



Grade 6

CAREGIVER CONNECTION

Dear Caregiver, Parent, or Guardian,

Building on previous lessons, this Caregiver Connection shares what students are learning in Lesson 3 of the *Safer, Smarter Teens* curriculum and provides simple ways for caregivers to support and reinforce these skills at home.

Lesson 3: Grooming

In today's lesson, students will learn about the **grooming** process. Abusers use this process to identify vulnerabilities, gain trust, and form relationships for the purpose of abuse. This systematic process begins by identifying a need or vulnerability in a potential victim. Then, favors and attention are used to fill the need. Keeping **secrets** creates a bond of silence that tricks and traps the victim. Isolation, or finding opportunities to be alone, provides access for abusers to test **boundaries**. All these steps — which begin small with small violations and then escalate — pave the way for abuse.

In this lesson, your child will be introduced to a new safety principle called **S.T.O.P – Secrets, Touches, Offering Favors, Pushing Boundaries** - an acronym which helps us recognize the **red flags** that warn of potential grooming. Telling a **trusted adult** is the **power play** to stop the grooming process.

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It is important for your child to recognize the red flags of grooming. The use of favors and special attention can indicate an unsafe situation. While not all instances of special treatment are an indication of grooming, to avoid your child having to make that determination, encourage them to tell a trusted adult of any special favors or attention.

Tips to Further Today's Lesson:

Discuss your child's groups, clubs, and activities. Think about what special favors or extra attention could be offered. Remind your child that they can always come to you if they are provided favors or attention that may signal a red flag. Discuss with your child that they must tell you if an adult is behaving in an unsafe way or if they notice the signs of grooming — secrets, touches, offering favors, pushing boundaries.

Have the Difficult Discussions

It's hard to imagine that your child could ever be targeted by a predator. Unfortunately, research shows that sexual abuse is far more common than most parents expect. One in three girls and one in five

boys will be the victim of sexual abuse before the age of 18.* How does that happen? The answer is the grooming process. One of the most powerful tools predators use is secret-keeping. They manipulate the victim by convincing them that they will be blamed or punished if they tell.

Parents play a critical role in interrupting this process. Talk openly with your child about grooming and make it clear that secrets about gifts, favors, touches, or breaking the rules are not okay. Let them know that while you may feel upset if rules are broken, getting in trouble is temporary, and their safety is far more important than any punishment. Emphasize they can always come to you, and you will listen, help, and protect them.

Human Trafficking

In this *Safer, Smarter Schools* middle school lesson, students learn to recognize and respond to the early warning signs of **grooming**—an essential component of human trafficking prevention. The lesson helps students understand how predators exploit trust, attention, and secrecy to gain control over vulnerable individuals, emphasizing that these behaviors are never the victim's fault.

How to Respond to Disclosure of Abuse or Exploitation

An adult's reaction to disclosure plays an important role in the beginning of the healing process for the child. Resist the urge to react strongly to the news or display anger toward the abuser. Instead, consider the following:

What to Say:

"I believe you."

"I'm really glad that you told me. It took a lot of courage to tell me."

"It's not your fault."

"We will work together to get you help. I will need to tell some other people who help protect children."

Be cautious with telling a child who has disclosed that "everything will be all right." There are many uncertainties that surround disclosure, emotions, and steps to recovery. Consider, instead, telling a child that they are important, people care about them and their safety, and that people will work to be with and support them moving forward.

Action Steps:

- If you know or suspect a child has become the victim of sexual abuse, you must make a report immediately. Find your local [reporting agency](#) or call **1-800-4-A-CHILD** (224453).

- Please make sure you are following your state/county/district/LEA policies regarding reporting digital safety and physical abuse.
- In many states, all citizens are considered mandatory reporters, and it is your responsibility to follow the proper protocols within 24 hours to report abuse.
- Access and share [The Guide to Hope and Healing](#) for guidance to recognize, report, and respond to a child who discloses.
- [Take It Down](#): This service is one step you can take to help remove online nude, partially nude, or sexually explicit photos and videos taken before the age of 18.

For more ways to talk to your child about staying safe, visit safer-smarter-families.org and safer-smarter-teens.org. For additional resources, visit laurenkids.org.

*Statistics for sexual abuse: <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC12130397/>

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