

## Grade Nine Safe Environment Lesson

### Outcomes

The learner will:

- ✓ Be able to identify the risk factors associated with sexual abuse.
- ✓ Develop a plan for responding to and supporting others in a crisis situation.
- ✓ Be provided with information and tools to identify and steer away from questionable and potentially dangerous situations.

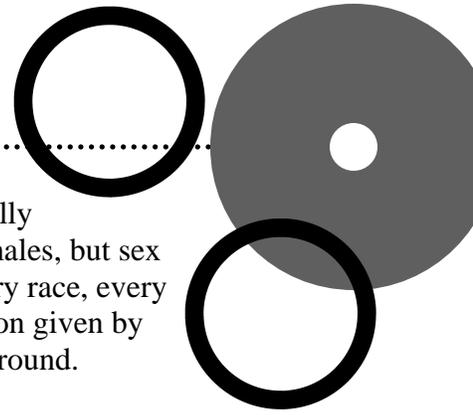
### Part One

1. Welcome the students and provide a brief overview of the session.
2. Provide each student a copy of the handout “Quiz Time.” Allow about 5-7 minutes for them to complete the handout on their own.
3. When everyone has completed the quiz, review each question and provide the participants with the correct answers and additional information as noted below.

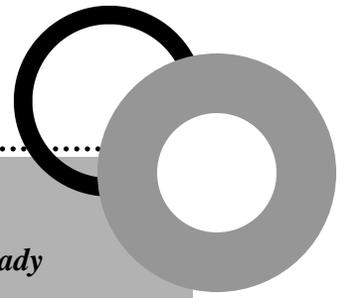
- *Can a person be sexually abused without being touched?*  
**Answer:** Yes. In reality, sexual abuse can take on various forms. It can be actions involving sexual intercourse to fondling under or over the clothes to the sexual exploitation of children where no direct physical action is perpetrated but where they are in the presence of someone who is clearly becoming sexually aroused by their presence. For example, a perpetrator might expose a child to pornography while watching to see what the child does in response to this exploitation, or a perpetrator might take photos of a naked child for personal sexual stimulation.
- *What percentage of the time does a victim of sexual abuse know his or her abuser?*  
**Answer:** 90 percent. Sexual abuse happens most often with people who know the victim. Stranger abuse is fairly rare. Abuse also happens in familiar places. Abusers are most often fathers, stepfathers, siblings, aunts, uncles, baby-sitters, caretakers, or supervisors. Normally the victim of sexual abuse knows his or her abuser.

### Gather the following items for this lesson:

- Pens or pencils (one for each student)
- Bible
- Copy of the handout “Discussion Starters” for each student (included-page 8)
- Copy of the handout “Quiz Time” for each student (included-page 9)
- Poster Board (one for each small group)
- Markers (an assortment for each small group)
- A copy of the closing prayer for each student (included-page 7)



- *Who is the most common sex offender?*  
**Answer:** A white married male. Perpetrators of sexual abuse usually know their victims. Most often, sex offenders are white, married males, but sex offenders can be found in every socio-economic classification, every race, every sexual orientation, and every description. Contrary to the impression given by the media, sexual offenders are also found in every religious background.
- *Do most children readily tell an adult, usually a parent, when something serious like sexual abuse happens to them?*  
**Answer:** No. Children frequently do not tell about being sexually abused, especially if the abuser is a member of the family. Those who have broken their silence are very often not believed as children or as adults. Abused children often struggle with the thought that they must be very bad for God to allow the abuse to happen in the first place.
- *Why is abuse not often reported immediately?*  
**Answer:** There are often no witnesses. The key to understanding why sexual abuse is not reported immediately is recognizing that so often the abuse happens in a secluded place. The abuser most often is someone who has power and influence over the child and who has used that power and influence to both groom and silence the child. Victims often want to tell and want to have the abuse stopped. As children, victims do not possess the mental capacity to break away from the power of their abuser to report what is happening.
- *Are most offenders prosecuted and punished?*  
**Answer:** No. Only a few of those who commit sexual assaults are apprehended and convicted for their crimes. Most convicted sex offenders are eventually released into the community under probation or parole supervision.
- *Of those who abuse, how many were abused themselves?*  
**Answer:** 30 percent. Most sex offenders were not sexually assaulted as children, and most children who are sexually assaulted do not sexually assault others. Not all abusers are acting out of revenge for their past victimization. Adolescent sex offenders do not always become adult offenders. Factors that may influence a victim to become an abuser include when the abuse happened, what kind of treatment the victim received, how the family reacted to the abuse, how many times the abuse took place, and what kind of abuse was inflicted on the victim.



