

Boundaries and Bullying

Time:

90min class, including gathering time and opening prayer.

Class Goal:

To inform teens about safety precautions from sexual and physical abuse and harassment, to remind teens of their self-worth, and to help them cherish and respect the bodies God gave each of us.

Opening Activity: Bullying Activity (15min)

Have students line up down the middle of an empty room (clear chairs to the perimeter). Each student will need room ahead of them and behind them, as they will need to be able to take steps forwards and backwards during the activity.

Ask students to close their eyes. For each statement that is read, prompt students to each take a step forward or a step backward, if the statement applies to them.

Here are the statements we came up with:

Have you ever felt like you had to change your appearance in order to fit in (step backwards).

If you've ever excluded someone from your group of friends because of their appearance, (step forward).

If you've ever felt like you weren't good enough or smart enough (step backwards).

If you've ever teased someone for being dumb or not different, (step forward).

If you've ever felt like you had to go along with what your friends are doing, even if you knew it was wrong (step backwards).

If you've ever felt insecure about yourself because of the way you look (step backwards).

If you've ever changed your appearance, the way you talk, or act in order to avoid being judged or ridiculed, (step backwards).

If you've ever ignored someone because you thought they dressed or acted weird, (step forward).

If you've ever been the subject of a hurtful rumor, (step backwards).

If you've ever spread a rumor or story about someone without knowing whether it was true, (step forward).

If you were ever teased or called names because of your race, ethnicity, or sexual orientation (step backwards).

If you've ever told or laughed at a racist or homophobic joke, (step forward).

If you've ever been in a fight because someone made fun of you for who you are, (step backwards).

If you've ever stopped being friends with someone because of what someone else thought of them, (step forward).

If you've ever ignored someone because you thought they dressed or acted weird, (step forward).

If you've ever teased someone for being different, (step forward).

If you've ever felt alone or like no one understood what you were going through, (step backwards).

Debrief:

At the end of the activity, have the students open their eyes, while they continue to face forward. By the end of the exercise, the line is stratified with some kids up front, and some kids toward the back (those who have been bullied more).

Because they are only able to "look forward", they are only able to "see" the kids who have it better than them; it's more difficult for them to see the kids who perhaps have it "worse" than they do when it come sot bullying.

By asking questions and discussing, help the kids to understand that this is often how the bullied feel; as though they are marginalized and ignored. Encourage them to reflect on how they might need to take more notice of what their classmates are dealing with.

***Note:** This activity can be done with other types of statements. We've done it our teen ministry to discuss privilege / social justice type issues.*

Teaching Part 1: Identity, Self Worth, Love (5min)

We started our class on this note, to explain the premise of how it is that we know that we are worth more than to be bullied, abused, exploited or violated in anyway.

- Each of us has self-worth, deserving better
- Right to NOT be bullied, harassed, or assaulted,
- Freedom to be loved, and to not be disrespected
- Freedom to not be pressured or coerced into anything that violates your personal boundaries by peers or anyone else.
- No one can take your worth away from you unless you give your power away to them.

-Catechism, scripture passages:

From the catechism:

Freedom is exercised in relationships between human beings. Every human person, created in the image of God, has the natural right to be recognized as a free and responsible being. All owe to each other this duty of respect. The right to the exercise of freedom, especially in moral and religious matters, is an

inalienable requirement of the dignity of the human person. This right must be recognized and protected by civil authority within the limits of the common good and public order. #1738

From Scripture:

I urge you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, your spiritual worship. Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect
Romans 12: 1

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.
Colossians 3:12-14

You formed my inmost being; you knit me in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; wonderful are your works! My very self you know.
Psalm 139: 13-14

You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength... You must love your neighbor as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these.
Mark 12: 30-31

Teaching Part 1: Abuse (5min)

After discussing our rights as given to us by God, the topic flows into a discussion of what we know is an obvious violation of those rights.

