

Lesson 3

When the Circle is Broken

Sometimes young people reveal personal information or details about incidents that, in order to respect confidentiality, need to be handled outside of the group environment. If this happens, tell the young person, "Thank you for sharing that, _____. That sounds really important. I will talk to you about that later (at the end of class, at the break, as soon as humanly possible, etc.)." When this happens, be sure you talk to the young person at your first opportunity and alert the administration. Remember that you are the responsible reporter in cases of suspected abuse.

This lesson complements the following Christian teachings:

- Belief that the teachings revealed in the Scripture/Apostles' Creed apply to our daily lives
- Human relationships are intended to be experiences of Divine Love
- Each person has a personal covenant with God
- Belief that we have a cloud of witnesses that have come before us
- Each person is called to live responsibly as a fully initiated Christian
- We are all called to holiness
- Belief that there is a unique and holy relationship between the love of God, our love of self, and our love of others
- Belief that the image of God is in ourselves and others.

Lesson Goal

Young people will be able to distinguish between safe and unsafe relationships.

Lesson Objectives

Young people will be able to:

1. Recognize physical, sexual, emotional, and spiritual boundary violations.
2. Recognize manipulative behaviors used to gain control (emotional grooming).

Materials Needed

1. Markers
2. Poster paper
3. Feeling Faces Chart for Young People (see the end of Grade 9 Lessons)
4. Copy of Opening and Closing Prayers for Young People (see the end of Grade 9)
5. Unequal Power Handout for Young People (see the end of Grade 9 Lessons)
6. Optional: Unmasking Sexual Con Games: Leader Guide by Kathleen M. McGee and Laura J. Buddenberg, Boystown Press, 2003, used with permission.
7. Student's Prayers from Lesson 2

Lesson Opening

Leader invites young people into their preferred prayer posture and call to mind the presence of the Holy Spirit. Leader leads the group in prayer with their own words or the below example.

Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of Your faithful and
enkindle in them the fire of Your love.

V. Send forth Your Spirit and they shall be created.

R. And you shall renew the face of the earth.

O God, Who did instruct the hearts of the faithful by the light of the Holy Spirit, grant us in the same Spirit to be truly wise and ever to rejoice in His consolation. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Getting Started

We have talked about our *Circle of Grace* in relationship to ourselves, God, and others in our previous lessons. We reflected on our unique qualities as expressions of God's love for us. Saying, "Yes," to those gifts within the Cloud of Witnesses is what God has called us to do. Lesson 2 discusses the many influences on our choices we make about ourselves and our relationships. Listening to the Holy Spirit within us and among us along with Holy Scriptures, and the tradition and wisdom of Christianity provide us with guidelines for our behaviors.

Lesson Development

Choose one of the two activities below:

Introduction

Guidelines and boundaries protect us in our *Circle of Grace* and help us have safe relationships. Boundaries protect us in four areas of our lives: physical, sexual, emotional, and spiritual. Physical boundaries are probably the easiest to see so we are going to begin by doing an activity to help us be aware of our physical boundaries.

Activity 1

1. *Ask each person in the group to find a partner. Designate one partner "A" and the other "B". Have all the young people designated "A" move to one side of the room and have the "B's" move to the other side of the room. The partners should be across the room from each other, facing one another with cleared space between them.*
2. *Instruct the "A" group to begin walking across the room toward their partner. Instruct the "B's" to say, "Stop," at the point which they become uncomfortable with the distance between themselves and their partner.*
3. *Now have the young people go back to their respective sides of the room and repeat the activity with partner "B" approaching partner "A".*

4. *Now ask two participants to volunteer to do the activity again. Privately instruct one person who will be approaching their partner to disregard his/her partner when the partner says, "Stop."*
5. *Have the participants return to their seats.*

