

### Lesson 3 for Grades 3, 4 and 5

- 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:** Establishing boundaries and creating a safe environment.
- Activity #4:** Learning to protect yourself from harm.
- 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 assist parents, guardians, and other caring adults in teaching children how to prevent or reduce the chance of sexual abuse.
- Objectives:** To give children an elementary understanding and ability to identify, define, and honor appropriate boundaries in different relationships
- Children can say “no” when they feel uncomfortable or confused by how another person is acting or when they are asked (or encouraged) to do something they know is wrong—even if the person is a friend or someone they love and trust.
  - Children should honor and respect the wishes of others who don’t want to be touched even when it feels like rejection and hurts their feelings. Learning that others have the right to say “no” and have their wishes respected is fundamental to their learning and growth because it will affect their actions later in life as teenagers and adults.

### Dealing with this age group—the key concept is “energy”<sup>1</sup>

These children are now away from home more often than ever before and must begin to recognize that safety issues can arise when they are out with friends or away at activities and events. They like to be in constant motion and always on the go. Groups are important. This is the “gang” age with friends of the same sex. Team sports flourish during this time.

Capable of intense loyalty to others, children of this age usually have a “best friend” to confide in. They can talk through problems and can think through their past actions to find a justification for their behavior. For example, they will have explanations and justifications for being late, not completing homework, still being on the phone after lights out, etc. They will also take time to search for the information they need to resolve their own questions. They are capable of developing plans and setting their own goals.

Often using tactics such as making up alibis or shifting the blame to others, this age is less concerned about small issues—although usually truthful about significant issues. They have a strong sense of right and wrong and justice. They can argue and hold strong

<sup>1</sup> DeBord, K. (1996). *“Childhood Years: Ages six through twelve.”* Raleigh, NC: North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service.

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**Lesson 3 for Grades 3, 4 and 5**

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debates. Caregivers may find they are more effective when dealing with this age by including them in the discussion while establishing rules and guidelines.

The best approach to working with this age group is through non-competitive games in which the children can establish individual goals. At this age, more explanation is necessary when rules are given. Children need to begin to learn to trust their own ability to make decisions. Therefore, criticism should be designed to teach. For example, when something goes wrong or does not turn out as planned, rather than tell the child what went wrong, ask, "Next time, how could you do that differently so you would have a better outcome?" Let the child begin to think through the process and develop possible solutions.

**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.

The difficulty in dealing with boundaries with this age group is that these children are moving from dependence toward independence. Telling them "the rules" will not be enough. Children of this age need to learn to reason it out for themselves. The adults involved are primarily concerned with safety issues that the children don't seem to be able to see clearly—at least not yet. And, parents can, and often do, find this process difficult.

Remember, children are like sponges. They absorb everything. Be very interactive with them during the exercises. Ask them for their input. Encourage them to go home and discuss these important issues with their parents. While their attention spans may seem short on the outside, on the inside, you can bet their intellectual "wheels are turning," and they'll remember a great deal from today's lesson.

**Special preparation exercise for teachers**

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.

Also, pick one day this week and notice every time that you are touched by another person. Ask yourself:

- Did I want that person to touch me?
- (If no) How did I react to let the person know that I did not want to be touched?
- (If yes) What was it about *that* person and *that* touch that made it acceptable?
- (If unsure) What is it about *that* person and/or *that* touch that has me questioning whether it was acceptable?
- How did I either communicate or *not* communicate my response to the touch?

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

### Lesson 3 for Grades 3, 4 and 5

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, 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.

Also, think of a time in your life when you felt particularly vulnerable (this needs to be a story that's appropriate to share with your students). Although you probably reacted in a way that spared you serious harm, you still felt vulnerable at the time. Go over that story in your mind and think about how you could respond differently to the same circumstances in the future. Be prepared to share this story with your students as appropriate during the exercises.

**Note to Teacher:** The teacher is not required to share a story about a personally vulnerable experience. This is simply a suggestion to help create empathy between the teacher and students to have the students more seriously understand the value of the message in this lesson. Please use your own judgment and only use a story that is not sexual in nature, not frightening, and is age-appropriate.

#### 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.<sup>2</sup>

#### Activity #3: Establishing boundaries and creating a safe environment:

**Directions:** Open the Boundaries discussion with the children by asking them if they know what a "boundary" is. Create some scenarios that will give them ideas about "boundaries" and "limits" and ask them to share the boundaries and limits they have in their lives. For example:

- What kind of rules must be followed at your house:

<sup>2</sup> The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition Copyright © 2000 by Houghton Mifflin Company.

