

Lesson 3 for Grades 3, 4 & 5

Boundaries: You Have Rights!

PRINCIPLE

Children must understand they have a right to be safe, and they are allowed to create boundaries to protect themselves in situations where they feel uncomfortable, or where they could be harmed.

OBJECTIVES

Through this lesson, the adult lesson leader reinforces the parent's message about boundaries. After Lesson 3, children should be better able to:

- Identify and define various types of boundaries
- Begin to set their own boundaries and communicate them to others
- Honor appropriate boundaries in different types of relationships
- Technology Component: Understand boundaries can apply for Online activities, too

CATECHISM / SCRIPTURE

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.
—Catechism of the Catholic Church, #1738 (1997)

Background for Lesson Leaders:

Before beginning this session, the Lesson Leader should read the *Teaching Boundary and Safety Guide*, as it gives a wealth of information regarding boundaries and how to address them.

By this age, children should already know the names of their private parts as communicated by their parents. The Lesson Leader should not teach children the names of their private parts, but can explain that the areas covered by bathing suits are our "private parts" and are kept covered and private for a reason—to keep us safe and healthy. Also, the word "no" is an extremely powerful word in every language. Using our voice, and the word "no" are effective ways to establish a boundary. Sometimes children may not be aware that they're allowed to say "no" to adults.

The best approach to working with this age group is through non-competitive games in which the children can establish individual goals. At this age, more explanation is necessary when rules are given. Children need to begin to learn to trust their own ability to make decisions. Therefore, criticism should be designed to teach. For example, when something goes wrong or does not turn out as planned, rather than tell the child what went wrong, ask, "Next time, how could you do that differently so you would have a better outcome?" Let the child begin to think through the process and develop possible solutions.

This age group: Dealing with the primary age—key concept is "energy"

This age group is learning how to function independently of their parents. They know how to read and their comprehension levels are giving them a better sense of abstract ideas. Their writing skills are better as they learn proper grammar / punctuation, and become more refined with communicating their ideas.

Children of this age are away from home more often than earlier in life and need to start recognizing that safety issues can arise when they are off with friends, under the supervision of a 3rd party, or at other events / locations. They like to be in constant motion and are always on the go. Groups are important. This is the "gang" age with friends of the same sex. Capable of intense loyalty to others, they usually have a best friend in which to confide. Although truthful about big things, they are less so about the smaller things, often making up alibis or shifting the blame to others. They have a strong sense of right / wrong, fair / unfair and are more able to discern the difference between safe / unsafe. They are able to use logic, can argue and hold strong debates. The difficulty in dealing with boundaries with this age group is that these children are moving from dependence toward independence. Ultimately, we all must learn to listen to that guiding voice inside our head and to trust "that uneasy feeling in our gut." That little voice or uneasy feeling is a warning sign that something is wrong. Telling them "the rules" will not be enough. Children of this age need to learn to reason it out for themselves. The adults involved are primarily concerned with safety issues that the children don't seem to be able to see clearly—at least not yet. Caregivers can be more effective when dealing with this age by including them in the discussion while establishing rules or guidelines.

ACTIVITY OPTION #1: Play the (optional) introductory video as an icebreaker

The introductory video for children and youth in this age range is designed to open a simple discussion about personal boundary safety. The video is brief and is not intended to be a substitute for the lesson itself. It's merely an introduction designed to "break the ice" and assist the transition of completing the interactive Lesson Activity options. If the video is shown as an optional activity, please use in conjunction with one of the additional activity options, because discussion and practice are the critical components needed to teach children and youth how to protect themselves. They learn best by "doing"; not just listening.

ACTIVITY OPTION #2: Review and discuss key vocabulary words

- **Rules**—a prescribed guide for conduct or action. We follow the rules to make sure we are safe—just like how we have a seatbelt rule to keep us safe in the car, or the safety rules before we cross the street. [For example, teach the child a simple rule for what to do if someone tries to touch him / her in an unsafe way, which is to say "No!", try to get away, and tell an adult as soon as possible.]
- **Limits**—the point or edge beyond which something cannot go. The furthest edge of something.
- **Rights**—We are all born free and equal, and have certain rights that are automatically ours. Everyone is entitled to these rights, and they should not be taken away from us. For example, teach children, "you have a right to be safe, and your body belongs to you!"
- **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.
- **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.]
- **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 that it's wrong for an adult or another child to ask a child 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".]

