

Lesson 3 for Grades 9 through 12

Preparation: Educators, catechists, youth ministers, and other caring adults should prepare by reviewing the entire lesson plan and by reading *Teaching Touching Safety: A Guide for Parents, Guardians, and Other Caring Adults*. Then, follow the instructions to complete as many of the activities as possible in your allotted amount of time.

Activity #1: Play the introductory video to begin the lesson.

Activity #2: Review the vocabulary words and definitions with your students.

Activity #3: Recognizing relationship boundaries.

Activity #4: Evaluating the boundaries in your life.

Activity #5: Keeping boundaries appropriate to the context of a relationship.

Prayer: A suggested (optional) prayer is provided at the end of the lesson. If you wish, you may use this prayer to conclude this lesson with your students.

Preparation for completing this lesson:

Principle: Setting limits and honoring them can help keep young people safe from harm.

Catechism: Freedom is exercised in relationships between human beings. Every human person, created in the image of God, has the natural right to be recognized as a free and responsible being. All owe to each other this duty of respect. The *right to the exercise of freedom*, especially in moral and religious matters, is an inalienable requirement of the dignity of the human person. This right must be recognized and protected by civil authority within the limits of the common good and public order. **#1738**

Goal: To assist parents, guardians, and other caring adults in teaching young people how to prevent or reduce the chances of sexual abuse or sexual violence of any type.

Objectives: To help teens further develop their ability to identify, define, and honor appropriate boundaries in different types of relationships and under different types of relationship conditions:

- They can say “no” when they feel uncomfortable or confused by how another person is acting or when they are asked (or encouraged) to do something they know is wrong—even if the person is a friend or someone else that they love and trust.
- They should honor and respect the wishes of others who don’t want to be touched, even when it feels like rejection and hurts their feelings. Learning that others have the right to say “no” and to have their “no” respected is a fundamental part of our character development as we grow into young adults. It empowers us to maintain our own boundaries and to respect and support the boundaries of those around us.

Dealing with the teens—the key concept is “searching”

This is the age where all the experiences that began with puberty—the physical changes and the developing emotions—are moving rapidly toward the newfound identity of 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 behavior. 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 meaningful adults.

Young people of this age primarily identify with their interpersonal relationships. They are beginning to have a stronger concern for others and have many questions about social relationships and decisions making. Safe friends and safe adults are critical at this age since teens have a strong need for role models and mentors in whom they can confide. It is also crucial that teens are able to identify unsafe adults and have the skills to effectively deal with them as necessary.

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Additional preparation for teachers

Many things make each of us different from the person next to us. The more we know about these things, the more self-awareness we have. And the more we know about ourselves and how we operate, the more we can empower others. Boundaries are the limits that define one person as separate from another or from others. A boundary promotes and preserves personal integrity. Boundaries give each of us a clear sense of self and how to function in relation to one another. Boundaries are unique to each individual and they are based on perceptions, personal histories, values, goals, culture, and concerns.

For the most part, we are not consciously aware of the personal boundaries in our lives. We don't think much about how they were established. We just *know* when someone steps over them. However, boundaries bring order to our lives and help us determine how others treat us. With clear boundaries, we are assured that we can protect ourselves from the ignorance, meanness, evil, or thoughtlessness of others.

Boundaries exist in the context of a particular relationship. For example, an appropriate boundary between a husband and wife is not necessarily an appropriate boundary between friends or acquaintances. And, an appropriate boundary between a parent and child is not necessarily the same as an appropriate boundary between a priest, teacher, or counselor and a child. Most people will accept and respect our boundaries if we are clear about them. But, with some people, we must actively defend our boundaries time and time again.

The difficulty in establishing and maintaining boundaries with this age group is that they are moving from dependence to independence and they are confused about who they are. They often define themselves by their friends, activities, accomplishments, looks, and the way they are accepted by others. Telling these young people that there are boundaries will not be enough. They need to understand where the boundaries are and how those boundaries affect everyday life. They need to process this information for themselves—and that can require some time. The adults involved are primarily concerned with safety issues that adolescents may be too self-absorbed to see clearly. And, parents can, and often do, find this learning process difficult and stressful. As parents and caring adults, we must be patient if we want to teach our middle school students how to expand their ability to protect themselves from harm.

