

## **Growing in Love Update: Kindergarten**

### **Chapter 1: Made by God**

**Theme:** Our bodies are special

**Essential:** Sadly, many children who are sexually abused tell no one because they are either embarrassed or don't have the words to use to communicate what has happened to them. Teaching children the names of private parts serves two purposes. First, by speaking matter-of-factly about the private parts we normalize the use of these words and we help the children recognize that these parts are as special and wonderful as all other body parts and that they can be talked about respectfully. In other words, we teach them that private body parts are not dirty or embarrassing to talk about. Second, we provide children with a vocabulary to use to ask us questions, or to speak with us about concerns. Some children may giggle when they hear the words, and this is perfectly normal. Let children know that it is okay to giggle because we don't use these words often; however, they are important parts of our body that can and should be talked about respectfully. Handling discussions of body parts and other aspects of human sexuality with frankness, respect, and sensitivity fosters the same respect and open communication in children.

A section about feelings has been added because the ability to express feelings is such an integral part of healthy sexuality that children should begin to learn at a very young age. When children are abused sexually, physically, or emotionally, they often feel two things at once. They may wonder, "Why is this person who loves me and who I love doing something that I know is wrong?" Teaching children to ask for help when they feel mixed up or confused feelings is an important step in identifying and stopping abuse.

#### **Lesson:**

1. Use Supplementary Lesson 1 (PR pp.56-57) to provide information about the names of body parts and to reinforce the message that our bodies are good and special (including genitals). These parts have names and can be talked about respectfully. Private parts are kept special, which means that we wear clothes to cover them. Always speak matter-of-factly about private parts so that children may learn to speak respectfully about them, as well.
2. Following this chapter add this information on feelings. Inform children that God gave us feelings to enrich our lives. Everyone has all kinds of feelings and all feelings are okay. Have children create "faces" on paper plates that demonstrate different kinds of feelings (happy, sad, angry, etc.). Discuss the feelings they have created and ask for suggestions and examples for times when they might feel these feelings. Ask

if it is possible to feel two things at once. Ask students for examples, or you may provide examples, such as:

- You are excited to start the new school year because you love school, but you are also a little worried because you will be in a new classroom with a new teacher and many students you do not know.
- Your best friend suggests that the two of you do something that sounds fun but that you know is wrong, or that your parents would not approve of (such as watch a movie on TV. that you wouldn't normally be allowed to watch, or play with your mother's make-up).

Next, cut the plates in half, horizontally, and demonstrate how you can mix up happy eyes, and sad mouth, for example, and explore with the children what this "character" may be feeling. Emphasize that feeling two things at once can be uncomfortable. Sometimes we call this feeling mixed-up or confused. Empathize that these that can be tough feelings to have. Ask the children what they would do if they had confused feelings (*the best answer is always to ask for help*).

3. Read and discuss: How are you Peeling? by Saxton Freymann and Joost Elffers (or another comparable book about feelings). Pay special attention to the "characters" that look confused or mixed-up. Ask open-ended questions such as, "How do you think he/she is feeling right now?" "Have any of you ever felt that way?" "What do you think he should do?"

## Growing in Love Update: Kindergarten

### Chapter 3: Made to be like Jesus

**Theme:** Sexual abuse.

**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 them<sup>1</sup>. 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” or because they “allowed” someone to touch their private parts. 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 that touching adults and older children should not ask children to keep touching secrets. We should also teach students the importance of and how to ask for help.

#### **Lesson:**

1. *Use of Supplementary Lesson 3 on PR pp56-60 , “Touch,” is not advised\*\*.*
1. Alternative: Explain to the children that our bodies are special gifts from God that belong to us and only us. Read the book **Loving Touches** by Lory Freeman and Carol Deach. Discuss the book and then remind them of some helpful points:
  - Some touches we like and some touches we don’t like
  - Your body belongs to you: you have the right to say “no” to ANY kind of touch.
  - We shouldn’t touch others who say “no touching.”
  - Private parts are kept special. This means that adults and older children should not touch or “play with” another child’s private parts. Similarly, older children and adults do not need help with their private parts. Mention that at this age most children should be able to care for their private parts themselves, including toileting and bathing, without adult assistance.
  - Touching is never a secret.
  - When feeling mixed-up or confused, especially about touch, you can always ask for help

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<sup>1</sup> Louiselle, C. & Gaulin, D. (2000). *Care for Kids Early Childhood Sexuality and Abuse Prevention Program*. Ontario, Canada: Leeds, Grenville, and Lanark District Health Unit.

