

Lesson 3 for Grades K, 1 and 2

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.

Activity #4: Work on the “boundaries” coloring pages.

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: Setting limits and honoring them can help keep children 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 teach children some ways to help protect themselves from sexual abuse.

Objectives: To begin to give children the ability to identify, define, and honor appropriate boundaries in different types of relationships. For example:

- They can say “no” when they feel uncomfortable or confused by how an older person is acting—even if the older person is someone they love and trust.
- They should honor and respect the wishes of others who don’t want to be touched—even if it hurts their feelings or they don’t understand why the person said “no.”

Dealing with this age group—key concept is “activity”

Small children have a natural curiosity, a lively and vivid imagination, and are growing less self-centered and becoming more conscious of others. Their attention span is short, but they build on concrete experiences, love to learn, and are highly inquisitive. However, they rely almost entirely on others to define good and bad for them.

When establishing the guidelines for appropriate and inappropriate behavior, parents and teachers should make every effort to create an environment where children are free to ask questions. This early experience of honesty and trust will set the stage for each child’s life-long relationships with significant adults. In addition, creating an atmosphere of open inquiry—where questions are encouraged—invites children to begin to learn to trust their own instincts and to begin to learn how to evaluate the world around them.

At this age, children are beginning to differentiate between the positive and negative aspects of everyday life. They are beginning to question adults’ expectations of blind obedience. At the same time they are learning how to respect and care for their own bodies in terms of hygiene, eating, and activity.

Caregivers need to be open, honest, and available to answer questions correctly and with the type of language children can understand. This is the time to discuss safe and unsafe touches to enable children to practice safety away from home.

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Supplemental information 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.

Most children will have difficulty with this concept at this age. They can see boundaries in a very literal and visual way (such as a fence around a yard), but they can also learn that words create boundaries. One boundary is created if, for example, a child says, "I don't need any help. I can do it myself." Another boundary is created when the child says, "I want a hug," or asks for a goodnight kiss.

Some other words and phrases that can create boundaries for children are "no," "don't do that," "let's play," "give me five," and "leave me alone." Obviously, when you think about it, there are many examples of using words to create boundaries. By using as many examples as possible, you can help young children begin to develop an understanding of the more abstract meaning of the term boundary—and, obviously, that abstract meaning is the one most germane to helping children learn to protect themselves from sexual predators.

At this age, children are just beginning to develop boundaries and to recognize their impact in life. They become upset when a friend doesn't want to play any more, or when a sibling refuses to give them a hug or a kiss at bedtime. They are beginning to learn how to interact with parents to achieve the best mutual outcome for a particular situation. And they are learning what parents, teachers, neighbors, friends, and others expect of them. You can help them begin to recognize the boundaries in their lives and raise their awareness about the power and importance of *their words* in establishing their own appropriate boundaries with all the people in their world.

Teacher preparation exercise

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.

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."

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.

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Activity #1: Play the introductory video to begin the lesson:

Note to Teacher: The introductory video for grades K through 5 is designed to open a simple discussion with children 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 children 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 children 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:

Supplies: Box of cereal.
Large, plain plastic bag. Not a sealable sandwich bag. But, rather, the type used for produce in a grocery store.

Activity: Invite the children to stand in a circle with you and hold hands with each other. Notice whether they maneuver for positions near their friends or whether they resist holding hands. This is a great resource for the discussion. Begin the lesson with a song of prayer to the tune of “Are you sleeping?”

God our Father (teacher)
God our Father (children repeat)
We thank you (teacher)
We thank you (children repeat)
For our friends and family (teacher)
For our friends and family (children repeat)
Amen. (teacher)
Amen. (children repeat)

Ask the children to sit in a circle with you in a chair at the top of the circle. Begin a conversation with the children about boundaries by asking them if they know what a “boundary” is. Create some scenarios that will give them ideas about “boundaries” and “limits” and how both boundaries and limits are an important part of our daily lives.

For example, ask the children to think about the rules they have at home.

- Where are you allowed to have food in your house? Why?
- What time is bedtime on a school night? What about weekends? If they're different, why are they different?
- When do you finish your homework? Are there other things you're not allowed to do until your homework is finished?
- Are animals allowed inside your house? If so, when and in which rooms?

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

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- Are you allowed to play outside in the rain? Why not?
- Are you allowed to eat dessert before you eat dinner? Why not?
- Do you wear a seatbelt when you're riding in a car? Why?

Each of these "rules" establishes a boundary. Talk with the children about these boundaries or limits and the fact that everyone has them, including adults. Some are rules that are given to us by others. But, sometimes, we get to choose our own boundaries. Ask the children if they can think of any ways that they have created boundaries for the people in their lives.

Some examples are:

- The times when they don't want a hug from a parent or grandparent or don't want a goodnight kiss.
- The times when someone wants to use their toys and they don't want the other person to do that.
- The times when they want to give themselves a bath or pick out their own clothes without help from mom or dad.

Explain that boundaries or limits sometimes seem like "no fun." It seems like they are getting in the way of what we really want to do. However, boundaries can also protect us from harm. They help us know when something or someone is not acting in a way that is healthy and good for us.

Visual display: Children are very visual at this age. One way to demonstrate the effect of boundaries is by using a box of cereal. Remove half the cereal from the box and pour it into a large plastic bag.

Show the children how the box demonstrates well-formed boundaries that keep the cereal inside and other things outside. The box fits in a particular space and does not allow the cereal to spill out into other areas. Meanwhile, the bag of cereal has no definite form. It is hard to hold onto and the cereal can spill out unexpectedly and become contaminated by other things in or on the cabinet or table.

This is what boundaries do. They define the space that keeps things safe and predictable. They also let us know what is expected of children and adults, and that children have the same rights as adults to have their personal boundaries respected. And while weak boundaries—like the bag of cereal—are not always the best way to protect something, strong boundaries—like the box—provide a much better way to protect something.

Activity #4: Work on the "boundaries" coloring pages:

Directions: In today's lesson the children will have an opportunity to color pictures that describe personal boundaries and explain what to do when someone violates our personal boundaries.

Supplies: Crayons, or colored pencils.
Coloring pages provided as handouts as a part of this lesson plan.

Note to Teacher: You'll want to review the "master" coloring sheet," which more thoroughly explains the exercise, and use it to select the specific sheets to photocopy and hand out to your students. This master sheet is also a valuable resource for any parents who are interested in knowing more about the program.

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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.















