

OBJECTIVES

Through this lesson, youth will develop a better understanding of healthy and unhealthy relationships. Following the lesson, youth will be able to:

- Identify the difference between healthy and unhealthy relationships.
- Follow a plan to “do the right thing” for themselves and others if they recognize an unhealthy situation
- Communicate regarding concerns of unsafe situations.

Lesson 1

We begin with boundaries.

Effective safety programs begin with education and understanding. Whether we are learning about bicycle safety, fire safety, or safe environments, the key to creating and maintaining personal safety is understanding what can happen and knowing how things really work.

Boundaries are the starting point. Learning about them and safety rules begins with young children and continues throughout life. The more we know about boundaries, the more we can protect ourselves and others.

It is not a youth’s role to protect other children—that is the job of adults. However, there are some things that youth, who are employees or assisting in volunteer capacities, can do to help.

What are boundaries?

Boundaries can be viewed as imaginary lines that separate one person from another.

- They promote our sense of “self” and help us preserve personal integrity while creating a framework for our relationships with others
- They can be physical, emotional, behavioral, verbal and spiritual
- They are formed during our early years as we model the behavior we witness from influential adults in our lives
- Boundaries differ depending on the relationship; boundaries between married couples are different from those between friends, and boundaries between children and parents are different from those between students and teachers/coaches

It is important for children and youth to know they have the right to speak up if something does not seem right to them—even if it concerns an adult. “No” is a very powerful word and an effective way to set a boundary, and it should be respected.

Use the terminology of “safe” and “unsafe” touches:

When discussing safety involving touch, a child should begin to discern the kind of touch that nurtures them versus touch that harms, it is best to talk about it in the terms of safety. For that reason, we shall use the terms “safe touch” and “unsafe touch.”

Youth should know examples of specific, “safe” physical touches:

The difference between safe and unsafe is tied to both the purpose and intention of the touch.

Safe touches are safe because they have a good purpose and are not intended to hurt. They are safe even when not knowing the person well, as long as the touches are appropriate to the relationship.

Examples include:

- “Cheek” kisses from Mom before bedtime

- Hugs from Dad after work
- “High fives” with friends during a game
- Shaking hands with someone new
- A loose hug from a teacher in class
- A pat on the back/shoulder from a coach
- Having Grandma/Grandpa bounce you on the knee
- A pat on the head by an Uncle
- Sitting on Dad’s shoulders

Safe touches that might feel unpleasant or painful:

Touches from doctors, nurses, dentists and “Dr. Mom” need special explanation because they are safe and necessary, and can sometimes hurt. Even so, they hurt for a good reason because they are meant to keep the children and youth healthy. Examples include when:

- The doctor gave you stitches after you fell off the bike
- The nurse gave you an immunization shot for health
- The dentist cleaned your teeth to keep cavities away
- Mom applied stinging ointment to a cut to fight infection
- Dad put drops in your eyes to flush out grains of sand
- Your brother pulled your arm to keep you from going into the busy street

Unsafe touches:

- Are meant to hurt, scare, or confuse, or, they violate the safety rules
- Examples children will recognize right away include hitting, punching, tripping, kicking and spitting
- This can also be any touches that make children feel uncomfortable or uneasy
- Includes any molestation
- Also include any touching of private parts—except in very limited and specific circumstances to keep the child safe and healthy

Anytime youth are confused by any touch, they should speak up and ask someone they trust about it, or, talk to someone who is supposed to be safe, such as a guidance counselor, supervisory adult, safe adult, parents, etc. This helps to determine whether a touch is safe or unsafe, and helps the youth to learn that working it out with a safe adult is the best way to deal with any confusion or discomfort.

Focus on the behavior:

Knowing who is safe is not always easy because most of the people who abuse children are known and trusted by the children and their parents. Almost 90% of the people who abuse children are in this group. This is why it is so important to focus on behavior.

Behavior of safe adults:

- Will not hurt the child without a good reason, and will not intentionally confuse or scare the child
- Consistently respect the safety wishes and concerns of the child and parent/guardian
- Exhibit behavior that is transparent and PAN: Public, Appropriate and Non-sexual in nature

Behavior of unsafe adults:

- Do not listen to the boundaries of the youth
- Do not follow the rules, especially when it comes to being alone with a youth
- Ask a child to keep a secret or to “keep this between you and me”
- Give gifts, without knowledge or permission of a parent/guardian
- Give unsafe touches, that are confusing, scary, or that hurt, or that violate the safety rules
- Perform unsafe behavior that makes a child feel uncomfortable or uneasy

“No, go and tell” when boundaries are violated:

Children also need an action plan for safety when the rules are violated. In the same way that children learn to, “stop, drop, and roll” in a fire, when someone violates their boundaries they need to know about, “No, go and tell.” Children have the right to say words that mean “no” to anyone who is making them feel uncomfortable. Then the child should try to get away from the situation and tell a trusted adult what happened. “No, go and tell” can make a difference in whether a child is harmed by a predator. Give them the tools and the freedom to take these actions.