*Ask the participants the following questions:*

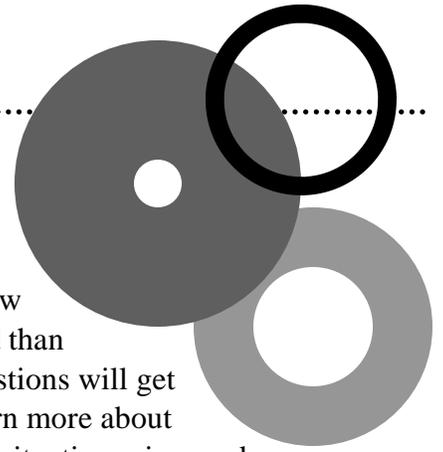
- *What surprised you in this activity?*
- *Is there anything in the quiz that didn't surprise you or that you already knew?*
- *How realistic do you think these facts are?*

4. Provide each participant with a copy of the handout "Discussion Starters." Allow 5 minutes for them to complete the handout on their own.
5. Divide the group into smaller groups of 6-8. Allow about 10 minutes for them to share their responses with the group. Be attentive to the groups and try to ensure that they stay on task. Answer questions of clarification that may arise. Share the following points with the whole group:
  - Talking about sexual abuse can be awkward and uncomfortable. Just remember that as you begin your discussions.
  - There is no right or wrong answer to any of the questions. The purpose of the discussion is to give voice to your own concerns, as well as to listen to the thoughts and concerns of others in hopes of better understanding and becoming more aware of the issues.
6. Gather the students back to the large group and ask for some sampling of answers from each small group. Pay particular attention to the way they ranked the assets that teenagers need to be happy and healthy. Ask what they could do to improve the quality of the assets they chose regardless of how they were rated.
7. Remind everyone that there is no right or wrong answer. This is an opportunity to speak their thoughts and feelings in a safe and trusting environment and to listen to the concerns of others.

## **Part Two**

1. Invite the students to return to their small groups. Present the following helpful hints to the group adding your own examples as appropriate.
  - Nothing we will learn in this session will prevent all young people from ever being harmed in any way. However, there are some tools and tips we can practice that will be beneficial in creating safe and sacred places and that will offer the coping skills necessary to move through a time of crisis.
  - Crisis can touch our lives in the form of something such as a failing grade on a test or in a class, a broken friendship, minor mistakes or accidents, or something more serious such as a devastating accident or illness, or even physical, emotional, or sexual abuse. Here are some tips and tools you will want to keep in mind for staying safe and for dealing with tough times:

**→Practice asking questions.** Spend one entire day thinking of a question for everything you do in that day. Do not rule out any questions. Try to think of everything, from how orange juice is squeezed from oranges to why math was created, from whether you should

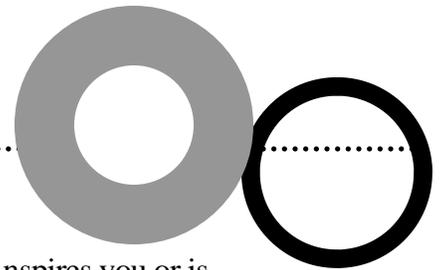


believe a rumor you heard to how a person is affected by participating in extra-curricular activities. After an entire day of asking questions, you will find that you do not need to ask questions about everything all the time, but certainly you take some things for granted and blindly accept as truth yet do not always know why you accept them. There is often more information to be gained than what you have immediately available to you. Practicing asking questions will get you into the habit of seeking all available resources to help you learn more about something, a habit that will be especially beneficial when a serious situation arises and you need to make an informed decision.

→ **Trust your instincts.** As you mature into young adulthood, you are becoming more and more aware of the opportunities to make choices for yourself. Along with this opportunity comes the responsibility to surround yourself with people—peers and adults—who will help guide you in making healthy choices. Through prayer and conversation, you can learn about the ways your decisions impact other people—either positively or negatively. You must also trust in the gifts God has given you. Your intuition alerts you when something is not right, your complex mind makes sense of a complicated situation, and your spiritual connection with God provides you the perseverance and strength to carry through difficult times. Practice trusting your feelings by discussing how you feel about something with another person you trust—a parent, sibling, friend, or significant adult. Use journaling to voice your thoughts on paper, and allow the tool of writing to help you unfold and clarify your daily thoughts.

