**SAFE ENVIRONMENT LESSON: Grades 6-8 (Lesson #5 & #6)**

We will teach Teaching Safety on Sunday, April 7. 2024. The lessons will be based on “Grooming Behaviors” of potential abusers. Please remember this is not a sex education lesson. If a child begins to ask or discuss issues that are not appropriate for this lesson please remind them their concerns are valid, however, these are questions that they need to discuss with their parents.

**Teachers:** Depending on the discussion you have with the students please do not feel pressured to get everything completed. We would just like a healthy and informative discussion for the students.

**LESSON #5**

**OBJECTIVE LESSON #5:** To give children the ability to begin to identify and define adult behaviors that indicate that the person wants more than friendship in the relationship and to trust their own instincts about what is “okay” and what is “not Okay.” The goal is not to teach them all the warning signs but to concentrate on two specific areas:

1. An adult who gives gifts without permission and instructs the child not to tell
2. Respecting their own instincts when adults’ requests make them feel uncomfortable or are confusing.

**VOCABULARY:**

1. Uncomfortable – Experiencing physical discomfort that leaves one ill at ease or uneasy, sometimes causing anxiety.
2. Confusing – To cause to be unable to think clearly, to make unclear or incomprehensible.
3. Secrets – Something that is hidden from others or that is known only to one or to a few.
4. Secluded – kept apart from social contact with other people, hidden from view.

**DISCUSSION / ACTIVITY:**

* **Note:** You may want to invite students to sit in chairs in a way that creates an atmosphere of togetherness and openness. Most students at this age are trying to find themselves without being embarrassed or standing out in a way that demonstrates their feelings about something. The discussion is designed in a way that allows for the students to speak about these issues conceptually rather than from personal experience. They don’t have to share what has happened to them but they can draw on their own experience and their own observations over time to use the discussion questions to begin to distinguish between gift giving that is an expression of pure, wholesome love and friendship and gift giving that is a tool used by people whose intention is to do harm.
* *Today we are going to have a conversation about “gifts.” When we talk about “gifts” what do you think we mean?*
  + **Note:** Let the young people talk about each of the questions in this section. For example, invite the young people to talk about what a gift is and encourage them to think beyond the package wrapped in pretty paper and topped with a big bow that is given on special occasions such as birthdays and Christmas.
* *It seems ridiculous to even ask that question, doesn’t it? However, a gift is something more than a package wrapped in paper with a bow on top or a gift bag filled with items and colorful tissue paper. The dictionary defines “gift” as: something that is bestowed voluntarily and without compensation. It also defines bestow as presenting or conferring something. “Without compensation” means what?*
  + Allow students to answer.
* *Yes, when you get something without compensation it means that you did not have to pay for it. However, “without compensation” means a great deal more than without payment. It really means that nothing is expected in return. If there is any condition or expectation, it is not really a gift.*
* *So, if a gift is something that is given, or presented to us and nothing is expected in return, what else would you consider to be a gift?*
  + Sometimes gifts can be expensive and sometimes they can be simple.
  + It is the intention behind the giving of the gift that must be clarified.
  + Gifts from parents, family members, and friends that recognize special occasions or acknowledge accomplishments are great and should be cherished and appreciated. However, these gifts are never given in secret on the condition that parents and guardians are kept in the dark.
  + Some gifts don’t come in packages. Gifts can be anything such as someone buying you lunch or paying for you to go to the movies.
  + **Note:** It is important that the young people begin to expand their idea of what constitutes a gift. All those traditional things are included when we talk about gift but there is much more that can be considered a gift and child molesters will use everything that they have.
* *What are some reasons that people – other than parents and guardians, grandparents, and family members – give gifts?*
  + There are “events” and “special occasions” when they get gifts from people other than parents and family, but for the most part these are unusual and public. The gifts are given in front of others or with the permission of parents.
  + Gifts are an opportunity to recognize something special or to acknowledge something such as recognition of an accomplishment or an acknowledgment of the completion of something.
  + Sometimes people give you things in order to “get something” from you. For example, they use the item as a bribe or an incentive to get you to do something you don’t want to do or are uncomfortable doing. It looks like a gift, seems life a gift, and the person giving it even says that it is a gift. However, THIS IS NOT A GIFT. It is important that all of us begin to recognize these situations when others are using these so called “gifts” to get you to do what they want – even if you don’t want to do it.
* *What kind of gifts might we get from people other than our parents or members of the family?*
* **Point to Make:**
  + At a birthday party or at Christmas time, we may get gifts from lots of different people.
  + A Youth Minister or teacher may present you with a gift acknowledging a major accomplishment.
  + Graduation is one of the times that gifts come from friends other than our parents and family, as well as first communion and confirmation.
  + Companies and sports teams often give gifts to people for promotional purposes. For example, the first 100 people at opening day of the local professional baseball or basketball team get a ball cap or a new bat.
* *What about people who give you a gift and tell you to keep it a secret?*
* **Point to Make:**
  + Sometimes grandparents and/or aunts and uncles give gifts and tell children to keep it a secret. Teachers need to reinforce the message that keeping secrets about gifts is wrong even if the child thinks that the parents will be upset about the gift or may ask them to give the gift back.
  + If the criteria for determining whether something is a gift are that it is given freely and without the expectation of anything in return, then this is not a gift. Keeping it from your parents is what is expected in return. In the overall scheme of things it may not seem like a big deal to keep a secret from your parents about a gift from a friend or family member.
  + Deliberately keeping things from your parents or guardians puts distance between you and them. Distance is like a wall or a barrier that comes between you and someone else all because of some secret you are keeping that you know your parents would want to know.
* *Why would someone do that?*
* **Points to make:**
  + Sometimes grandparents are frustrated by parents’ rules about gifts or that they realize that they are going overboard and want to keep from making parents mad.
  + Other times people use this as a way to come between you and your parents or to manipulate and control you so that they can lure you into doing something you don’t really don’t want to do, something you don’t feel comfortable doing, or something or which you know your parents would not approve.
* *What would be a “good” purpose or intention for someone asking that you keep a gift a secret from parents or guardians and what other purpose might someone have for making that request?*
* **Points to make: NOTE –** It is important that this discussion clarify the difference between gifts that are appropriate expressions of love and friendship and those that are tools for manipulation and control.
  + Someone who lets you do things that your parents would not allow you to do without getting permission or gives you gifts that your parents do not know about is not a friend. Their interests are not the same as yours and their actions should always be suspect. Even though it may seem harmless to you – after all, you just disagree with your parents on the issue – the intentions of the adult involved may be very different than you think. This person does not deserve your trust.
  + Remember that safe adults and safe friends are those that respect your wishes and the wishes and rules of your parents, guardians, and caretakers when it comes to these kinds of issues.
  + When someone suggests that you can do something that you think your parents would not allow or accept a gift you are unsure about, tell the person that first you need to call and check in with your parents. If the adult or older person objects, tries to talk you out of making that call, or leaves you with the idea that it can just be your own “secret,” it is best to steer clear of that person.
* *How does it make you feel when your friends, people you trust, or perhaps even your parents keep secrets from you?*
* **Points to make:**
  + It might not seem like a big deal but think about how it makes you feel when your friends keep a secret from you. It makes you feel like you are an outsider and it hurts your feelings. This happens with your parents when you keep secrets from them. They feel like outsiders and it hurts their feelings.
  + Keeping secrets about things that you know your parents would want to know creates distance between you and them. Even if they are standing beside you, it feels like they are far away because you are withholding an important secret.
* *What do you do when someone – a friend or someone you trusted in the past – asks you to keep a secret from your parents or guardians that you know you should not keep?*
  + **Points to make:**
    - People who say that they are your friends and then expect you to do things to prove your friendship or loyalty are not friends.
    - No matter how tempting it is to go against the rules of the family or your parents’ wishes, the risk of harm to you is great. Along with God, the people who love you most and want what is best for you are your parents.
    - Sometimes it is hard to talk with parents about something like this because perhaps the adult whose behavior is questionable is a friend of theirs, or worse still, a relative. Perhaps it is difficult because you know that your parents will be upset and you don’t want to cause that. If that is the case and you don’t feel you can talk with your parents about what is happening, go to another adult whom you trust for advice.
* *What would you say is the most important message for you to remember out of this lesson?*
  + **NOTE:** Using the board, make a list of the things they learned during the discussion. Encourage them to list everything.

