



Office of
ETHICS & INTEGRITY IN MINISTRY

A brief message from the EIM Office to Lesson Leaders:

Dear Lesson Leaders,

Thank you for your service in ministry at your parish or school. The work you do helps to build the Church of tomorrow. The children placed in your care, no doubt, look to you as an example of faith and as a role model.

As you know, Empowering God's Children seeks to teach children about safe boundaries and what to do if they feel uncomfortable or unsafe. Talking about boundaries and safety, especially when it comes to sexual abuse, can be challenging for adults and for children. However, research shows that talking about safety can de-stigmatize these conversations and make it easier for children to tell a safe adult when something uncomfortable or unsafe has happened to them. It is our responsibility as safe adults to give children every tool possible to keep themselves safe if we aren't there to protect them. The lessons you teach directly impact the safety of the children you serve.

A child may disclose abuse to you during your time as a teacher/catechist. You must know to stay calm, assure the child of your commitment to their safety, and immediately make a report to civil authorities (instructions on reporting abuse are found at www.austindiocese.org/report-abuse). If you would like more information on responding to abuse, please email the EIM Office and ask to be assigned the Lesson Leader Orientation, which teaches about what to do when a child discloses abuse.

If you have any questions about Empowering God's Children, or anything EIM related, please always feel free to call or email the EIM Office.

Once again, thank you for your dedication to the children in your community. It is through safe adults like you that we continue to make our Church a safer and healthier environment for everyone to grow in faith according to God's will.

Sincerely,

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Lesson 5 for Grades 3—5

Being a Safe Friend

PRINCIPLE

Children must know that being a friend means that we “do the right thing” when it comes to healthy friendships with their peers: meaning we recognize unsafe situations, intervene (when possible) and get the information to a safe adult.

CATECHISM / SCRIPTURE

“Faithful friends are a sturdy shelter; whoever finds one finds a treasure. Faithful friends are beyond price, no amount can balance their worth.”
—Sirach 6:14-15

“Do not be a foe instead of a friend.”
—Sirach 6:1

OBJECTIVES

Through this lesson, the adult lesson leader teaches and reinforces students responding with action when they or a friend are presented with unsafe situations. After Lesson 5, children should be better able to:

- Participate in healthy friendships
- Recognize that they can do something to help themselves and their friends when confronted with unsafe situations
- Respond appropriately to unsafe situations involving themselves or their friends:
 - Say “No!” if involved in an unsafe situation
 - Try to leave the situation if they feel uncomfortable
 - Tell a safe adult as soon as possible (even if it happened to a friend)
- Technology Component: Understand similar actions apply for Online activities, too.

Background for Lesson Leaders:

Before beginning this lesson, the Lesson Leader should complete the VIRTUS Lesson Leader Orientation, and/or read the VIRTUS *Teaching Boundaries and Safety Guide*, as it gives a wealth of information regarding boundaries. While adults are the main protectors of children, there are skills children can learn to better protect themselves and each other when faced with tough situations where caring adults aren't present.

This message of being a “safe friend” needs special attention for two reasons. First, the idea of safe friends should not be confused with the adult's specific role when it comes to appropriate boundaries with youth. In this safety lesson, the message of being a “safe friend” is primarily geared to assist children with understanding *how to be a safe friend to themselves and to other youth*. Lesson Leaders are not being asked to be friends with children; rather, Lesson Leaders and caring adults in the life of a child are always called to be “friendly” with youth, and not their “friends.” This is an important boundary distinction. In the healthiest of relationships between adults and children, adults are known to be safe.

Second, the underlying message of this lesson focuses on healthy relationships and boundaries. Please be very clear in your communication to children in that they are *not responsible* for each other. Misinforming children by saying that one person's welfare is a child's responsibility could make a child feel more guilt if they weren't able to prevent or stop abuse from occurring for themselves or a friend. The distinction for this lesson is that there are times when children are being abused, or they know a peer is in need of help, but, they don't always know the best way to assist. Being a safe friend means that children do the “right thing” for themselves, and for each other—meaning that they perform action, or intervene in safe ways when they are aware of a problem.

Keep in mind some of these myths to unpack during the lessons: sometimes children may not be aware that they're allowed to say “no” to a behavior that makes them uncomfortable. They may make promises with their peers to keep safety secrets in an attempt to protect them, not realizing that it's most important to deliver knowledge about unsafe situations to safe adults. They'll also need to know that it's never their fault (nor will it ever be their fault) if they or someone they know has been abused, or is hurting.

