

Growing in Love: Grade 7

Chapter 2: Real Love

Theme: Touching safety

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. Sadly, victims of abuse often feel shame or guilt that they were somehow responsible for their suffering because they did not say “no”. 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. One helpful rule for children to learn is the rule that touching should not be a secret. We also need to teach students the importance of asking for help and help them identify who to ask.

Vocabulary: abuse

Lesson:

1. Add to TE p. 19. Define the word **abuse**. Be certain to communicate that sexual abuse is not only touching, it can be showing a child sexual pictures, taking pictures of a child with no clothes on, asking a child to touch an older child or grownup’s private parts (penis, vulva, bottom, breasts).
2. Review the following guidelines for safety:
 - Your body is your own; it is okay to say “no” to ANY kind of touch.
 - Touching is never a secret.
 - When feeling mixed-up or uncertain about something, the best thing to do is to ask for help
 - Abuse is NEVER the child’s/teen’s fault, even if the s/he didn’t say “no”.
 - Trust your feelings and ask for help if a situation feels uncomfortable.
 - Your family, your friends, and your church want to help you.
3. Read and discuss the fourth story in **No More Secrets for Me** by Oralee Wachter and Jane Aaron, Illustrator. Use the following questions to begin your discussion:

¹ Loiselle, C., Gaulin, D. (2000). *The Care for Kids Early Sexuality Education Program*. Canada: The Leeds, Grenville and Lanark District Health Unit.

- Do you know the difference between when to tell a secret and when to keep it?
 - Is it fair to ask someone to keep a secret that is dangerous or hurtful?
 - What would you do if someone told you that he or she was being sexually abused? How could you help that person?
4. Ask students to brainstorm the types of adults in their community that they can go to for help. These may be names of individuals in their families, church or school communities, or police, hotlines, or 911 (*See list of community resources in the bound Overview document*). Encourage students to think of 3 or 4 adults that they could ask for help. Have each student write a letter, based on the following instructions:
- The letter is written to yourself.
 - The purpose is to tell who your trusted adults are and why each person is on your list.
 - This letter should be put away somewhere special to refer to if you ever need to talk about a feeling uncertain or confused about something or someone.

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Chapter 3: Fully Human

Theme: Chastity in the context of abuse

Essential: Frequently victims of abuse report feeling as if they are “damaged goods,” that they are dirty or somehow “changed” forever in a negative way. To facilitate healing, victims need reassurance that the abuse did not make them dirty or bad.

Vocabulary: sexual abuse

Lesson:

1. After doing TE p. 29 mention that many students ask if people are still considered chaste and virtuous if they have been abused sexually. The answer is “yes”. Explain that sexual abuse is wrong not because sex is dirty or bad, but because it involves one person in a position of power taking advantage of another person. Both adults and older children can have sexual behavior problems and decide to take advantage of children. Emphasize that sexual abuse is never a child’s fault.

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Chapter 3: Fully Human

Theme: Taking care of oneself.

Essential: The experience of sexual abuse can have profound short- and long-term effects on the mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual development of a child. Evidence suggests that children who tell someone about their abuse and who, in turn, feel believed and supported, have better outcomes than those who do not feel believed and supported. Yet only one in ten children who are abused ever tell anyone. Children need to understand that taking care of mind and spirit means seeking help when troubles and worries seem overwhelming. While prayer and community involvement are important, we must confirm that each child has a solid support system in times of need.

Vocabulary: modesty privacy

Lesson:

1. While completing the lesson on page 31 it is important to communicate that making good choices shows respect for oneself. When bad things happen to us (including bullying, harassment, abuse) we should try our best to take care of ourselves. While this should include prayer, we should also seek help from people we know and trust. Just as there are different ways of communicating (by talking, using the telephone, or writing letters), there are also different ways of asking for God's help. While prayer is one way of asking for God's help, sometimes God communicates through the people in the physical world around us. Sometimes we ask God to help us when we seek help from helpful people. Having to face extreme emotional hardship and stress without the support of others can lead to physical and mental illness.
2. Write on some index cards some questions that will assist students in understanding making choices about privacy and boundaries. Some examples might be:
 - You are taking a shower and your brother's friend walks in and begins to talk to you. You ask him to leave, but he does not. He says it is "no big deal" because he has a sister who he has seen without clothes on.
 - Sometimes you and an adult family friend exchange e-mail messages. You both like music and you enjoy chatting about new songs and groups. One day s/he sends you a message that has a link to a sight where you find pictures of nude women.
 - One day one of your teachers makes a comment about your appearance, saying that s/he likes the way you are wearing your hair. This teachers has always given you praise about your intelligence and grades, but this is the first comment about your appearance. The comment makes you mildly uncomfortable, but you decide

to shrug it off. A few weeks later, the same teacher happens to see you in the all when no one else is around. S/he comments that the two of you seem to have lots in common, and asks if you would like to “hang out” at his/her apartment after school the next day.

3. Divide the class into groups to read the scenarios and discuss how they would feel in this situation and what they could do about it. Then have the groups present what they discussed, either by acting it out or just telling the class what some of their choices were to solve the problem. Discuss some of their suggestions. Ask the whole class how chastity, purity, and freedom apply to these situations.

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Chapter 3: Fully Human

Theme: Messages we send and receive about our bodies and sexuality

Lesson:

1. Pages 32 and 33 review respect and harassment. The project “On Your Own” is great for this age group. Once the project is completed, use the following discussion questions as a guide to help students explore and think critically about media messages. Try to be respectful of all students’ thoughts and opinions (*remember that your parents probably hated the music you listened to, too!*).
 - Do you find any of these lyrics to be disrespectful? To whom?
 - What messages do these lyrics send to the people who listen to them?
 - Could the music industry show more respect for its listeners? If so, how?
2. You could do the “As a Class” activity next or save for a later lesson. The posters might focus on depicting respect. Give the class freedom to be creative.

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Chapter 5: Growing in Grace

Theme: Maturity and consent

Essential: Adolescents may be at particularly high risk for abuse due to their strong need for acceptance and belonging. Due to their mental, emotional, and psychological immaturity, even subtle peer pressure can lead students to make poor choices regarding with whom and how they spend their time. Sexual offenders realize that teens that are isolated with few friends and inadequate support systems are particularly vulnerable to grooming tactics involving compliments and promises of companionship. Many adolescent victims of sexual abuse are actually tricked into believing that they are involved in a loving, healthy “adult” sexual relationship.

Vocabulary: adult consent relationship

Lesson:

1. Add this to the end of the lessons in Chapter 5, after p. 53. Emphasize that while students are maturing, they are not yet adults. In our society, 18 is the age at which individuals are no longer considered minors. Society acknowledges that adolescence is a time when individuals mature and learn to make responsible decisions. Society guards this time of growth as valuable and necessary and protects teens from having to make complex adult decisions such as those regarding marriage, participation in the armed forces, and using alcohol, to name a few. Teens are also protected from having to make decisions about engaging in sexual activity with adults. Adults who have sexual intercourse with persons under the age of 18 are acting both irresponsibly and illegally. Add that being a teen is tough. Most teens want to belong, to be accepted. Sadly, some adults take advantage of this. *Adults who try to have relationships with children and teenagers have a problem and need to get help.*
2. Read each of the following scenarios aloud. Ask students to think to themselves whether they would feel comfortable or uncomfortable in each situation. Then ask, “For those of you who felt uncomfortable, what specifically tipped you off, or suggested that something might be not quite right?” Ask students to discuss how they might handle the situation (*in some cases they will need to find out more information to determine the person’s intentions*).
 - Your basketball coach e-mails you occasionally about information concerning the team, such as about practices, games, tournaments, etc. You notice lately that some of the e-mails have been coming only to you, which seems nice because you really admire your coach, and you have lots in common – you like the same music, the same videos and movies. Occasionally s/he also sends sexy jokes which, at first, surprised you. One day s/he sends an e-mail asking if you’d like to come over for some extra coaching practice at her/his house.