**LESSON #6**

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**CLASSROOM DISCUSSION / ACTIVITY:**

* **Note to teacher:** The purpose of this conversation is to begin to expand the discussion about the touching rules to the grooming process. It is important to empower young people to put a stop to activities that place them in harm’s way before there is an opportunity for the harm to occur. One of the ways they can protect themselves is to think before they act or, more accurately, think of the possible risks before they go somewhere with someone and put themselves in a dangerous or risky situation.
* *In our discussions last year we talked about your right to speak up and tell a trusted adult when someone harms you or touches you in a way that makes you feel uncomfortable. We also talked about how to recognize a trusted adult.*
* *It today’s discussion we will review some of that material, but our primary focus is going to be on establishing some guidelines for you that are more likely to protect you from finding yourself in a compromising, risky or even dangerous situation.*
* *What is someone you think has earned your trust invites you to go somewhere or asks you to do something that makes you feel uncomfortable?*
* **Points to make:**
  + If the choice is between trusting your instincts and trusting another person – **TRUST YOUR OWN INSTINCTS.**
  + The criteria for a trustworthy adult and others are:
    - They do nothing that scares, confuses or hurts you without a good reason (i.e. a nurse gives a shot or a dentist repairing a problem tooth.)
    - They honor your boundaries and the rules set by your parents
  + Trustworthy adults are people that listen to you and treat you with respect. They are people that respect the wishes and limits set by your parents or guardians. Trustworthy adults would not ask you to do something that makes you feel uneasy or that could put you at odds with your moral values, your principles, or your parents.
  + Ask yourself whether this person has your best interests at heart. If you are not completely convinced about this and totally comfortable with the request of the invitation, say “no thanks.”
* *How will you handle a situation like this? What will you say? What will you do? Who will tell – if anyone?*
* **Points to make**
  + Remember that you have the right to say “no” and that anyone who does not respect that right is not really a friend.
  + If you don’t feel you can decline to go, invite other young people or adults to go with you. Make sure that you are not in a position of being alone in a secluded area with an adult who invited you there or insisted that you go there.
  + If you are leaving the area with this person, tell everyone you see. Let them know where you are going and who you are going with.
  + If there are no others around, call someone on your cell phone and let them know what’s happening.
  + Remember that if the person has no ulterior or harmful motives or bad intentions, they will not be upset by your desire to let people know what is happening or to invite others to join you.
  + If you don’t feel comfortable, there is no reason that the adult can give that should override your own discomfort about the situation. Trust yourself.

**PRAYER**

My holy Angel Guardian,

Ask the Lord to bless the journey that I undertake,

That it may benefit the health of my soul and body;

That I may reach its end,

And that, returning safe and sound,

I may find my family in good health.

Guard, guide, and preserve us throughout the day and night.

Amen.