Bullying-overpowering, threat of physical harm or damage to reputation (can be in person, or written, via internet)

Sexual harassment- unwanted gestures of a sexual nature that violate a person's boundaries

Sexual assault- forced or coerced sex with a person without their consent, violates a person, can cause trauma or unwanted pregnancy

Boundaries—the limits that define one person as separate from another or from others. Boundaries promote and preserve personal integrity. Boundaries give each person a clear sense of “self” and a framework for how to function in relation to others. Boundaries bring order to our lives and empower each of us to determine how others will interact with us.

Unsafe touch—harmful touches committed by an individual or group that physically, sexually, or psychologically harms a child or young person. This touch is often from people who either cannot or choose not to see the harm in their actions.

Peer Pressure—the strong influence of a group—especially of young people—on members of that group to behave as everyone else does.

Video Clips: Bullying and Boundaries (6min)

We wanted to make the point in this class that abuse, rape, violence, are all connected to acts of bullying and other ways that people violate one another's boundaries and dignity. So we decided to play the following video clip, that was pulled from Youtube and consists of Glee clips. It was created by the "It Gets Better" project.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pmqomi8kfXg>

Personal Witness: Acquaintance Rape (20min)

In this section, a volunteer gave a personal testimony about an experience of rape, focusing her witness on issues of prevention, and the complicating guilt experience and how you can come to understand that it's not your fault. To protect her anonymity I won't be inserting the entire talk here, but part of it I will include because it was through her witness that a lot of our prevention and other safety points were addressed:

I'm going to talk to you about something very sensitive and deeply personal today. I'm sure most of you have heard the messages of "no means no" and "it's not your fault" before; but sometimes we can hear these messages so much that they lose their meaning. And so, I'm going to talk about this in a very honest way, and explain what those slogans really mean when you actually go through something like this.

My story is about rape; something called acquaintance rape, which just means that I had met the attacker prior to the attack. This wasn't a friend, and it wasn't someone I was on a date with.

I'm sure this will be a sensitive topic for you to listen to. I think the feelings I'm going to talk about are common to anyone who has been a victim of violence, bullying, and harassment. Because ultimately rape is about power, and not respecting someone's boundaries and dignity. Listening to my story may bring up feelings for you, and that's totally ok. I'll be honest, even though this happened a few years ago, I still get upset after talking or thinking about it. If there is anyone in here who has gone through something like this, who needs resources or people to talk to, please know that you are always welcome to approach us.

It's also important to remember that our number one responsibility is to keep you safe. Which means that if you tell us that you are being sexually harassed, exploited or abused, we are required to take steps to report that and make sure you are safe. There are always people you can talk to, resources we can help refer you to, and we're going to give you all

a list with several phone numbers that you can reach out if you need to. I know making that call is very hard, but for me, getting help was the only way I was able to heal.

...

It took a long time to heal from this experience, but I did, and I have, and I think it has actually made me learn a lot of things about myself. My main take away, was that I need to love myself.

I have to love myself enough to listen to that voice inside my head when I know that a situation doesn't feel right.

If I'm out somewhere and I feel unsafe, I need to leave – no matter what others will think or say.

If I'm with someone and they aren't respecting my boundaries, if they are trying to touch me or invade my space in a way that just doesn't feel right, I need to speak up and make it clear that what they are doing is wrong. If they still don't listen, then I leave and I don't spend time with that person.

I need to trust my own instincts and know that when something feels unsafe, it probably is. And not try to be "nice" and make excuses for people. I have to love myself more than that. This is still really hard for me. It's hard to think that someone will be mad at me for saying something, or think that I'm "over reacting". But I've learned the hard way and now I know, it's better to trust my instincts. God gave them to me for a reason.

But overall, I have to love myself enough to know that no matter what, NO ONE has the right to violate my body. Whether this comes as a rape, violence, verbal abuse; it doesn't matter. I have the right not to be abused by people through their words or actions, I have to love myself enough to stand up for myself. God gave me this body and this life, and no one has the right to abuse it. Saying "no" once is enough. Knowing what that phrase really means, and really owning that, is incredibly empowering.

