

Safe Touch Program

6th through 8th Grades

Information for Parents:

Program Goals:

1. To provide information at age-appropriate levels to make middle school youth aware of the concepts of safe touch vs. inappropriate touch
2. To provide information in regard to:
 - recognizing the uncomfortable feelings we get when someone treats or touches us inappropriately
 - how to say NO and get away from unsafe situations
 - how to report concerns to a safe adult
3. To provide information that a parent can share with his or her own child in a brief format
4. To focus on safety, rather than on sexuality

Tips for Presenting this Information to Your Adolescent:

This program is designed to help young adolescents identify situations or events that do not feel safe. Many times youth (and even adults) fail to recognize the danger or being in situations with someone who is not being appropriate, because they fail to listen to their own sense of what is wrong. This is why this program is strongly focused on helping youth recognize feelings that alert them to situations that may not be right and to take action.

Your child's school or PSR program has available additional materials, such as visuals and websites, etc., that you may wish to use with your child. Please ask the administrator of their school or program, or contact the Safe Environment Office of the Archdiocese of St. Louis at (314) 792-7271 to obtain those additional materials, if you wish to review them for use with your adolescent.

Note that this program does not discuss specific body parts. As a parent, you may wish to teach your child the appropriate names for their private body areas.

Please be aware that youth have disclosed mistreatment because of this program; it is very important. Just as with any important information, how it is presented to the child makes the difference. This information can be treated similarly to fire safety information, in that it is important, serious, and discussed regularly.

If after presenting this information to your child, your child shares information that suggests he or she has experienced mistreatment, know that support is available. You may contact the Safe Environment Office of the Archdiocese of St. Louis at (314) 792-7271 and speak to the director, Sandra Price. You may also speak to your child's school principal or school counselor, or reach Catholic Family Services at 1-800-652-8055. The Missouri Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline is 1-800-392-3738 and is answered 24 hours a day, every day of the year.

The material below is based on the program as it would be presented to a class of students your adolescent's age. Please present this information to your child in the individualized, personal way that you know will be best.

Safe Touch Program

Grades 6-8 Lesson

Parents: Keep in mind that sexual abuse perpetrators use a grooming process that involves teaching youth not to follow their safety instincts or typical personal boundaries. This program, therefore, teaches adolescents to understand appropriate boundaries, listen to their instincts when a situation feels unsafe, and take action.

Part 1: Boundaries

Parent shares:

Today, we are going to discuss some topics - safe touch and personal body safety that can be difficult or even uncomfortable to discuss at times. But it is an important topic, so we are going to have a serious discussion about it.

Our discussion of safety starts with understanding boundaries. Each of us has personal rules called personal boundaries. Our boundaries determine what we do or don't do, who we share personal information with, how we communicate online, and what kind of physical contact we have with others.

For example, you might have a personal boundary about whether or not you share clothes with your brother or sister. Or you might have a boundary that you'll hug your best friends but not all of your sports teammates.

There are some people who intentionally try to cross other people's boundaries. They try to get too close, either physically or emotionally, or they share too much information and want you to share too much in return. This can happen in "real life" or online.

When someone tries to cross your personal boundaries, it can feel emotionally and physically awkward or uncomfortable. Emotionally, it can make you feel nervous, worried, or uneasy. Physically, when someone crosses your personal boundaries, it can make your stomach feel upset, your chest feel tight, or maybe you feel dizzy or shaky.

When we feel worried and nervous, when our stomach feels uncomfortable, our chest feels tight, or we feel shaky, these are clues that our bodies are giving us. Our bodies give us clues, feelings, or instincts, when something just isn't right. It's important to TRUST those instincts!

Too often, we can be too trusting of others, even when they haven't earned that trust. Instead, trust your own instinct when it feels like something just isn't right or safe in a situation. If we listen to ourselves, our bodies will tell us when someone is trying to cross our personal boundaries.

Religious Importance:

Making safe decisions, taking care of our bodies and being respectful of ourselves and others is important to God. Your parents brought you to church and presented you to God at Baptism, and Jesus dwells within you. You are loved and cherished and your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. God does not intend for any harm to come to you just as he does not intend for you to cause any other person harm. We are all made in

God's likeness and as such we are made for Greatness! We must honor and respect the boundaries of others just as we expect our own boundaries to be honored and respected.

Part 2: Safe Touch

Parent shares:

One very serious personal boundary is the issue of the private areas of our bodies. People (like doctors or nurses) need permission to touch or see the parts of your body that are private. Young people your age face serious concerns with this issue.

The first concern involves adults who try to cross personal boundaries with adolescents.