2. Ask children to describe secrets that are fun to keep (*birthday presents, surprise parties*). What types of secrets do you not like keeping (*secrets that make us feel sad or mixed-up*)? To demonstrate, play this version of the game 20 questions. Tell the children that you have a secret surprise for them at the end of class, but that they have to guess what it is (or find it via scavenger hunt). The surprise can be something small like stickers or a treat. Once they have guessed or found the surprise, point out that the secret would not have been fun unless you got to tell about it. If someone asks you to keep a secret that no one will EVER know about, it's probably not a good secret to keep.
3. Summarize by saying that most touches are loving touches, but that some grownups and even other children have touching problems.

*\*\*Note to teachers: Please refrain from using the terms "good" and "bad" touch. In many situations sexual abuse is not "forced" – it may take place within a relationship that a child believes is loving and/or meaningful. Labeling sex as "bad" may induce feelings of intense guilt and be harmful to the self-esteem of children who are aroused by the abuse or perhaps get pleasure from the "special" attention and relationship they have with the offender. Children may come to believe that if they "like" bad touching then they are wrong and not worth protecting. Children are also less likely to disclose sexual abuse if they have been lead to believe that they participated willingly in "bad" touch.*

## **Growing in Love Update: Kindergarten**

### **Chapter 4: Made to Be Together**

**Theme:** Sometimes we need help.

**Essential:** Sexual abuse would not exist without secrecy. Sexual behavior with a child is not only illegal, but something that is considered taboo in our society. In addition, sometimes it may seem easier to try to believe that it doesn't/didn't happen and move on than to talk about it. In fact, evidence suggests that only one in ten victims of abuse ever tells anyone. There are many reasons why children don't tell, including:

- Some don't understand that they have been abused
- Some may feel they are to blame
- Some are ashamed or embarrassed
- Some feel that they will not be believed
- Some don't know how to tell or don't have the words to use
- Some children try to tell, but we don't recognize their cries for help

Children are much more likely to experience a healthy recovery from abuse if their stories are heard and if they feel believed and supported following their disclosure. Most children are comfortable asking for help; if we encourage children to ask for help when they feel confused or mixed up about things, including touch, we may be able to remove the secrecy surrounding abusive situations. We must ensure that our children have a network of adults with whom they feel comfortable asking sensitive questions. We must also ensure that they are equipped with the language and communication skills necessary to be able to ask for help

**Lesson:**

As a follow-up to the "I am a helper" activity on TE p. 58, add the following activity which emphasizes that sometimes we all need help. Have children complete a "Who do you ask activity?" This could be a "web" or "tree" of supports, or a telephone with big buttons to write or draw pictures of people. Each child should know the names of at least three or 4 adults they can go to for help. Encourage them to think of people both inside and outside of the family. Options may include people at church, school, or the neighborhood. Every child should have their own individual list. Be creative and have fun with this – make it a project that they would want to hang on their refrigerator! You may even want to ask the children to get "autographs" beside each name or picture from the important people in their lives. See how many they can get – it is a great tool for prompting discussions and establishing strong support systems for children. Include 911 and tell the children that they should always call 911 and ask for help if they feel scared or if someone, including themselves, has been hurt badly.

## **Growing in Love Update: Kindergarten**

### **Chapter 5: Made to Be Holy**

**Theme:** Forgiveness

**Essential:** Some of the most sensitive issues of trauma recovery concern the concept of forgiveness, a concept which is at the heart of Catholic tradition. For most trauma victims, however, forgiveness is one of the last issues with which they should deal. This includes children. Victims must have sufficient time and support from others so that their forgiveness is their forgiveness, and not the forced agenda of another. As adults we must be careful to validate and not dismiss children's complicated feelings towards trusted adults who abuse them. If pushed to forgive before they are truly ready, they may later find themselves in another faith crisis<sup>2</sup>. Children are helped by learning that forgiveness is a process, and that several steps may need to occur before they are ready to forgive.

