



## *Catholic Safe Environment Curriculum for Middle School*

*2014/2015*

### **Doctrinal Connection** (CCC 1756)

**1756** ...the morality of human acts ... inspires the circumstances (environment, social pressure, duress or emergency, etc.) ... One may not do evil so that good may result from it.

### **Youth Code of Conduct** (DSJ, OPVCA)

Awareness of the Youth Code of Conduct for the Diocese of San Jose is essential for promoting proactive interactions, positive pressure among peers, and establishing and maintaining appropriate personal boundaries in their personal, social, and educational situations.

1. Every youth is expected to act in a Christ-like manner
2. Every youth is expected to be respectful.
3. Every youth is expected to cooperate with classmates, teachers, peers, and adults.
4. Every youth is expected to communicate in an appropriate manner.
5. Every youth is expected to respect the personal boundaries and property of others.
6. Every youth is expected to promote and support a safe, fun, healthy environment.
7. Every youth is expected to report and inform adults in charge of any kind of abuse or harassment in real life or on line.
8. No youth will tolerate abuse of any kind.

## **Proactive Interactions**

Being proactive when interacting with others can be difficult for some middle school aged children. Respecting the rules and using respectful language establishes positive and proactive interactions.

1. Respecting the Rules – There are many rules that must be followed to stay safe at school, home, and in the community. Rules are for everyone, everywhere, and at all times. Rules are made to help everyone stay safe and enjoy their time. Rules have to be followed or people and feelings can get hurt. Rules may be a little different in homes, but the rules their parents make for them are the rules they need to follow. While at school, church activities, community events, or in businesses, rules that are established for safety need to be followed to ensure the safety of themselves and others.
  - Ask your group to name some rules that keep them safe at school or church.
  - Ask your group to name some rules they have at home that keep them safe.
  - Ask your group to name some rules they have seen at the pool or public place.
2. Respectful Language – Practicing respectful language helps ensure that middle school children have a plethora of words to use to express their feelings. Respectful language is more than just manners. Respectful language sets the tone for an interaction.
  - State the Golden Rule – “Do unto others as you would have done unto you.” Inform the group that this also means to “speak to others the way you would like to be spoken to.”
  - Ask your group to call out respectful words. Ask them to think of words they can use when they might be irritated or confused and then when they are happy.

## **Positive Pressure**

Having the confidence to be a leader and influence peers in a positive manner is an ongoing task that can take a lifetime. Confidence is the cornerstone positive pressures among peers. Confident peers can influence the entire group to behave positively. Use the following to help encourage positive praise from the members in your group.

1. Strike a Pose – Choose a leader to begin the game. The game begins by the leader striking a pose that shows confidence or courage. The rest of the group copies the pose. Hold for a few seconds, choose a new leader, repeat. Encourage different

poses. Continue until all group members have had an opportunity to be the leader. Without pointing out a “favorite” pose, praise all poses.

2. Personal or Peer Attitude – Positive pressure includes being able to help their friends in need. It is important for middle schoolers to understand the attitudes of their friends, so if there is a change, it can be addressed. A personal attitude or peer attitude can change when a crisis occurs in their lives. Many times these are little crisis that are handled within minutes or even days and do not have any lasting effects. But, in some cases, crisis situations can turn into self injury to deal with the pain the middle schooler is feeling and unable to handle on their own. Self injury can be anywhere from drug use, alcohol consumption, cutting, hair pulling, eating disorders, social media posts about hurting themselves or others, and suicide. Middle school aged children can play an important role in helping themselves or their peers when they are aware of an attitude change. Encourage your group to talk to a trusted adult if they have a concern that a friend or peer is in crisis mode, if they see any kind of disturbing or questionable pictures posted on social media sites, or if they see any physical signs of abuse.

## **Personal Boundaries**

At this stage in life many of your group members struggle with establishing and maintain personal boundaries. They are changing mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Sometimes they need some reminders of space and the importance of respecting others space as well as their own.

1. Respecting Personal Space – Personal space is often referred to as the “bubble.” Most middle schoolers have a personal feeling of how much space they need between themselves and another person that makes them feel comfortable. Personal space also changes depending on the relationships. Best friends might be stand very close to one another while classmates may give one another a few inches of space. When in the proximity of a stranger, the recommended space is about 3 feet or the length of an arm.
  - Invite your group to stand up and space out around your area. Have them outstretch their arms to their sides and give each other the “Stranger Space.”
  - Now, have your group line up as if they would to go outside. Notice the difference between the “Stranger Space” and the “Friend Zone.”
2. “Friending” – In the digital age and accepting that most middle schoolers are starting to experiment with social media sites or live gaming. They need to be reminded of some “personal boundaries” to establish while in cyber space. To encourage

safe encounters in cyber space and encourage your group to be positive while on line, tell your group to only “friend” people they know in real life. Refuse friend requests from any user that they do not know in real life. Refuse friend requests from users who are not positive or use degrading language towards others. Remind the group to keep friends limited to the people they want involved with your personal business. It is their responsibility to maintain a positive image on line and they can make a difference for other users.

## **Cyber Safety**

Children spend an extraordinary time using devices and communicating in cyber space. Safety encompasses not only real life situations, but has to address online activity as well.

1. Apps – Identifying safer apps and avoiding unsafe and questionable applications can be easy to do. Tell your group to read the terms and conditions prior to downloading any app. Tell your group to look for words like “virus” or “scam” and avoid those apps. Remind your group that not all apps are free.
2. Cyber Purchases – Minors cannot purchase any application, game, upgrade, music, movie, merchandise, etc without parental consent. Many times this age group will use the reasoning “it’s my money.” In reality, purchases made online require the user to enter a legally binding contract to make the purchase. The little “I agree” box must be checked to complete the process. A minor cannot enter a legally binding contract, therefore it does not matter who has the money, it is the parent who must approve and make the purchase. Parents will be liable for all charges on accounts.
3. Live Games – Gaming can be very fun, educational, and entertaining. Xbox Kinect and Wii Live are game consoles that allow players to connect on line with others around the world. Remind your group, that no matter how challenged they feel by an invite from another player, only play with people that they know in real life.
4. Pop ups – Advertisements or questionnaires pop up on screens during most apps and games. Turning on the “pop up blocker” helps prevent these and can help save a device from being spammed or sent a virus. Remind your group to always “X” out of a pop up. Remind them that pop ups that state “you won” are scams and dangerous. Remind your group to never click on the “OK” button or “Accept” button.
5. Email/texting –Take a survey of your group and ask them who uses texting or emailing. Texting and emailing is a fantastic form of communication but has to be used properly. Remind your group to reread any message and double check who they are

sending the message to BEFORE they press SEND or POST. Tell your group that everything they send into cyber space, on any device, is there forever and seen by many people they may not even know. They need to think twice before pressing SEND or POST, have them think about how someone might interpret their statements, sarcasm and “jokes” are many times misinterpreted and can cause dramatic situations in real life. Remind the group that pictures are never able to be erased or taken back. Only post pictures with parental consent that are flattering and positive to their reputations.

### **Proactive Activity (optional)**

Distribute the comic pages. Have your group write information they have learned during this class around each comic. As a group, create poster boards to display around the church or school that can be used to inform everyone of how to stay safe in real life and on line.

### **Certificate of Completion**

Please distribute the Certificate of Completion to all of your group members. Have the students fill in all the information (or it can be filled in prior to the class session). Form included (next page).