ACTIVITY OPTION #3: Establishing boundaries and creating a safe environment

Activity: Children will have an opportunity to discuss boundaries.

Discussion: Open the boundaries discussion with the children by asking them, "Do you know what a "boundary" is?" Create some scenarios that will give them ideas about "boundaries" and "limits" and ask them to share the boundaries and limits they have in their lives. For example:

- What kind 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 phone?
 - Where are you allowed to have food in your house?
 - What are your family's rules regarding the Internet?
 - What are your family's rules regarding gaming and 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?

Explain to your students that these are examples of boundaries. They are limits placed on us by our own instincts and by the rules established by others in our homes, our schools and in our society.

Engage the students in a discussion of this issue by making the following statements. Ask for their response after each statement.

Statement: *Boundaries are good!*

Now, ask the students: "Why are boundaries good?"

Points to make in the follow-up discussion:

- Boundaries define us as individuals and bring order to our lives.
- Boundaries determine how we allow others to treat us.
- Boundaries determine how we treat others.
- Healthy boundaries keep us safe.

Note: Children may end up sharing about situations that involve abuse. If there are any reports of suspicious incidents, make note and report suspected abuse immediately to the child protective services in your state.

Statement: *Boundaries are different depending on the relationship.*

Now, ask the students: "Why are boundaries different depending on the relationship?"

Points to make in the follow-up discussion:

- Boundaries between best friends are different from boundaries between people who just met.
- Boundaries between children and parents are different from boundaries between children and teachers.

Statement: *When someone crosses a personal boundary line, boundaries are violated.*

Now, ask the students to give examples of boundary violations. These violations could be simple things such as, "My sister won't stay out of my stuff" or more difficult things such as, "Sometimes the coach comes in the locker room and watches us change clothes after practice." Here are some examples of boundary violations that can help begin the discussion:

- Coach pats you on the buttocks as you run past him on the way out to the playing field.
- You listen in on a private conversation between your brother and his girlfriend.
- Someone behind you copies your test answers.
- Your dad's friend stares at you whenever he is around you.

One basic boundary we all have is our skin. When our skin is scratched or cut, our physical boundary is violated and we become vulnerable to infection and scars. In the same way, violation of our emotional boundaries leaves us vulnerable to other types of harm and other kinds of scars.

Statement: *We can protect ourselves when someone violates our boundaries.*

Now, ask the students to think of ways to deal with someone who violates boundaries. Use the following examples of ways we can protect ourselves.

- Speak up and let the person know that you want them to stop what they are doing.
- Get away from the person.

Strengthening our boundaries and taking action to stop someone who is violating them protects us from other people's ignorance, their thoughtlessness, and their malice. We deserve to be protected from these things.

Most people will respect our boundaries if we explain them clearly. However, some people will push the limits of our boundaries, violate them, and then expect us to go along—or at least not to tell on them. With these people, we must *actively* defend our boundaries.

ACTIVITY OPTION #4: Learning to protect yourself from harm

Directions: Brainstorm the different types of boundary violations that can occur, and write them in a place that everyone can see. Boundaries can be personal, physical, emotional, mental, spiritual, involving language, involving safety, involving trust, etc. Then begin the discussion.

SUPPLIES

Paper
Writing utensil

Discussion: Explain to youth that since boundaries are based on our own value systems, perspectives, experience, family environment and culture, our boundaries may differ from others. This is totally OK! But it isn't OK when it comes to safe environments.

Note: Remember that no one has to share. This is an opportunity for the students to begin to break through their reluctance to talk about themselves in a non-threatening way.

You don't have to defend yourself when you place a boundary, and if someone has a problem—it is not your problem, it's theirs. If the individual can't accept your boundary or constantly pushes on it, you may need to evaluate if this person is a good fit in your life anymore.

