Objectives: Through this lesson the catechist, teacher, or youth minister reinforces the parent's message about touching safety and protecting private body parts. Upon completion of this lesson, children should be better able to:

- Clearly state the rules about inappropriate touching.
- Describe safe touches.
- Say "No!" when someone tries to touch them in a way that is uncomfortable or otherwise inappropriate.
- Identify the situations when secrets are appropriate and when secrets are a threat of harm.
- Name their safe friends and safe adults.
- Identify special safe adults.
- Respond in an appropriate manner to unsafe situations.

Parent Notice: Send a notice to parents outlining the goals and objectives of the *Touching Safety* program and giving parents an opportunity to "opt out" should they choose to do so. Every parent needs to return the form noting that their child has permission to attend the lesson or that they have chosen not to have their child attend the lesson. This form must be returned in either instance and retained at the parish/school office.

Dealing with the pre-adolescent and adolescent age—Healthy questioning

The middle school child is experiencing a period of rapid growth. The emergence of interest in the opposite sex is occurring. He or she is concerned about physical change, body size, skin quality, and hair length. Body image is very important to this child as he or she complains of being either too physically mature or too physically immature. The peer group plays an important role in shaping attitudes and interest. Caregivers need to regularly assure youngsters that changes are normal, though the rate of change varies from person to person.

Parents, catechists, teachers, youth ministers, and other caring adults must carefully listen to children and observe *what is happening in their lives*. Let young people be themselves. Let them explore their self-expression; but, know *who* they are with and *what* they are doing, and remind them of the importance of protecting themselves during this dynamic time in their lives. During this time, children are completely self-absorbed, and many are naturally less communicative than at other periods during their development.

At this age, young people are experiencing many changes, both physically and emotionally. They may question traditional rules and struggle with making personal decisions. They have a heightened awareness of their bodies, which may cause them to feel awkward, confused, and uneasy about themselves. They lack the experience to anticipate the consequences of their decisions. Caregivers can assist adolescents in forming healthy views about appropriate boundaries in relationships.

Vocabulary words:

- Touching
- Puberty
- Peer Pressure
- Private body parts

¹ *The New American Bible*, Catholic Book Publishing Company, 1970 (Imprimatur July 27, 1970).

- Unsafe Adult
- Secret/s
- Safe Friend
- Unsafe Friend
- Boundaries
- Special Safe Adult
- Respect
- No!
- Safe Adult
- Unsafe Touch
- Safe Touch
- Slang

Activity:

In preparing for this activity, review *Teaching Touching Safety: A Guide for Parents, Guardians, and Other Caring Adults*. Then, discuss the fact that a child has a right to say "No," and to expect the other person to listen and respect the "No."

These exercises are intended to empower young people to begin to think about safety issues and to be their parents' partner in making sure that the child has the tools needed to resist the overtures of a potential child molester.

Discuss situations that could be a part of a grooming process. As you look at the situations, you will see that none of them are clear-cut examples of grooming. Discussion allows the young people to work out the issues involved in determining whether the adult's actions are part of the grooming process. It is important that young people begin to recognize the elements of grooming and identify things that are "red flags."

- Adults or older children who allow young people to watch R-rated or X-rated movies. (In the first situation, the mere fact that an adult allows a child to watch an R-Rated movie is not necessarily grooming. However, if the movie is one the parents have forbidden the child to see and the adult tells the child to keep it a secret, the adult's action become more suspicious.)
- Adults or other children who tell dirty jokes or look at "adult" (naked or sexually explicit) pictures.
- An adult or older child who does something unsafe and, when the young person says, "Stop," the adult or older child agrees to back off but asks the child not to tell anyone what happened.

Hand out the word puzzle and explain the instructions to the children. Children are instructed to find the words on the list that are related to the topic of "Touching Safety," and to circle each of those words. Each word will be in a straight line, but it may be written vertically (up and down), horizontally (left and right), diagonally (at an angle), and either forward, backward, or upside down (see the example, below).

Include word puzzle.

Suggested prayer to end the lesson:

Dear God,

Even though we are each unique, there are ways that we are alike because you made each of us in your image.

Help me to remember to respect myself just as I want others to respect me.

Help me to live as you have commanded me to live, and guide me in times of confusion and uncertainty.

And, help me to remember, God, that in your loving presence I will always be safe and protected.

Amen