

For the Classroom – Safe Environment Program, Grade 8 Our Dignity as Children of God

Note: It is recommended that those who will be teaching this lesson first read *The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality* by the Pontifical Council for the Family before presenting this material. The dignity of the human person as laid out in the primary and intermediate grades is the foundation of our Safe Environment program.

Prayer: Please Read Psalm 139:1-18 together in class.

Objectives:

1. Students will understand their dignity as children of God.
2. Students will understand virtue and vice.
3. Students will know practical steps for protecting themselves from sexual abuse.
4. Students will know how to react to abuse and to the possible threat of abuse.

Teaching Points:

Note: While an understanding of the dignity of the human person, as well as the nature of virtue and vice are foundational, it is in no way to be implied that those who are the victims of abuse are to blame – or that they have been abused because they were not behaving in a chaste, virtuous manner.

Our Dignity as Children of God

Every human person is created in the image of God. This amazing dignity bestowed on the human race was raised even higher when God became man and died out of love for the salvation of every person. Because of the dignity with which we were created, and the love by which we were redeemed on the cross, all people deserve to be revered and treated with dignity. We have an obligation to uphold the dignity of ourselves and of one another, especially the most helpless among us (children both before and after birth, the sick, the poor, and the elderly).

Virtue

The class should read paragraph 1804 from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* on virtue and the students should write out the definition of virtue from the *Catechism*.

The Cardinal Virtues

The Cardinal Virtues are the virtues of Prudence, Justice, and Temperance, and Fortitude. The word Cardinal comes from the Latin word *cardine*, which means hinge. They are called the “hinge” virtues because every other natural virtue is based upon and grows from the Cardinal Virtues.

- Prudence - discovering our true good and choosing the right means of achieving it
- Fortitude/Courage - firmness in the pursuit of the good

- Justice - giving the proper due to God and neighbor
- Temperance - moderating the attraction of the pleasures of the senses

The Virtue of Chastity

The virtue of chastity grows from the virtue of temperance. “*Chastity is the spiritual power which frees love from selfishness and aggression*” and is needed due to the effects of original sin (*Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality*, 16). In developing the virtue of chastity, through a proper understanding of the dignity of each person and through effort and practice, we look upon a person and treat him with respect and dignity, rather than as an object for sexual pleasure (lust). Chastity is a life-long process of self-mastery involving training in modest behavior, protection of the senses, fidelity to prayer, reception of the sacraments and wise guidance. For young people and unmarried adults, it involves a firm commitment to avoid situations that are likely to inflame sexual desire. Purity in thought, word and deed are essential for chastity.

The sacred gift of marital union is to be reserved for spouses in the sacrament of Marriage. Until the point of committing themselves totally to one another before God, any pre-marital sexual activity amounts to using the other person for personal gratification and pleasure. Therefore, these sins against purity and chastity are not expressions of genuine love, even if they “feel” loving. The usual consequences of sins against chastity include guilt, loss of innocence, greater selfishness, damage to a future marriage, risk of disease, pregnancy outside of marriage, rift in relationship with parents, depression and, most importantly, loss of our relationship with and love for God (CCC 2337-2351, 2514-2533). God has given us a plan for authentic love and chastity that guards against using other persons and that protects marriage, family and the dignity of the human person.

Vice

“A vice is a bad moral habit. Technically a vice is the strong tendency to a gravely sinful act acquired through frequent repetition of the same act. Qualities that characterize a vice are spontaneity, ease, and satisfaction in doing what is morally wrong” (*Modern Catholic Dictionary*, John A. Hardon, S.J., 561). While virtue forms a person, vice “de-forms” a person.

Students should write down the definition of vice from the glossary of the *Catechism*. Spiritual direction and counseling are essential for abandoning some vices. A total and permanent separation from the near occasion of sin is necessary for someone who has struggled with a vice that can significantly damage his life and the lives of others.

Students are to be taught that they should avoid those adults who would seek to do the following:

1. Discourage other adults from participating or monitoring youth activities
2. Frequently want to be alone with young people
3. Are more excited to be with young people than adults

4. Give gifts to children or young people, often without permission
5. Seek contact that is not respectful of a young person's comfort zone, for example with unwanted hugs
6. Frequently want to wrestle or tickle
7. Think the rules do not apply to them
8. Allow young people to engage in activities their parents would not allow
9. Use bad language or tell inappropriate jokes and stories
10. Show pornography

Avoiding Potential Danger

Avoiding potential danger means that we must be careful to avoid situations that could make us vulnerable to harm. How can we avoid potential harm?

1. By using the "2 by 2" principle. When with an adult or with people your own age (including dates) always be with a friend on whom you can depend.
2. By making sure your parents know of any regular meetings or correspondence (such as email) with an adult.
3. By talking to your parents. Let them know where you are at all times.
4. By avoiding drugs and alcohol. You are never less safe than when you are intoxicated. Avoid others who are intoxicated. Even people you know well cannot be trusted in that state.
5. By dressing modestly.
6. By being visible when you are with someone, whether someone your age or an adult, other people should be able to easily see you.
7. By watching out for abusers. Under no circumstances should a person who has abused a child be working with young people. If you know of someone who has abused another, they should not be near you.

Communicating Your Concerns

Communicating your concerns means telling someone in authority when you are uncomfortable with a situation or a person, and most especially, if you have been abused or you suspect that someone else may have been abused.

Pay attention to your own intuitions/feelings. Even if abuse is not occurring, it is still important to let others know when you have concerns. Only by communicating concerns can we use our knowledge to create a safe environment. Remember the following:

1. If you are worried that a friend is being/has been abused tell someone in authority. Be a true friend even at the risk of upsetting him or her by “overreacting.”
2. If you have sought help from someone in authority and that person does not take action, tell another person in authority.
3. If you have been abused, it is not your fault, even if you have not followed the steps listed above to avoiding potential danger. Do not fear being blamed. You will not be.
4. There is a network of help at home, among friends, at school, in the Church, and in various other organizations. There is always someone to turn to no matter who has victimized you or someone you know. Specifically:
 - o Always talk to your parents about your concerns.
 - o Notify a church official and/or a principal.
 - o Call your county's Child Protective Services hotline, the County Prosecutor and/or the Diocese of Rockford.
 - o Do not hesitate to call the police.

This lesson plan has been adapted from the Diocese of La Crosse.