

**Intermediate Level, Grades 3, 4, 5 (ages 8 to 11 years)**

**Year Three: Grooming—Recognizing risky adult behavior—Teacher Planning and Preparation**

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**Getting started with Lesson:**

- Principle:** To identify grooming behaviors of potential abusers. Specifically:
- 1) Adults that give gifts without permission and then instruct the child not to tell anyone about the gift or where they got it, and
  - 2) Emphasize to children when to refuse to go where an adult is trying to take them and when to refuse to do what an adult asks you to do.
- Goal:** To assist children in recognizing the risky, frightening, or confusing behaviors that adults exhibit, and to teach children how to trust their own instincts and resist the overtures of a potential molester.
- Objectives:** To give children the ability to begin to identify and define adult behaviors that indicate that the person wants more than friendship in the relationship and to trust their own instincts about what is “okay” and what is “not okay.” The goal is not to teach them all of the warning signs but to concentrate on two specific areas: 1) an adult who gives gifts without permission and instructs the child not to tell and 2) respecting their own instincts when adults’ requests make them feel uncomfortable or are confusing. The specific learning goals are:
- Children learning to distinguish between a gift given from love and generosity and one that is given as an attempt to trap them in a cycle of secrecy.
  - Children learning that they can say “no” when they feel uncomfortable or confused by how an older person is acting—even if the older person is someone they love and trust.
  - Children learning that they should not go with or meet alone with an adult in an isolated or out-of-the-way area where no one else is around.
  - Children learning that they can speak up and tell a trusted adult when someone’s behavior makes them feel uncomfortable or uneasy.

**Dealing with the intermediate age: “Energy” is the key concept<sup>1</sup>**

These children are away from home more often and need to start recognizing that safety issues can arise when they are off with friends or at other events and places. Many parenting resources refer to this age group as “tweens” because they are no longer small children but they are not yet teens. The group is often Internet savvy and participates in online activities in ways that make them particularly vulnerable to Internet child predators.

These children like to be in constant motion and are always on the go. Groups are important. This is the “gang” age when children spend most of their time with groups of friends of the same sex. It is also a time when participation in team sports flourish. Capable of intense loyalty to others, they usually have a best friend to confide in. They can talk through problems and can think through their past actions to find a justification for their behavior. For example, they will have explanations and justifications for being late, not completing homework, still being on

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<sup>1</sup> DeBord, K. (1996). “*Childhood Years: Ages six through twelve.*” Raleigh, NC: North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service.

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the phone after lights out, etc. They also will take time to search for the information they need to resolve some question for themselves, and they are capable of developing plans and setting goals.

Although truthful about big things, they are less so about the smaller things, often making up alibis or shifting the blame to others. They have a strong sense of right and wrong or fair or unfair. They can argue and hold strong debates. Caregivers can be more effective when dealing with this age by including them in the discussion while establishing rules or guidelines.

The best approach to this age group is through non-competitive games in which the children can establish individual goals. At this age, more explanation is necessary when rules are given. Children need to begin to learn to trust their own ability to make decisions. Therefore, criticism should be designed to teach. For example, when something goes wrong or does not turn out the way that the child wanted, rather than tell the child what went wrong or how to do it differently, ask, "how could you do that differently next time?" Let the child begin to think through and reason out solutions.

**Vocabulary words:**

- Confusing — To cause to be unable to think clearly, to make unclear or incomprehensible.<sup>2</sup>
- Secrets — Something that is hidden from others or that is known only to one or to a few.<sup>3</sup>
- Secluded — Kept apart from social contact with other people, hidden from view.<sup>4</sup>
- Surprise— Something that leaves a person feeling wonder, astonishment, or amazement, as at something unanticipated.<sup>5</sup>
- Tattle— To gossip about another by revealing their plans or activities in a sensational way or spreading rumors about another person.<sup>6</sup>
- Uncomfortable — Experiencing physical discomfort that leaves one ill at ease or uneasy, sometimes causing anxiety.