One way to raise our own awareness about the boundaries in relationships is by becoming conscious of the *consistencies and inconsistencies* between our beliefs about ourselves and the beliefs others have about us. Prior to teaching your students about boundaries, try participating in Activity #3 using your own life as the example. Look at the influences in your life, both as a young person and now as an adult, in the areas of your beliefs, values, and relationships. How you view yourself is affected by the opinions, beliefs, values, and expectations of others. Activity #3 helps bring this into focus. Review and consider Activity #3 about a week prior to teaching this lesson plan and it will help you be well prepared to present the lesson to your students.

Activity #1: Play the introductory video to begin the lesson:

Note to Teacher: The introductory video for grades 9 through 12 is designed to open a discussion with teens about touching safety and personal boundaries. The video is approximately seven (7) minutes long and is neither created nor intended as a substitute for the lesson itself. It is merely an introduction designed to “break the ice” among those in this age group and to get everyone talking about the relevant personal boundary and personal safety issues. Importantly, the video will get teens focused on the topic matter, which will help the teacher to facilitate an easy transition into the interactive activities within the lesson. These interactive activities are the critical components where students have a real opportunity to learn how to protect themselves.

We recommend that you watch the video in advance at least a couple of times prior to showing it to your students, so you'll be able to more easily anticipate when the video will end. The video really needs no introduction. Just put it into the machine, and hit “play.” If you're using a DVD version of the video, you'll select the English or Spanish version and the appropriate age group from a menu screen. If you're using a VHS version of the video, you'll need to “cue” the tape to the correct version prior to your class time.

Activity #2: Review and discuss the vocabulary words and definitions:

Boundaries—the limits that define one person as separate from another or from others. There are boundaries you can see (like a fence around a yard) and boundaries you can't see with your eyes (like the comfort zone around us that we call our “personal space”). Boundaries vary depending on the relationship with the other person. For example, a boundary between a child and a grandparent is different than the boundary between a child and a teacher or coach.

Limits—The point or edge beyond which something cannot go. The furthest edge of something.

Secret—Something that is hidden from others or that is known only to one or to a few.¹

¹ The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition Copyright © 2000 by Houghton Mifflin Company.

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Activity #3: Recognizing relationship boundaries:

Directions: Remind your students that these lessons are designed to give them the tools to protect themselves when uncomfortable, difficult, or even dangerous situations arise. Tell them that in today's lesson, the class will be talking about boundaries—what they are and how they can help protect us from harm.

Note to Teacher: Notice how your students are seated. For example, did they move their chairs closer together or further apart than the chairs were originally arranged? Or, did certain individuals decide to sit farther from the group than to take the last open chair in a row? This is all material you can refer to during the discussion of boundaries. Every one of those actions is related to a self-determined boundary issue.

Getting Started: Open the discussion with the students about boundaries by asking them if they know what a "boundary" is. Create some scenarios that will give them ideas about "boundaries" and "limits" and how great a role boundaries and limits play in our everyday lives. For example:

- What kinds of rules must be followed at your house:
 - What are your family rules regarding when your homework must be completed? Are there other activities that aren't allowed until your homework has been completed?
 - How long and how late are you permitted to be on the telephone?
 - Where are you allowed to have food in your house?
 - What are your family's rules regarding computer access?
 - What are your family's rules regarding video games?
- Does your family limit who can come into your room and when they are allowed to be in your room?
- Do you expect your best friend to sit next to you at lunch every day?
- Do you want your parents to pretend that they don't know you when you are together at a party or at the mall?
- Can you explain why you moved the chairs, sat closer to some people and away from others, left empty chairs between you and others, etc. when we started this class?

Strong boundaries are essential components to safety. When we are clear about our boundaries, we know how to demand respect from others and can more easily protect ourselves from people who are intent on violating our boundaries.

Activity #4: Evaluating the boundaries in your life:

Supplies: Journal sheets that accompany this lesson plan. You'll need to make a copy for each student. You'll also need to make sure each student has a pen or pencil.

