

GRADE 12 - CLASSROOM

COMPASS CHILD PROTECTION CHILDREN'S PROGRAM



Illusions of Safety
Parent Handout

Illusions of Safety

Grade 12 - PARENT FOLLOW-UP SESSION

With children who attended the session

Instruction for the Parents

Your teen attended Compass Children's program session today which dealt with the sensitive issue concerning online predators. The classroom session was held to open the discussion with you, the parents.

Sometime within the next week, please set aside 30 minutes and discuss this material with your teen. This packet contains the material you will need for a follow-up discussion and a step-by-step guide.

PARENTS: Before you begin the discussion with your teen, please go through all the material in this packet. Be prepared to discuss this material in ways that will be appropriate for your teen.

Session Overview:

For the opening activity, students worked on some illusion puzzles. The idea that what can't completely trust what we see was introduced.

Next, the students were encouraged to think about the qualities they want in friendships. With the help of an activity, students were encouraged to reflect on what they want in a friendship.

Students were then taught about predators and how they operate. This is further discussed using an explanation of the different phases a predator may take a victim through.

The students make 'Safety Resolutions' to prepare for challenging situations.

Background Information for Parents

*As you prepare to lead your child through a conversation on staying safe, **this background information is for you, not your children**, to better understand the issues.*

Child sexual abuse is a form of abuse that includes sexual activity with, or in front of, a minor. When a person engages in this way, they are committing a crime that can have lasting effects on the child. **A child cannot consent to any form of sexual activity.**

The following are forms of child sexual abuse:

- Sending obscene phone calls, text messages, images or other communication.
- Touching a child's private parts.
- Forcing or tricking a child to touch the private parts of an adult or another child.
- Having sex of any kind.
- Exposing oneself.
- Producing, owning, or sharing pornographic images of children.
- Trafficking children for sex.
- Engaging in any other sexual conduct that is harmful to a child's mental, emotional, or physical development.

Some behavioral signs in children that may indicate sexual abuse include sudden and intense fears, trauma, isolation from others, drastic disruptions in temperament and coping styles, hygiene changes (such as bedwetting, refusing to bathe or washing excessively), being over-protective of siblings, sleep problems or nightmares, inappropriate sexual knowledge, or behaviors beyond their years, or running away from home.

Most sexual abusers have a pre-existing relationship with their victims and/or families. Sexual abusers have gained access, authority, and often the trust of both the child and parent. They

may involve themselves in a family's life as well as appear to do great things in the community – this is a way of being “hidden in plain sight” to gain access to children.

A process—often called “grooming”—is a way that abusers break down a child or young person's physical, emotional, and behavioral boundaries while, at the same time, damaging their relationships with adults, their spiritual life, their values, and their sense of self. Make sure to know who is in your child's life, both children and adults. As part of a grooming process, potential abusers (also called predators) might give presents to or offer favors for children.

Grooming bribes or “guilt gifts” might include unexplained clothing, cash, jewelry, phones or trips. Parents should **know the source of any gifts and treats their child receives**. Children and teens should ask their parents before accepting ANY gifts.

Abusers use grooming tactics with parents and caregivers, too. Predators may be eager to babysit; they may offer “a shoulder to cry on” or financial help. They may pose as the wise counselor with sage advice (what a stressed parent often needs) or the go-to neighbor with exciting “treats” or offer to take a child on a family trip with them (things a lower-income parent may not be able to provide). These intentional behaviors are designed to trick the parent into trusting their child with the predator.

A predator's boundary violations may become so entrenched into daily life that adults fail to recognize it. The people in a child's life become convinced that the predator's inappropriate behavior is safe. **If a child says that they have been abused, believe them—even if you think it's impossible.**

It is common for children who are victims of abuse, including neglect, to blame themselves and believe a situation is their

fault. Furthermore, this message may be reinforced by the person who is abusing them. It is our responsibility as their parents to let them know that it's NOT THE CHILD'S FAULT, they did NOT do anything wrong. This should be continuously reinforced—don't just say it one time and think that's enough. For kids to believe it, we have to say it over and over.

One of the most important ways we can keep our children safe is to have open and courageous communication. Encourage them to come to you when they are confused about anything or have questions. Having conversations about the opposite sex, names of private parts, or other uncomfortable things related to sex helps build language and comfort with your child. Clearly teaching the names of private body parts, enables a child to share with you accurately when they suspect abuse happening to a friend, or even to themselves.

Build strong communication bridges with your children so that when they have to talk about something heavy or hard, they are able to bring it to you with greater ease. For example, your child may step forward and share about a mistake they made, something a friend did, or an unjust situation. Your reaction to these situations determines their level of comfort in continuing to bring such things your way.