**Supplemental Resource Material for Teachers**

The grooming process employed by a child molester is three-pronged. The process may take months, or even years to accomplish, but child molesters are patient and willing to wait for what they want.

The three aspects of grooming are *physical grooming*, *psychological grooming*, and *community grooming*. All three are components of the process and they can all occur simultaneously.

*Physical grooming* involves touch. It can begin with a simple pat on the back or the arm—a completely acceptable way of touching. However, over time the touching becomes more and more intimate until it crosses a line and becomes sexual abuse. Molesters will try to convince the child or parent that the touch was accidental at first. As time progresses, however, the contact becomes increasingly inappropriate although the child may not realize what is happening.

At the same time the *physical grooming* is progressing, the molester initiates the *psychological grooming* process. This process also begins with acceptable interactions. For example, a molester may talk to children about what

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<sup>2</sup> WordNet ® 2.0, © 2003 Princeton University

<sup>3</sup> The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition Copyright © 2000 by Houghton Mifflin Company.

<sup>4</sup> Id.

<sup>5</sup> Id.

<sup>6</sup> Id.

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they are interested in, which is a valuable technique used by youth ministers and others as they get to know young people in order to develop appropriate ministerial relationships. Clearly, it is important to talk to children on their level. They communicate with children in a way that children understand—a valuable characteristic of good teachers. However, the intentions of the molester are quite different than those of good people engaged in ministry. The child molester will use these activities to begin to insert themselves into a child's life and drive a wedge between the child and the parent.

Over time the child molester creates a sense of dependence in the child by developing this "special" relationship—and the child enjoys it at first but eventually the child experiences feelings of being trapped. During this time, the molester employs many of the techniques listed below to break down the child's resistance and build up his or her dependence. If, at any time, the child threatens to tell, the molester may threaten to harm something or someone that the child loves. The molester may also persuade the child that parents will blame the child or refuse to believe the child. These psychological techniques leave the child conflicted, helpless, and dependent and, unfortunately, more bonded to the molester.

While applying the physical and psychological grooming methods, the molester is also grooming the *community*. The molester is developing relationships with the parents and other adults within the community and convincing them that he or she genuinely cares about children and is looking out for their best interest. Generally, the community comes to associate the molester with having special insight into children and as someone to be trusted. When a child accuses the molester, or when the molester is caught abusing a child, the community may react with outrage, not at the molester, but at the accuser because the accusations seem so inconceivable.

There are behaviors that indicate when someone is a potential risk of harm to children. Through the examination of over 500 cases of child sexual abuse and interviews with many convicted offenders, we have identified some of these specific behavioral indicators. Although none of these warning signs is *proof* that the adult is a child molester, any of these signs warrants intervention to interrupt the behavior.

Some of the warning signs are indicative of an individual who presents potential risk of harm to children are:

1. *Always wants to be alone with children.* This person discourages other adults from participating and structures their interaction with children at times and in locations that cannot be monitored. The key words here are "always" and "wants." This is someone who manipulates people and situations to make it appear as if the adult is merely helping out in difficult situations or to ensure that the job with opportunities for seclusion comes to him or her.
2. *More excited to be with children than adults.* This person always prefers the company of children to that of adults. He or she always offers to stay with the children and gravitates towards groups of children even when other adults are present.
3. *Give gifts to children, often without permission.* The gifts may be as simple as candy or soda that parents won't allow, or as expensive as an MP3 player or expensive shoes. It is inappropriate for any adults to give gifts to children, in turn, asking the child to keep the gift a secret—even grandparents, aunts, uncles, and others known and trusted by the children and their parents.
4. *Goes overboard touching children—particularly wrestling and tickling them.* Adults who use games and other seemingly harmless activities to get their hands on children in potentially intimate ways are behaving in an inappropriate and risky manner. Regardless of the intention of the interaction, this type of behavior conditions children to accept inappropriate behavior from the adults in their lives and conditions the community to accept this kind of behavior between adults and children. Therefore, children become much more vulnerable to potential child molesters.