Boundary safety rules:

- Children should say “No!” or “Stop!” or other words that mean “no”
- Try to remove themselves from the situation
- Tell a parent or another safe adult as soon as possible

Confronting an adult may be hard for some children. Here are some ideas of things they can say to get away from the situation when, “Stop touching me that way; I don’t like it!” is not the safest or easiest choice.

What children could say to get away from a scary or uncomfortable situation:

- “I don’t feel well, I’m going to throw up.”
- “Leave me alone, I’m telling my mom/dad.”
- “I need to use the restroom.”
- “I’m thirsty and need something to drink.”
- “My mom is waiting for me, I need to go now.”

When children know about the boundary safety rules, and have words to say to communicate about what has happened to them to the right person, they learn that it’s OK to talk about these subjects. And, they are more likely to challenge an inappropriate touch or speak up when someone leaves them feeling uncomfortable. Youth have a right to be safe.

Older youth and teens often disclose to their peers about abuse that is happening, or has happened to them, and do not always communicate about abusive situations to adults.

Sometimes it can be confusing to know whether to speak up or keep quiet about abuse to protect a friendship. Disclosing abuse is not snitching. Talking about it with safe adults is the right thing to do. And, it protects friends from harm. Friends can also offer to go with their peers to take the situation to a safe adult, or they can talk to the safe adult on their friend’s behalf. Keeping quiet only protects people who cause harm.

Teens, regardless of the situation, can say “no” and have the right to have that “no” honored and respected.

When you are a minor, the ultimate responsibility of protecting children lies with the adult who is supervising—not with you.

However, if possible, there are some things that you can do to help if another minor comes to you with a safety problem.

These are some key facts to remember when thinking about dealing with disclosures:

- **Reassure the child that communicating was the right thing to do.**
- **Don’t promise not to tell.** Children often preface their disclosure with a request for confidentiality. When you let them know that you must tell the people who can help stop the abuse from happening to them or anyone else, they usually still disclose.
- **Be honest with the child.** Let children know what happens next and assure them you will only tell people who need to know to keep the child safe.

If abuse has happened in your life, it is really important to get the information to a safe adult.

In addition, sometimes children or friends might come to you and tell you about something abusive or scary that is happening in their lives. Sometimes they are trusting you with a disclosure of abuse, and the best thing you can do to help them is to get the information to a safe adult.

The following videos will discuss how you can help get the information to a safe adult who can help.

Lesson 2

Many times, people don't disclose about abuse because of fear—that they won't be believed, or that there will be negative consequences—or because they feel like no one else would understand what they're going through.

Our friends are the ones who are most likely to recognize when we are in an unhealthy situation.

Youth who have strong friendships and support systems are better able to navigate and recover from unhealthy or tough situations.

Take action to help...

As a friend, this is why it's important to listen, and be kind, even if you aren't very close.

A common question surrounds whether to promise confidentiality when it comes to hearing about abuse. You, as a friend, *cannot promise* complete confidentiality when hearing about abuse, because there may come a time where you will need to communicate with a safe adult on their behalf—to protect them.

So, what if you've *already* promised to keep it a secret? Can you—or... *should* you—share the information with the right person who can help?

YES!

Does sharing it betray the person and their confidence? **NO.**

Sharing the information with a trusted adult who can help is important. Sharing about abuse is *helping* them—when they can't get the help they need themselves. That's being a good friend, even if it doesn't *feel* like it, because you are watching out for someone else's safety.

Be supportive!

Support can take different forms.

Support doesn't mean you turn a blind eye to unhealthy relationships.

It means being there, believing the person, letting them know you're there for them, even in a crisis, and getting the person the help they need—even if that means communicating a secret to someone who can actually help.

It might mean spending more time with the person, or it could be reporting to law enforcement.

Don't give up on your friends, but don't be a part of their poor decisions either.

Communication is key if you believe a friend is in trouble and needs help.

