

Lesson 3 for Grades 6, 7 & 8

Boundaries: You Have Rights!

PRINCIPLE

Youth 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.

Remember that children of this age are dealing with enormous peer pressure while trying to understand their independent role in the world apart from their families. It is not always "cool" to say that you must tell someone if you are touched or approached (in person, or online) in an inappropriate or sexual way. Situations of this nature may involve immense shame, guilt, threats, etc., for the youth. So, do your best to stress the importance of good communication while speaking to the adolescent in a way that has him / her actually hear you, rather than ignore you. It will be important for the adult to stress "healthy" behavior and boundaries, and the "right thing to do" when discussing boundaries to this age group.

These exercises are intended to empower young people to begin to think about safety issues and to be their parents' partners in making sure the child has the tools needed to resist the overtures of a potential child molester or an adult with poor intentions.

This age group: Dealing with pre-adolescents and adolescents—key concept is "transition"

The middle school child is experiencing a period of rapid growth. The emergence of interest in the opposite sex is occurring. He / she is often concerned about physical change, body size, skin quality and hair length. Body image is very important to this age as he / she complains of being either too physically mature or immature—and may also complain that they do not have enough privacy. The peer group plays an import role in shaping attitudes and interest. Caregivers need to regularly assure youngsters that changes are normal, though the rate of change varies from person to person.

Lesson leaders must carefully listen to children and observe *what is happening in their lives*. Let young people be themselves. Let them explore their self-expression; but, know *who* they are with and *what* they are doing, and remind them of the importance of protecting themselves during this dynamic time in their lives. During this time, children are completely self-absorbed, and many are naturally less communicative than at other periods during their development. This is the point that more trust will be given to the youth to evaluate safe and unsafe situations when they are not in the care of their parents.

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: Discussion—Discovering the boundaries in your life

Activity: The purpose of this activity is to create scenarios for youth that will give them ideas about boundaries and limits, and how both are an important part of our daily lives. You'll discuss how rules establish boundaries, how sometimes we people infringe on our boundaries, and how we can create them for ourselves.

Discussion: **Step 1:** Begin the conversation about boundaries by asking if they know what a "boundary" is, and have them explain it from their perspective.

Step 2: Then, begin to create scenarios by asking questions about some of the rules they have at home. For example:

- 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?
- For how long, and how late are you permitted to be on the phone?
- What are your family's rules regarding the Internet?
- What are your family's rules regarding gaming or 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?
- Do you wear any type of seatbelt when you're in the car?
- 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: Each of these "rules" that we just talked about establishes a boundary. Everyone has them, including adults. Like the examples just discussed, some are rules that are given to us by others—like our parents, teachers or coaches.

Step 3: Explain that sometimes we get to choose our own boundaries, and ask the children if they can think of any ways that they have created boundaries or rules for the people in their lives. Questions you can ask:

- Have you ever pretended to agree with something, or someone, when you really did not agree?
- Have you ever chosen not to tell on someone who broke the rules, because that person asked you not to tell?
- Have you ever gone along with an activity even though you didn't really want to go along with it?
- Have you ever declined to join in on an activity that you really wanted to do because someone else talked you out of it?
- Have you ever hidden how you really feel out of fear of how other people might react?
- Have you ever spent too much time doing things for other people and been frustrated that you don't spend enough time doing things you need to do for yourself?

Step 4: Ask your students why they do these things and how it makes them feel?

During the discussion of their reasons, address the following points:

- When you disregard your personal beliefs, values, wants and feelings, it sometimes causes you to feel diminished, disrespected, upset, annoyed, frustrated, angry, etc.
- Boundaries are the invisible lines we draw around ourselves for self-protection and self-preservation.
- When you don't speak up, you hide your true self and allow others to violate your boundaries. Sometimes we feel like we can't speak up.
- Most people will respect our boundaries if we let them know what they are. However, with others, we must actively defend our boundaries.

ACTIVITY OPTION #4: Boundaries journal analysis—Who am I?

Activity:

This activity involves utilizing movement, deeper reflection and time to journal to illustrate to children that they have the right to boundaries and to learn how to maintain them. Please be aware that this could be converted to a 2-day activity if time allows, where section "III." could be discussed on the second day.

Note: The journal sheets template is included in the downloaded set of materials at the end of this packet.

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

Ask them to imagine a circle around them (if you are outside, ask them to draw circles using chalk). Explain to them that this is their personal space, a physical example of how they have a right to physical space without anyone entering that space. Ask them to note that some persons might have bigger circles than others, and that's OK.

Now, have each student to continue to stand in the center of his or her imaginary (or actual) circle for a few minutes, and imagine that everything inside that circle makes up his or her life.