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Distinguishing between appropriate and inappropriate touch is important because studies show that children thrive with physical contact and affection. Touch that is public, appropriate, and non-sexual—PAN—is good for children and should be encouraged.

5. *Allows a child to engage in activities that parents would not allow.* Obvious behaviors include doing drugs, smoking, or drinking. However, an adult who permits a child to do anything that parents have forbidden is behaving inappropriately. Other activities parents might not permit include video games, certain kinds of music, online chat rooms, movies with a particular rating, junk food, etc. Allowing children to do these things without the permission of the parent reinforces a culture of secrecy between the adult and the child being groomed and drives a wedge between the child and their parent(s).

Child molesters say that children who have had trouble with parents and/or guardians in the past are more vulnerable to victimization. The molesters think that these children are less likely to be believed by parents if they report the abuse. Therefore, this is one of the groups molesters consider to be most available to them.

6. *Thinks the rules do not apply to them.* This might be as simple as consistently ignoring or violating parish or school policies and procedures. However, these adults also do not think that society's rules apply to them. Remember, they think that it is okay to have sex with children. Therefore, this warning sign can manifest itself in many different ways.
7. *Uses bad language, tells dirty jokes, and shows children pornography and other "dirty" magazines.* Although this is not something other adults are able to observe, this action will often manifest itself in the young child's language and behavior. In addition, educating our children about the inappropriateness of sexually explicit material is important—as well as letting them know that if someone else shows it to them, the child will not be in trouble just for seeing the pictures.

Knowing the warning signs means that we can recognize the behaviors that indicate a child is or children are at risk. These are the early warning signs of a potentially inappropriate relationship with a child.

Trust is key to the grooming process. Because of this, child molesters learn how to manipulate children and adults into accepting their behavior as "normal," thus convincing others that they are completely trustworthy. Their lives are carefully crafted to appear proper, because they know the importance of public perception.

One of the difficulties in dealing with the grooming process is that grooming almost always involves pleasure for the victim. Children want what they want and the molester is willing to give them what they want. The pain and trauma of child sexual abuse disrupts the pleasure and it also confuses the victim. Children don't know what is actually happening or how they should respond.

However, the grooming process is complex. There are many warning signs that someone's behavior indicates that they are a potential risk of harm to children. It is unrealistic and unproductive to try to teach young children all these warning signs at once. So, these lessons are designed to focus on two of the signs to which most children can relate—*gives gifts without permission* and *asks the children not to tell and removes children from the community environment to meet with them in a secluded area or allows them to do things their parents would not allow*. Concentrating on these two warning signs will reinforce the message from parents and others about stranger danger as well as expanding the child's ability to recognize risks that arise and trust their own instincts about those risks or discomforts.

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**Also incorporate the following behaviors:**

**a. Communicate your concerns**

When we see something that causes us concern or makes us feel uneasy, it is sometimes difficult to find the "right words" to use when we report our concerns. If you tell someone that you are concerned about his or her behavior, but you are not able to clearly describe the behavior, you are putting the other person in an uncomfortable position and likely, will make him or her angry. Before having such a conversation, think through the message that you want to communicate. Make sure you can explain to the person:

- Exactly what you saw;
- The reasons you were concerned; and,
- If you are talking directly with the person involved, let the person know why you are bringing this issue to him or her directly, instead of reporting it to a supervisor.

Communicating a concern is not an accusation of wrongdoing. Rather, it is an opportunity to allow someone to see a reflection of how he or she appears to others. By thinking through your communication and being sure about what you want to communicate, you can ensure that your message is clear and unambiguous.

