# Teaching Boundaries and Safety Reference Guide™

## Point 1: Teaching about the Private Body Parts

Children are naturally curious, and they have questions about their bodies. Children who are not provided adequate answers from their parents, guardians, or other safe adults are more vulnerable to abuse. Teaching children about their body parts is important to the developmental process.

## Point 2: Who are Safe Friends and Safe Adults

Children, by nature, trust people—even people they don't know. This trust is what attracts people to children—people with both good and bad intentions. How can you, as a parent or caring adult, maintain a child's trusting innocence while also keeping the child safe? For the purposes of teaching safety, safe friends and safe adults are people who:

• Won't hurt the child without a good reason and won't confuse or scare the child intentionally; and

• Are sure to respect the child's wishes and the wishes and the rules of the child's parents, guardians, and caretakers when it comes to personal safety—including touching safety.

## Point 3: The Difference Between Safe and Unsafe Touches

### Safe Touches

One way a child can tell if someone is safe is by observing how the person touches others. Safe friends and safe adults touch children in safe ways and not in ways that are scary or confusing. Safe friends and safe adults don't touch children in ways that seem strange, or that hurt without a good reason. You should then explain *why* these touches are safe. They are touches that have a good purpose, are not intended to hurt, and are familiar and safe.

### Unsafe Touches

An unsafe touch is any touch that is meant to hurt or scare someone. Hitting, punching, tripping, kicking, and spitting are examples of unsafe touches. In addition to these examples, parents, guardians, or other safe adults must also explain that touching private body parts can also be an unsafe touch. Let your child know that any touch that is new, scary, or confusing—or a touch that starts out okay but becomes scary or confusing—may be an unsafe touch. Teach children to trust their own instincts and to speak up when something makes them uncomfortable.

## Point 4: Teaching Children to Identify Their Special Safe Adults

A child's life may include many, many safe friends and safe adults. That's why it is important for a child to know about special safe adults. Most people who are considered safe adults do not have the right to see or touch a child's private body parts for any purpose. Once children understand *safe friends and safe adults* and *safe and unsafe touches*, you must explain the specific meaning of *special safe adults*.

Parents, guardians, or other safe adults must begin by identifying your child's special safe adults. Establish the criteria for determining your child's special safe adults by asking yourself these two questions:

1. "Who, other than myself, would respect my child's physical safety and respect my wishes regarding my child's safety—including the safety of his or her private body parts?"

2. "Of these people, who might ever be put into a position to see or touch my child's private body parts for the purpose of helping keep my child clean or healthy?"

## Point 5: Teaching What to Do if Touched in an Unsafe Manner

Teach your child a simple rule for what to do if someone tries to touch him or her in an unsafe way. The child must send a clear signal to any child or adult whose behavior is unsafe—a signal that unsafe behavior will not be tolerated. A child needs to know that any time someone tries to touch his or her private body parts or tries to get the child to touch the private body parts of the other person, the child should say words that mean "No!" and then should tell the child's mother or father or another safe adult as soon as possible.

Instruct young children to run away if the touching involves private body parts or if they don't feel safe for any other reason. Let children know that you will believe them, and that they will not be in any trouble for saying "No!" and running away. Tell older children to immediately get away from the person who touched them inappropriately. This may mean walking away or backing away from the person, or it may mean altogether leaving the location of the unsafe person.

Parents, guardians, and caring adults should remember that most children do not lie about abuse. So, when a child discloses abuse—directly or indirectly (such as telling about a friend who is being hurt by someone)—it is important to provide support for the child. By following some simple rules, you can assure children that they are safe and that telling was the right thing to do:

1. **Let children talk.**
2. **Avoid displays of shock or disgust.**
3. **Respect the child's privacy.**
4. **Address the child's feelings and let him or her know that you trust the child and that the story will be investigated.**
5. **Be honest with the child about what will happen next.**
6. **Do not scold the child.**
7. **Get immediate medical attention if necessary.**
8. **Get counseling/therapy for the child.**
9. **Don't be surprised or upset if the child reports the incident to someone outside of the family.**

## Point 6: Teaching "No Secrets"

Communication is necessary to prevent abuse. It is difficult for children to talk about child sexual abuse—even children who understand and practice touching safety. It is not uncommon for children to keep abuse hidden, and child molesters rely on this secrecy.

That's why you should establish this important point:

**Your child can tell you about anything that makes him or her feel unsafe—even if someone told him or her to keep it a secret or threatened the child if he or she told.**

Assure your child that you will listen to him or her and not get angry, and that your child's safety is your first priority.

VIRTUS® is registered trademark of National Catholic Services, LLC. ("National Catholic") in the United States. Protecting God's Children® and the Teaching Boundaries and Safety Reference Guide™ are trademarks of National Catholic. National Catholic has licensed use of its Protecting God's Children® programs to the Diocese of _____ ("Diocese"). National Catholic owns the copyrights in the artwork and substantive text appearing in this brochure. In addition, National Catholic has authorized the Diocese to distribute the artwork and text in this brochure to employees and volunteers of the Diocese. Neither the artwork nor text may be reproduced or further distributed in any form or manner, without the prior written permission of National Catholic. Please feel free to contact National Catholic for more information about its products and services. You may contact:

Editor at editor@virtus.org

©2002-2010 by National Catholic Services, LLC. All rights reserved.

Please keep in mind that this quick reference guide is designed to summarize and highlight many of the key points of the Teaching Boundaries and Safety Guide™. Please consult the full Guide for all relevant information.

VIRTUS® Excellence Builds Trust

**National Catholic Services, LLC**

# *Protecting God's Children®*

## Empowering God's Children™: Teaching Boundaries and Safety Reference Guide™