Ask the children to list some clues or feelings that show us that a boundary needs to be placed. Examples include:

- Feeling angry
- Feeling upset
- Feeling suffocated
- Feeling threatened
- Constantly feeling guilty
- Feeling uncomfortable
- Feeling afraid
- Feeling anxious about how the person will react
- Feeling like you have to walk on eggshells
- Feeling like you can't let someone down
- Having a hard time telling the person "no," even when you don't want to do the activity
- Person doesn't like it when you spend time with others

Step 1: Ask your students to recall when they found themselves in an uncomfortable situation with one of their friends or classmates stepped over a boundary line that upset them. Tell students you're going to give them five (5) minutes to write about their experience. The story should include:

- What happened—e.g., what kind of boundary violation.
- How the student reacted to the violation.
- The student's feelings when the situation came to an end (if it ended).

Step 2: Invite those who are willing to share their stories (this is your opportunity to share your own experience about being vulnerable, including what happened, how you reacted to the boundary violation, and how you felt when the situation came to an end).

Step 3: Now—after listening to some of the different experiences written by your students—ask them to speculate about how they might handle things differently in the future, in a way that will leave them feeling that they did their best to take away the other person's opportunity to violate their boundaries.

Closing thought: Let students know that setting limits about your personal boundaries and sticking to them can protect you and others from harm.

ACTIVITY OPTION #5: Practice Makes Perfect: Strengthening Our Boundaries (with worksheet)

Background: Role playing or “coaching” is extremely important when it comes to strengthening children’s boundaries, because children are much more likely to know what to do in these types of situations and reiterate the words or behavior practiced during the exercise. They’re less likely to completely freeze or become paralyzed in the moment that their boundaries are violated, and they’re more likely to tell a trusted adult about what occurred.

Note: The activity handout sheet is included in the downloaded set of materials at the end of this packet.

SUPPLIES

Pre-printed lesson handouts
Writing utensil

Activity: In this activity, the lesson leader will give a brief discussion of boundaries, and will then pass out the worksheets. After the children have taken the time to complete the worksheets, the Lesson Leader will guide another discussion about the answers.

Discussion: **Explain the following to youth:** Boundaries promote safety, and there are lots of different types.

A boundary is a line, a limit. It’s between us and other people or things. On our end, setting a boundary means respecting our own safety and needs. On the other hand, boundaries are also necessary to listen to the needs of others for their own safety. For example, we have physical boundaries that are personal to each of us and that keep us safe. Unlike a wall or a fence, you can’t always see our physical boundaries, but they are in place for our protection. They say when and where it’s OK to touch us, and when we don’t feel like being touched.

There’s also emotional boundaries, that include how connected or “close” you feel to another person. Different relationships will have different levels of emotional attachment and boundaries. When you have emotional boundaries, they describe what you’re comfortable sharing about yourself to another person and whether you spend time with them or not, and how much time you are willing to spend with them.

Behavioral boundaries are the behaviors, or things, that you will do and won’t do. This includes your safety rules. Sometimes people don’t know what your rules are, and you have to say them out loud, or address them, firmly. Sometimes people don’t care about your boundaries, and that’s wrong—you may have to try to get away from these types of people.

Pass out the worksheet:

- I. **Part 1: Brainstorm “Boundary Safety Phrases” together.** The worksheet asks: What are some safety words and phrases we can say when we are uncomfortable, or need to insert a boundary in our interactions with adults or other youth?

Ask children to write their answers in spaces provided. Ensure they also write down these options below:

Lesson Leader’s answer key:		
“Leave me alone!”	“No!”	“My body is private.”
“My body belongs to me.”	“You are NOT safe.”	“Stop!”
“No thank you (firm voice).”	“I’d rather give you a high-five.”	“I’m telling my parents about this.”
“I don’t feel comfortable when you do that.”	“I don’t like it when you do that to me.”	“I don’t like that.”

- II. **Part 2: Ask children to read through the questions and write their answers before role-playing.** In a few minutes, children will have an opportunity to come back together to role-play and say what they would do within the different scenarios.

Gearing up to practice with role-playing: once you have gathered the kids together again, say: Our boundaries are like a personal bubble, with a forcefield.