Discussion

1. The activity we just finished helped demonstrate physical boundaries. It also demonstrated that when we say stop and the other person doesn't; our *Circle of Grace* has not been respected. The type of relationship you have with someone helps determine how close you allow that person into your *Circle of Grace*.
 2. *Allow the young people to reflect on how they felt during this activity by asking the following questions.*
 - a. As your partner walked toward you, at what point did you become uncomfortable?
 - b. How much of your comfort depended on the relationship you have with your partner? (Unknown, acquaintance, friends, etc.)
 - c. How did you feel during the last activity when the partner did not stop?
 - d. *Go to Brainstorming Session*
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Introduction

Guidelines and boundaries protect us in our *Circle of Grace* and help us have safe relationships. Boundaries protect us in four areas of our lives: physical, sexual, emotional, and spiritual. Physical boundaries are probably the easiest to see so we are going to begin by doing an activity to help us be aware of our physical boundaries.

Activity 2

1. *Ask the group to name all the individuals and groups with which they have relationships of any kind. Allow a few minutes for a variety of responses which may be recorded on poster paper or whiteboard/chalkboard.*
2. *After sufficient time, divide the large group into small groups (5-7 persons) and assign each group one of the following Relationships Types. (Small groups may need to take more than one type of relationship.) Provide marker and newsprint for each relationship assigned.*

3. *The Relationship Categories/Types are:*
 - a. *our relationship with God*
 - b. *our relationship with Family*
 - c. *our relationship with Significant Others*
 - d. *our relationship with Casual Friends/ Acquaintances - Same Sex*
 - e. *our relationship with Casual Friends/ Acquaintances - Opposite Sex*
 - f. *our relationship with Teachers, Ministers, Clergy*
 - g. *our relationship with all others.*
 4. *Have each group brainstorm 5-10 adjectives that describe their assigned relationship.*
 5. *Have each small group present their adjectives and post the lists. Summarize similarity between adjectives describing our relationship with God and the other relationships in our lives to draw the conclusion that God is a part of all relationships.*
 6. *Go to Brainstorming Session*
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Brainstorming Session

(Refer to the Boundary Presentation in Lesson 2)

1. *Divide into at least four small groups (5-10 young people). Hand each group poster paper and markers. Assign each group one of the four boundaries (physical, sexual, spiritual, and emotional). Ask the groups to brainstorm ways in which their assigned boundary can be violated (or has been violated) in the lives of young people.*
2. *After sufficient time, ask each group to present their results to the large group.*

Optional: If the group size is not sufficient for small groups; invite the large group to brainstorm all four boundaries together.

Discussion

1. We have looked at several ways in which young people's boundaries are violated. The boundaries violations were fairly easy to list. Why then, even though we know about boundary violations, do they still happen? One reason may be that it is hard to identify why we are uncomfortable with a person or a particular action. It is important to take time to listen and reflect WHY we are uncomfortable. Is it because we thought they were our friend or that they "liked" us? Discussing these concerns with an adult we trust is essential to gain clarity regarding the situation. The behaviors of offenders are for the sole purpose of putting a youth in a vulnerable position to be exploited (to take unfair advantage of someone/situation in order to get some benefit). *Pass out the Unequal Power handout and begin to discuss it.*

2. Unequal power, secrecy and isolation are key strategies offenders often use to put someone in a vulnerable position to be exploited or abused. Write these three strategies on the board. Handout is available at the back of the lesson.

Unequal Power: When one person has more power in a relationship. This can be in the areas of age, size, position, resources, status or knowledge.

- Does this person have more status than you? (An upper classmate.)
- Is he/she in a position of authority?
- Is he/she more popular?
- Is he/she significantly older (more than two years?)
- Does he/she have more resources such as money, knowledge, car etc. than you do?

Healthy personal relationships almost always have a balance of power.