Action tips to help:

- Ahead of time, write down the reasons that you believe the relationship is problematic to help with the conversation.
- Say why you're concerned.
- Take the time to explain to them that: the behavior is not normal, and life could be better and happier.
- Explain they don't deserve abuse, and,

- Stay calm and logical.

Reach out to others for help if needed, *even if you're not quite sure there's abuse.*

Sometimes we might also need counseling to help us work through trauma.

People you can go to for help include:

- Lesson leader
- School counselor (or a therapist)
- Teacher / Coach
- Youth leader
- Parents
- Any trusted (or safe) adult

If a crime is involved, like physical abuse, sexual exploitation, rape, or child sexual abuse by an adult, you will need to reach out to the police or emergency services.

Offer to go with your friend as a support person.

There are numerous resources for help, including hotlines and websites to visit when in crisis or just for advice.

- The National Domestic Violence Hotline is an organization for people who are in crisis after rape, and need to be connected with a counselor. The website is www.ndvh.org and the phone number is 1-800-799-SAFE
- The National Sexual Assault Hotline is www.rainn.org or 1-800-656-HOPE
- The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org or 1-800-273-8255,
- And, Child Protective Services is available in each state through a quick Internet search.

Do the right thing...

Providing friends with your support and avenues of help could save them from years of pain... And, could ultimately save their lives.

People who perform inappropriate behavior in relationships will continue to do so until they're stopped.

Getting out of the relationship, and reporting any crimes that occurred, like physical abuse or rape, help to stop the victimization of others.

Abuse is never OK, and now you know how to get help for yourself, or a friend.

You deserve to be in a healthy relationship, that contributes to a happy and healthy life.

Lesson 3

Whether as an employee or a volunteer, there are special considerations to be noted when contributing to a safe environment—even when you are a minor yourself.

If you are a minor, your organization may have a policy stating that upon your 18th birthday, or perhaps when you graduate high school, you will need to complete compliance-related screening procedures such as background checks, policy- or code of conduct acknowledgements and additional training.

There may also be organization-specific dating rules regarding age. You'll want to check with your organization for specifics.

In any program or environment involving children, there is an increased level of observation that is needed.

The responsibility to ensure the safety of children is 100% that of adults—it's their job to keep youth safe.

You, as a teen, can assist in this endeavor, too.

Your observations of adults or older youth who behave inappropriately, or who make you feel uncomfortable, are **important indicators of an issue**.

You might even notice that *other* youth feel uncomfortable or uneasy when around these individuals.

Examples of inappropriate behavior on behalf of adults or older teens include:

- People who work to be alone (one-on-one) with youth, or discourage others from participating.
- People who show favoritism or give individual children specialized gifts without permission from the parents or the organization.
- People who ask youth to keep things “secret” or “just between them.”
- People who go overboard touching or tickling, or touch children in places that are sensitive or private; they might invite kids to sit on their laps.
- People who tell crude jokes, use sexually explicit language, talk about private parts, or talk about sexual matters.
- People who show others pornographic images or material, or ask youth to share pornographic images or material; this might not just be a warning sign, it could also be illegal.

Each of these examples (at the very least) are warning signs that the individual is overstepping proper boundaries.

If people are exhibiting these warning signs, or other inappropriate behavior, it does not always mean that they are grooming or abusing a child.

Regardless of who it is, or why they're doing the behavior, or even the circumstances involved, the information has to get to a safe adult.

A **safe adult** is one who prioritizes safety.

You might also observe children who are exhibiting red flag behaviors that could be a sign that they need help from a safe adult.

Examples include...

- When there is a sudden change in behavior, relating to likes or dislikes, or eating habits...
- They may become aggressive, withdrawn or depressed,
- They lose interest in activities,
- They become secretive, or guarded, particularly with technology or online activities,
- They become fearful, anxious or uncomfortable around certain people,
- They bathe excessively, or stop taking care of personal hygiene, and,
- They exhibit self-injury, drug or alcohol abuse.

If a youth tells you they've been abused, believe them. Get the information to a safe adult.

If you're aware of any of these types of behaviors, whether from an adult or child, it's important to communicate your concerns to a safe adult.

If you feel uncomfortable with *that* person, you can speak to their supervisor, too.

There are *always* people who can, and want to help, even if it means that you have to call the authorities.

If there is ever a time where you feel that there is an emergency, you can call 911. You can also call the police anytime you feel you need help and aren't getting it from people in your life who are supposed to be safe.

You might have to be a voice for a youth who cannot speak up on their own.

This is the right thing to do when we know that others are in trouble.

Thank you for doing what is right.