Note: There are some intentionally similar scenarios to help cement the right action.

You're the boss of you! We can't control others, but we can try to protect ourselves by doing and saying specific things to set a boundary, and get help right away if something scary or bad happens.

Let's practice a few of these scenarios so that we have some tools in our toolbox on how to respond if it does happen. Remember to practice using a firm voice. I'll read it, and you tell me what you would do. Here's the first question!

1. **Question from worksheet:** What if an adult wants to take you to a room or place where no one else is located? Should you go with him? What if it's someone you know? What if it's another kid?

Answer: *If someone tries to take you to a place that looks like it's out of the sight and hearing of others, you can say "no" or use one of the boundary safety phrases. Speak to another adult about what is happening, and ask permission before you go anywhere with anyone. Even if you have permission to go, if you feel uncomfortable at any point, you can say "no" and try to leave the situation.*

2. **Question from worksheet:** What if you're uncomfortable with something that an adult is doing? Is it OK to talk about it with a safe adult, even though the person who is making you uncomfortable is also an adult? What if my safe adult is the person who is making me feel uncomfortable?

Answer: *It is always OK to use one of the "boundary safety phrases" listed above, and it's always OK to talk to a safe adult.*

3. **Question from worksheet:** What if my safe adult is the person who is making me feel uncomfortable?

Answer: *If the person who is making you feel uncomfortable is actually supposed to be your safe adult, then you could communicate to another safe adult—perhaps like your mom, dad, aunt, grandma or teacher.*

4. **Question from worksheet:** Is it OK to say "no" to an adult when it has to do with your safety?

Answer: *Absolutely! You can always say "no" or use one of the boundary safety phrases when it has to do with your safety!*

5. **Question from worksheet:** What if someone you know wants a kiss, but you don't want to give a kiss?

Answer: *You don't have to give kisses or hugs to anyone if you don't want to. It's your body, and your safety rules. Instead, utilize one of the boundary safety phrases.*

6. **Question from worksheet:** What if you'd like to give a hug to someone you do know, but they don't want to be hugged? Is it OK if they don't want to be hugged?

Answer: *Remember, people are in charge of their own bodies, just like you're the boss of your body. If they don't want to be touched, then it's NOT OK to touch them. Just like, when you don't want to be touched, it's NOT OK for someone to touch you in a way you don't like.*

7. **Question from worksheet:** What if you'd like to give a hug to someone who you're not sure of whether they want a hug or not? What should you do first?

Answer: *Ask them! They may not want a hug at that moment, and we should respect and honor their physical boundaries. There may be something else that you can do to show them affection or support, like a high-five, blowing a kiss, a smile, etc.*

Note: The Lesson Leader can have the children answer several or all of the questions on their own during quiet time, and then come back for a discussion to give the preferred answers during role-playing. In this way, the sheet can be taken home and parents can be further included in the boundary development process. This is an important activity to share with the parents so that they uphold their children's boundaries for them, and can also be supportive when the children attempt to place boundaries for their own safety and wellbeing.

With the actual role-playing, the Lesson Leader can ask for volunteers for each example, direct the question to the whole group or assign examples to small groups. The Lesson Leader will read the example aloud, and ask youth what they would do or say. Then the Lesson Leader will follow up with words of affirmation, and guide them with actions to help them with their boundaries as denoted with the answer key. During the discussion, be careful not to make a child feel as if they were "wrong," but do encourage the right actions and behavior for their safety and wellbeing.

8. **Question from worksheet:** What if a stranger stops you in the street and asks you to help them, or even to help find a puppy or kitten? What if it's someone that doesn't look like a stranger, and who you 'kinda' know, but don't know well?

Answer: *While it's good to help people, always talk to a safe adult first before going anywhere with anyone, or helping anyone. Usually grownups help other grownups, and safe grownups don't ask children for help.*

9. **Question from worksheet:** What if your friend is calling someone else names and calling them stupid? Is that OK? What should you do? What can you say?