Directions: Have your students spread out through the room so that, standing, they are far enough apart that with arms extended, they are no closer than fingertip-to-fingertip to the next person (approximately six feet apart in all directions).

Now, have each student stand in the center of his or her imaginary circle and imagine that everything inside that circle makes up his or her life.

Here's what you'll say to the students:

What are the things that fill up your circle? Think about the things that you care about, the things that upset you, the things you believe, and the things you dislike. (*Pause*) Think about what's most important to you and what you value in others. (*Pause*) What things are attractive to you and what do you find disgusting?" (*Pause*)

Answer these questions on the first page of the Journal ... the page entitled "Who I know myself to be."

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Give your students approximately five minutes to write their answers to the questions on the handout, and then move to the next set of questions on the next Journal page.

Next, think about the other people in your life. What do they think about you? (*Pause*) What do they like about you? (*Pause*) What do they not like about you? (*Pause*) What would they say is most important to you? (*Pause*) What would they say are your beliefs about yourself? (*Pause*) What would they say you value most in life, and what would they say you find most disgusting?" (*Pause*)

Answer these questions beginning on the second Journal page ... the page entitled, "Who others think I am." In fact, these questions cover the next three pages in your Journal, so you'll have approximately 10 minutes to answer them.

Give your students approximately 10 minutes to write their answers to the questions on the handout, and then resume the discussion.

There are many things that make each person unique and distinct from everyone else. Recognizing these differences can help us to better understand our relationships with others in our lives. This kind of knowledge helps us reinforce and establish appropriate boundaries.

Take a few more minutes to notice what you think and believe about yourself, and what you believe that others believe about you. Are they similar or are they different? How are they different? Do you recognize anything special about the areas where everyone agrees? What about the areas where you believe that others *just don't get it*? How do these areas affect your relationships with the other people in your life? Take a few minutes now to answer the analysis questions that compare your own beliefs to what you think others believe about you.

Give your students another two to three minutes to complete the "Analysis" section of the Journal.

What you think and believe about yourself—the things you wrote on the first page of your Journal—are the boundaries you have already set for yourself. After this exercise, you might see some areas where the boundaries you have set are too loose and undefined. On the other hand, there may be areas where your boundaries are too inflexible or rigid. Can you also begin to see how the things you believe about yourself can have an impact on how others treat you, and whether they violate your boundaries?

Give your students an opportunity to share anything they are comfortable sharing from what they've learned from the exercise. Encourage them to talk this over with their best friend, their parents or guardians, or another trusted adult. Remind them that being clear about their boundaries and insisting that others honor their boundaries, is a powerful tool in keeping themselves safe.

It is up to us to honor, respect, and understand our boundaries and the boundaries of others. It is sometimes hard to know where to look and find our limits. One way is to examine what we think and believe about ourselves and what we think others believe about us. Understanding our boundaries, for example, can have a profound affect on how we listen to our parents or how we allow our friends to treat us.

In Lesson 4, we will talk about some specific risks that you might face as you gain more independence. It will be important for you to create boundaries for yourself and rules to follow to protect yourself in many different situations. Pay particular attention to those areas you've identified in this exercise where there's a lack of consistency between your beliefs and the way others around you view your beliefs.

For example, you may disagree with your parents about your level of maturity about yourself and the quality of your choices. They may believe that your friends have a negative influence on you, and you may believe that your friends are the people you can most rely on and trust. One of the things they are concerned about is date rape and the use of the drugs associated with this type of crime. You should also be concerned about this, and you should also be concerned about making sure none of your friends falls victim to this dangerous crime.

You'll notice that there's an additional "Food for Thought" section at the end of your Journal. After we leave here today, please take a look at that additional section and continue to think about the way your boundaries impact your relationships with those around you.

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Activity #5: Keeping boundaries appropriate to the context of a relationship:

Supplies: Paper and pens or pencils.

Information: Establishing and honoring personal boundaries includes both the way we behave and the way we allow others to behave. For example, St. Paul says that we reap what we sow, yet we often don't think about the many consequences of our behavior. One of the biggest problems for us as human beings is learning that we cannot be everything to everyone, and that setting boundaries for ourselves also means setting limits on what we are willing to tolerate from others.