The last bit of love was learning to love myself despite this experience. Which may well have been the hardest part. Knowing that my body still has dignity and worth. I have to love myself enough to know that I'm still worth something, and that this experience doesn't define me.

To get through it, I needed the love and support of a lot of people in my life, in addition to the counseling. I needed to be able to talk to safe friends, be around people I could trust who made me feel loved, and be reminded of how much love I have in my life.

Beyond that though, I also knew that I needed God. Somehow, God found a way to make something good out of this horrible experience. God has shown me what it truly means to love myself, and surrounded me with people who have shown me the true expression of His love.

Teaching Part 3: Personal Safety Awareness (10min)

This section referenced the witness talk, and again discussed the idea of setting boundaries, what it means to consent, saying “no” and resources to turn to if something happens. We prepared a handout of resources to provide our teens which included contacts at our parish, as well as crisis lines.

To help teens further develop their ability to identify, define, and honor appropriate boundaries in different types of relationships and under different types of relationship conditions:

-Consent: California defines consent as "*positive cooperation in act or attitude pursuant to an exercise of free will.* "

-Consent is verbal, *assuming* consent is not the same as hearing “Yes”.
(i.e.: their *eyes* said “yes” ... eyes don’t talk.)

-You don’t have to give into pressure from friends or your boyfriend or girlfriend, or anyone else.

-You can and SHOULD say “no” when you feel uncomfortable or confused by how another person is acting or when they are asked (or encouraged) to do something they know is wrong—even if the person is a friend or someone else that they love and trust. Unfortunately, not everyone waits for a yes to presume consent, but NO MEANS NO.

- You should honor and respect the wishes of others who don’t want to be touched, even when it feels like rejection and hurts your feelings. Learning that others have the right to say “no” and to have their “no” respected is a fundamental part of our character development as we grow into young adults. It empowers us to maintain our own boundaries and to respect and support the boundaries of those around us.

-If someone makes you uncomfortable, let them know, if that doesn’t work get help from someone else:

“If your brother [or sister] sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he/she listens to you, you have won over your brother. If he doesn’t listen, take one or two others along with you, so that ‘every fact may be established on the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ If he refuses to listen to them, tell the church.” (Matthew 18: 15-17)

-It’s always okay to reach out or get help, see Resources list for all the places and people you can reach out to.

Discussion Groups: Reactions and Q&A (20min)

For this section, we decided to break our class along gender lines for a discussion. Our previous experience with sensitive topics has shown us that often the teens will only talk openly when not in front of classmates of a different gender.

Suggested Discussion Questions:

- What parts of the teaching or talk today struck you?
- What confuses you?
- Do you have any experiences of having to set boundaries with someone?
- How do you normally define consent?
- How does God meet us in all of this?
- What does it mean to you “to love”?

Teaching Part 4: Radical Love (10min)

We wanted to end the note on a message of love, with a large group session that focused on the idea that ultimately we are called to love one another and ourselves.

-Ultimately we are called to RADICALLY love one another (it's a verb and a choice that we are given, not just a feeling,)

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your heavenly Father, for he makes the sun rise on the bad and the good, and cause rain to fall on the just and the unjust. For if you love those who you greet your brothers only, what is unusual about that? Do not the pagans do the same?" –Matthew 5: 43-47.

-We are called to love and cherish each other as brothers and sisters in Christ, sons and daughters of God.

-We are made up of both body and soul: without our soul we are dead, without our body we are ghosts.

Credits:

Developed by St. Monica Catholic Community Youth Ministry, under the direction of Fr. Tim Klosterman for our Confirmation program, drawing from existing materials from Virtus website.

No copyrights reserved; share and distribute freely. If you have questions about any of this material or have suggestions for an improvement, please email youth@stmonica.net

By:

Carolyn Pierce

Christie Young

Jessica Gerhardt