→ **Be clear about what you want and need.** How simple is it to ask for a new game, a new bike, a new car, or new clothes for your birthday or as a holiday gift? What if you were able to voice your internal needs and wants just as clearly and easily? It is okay to tell someone that you feel uncomfortable or want to get out of a situation because it doesn't feel right, whether the situation is lying, stealing, gossiping, or putting someone down. You don't have to do something that goes against what you believe is right just because someone else says you should—even if that someone is an adult. Practice being clear about what you need to be healthy in everyday life situations—how much sleep you need, communicating how you are feeling, wanting to have time alone, or needing help with homework. Communicating what you need has nothing to do with being selfish. In fact, it is self-care to think about and to articulate what your body, mind, and soul need to stay healthy and happy. Look to the significant adults in your life, such as your parents, teachers, or trusted family and friends, to help you balance the difference between need and greed.

→ **Get involved.** Being involved in the community does not have anything to do with being popular or being the most active or voted the friendliest or most outgoing. Do not limit yourself because you don't think you deserve to be an active community member. Educate yourself about the different ways you can be involved in the community. Find something that is interesting to you. Take piano lessons outside of school, meet your



neighbors, volunteer at a local shelter, baby-sit for family and friends, walk in a benefit race, teach Bible stories to children at your church, tutor peers, or participate in a team or club. Choose something that inspires you or is interesting to you. Being involved serves two main purposes: (1) you get to know other teens and adults who can potentially support you and whom you can potentially trust, and (2) you build your own character, set examples for others, and gain insight into who you are and who you want to be. Community involvement gives you an opportunity to think about your future and your goals.

Ask the participants if they have any additional tips or ideas to offer. Allow for some discussion if time permits.

2. Tell the participants that each small group is to create an advertisement for one of the tips they have just heard. Provide each group with a poster board and several markers. Assign each group one of the four tips presented in step 1. It is okay if several groups are assigned the same tip.
3. Tell the groups to imagine they are at a baseball game, riding in a car, surfing the Internet, or reading a magazine. They should create an advertisement for that place or space. Assign one of those locations to each small group, or invite the groups to choose a different location they would like to create an advertisement for. Ask them to create an advertisement that might be found in the location they have chosen. Remind the groups that their advertisement should be engaging, interesting, and informative and that it should make a viewer want to buy the product or service they are promoting. Invite the groups to imagine how they could make their viewers want to have this "product." To make the activity more challenging, tell the groups that the other groups will judge their advertisements for effectiveness and that there will be prizes awarded to the winning advertisements. Give the groups 15 minutes to complete the assigned task.
4. Invite each group to present to the large group the advertisement they have created. Add comments and suggestions where necessary. Consider posting the advertisements in a visible location for parishioners and/or other students to see.

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**Part Three** Closing Prayer

## **You Know Me**

1. Invite someone to proclaim Jeremiah 29:11-12. Allow a few moments of silence after the reading.
2. Share the following points with the participants:
  - Although many things in life may challenge us, God has great things in mind for each of us.
  - God knew us even before we were born and desires for us to follow God's lead and be guided by God's love.
  - God's plans for each of us involve growing spiritually, seeking goodness, and trusting in God's all-knowing power.
  - With God's guidance and the guidance of the Church, we can persevere through difficult situations.
4. Invite the students to share any thoughts or reflections they might have on the reading from Jeremiah.

Conclude by inviting the participants to pray the closing prayer together:

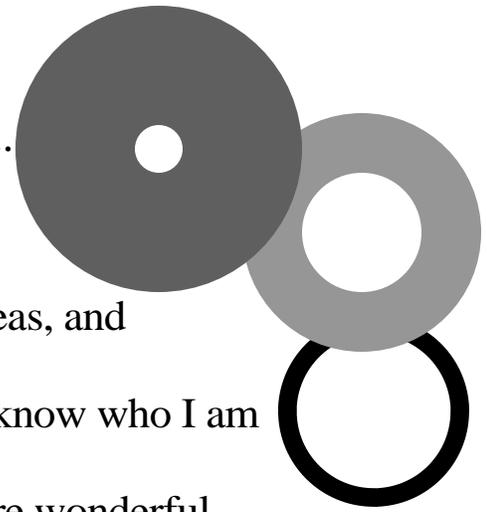
*Lord, you have created me with specific thoughts, ideas, and characteristics. You know everything about me. You know who I am and who I will become. You have plans for me that are wonderful, plans that I might not even be able to imagine for myself. Help me to trust in your guidance, Lord. Help me to believe that I don't have to do anything by myself. Help me to remember that you are ever-present, all-knowing, and completely loving. Grant me the gifts I need to believe in myself. When I feel discouraged, remind me that I am a capable person. When I feel lonely, send me friends and family who will support me. When I am totally confused, show me the right path to follow. When I doubt the future, enlighten me to trust in your creative plans. I ask this with a humble heart and with much gratitude. AMEN.*