In fact, let's look at what the scriptures tell us about how to care for each other and where to look when it comes to setting appropriate limits on what we do for others and how we honor their expectations and demands.

How many of you are familiar with the story of the Good Samaritan? What is it?

As your students recount the parable of the Good Samaritan, make the following points:

- He was truly a compassionate, empathetic person who genuinely cared for the injured traveler.
- He made a big sacrifice to ensure the traveler received care.
- He found a way to care for others and care for himself too.

Consider that if the message of the Gospel was to always put the needs of others ahead of your own, the story of the Good Samaritan might have gone something like this:

The Good Samaritan finds the injured traveler by the side of the road. He gathers him up and takes him to the nearest inn where he tends to the traveler's wounds. And then, when it is time for the Samaritan to leave to make his appointment, he tells the traveler that he has paid the innkeeper to care for the traveler's injuries and that he must go to take care of his own business.

However, the injured traveler says "What? You're leaving me here? Don't you think you are being selfish? I am in bad shape. You don't know what I might need over the next few days to survive. What kind of an example would you be if you just went off and left me here without your care?"

In response, the Samaritan says, "I guess you're right; I'll stay with you a few days more to make sure you are cared for. It would be uncaring of me to leave you here alone."

Three days later, a message is delivered to the Samaritan. It says the merchant he was to see in Jericho could wait no longer, so the merchant is taking his business elsewhere.

Upon reading the message and realizing what has happened, the Samaritan screams at the recovering man, "Look what you have done to me. My business is ruined. You caused me to lose those camels I needed to deliver my goods. This may put me out of business. How could you do this to me?"

This version of the story may seem *more* familiar to many of us as it more closely resembles what we experience in our daily lives. Moved with compassion to help someone, we sometimes allow ourselves to be manipulated into giving more than we wish to give. We end up resentful and angry. We have lost something we needed for ourselves because of boundary violations.

Or, it might be that we are the one applying the pressure on someone else—harping on someone until they give in to our desires. Regardless of which side you are on, nobody wins.

Directions: We will now write our own parable about establishing appropriate boundaries. First, let's look at what we mean by a "parable."

"Parables" are stories that make a point. Jesus used parables to help people understand who God is and what He expects of us in our earthly life. Parables use a sort of brief dramatic scenario to illustrate a point. The purpose of a parable is to describe the unknown by using something known or familiar. That way, we can more easily relate to the example and more easily understand the concept of the message.

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The most important thing to remember about parables is to avoid getting bogged down in the details of the story. The story is intended to illustrate a point—just one point—and the message is the most important element.²

Now, create your own parable by thinking of a story about something that happened to you. For example, look for a time when someone made a sacrifice for you or a time you were called upon to make a sacrifice for someone.

Begin by writing down the story. Then look to see whether the boundaries that were honored were appropriate. If not, look to see what you (or they) could have done differently.

Now, write the story using the version that demonstrates honoring appropriate boundaries. The parable should have one main point—and if you want, it might have an interesting twist as well.

Note to Teacher: When the students have finished writing their parables, invite them to share with the group. Acknowledge them for the work they did and point out the strengths of each of the parables. Take advantage of any opportunity to use one or more of these parables at a liturgy or parish celebration.

Suggested (optional) prayer to end the lesson:

Note to Teacher: This prayer is a variation of an old Catholic traveler's prayer to be said before beginning a journey. Remind your students that life is a journey. Each time they leave their home and go out on their own or with peers, they are traveling. Prayer can help prepare them for each step of their journey and can guide them along the way.

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.

References:

Liberia Editrice Vaticana (1997). *Catechism of the Catholic Church (2nd Ed.)*. Washington DC: United States Catholic Conference.

United States Catholic Conference (1990) *Human Sexuality: A Catholic Perspective for Education and Lifelong Learning*. Washington, DC: Office for Publishing and Promotion Services.

² Schwager. D., *The Parables of Jesus*, www.rc.net/wcc/oparable2/htm.