SUPPLIES

Pre-printed journal sheets (1 per student)
Writing utensils for journaling
Outdoor chalk (optional, if outside)
Timer (if necessary)

Note: After each of these examples presented to the youth, the Lesson Leader should pause for at least 5 seconds after each question. Use a timer if necessary.

Time for reflection. Here's what you'll say to the students:

1. When thinking about everything that makes up your life, 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.
2. Think about what's most important to you and what you value in others.
3. What things are attractive to you and what do you find disgusting?"

Journal time. Ask them to take a seat (wherever you'd like them to be, whether it's inside or outside), and pass out the lesson sheets entitled, "Boundaries Journal Analysis—Who am I?" The following sections correlate to the worksheet journal.

- First section: "Who I know myself to be."** Give them at least 5 minutes to answer the questions on the first page of the pre-printed journal sheets. Then, ask them for their attention again.
- Second section: "Who others think I am."** Ask students to think about the other people in their lives, and ask:
 - What do they think about you?
 - What do they like about you?
 - What do they not like about you?
 - What would they say is most important to you?
 - What would they say are your beliefs about yourself?
 - What would they say you value most in life, and what would they say you find most disgusting?"

Note: While the Lesson Leader has the ability to extend the timeframe for each of the sections, these journal pages do not have to be completed by the youth in their entirety during the lesson. Ask the students to complete at least one answer for each example.

The pages will go home with the students, and will not be collected by the Lesson Leaders. As this is considered a "journal," Lesson Leaders should not read from the children's pages under any circumstances, unless the child wants to share the information. If this lesson is converted to a 2-day lesson, then children will need to take the sheets home and bring them back for the next lesson. If you conduct a 2-day lesson, you may need to provide additional printouts of the journal sheets for those who forgot their own.

Direct students to the second page of the journal worksheet, and give them approximately 10 minutes to complete the questions under the section of "Who others think I am!" Then, ask them for their attention again.

- III. **Third section: "Analysis."** Explain that 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 establish and reinforce appropriate boundaries. Ask students to reflect on the following:
- Notice what you think and believe about yourself, and what you believe that others think 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?

Then, invite the youth to take a few minutes (3-5) to answer the analysis questions on the final page of the journal that compare their own beliefs to what they think others believe about them. At last, ask them for their attention again.

Conclusion: Explain to youth: 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're comfortable sharing regarding what they've learned from the exercise. They may need a few minutes to gather courage and think about what they'd like to share.

At the very end of the lesson, 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.

ACTIVITY OPTION #5: Boundaries for take-out—An experiment!

Activity: This activity involves reviewing the worksheet and selecting one of the pre-printed actions that involves setting a boundary, and then implementing it for the course of a week and recording what occurred each day. The goal is to create and maintain strong boundaries that endure past this upcoming week of the exercise.

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

Please be aware that this could be converted to a 2-day activity if time allows. Ideally, the children would be able to come back after conducting the experiment and communicate on the second day about what was learned in Part III. The overarching takeaway is that children have a right to boundaries, and there are tools that can be learned to establish and maintain those boundaries.

Directions: **Part 1—Choose the action below and practice is seriously for the week.** Ask your students to select one of the following four practices to practice diligently for the next week. Students should select an action that they don't normally do in their current day-to-day lives. The options listed on the activity handout include the following:

1. Answer honestly, when someone asks his or her opinion, even if it is a different opinion than that of the person asking the question.
2. Don't go along with any activity in which you don't honestly want to participate.

3. Stop agreeing or disagreeing with others based on what you think they want to hear.
4. When friends and family ask you for your preferences—such as food, movies, activities—tell the truth.

Part 2—Record what happens each day: Tell them: throughout the next week, use the additional worksheet pages included in the take-away packet, and write your observations about what happens when you answer these kinds of questions honestly and stand up for your own beliefs and values. Being clear about boundaries affects the quality of your life. Items to record for each day include:

- What happened?
- How I responded
- Where do I see that my boundaries are fuzzy or confused?

Part 3—Thoughts for reflection: The youth will record their thoughts after completing the exercise (with potential to discuss them in the next lesson per the decision of the Lesson Leader). Thoughts for reflection include:

1. Overall, do you feel you need stronger boundaries?
2. Did you struggle to maintain the boundaries at all?
3. Was there any person (or people) in particular who made it more challenging to set boundaries?
4. If so, what do you need to do in the particular relationship(s)?
5. Any other thoughts?

Note: Prior to explaining Part 3, the Lesson Leader will need to decide if this is going to be a 1-day or 2-day lesson.

