

Speak Up Be Safe 8th Grade Curriculum: Major Topics and Key Ideas

An important part of growing up and preparing to become an adult is having more responsibility and freedom. With the increase in freedom, there comes a responsibility to stay safe. However, the adults in a teen's life are still responsible for protecting them from certain types of danger, including abuse. But as teens are given more freedom, adults won't always be around. It is important for teens to know who safe adults are so they know who to go to when faced with an unsafe or uncertain situation (the characteristics of a safe adult are reviewed and students are asked to identify safe adults in their lives both at school and outside of school).

There may be times when safe adults are not available and a teen will need to make choices or decisions regarding their safety. Part of keeping safe means doing their best to recognize and prevent risky and abusive situations where they might get hurt. Knowing what to do to prevent unsafe situations can help teens to stay safe.

It's important for teens to respect others and make sure they are not engaging in abusive or unsafe behaviors. While abusive behavior is not the norm and most relationships are healthy, some people do experience abusive relationships. Teens need to recognize the characteristics of healthy relationships. As a teen's social world continues to expand, they need to recognize how their social development can open them up to different kinds of abuse.

There are 4 types of abuse: physical abuse, emotional abuse (which also can be verbal abuse or psychological abuse), sexual abuse, and neglect. Students will begin to understand that there are broader definitions to abuse. In any relationship, if someone has power or authority over another person and does something to cause serious harm ON PURPOSE, that is abuse. Most of the time, victims know their abuser; in fact, 97% of the time victims know the person who abuses them.

Types of Abuse

1. **Physical Abuse** is when someone hurts a child's body by hitting, punching, kicking, shaking, or twisting something like an arm or a leg. It can leave behind a bruise, a broken bone, cuts, or burns.
2. **Neglect** is the most common type of abuse. Neglect is not having what a child needs to be healthy and safe; for example, not being fed or having proper clothing, not having a place to live, being left alone for long periods of time, or being left with adults who are unsafe. Purposefully not seeking medical attention for severe illnesses or injury can also be Neglect. Neglect is abuse because it hurts children emotionally and physically.
3. **Emotional Abuse** is also called verbal abuse or psychological abuse. This type of abuse may occur when someone is repeatedly told bad things about themselves; for example, being told they can't do anything right, or that they are stupid. This type of abuse includes insults and put-downs that happen over and over again. Emotional abuse also takes the form of bullying, but bullying can also include physical abuse. Bullies can be children of the same age or they can be adults.
4. **Sexual Abuse** involves touching, showing or talking about private body parts in a way that is hurtful or harmful, or without consent. Sexual abuse can happen between minors, or between adults and minors. This type of abuse can include talking explicitly about sexual activity, taking explicit pictures or showing explicit pictures. When kids or teenagers are involved in the taking or showing of explicit pictures, this is a violation of the law and could be considered abusive. If any of these things happen between an adult and a minor, it is illegal and abusive (a minor in CA is 17 years of age or younger).

Sexual abuse can also involve showing a minor explicit pictures or videos of adults. These pictures or videos are called pornography and can be on paper, on a cell phone, on a computer or any other technology with a screen. But if sexually explicit pictures or videos are of a minor, this is not called pornography, but rather it's called CSAM. CSAM stands for Child Sexual Abuse Material and is always illegal. Lastly, sexual activity between minors may be abusive and illegal if there is a significant gap in age, a power imbalance between the minors, or a lack of consent.

Cyber Abuse

Cyber abuse is a general term for abuse that happens on the Internet, or through texts, email, and social media. If someone is teasing or harassing a child or someone else online or with technology, this is called cyberbullying. Some types of cyberbullying even cross the line into unlawful or criminal behavior and most states have anti-bullying laws that include cyberbullying because it can be a form of emotional abuse. Just because these things happen through technology, the behavior is not any less abusive.

