

Growing in Love Update: Grade 6

Chapter 1: Life from Love

Theme: Mental and emotional health

Essential: When children are abused sexually, physically, or emotionally, they often feel two things at once. They may wonder, “Why is this person who loves me and who I love doing something that I know is wrong?” Teaching children to ask for help when they feel mixed up or confused feelings is an important step in identifying and stopping abuse. We must also assist children in creating their own personal “safety net” of people to whom they can turn with questions about feelings. When problem-solving with children about how to manage feelings, asking for help should always be one of the best responses.

Lesson:

1. During the discussion on T p. 9 ask the students, “Have any of you ever felt two emotions at the same time?” Ask for examples. If students don’t come up with their own examples, use the following:
 - Has anyone ever moved to a new place and been both excited and nervous at the same time?
 - Have you ever been excited to join a new sports team, yet also worried that you might not be very good?
 - Have you ever been asked to do something that sounded like a lot of fun, but that you knew your parents wouldn’t approve of?

Feeling two emotions at once can be tricky! In situations where you have a choice, how do you decide whether to go ahead or stop, and what are some options? (*stop and think, make an excuse to get more time, pay attention to your “gut” feelings, weigh the pros and cons, think about the worst thing that could happen*)?

2. Let students know that they don’t always have to figure things out on their own. Many supportive adults around you can be helpful; in fact, you may find that an adult close to you has experienced something similar to what you are going through. If the first person you ask for help is not helpful, try someone else, but don’t give up. As a class, ask students to name people they would feel comfortable asking for help with problems, including feelings. Next, give each student an index card. Ask students to imagine a problem that is very personal, such as one that has to do with sex, or a personal relationship, or a secret that troubles them. Ask each student to write down the names of at least 3 people they could ask for help with such a problem. Let students know that you will not be collecting the cards; instead, they should keep the cards with them and give additional thought to the names on the list. Remind students that they can always call 911 if they are concerned that someone, including themselves, has been hurt or abused.

Growing in Love Grade 6

Chapter 2: Covenant of Love

Theme: Trust

Essential: Children are taught to trust adults, yet, sadly, some adults take advantage of this trust. Children should understand that trust never means having to accept or go along with something that they know or suspect may be wrong.

Lesson:

1. During the discussion of trust and loyalty on pp. 12-13 ask the students, “Can you think of a secret that is never a good idea to keep (*a secret about touch*)?”
2. Tell students that trust is an important part of all human relationships yet, sadly, sometimes kids and even adults can misuse or abuse your trust. Trust never means having to accept or go along with something that you know or suspect is wrong. Explain that sometimes it is okay to question or say “no” to what is being asked of you, even if the person making the request has always been very trustworthy in the past. This is true even if the person is in a position of authority, such as a parent, babysitter, coach, teacher, or priest. If you feel uncomfortable with a request or direction, consider going to a helpful adult to talk about your concerns and options. Use this exercise as an example: If I told you to take all of that paint over there and pour it on the floor (or something equally absurd), would you do it? (*No*). If your babysitter ordered you to eat all 26 cookies in the cookie jar, would you do it? (*No*) If, at the end of a school day, a grownup said that your parent has asked them to drive you home; this person looked familiar, but you didn’t really know him/her. Would it be a good idea to go with them? (*No*) If your parent told you to go outside in the snow without any shoes on, would you do it? Why not? (*You might think they weren’t feeling well for giving such poor advice, so it would be a good idea to seek some help*).