**Lesson:**

1. Mention that forgiveness is very important part of our Catholic faith. Ask, "What does forgiveness look like?" The children may come up with a variety of answers that may help you develop a greater understanding of their understanding of this complex concept. There is no right or wrong answer.
2. Explain to the children that there can be different levels of hurt. For example, being called a "dummy" feels different than perhaps being called a name that is more personal – such as if someone makes fun of you for wearing glasses, or because you can't afford nice clothes. Sometimes we can forgive people easily, and go right back to being friends. Other times, for things that are bigger, forgiveness might not happen right away. Sometimes we have to go through steps before we can truly forgive (such as talking about our feelings, trying to understand the other person's point of view, and accepting that we have been hurt).
3. Guide them towards the conclusion that forgiveness is a process and that it may not happen right away. No one should be forced to forgive before they are ready. If you are finding it hard to forgive, ask your parents, your teacher, or another trusted adult for help and guidance.

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<sup>2</sup> Bringing God's Presence to Trauma Victims (2005). Church World Service Emergency Response Program. <http://www.cwserp.org/training/Chaplain.pdf>.

## **Family Resource**

### **Growing in Love: Kindergarten**

#### **Chapter 1 - Our bodies are special:**

Sadly, many children who are sexually abused tell no one either because they are embarrassed or ashamed or because they don't have the words to use to communicate what happened to them. Teaching children the names of private parts serves two purposes. First, by speaking matter-of-factly about the private parts we normalize the use of these words and help children recognize that these parts are as special and wonderful as all other body parts and that they can be talked about respectfully. In other words, we teach them that private body parts are not dirty or embarrassing to talk about. Second, we provide children with a vocabulary to use to ask us questions or to speak with us about concerns. Some children may giggle when they hear the words, and this is perfectly normal. Let children know that it is okay to giggle because we don't use these words often; however, private parts are important parts of our body that can and should be talked about respectfully. Handling discussions of body parts and other aspects of human sexuality with frankness, respect, and sensitivity teaches the same respect and open communication in children.

The ability to express feelings is such an important part of healthy sexuality that children should begin to learn at a very young age. When children are abused sexually, physically, or emotionally, they often feel two things at once. They may wonder, "Why is this person who loves me and who I love doing something that I know is wrong?" Teaching children to ask for help when they feel mixed up or confused is an important step in identifying and stopping abuse.

#### **Lesson Summary**

- Students will learn the names of the body parts, including private parts.
- Students will learn that private parts are kept special. We don't show these parts to others; in fact, we wear clothes to cover these parts.
- Students will create paper plate faces that demonstrate different feelings.
- Students will be encouraged to think of examples of times when they might have two different feelings at the same time. Examples might include feeling excited but also nervous on the first day of school, or excited but also fearful the first time they ride a roller coaster. They are then encouraged to ask a trusted adult for help in making sense of mixed up feelings.
- As a class, students will read the book **How are You Peeling?** and discuss how the characters appear to feel, especially those who look mixed up or confused.

#### **Home Activity**

Share with your child about a time when you felt two different feelings at the same time. For example, you were excited about going to a party, but a little scared because you didn't know many of the people going to the party. Ask your child to tell about a time when he/she felt mixed feelings. Also ask them to share what they discussed about mixed feelings in class.

## **Family Resource**

### **Growing in Love: Kindergarten**

#### **Chapter 3 – Sexual Abuse**

The ability for a child to say “no” to inappropriate touch is difficult 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 them<sup>3</sup>. 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 because they did not say “no” or because they “allowed” someone to touch their private parts. 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. Children should also learn that touching should NEVER be a secret, and that they can ask for help when feeling mixed up or confused about a secret they may have been asked to keep, especially secrets concerning touch.

#### **Lesson Summary**

- Your body belongs to you and only you.
- Sometimes we like touch and sometimes we don’t.
- It is okay to say no to ANY kind of touch.
- We don’t touch people who say “no touching.”
- No older person should “play with” your private parts (*name the private parts*).
- Touching is NEVER a secret.
- If you ever feel confused about touch, always ask for help from a trusted adult.