It is OK to say no to an adult who tries to be inappropriate with you physically or behaviorally. No adult - including relatives, friends, neighbors, adults at church and adults at school - has the right to touch the private areas of your body or ask you to touch their body. Students in middle school sometimes believe that only younger children can experience this type of abuse by adults. Actually, however adolescents are at increased, not decreased, risk for this type of abuse.

Be aware that adults who try to cross boundaries with children or teens, will not usually begin with physical touching. Instead, they often begin by trying to earn the young person's trust and even the trust of the young person's family. They can do things like sharing secrets, giving gifts, giving lots of compliments, showing the adolescent inappropriate photos or videos, and even providing the student alcohol. It is never appropriate for adults to have dating or romantic relationships with middle schoolers. When an adult's behavior gives you that gut instinct that something just isn't right, trust your instinct.

Some adults engage in a crime called child sex trafficking. Child sex trafficking occurs when a child under age 18 is pressured into any sexual behavior that is traded for money, food, shelter, drugs, or anything else of value. This includes on line sexual behaviors. The potential for trafficking is one of the most serious reasons why we never meet someone in real life who we've only met on line. Beware of anyone on line who asks to meet you or offers to pay you cash, gifts, or game credits for you to provide photos, videos, or webcam access of yourself

Another issue today involves safety with friends and classmates.

It is not always an unsafe adult who can try to cross an adolescent's personal boundaries. It is important to trust your instinct when it comes to the behavior of people your own age and older teenagers, too. Sometimes, adolescents use poor personal boundaries. They might want to share too much information, or become too close physically or emotionally. Some individuals at this age are already looking for romantic or dating types of relationships, and can pressure other people who may not feel ready for that type of relationship.

Just like with an adult, you have the right to say no and get away from any person, even someone your own age or a teenager, who makes you feel uncomfortable or who pressures you in any way. No friend or other adolescent ever has the right to touch you without your permission or to pressure you into inappropriate or unsafe behavior.

Part 3: No, Go Tell

Parent shares:

When someone crosses our personal boundaries, our instinct will often tell us that something is wrong. It is important that we trust our instinct and take action when someone is trying to cross our boundaries. If someone touches you inappropriately or does anything else that gives you a gut instinct that something just isn't right:

- First, immediately say something like NO, STOP or LEAVE ME ALONE. Use eye contact and use a firm and clear voice. Be clear that you are serious. (*Demonstrate how this sounds and looks.*)
- Second, get away from that person. If someone has tried to touch you inappropriately, you have the right to get away from them, even if they are an adult.
- Last, tell a safe adult about what happened. Safe adults include us [parents], teachers, school counselors or other close relatives. It is someone that you trust to care about you and listen to you.

Tell a safe adult about what happened even if someone asked or told you not to tell. Often times, adults who are inappropriate with young people will make threats or tell the young person that they have to keep the situation a secret. No adult should ever ask you to keep a secret from us, your parents.

It is important to tell an adult you trust, whether the person who crossed your boundaries is an adult, an older adolescent, or even someone your own age. It does not matter whether they are male or female. This is also true whether the person who mistreated you is a stranger or someone that you know.

Question: We talked about three steps to take if you feel a situation isn't safe. What are those three steps?

(Say no, Get away, Tell a safe adult.)

Question: What should you do if someone tells you to keep the situation a secret or not to tell us [parents]?

(Tell an adult they trust anyway.)

Question: What should you do if a friend or classmate pressures you to touch a private area of your body? What should you do? (*No, Go, Tell.*)

Part 4: Online Safety

Note, these safety rules can be discussed on the same day as Parts 1-3, above, or on a different day.

Parent shares:

It's also extremely important to make safe choices online.

First, we have to be very careful about sharing personal information online, because there are

certain people online who are very dangerous. We call these people online predators. An online predator is an adult who tries to start inappropriate relationships with kids.

If an adult that you and we [parents] don't know in real life tries to get to know you on line, this should give you that uncomfortable feeling or instinct that something just isn't right. If someone online asks for pictures of you, sends you cash, gifts, or game credits, asks for webcam access to you, or asks to meet you in real life, tell us [parents] or another safe adult right away.

The best way to stay safe online is to never talk to strangers. And online everyone that you don't know 'in real life' is a stranger. This is because we can never be 100% sure that someone is really who they say they are online. We all know how easy it is to create fake profiles on social media. So we may think we are talking to a thirteen year old, and it could be an adult online predator or child sex trafficker who's trying to meet kids. We can never be sure.

Remember talking about trusting our feelings or instincts when someone is making us feel uncomfortable? It is important to trust our instincts when we are on line too. If you ever feel uncomfortable about how someone is talking to you online or when you are playing a game, stop talking to them immediately and tell an adult you trust.

