

**Lesson 4 for Grades 6-8**

**Partnering with Parents & Guardians for Safety:  
Secrets, Surprises and Promises**

**PRINCIPLE**

Children must learn how to respect their own health and safety, and that of others, by understanding the safety rules about secrets. They have a right to be safe, and they are allowed to create boundaries to protect themselves in situations that cause discomfort or violate the safety rules.

**CATECHISM / SCRIPTURE**

*“Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, says the LORD.”* —  
Jeremiah 1:8, New Revised Standard Version of the Bible (NRSV)

**OBJECTIVES**

After lesson 4, children should be able to:

- Identify the boundary differences between secrets, surprises, and promises
- Understand the safety rules with regard to secrets and promises
  - Say “No!” when someone tries to touch them in an unsafe or uncomfortable way.
  - Try to get away from the situation
  - Tell an adult as soon as possible
- Begin to understand that if anybody does make them keep a secret, gives them an unsafe touch or shows them inappropriate material, it isn't their fault
- Understand boundaries can apply for Online activities

**Background for Parents and Guardians:**

In preparation for teaching this lesson and to lead the activities, review the *Teaching Boundaries and Safety Guide: Safe Environment Guide for Caring Adults, Parents and Guardians*.

Before sitting down with your child(ren) and beginning the activities, read through this entire lesson and view the video. Choose the activities that you are most comfortable with first and gradually moving to the others. You will find it is helpful to have the *Teaching Boundaries and Safety Guide* handy to navigate the lesson material. These activities are intended to empower young people to think about safety issues with you as their partner.

**Considerations for the age groups—**

Children of this age are dealing with enormous peer pressure while trying to understand their independent role in the world apart from their families. This is the age where puberty may begin or has already. 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. These situations may create feelings of immense shame, guilt, threats, etc., for the youth. Good communication while speaking to this age group should be stressed. With this age group it will be important to stress “healthy” behavior and boundaries, and the “right thing to do” when boundaries are violated.

**Activity #1: Introductory Video**

**Directions:** View and discuss the introductory video with your child. The introductory video for all grades is designed to open a simple discussion with children about personal boundaries and touching safety. The video is approximately six minutes long and is neither created nor intended as a substitute for the activities. It's merely an intro designed to “break the ice” and assist the transition into completing the interactive Lesson Activity options. It can be used in to introduce any of the following activities. Discussion and practice are the critical components needed to teach children how to protect themselves. They learn best by “doing”; not just listening or watching.

Grades 6-8 Video links:

English 6 – 8: <https://www.youtube.com/embed/P3RoYAYkDQ4>

Spanish 6 – 8: <https://www.youtube.com/embed/XBN8gsD8A7U>

**Activity #2: Review and Discuss Vocabulary words in an age-appropriate way with your child**

**Private body parts**—those body parts covered by a bathing suit.

**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.]

**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.]

**Safe friends and safe adults**—safe people won't hurt you without a good reason and won't intentionally confuse you. They listen to and consistently respect boundaries, and follow the rules. [Explain that a child may have many safe friends and adults. Give children examples of adult behavior that could hurt them, but may be necessary for the child's safety, i.e. medical exams, vaccinations, throat swabs, removing splinters, stopping a child from running into the road, etc.]

**Unsafe friends and unsafe adults**—unsafe friends and unsafe adults put a child at risk for emotional, spiritual and physical harm. These are people who place a child in danger for their own purposes without concern for the welfare of the child. They also do not consistently listen to the parents' wishes or the child's boundaries. [Tell children we can know when someone is unsafe if they do not follow the rules or listen to our boundaries.]

**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, fearful or sad. Secrets also send the message to children that they, or someone else, will get into trouble if the secret is shared [For example, let children know that there are no secrets when it comes to personal and physical safety. Tell children it's wrong for an adult or another child to ask 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”.]

**Surprise**—Surprises are typically happy. They cause feelings of happiness and joy. They are exciting, and temporary— meaning they will be revealed within a specific timeframe. As surprises are usually fun, they include activities like birthday surprises, gifts, trips and special treats. Surprises are inclusive and meant to be shared with others.