This age group: Dealing with the primary age—key concept is “energy”

This age group is learning how to function independently of their parents. They know how to read, their writing skills are improving, and their comprehension levels are giving them a better sense of abstract ideas—all refining their communication. Youth this age are away from home more often now, and need to recognize safety issues can arise when they're off with friends, under others' supervision, or elsewhere. They like to be in constant motion and are always on the go. Groups are important; this is the “gang” age with friends of the same sex. Capable of intense loyalty, they usually confide to best friends. Although truthful about big things, they're less so with smaller things, often creating alibis or shifting blame. With a strong sense of right / wrong, fair / unfair and more ability to discern safe vs. unsafe, they're able to use logic, can argue and hold strong debates. The difficulty in dealing with boundaries is that this age is moving from dependence toward independence. Ultimately, we all must learn to listen to that guiding voice inside our head and to trust “that uneasy feeling in our gut,” which is a red flag that something is wrong. Telling them “the rules” won't be enough because this age group needs to reason it out for themselves. Adults will be more effective with the safety plan if they include children in the conversation when establishing rules or guidelines.

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Ensure that attendance is being taken. You will need to note:

- (1) Grade(s) of Children Being Taught: _____
- (2) Number of Children in Attendance: _____
- (3) Number of Children Absent: _____
- (4) Number of Children who Opted-Out: _____

Needed for the lesson: Utensils to color with

Begin in Prayer (you may use your own prayer or the one provided):

Lord, thank you for all the blessings in my life.

Allow me to walk in Christlike Love as an example to those around me,

Propagate Peace wherever there is turmoil and dissent,

Reflect the Kindness of Christ even when there is anger,

Stand firm and Faithful in the Truth of God,

Show Self-Control when others show poor decision-making,

Be Patient and slow to anger, even in times of stress,

Let my Joy overflow and bring happiness to others,

Live with Goodness and honor so that I may be a safe harbor to those who are afraid,

And correct wrongs with humility, practicality, and Goodness.

Through all these Fruits of the Holy Spirit, Lord, I ask that you guide me to be a beacon of your safety and love to those I love. Allow me to be a good and faithful friend, always turning to you when I am unsure.

In Christ's name I ask this, Amen.

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Activity 1: Personal Space Bubbles

Instruct the children to spread out and hold their arms wide like an eagle. Have them flap their arms around and turn in circles. Explain the following:

Each of us has an invisible personal space bubble that exists around us. This bubble should be a boundary for how close someone should be to us. If someone gets too close to us or makes us uncomfortable, it means they are invading our personal space and not respecting our boundaries.

Respecting boundaries—we should have respect for ourselves and respect for others. Respect for ourselves means we understand our dignity and value as a person, and work to create or maintain boundaries to protect ourselves. We feel upset or uncomfortable when someone doesn't honor our own boundaries, and we communicate with the right person if we need help. Respecting another's boundaries means you care about them, and won't do anything that would bring them harm, and that you communicate with the right person to get them help if they are being harmed by someone else. *[Give children examples of respecting others, i.e., not calling people mean names, not hitting others, following rules at school or at home, stopping an activity when someone asks, letting an adult know when someone is in pain or hurt, etc.]*

Activity 2: Coloring Page

Explain the following definitions from the provided coloring page.

Safe friends and safe adults—safe people won't hurt you without a good reason and won't intentionally confuse you. They listen, consistently respect boundaries, and follow the rules. *[Explain that a child may have many safe friends and adults. Give children examples of adult behavior that could hurt them, but may be necessary for the child's safety, i.e., medical exams, vaccinations, throat swabs, removing splinters, stopping a child from running into the road, etc.]*

Unsafe friends and unsafe adults—unsafe friends and unsafe adults put a child at risk for emotional, spiritual, and physical harm. These are people who place a child in danger for their own purposes without concern for the welfare of the child. They also do not consistently listen to the parents' wishes or the child's boundaries. *[Tell children we can know when someone is unsafe if they do not follow the rules or listen to our boundaries.]*