**b. Create a context or framework for the conversation.**

It is quite likely that the person involved will become offended and/or upset upon hearing that you are concerned about his or her behavior with children. While it is impossible to guarantee that someone will not get upset or not be offended, it is possible to minimize the risk of that reaction by creating a framework or context for having the conversation.

Any time you are getting ready to have a serious conversation, it is important to begin by talking about *why* the conversation is necessary. When people understand that the reason you bring up an issue is actually because of your concern for them, they may be able to hear what you say as a *contribution* rather than a *condemnation*.

Creating a context or framework for the conversation might include explaining that after participating in a Protecting God's Children® awareness session, you realized how important it is for all of us to monitor our own behavior, as well as the behavior of others around us who interact with children. You might tell the other person that you have made some changes to your own behavior and that you have observed them engaging in certain behaviors that others might interpret as a warning sign ... and that is the reason for having the conversation.

Take the time to establish the framework for the conversation. Let the person know that you are not accusing him or her of anything. Assure the person that you believe he or she has only the best of intentions, and that your fear is that he or she is engaging in certain behaviors without the proper consideration, and that others may see those behaviors as risky and jump to the wrong conclusions. Describe the specific behavior that is questionable and encourage the person to find another way to accomplish the ministry goal that the behavior is intended to achieve.

Let the person know that you are willing to work with them to find a more appropriate way to get the job done. Make sure that he or she knows that you came directly to the individual involved because of respect and a desire to resolve this issue as quickly as possible. Let the adult know that you are committed to both the safety of children and the well-being and safety of the adults who work with them.

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**c. Invite others to monitor you**

Make a commitment to model appropriate behavior by letting everyone know that you are inviting them to monitor you and to advise you if they see something inappropriate or questionable in your behavior. One way to deal with this is to make an announcement in a staff meeting. State that you are committed to raising your awareness about the warning signs of potential child molesters and that you recognize that some of them are things you have never previously considered as risky behaviors and you might be doing them unknowingly. Ask others to pay attention when they see you interacting with children and young people and to let you know if anything seems inappropriate so that you can take immediate action to correct any behavior that raises concerns.

This proactive step opens the door for each and every person to begin to achieve greater awareness of the risky behaviors in which adults can engage with children and to create an environment of support among teachers and other volunteers. Paying attention to each other is a great way to practice both noticing the adults within an environment and looking for the warning signs of potential abusers.

**d. Pay attention to the response**

Once you have communicated your concern, it is important to notice what happens next. If the person changes his or her behavior and eliminates the risky situations, then you know that this person had no intention to do harm. However, if nothing changes, you must speak to the supervisor or, if you have already communicated with the supervisor, to the next person in the chain of responsibility. One of the primary reasons for communicating concerns is to give the adult whose behavior is risky a chance to change. If that does not happen, the adults' intentions are suspect and should be treated as such. It may also be that a supervisor who was advised of the concern did nothing to intervene in or to correct the situation. Although this does not mean that the person whose behavior is questionable has "bad" intentions, the supervisor's inaction needs to be dealt with by his or her supervisor.

Ultimately it is important to realize that communicating a concern means more than telling someone. It also means continuing to observe the person and paying attention to the response to the concern. The welfare of our children is the motivating force for all of these actions. When we are observant and can protect children *before* harm occurs, we not only protect the children from trauma, but also from having to experience something that compromises their innocence.

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Play the introductory video to begin the lesson.

**Activity #1:** Classroom Discussion — Adults who give gifts without permission and tell you not to tell your parents or guardians.

**Activity #2** Classroom Discussion — Invitations from adults and others that make them feel uneasy or uncomfortable.

**Activity #3:** Word Search.

**Supplies:**  
Opening Video  
Prayer Handout/Poster  
Video Player and TV  
Boom box or CD player

**Activity #1:** Classroom Discussion — Adults who give gifts without permission and tell you not to tell your parents or guardians.