**Problem**—Problems can be big and small; they can be small, little things like puzzles or big things like emergencies—and often need to be solved. They can involve fears and emotions. Sometimes we put boundaries in place to prevent problems, or to be more prepared for them. Whenever we have a problem that we don't know how to solve, we should talk to a safe adult for help. If we have problems about safety issues, boundaries and secrets, we definitely need to talk to a safe adult. [For example, a house fire is a big problem for everyone who lives there, and for the people who live near that house. It's a problem because it's unsafe, and it could hurt people. When a house is on fire, help is needed help right away. How do we get help with the problem of house fires? As soon as it's safe, we “stop, drop and roll”, try to get out and call 911, and the fire department comes to help us fix the problem of the fire that's too big to fix on our own.]

**Threat**—When someone threatens you, they are stating that they are going to hurt, injure, damage or do something dangerous if you don't do what they want you to do. You never have to listen to threats, but you should be prepared in case you experience them. [For example, someone might threaten you and say if you tell about an unsafe secret, they're going to hurt your someone/something you know, and that you're going to get into trouble. When you hear someone threaten you about an unsafe secret, that is when we definitely need to tell a safe adult.]

**Promise**—When you make a promise, you are declaring that something specific will happen—that you will either “do” or “not do” something. Promises can be good! But, we should never make promises about keeping quiet regarding unsafe secrets.

**Activity #3: Boundaries**

**Background:** This activity involves providing boundary information, helping children to think about this subject, and then giving them specific scenarios to work out how they would respond to the situation if they are confronted with it.

**Discussion:** Children need to understand that there are significant differences between surprises and secrets, and that if someone is trying to make them keep a secret, then they must tell a safe adult. When a child knows the difference between secrets and surprises and that keeping a secret isn't OK, he/she is more likely to reveal boundary violations and/or abuse.

**Directions:** Talk to your child about secrets:

- A secret is something that is intended to never be told. They're unsafe, especially when they have to do with our boundary safety rules involving our bodies. Boundary safety involves rules like when we tell a safe adult when we're uncomfortable or scared, and how we tell a safe adult right away if someone tries to touch or see our private parts—or shows us images of private parts. Knowing about secrets are an important part of our boundary safety plan, because they impact our safety.
- When it comes to safety and the boundary rules, it's not OK to keep secrets. You have a right to be safe, and for people to honor and respect your boundaries. When someone asks you to keep a secret, it can make you feel sad and scared, or uncomfortable. Sometimes they might even make you feel special, because you might like the person who is asking you to keep a secret.
- Holding on to a secret might also cause us to feel guilty or ashamed. It can take great courage to do the right thing and reveal an unsafe secret either about ourselves or someone we know—but this is the right thing to do.
- It's wrong for an adult or another child to ask you to keep a secret about your safety—especially unsafe touches—because that's a way for people to get hurt. Keeping silent about an unsafe secret only protects the person who is causing the harm, which allows them to keep on doing what they want to that person, and maybe others.
- If someone asks you to keep a secret about something unsafe, you have to tell a safe adult, even if the person told you not to. Sometimes the adult or other person might say that something is “confidential,” which means the same thing as secret.
- Sometimes our friends might confide in us about something unsafe that happened to them. Sometimes when people confide in us, they are asking for help, even if they tell us not to tell anyone else.
- Sometimes people will try to scare you into making a promise about keeping secrets. The person might say that you'll get into trouble if you tell, or they might threaten you and say that they'll hurt your animal, or a friend or family member. They might threaten your reputation or hold something they know over you as blackmail. If this happens, it's really important that you talk to a safe adult.
- Sometimes this is scary, especially if we feel we've done something wrong, but telling a safe adult is the right thing to do.
- It's OK to talk about the unsafe secret with one of your safe adults, even if you promised not to tell. You can always talk to your safe adults!
- Sometimes, though, our safe adults might not act the way we expect them to, and if that happens it's even more important to get the information to a different safe adult—and keep going until you get help.
- If you've already kept a secret with someone that you now realize is unsafe, it is important to go to your safe adult (or a different one) and talk to them about it.

**Talk to children about their safe adults:**

**Say/Ask:** Let's talk about the safe adults in your life. Who are your safe adults?

**Answer:** Safe people won't hurt you without a good reason and won't intentionally confuse you. They listen to and consistently respect your boundaries and follow the rules. Explain that a child may have many safe friends and adults. Give children examples of adult behavior that could hurt them, but may be necessary for the child's safety, i.e. medical exams, vaccinations, throat swabs, removing splinters, stopping a child from running into the road, etc.

