

## **VIRTUS: Safe Environment Children's Program**

### **Lesson 3 for Grades 9 through 12: Safety, Communication and Unconditional Love**

**Principle:** To identify risky behavior in adults. Specifically:

- Know the difference between unconditional love and love that has strings attached.
- Reinforce safety rules and set rules for what gifts from adults are appropriate for a child to accept.

**Catechism:** *Man is obliged to follow the moral law, which urges him "to do what is good and avoid what is evil"(cf. GS 16). This law makes itself heard in his conscience. #1713*

*"To love is to will the good of another."(cf. Mk 7:21) All other affections have their source in this first movement of the human heart toward the good. Only the good can be loved. Passions "are evil if love is evil and good if it is good." #1766*

**Goal:** To assist educators, catechists, youth ministers, and other caring adults in teaching children how to prevent or reduce the risk of sexual abuse.

**Objectives:** To give children an understanding of unconditional love and to know and learn that if someone puts conditions on their love, that is not the kind of love God intended for us. Upon completion of this lesson, children should be better able to understand that:

- love requires respecting others and ourselves.
- we are called to love others as God and Jesus loves us.
- if we are being hurt or treated disrespectfully we should tell a trusted adult.
- the keeping secrets rule is that only good surprises should be kept secret.
- there is a distinction between a gift given from love and generosity and one that is given in secrecy, in which the rules for keeping secrets have been broken.

#### **Activity #1: Opening Prayer:**

Loving God, we come before you today to ask for your guidance and wisdom so that we may know and do your will and walk with you each day. We offer these intentions as we begin our prayer together today.

Please respond: *Lord, hear our prayer.*

- For all students who suffer abuse; that they may feel God's loving arms enfold them and take away their pain, we pray to the Lord...

- For all those who harm students; that they may seek forgiveness and turn away from harming others, we pray to the Lord...
- For all parents and others who care about children and young people; that they learn how to protect them and make sure that they are safe from intentional harm, we pray to the Lord...
- For these and all the deepest intentions we hold in our hearts, we ask this in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

### **Activity #2: “Love is...” Discussion:**

When Jesus told us to “love God with all your heart” and to “love your neighbor as yourself,” he meant for us to show love unconditionally. That means that our neighbor does not have to do anything special - they don’t have to be deserving of our love.

1 Corinthians 13:4-7 gives us a good definition of what it means to love one another. Many couples select this reading when they celebrate the sacrament of marriage, but these qualities are not just qualities of marital or romantic love. Patience, kindness, humility, truthfulness, perseverance, dignity and respect for others are qualities of all right relationships. St. Paul’s words to the Corinthians provide us with a good means of evaluating our relationships with others; helping us to discern if we are making good choices in our actions toward others and helping us to steer clear of hurtful or abusive relationships.

Some signs of an abusive relationship are clear:

- When one person is hurtful to another
- When one person insists on his own way with little regard for the needs of others
- When one person degrades or humiliates others

Other signs of an abusive or controlling relationship are less clear, and in fact, some of the very same things that indicate that a relationship isn’t right can feel pretty good. We may feel flattered when someone expresses jealousy or is possessive of our time and attention. We may experience a sense of excitement in wrongdoing, or may feel arrogance and pride in gaining the attention of someone who seems unattainable or unapproachable. Unfortunately, a relationship built on these qualities is likely to be hurtful to one or more of the individuals involved. Jealousy and possessiveness can be a sign of a desire for control that can quickly turn into abusive behavior.

**Directions:** Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 and use the **handout by substituting “I am” for “Love is”**. Then try substituting the name of someone significant in your life to help determine if the relationship is really right for you.

**NOTE:** Remind the students that if they feel they are involved in an abusive relationship and they need help getting out of it, they should tell a trusted adult.

### **Activity # 3: Do You Know the Drill?:**

**Directions:** Using the handout, discuss the following: One of the reasons we feel so sure we would know what to do in a fire or a tornado is that we have a clear plan for safety in those situations. Not only do we have a plan but in the case of fire, we have practiced the plan over the years through drills. Many places have fire escapes and posted plans for us to follow. There are fire exits, alarms and extinguishers that are marked so they are easy for us to see. Sometimes we find ourselves in relationships or situations with other people that are not safe. Sometimes the escape plan is not so clear. One reason we don't have a clear escape plan is that the warning signs and the escape route isn't often posted for us to see and follow. Often we haven't stopped to think about a plan.

What is the risk? As teenagers, you are more likely to be a victim of sexual abuse, than you are to be injured by fire. Teens are also at a greater risk of becoming involved in a violent relationship, or becoming addicted to alcohol or drugs. So why don't we have a well rehearsed plan for those situations? Sometimes it is because those things are hard to talk about. Often it is because we do not think it could happen to us.

The fact of the matter is that if we have a plan for how to address risky situations, we are more likely to make choices that keep us safe.

Take some time to review the handout and think about what your plan would be in the different situations. Drill yourself so you are ready to act if you need to.

### **Suggested prayer to end the lesson:**

**Note to Teacher:** This prayer is a variation of an old Catholic traveler's prayer to be said before beginning a journey. Remind your students that life is a journey. Each time they leave their home and go out on their own or with peers, they are traveling. Prayer helps prepare them for each step of their journey and guides them along the way.

My holy Angel Guardian,  
Ask the Lord to bless the journey that I undertake,  
That it may benefit the health of my soul and body;  
That I may reach its end,  
And that, returning safe and sound,  
I may find my family in good health.  
Guard, guide and preserve us throughout the day and night.

Amen.