

Lesson 5 for Grades 9-12

Partnering with Parents & Guardians for Safety: *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.

OBJECTIVES

After lesson 5, children should be 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)

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 6:14-1

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

Background for Parents and Guardians:

In preparation for teaching this lesson and to lead the activities, review the *Teaching Boundaries and Safety Guide: Safe Environment Guide for Caring Adults, Parents and Guardians*.

Before sitting down with your child(ren) and beginning the activities, read through this entire lesson and view the video. Choose the activities that you are most comfortable with first and gradually moving to the others. You will find it is helpful to have the *Teaching Boundaries and Safety Guide* handy to navigate the lesson material. These activities are intended to empower young people to think about safety issues with you as their partner.

Considerations for the age group—

Grades 9-12 This is the age where all the experiences that began with puberty accelerate rapidly as the teenager matures into a young adult. 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. They may appear to reject authority to define their independence, in reality though, they rely on strength and support of 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. Fortifying online boundaries and guidance with online behavior is needed.

Activity #1: Introductory Video

Directions: View and discuss the introductory video with your child. The introductory video for all grades is designed to open a simple discussion with children about personal boundaries and touching safety. The video is approximately six minutes long and is neither created nor intended as a substitute for the activities. It's merely an intro designed to “break the ice” and assist the transition into completing the interactive Lesson Activity options. It can be used in to introduce any of the following activities. Discussion and practice are the critical components needed to teach children how to protect themselves. They learn best by “doing”; not just listening or watching.

Grades 9-12 Video links:

English 9 – 12: https://www.youtube.com/embed/eY_oua646oc

Activity #2: Review and Discuss Vocabulary words in an age-appropriate way with your child

Saying “No”—to say “no” means to refuse, deny, reject or express disapproval of. This word is used to express a boundary and communicate that you do not want something to happen or continue. [Let children know It’s OK to say “No” to an adult if they make you feel scared or uncomfortable, or if they touch your private body parts.]

Uncomfortable—experiencing discomfort that leaves one feeling 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.]

Confusing—is something that is hard to figure out because it doesn’t make sense, it is unclear or puzzling. To cause confusion is to cause an inability to think clearly or to be misleading. [An example is a big, messy knot—it can be confusing because it’s hard to figure out where each part goes how to straighten it all out.]

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.]

Safe friends and safe adults—safe people won’t hurt you without a good reason and won’t intentionally confuse you. They listen to and 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.]

Secret—something kept hidden, never told or unexplained. Secrets exclude others and have potential to harm, sometimes causing the person involved to feel frightened or uncomfortable. [For example, let children know that there are no secrets when it comes to personal and physical safety. Tell children it’s wrong for an adult or another child to ask to keep a secret about safety—especially unsafe touches—because that’s a way for people to get hurt. If an individual tries to make a child keep a secret or makes him / her feel frightened, the child must know to communicate this information right away to a parent or caring adult—and be reassured that the child will be protected regardless of threats or seeming consequences of “telling”.]

Surprise—Surprises 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 surprises are usually fun, they include activities like birthday surprises, gifts, trips and special treats. Surprises are inclusive and meant to be shared with others.

Problem—Problems 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 problems, or to be more prepared for them. Whenever we have a problem that we don’t know how to solve, we should talk to a safe adult for help. If we have problems about safety issues, boundaries and secrets, we definitely need to talk to a safe adult. [For example, a house fire is a big problem for everyone who lives there, and for the people who live near that house. It’s a problem because it’s unsafe, and it could hurt people. When a house is on fire, help is needed help right away. How do we get help with the problem of house fires? As soon as it’s safe, we “stop, drop and roll”, try to get out and call 911, and the fire department comes to help us fix the problem of the fire that’s too big to fix on our own.]

Threat—When someone threatens 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 threats, but you should be prepared in case you experience them. [For example, someone might threaten you and say if you tell about an unsafe secret, they’re going to hurt your someone/something you know, and that you’re going to get into trouble. When you hear someone threaten you about an unsafe secret, that is when we definitely need to tell a safe adult.]

Promise—When you make a promise, you are declaring that something specific will happen—that you will either “do” or “not do” something. Promises can be good! But, we should never make promises about keeping quiet regarding unsafe secrets.

Privacy—Privacy 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 privacy does not result in hurting them or others, or compromising someone’s safety. And, complete privacy is not always applicable when it deals with 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 keep the information private insofar as we only 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. We also keep other things private, such as our private parts, which we keep private underneath our clothing when we’re in public. Privacy and secrecy are often confused—and the main difference is that unsafe secrecy involves situations where we deliberately keep something from someone else usually out of fear, where keeping the secret can negatively impact or harm ourselves or someone else.