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Lesson 3 for Grades 3, 4 and 5

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- What are your family rules regarding when your homework must be completed? Are there other activities that aren't allowed until your homework has been completed?
- How long and how late are you permitted to be on the telephone?
- Where are you allowed to have food in your house?
- What are your family's rules regarding computer access?
- What are your family's rules regarding video games?
- Does your family limit who can come into your room and when they are allowed to be in your room?
- Do you expect your best friend to sit next to you at lunch every day?
- Do you want your parents to pretend that they don't know you when you are together at a party or at the mall?
- Can you explain why you moved the chairs, sat closer to some people and away from others, left empty chairs between you and others, etc. when we started this class?

Explain to your students that these are examples of boundaries. They are limits placed on us by our own instincts and by the rules established by others in our homes, our schools, and in our society.

**Engage the students in a discussion of this issue by making the following statements. Ask for their response after each statement.**

**Statement:** *Boundaries are good!*

Now, ask the students: "Why are boundaries good?"

**Points to make in the follow-up discussion:**

- Boundaries define us as individuals and bring order to our lives.
- Boundaries determine how we allow others to treat us.
- Boundaries determine how we treat others.

**Statement:** *Boundaries are different depending on the relationship.*

Now, ask the students: "Why are boundaries different depending on the relationship?"

**Points to make in the follow-up discussion:**

- Boundaries between best friends are different from boundaries between people who just met.
- Boundaries between children and parents are different from boundaries between children and teachers.

**Statement:** *When someone crosses a personal boundary line, boundaries are violated.*

Now, ask the students to give examples of boundary violations. These violations could be simple things such as, "My sister won't stay out of my stuff" or more difficult things such as, "Sometimes the coach comes in the locker room and watches us change clothes after practice."

Here are some examples of boundary violations that can help stimulate the discussion:

- Jessica told Mary the secret that Tammy told her.
- Coach pats you on the buttocks as you run past him on the way out to the playing field.

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Lesson 3 for Grades 3, 4 and 5

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- You listen in on a private conversation between your brother and his girlfriend.
- Someone behind you copies your test answers.
- Your dad's friend stares at you whenever he is around you.

One basic boundary we all have is our skin. When our skin is scratched or cut, our physical boundary is violated and we become vulnerable to infection and scars. In the same way, violation of our emotional boundaries leaves us vulnerable to other types of harm and other kinds of scars.

**Important Note to Teacher:** If there are any reports of suspicious incidents, make note and **REPORT SUSPECTED ABUSE IMMEDIATELY.**

**Statement:** *We can protect ourselves when someone violates our boundaries.*

Now, ask the students to think of ways to deal with someone who violates boundaries. Use the following examples of ways we can protect ourselves.

- Speak up and let the person know that you want them to stop what they are doing.
- Get away from the person.

Strengthening our boundaries and taking action to stop someone who is violating them protects us from other people's ignorance, their thoughtlessness, and their malice. We deserve to be protected from these things.

Most people will respect our boundaries if we explain them clearly. However, some people will push the limits of our boundaries, violate them, and then expect us to go along—or at least not to tell on them. With these people, we must *actively* defend our boundaries.

**Activity #4: Learning to protect yourself from harm:**

**Supplies:** Paper and pen or pencil for each student (*a sheet of notebook paper is ideal*).

**Directions:** **Step 1:** Ask your students to recall when they found themselves in an uncomfortable situation with one of their friends or classmates stepped over a boundary line and upset them. Tell students you're going to give them five (5) minutes to write about their experience. The story should include:

- What happened—e.g., what kind of boundary violation.
- How the student reacted to the violation.
- The student's feelings when the situation came to an end.

**Step 2:** Invite those who are willing to share their stories (this is your opportunity to share your own experience about being vulnerable, including what happened, how you reacted to the boundary violation, and how you felt when the situation came to an end).

**Note to Teacher:** *Remember that nobody has to share. This is an opportunity for the students to begin to break through their reluctance to talk about themselves in a non-threatening way.*

**Step 3:** Now—after listening to some of the different experiences written by your students—ask them to speculate about how they might handle things differently in the future, in a way that will leave them feeling that they did their best to take away the other person's opportunity to violate their boundaries.

**Closing thought:** Leave students with the closing thought that setting limits about your personal boundaries and sticking to them can protect you and others from harm.

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Lesson 3 for Grades 3, 4 and 5

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**Suggested (optional) prayer to end the lesson:**

**Note to Teacher:** This prayer is a variation of an old Catholic traveler's prayer to be said before beginning a journey. Remind your students that, as they grow up, they are on a journey through life. Each time they leave their home and go out on their own or with peers, they are traveling. Prayer can help prepare them for the journey and guide them along the way.

My holy Angel Guardian,  
Ask the Lord to bless the journey that I undertake,  
That it may benefit the health of my soul and body;  
That I may reach its end,  
And that, returning safe and sound,  
I may find my family in good health.  
Guard, guide, and preserve us throughout the day and night.

Amen.

**References:**

Liberia Editrice Vaticana (1997). *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (2<sup>nd</sup> 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.