When your child does come to you, avoid reacting emotionally, and be supportive. Assure them that you love them, and you will help them find a solution.

In the classroom session, the following phases of grooming were taught:

Building Trust phase:

To build trust, the predator starts getting a little bit more personal. They may give gifts and seek to establish secrets at this point. In this phase, predators show themselves to be kind, loving, caring and responsible- not just to the person they want to hurt, but also to the person's family and the community. Remember, the predator could take on important roles in a community to make people like and trust them. Or they may act sensitive and caring to a child or teen to build trust and friendship.

Risk Assessment phase

These phases can happen in any order but at some point, the predator may bring up inappropriate topics such as sex, drinking, drugs, sending images, or arranging a phone call. This is an attempt to see what the teen is open to doing. If the teen shuts down, stops talking, or does not like an image that was sent, the predator may back off (for a while) to build more "trust" before introducing the subject again. Keeping secrets often falls into this category.

Exclusivity phase:

The predator might try to get a teen to ignore or withdraw from their friends or family. The predator may get upset and express hurt when their targeted youth does not connect with them on the phone or online or opts to do things away from them. The predator may threaten something bad if their intended victim tells anyone about their relationship. The predator will often try to meet with the teen or child alone.

Manipulation phase:

This is when a conversation turns to the teen doing things that they may not have previously been comfortable doing such as meeting in person or engaging in sexual related activity. The predator may blackmail the teen by threatening to “tell” their “secrets.” A teen may feel love for the predator.

These phases can be skipped, or the order changed, depending on the responses of the potential victim.

PARENT-TEEN PROCESS

Here are some thoughts and questions to help supplement your discussion with your teen.

1. Discuss online predators

In the classroom we discussed who predators are, how they operate and what typical predatory behavior looks like. Ways to protect oneself from predators were also discussed. With the help of different activities, the students were made aware of how dangerous it is to build relationships with strangers online.

You may ask your teen what they learned about predators. You may discuss how predators could affect their lives and cause lasting damages. You may want to help your teen understand how a true friendship or relationship is different from the manipulative relationships that are initiated from behind the mask of a predator's offer of love or friendship.

Have an honest and open discussion with your teen. Ask if they ever thought being friends with strangers was exciting or fun. Discuss the different reasons your teen may think this is okay and reason with them about the different aspects of communicating with strangers. Help them weigh the good and the bad, and help them understand the dangers involved.

The next few questions may be sensitive and require an open hearted and honest discussion.

Ask your teen if anyone they met online has ever asked them to meet face to face. If yes, ask them how they dealt with it. Discuss with your teen how they should respond in the future if any one online asks them to meet face to face. Also ask your teen if anyone they met online has ever tried to talk to them about things, they were uncomfortable about or shown them videos or images with indecent

content. Ask your teen to inform you at any point if this happens. Let them know that you appreciate their honesty. Let your teen know how important it is for them to involve you in such cases so that you can help them.

Assure your teen that it is never too late for them to approach you if they are in trouble.

2. Discuss the boundaries to be set for intimacy in relationships.

We discussed in the class how predators may manipulate or blackmail one into participating in activities that one may be uncomfortable with. This included sexual advances that a predator may make on a person.

You may discuss with your teen the boundaries that are needed in relationships before marriage. Explain to them that setting boundaries for intimacy ensures that they have loving, long-lasting relationships based on trust. Discuss how this applies to real life relationships as well as online ones. Discuss that what they do in online relationships will have lasting consequences and can be as harmful as having actual physical intimacy with strangers. Help your teen understand why they need to be strong and say No to sexual advances made by known or unknown people, friends and predators. Help your teen understand that even if they are being blackmailed, they can come to you instead of giving in to the pressures of the predator out of fear.

3. Discuss safety resolutions

Turn to your child's activity book, to the page "safety resolutions." Talk about each of the scenarios and discuss their resolutions. Encourage their initiative and support their efforts.

4. End with prayer.

Keeping one's teen safe, especially from sexual or physical exploitation, is something every parent strongly strives for. For this, along with an open relationship and good communication with your teen, it is important for you to spend time praying for them. Now pray with your teen for God to keep them safe from all types of dangers online. Pray for God's protection over them from predators and their traps. Pray for God's grace, that they have the strength to say no to all the pressures and temptations that they face. Pray for them to make wise choices and when needed avoid activities altogether in this world full of temptations. Pray that you as a family may develop a close and open relationship where you can help each other deal with problems like these.