Secluded—Kept apart from social contact with other people. Seclusion is the act of secluding or shutting out. Similar, but different than keeping “isolated,” which is the state of being detached or separated.

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 narcissistically, 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 intentionally hurt, and is 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 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 it, without a sense of remorse. A key aspect is the ongoing pattern, involving an imbalance of power where 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.]

Activity #3: Discussion: How can a safe friend help other friends with unhealthy relationships?

Activity: This activity has two parts, discussion and application. Youth recognize the differences between healthy relationships and unhealthy ones and are better able to socially navigate being a “safe friend” in tricky peer situations.

Preparation: Before the lesson create an environment of togetherness and openness, understanding this topic may bring about discomfort or embarrassment. Do not force youth to speak if they do not wish to; instead, invite, inspire and encourage.

Discussion: Lead discussion with your child about standing up for themselves and others.

PART 1: DISCUSSION. Say: Our lives are made up of relationships with everyone around us, including relationships between family members, teachers, coaches, other adults, acquaintances—our friends—and other significant people in our lives.

Ask: What makes a relationship healthy? (Key elements include two individuals who are committed to: having mutual respect, freedom to be one’s self, honoring each other’s boundaries, and communicating in healthy ways.)

Ask: How do I know if a relationship is unhealthy—even peer friendships? (It’s unhealthy when there isn’t respect, when power is used to manipulate, name-calling, a lack of kindness, when there’s dishonesty, when it hurts or is confusing, when someone tries to get you to do something you don’t want to do, when there’s abuse, etc.)

Explain: Abuse doesn’t always look abusive: Abuse can be psychological, with isolation, control or intimidation; it can be emotional, can involve bullying or digital abuse, stalking, physical abuse or a threat of violence, or sexual abuse.

Sexual abuse is when one pressures, forces or *tries* to force the other to do a sexual activity—even *kissing*—against their will, or without consent, which means that it isn't wanted (or that the person cannot give consent due to being incapacitated due to drugs, alcohol, fear, pressure, or some other reason, like changing their mind at any time).

Child sexual abuse is when an adult does these behaviors with a child or youth—even a teen.

Date rape is a type of sexual abuse. "Date rape," or, acquaintance rape, is any non-consensual sexual activity between at least two people who know one another. Most victims know their abusers. It's more common than you might think, and can happen between friends, acquaintances, people who are dating, teammates, classmates, people who have recently met...

- There are some people who recruit others for sexual purposes, to make money or gain power over them— which can be referred to as sexual exploitation or sexual trafficking.
- Sexual abuse, exploitation and particularly *rape*, aren't always violent. They can happen when someone says "no," and their wishes aren't respected.
- A common myth is that it can't be *rape*, *exploitation* or *sexual abuse* if you're in a relationship with the person, or, if you've performed sexual activities in the past, or—if you didn't seem to fight back. The person who is raped, or sexually abused... Or exploited, whether female or male, is never at fault—they are **never to blame**; they never "ask for it", their clothing is never at fault, and they never "owe" anyone anything, ever.

Ask: Whose fault is the abuse? (If *you* have ever been mistreated in a relationship, it can be really confusing. It's easy to blame yourself. If someone hurts you physically, emotionally, sexually or in some other way—you *did nothing to cause the abuse*. It has nothing to do with your level of intelligence or strength. It's always the fault of the person who is abusing. A lot of people don't know what to do when they experience unsafe or unhealthy relationships. They might feel like there's no way out, or be afraid to ask for help.)

Ask: What is a friend? (see, "healthy relationship" information. A friend is someone who cares about you will respect your wishes and won't force, pressure or manipulate you to do anything. They don't confuse you, they consistently respect boundaries and follow the rules. This is true of safe friends and safe adults, too.)

Ask: What do you do, as a safe friend, when you see someone in an unsafe situation? (Our friends are the ones who are most likely to recognize when we are in an unhealthy situation. As a friend, even a "peripheral one," this is why it's important to listen, and be kind, even if you aren't very close. In any case, regardless of who it is, or why they're doing the behavior, or even the circumstances involved, the information has to get to a safe adult. A **safe adult** is one who prioritizes safety.)

Ask: Can you promise confidentiality to a friend about abuse? (No, you, as a friend, *cannot promise* complete confidentiality when hearing about abuse, because there may come a time where you will need to communicate with a safe adult on their behalf—to protect them.)

Ask: So, what if you've *already* promised to keep it a secret—can you—or... *should* you—share the information with the right person who can help? (Yes.)

Ask: Does sharing it betray the person and their confidence? (No. It's *helping* them—when they can't get the help they need themselves. That's being a good friend, even if it doesn't *feel* like it, because you are watching out for someone else's safety.)