**Say/Ask:** Who are some of your safe adults?

**Answer:** Examples may include: teachers, someone at church, principal, aunt, uncle, mom or dad, police officer, firefighter, etc.

**Ask:** How does privacy affect secrets? Approach the topic of privacy with youth.

**Explain:** Privacy is primarily about being respectful of a person's personal boundaries or information. The things we appropriately can keep private include beliefs, opinions, ideas, traits, etc. Maintaining and honoring someone's privacy does not result in hurting them or others or compromising someone's safety. And, complete privacy is not always applicable when it deals with our safety boundaries. When it comes to a situation where boundaries have been violated, someone is hurt or has the potential to be hurt, we should keep the information private insofar as we only tell the people who need to know to help us (and them) stay safe—such as our safe adults or other people who can help us.

We also keep other things private, such as our private parts, which we keep private underneath our clothing when we're in public. Privacy and secrecy are often confused—and the main difference is that unsafe secrecy involves situations where we deliberately keep something from someone else usually out of fear, where keeping the secret can negatively impact or harm ourselves or someone else.

**Ask: What are the differences and similarities between Unsafe Secrets and Safe Surprises?**

Record your responses on a sheet of paper and discuss what's in the Chart that follows.

**Note:** In this activity, it's important to acknowledge that there are adults and children who do have good intentions, who attempt to make children keep secrets without realizing that they might be dangerous. All types of secrets are dangerous because they might condition children to keep secrets from unsafe people. With this in mind, be sure not to vilify anyone who does ask to keep a secret, and instead stress the importance of always taking that information to a safe adult. Remember that there will be children who have already promised others to keep secrets, and they should not be made to feel guilty or ashamed about this.

	UNSAFE SECRETS:	SAFE SURPRISES:
DIFFERENCES	May cause feelings of sadness	Often cause feelings of happiness, excitement
	May cause feelings of shame or guilt	Often cause feelings of confidence
	May cause feelings of anger or betrayal	Shouldn't cause feelings of anger or betrayal
	Might involve threats regarding the safety of loved ones, including animals, or someone's reputation	Never involve threats regarding the safety or reputation of anyone
	Could involve unsafe touches, unsafe images, boundary violations, feelings of discomfort, etc.	Might cause initial feelings of discomfort (if the person doesn't like surprises, or if the information is shocking)
	Are hidden	Are revealed
	Have potential to be kept forever	Are temporary
	Are never told	Are meant to be shared with others (eventually, at the right time)
	Exclude others	Are inclusive
	Have potential to harm, or hurt someone's feelings	Have potential to bring joy
	Can sometimes make someone feel unlovable	Would never make someone feel unlovable
	Sometimes require courage to share	Sometimes require patience when waiting to share
	SIMILARITIES	Might sound like they are fun (although it may not truly be fun for everyone)
Might make the recipient or bystander "special" to be involved		Might make the recipient or bystander "special" to be involved
Could involve gifts or privileges		Could involve gifts or privileges
Can be a burden (because of the weight of the problem)		Can be a burden (because of the excitement and desire to reveal, since waiting can be hard)
May cause feelings of fear (scary)		Might involve feelings of slight apprehension

**Say:** Listen to the examples I am going to give you. Think about whether the example is an unsafe secret or safe surprise? And, why?

**Note:** There may be additional reasons as to why a secret may be unsafe (and, conversely, why a surprise might be safe), that are not conveyed in the answers below. Some questions might also share both surprising and secretive elements to them. They will require additional clarification relating to appropriate privacy. When children ask questions about how privacy comes into play, refer back to the definition and explanation listed in the lesson plan above, then compare it with the scenario in question and ask how it applies.

You should be prepared for your child to bring up other "what if" scenarios. Get through the questions first, and then address the additional scenarios. When this happens, refer to the chart and guide the students in deciding whether the proposed situation is a safe surprise or an unsafe secret.