**“Everyone likes to get gifts! We look forward to birthday parties and Christmas and any other occasion when our parents, friends, and members of the family give us special gifts.”**

**“What are some reasons why gifts are given?”**

**NOTE: Let the young people talk about this.**

**Points to make:**

- There are “events” and “special occasions” when they get gifts from people other than parents and family, but for the most part these are unusual and public. The gifts are given in front of others or with the permission of parents.
- Gifts are an opportunity to recognize something special or to acknowledge something such as recognition of an accomplishment or an acknowledgment of the completion of something.
- Sometimes gifts are given to “get something” from the recipient. For example, the gift may be used as a bribe or an incentive to get you to do something you don’t want to do or are uncomfortable doing. The gift may be a way the person gets you to do what they want—even if you don’t want to do it.

**“What kind of gifts might we get from people other than our parents or members of the family?”**

**“Sometimes gifts come in boxes with wrapping paper and ribbon. Other gifts are not wrapped in pretty paper and topped with a colored ribbon.”**

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**Points to make:**

- Sometimes gifts can be expensive and sometimes they can be simple.
- It is the intention behind the giving of the gift that must be clarified.
- Gifts from parents, family members, and friends that recognize special occasions or acknowledge accomplishments are great and should be cherished and appreciated. However, these gifts are never given in secret on the condition that parents and guardians are not to be informed.
- At a birthday party or at Christmas time we may get gifts from lots of different people.
- A Youth Minister or teacher may present you with a gift acknowledging a major accomplishment.
- Graduation is one of the times that gifts come from friends other than our parents and family and so are first communion and confirmation.
- Companies and sports teams often give gifts to people for promotional purposes. For example, the first 100 people at the opening game of the local professional baseball or basketball team get a ball cap or a new bat or everyone who comes to opening day of the new store gets a free CD, or a store has a "buy one, get one free" promotion.

**"Do people ever give you a gift and tell you to keep it a secret?"**

- Sometimes grandparents and/or aunts and uncles give gifts and tell children to keep it a secret. Teachers need to reinforce the message that keeping secrets about gifts is wrong even if the child thinks that the parents will be upset about the gift or may ask them to give the gift back.

**"Why would someone do that?"**

- Sometimes grandparents are frustrated by parents' rules about gifts or that they realize that they are going overboard and want to keep from making parents mad.
- People can use this as a way to come between you and your parents.

**"How does that make you feel?"**

- Keeping secrets about things that you know your parents would want to know creates distance between you and them. Even if they are standing beside you, it feels like they are far away because you are keeping an important secret.
- It might not seem like a big deal but think about how it makes you feel when your friends keep a secret from you. It makes you feel like you are an outsider and it hurts your feelings. Perhaps parents feel this too.

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**“What would be a “good” purpose or intention for someone asking that you keep a gift a secret from parents or guardians?”**

**Points to make:** It is important that this discussion clarify the difference between gifts that are appropriate expressions of love and friendship and those that are tools for manipulation and control. Key points to make in the discussion include:

- Someone who lets you do things that your parents would not allow you to do without getting permission or gives you gifts that your parents do not know about is not a friend. Their interests are not the same as yours and their actions should always be suspect. Even though it may seem harmless to you—after all, *you* just disagreed with your parents about this issue—the intentions of the adult involved may be very different than you think. This person does not deserve your trust.
- Remember from earlier lessons that “safe friends” are those that respect your wishes and the wishes and rules of your parents, guardians and caretakers when it comes to these kinds of issues.
- When someone suggests that you can do something that you think your parents would not allow or to accept a gift you are unsure about, tell the person that first you need to call and check in with your parents. If the adult objects, tries to talk you out of doing that, or leaves you with the idea that it can be your own “secret,” be wary of that person.