PART 2: BRAINSTORMING AND APPLICATION OF THE MATERIAL. Invite the youth to either write down their answers, or simply discuss them with you.

Ask: How can you be a supportive friend? What are some examples of what you can do, or what that means?

Support doesn't mean you turn a blind eye to unhealthy relationships. It means being there, believing the person, letting them know you're there for them, even in a crisis, and getting the person the help they need—even if that means communicating a secret to someone who can actually help. It might mean spending more time with the person, or it could be reporting to law enforcement. Don't give up on your friends, but don't be a part of their poor decisions either. Stay calm and logical, but communicate why you're concerned, and that the behavior isn't normal and that life could be better and happier. If a crime is involved, offer to go with your friend to disclose, or as a "support" person. Reach out to others for help if needed, if you're not sure abuse is happening. If a crime is involved, like physical abuse, sexual exploitation, rape, or child sexual abuse by an adult, you will need to reach out to the police or emergency services.

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 #4: Unhealthy Relationships— Role Play to be a Safe Friend

Activity: This is a 2-part activity involving a discussion, then reviewing case studies and applying safety knowledge through role playing and follow-up with discussion. Youth recognize the differences between healthy relationships and unhealthy ones, and are better able to socially navigate being a “safe friend” in tricky peer situations.

PART 1: DISCUSSION. Say the following: Sometimes we are in relationships or friendships with others where something isn't quite right. You might feel taken advantage of, bullied—maybe even abused. Maybe someone else always has their way and you're the one who has to sacrifice what you want. Do you feel like you always know how to say “no?” It's important that we know how to stand up for ourselves in really tricky situations, and get help for ourselves and our friends when needed. We are going to talk about being *assertive*.

There's a lot of confusion regarding being assertive. Sometimes people think that being assertive is rude... Or that it's being aggressive. The truth is, regardless of whether we are shy or outgoing, or introverted or extroverted, or don't like conflict or love to argue, we should all be assertive! It's part of healthy boundaries, and all healthy relationships have healthy boundaries.

Being assertive doesn't mean that we have to be loud or annoying. It just means that we identify our feelings, note when something is not right, gather our courage and take the steps to communicate when we feel something unsafe needs attention for ourselves, and for our friends.

Clarify the roles of adults, and safe friends: As we continue this discussion, it's important to recognize it's the job of adults to protect youth from unsafe situations. Most people are safe, but there are people who will manipulate us or wish to harm us, and who do hurt us.

Youth can also be a “safe person” for others. This is called being a “safe friend.” **As a youth, it's not your JOB (as youth) to protect others. It is not your responsibility, because you are youth.** But, when we do know that someone is hurt or hurting, then we **should try to help** by getting that information to a safe adult. Let's recap these really important points:

- Whose responsibility is it to keep youth safe? (ADULTS; it's the adult's job to protect youth)
- Can we, as youth, also help when we know there's a problem? (Yes, usually youth can help, too)
- How can we, as youth, help the most? (Take the information to a safe adult; a trustworthy person)

Tell safe adults when you need help; telling isn't “snitching”: Even if we don't realize it, we all have many safe people in our lives who want to help us. However, they don't always know when we need help unless we actually tell them.

Note: Parents should be careful to communicate to youth 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 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 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.

Telling a safe adult when we, or others, need help is not “snitching” or “crossing the line.” You have a right to be safe! Your friends have a right to be safe. If you know that there's important information about safety, adults should listen to you. If a safe adult isn't listening to you, take the information to another safe adult. Keep taking the information to a trustworthy person, and may a different trustworthy person, until you feel that you've been heard.

Remember: if you, or someone you know, has been abused—it's not your fault. There's nothing you did to cause the abuse. You are unique, you matter. Being happy and healthy, and having healthy and safe relationships is very important. If you're in a bad or unsafe situation (or know someone who is), it might be time to get some help.

Being assertive is about standing up for yourself. It's about expressing your thoughts, your feelings and your needs. However, keep in mind that when it comes to matters of health and safety, and abuse, it doesn't matter if you are assertive OR aggressive in your response. At the very least, assertiveness is necessary. But, an aggressive response is certainly OK, too.

PART 2: CASE-STUDY ANALYSIS AND ROLE PLAYING: This portion is composed of questions for discussion, along with case-study scenarios. Use the same set of questions for each case study.

Questions to discuss 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. A new girl in in their class, and 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.)

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 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 ended up meeting him in person and said he was a lot of fun. She also confided to you that she was just a little bit worried because she shared a photo of herself without a shirt on, and he has been pressuring her lately for more photos and threatening her 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.