Answer: *Part of expecting our boundaries to be respected is to respect the boundaries of others. We don't participate in name-calling because it isn't kind. It would be appropriate to talk to our friend about their mean behavior and ask them to stop. To do the right thing, sometimes we have to step in and help protect other people from harm, too.*

10. **Question from worksheet:** When Grandma and Grandpa come, do you have to give them a kiss? Is there another action you could do to greet them that might make you more comfortable?

Answer: *No, you don't have to give anyone a hug or kiss if you don't feel like it. Perhaps a high-five, a wave, a smile, shaking hands, blowing a kiss—or nothing at all.*

11. **Question from worksheet:** What if someone tries to pull your pants down? Is that OK? What should you do?

Answer: *No, it's not OK! Your private parts are special and they're covered to keep you safe. Use one of the safety phrases and tell an adult right away.*

12. **Question from worksheet:** What if something bad happens to you, and you forget to use one of the boundary safety phrases? Are you still allowed to tell a safe adult?

Answer: *Yes! If you forgot to use one of your safety phrases, or just couldn't say it in the moment, you should definitely still tell a safe adult what happened!*

13. **Question from worksheet:** What if you have a question about something someone did, or feel confused about what happened? Who should you talk to about it? What if the person who did it said that no one will believe you? What if they threaten to hurt something or someone you love?

Answer: *Always talk to a safe adult when you are confused or upset about something that happened to you!*

14. **Question from worksheet:** What if you like something at first like holding hands with someone, and then don't like it anymore later? Is it OK to say no?

Answer: *Yes! It's never too late to place a boundary—even if we thought we might be liking the activity at first.*

15. **Question from worksheet:** If someone is tickling you and you don't like it, should it stop right away? What could you say?

Answer: *Yes! If you say "no" to someone, they should stop the activity right away. You could use one of the boundary safety statements such as, "Stop tickling me! I don't like it!"*

16. **Question from worksheet:** What if your best friend is sad because of something regarding their safety and needs help, but doesn't want you to talk to anybody about what is making them sad and asks you to keep a secret? Should you keep a secret?

Answer: *No, asking to keep a secret about safety is never OK. Even if you promised not to tell, you should still tell a safe adult as soon as possible—this is the right the to do.*

17. **Question from worksheet:** If you're pushing someone and they're laughing, but suddenly say to stop, what do you do? What if you're the one who said stop, and someone doesn't listen to you?

Answer: *Honor the request! If you feel uncomfortable, it's entirely acceptable to try to leave that situation and spend time with other friends, instead.*

Concluding statements / ensure children have the following takeaways. Tell them: You are strong, and smart, and good—and you're important. God loves you tremendously and doesn't want you to be hurt, or sad.

Most people are safe. Adults are here to protect you, and sometimes we have to protect ourselves the older and more responsible we become. It can take a lot of courage to say these things. And sometimes, when we're scared or nervous, we forget the words and freeze, and that's OK, too, because it's not your fault if something bad happens to you.

Remember, if you're in a situation where you don't feel right, or you feel scared or uncomfortable, or nervous, anxious, humiliating or embarrassing, listen to your intuition! If someone is asking you to do something you don't like, it is ALWAYS OK to say "no."

ACTIVITY OPTION #6: Netsmartz Bad Netiquette Stinks

Background: This short 7-minute video is shared with permission from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, and can be played for children as part of an activity. It is designed to open a simple discussion with children about safety. Children learn to be safe online and offline, and that they have a right to be safe.

Description: Watch Potty-Mouth Pete as he tries to spread bad netiquette all over the Internet. Can Clicky, Webster and Nettie stop him before it's too late?

Click here for the link: <https://www.netsmartz.org/NetSmartzKids/BadNetiquetteStinks>

End the lesson with a prayer

The Lesson Leader may invite the children to create their own prayer, he/she may lead a prayer, or may use the suggested prayer below.

Dear God,

Sometimes things happen to me that are confusing or frightening. When I am confused or feel scared, help me remember what I have learned today. Help me remember that boundaries are good, and the physical boundaries I learned today so I can protect myself from anyone who might want to hurt me—even if it is someone I like. Thank you for my parents or loved ones and my teachers who are teaching me how to keep myself safe and healthy. Remind me that I am special and that you are always with me. Amen