Growing in Love Grade 6

Chapter 3: Christian Love

Theme: Sexual abuse

Essential: The ability for a child to say “no” when confronted with inappropriate touch is greatly compromised in situations where the offender is someone they love and trust, as is the case for over 90% of sex offenses. Experts in child development believe that children are developmentally incapable – physically, emotionally, and psychologically – of asserting themselves against an older child or adult who might try to abuse them¹. From a young age children are taught to “obey” those who are in charge of their care. In addition, many offenders are very skilled at leading children to believe that they were voluntary participants in the abuse. Adolescents and pre-adolescents may be at particularly high risk for abuse due to their strong need for acceptance and belonging. Sadly, victims of abuse often feel shame or guilt that they were somehow responsible for their suffering because they did not say “no” or because they “allowed” someone to touch their private parts. For these reasons, we should be careful to balance the lesson that children have the **right** to say no to ANY kind of touch (versus that they *should* or *must* say no), with the message that this can be very hard to do and is sometimes not safe to do. A helpful guideline for children to learn is that adults and teenagers should never ask kids to keep secrets about touching or looking at their bodies. Students should also learn the importance of asking for help.

Lesson:

1. After reading the text on T p. 25, define sexual abuse. Note that sexual abuse is not limited to contact experiences, but may also include showing a child pornography, obscene phone calls, and exposure to other sexual material.
2. Say, “While our conscience and feelings can guide us towards knowing what is right and wrong, there are also some basic guidelines that we can follow:”
 - Your body belongs to you. You have the right to refuse any kind of touch.
 - Touching should never be a secret. If someone tells you to keep a secret, or if you sense or know that someone would be in trouble if you told, you may be being mistreated or abused.
 - Abuse doesn’t always feel bad at the time when it happens. Some adults are very good at convincing children and teens into believing that what they are doing is perfectly okay. Note that healthy adults are sexually attracted to persons their own age.

¹ Louiselle, C. & Gaulin, D. (2000). *Care for Kids Early Childhood Sexuality and Abuse Prevention Program*. Ontario, Canada: Leeds, Grenville, and Lanark Health District Unit.

- A child or teen is not at fault if an adult convinces or tricks them into sexual activity.
 - If you think you may have been abused or mistreated, asking for help can promote healing and may also protect others from abuse.
3. Read the third story titled, “What if…” (p.26) in No More Secrets for Me by Oralee Wachter. Begin your discussion with the following questions:
- Did you ever like a person, and yet not like what they were doing?
 - What would you do if someone you liked tried to talk you into doing something you weren’t comfortable with, or that you knew was wrong?
 - What if the person said there was nothing wrong with what he was asking? Do you have to believe him just because he was older, or bigger than you?
4. Review the following “warning signs:”
- An adult or older teen who acts more like a peer (tells dirty jokes, shows you adult magazines)
 - An adult or older teen who spends all his/her free time with children/teens
 - An adult or older teen (3 or more years) who compliments you on your body development
 - An adult or much older teen (3 or more years) who expresses romantic interest in you
 - Anyone who asks you to keep a secret about touching or looking at your/their body
5. Remind students of the support system activity they completed in Chapter 1. Suggest that they take another look at the names they wrote on their index card and consider whether they would feel safe asking those people for help in the event that they were involved in an abusive situation.

Family Resource

Growing in Love: Grade 6

Lesson 1 – Mental and Emotional Health

When children are abused sexually, physically, or emotionally, they often feel two things at once. They may wonder, “Why is this person who loves me and who I love doing something that I know is wrong?” Teaching children to ask for help when they feel mixed up or confused feelings is an important step in identifying and stopping abuse. We must also assist children in creating their own personal “safety net” of people to whom they can turn with questions about feelings, their body and privacy. When problem-solving with children about how to manage feelings, asking for help should always be one of the best responses.

Lesson Summary

- It is possible to feel two things at once.
- Strategies for problem-solving when feeling uncertain or confused (*stop and think, make an excuse to get more time, pay attention to your “gut” feelings, weigh the pros and cons, think about the worst thing that could happen*)
- Get help from a trusted adult when you feel confused or have questions about your body or privacy.