Secrecy: The condition of being hidden or concealed. The habit or practice of keeping secrets or maintaining privacy or concealment

- What would your parents/family think if they knew ALL aspects of the relationship/interaction? (Example: This person treats you significantly worse when you are alone with them as opposed to when the two of you are with others.)
- This person has done something to hurt you and they pressure you to keep it a secret. Or they may pressure you to keep secret some aspect of the relationship like gifts or activities that your family/parents would not approve. They say no one will understand or that you will be blamed.

Remember as Christians we believe that help and healing will come when we bring our concerns into the light. The person who is pressuring you to keep a secret is not protecting you but themselves.

Forced Isolation: When someone forces/pressures another to be separated from others in order to gain control.

- Does this person say that they are the only one who understands you?
- Do they get mad if others join you in an activity or just hang out with you?
- Do they use their words or gifts to control you?
- Do they get mad/ explosive if you do not text or answer you phone right away?

Individuals in healthy relationships respect each other's need for friends and family. You do not have to act in a certain way in order for them to trust you

Activity

We have talked about ways a young person’s physical, sexual, emotional, and spiritual boundaries can be violated. The behaviors of offenders are for the sole purpose of putting a youth in a vulnerable position to be exploited or abused. Let’s see if these real high school situations are safe or unsafe.

Present one of the following sets of scenarios and questions to the large group. Ask the young people to also identify any of the offender’s behaviors/attitudes that put a youth at risk for a boundary violation. The Feeling Faces Chart is available at the end of the Grade 9 lessons for use as needed. Allow time for discussion on each scenario.

Special note to leaders

Before presenting the scenarios, re-emphasize the following: “Some of you may have been in the type of situations we are going to talk about where there has been a boundary violation or grooming behaviors. It is my hope and desire that you do not hold this inside of you but rather find an adult that you trust to talk about it.”

Choose either group 1 or 2 scenarios sections

Scenarios - 1

1. A teacher/instructor comments about how you are dressed that day while looking at you in a way that makes you uncomfortable. Is this safe or unsafe?

Pause.

This situation is unsafe. What is unsafe here?

- An adult talking about things that make you feel uncomfortable.
- Differences in age and status influence your response.
- What key offender strategies are involved in this scenario?

What would need to change to make this situation safe? (*Brainstorm ideas with the young people to address the unsafe circumstances listed above.*)

2. You are the first one in your family to get home after school. Your adult neighbor, whom you have known since kindergarten, often waves at you and calls on the phone to check on you. One day you hear a funny noise in the house when you are alone. You call your neighbor to ask for help. The neighbor says he and his wife will be over and tells you to call your parents and let them know what is going on. Is this situation safe or unsafe? *Pause.*

This situation is safe. Why is it safe?

- It is important to identify trusted adults who are respectful of your *Circle of Grace* and their own.

- Two adults are coming over and parents are aware of the situation.
 - The adult told the young person to notify parents. He did not try to keep it a secret.
3. A new friend asks you to come over to his house and hang out. You go over to the friend's house and the two of you start to surf the internet and social networking sites (SNS). He makes the comment that it would be so cool to post some crazy photos on the SNS. He asks you to take your shirt off so he can take a photo with his phone. You decide to keep your school sweatshirt on and instead just make funny faces for the photo. Is this safe or unsafe? *Pause.*
- This situation is confusing but unsafe. Why is it not safe?
- Removing clothing is not an appropriate request or action.
 - The young person still revealed personal information via his/her school sweatshirt.
 - The young person was pressured into doing something that was uncomfortable/ unsafe instead of saying, "No," and leaving.
 - Postings on SNS can be widely distributed to millions of unknown persons. This can be viewed and manipulated without a young person's knowledge or permission. This would include images sent via cell phones. The images on the cell phone can also be distributed to a number of people. Be aware! "Sexting" Sexually explicit images or text messages sent by way of a phone. There may be legal consequences if one or both persons involved are minors. What would need to change to make this situation safe? (*Brainstorm ideas with the young people to address the unsafe circumstances listed above.*)
4. A teacher at your school invites you and a friend to go to a movie on Friday night. She stated that the two of you are her favorite students. The teacher offers to take you and bring you home. She says she will pay for the movie and the refreshments. Is the situation safe or unsafe? *Pause.*
- This situation may be confusing. But it is not safe.
- An adult lures youth into her company with gifts or special attention/information.
 - What key offender strategies are involved in this scenario?
- What would need to change to make this situation safe? (*Brainstorm ideas with the young people to address the unsafe circumstances listed above.*)
5. Your best friend confides in you that she tried some beer at a party she attended last week. She says it made her laugh and made her sick. She says it was not a great experience but she asks you to keep it secret from your parents and hers. *Pause.*
- This situation is not safe. What is unsafe here?
- A young person is asked to keep a secret from an adult.