Teens will learn about the nature of abuse. Many times an abusive relationship starts out as a good relationship. But if one person begins to cross boundaries or make the other feel uncomfortable, and they repeatedly do not respect personal boundaries, the relationship can become abusive. Sometimes abuse is obvious. A person knows about it, but they have difficulty trying to stop it or avoid it. Other times, abuse is subtle or hard to see and they don't recognize that it is happening. Sometimes abusers trick people into trusting them. When abusers use gifts and emotional support to manipulate their victim into a relationship, it's called *grooming*. Grooming can occur both in person and online. Students will watch a video explaining what grooming is.

Teens will learn that in an abusive situation, the abuser is usually someone the child knows. Abuse and violence, especially sexual assault, perpetrated against young people happens most frequently at either the victim's or perpetrator's home, but it also happens at school and other locations.

Students will learn about online safety in regards to abuse. One of the times it can be hard to recognize abuse is when students are online. There is a certain type of abuser called an Internet Predator. The FBI estimates that at any given time, there are a half million Internet Predators online. These predators use the Internet to find children whom they can trick into an abusive relationship. Young people often let their guard down while online, allowing strangers into their lives, and teens openly discuss things they would not openly discuss in person. Students will learn the ways in which online predators target their victims.

Teens will learn the Speak Up Be Safe safety principles:

- The first principle is "I decide what to do with my body."
- The second principle is "It's okay to ask for help to keep yourself and others safe."
- The third principle is "I have choices." (options or strategies to resist or get away from abusive situations)
- The fourth safety principle is "Tell someone in authority."
- The fifth, and perhaps the most important, safety principle is "Abuse is NEVER my fault."

Students will work together in small groups and be asked to think critically by analyzing scenarios representing potentially abusive situations.

Students will watch a video to learn about human trafficking. Human trafficking is a crime in which an abuser uses a person for their own benefit. The person taking advantage is called a human trafficker. When the trafficker uses a child for their benefit, it's called "child trafficking." People who traffic children look for youth with vulnerabilities, which can be any life circumstances that open children up to being a target. But having vulnerabilities isn't the problem -- everyone has them. The problem is with the person who takes advantage of a child with vulnerabilities, and ANYONE can be a child trafficker. These days, trafficking, in one form or another, can happen anywhere.

People often think of human or child traffickers as kidnappers, but victims usually have some kind of relationship with the trafficker, whether it's online or in their physical lives.

Teens will learn the acronym RESIST in order to help themselves if they encounter potentially abusive situations. Having a plan ahead of time is always a good idea and a way to stop or prevent abuse.

R - Run (immediately get away from the situation; find a safe place or person)

E - Escape (if you can't leave immediately, remove yourself from the danger as soon as possible)

S - Scream (get someone's attention; get help, make an excuse)

I - Ignore (avoid the issue now; take action later)

S - Stay Away (if you know a problem exists, don't go back to it)

T - Tell (find someone you trust or someone in authority and tell them what happened)

Small Group Work

Students will break into small groups and discuss potentially abusive situations and how to apply the RESIST strategies. Then, they will have a class discussion about each scenario and how the RESIST strategies work.

One scenario the students will discuss includes the term sextortion. Sextortion is a crime and a form of child sexual exploitation in which children are threatened or blackmailed. Sextortion occurs when a child shares an image with someone they thought they knew or trusted. In many cases, children are targeted by a person they met online who obtained a sexual image or sexual content from the child through deceit, coercion, or some other method in order to get money or additional sexual content. Believe it or not, sextortion happens to thousands of young people and even adults every year. Law enforcement can intervene and stop the harassment, arrest the person or people behind the crime and help get the support the victim needs.

Teens will discuss the reasons it can be hard to tell an adult or authority figure about unsafe or abusive situations:

- they are afraid no one will believe them
- they are worried friends and family will judge them
- they don't want to get anyone in trouble
- they are scared they will get in trouble
- they are afraid someone will hurt them or someone they care about
- they think there is no solution to the problem
- they feel alone, think no one cares, think no one will help or understand
- they are worried they will embarrass their family once they tell

Students will learn that adults understand abuse can be subtle or hard to detect, and teens can become involved in unhealthy situations or relationships without realizing what is happening. No matter how a child ended up in a situation where abuse was taking place, abuse is never their fault and it's never too late to tell.