



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 9—12

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.”

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:
 - o Say “No!” if involved in an unsafe situation
 - o Try to leave the situation if they feel uncomfortable
 - o 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 youth 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 or teens; rather, Lesson Leaders and caring adults in the life of a youth 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 youth, 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 youth in that they are *not responsible* for each other. Misinforming youth by saying that one person's welfare is a youth's responsibility could make a youth 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 youth 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: youth 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 teenagers—key concept is “searching”

This is the age where all the experiences that began with puberty—the physical changes and the developing emotions—accelerate rapidly as the teenager matures into a young adult. The self-consciousness deepens and matures. The world of “children” is now renounced. Teens believe in their immortality and may tend to be reckless in their behavior—in person and online. Although it would appear that they reject authority while defining their own independence, in reality, they rely on the strength and support they find in parents and other influential adults. Feeling supported and understood is important for this age group, as is upholding boundaries while the reasoning portions of their brains continue to develop. Teens have a great deal of personal freedom. This freedom also puts them at risk in various ways. Parents and guardians expect teens to take care of themselves and to ask for the help that they need. Caring adults must know that youths' online behavior and boundaries may need to be fortified.

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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: writing materials

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.

Lesson 5 for Grades 9—12**Being a Safe Friend****Activity 1: Personal Space Bubbles**

Instruct the children to pair off (groups of 2). Explain the following:

Before we begin, let's talk about personal space. Each of us has what we can think of as an 'invisible bubble'—the space around our body where we feel comfortable. That bubble is not the same in every situation. It can change depending on who we're with, how well we know them, where we are, and even how we're feeling that day. For example, you might be okay standing closer to a close friend, but want more space with someone you don't know as well or in a crowded setting. It's important to remember that everyone's 'bubble' is different, and part of showing respect is paying attention to both nonverbal signals and clear communication so we can honor those boundaries.

I'd like everyone to stand facing their partner. One person will stay in place while the other begins a few steps away and slowly walks forward. The person standing still should pay attention to their comfort level and use only nonverbal signals—such as stepping back, turning slightly, or changing facial expression—to show when they begin to feel uncomfortable. If you are the one moving, your job is to watch closely and stop as soon as you notice those signals. We'll try this once, then switch roles. After both partners have had a turn, we'll come back together for a quick reflection. *Allow 5-10 minutes for the students to participate in the activity.*

What signals were easy or hard to notice? What did you learn about paying attention to others' comfort? *Allow for answers & discussion.*

It's also important to pay attention to your own feelings and recognize when something doesn't feel right. Each of you has the right to feel safe and comfortable, and it's important to speak up if someone crosses a boundary. You should use clear, direct words like "Stop," "No," or "I'm not comfortable with that," and remove yourself from the situation as soon as you can. When this happens, it's important to tell a trusted adult so they can help support you and make sure you are safe. You won't get in trouble for speaking up and protecting your boundaries.

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Activity 2: Understanding how to be a Safe Friend – In this activity, the youth will break into small groups, review case studies, and apply safety knowledge through role playing and follow-up with discussion. The goal is to teach the youth to recognize the differences between healthy relationships and unhealthy ones, and to better socially navigate being a “safe friend” in tricky peer situations.

Preparation: The Lesson Leader will want to create an environment of togetherness and openness, understanding this topic may bring about discomfort or embarrassment; some youth may want to “blend in” or have a sense of anonymity. Do not force youth to speak if they do not wish to; instead, invite, inspire and encourage.

Directions: Break the students into small groups, with an adult leader with each group to facilitate the discussion. Invite the students to sit in seats in a way that creates an atmosphere of togetherness. Ask the youth to review the questions below, and then go through the scenarios one by one. The adult leader should read the cases aloud. Then, dialog with youth about standing up for themselves and others, by facilitating a discussion about the questions listed below.

Questions to discuss within the group for each scenario:

- What are some of the issues that are occurring in the scenario—can you identify any red flags?
- Are there any specific boundary violations?
- Is this a situation that needs to be communicated to a safe adult?
- What could a safe friend do to help?
- How would you say something to your friend?
- And, to a safe adult?

Scenario #1: Connor feels like he’s never allowed to say “no” to his girlfriend about anything or tell her that she’s wrong, and you can tell he is often worried about whether or not she will overreact to little things. They fight a lot, and you noticed that she gets really aggressive during fights. She pushes him and calls him names. Once, you saw a red mark on his cheek and suspected she slapped him—but quickly dismissed the thought because he is a big guy and can fend for himself. Is this a healthy relationship? (No—discuss why.)

Scenario #2: Lea is best friends with Kayla. There is a new girl in in their class, and she has been spending more time with them as a group. Lea sometimes feels upset and realizes that she feels slightly jealous, because she hasn’t been able to spend as much time with her best friend. She tells Kayla that she misses their talks and that she’d love to spend some time one-on-one, if Kayla is cool with that, too. Is this a healthy relationship? (Yes—discuss why.)