Safe touches—touches that have a good purpose, aren't intended to hurt, and should be familiar. They're safe and can also be meant to keep you healthy, even if the person isn't known well, as long as the touches are appropriate for the particular relationship, such as when mom kisses your forehead at night, when you high-five your teammate, etc. *[Avoid saying safe touches that feel good are "safe, loving, or show someone loves you" since sometimes touches are safe and necessary, but can also hurt—although they hurt for a good reason to keep children safe, such as stitches, a doctor shot, or dental cleanings.]*

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Unsafe touches—inappropriate touches, could be meant to hurt or scare, or are contrary to the touching rules. If unsure about a touch, ask a parent. *[Unsafe touches include hitting, punching, tripping, kicking, spitting, touching private parts (areas covered by a bathing suit), etc.]*

Rude—describes behavior where someone inadvertently or accidentally does or says something hurtful. Rudeness is usually unplanned and not intended to hurt. *[Examples include social awkwardness, such as burping into someone's face, cutting someone off, behaving selfishly, having poor manners, bragging about an accomplishment, etc.]*

Mean—describes behavior where someone says or does something hurtful on purpose, once (maybe twice). The aim is to hurt intentionally, often motivated by anger. *[Examples include putting someone down so the mean person looks/sounds better, making fun of how the person dresses or looks, insulting the person's skills or intelligence, or saying/behaving in an unkind way after a disagreement, saying things like: "why would you wear that, it looks terrible on you" or "you're so dumb, you should quit."]*

Bullying is different from being rude or mean. It is cruel; the intentional, repeated exposure of negative and aggressive behaviors to a targeted person over time. The bully will say or do something intentionally hurtful and keep doing so without being sorry for their actions. A key aspect is the ongoing pattern of power imbalance, in which the bully has more control or influence. *[Examples include physical, verbal, and emotional aggression, in-person and online; social exclusion, hazing others, spreading rumors or inappropriate content, cyberbullying, etc.]*

Lesson 5 for Grades 3—5**Being a Safe Friend****Activity 3: Thumbs Up or Thumbs Down: Safety Check-In Activity**

Purpose: Children will listen to safety-related scenarios and share their immediate reactions using simple hand signals. This activity helps the Lesson Leader assess prior knowledge, clarify misunderstandings, and reinforce the meaning of being a “safe friend.”

Activity Instructions:

- 1. Prepare the Group:** Have children sit quietly in their seats with their heads down and eyes closed. Explain that they will be participating in a multi-part safety activity.
- 2. Explain the Response Signals.** Let children know how they will respond to each question or scenario:
 - Thumbs up = Yes / Safe
 - Thumbs down = No / Not safe
 - Hand resting palm-down on the back of their head = Not sure
 - *Reassure them that there are no wrong answers—this is simply a way to share what they are thinking.*
- 3. Read each safety scenario aloud and then lead a discussion.**
 - Children respond using the hand signals.
 - The Lesson Leader quietly observes and makes mental or written notes, especially when there is confusion or a wide range of responses.
 - Lead a discussion on each safety scenario, ensuring that the students understand. Affirm correct understandings, gently clarify any misunderstandings, and emphasize key points about being a safe friend, offering explanations as needed.
 - Notice any changes in understanding and reinforce positive learning.

Leader Notes

- This activity is meant to be observational and supportive, not corrective or disciplinary.
- Simple answers are provided for reference, but feel free to pause and explain further whenever a scenario needs additional clarity.

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Safety Scenarios:

- (1) **Ask:** Is it our parents' responsibility to keep us safe and healthy? **Answer & Explanation:** YES / THUMBS UP, parents and caring adults are responsible for the welfare and safety of children. Children can help protect others, too, because it's the right thing to do, but it isn't the child's job to keep anyone else safe—that's the job of the adult.
- (2) **Ask:** Do kids need to know about bicycle safety, like wearing a helmet? **Answer & Explanation:** YES / THUMBS UP, while it's the adult's job to primarily protect children, youth can also be aware of how to be safe, too.
- (3) **Ask:** Is it OK for a kid to say “no” to an adult or friend if they don't feel safe or comfortable? **Answer & Explanation:** YES / THUMBS UP, boundaries are important! And, it's OK to say “no” when you don't feel comfortable.
- (4) **Ask:** Is it OK if someone calls you “stupid” or other names, and doesn't make you feel good about yourself? **Answer & Explanation:** NO / THUMBS DOWN, it's not OK for anyone to make you feel bad about yourself or call you names. This is an unhealthy relationship, and it's not OK to be in an unhealthy relationship. You deserve to be in safe, happy friendships and relationships with others—especially with your friends and family.
- (5) **Ask:** Does anyone have the right to harm your body by causing bruises, burns, bleeding, bites, or even broken bones? **Answer & Explanation:** NO / THUMBS DOWN, no one has a right to cause you harm or put you in an unsafe situation—not even an adult; in fact, you have a right to be safe.
- (6) **Ask:** Are strangers the only people who can be dangerous or hurt children? **Answer & Explanation:** NO / THUMBS DOWN, no; strangers can hurt kids, and people we know, trust, and love can hurt kids, too. Sometimes people hurt us, but they also tell us they love us, which can feel very confusing. Someone safe will never hurt you (or allow you to be hurt without a good reason, like removing a splinter to prevent an infection) or cause you to feel confused about a safe touch or action.
- (7) **Ask:** Do you have the right to tell an adult or a kid to stop if they are touching you in a way you don't like or think is okay? **Answer & Explanation:** YES / THUMBS UP, boundaries are important! And, it's OK to say “no” when you don't feel comfortable. It's also important to try to leave the situation if you feel uncomfortable (or scared, or confused, or puzzled, or unsure, or if someone tries to touch your private parts, and then tell a safe adult as soon as possible (even if it happened to a friend).
- (8) **Ask:** Should you tell someone if physical hurt or abuse happened to you, like hitting you, pushing, or punching? **Answer & Explanation:** YES / THUMBS UP, sometimes we have to be a safe friend to ourselves, too! That means, standing up for ourselves when we are hurt, or being abused, or even feeling uncomfortable, and getting the information to a safe adult.
- (9) **Ask:** Should you tell someone if the physical abuse happened to your friend, and they made you promise not to tell? **Answer & Explanation:** YES / THUMBS UP; When we know (or feel like) there's an unsafe

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situation where a friend is hurting, we should always take that information to a safe adult, even if you promise your friend. It's safer to ask an adult for help when this happens. Tell a safe adult; ask for their help.

- (10) **Ask:** Should you tell someone if someone only threatened to hurt you—verbally or online? **Answer & Explanation:** YES / THUMBS UP, even just the “threat” of abuse can be just as bad as physical abuse. Sometimes we have to be a safe friend to ourselves, too! That means, standing up for ourselves when we know that someone is a problem, or when we are hurt, or being abused, or even feel uncomfortable, and getting the information to a safe adult.
- (11) **Ask:** If a kid is hurt by someone or abused, is it ever their fault? **Answer & Explanation:** NO / THUMBS DOWN, no, it's never a youth's fault (nor will it ever be their fault) if they or someone they know has been abused, or is hurting. [It's also not a youth's fault if an adult isn't taking care of them the way that they're supposed to, like giving them the food they need, or a blanket for sleeping when it's cold, etc.]
- (12) **Ask:** Is it OK to keep quiet about being abused if you also think you did something wrong, and are worried you might get into trouble? **Answer & Explanation:** NO / THUMBS DOWN, no, it's not OK to keep quiet about being abused, even if you're afraid you're going to get into trouble, even if you are afraid that you also did something wrong. It is never your fault, regardless of the circumstances, if you've been abused.
- (13) **Ask:** Do you have the courage to stand up for yourself or for a friend, and tell an adult when you're hurt, uncomfortable, or being abused? **Answer & Explanation:** Hopefully YES / THUMBS UP. Sometimes we have to be a safe friend to ourselves, too! That means standing up for ourselves when we feel uncomfortable or getting the information to a safe adult. The fact that you feel upset and uncomfortable is a good sign that you have to do something about it! When someone is hurting you or making you feel uncomfortable, regardless of whether it's from a friend, and regardless of what they've said to you to try to get you not to tell, you have to tell a safe adult about it as soon as you can. Even if the situation happened in the past, it's never too late to tell a safe adult!

End the Lesson in Prayer (you can use this, or any, prayer).

Lord, help me to remember your blessings each day. Allow me to remember that I am special and made in your image. Give me the courage to stand up for myself and others, no matter what. Thank you for loving me and for giving me safe friends, parents, and adults who want to keep me safe and happy. Amen.