- The friend is put at risk for future problems.
- The person who provided the alcohol is protected.

What would need to change to make this situation safe? (*Brainstorm ideas with the young people to address the unsafe circumstances listed above.*)

6. You are alone watching TV. The show you are watching features people who are dressed in a sexually suggestive manner. They are dancing and acting in a suggestive manner by themselves and with other people. You know your parents would disapprove but you continue to watch. Is this situation safe or unsafe? *Pause.*

This situation is unsafe. What is unsafe here?

- Watching shows that feature people being disrespectful to their own *Circle of Grace* does not help you to respect and protect yours and those of others.
- It is important to know what boundaries you should set for yourself about what you watch, read, listen to, etc., when you are alone in order to protect your *Circle of Grace*.
- When you routinely view images that are inappropriate, you become desensitized to what is safe and unsafe.

What would need to change to make this situation safe? (*Brainstorm ideas with the young people to address the unsafe circumstances listed above.*)

Proceed to the Discussion following Large Group Discussion.

Scenarios - 2

1. One of the popular church leaders in your parish invites you to a special meeting or trip. The adult leader gives you a permission slip to take to your parents but tells you not to tell other adult leaders in the church because he wants this to be your special time together. Is this safe or unsafe? *Pause.*

This situation is confusing and unsafe. What is unsafe here?

- Adult tries to get youth to keep secrets from parents or other respected adults. When in a situation like this, you should let your parents and other trusted adults know that this adult leader is telling you to keep a secret from them. Then your parents and other adults who care about you have more information about the situation and can better keep you safe.
- Adult planning private activities with young people.
- What key offender strategies are involved in this scenario?

What would need to change to make this situation safe? (*Brainstorm ideas with the young people to address the unsafe circumstances listed above.*)

2. One of your coaches thinks you can make the select team if you work a little harder on some skills. The coach offers to stay late after everyone has gone home and work one on one with you to help improve skills. He says it is important to not talk about this with others because they may be jealous. *Pause.*

This situation is unsafe. What is unsafe here?

- An adult arranges to be with a young person alone.
- What key offender strategies are involved in this scenario?

What would need to change to make this situation safe? (*Brainstorm ideas with the young people to address the unsafe circumstances listed above.*)

3. Your best friend confides that she tried beer at a party she attended last week. She says it made her laugh and made her sick. She says it was not a great experience but she asks you to keep it secret from your parents and hers. *Pause.*

This situation is not safe. What is unsafe here?

- A young person is asked to keep a secret from an adult.
- The friend is put at risk for future problems.
- The person who provided the alcohol is protected.

What would need to change to make this situation safe? (*Brainstorm ideas with the young people to address the unsafe circumstances listed above.*)

4. A person you know from the internet wants to meet you at the mall this weekend. You have been IM (instant messaging) and texting for six months. Is this situation safe or unsafe? *Pause.*

This situation is unsafe. What is unsafe here?

- You have never met the person face-to-face.
- You do not really know this person.
- You have no way to verify whatever this person has said.
- You have no way of knowing who else has seen the information that you have shared. They may have cut and pasted the information into a blog or website or shared it with a group of friends.
- What key offender strategies are involved in this scenario?