- A neighbor greets you on the street and comments on how you've grown. S/he says that you are getting better looking every day. This neighbor invites you over to check out a new video game.
- Your uncle has come into town for a holiday weekend. He plays a board game with you and other relatives. Later that evening he sits with you to watch some TV. Before bed, when everyone has left the room, he says that he has some cool pictures in his room that he'd like to share with you.
- Your brother's friend is visiting and starts some friendly conversation. He starts joking around and then begins to tickle you. Soon you find that you are both laughing and rolling around on the carpet.

Following the exercise, state that while all of these situations may not turn out to be dangerous, the purpose of this activity is to teach us to trust our instincts, which are usually correct.

3. Consider inviting a panel of Catholic adults to talk with the students about puberty and responsible sexual behavior before and during marriage. Be sure to select individuals who feel comfortable talking openly and honestly about sexuality and who will model respectful conversation for the students. Allow students to submit questions *anonymously*. As the teacher, you may want to raise your own "frequently asked questions," such as those listed below:
 - How do I know if a boy/girl likes me? (Use this opportunity to talk about feelings and appropriate as well as misguided expressions of romantic interest)
 - Is kissing and touching before marriage okay? (Apply appropriate concerns according to Catholic beliefs and values, but also use this as an opportunity to point out that any touching should be consensual – meaning that both people agree to it "in their hearts" and that adults over the age of 18 should never kiss, touch, or "flirt with" adolescents (Within reason – for example, students may ask if an 18 year old can flirt with a 17 year old. As a guideline, an adult showing interest in someone 3 or more years younger than themselves may have another motive, and may be suggestive of a problem).
 - Why do people make such a big deal about sex?

Family Resource

Growing in Love: Grade 7

Lesson 2 – Touching Safety

Children are often unable to “say no” when a sexual 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 voluntary participants in the abuse. Sadly, victims of abuse often feel shame or guilt that they were somehow responsible for their suffering because they did not say “no”. 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.

Lesson Summary

- Your body is your own; it is okay to say no to ANY kind of touch.
- Touching is never a secret.
- When feeling mixed-up or uncertain about something, the best thing to do is to ask for help from a trusted adult.
- Abuse is NEVER the child’s fault, even if the child didn’t say “no”.
- Trust your feelings and ask for help if you feel uncertain about a situation involving touch or body privacy.
- Your family, your friends, and your church want to help you.

Home Activity

Ask your child to tell you about the story read in class titled No More Secrets for Me. You might use the following discussion questions:

- Can you give me an example of when to tell and when to keep a secret. Keep a secret when it is about something good that will be publicly known later. *Tell a secret right away if the secret is about touch, or if it is about anything that could be hurtful to me or someone else.*
- When should you break a promise and when should you keep it? *Same as above.*
- How could you help a friend if they told you that he or she was being sexually abused? *Encourage them to tell someone, so that they can get help and so that the abuser does not abuse others. If they refuse to tell anyone it might be necessary to tell an adult myself.*

² Loiselle, C., Gaulin, D. (2000). *The Care for Kids Early Sexuality Education Program*. Canada: The Leeds, Grenville and Lanark District Health Unit.

Family Resource

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Lesson 3 – Chastity in the Context of Sexual Abuse

Frequently victims of abuse report feeling as if they are “damaged goods,” that they are dirty or somehow “changed” forever in a negative way. To facilitate healing, victims need reassurance that the abuse did not make them dirty or bad.

Lesson Summary

- People are still considered chaste and virtuous if they have been abused sexually.
- Sexual abuse is never a child’s fault.
- Sexual abuse is wrong because it involves one person in a position of power taking advantage of another person.

Home Activity

As your child what they think it means to be chaste. If someone is abused or sexually assaulted, does this somehow affect their chastity (*No*)? Does it affect the quality of person they are (*Abuse may change their feelings and perceptions of some things, but they are still a good and wonderful person*)? If you wish, you might talk about the concept of secondary virginity.

