

Lesson 4 for Grades 9-12

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—

This is the age where all the experiences that began with puberty accelerate rapidly as the teenager matures into a young adult. Self-consciousness deepens and matures. The world of “children” is now renounced. Teens believe in their immortality and may tend to be reckless in their behavior—in person and online. They may appear to reject authority to define their independence, in reality though, they rely on strength and support of parents and other influential adults. Feeling supported and understood is important for this age group, as is upholding boundaries while the reasoning portions of their brains continue to develop. Teens have a great deal of personal freedom. This freedom also puts them at risk in various ways. Parents and guardians expect teens to take care of themselves and to ask for the help that they need. Fortifying online boundaries and guidance with online behavior is needed.

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 9-12 Video links:

English 9 – 12: https://www.youtube.com/embed/eY_oua646oc

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

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 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.

Privacy—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.

Activity #3: Boundaries

Background: This activity involves providing boundary information, helping your child to work out how they would respond to the situation if they are confronted with it.

Note: Youth need to understand that there are significant differences between surprises and secrets, in addition to how privacy is incorporated into the conversation for both topics. The older we are, the more we consider elements of privacy in communication with others. However, they must know that if someone is trying to make them keep an unsafe secret, then they must tell a safe adult—which will involve having courage. When a youth knows the difference between unsafe secrets and safe surprises and that keeping a secret isn't OK, he/she is more likely to reveal boundary violations and/or abuse.

Discussion: Talk to youth about unsafe secrets.

Note: In this activity, it's important for you to acknowledge that there are adults and youth who do have good intentions, who attempt to make youth keep secrets without realizing that they might be dangerous. All types of secrets are dangerous because they might condition youth 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 youth who have already promised others to keep secrets, and they should not be made to feel guilty or ashamed about this.

- An unsafe secret is something that is intended to never be told. They're unsafe, especially when they have to do with our boundaries involving our bodies.
- You have a right to be safe, and for people to honor and respect your boundaries.
- When someone asks you to keep an unsafe secret, it can make you feel sad and scared, or uncomfortable. Sometimes they might even make you feel special or loved, because you might like the person who is asking you to keep a secret.
- Holding on to an unsafe 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.
- 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 or "swore you to secrecy". Sometimes the person might say that something is "confidential," which means the same thing as secret.
- 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 you or someone else.
- 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 stressful and may even involve an element of fear, 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)	Are fun (usually 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

Discussion: Ask your child the following questions, listen to their responses, gently correct if necessary, and explain the answers:

Ask: Have you ever thought about what personal boundaries are? What are they?

Answer: There are non-negotiable boundaries, such as the boundary safety rules, which include the fact that you have a right to be safe, and that no one is allowed to violate that right or touch you or your private parts, or make you feel uncomfortable—whether online or in person. Boundaries include figuring out what you do and don't like, what makes you comfortable vs. uncomfortable, what makes you feel fearful, and how you should be treated with respect.

Ask: Why are safety boundaries important?

Answer: They're important because they keep us safe, and they let us know that we have a right to be safe. ○ They also give us tools to communicate if we have a problem, if we're scared, or if we're uncomfortable.

Ask: What are secrets?

Answer: Secrets are pieces of information or actions that people don't want us to share, or that we are fearful of sharing.

Ask: How do we know how to identify secrets?

Answer: They're kept hidden and are meant to never be told. They keep other people in the dark, and can make us feel scared or uncomfortable, or sad. They also sometimes involve situations where someone might get into trouble if the secret is shared.

Ask: How do secrets relate to safety boundaries?

Answer: 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. Secrets are an important part of our boundary safety plan, because they impact our safety. When it comes to your safety and the boundary rules, it's not OK to keep secrets.

Ask: Can we keep little secrets?

Answer: If someone tells us that it's just a little secret and that it's OK to keep it, it's still not ok! We can keep surprises for a very short amount of time because we know we will eventually share the surprise, but must always tell unsafe secrets to our safe adults.

Ask: What if our best friend asks us to?

Answer: Sometimes our best friends might ask us to keep secrets, but even in those situations it isn't OK to keep them.

Ask: What if no one told us a secret, but we feel like we have a problem? Can we keep that a secret?

Answer: 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. We must also talk to our safe adults when we feel like we have a big or little problem. Problems are never meant to be kept silent or kept secret, because that is unsafe. Problems should always be shared with people who can help us, because we shouldn't carry heavy burdens on our own. (Give age-appropriate examples of sharing the load).

Ask: Are secrets and surprises the same thing?

Answer: No, sometimes they might look similar, but they aren't the same. Surprises are happy and joyful. They're temporary, and meant to be shared with others, like when we have a surprise party, or when we buy a special present for someone's birthday, or if we've made a special desert for someone because they did a good job. These can always be shared with safe adults.

Ask: What do we know about safe friends and safe adults?

Answer: Safe people won't hurt you without a good reason and won't intentionally confuse you (like digging into your finger to remove a splinter; it hurts, but it has to be done if there's a risk of infection). They listen to and consistently respect boundaries and follow the rules. If you have a problem or encounter a situation that violates the safety rules—or even just makes you feel uncomfortable, it is right to tell a safe adult about it. No one should ever ask you to keep unsafe touches a secret—even if the touch tickled or felt good. It's never OK for anyone to make you feel uncomfortable, or unsafe. You have a right to be safe!

Ask: What is privacy, and what is OK to keep private?

Answer: 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. We also keep other things private, such as our private parts, which we keep private underneath our clothing when we're in public.

Ask: Don't you also have a right to privacy regarding my boundaries? Where is the line? |

Answer: Yes, you do, but not when the information or situation it could hurt you or someone else. 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. In 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. 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 the following question, and take note of your child's answers: What are examples of situations that we must always share with safe adults?

Supply them with additional examples that would automatically prompt them to speak to a safe adult.

- If someone tries to touch or violate our private parts, or our friends' private parts.
- If someone gives you a gift and tells you not to tell or puts conditions on gifts.
- If someone says, "it's our little secret" when they tell you something important.
- If someone gives you something exclusive and says that you should keep it just between the two of you.
- If someone says mean things about a friend and tells you not to repeat it to anyone else.
- If someone tells you how a friend was hurt and asks you not to tell anyone else about it.