In all of these scenarios about unsafe secrets, remind your child that whether these types of scenarios happen to them, or happen to someone they know—it's can be really difficult to talk about situations that involve abuse and

*boundaries. Encourage them to always communicate with a safe adult—but if they aren't ready for that, then they can talk to a friend first, to ask that friend to help them have the courage to speak to a safe adult.*

*Explain: If you're the friend, do everything you can to get the person to the safe adult when involved with an unsafe secret, even if it means that you have to be the one to tell the safe adult on your own.*

1. **a.)** Is it an unsafe secret or safe surprise if someone tells you about a prank they are planning on doing to someone that you realize could hurt the person, but you're also told not to tell anyone? **Answer:** Unsafe secret
1. **b.)** Why? Because someone could get hurt; this may not be a safe activity and needs intervention.
1. **c.)** What next? You can always share something like this with your safe adults, and also with the friend who is going to be pranked. You could also ask the other friend not to do the prank at all. In more immediate and serious situations, you could also involve a supervisor.
  
2. **a.)** Is it an unsafe secret or safe surprise... if you're spending time with your friend and notice he has bruises all over his arms and legs? Your friend told you that his dad gets really angry sometimes and that's "just what happens—if you're really my friend, you'll promise me you won't tell anyone about it!" You promise not to say anything, but now you're second guessing your decision. **Answer:** Unsafe secret
2. **b.)** Why? It violates the safety rules because your friend was hurt, and may continue to be hurt in the future. Keeping silent only protects the person who is causing the harm, which allows them to keep on doing what they want.
2. **c.)** What next? Talk to a safe adult, even though you promised you wouldn't. Real friends get their friends to the right person for help when it's needed. When it comes to the safety rules, it's OK to break promises.
  
3. **a.)** Is it an unsafe secret or safe surprise... if one of your parents wants to have a special dinner because a family member had a big accomplishment? What if you just want to tell the person that you're planning something, without telling them WHAT you're planning? **Answer:** Safe surprise
3. **b.)** Why? Because it's temporary, it will be revealed and shared, it is inclusive, and will be fun! However, there may be a privacy component here about giving some details and not all of them.
3. **c.)** What next? You can always share this with your safe adults, and in the meantime, keep the information about the dinner/treat private for a short amount of time until it can be revealed to the family member. If you wanted to share parts of the information with the recipient, you should first communicate to the person planning the surprise to see what information might be shared, when it can be shared and why it should or should not be shared.
  
4. **a.)** Is it an unsafe secret or safe surprise... if your teacher tells you she has a surprise for you, and gives you a surprise gift, but says, "maybe one day we can tell others, but let's keep it our little secret for now"? You really like the gift and want to keep it. And, you know that your parents wouldn't be able to afford it. Plus, it makes you feel special that your teacher cares enough about you to get you a present. But, it's confusing that she called it a surprise when she also said you couldn't talk about it yet. **Answer:** Unsafe secret
4. **b.)** Why? This is a tough one! It's referred to as a surprise gift because you were surprised to receive it, but you're being asked to keep a secret that may or may not be told to others. You should never be asked to keep a secret from both of your parents, even if it's "called" a surprise. Gifts and surprises are meant to be shared, and we don't keep secrets about gifts forever.
4. **c.)** What next? Talk to a safe adult, because your teacher may not have good intentions.
  
5. **a.)** Is it an unsafe secret or safe surprise... if your parents tell you that they're going to have a baby, and that you're going to have a little sibling, and ask that you don't tell anyone until they're ready to share the information publicly? They also tell you that even when they start to talk about it, they don't want you to ever post pictures of the new baby on social media. **Answer:** Safe surprise
5. **b.)** Why? This is a tough one! It's a safe surprise that you can temporarily keep because it will eventually be revealed and shared on a certain date, plus it's joyful and exciting. However, it also involves a privacy boundary that your parents are placing about how much information to provide about your sibling online.
5. **c.)** What next? Keep the information about the pregnancy private for a short amount of time until you get the green light to reveal it with others per the boundaries that your parents have set. After that, you'll have to follow the personal safety boundaries that your parents have set about what can and can't be posted online about the new little one.
  
