



ARCHDIOCESE OF ST. LOUIS
Office of Child and Youth Protection

SAFE TOUCH PROGRAM

9th Grade through 12th Grade

INFORMATION FOR PARENTS

PROGRAM GOALS

1. To provide information at age-appropriate levels to make high school students 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 trusted 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 of 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 son or daughter's school 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 contact the Archdiocese of St. Louis Office of Child and Youth Protection 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 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 Archdiocese of St. Louis Office of Child and Youth Protection at 314-792-7271 and speak to the executive director, Sandra Price. You may also speak to your child's school principal or school counselor, or reach Saint Louis Counseling 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.



ARCHDIOCESE OF ST. LOUIS
Office of Child and Youth Protection

SAFE TOUCH PROGRAM

High School 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 about personal 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.

Many teenagers mistakenly believe that they are not at risk for being sexually abused, assaulted, or trafficked. This is a mistake. In fact, of all child sexual abuse cases that are proven in our country, the majority are toward high school aged adolescents. And adolescents are far more likely to be mistreated this way by a relative, friend, or someone else they know than by a stranger.

Statistically, about 1 in 4 females and 1 in 8 males are sexually abused or assaulted before turning 18.

Boundaries:

Our discussion about personal 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.

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 or uneasy. At other times, or in other situations, you might feel really angry that someone tried to cross your boundaries, or really scared, because what happened to you was frightening.

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.

Sometimes, pushing the boundaries can feel good, flirty or interesting in the beginning, but it can quickly turn uncomfortable when someone crosses the line.

When our emotions and our bodies react in these ways, this is our gut instinct telling us that something isn't right. Our bodies give us clues, or instincts, when a situation is threatening. It's important to TRUST those instincts when our safety is involved!

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. We, 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. High school students face some serious concerns with this issue.

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

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 you on private areas of your body or pressure you into inappropriate behavior. It is never appropriate for adults to have dating relationships with adolescents. As said before, teens sometimes believe that only younger children can experience this type of abuse by adults. Actually, however, teens are at increased, not decreased, risk for this type of abuse.

Be aware that adults who try to cross boundaries with adolescents 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 giving lots of compliments, telling the teen secrets, giving gifts or backrubs, showing the teen pornography, and even providing them with alcohol. It is never appropriate for adults to have dating or romantic relationships with high 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 online 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 online. 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.

Another concern involves safety with friends and dating partners.

Teenagers can be mistreated or assaulted by people their own age, just as with adults. However, you can make smart choices that may help you to stay safe and make it less likely that you will experience an unsafe situation.

These smart choices include:

- Stay sober and aware while out with a date or friends. Statistics show that in the majority of date assaults, alcohol is involved.
- Don't go out alone with a dating partner until you know him or her better.
- Be mindful of your location and don't go to secluded areas. This includes houses where parents aren't home and vehicles in parking lots.
- If you're at a party, keep your beverage with you in order to reduce the chances of being drugged without your knowledge. If you have set down your drink or not kept watch over it, get a new glass and pour out the old one.

Question for discussion: Do you know any additional, good safety tips to share? What do you do to watch out for your personal safety?

Remember though, even a person who has made a mistake in judgment deserves to be safe and does not deserve to be abused or assaulted. You always have the right to say "no." You don't have to go along when someone is pressuring you to cross your boundaries. This is true even if you have crossed those boundaries before.

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. If someone touches you inappropriately or does anything else that gives you a gut instinct that something just isn't right:

- 1) 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 looks and sounds.*)
- 2) Second, get away from that person. If someone has tried to touch you inappropriately, you absolutely have the right to get away from them, even if they are an adult.
- 3) Last, tell an adult that you trust what happened. Trusted 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 an adult you trust about what happened even if someone asked or told you not to tell. Often adults who are inappropriate with young people will make threats or tell the teenager 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 or 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. Statistically, over 90% of young people who are sexually mistreated know the person who mistreated them.

