

Virtus® Touching Safety Program



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 of 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 are:

Year 1

- **Lesson 1: The Touching 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: Identifying Safe and Unsafe Friends**-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 5: Grooming**-Students learn about the types of behavior that may indicate that an adult is grooming the child or young person for something more than friendship. It also helps students learn to trust their own instincts about what is "okay" and what is "not okay."
- **Lesson 6: "No secrets"**-Reinforcing and building on the lessons from Year 2, this lesson deals with peer groups and other influences (including grooming by an abuser) that prevent children and young people from reporting inappropriate behavior. It also helps children and young people develop their own decision-making process to use in these situations.

Regardless of a child's grade level at the time the program is implemented, each child should participate in all six lessons during the three-year cycle.

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.

Each lesson for each age group includes the following:

- Instructions to help the teacher, catechist, or youth minister prepare to deliver the lesson.
- Helpful teaching support from the Catechism to give the teacher or catechist a framework for how to keep the lesson within the context of Church tradition and theology.
- A learning goal, including expected learning outcomes for students.
- An overview for creating a successful learning experience for the specific age group.
- Key vocabulary words and definitions that apply to the lesson. These words empower children and young people with the distinctions they need to help recognize inappropriate behavior by those with whom they interact.
- Suggested activities, with instructions (and appropriate handouts for students as needed).

- A closing group prayer that reflects the key message of the lesson.

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. Additionally, a new set of introductory videos has been developed to make it easier and more comfortable for teachers and catechists to present the lessons to students.

The Purpose of the Introductory Videos:

Child sexual abuse is a sensitive topic. And, although the *Touching Safety* program lessons include activities that are simple and fun, it is not easy for some adults to initiate a preliminary discussion about sexual abuse. Even those who feel comfortable talking with their own children about these issues may find it challenging to talk about this subject matter in a classroom full of children or teenagers.

The new *Touching Safety* program video introductions are intended to relieve trainers of the responsibility for "breaking the ice" on this sensitive subject matter. The presenter on the video opens the discussion, covers some basic issues, and allows the "live" trainer to use the activities and supplemental materials in the lesson plans to engage children and young people in meaningful discussions about recognizing and avoiding unsafe behaviors. So, while the video lays the groundwork, the trainer uses the activities to help students apply the message from the lessons to their daily lives.

Each video introduction is approximately six to seven minutes long. In each age-appropriate video, a presenter will speak directly to children or young people about the purpose of the program and the goals for the lesson, as well as what the children can expect from the activities and discussion. The presenter will introduce the touching safety rules and the concepts of "safe" and "unsafe" friends and adults, and provide some basic facts, vocabulary words, definitions, and discussion points that will be further developed through the activities and supplemental materials provided in the "live" portion of the training.

Three different age-appropriate videos are available-one each for:

- Grades K through 5 (this video is used to introduce both the Grade K-2 lessons and the Grade 3-5 lessons)
- Grades 6 through 8
- Grades 9 through 12

Also, the videos are available in English and Spanish language versions. And, all Spanish videos were written and produced as Spanish language presentations, and not merely as voice over translations or subtitles.