Home Activity

When you suspect that your child feels uncertain about something, help them express those feelings with words. When the child shares, listen first and then ask what the child thinks he/she should do about the problem. Then you might ask if the child would like to hear what you think about the matter. Similarly, the next time you feel confused or uncertain, verbalize your mixed feelings in front of your child. Example: “I’m happy you have a good friend who wants to invite you to a sleepover, but I’m also worried that I’ve never met her parents, and she lives so far away.” Children learn how to communicate from their parents. A child who expresses thoughts and feelings through words rather than through actions is more likely to let you know – with words - when something is wrong.

Family Resource

Growing in Love: Grade 6

Lesson 2 – Trust

Children are taught to trust adults, yet, sadly, some adults take advantage of this trust. Children should understand that trust never means accepting or going along with something that they know or suspect is wrong.

Lesson Summary

- Touching should never be a secret.
- Trust never means accepting or going along with something that you know or suspect is wrong.
- Sometimes it is okay to question or say no to what is being asked of you.

Home Activity

All families have rules, and many family rules are non-negotiable. However, if your child does question a rule, take time to review why the rule is important. The most important family rules often involve safety (ex. “Don’t open the door if you don’t know who it is”). Others involve respect (“Say please and thank you”). Let your child know that **rules of safety always come before rules of respect**. If someone asks or tells them to do something that makes them feel uncomfortable or unsafe, it is okay to say no, or to make an excuse such as “I’d better ask mom first.” This is true even when the direction is given by an authority figure.

Family Resource

Growing in Love: Grade 6

Lesson 3 – Sexual Abuse

The ability for a child to say “no” when faced with inappropriate touch is very difficult when the offender is someone they love and trust, as is the case for over 90% of sex offenses. Experts in child development believe that children are developmentally incapable – physically, emotionally, and psychologically – of asserting themselves against an older child or adult who might try to abuse them². From a young age children are taught to “obey” those who are in charge of their care. In addition, many offenders are very skilled at leading children to believe that they were willingly taking part in the abuse. Teenagers and preteens may be at particularly high risk for abuse due to their strong need for acceptance and belonging. Sadly, victims of abuse often feel shame or guilt that they were somehow responsible for their suffering because they did not say “no” or because they “allowed” someone to touch their private parts. For these reasons, we should be careful to balance the lesson that children have the **right** to say no to ANY kind of touch (versus that they *should* or *must* say no), with the message that this can be very hard to do and is sometimes not safe to do. Children should also learn how and who to ask for help.

Lesson Summary

- Sexual abuse is not limited to inappropriate touch; it may also include obscene phone calls, child pornography, and exposure to other sexual material.
- While our conscience and feelings can guide us towards knowing right from wrong, the following are some basic guidelines to follow:
 - Your body belongs to you. You have the right to refuse any kind of touch.
 - Touching should never be a secret.
 - Abuse doesn’t always feel bad at the time when it happens. Some adults are very good at convincing children and teens into believing that what they are doing is perfectly okay. Note that healthy adults are sexually attracted to other *adults*.
 - A child or teen is not at fault if an adult convinces or tricks them into sexual activity.
 - Asking for help can promote healing and may also protect others from being abused.
- Warning signs that someone may be a predator:
 - An adult or older teen who acts more like a peer (tells dirty jokes, shows you adult magazines).
 - An adult or older teen that spends all his/her free time with children/teens.
 - An adult or older teen (3 or more years) who compliments you on your body development.
 - An adult or much older teen (3 or more years) who expresses romantic interest in you.

² Louiselle, C. & Gaulin, D. (2000). *Care for Kids Early Childhood Sexuality and Abuse Prevention Program*. Ontario, Canada: Leeds, Grenville, and Lanark Health District Unit.

- Anyone who asks you to keep a secret about touching.

Home Activity

Review with your child the lessons learned in class. If your child sees or hears news stories about children their age who have been sexually assaulted or abused, help them understand that while most grownups and older kids can be trusted, some have problems with touching and body privacy. Remind them that touching should never be a secret and that abuse is never the child's fault.