**Activity #2: Class Discussion — Invitations from adults and others that make them feel uneasy or uncomfortable.**

NOTE TO TEACHER: The point of this discussion is to build on the discussion from the previous lesson to empower young people to trust their own instincts and to avoid going anywhere—particularly to an isolated area—alone with another adult. Also, remind students that they have the right to say “no” and to tell another person when someone approaches them to go somewhere they know that they are not allowed to go or to go to an isolated area.

Ask the students about invitations from adults and others that make them feel uneasy or uncomfortable. Give some examples of how this might happen and invite the students to discuss how they might deal with these situations.

- A teacher invites you into the teacher’s lounge when others are not around.
- An adult who volunteers with the youth group asks you to come *alone* with him or her to a remote part of the building to help load or unload something.
- A bus driver offers to take you to a drive-in restaurant after school for that smoothie you’ve been wanting as soon as he or she drops off the other riders.
- A coach asks you to stay late after everyone else is gone home for some individual instruction.
- A religious education teacher offers to give you a ride home every week after class.

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- A friend of your parents always seems to want to touch you. This person pats you on the back, pulls you into hugs, and touches your arms, your hands and your head every time you are within reach.

**Points to make:**

- Students can say “no” when they feel uncomfortable or confused by how an older person is acting—even if the older person is someone they love and trust.
- Students should not go with or meet alone with an adult in an isolated or out-of-the-way area where no one else is around.
- Students need to speak up and tell a trusted adult when someone’s behavior makes them feel uncomfortable or uneasy.
- It is sometimes hard to identify the problem. Is a person safe or is a person just a little too touchy-feely? The point is that the student’s comfort is the determining factor, not the intentions of the other person. If one doesn’t feel comfortable, speak up. If they don’t listen or respect the student’s wishes, they should tell the first trusted adult they see and get as far away as possible.
- Trust your instincts. When something does not feel right, take action to protect yourself from harm.

**Activity #3: Word Search**

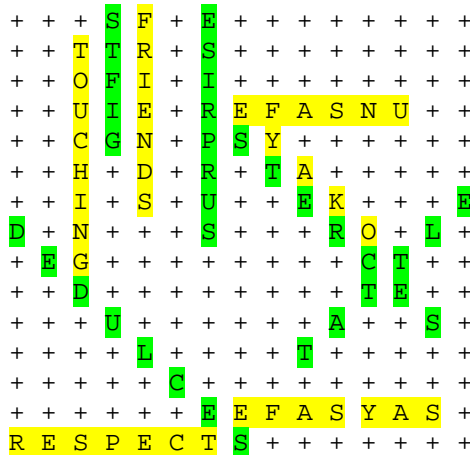
**Directions:** Hand out the word puzzle and explain the instructions to the children. Children are instructed to find the words on the list that are related to the topic of “Touching Safety,” and to circle each of those words. Each word will be in a straight line, but it may be written vertically (up and down), horizontally (left and right), diagonally (at an angle), and either forward, backward, or upside down (see the example, below).

**Example:** Find the following words in the puzzle below and draw a circle around the word or color it with a highlighter. The words are spelled out correctly in a straight line. There are no spaces between letters or between words in two-word phrases (For example, “SAY NO” will appear as “SAYNO”). However, words may be upside down, backwards or at an angle. Some letters may be used by multiple words.

**Word Puzzle Solution:**

FRIENDS	SECLUDED
GIFTS	SECRETS
OKAY	SURPRISE
RESPECT	TATTLE
SAFE	TOUCHING
SAY	UNSAFE

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**Prayer to end the lesson**

*(Have this prayer on a poster on the wall and as a handout for the students to pray along with you and then take home with them. It is a variation of an Old Catholic Traveler’s Prayer to be said before beginning the journey. Remind the students that as they grow up, they are on a kind of journey through life. Each time they leave their own home or their own room to go out on their own, they are traveling. Prayer can help prepare them for the journey and guide 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.

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<http://www.virtus.org/virtus/pgc-Parent-Handbook 05-03.pdf> retrieved March 5, 2004.