Question: What do you think are some ways that middle school students sometimes take safety risks online? *(If your child provides answers, ask him or her what would be a safer way to handle the situation they described. This is a great way to begin talking in more depth about online safety.)*

Pornography and Sexting:

Another very dangerous part of the internet for everyone is internet pornography sites. Internet pornography is on line videos that show the private parts of people's bodies. It is understandable to be curious about pornography at your age. But it is important to know how dangerous internet pornography can be. Internet pornography depicts men and women in a way that is not realistic and it can make people believe that what they see is normal and healthy. Most married adults do not actually look or act like the people in pornography. Pornography goes against our families' values and our faith.

Internet pornography is one of the most addictive things that exists. The more we look at it, the more our brains crave it. And individuals of all ages who regularly use internet pornography experience emotional and physical problems and problems with their real-life relationships. The bottom line is that internet pornography is inappropriate and unhealthy. You should never search for these sites, and if one pops up automatically, you should close that window immediately.

Sexting is another dangerous online behavior. Sexting is the sending of sexual photos, videos, or text messages over cell phones. No matter what, even if someone asks you or dares you, never, ever take an inappropriate photo or video of yourself or anyone else. We all know this is wrong, but it is illegal too. It is illegal to have or send pictures that show anyone under the age of 18 in a sexual way. Middle school students have been charged and punished as criminals for sexting. If anyone, even a friend or someone you like, sends you an inappropriate photo or video, delete it and tell them to stop. If they don't stop, tell us [parents]. You are putting yourself at serious legal risk if you have this type of material on your phone or other technology.

Conclusion

Parent shares:

While this topic is not an easy one to discuss, it is important. Please remember -you can trust your instinct that something isn't right or isn't safe about a situation, and you can tell an adult you trust, if someone has touched you or treated you inappropriately.

Just as each of us has the right to be free from mistreatment and pressure from others both online and in "real life," we also have the responsibility to never place that pressure on any other person. It is important that we respect others' physical, emotional, and on line boundaries.

Part 5: Safety Rules

Note, these safety rules can be discussed on the same day as Parts 1-4, above, or on a different day. (Parents: There is a written handout available for middle school students that you may provide to your child.)

1. Never go places alone. Unsafe adults and child sex traffickers usually focus on adolescents that are alone.
2. Always let an adult know where you are going and with whom you're going to be.
3. Never get into a car or go with a stranger or any person who makes you feel uncomfortable.
1. Be aware: predators use tricks to lure adolescents. Never go with someone you don't know, even if they say something like you have won a contest or are invited to a "modeling tryout." Never approach a car that is asking you for directions or help. Those are common lures used by adult predators. Know that safe adults never ask children they don't know for help or directions. Safe adults will never ask you to leave a store, the mall, or another safe area without permission.
2. If you need help in public and cannot contact an adult you know, ask a store clerk, uniformed police officer, or mother who has children with her for help. These adults are considered safest when you are in an emergency situation.
3. It's all right to be suspicious of adults who seem too friendly. Trust your instincts when it doesn't feel right. An unsafe adult is someone who makes you feel uncomfortable or uneasy, asks you to keep secrets, wants to be alone with you, or tries to get too close. You have the right to get away from any adult who makes you feel uncomfortable or unsafe.
4. No adult should ever touch you inappropriately. Inappropriate behavior could include talking about their private body areas, showing inappropriate or pornographic photos, or asking you about your body.

5. To stay safe online:
 - Never friend or follow someone on social media that you don't know offline "in real life." Some unsafe adults pretend to be teens online, in order to trick adolescents into giving out their personal information.
 - Keep your privacy settings set as strictly as possible.
 - Keep all your devices and online accounts password protected (use different passwords for each profile), and never share passwords with anyone other than your parents.
 - Always log off social media when you are finished using it.
 - Close your laptop when dressing or showering - be careful with your webcam.
 - Never take, post, forward or comment on any inappropriate pictures.
 - Disable location services on social media and photos
 - Beware of anyone online who asks to meet you or offers to pay you cash, gifts, or game credits for you to provide photos, videos, or webcam access of yourself. Online child sex trafficking is illegal and extremely dangerous.

6. We are going to develop a family password for emergencies. Do not go with adults who claim that one of us [parents] is hurt or sick, unless they know our family password.

10. Trust your instincts! If a situation doesn't feel right, leave it and get help if needed. Remember, if someone touches or treats you inappropriately, SAY NO, GETAWAY, and TELL AN ADULT YOU TRUST.