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Scenario #3: Jennifer says that she feels like her boyfriend says mean things to her all the time, on purpose—and that it makes her feel small and useless. When she finally did, he told her to “get over it.” She’s increasingly anxious and you’ve noticed that she isn’t eating much anymore. She often makes excuses about why she can’t hang out. (No—discuss why.)

Scenario #4: Josh’s teacher gave him a gift of a game he really wanted after school when they were hanging out during tutoring hours. She said to keep it a secret just between them, or that she’ll take it back. Some of the guys have a crush on this teacher and slap him on the back and say he’s lucky. You tell him a gift is something that is supposed to be freely given, without any expectations of something in return, or any conditions. He says it’s harmless, and that they’re just gifts between friends. Is this a healthy relationship? (No—discuss why.)

Scenario #5: Claire has been talking to a guy on the Internet through her favorite social media app. Everything she communicated about him seemed “legit.” She ended up meeting him in person and said he was a lot of fun. She told you that she wouldn’t do anything risky, but you later found out that she shared some photos of herself with him without her shirt. She also confided to you that she was just a little bit worried because after she shared a photo of herself without a shirt on, he has started pressuring her for more photos and threatening her, saying that he’ll do something bad if she doesn’t. She said she still really likes him, but that he better stop being obnoxious—but that she can totally handle it all. Is this a healthy relationship? (No—discuss why.)

Concluding statements: If you can recognize problematic behaviors or abuse, try to do the right thing and find a way to help your friend—this involves courage. It isn’t your *responsibility* to save or protect your friends, but if you know there’s a problem—see if there’s anything you can do to help by first and foremost telling a safe adult. You deserve to be in a healthy relationship with healthy boundaries and safe friends. You don’t deserve to be treated poorly—no one does. If you, or someone you know is in an unhealthy relationship, tell a safe adult right away.

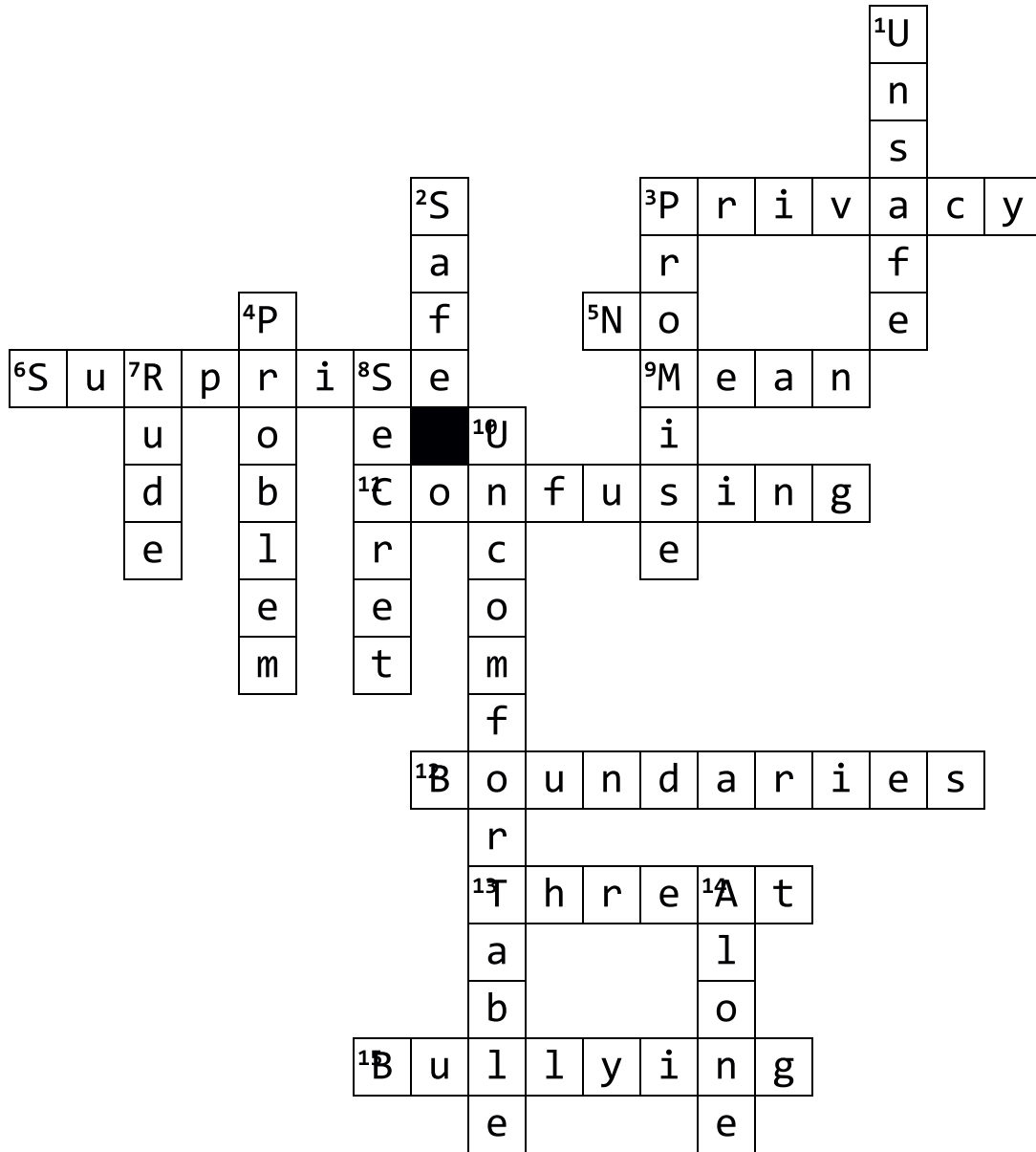
Activity 3: Crossword Puzzle - Use the remaining time for the kids to work on the crossword puzzle. Five to ten minutes from the end of class, read out the answers from the crossword answer key.