#### **Home Activity**

Discuss with your child what it means to obey. Ask your child to name different people in their life whom they would consider to be an “authority figure.” Ask if there might ever be a situation in which an authority figure asks or orders them to do something that they really shouldn’t do (*Yes, if they ask me to do something that I know is wrong, such as to keep a secret about my body or touch*). Help your child understand that while most grownups mean well and can be trusted, grownups can make mistakes and have problems, just like kids (such as touching problems). Create a “plan” with your child for what to do if an authority figure asks them to do something that is wrong. Be sure to let them know that it is okay to say no, but that this can be hard to do.

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<sup>3</sup> Louiselle, C. & Gaulin, D. (2000). *Care for Kids Early Childhood Sexuality and Abuse Prevention Program*. Ontario, Canada: Leeds, Grenville, and Lanark District Health Unit.

## **Family Resource**

### **Growing in Love: Kindergarten**

#### **Chapter 4 – Sometimes We Need Help:**

Sexual abuse would not exist without secrecy. Sexual behavior with a child is not only illegal, but something that is considered taboo in our society. As a result, most people, including victims, don't talk about it. Sometimes it seems easier to try to believe that it doesn't/didn't happen and move on. In fact, evidence suggests that only one in ten victims of abuse ever tells anyone. There are many reasons why children don't tell, including:

- Some don't understand that they have been abused.
- Some may feel they are to blame.
- Some are ashamed.
- Some feel that they will not be believed.
- Some don't know how to tell or don't have the words to use.
- Some children try to tell, but we don't recognize their cries for help.

Children are much more likely to experience a healthy recovery from abuse if their stories are heard and if they feel believed and supported following their disclosure. Most children are comfortable asking for help; if we encourage children to ask for help when they feel confused or mixed up about things, including touch, they may be less likely to keep a secret about touch or abuse. We must ensure that our children have a network of adults with whom they feel comfortable asking sensitive questions. We must also ensure that they are equipped with the language and communication skills necessary to be able to ask for help.

#### **Lesson Summary**

- Sometimes we all need help.
- The children will make individual lists of 3 or 4 trusted adults that they can go to for help.

#### **Home Activity**

This is a great lesson to use every day. Whenever you find that your child is having difficulty doing something or understanding, remind him/her that he/she can ask for help. Mention that the child can come to you or to another trusted adult to get help with tough questions, confused feelings, or difficult activities. Make sure that your child knows of at least 3 or 4 people that they trust to be of help. Your child should help make this list, because s/he may not necessarily trust the same people you trust.

## **Family Resource**

### **Growing in Love: Kindergarten**

#### **Chapter 5 – Forgiveness**

Forgiveness is a concept at the heart of Catholic tradition. For most victims of interpersonal trauma such as abuse, however, forgiveness is one of the last issues with which they should deal. This includes children. Victims must have sufficient time and support from others so that their forgiveness is their forgiveness, and not the forced agenda of another. As adults we must be careful to validate and not dismiss children's complicated feelings towards trusted adults who abuse them. If pushed to forgive before they are truly ready, they may later find themselves in another faith crisis<sup>4</sup>. Children are helped by learning that forgiveness is a process, and that several steps may need to occur before they are ready to forgive.

#### **Lesson Summary**

- Using different scenarios, the children will learn that there can be different levels of hurt.
- Sometimes it is easy to forgive, and sometimes it is hard to forgive.
- Forgiveness is a process that may not happen right away.
- Ask a trusted adult for help and guidance if you are finding it hard to forgive.

#### **Home Activity**

Whenever your child has an “I’m sorry” or an “I forgive you” moment, try to stop and talk about how easy or hard it was to apologize or to forgive. Explain that talking about the particular situation can help the healing process. If he/she can’t talk directly to the person involved, remind your child that he/she can always go to a trusted adult to discuss what happened.

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<sup>4</sup> Bringing God’s Presence to Trauma Victims (2005). Church World Service Emergency Response Program. <http://www.cwserp.org/training/Chaplain.pdf>.