Question: We talked about three steps you should take if your instinct tells you that you are at risk. What are those steps? (*Say no/stop, get away, tell a safe adult.*)

PART 4: ONLINE SAFETY

Note that these safety rules can be discussed on the same day as Parts 1-3 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 how we share personal information online, because there are online predators who will try to misuse any information that we share. Some predators may try to steal your identity or gain access to our family's financial information, but the type of online predator we're discussing today is an adult who tries to start inappropriate or abusive relationships with minors.

If an adult that you don't know in real life tries to get to know you online or get too close online, this should give you that 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 an adult you trust.

The best way for anyone to stay safe online is never to 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 you may think you are messaging and exchanging photos with a seventeen year old girl, and in reality it could be a 50 year old man who's an online predator or child sex trafficker. You can never be sure.

Remember talking about trusting our instincts when someone is making us feel uncomfortable? It is important to trust our instincts when we are online too. If you ever feel uncomfortable about how someone is talking to you online, asking for your pictures or personal information, or when you are playing a game, stop talking to them immediately and tell us [parents] or another adult you trust.

Question: What do you think are some ways that high school students sometimes take safety risks online? *(After each response, ask your child what would be a safer way to handle the situation they described. Continue to remind your adolescent not to interact online with individuals that they don't know in real life.)*

Pornography and Sexting:

Another very dangerous part of the internet for everyone is internet pornography sites. It is understandable to be curious about pornography, but it is important to know that internet pornography is one of the most addictive things that exists. Because our brains are hard-wired to find sexuality appealing, there is a natural positive response in the brain when we see pornography. The problem, however, is that today's online pornography is available 24 hours a day, with just a click, and shows never-ending variety – meaning constantly new and different faces, bodies and behaviors. Our brains have never evolved for this type of sexuality.

After regular exposure, research shows that internet pornography starts to have very serious effects on users. Some users start to experience depression and social anxiety. Other users begin to have difficulty getting through the day or going to sleep without using pornography. Many start to notice physical and sexual problems in themselves. And these effects only go away when a person completely stops using pornography.

Internet pornography also 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. This is not the way intimacy works in real relationships. The bottom line is that internet pornography is inappropriate, unhealthy and very addictive. Pornography goes against our families' values and our faith. The smart choice is never to use it.

Sexting is another dangerous online behavior. Sexting is the sending of sexual photos, videos, or text messages over cell phones. We all know this is morally wrong, but it is illegal too. It is illegal to have or send pictures or videos that show anyone under the age of 18 in a sexual way. It's also illegal to send a sexually explicit text message to a minor. "Sexting" could result in being criminally charged for possessing and/or distributing child pornography. High school students have been charged with felonies and even added to states' sexual offender registries for sexting. All it takes is for one person's parent to see their phone, get concerned and notify authorities. 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 your parent. You are putting yourself at serious legal risk if you have this type of material on your phone or other technology. No matter what, even if someone asks you or dares you, never, ever take an inappropriate photo or video of yourself or anyone else.

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 online boundaries.

PART 5: SAFETY RULES

Note that these safety rules can be discussed on the same day as Parts 1-4 or on a different day.

(Parents: there is a written handout available for high school students that you may provide to your child.)

- 1) Never go places alone; try to stick with a friend or in a group. Unsafe adults and child traffickers usually focus on kids and teenagers who 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 with a stranger or any person who makes you feel uncomfortable.
- 4) 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 vehicle that is asking you for directions or help. Those are common lures used by adult predators. Know that safe adults never ask minors 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.
- 5) 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.
- 6) 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.
- 7) No adult should ever touch you inappropriately. Inappropriate behavior could include talking about their private body areas, showing pornography, providing alcohol, or asking you about your body.

- 8) To stay safe online:
- Never friend or follow someone on social media that you don't know offline "in real life." Online predators often 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 us, 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 or videos. Never keep this type of material on your phone or other device.
 - Completely avoid internet pornography.
 - Turn off location services for 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.
- 9) Our family will develop a family password for emergencies. Do not go with adults who claim that one of us 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
 - Get away
 - Tell an adult you trust