What would need to change to make this situation safe? (*Brainstorm ideas with the young people to address the unsafe circumstances listed above.*)

5. You stay overnight at a friend's house. After his/her parent's go to bed, your friend starts to sneak out to go to a party. Your friend expects you to go. You don't want to go. You tell your friend that you feel sick and want to call your parents to come get you. Is this situation safe or unsafe? *Pause.*

This situation is unsafe but the young person's response is safe. Why?

- The young person has listened to his/her feelings (instincts) that tell him/her not to go to the party.
- The young person states his/her need to call parents.

What would need to change to make this situation safe? (*Brainstorm ideas with the young people to address the unsafe circumstances listed above.*)

6. You are alone watching TV. The show you are watching features people who are dressed in a sexually suggestive manner. They are dancing and acting in a suggestive manner by themselves and with other people. You know your parents would disapprove but you continue to watch. Is this situation safe or unsafe? *Pause.*

This situation is unsafe. What is unsafe here?

- Watching shows that feature people being disrespectful to their own *Circle of Grace* does not help you to respect and protect yours and those of others.
- It is important to know what boundaries you should set for yourself about what you watch, read, listen to, etc., when you are alone in order to protect your *Circle of Grace*.
- When you routinely view images that are inappropriate, you become desensitized to what is safe and unsafe.

What would need to change to make this situation safe? (*Brainstorm ideas with the young people to address the unsafe circumstances listed above*)

Proceed to the Discussion following Large Group Discussion.

Large Group Discussion

- We have talked about when our *Circle of Grace* is broken by boundary violations. We have also discussed that the behaviors of offenders are for the sole purpose of putting a youth in a vulnerable position to be exploited or abused. We reviewed three of the key factors in an offender's behavior. Sometimes those behaviors are easy to see, sometimes they aren't.
 - It is always important for us to listen to the Holy Spirit for guidance and direction.
 - The Holy Spirit will help us to decide what we should do.
 - Often that help comes by way of an uncomfortable feeling inside us. It is hard to explain or describe other than to say it's our gut feeling. (*Refer to the "Feeling Faces Chart" as needed (see the end of Grade 9 lessons)*)
 - We need to listen to our gut feelings - they can help us answer the questions of whether or not this behavior would be saying, "Yes," to what God has called us to be - or whether or not this behavior should be in our *Circle of Grace*.
 - Even though it may be hard, we need to confide in a trusted adult. This will help us gain clarity and know that we are not alone.
- There are times when we realize that something that happened in our past was not the best thing for us. That, too, may be the Holy Spirit inviting us to heal. Remember there are many people in our faith community ready to listen and help.

Lesson Extender

1. *Ask the young people to gather in groups of 5-8. Give each group a piece of poster board or butcher paper.*
2. *Ask each group to brainstorm on one side of the paper the different physical boundaries of:*
 - a. *Our Planet*
 - b. *Our Country*
 - c. *Our State*
 - d. *Our City*
 - e. *Our Home/Yard*
 - f. *Our Person.*
3. *Then ask them to brainstorm how those boundaries protect us.*

Optional: If the group size is not sufficient for small groups; invite the large group to brainstorm all four boundaries together.

Lesson Closing

Leader invites young people into their preferred prayer posture and call to mind the presence of the Holy Spirit. Leader leads the group in prayer with their own words or the below example.

**Good and gracious God,
help us to see Your image when we look in the mirror,
help us to see Your goodness in all those we meet,
help us to recognize Your love through the Cloud of Witnesses,
help us know Your will through the whisper
of the Holy Spirit,
help us to say, "Yes,"
when Your call us to be all that we have been created to be,
help us to serve Your and others without pushing ourselves forward,
help us to know our limits and to respect the limits of others,
and help us to respect our *Circle of Grace* and live always in
the ultimate *Circle of Grace* – Your Love. Amen.**