

## Speak Up Be Safe 7<sup>th</sup>/8<sup>th</sup> Grade Curriculum: Major Topics and Key Terms

At your age, you have a lot of responsibilities both at home and at school, you're building new relationships and new skills, and you're growing from a child to a young adult. It's important to know how to stay safe.

We have various moods at different times. Your mood can change based on how you feel emotionally, on the inside, and physically, on the outside. Sometimes your mood can change as your intuition tells you a situation feels safe or unsafe. There can also be changes occurring in your body in response to different situations. It's important to be aware of what your body is communicating by paying attention to your instincts and listening to your intuition. This can be that voice in your head saying, "It's not safe" or the way your body reacts in an unsafe situation. These are warning signs that you might not be safe. When you feel unsafe, you need to ask a trusted adult for help.

One of the things that can make us feel unsafe is when someone crosses a **personal boundary**. Personal boundaries are limits that a person sets to decide reasonable and safe behaviors for others toward him/her, and we decide how to respond when someone goes past those limits. There can be boundaries for our emotions and our physical space and these boundaries may change based on the situation or who you're with. As you get older, you may have different groups or circles of friends. With each group, you may share different levels of communication and decide whom you trust and want to share your feelings with. These circles can have different boundaries based on how well you know and trust a person.

The first safety rule is "**It's my body.**" We should all feel in charge of what happens with our bodies. It is our right.

**Safe adults** are trusted adults who can help you make decisions to keep yourself and others safe. The second safety rule is "**Ask an adult if I am safe.**" It is important to identify the safe adults in your life and talk with a safe adult when you're in an uncomfortable situation or if you know of a situation where someone else might be unsafe. Before complying with any request that makes you feel uncomfortable, you should find a safe adult to talk with about the situation. You don't have to make decisions about safety on your own. For many of us, our caregivers or parents will be our safe adults, but sometimes they may not feel safe to us or they may not be in a position to help when we need them. There is never a point when it is too late to tell about someone hurting or harming you.

**Sexual harassment** means to tease, bother, or annoy someone because they are a boy or girl, and it is any behavior that is unwanted and sexual in nature. It can take place in person or electronically, and there are laws and school policies against it. There are 3 types of sexual harassment: verbal, writing, and physical. Anyone can be sexually harassed and anyone can potentially sexually harass someone else. What matters is how the person on the receiving end feels about the behavior. The "victim" decides if the behavior is unwanted and is sexually harassing; NOT the perpetrator.

**Abuse** is when someone bigger, stronger, or in a position of power, either an adult or another young person, does something to harm someone on purpose. There are 4 different types of abuse. **Physical abuse** is when someone hurts a person's body by hitting, pinching, punching, kicking, shaking or twisting something like an arm or leg and often leaves behind a bruise, broken bone, cuts or burns. **Neglect** is when a child is not getting what he/she needs to be healthy and safe. **Emotional abuse** is when someone is told bad things about himself/herself over and over again to hurt feelings or make them feel badly about themselves. **Sexual abuse** includes someone: (a) trying to talk to a child about or show a child their private body parts or asking a child to talk about or show his/her private body parts, (b) trying to touch a child's private body parts or to have a child touch their private body parts, or (c) taking pictures of private body parts or showing explicit pictures to a child.

**Bullying** is when someone uses physical force, threats, teasing or name calling over and over again to hurt another person physically, emotionally or both. Adults or children can engage in bullying behaviors.

Sometimes the person doing the abuse or bullying is a stranger, but most of the time it is someone the victim knows. It can be really hard to think about and understand that people we know and even love and who love us could make such hurtful choices, but sadly it happens.

The third safety rule is **“I have choices.”** When you’re in an unsafe situation or a situation that you’re not sure about, you have choices to help you stay safe. There are resistance strategies (RESIST: Run, Escape, Scream, Ignore, Stay away, and Tell) you can use to avoid being hurt in a potentially unsafe situation.

The fourth safety rule is **“Tell someone.”** Identifying the safe adults in your life who you can talk to and go to when there is an unsafe situation is important.

Abuse and bullying can happen anywhere including on the internet and when using social media.

**Cyberbullying** is when a person teases or harasses over the internet and is a pattern of behavior with the intention of causing pain to another person.

On social networking sites and online gaming sites you can chat with someone you don’t necessarily know. People may send you virtual gifts in a game or do special favors for you to become friends with you, but it is very hard to tell the difference between a kind stranger and a predator. Some people will say things online that they would never say or do in person because they think they can “hide” behind their screen. Also, anything you say, share or send via technology is both public and permanent. Once it’s sent, you have no control over how it gets saved or shared.

There are things you can do to stay safe on the internet. 1. Never share personal information online and use the privacy settings of social networking sites. 2. Never meet in person with anyone you “met” online. 3. Think about others. Never say anything hurtful, embarrassing, or personal about someone online or in a text message. 4. Speak up right away if you witness or are subjected to online cruelty. Take screenshots of texts and/or Facebook threads. Do not engage with someone who is being cruel online; ignore them.

**Internet predators** look for children to contact and abuse over the internet. They try to trick children into thinking of them as really good friends, when really they are strangers. If you feel unsafe or uncomfortable with what someone is saying to you online, this is a clue that something might now be right or might be unsafe. You should stop communicating with that person and tell a safe adult.

Sometimes people use cell phones for things that are not safe. This includes sending inappropriate text messages (ones that are threatening, graphic or sexual) or explicit pictures which can be pictures of private body parts. Pictures and texts can be sent to a lot of people very quickly. Sometimes they’re sent by accident, but they can be sent on purpose to hurt or embarrass someone. You can’t “unsend” a picture or text and have no control over what happens to it or when. One way to make sure your choices are safe is to ask yourself, “Would I tell or show this in person?” and “How much would I mind if this was posted on a bulletin board for everyone to read or see?”

If you know about abuse or bullying happening around you, you need to speak up, even if it is not about you directly. You can make a difference.

Safety rule number 5 is **“It’s NEVER my fault.”** Abuse is never the victim’s fault, and you should not be afraid to tell someone. Manipulation and power are key ingredients in abuse and bullying. A victim of abuse cannot begin to heal the hurt until they tell someone and get the help he or she needs. When you speak up, you might be helping not only yourself, but other kids too. It is likely the abuser is also hurting others. In addition, the abuser probably needs help and might not get it if something isn’t said.