Lesson 3 for Grades 9 through 12—Journal Sheets for Activity #4

Who I know myself to be!

The three things that I care about most are:

_____, _____, _____

The three things that upset me most are:

_____, _____, _____

My core beliefs about myself are:

_____, _____, _____

I believe that life is:

_____, _____, _____

I believe that God is:

_____, _____, _____

The three things I most dislike are:

_____, _____, _____

My three most important values are:

_____, _____, _____

The three things I value most in others are:

_____, _____, _____

The three things I find most attractive are:

_____, _____, _____

The three things I find most disgusting are:

_____, _____, _____

The three things I like the most are:

_____, _____, _____

Who others think I am!

My parent(s) or guardian(s):

The three things my parents or guardians most like about me:

_____, _____, _____

The three things my parents or guardians would say that I believe:

_____, _____, _____

The three things that my parents or guardians would say that I most value:

_____, _____, _____

Three things about me that irritate my parents or guardians:

_____, _____, _____

Three things that my parents or guardians will say are most important to me:

_____, _____, _____

Three things my parents or guardians will say that I believe about myself:

_____, _____, _____

My friends:

Three things my friends like about me:

_____, _____, _____

Three things my friends would say that I believe:

_____, _____, _____

Three things that my friends would say that I value:

_____, _____, _____

Three things about me that irritate my friends:

_____, _____, _____

Three things that my friends will say are most important to me:

_____, _____, _____

Three things my friends will say that I believe about myself:

_____, _____, _____

Who others think I am!

My church (e.g., my youth minister, pastor, or religious education director)

Three things my Church likes about me:

_____, _____, _____

Three things my Church would say that I believe:

_____, _____, _____

Three things that my Church would say that I value:

_____, _____, _____

Three things about me that irritates my Church:

_____, _____, _____

Three things that my Church would say are most important to me:

_____, _____, _____

Three things my Church would say that I believe about myself:

_____, _____, _____

My school (e.g., my teachers, coaches, band and orchestra directors, etc.)

Three things my school would say that I believe:

_____, _____, _____

Three things that my school would say that I value:

_____, _____, _____

Three things about me that irritate my school:

_____, _____, _____

Three things that my school would say are most important to me:

_____, _____, _____

Three things my school would say that I believe about myself:

_____, _____, _____

Who others think I am!

The media

Three things the media would say that my peers and I believe:

_____, _____, _____

Three things that the media would say that my peers and I value:

_____, _____, _____

Three things about my peers and me that irritate the media:

_____, _____, _____

Three things that the media would say are most important to my peers and me:

_____, _____, _____

Three things the media would say that my peers and I believe about ourselves:

_____, _____, _____

Analysis

Ways my beliefs about myself are similar to what others think that I believe:

Ways my beliefs about myself are different from what others think that I believe:

How do the areas where we differ affect my relationships with the people in my life?

Additional Food for Thought

How Vulnerable are you to the inappropriate advances of others?

Now that you've had a chance to evaluate your own beliefs and values and to consider how others around you perceive your beliefs and values, take a moment to consider the areas of your life where your ideas about yourself are in conflict with the impressions that others have about you.

- Are there specific areas where the differences are particularly confusing to others, or where the differences are particularly stressful to you?
- Can the uncertainty and confusion make you more vulnerable to the advances of a sexual predator?

Please keep in mind that a sexual predator can look like someone very normal—for example: a boyfriend or girlfriend, a teacher or coach, a neighbor or family friend, a trusted person in the community such as a police officer or a member of the clergy, or even a member of your own family.

These are issues to think about and to discuss with the people in your life that you really trust. Always have a game plan. Know who you can count on if you find yourself in trouble.

As you become an independent adult, you'll quickly learn that life is full of challenges, and there are no easy answers. But, on serious issues such as your personal safety, you can do yourself a huge favor by spending just a few minutes thinking about these things ahead of time, and talking about these kinds of "what ifs" with a trusted friend. We hope that you never find yourself in trouble and with the need to call someone for help. But, if you do, your game plan will help give you the confidence and reassurance you need to get past a temporary bump in the road and to help keep yourself safe.