

Protecting God's Children®

Overview of the Touching Safety Program

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The job of ensuring children's safety is a challenging undertaking. The prevention of child sexual abuse requires more than adult awareness, education, and training about the nature and scope of the problem. We must also give our children the tools they need to overcome the advances of someone who intends to do them harm.

The *Teaching Touching Safety* program guide (*Teaching Touching Safety Guide*) is a tool designed to assist parents and teachers in this important task.

The Touching Safety program is a vehicle through which parents, teachers, catechists, and youth ministers give children and young people the tools they need to protect themselves from those who might harm them.

The Touching Safety Program Lessons were Created for Four Specific Age Groups:

- Grades K through 2
- Grades 3 through 5
- Grades 6 through 8
- Grades 9 through 12

Each year, the program provides a theme that introduces and builds on the basic concepts of the *Teaching Touching Safety Guide*. The material is developmentally appropriate for each age group and includes content and activities that reinforce the message.

The materials for teachers include everything needed to prepare for and present each lesson—including additional information to help teachers better understand the context of the materials they are about to present. For example, teachers have access to a glossary of terms for all the lessons. They also have handouts and other reference materials such as information on how to respond to disclosures, how to report suspected abuse, and other supplemental materials.

The lessons are organized in a three-year cycle so each child experiences a totally different lesson plan each time the materials are presented and so each child receives the full range of information from the *Teaching Touching Safety Guide* in small, “digestible” bites, over a three-year period. Then, as a child advances to the next age group, there are a whole new set of age appropriate lessons that explore the major topics in increasingly greater detail. Your diocese may choose to present one lesson in the fall and one in the spring or to present both lessons at the same time.

The themes covered (in an age-appropriate way, of course) in each of the three years

Year 1 Lesson 1: Touching Safety Rules—Students learn simple rules about what to do and how to react when someone's touch is confusing, scary, or makes the child or young person feel uncomfortable. Young people start to deal with the real risks they face when they are out in the world and on their own, and they begin to learn where to draw boundary lines in relationships.

Lesson 2: Safe Friends, Safe Adults, and Safe Touches—Children, young people, and their parents establish basic guidelines for working together to make certain *which* friends and other adults in their environment can be trusted to act safely and in the best interest of each child or young person.

Year 2 Lesson 3: Boundaries—Students learn about personal boundaries and how identifying and honoring those boundaries can give a child or young person the self assurance needed to speak up when someone tries to step over the line.

Lesson 4: Telling Someone You Trust—Children and young people learn who to tell when something makes them feel uncomfortable or confused. This lesson also begins to explore the phenomenon and power of “secrets” in a child's life at various ages.

Year 3: Lesson 7: Internet Safety—Assisting children and young people in recognizing the risks of providing personal information to anyone on the Internet and to help them realize how hard it is to know who someone really is when the only avenue of communication is the Internet.

Lesson 8: Creating and Following Family Rules—Educating young people about Internet safety and teaching them the importance of creating and following family rules in the effort to keep everyone safe.

Basic structure of the lesson plans:

This program and each included lesson are founded on the principles of appropriate relationship boundaries in the broader context of Christian values. All lessons are age-appropriate, and help children and young people develop the vocabulary and boundary distinctions necessary to empower them to begin to recognize inappropriate behavior by others, while practicing appropriate relationship boundaries in their own lives. Each lesson takes approximately 45 minutes to an hour to complete.

The lessons focus on an age-appropriate discussion of touching safety, relative to the specific roles that different people play in a child's life. All of the lessons stress the importance of keeping private body parts "private," and of telling a trusted adult about anyone's behavior that causes a child to feel uncomfortable or threatened.