6. **a.)** Is it an unsafe secret or safe surprise... if your cousin tells you an uncle you both know has been touching her inappropriately for the past year and has made her look at pornography online, but wants you to keep it private and not tell anyone? The uncle is a police officer, and is well known and respected in the community. She begs you not to say anything to anyone else. She specifically said, "look, it's over now, I'm over it, and nothing can be done because no one is going to believe me over a police officer! Plus, everybody likes him! Our parents will be really upset, will probably say I did something wrong or they'll say I'm lying, and I don't want to deal with that." **Answer:** Unsafe secret
6. **b.)** Why? It violates the safety rules because the cousin has personal body boundaries that were crossed— no one is allowed to touch your private parts unless to keep you clean and safe (and these touches are brief, and never a secret). Your cousin wants you to keep quiet because she is afraid of what could happen with her parents not believing her, even though by not saying anything other children could be molested, too. Sometimes people use their

powerful jobs or likable personalities to be able to do what they want without caring about how others are hurt or affected, and that is never OK when it comes to personal safety boundaries—and makes it even more important that inappropriate behavior comes to light. Even though your cousin says that everything is OK and over now, this may not be true and your cousin may not realize the psychological effects of abuse. Sometimes when people confide in us, they are asking for help—even if they tell us not to tell anyone else. Secrets can be painful, and can cause sadness.

**6. c.)** What next? The right thing to do is to tell a safe adult right away. If family doesn't believe the information, then it's time to take the information to someone who can do something about it, such as a guidance counselor at school.

**7. a.)** Is it an unsafe secret or safe surprise... if an older teen pulls up a girl's dress at school, takes a picture so others can see her underwear and bra underneath, and then messages it to others? Several of your classmates know about it, and have made fun of her, but no one wants to tell on him. You also know that the girl has been very upset, and has been skipping school because of it. **Answer:** Unsafe secret

**7. b.)** Why? It violates the safety rules because your friend's personal boundaries were violated several times. First, they were violated when someone pulled her skirt up, again when someone showed an image of her private parts (bra/chest/underwear—areas covered by a bathing suit) to others, again when her picture is shared electronically by others, and then every single time someone looks at the image. Even though this situation is including others in what they consider to be "fun", it's causing your friend feelings of sadness and fear, and certainly has great potential to harm your friend and her reputation.

**7. c.)** What next? Let your friend know that you're there for her, and tell a safe adult right away. This is the right thing to do whether any of the people in the situation are your friends or not.

**8. a.)** Is it an unsafe secret or safe surprise... if you're in what you consider to be a loving relationship, but the other person doesn't seem to care when you say "no" when it comes to your body—and you don't want anyone else to know? Most of the relationship is awesome, but there are a lot of times where you're hurt and sad, and you feel like your boundaries aren't respected. You don't know if it's a big enough deal to talk to anyone about, because you've been told that all relationships have ups and downs. Plus—you don't want people to judge your boyfriend/girlfriend and say bad things about them, since they don't know the person like you do. **Answer:** Unsafe secret

**8. b.)** Why? It's an unsafe secret because you feel uncomfortable, and it violates the safety rules because your boundaries are not being upheld. Saying "no" is a powerful boundary, and should be honored, especially when it comes to your body and personal boundaries. You deserve respect and have a right to be safe—and feel safe, especially in the context of a relationship. It's true that relationships can have ups and downs, but if you're consistently feeling hurt and sad, it's often a sign that something is wrong, and needs to be addressed. Even if people don't know your girlfriend/boyfriend like you do, it doesn't mean that they can't objectively say that something is wrong.

**8. c.)** What next? Tell a safe adult right away.

**9. a.)** Is it an unsafe secret or safe surprise... if your coach asks you questions about your private parts, including what they look like? The coach is known as a "cool" person, and seems to never really care about the rules. You don't really want to discuss your private parts with your coach, but feel stuck because you don't want your spot on the team to be jeopardized. You answered the coach's question, but you don't know if you should say anything about the encounter or just keep it quiet. **Answer:** Unsafe secret

**9. b.)** Why? If you were to keep quiet about this encounter, it would be an unsafe secret because it involves a situation that has caused discomfort, and it crosses your boundaries. You never have to speak about what your private parts look like to others. Safe adults should never ask you questions about what your private parts look like, unless you've disclosed discomfort or pain, or it's someone like a parent or doctor who's helping to ensure that you're safe and healthy.

**9. c.)** What next? Talk to a safe adult.

**10. a.)** Is it an unsafe secret or safe surprise... if your friend tells you that they have a crush on a friend and asks you not to say anything to anyone? **Answer:** Safe surprise

**10. b.)** Why? This is a tough one! It's a safe surprise that's probably temporary and fun, that you can keep from the object of the crush. However, it doesn't mean that you have to keep the information quiet from your safe adults—who are always safe to communicate with about surprises or secrets.

**10. c.)** What next? Keep the information private from peers or the object of the crush, but, you can always tell a safe adult about information like this.