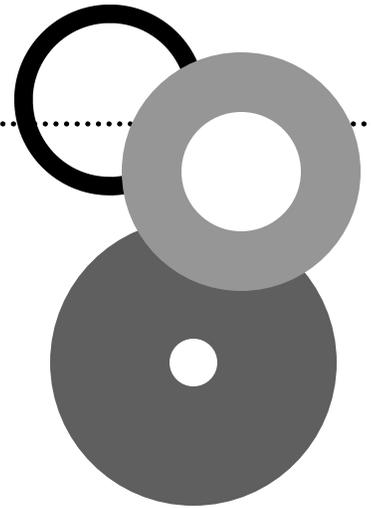
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## **PRAYER**

Lord, you have created me with specific thoughts, ideas, and characteristics. You know everything about me. You know who I am and who I will become. You have plans for me that are wonderful, plans that I might not even be able to imagine for myself. Help me to trust in your guidance, Lord. Help me to believe that I don't have to do anything by myself. Help me to remember that you are ever-present, all-knowing, and completely loving. Grant me the gifts I need to believe in myself. When I feel discouraged, remind me that I am a capable person. When I feel lonely, send me friends and family who will support me. When I am totally confused, show me the right path to follow. When I doubt the future, enlighten me to trust in your creative plans. I ask this with a humble heart and with much gratitude.

AMEN.





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## DISCUSSION STARTERS

I think talking about sexual abuse is (circle one word) . . .

Scary            Uncomfortable            Gross            Important  
Necessary      Helpful                      Pointless

Rank the assets that you need to be a healthy and happy teenager:

- caring adults and parents
- patience
- a relationship with God
- a good job
- money
- friends
- trust
- an education

If a friend told me that he or she had been sexually abused as a child, I would...

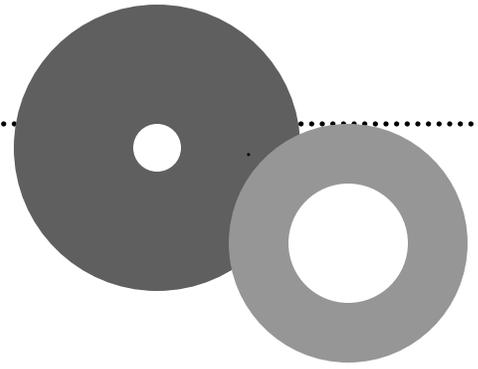
If someone asked me how I felt about talking to my parents about sex, I would say...

If I were in a situation with someone where I felt uncomfortable and wanted to get out of the situation for my safety, I could say or tell the person...

If that person were an adult, I would...

If someone in my family or community were accused of sexually abusing someone, I would feel . . .

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## Quiz Time

1. *Can a person be sexually abused without being touched?*
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  
2. *What percentage of the time does a victim of sexual abuse know his or her abuser?*
  - a. 50 percent
  - b. 66 percent
  - c. 75 percent
  - d. 90 percent
  
3. *Who is the most common sex offender?*
  - a. a homosexual
  - b. a poor person
  - c. a white married male
  - d. someone who was previously abused
  
4. *Do most children readily tell an adult, usually a parent, when something serious like sexual abuse happens to them?*
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  
5. *Why is abuse not often reported immediately?*
  - a. there are no witnesses
  - b. children are good storytellers and don't always know what they're saying
  - c. most reported cases turn out to be false accusations
  - d. victims do not want to tell anyone
  
6. *Are most offenders prosecuted and punished?*
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  
7. *Of those who abuse, how many were abused themselves?*
  - a. 10 %
  - b. 22 %
  - c. 30 %
  - d. 48 %

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