ACTIVITY OPTION #6: You are worthy—Own your life!

Activity: This activity involves reviewing the worksheet and selecting multiple choice answers about our relationships to determine if there are any boundary issues that need to be addressed. Then, a discussion will ensue to give tips on how to strengthen or place boundaries.

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

Directions: Write the different types of boundary violations that can occur in a place where everyone can see—here are examples of the most common types: boundaries can be personal, physical, emotional, mental, spiritual, involving language, involving safety, involving trust, etc. Then begin the discussion and hand out the lesson worksheet.

SUPPLIES

Pre-printed lesson handouts
Writing utensil

Discussion: **Explain the following to youth:** 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 being safe.

Pass out the lesson worksheet, and ask the students to fill it out with answers that are as honest as possible. Explain that there are 3 possible answers that they can circle:

- **Yes:** which means that the scenario is actually occurring in their life, or they think it is
- **Possibly:** which means that the scenario might be occurring, or that it's likely. If there's any hint of doubt, then this is the answer to select.
- **Not applicable to anyone in my life:** means that the particular type of scenario doesn't seem to be occurring from the youth's perspective.

Give students 5-10 minutes to complete the exercise. Then, ask them for their full attention for the next part of the activity.

Continue with the discussion and this series of questions and statements:

- With a show of hands, how many of you said “yes” to at least one of these examples?
- With: with a show of hands, how many said “possibly” to at least one of these examples?
- This is a good self-analysis, but if you selected “Not applicable to anyone in my life,” would your best friend feel differently about some of the examples and your responses? *(This question is not listed to devalue the thoughts and feelings of the youth, but to introduce the thought that sometimes other people can see more clearly than we can when we’re deep into a situation.)*
- When you’re thinking about the people that caused these “yes” or even the “possibly” answers, do you think that something needs to happen? *(Answer: YES, boundaries need to be addressed)*
- Sometimes we find ourselves in situations where our boundaries are violated—we can see that by looking at the examples on the sheet. Is it OK to set a boundary, increase the ones we already have or remove the person/situation from our lives? *(Answer: YES)*
- So, now what? You have an honest analysis of what is going on with the other people in your life and how they impact you. You can see how these things would affect how happy and healthy you are. So... Now what? *(This question is designed to get youth to begin to brainstorm an action plan. Suggestions on guiding the conversation are below)*

Note: The Lesson Leader should communicate that no one has to share if they don’t feel comfortable.

Next steps: Invite the youth to give some suggestions on what they could do. Ensure that these points are covered as “elements to remember” when setting and maintaining boundaries:

- Sometimes creating or enforcing boundaries takes courage and strength.
- It’s never too late to place a boundary, or strengthen one, or reinstate one.
- Proper boundaries are essential for healthy relationships and protection.
- You have a right to be safe.
- Using language can be very effective in establishing a boundary (i.e., saying “no,” “don’t call me anymore,” “I don’t want you to do that,” etc.).
- Be firm and consistent when you communicate about your boundaries.
- You can completely shut down a situation, or leave the door slightly open to revisit later, it’s up to you and the healthiness of the situation.
- It is entirely appropriate and acceptable to communicate expectations, or even create rules for behavior with specific people—try to keep it as simple as possible, though.
- When first creating boundaries, you’ll need to think about boundaries that are necessary for your current interactions, and, boundaries set at the “very beginning” for future interactions.
- To establish boundaries, consider your top 10 most important values or beliefs, and then ensure that your boundaries with others reflect those beliefs. You will likely have different boundaries for various people in your life, depending on the closeness of the relationship.
- Reflecting on what boundaries you have or would like to have NOW makes it easier to maintain them when you enter the event / situation that feels confusing.
- Even though it’s the responsibility of adults to keep minors safe, you may need to place a boundary in any friendship that you have with an adult.
- You have a right to be respected—you are worthy of respect!

Concluding thoughts. It’s important for youth to know the following: 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.

ACTIVITY OPTION #7: Netsmartz Online Safety: NST Profile Penalty

Background: This short 3-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 youth about safety. Youth learn to be safe online and offline, and that they have a right to be safe.

Description: Watch the video to determine how to strengthen your online boundaries. Everything on your profile represents who you are. What does yours say about you?

Click here for the link: <https://www.netsmartz.org/nsteens/profilepenalty>

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 don't know where to turn, help me remember what I have learned today. Help me remember to uphold my boundaries so I can protect myself from anyone who might want to hurt me—even if it is someone I like, and help me to protect my friends as well by delivering safety information to people who can help. Thank you for my parents or loved ones and my teachers who are protecting me. Remind me of your love for me and that you are always with me. Amen*