Family Resource

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Lesson 3 – Taking Care of Oneself

The experience of sexual abuse can have devastating short and long-term effects on the mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual development of a child. Evidence suggests that children who tell someone about their abuse and who, in turn, feel believed and supported, have better outcomes than those who do not feel believed and supported. Yet only one in ten children who are abused ever tell anyone. Children need to understand that taking care of mind and spirit means seeking help when troubles and worries seem overwhelming. While prayer and community involvement are important, we must confirm that each child has a solid support system in times of need.

Lesson Summary

- When bad things happen to us we need to take care of ourselves. While this should include prayer, we should also seek help from adults that we trust to take care of us.

Home Activity

Think of some times when your child has made a good choice by telling you something that may have been hard to tell. Discuss these and share your pride in his/her choices. Ask how he/she felt after making these decisions. Whenever any new tough decisions need to be made, encourage your child to think about each choice and look at the pros and cons of each. As you help with this, continue to let your child know how good it is that he/she is trying to care of him/herself.

Family Resource

Growing in Love: Grade 7

Lesson 3 – Messages We Send and Receive About Bodies and Sexuality

Teenagers today get a many of their cues about what they should look like and how they should behave from the media – television, movies, magazines, music, and music videos. Sadly, these influences are often not positive. Boys and girls who grow up believing that men are the tougher, more dominant sex and that women the weaker, less in control sex are at higher risk for becoming abusers and for being abused in teen and adult relationships, respectively. The media often reinforces these stereotypes by portraying women as sexual objects of desire. By encouraging our kids to think critically about the abundance of messages in our society about how men and women should behave, we will create stronger, more independent thinkers who are less likely to be influenced negatively by these messages.

Home Activity

Listen to some popular songs or watch some music videos together and discuss the messages being sent about bodies and sexuality. Try not to be judgmental; by listening to your child's thoughts and feelings you will show them that what they have to say is important. To find out more, ask questions or such as: What do you think about the way the women/men are dressed in this video? Do you ever feel pressure to look like the men/women in this video? Why do you think that in most music videos most of the actors/actresses are wearing very few clothes? It seems like the men act real tough in most videos – is that the way men are “supposed” to act? What happens if a man doesn't feel like acting “tough” all the time? What about women – do the videos suggest a way a women is “supposed” to act? Reinforce that all of us are special and unique, and shouldn't need to fit into a “mold” that's prescribed by the music or video industry. Many of these images are unrealistic, especially the body types. The images can also be hurtful because they often portray sex as a casual game and women as sexual objects to be conquered.

Family Resource

Growing in Love: Grade 7

Lesson 5 – Maturity and Consent

Teenagers may be at particularly high risk for abuse due to their strong need for acceptance and belonging. Due to their mental, emotional, and psychological immaturity, even subtle peer pressure can lead students to make poor choices regarding with whom and how they spend their time. Sexual offenders realize that teens that are isolated with few friends and inadequate support systems are particularly vulnerable to grooming tactics involving compliments and promises of companionship. Many adolescent victims of sexual abuse are actually tricked into believing that they are involved in a loving, healthy “adult” sexual relationship.

Lesson Summary

- Being a teen can be tough. Sadly, some adults take advantage of this emotional time.
- When you are feeling confused or uncomfortable in a situation, it is important to trust your instincts, try to get out of the situation, and ask for help.

Home Activity

If your child sees or hears news stories or programs about sexual predators, talk to them about what it means and ask questions to encourage them to think about their risk. You might ask:

- Do you think the child realized that what was happening to him was wrong? *Note and share that many children/teens are so charmed by the person that they don't realize that what's happening is wrong.*
- Do you think that could happen to you or someone you know? Why or why not?
- Do you think you would be able to tell me if something like that did happen to you? Try not be offended and don't appear upset if your child says “I don't know” or “No.” Many teens – even those who are relatively close to their parents - are embarrassed or ashamed to tell their parents when they are involved in sexual activity, especially in families in which there are strict rules about dating and/or sexuality. Ask if they have another adult in mind to whom they could turn (be sure they can name at least 2 or 3). In addition, consider whether there might be things about your parenting style that you may need to change now that your child is growing older, to foster greater communication. There are many great parenting books available. You might also check with your child's counselor at school for more helpful tips.