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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.

EGC L5: Being a Safe Friend



Across

3. _____ is primarily about being respectful of a person's personal boundaries or information. The things we appropriately can keep private include beliefs, opinions, ideas, traits, etc. Maintaining and honoring someone's _____ does not harm them or others or compromise their safety. And complete _____ is not always applicable to our safety boundaries. When it comes to a situation where boundaries have been violated, someone is hurt or has the potential to be hurt, we should tell the people who need to know to help us (and them) stay safe, such as our safe adults or other people who can help us. An example of some things we keep private, are our private parts (parts of our bodies covered by a bathing suit),

Down

1. _____ friends and _____ 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. We can tell when someone is _____ if they do not follow the rules, try to hide things from other safe adults, or don't listen to our boundaries.

2. _____ People won't hurt you without a good reason and won't intentionally confuse you. They listen, consistently respect boundaries, and follow the rules. You may have many _____ friends and

which we keep private underneath our clothing when we're around others.

5. To say "____" means to refuse, deny, reject, or express disapproval of. This word is used to establish a boundary and to communicate that you do not want something to happen or to continue. It's OK to say "____" to an adult if they make you feel scared or uncomfortable, or if they touch your private body parts.

6. _____s are typically happy. They cause feelings of happiness and joy. They are exciting and temporary—meaning they will be revealed within a specific timeframe. As _____are usually fun, they include activities like birthday _____, gifts, trips, and special treats. _____ are inclusive and meant to be shared with others.

9. Describes behavior where someone says or does something hurtful on purpose, once (maybe twice). The aim is to hurt intentionally, and is often motivated by anger. Examples include putting someone down so the _____ 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."

11. When something is hard to figure out because it doesn't make sense, it is unclear, or puzzling. To _____ is to cause an inability to think clearly or to be misleading. An example is a big, messy knot—it can be _____ because it's hard to figure out where each part goes, and how to straighten it all out.

12. 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 _____ to protect ourselves. We feel upset or uncomfortable when someone doesn't honor our own _____, and we communicate with the right person if we need help. Respecting another's _____ 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. An example of a _____ is your personal space bubble, which is the invisible barrier in which you should feel safe when around other people.

13. When someone _____ens you, they are stating that they are going to hurt, injure, damage, or do something dangerous if you don't do what they want you to do. You never have to listen to _____s, but you should be prepared if you encounter them. For example, someone

adults. There are some things that can be uncomfortable or may hurt, but are done with transparency to you and other adults and are only done when necessary, i.e., medical exams, vaccinations, throat swabs, removing splinters, stopping you from running into the road, etc.

3. When you make a _____, you are declaring that something specific will happen—that you will either "do" or "not do" something. _____s can be good! But we should never make _____s to keep quiet about unsafe secrets.

4. _____ can be big and small; they can be small, little things like puzzles or big things like emergencies, and often need to be solved. They can involve fears and emotions. Sometimes we put boundaries in place to prevent _____s or to be more prepared for them. Whenever we have a _____ that we don't know how to solve, we should talk to a safe adult for help. If we have _____ with safety, boundaries, or secrets, we definitely need to talk to a safe adult.

7. Describes behavior where someone inadvertently or accidentally does or says something hurtful. _____ness 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.

8. Something kept hidden, never told, or unexplained. _____ exclude others and can cause harm, sometimes leaving the person involved feeling frightened or uncomfortable. There are no _____ when it comes to personal and physical safety. It's wrong for an adult or another child to ask to keep a _____ about safety—especially unsafe touches—because that's a way people get hurt. If an individual tries to make you keep a _____ or makes you feel frightened, you must know to communicate this information right away to a parent or caring adult—and be reassured that you will be protected regardless of threats or seeming consequences of "telling".

10. Feeling _____ means you may feel uneasy, sometimes causing anxiety or feelings of nausea. It might be a feeling in the "pit of your stomach," or it could be the hairs standing up on the back of your neck. You may freeze, want to fight, or feel like running away from the situation.

14. Kept apart from social contact with other people. Feeling _____ is to be secluded or shut out from others. Similar, but different than keeping "isolated," which is the state of being detached or separated.

might _____en you and say that if you tell about an unsafe secret, they're going to hurt someone/something you know, and that you're going to get into trouble. When you hear someone _____en you about an unsafe secret, that is when we definitely need to tell a safe adult.

15. _____ 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 remorse. A key aspect is the ongoing pattern of an imbalance of power 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, cyber_____, etc.