VIRTUS®
Excellence
Builds
Trust

Protecting God's Children® Teaching Safety for Teens®
Junior High Level, Grades 6, 7, 8 (ages 11 to 14 years)

Principle:
Educating children about Internet Safety. Specifically:
1) Some Do's and Don'ts of interacting with people on the Internet, and
2) The importance of protecting yourself and your personal information while using the Internet.

Action: For parent and young people to read together this informative and preventive guidelines.

Catechism:
Man is obliged to follow the moral law, which urges him "to do what is good and avoid what is evil" (cf. GS 16). This law makes itself heard in his conscience. **#1713**

Goal:
To assist children and young people in recognizing the risks of providing personal information to anyone on the Internet and to help them realize how hard it is to know who someone really is when the only avenue of communication is the Internet.

Objectives:
To teach young people safety rules for the Internet and to raise young people's awareness about the ways adults can use the Internet to confuse and "trick" them into believing things that are not true. The goal for this lesson is not to teach everything about Internet safety but to concentrate on two specific areas:

1) Keeping personal information private, and do not share personal information.
2) Realizing that there is no way to really know who is communicating with you on the Internet.

The specific learning goals are:

- Young people can learn when to give personal information to an adult and when to keep it private.
- Children and young people should never give private information to someone they don't know or can't see, such as people who might contact them through the Internet.

Dealing with the pre-adolescent age—key concept is "transition" The junior high school child is experiencing a period of rapid growth. The emergence of interest in the opposite sex is occurring. These young people are concerned about physical change, body size, skin, and hair length. Concepts depend a great deal on body image as young people complain of being either too physically mature or too physically immature. Peer groups play an import role in shaping attitudes and interests. Caregivers need to regularly assure youngsters that changes are normal though the rate varies from person to person.

Parents, catechists, teachers, youth ministers, and other caring adults must also listen to children and observe what's going on in their lives. Let young people be themselves. Let them explore their self-expression but know who they are with, what they are doing, and remind them of the importance of protecting themselves during this time in their lives. During this time, children are completely self-absorbed and many are naturally less communicative.

Declaration on Christian Education, Gravissimum educationis, Proclaimed by Pope Paul VI, October 28. 1965, Article 3 at 44.

Getting started with Lessons 7:

<u>Vocabulary words:</u>
- Internet—Global communication network allowing computers worldwide to connect and exchange information.
- Social network—A site or place on the Internet where a number of users can communicate with each other in real time.
- Private—Personal information not publicly expressed.
- Rules—A principle or regulation that governs actions, conduct, and arrangements.

<u>Supplemental Resource Material</u>
The complete grooming process employed by a child molester is usually three-pronged and involves physical as well as psychological behaviors. In person, the process may take months, even years to accomplish with regular face-to-face contact. However, through the Internet, predators can break down the child's defenses in a very short amount of time, particularly if the child is vulnerable or ignorant about the risks of the Internet.

The three aspects of the typical grooming process are: **Physical grooming, psychological grooming, and community grooming—and all three can occur at the same time.**

In the case of Internet seduction, the physical grooming becomes part of the process much later in the game. In fact, by the time the molester has an opportunity to touch the child it may be too late to protect the child from harm. There is no "build up" in the levels of intimacy of touch when the Internet is the initial contact point. Children solicited through the Internet are often abducted by the molester when a face-to-face meeting is arranged or there is any kind of physical contact. **On the Internet, the physical grooming and community grooming are left out of the initial process, and the psychological grooming has some new twists.**

The most important aspect of grooming through Internet contact is the psychological grooming. The molester establishes a relationship online by pretending to be someone in the child's age group. Through conversations about things the child is interested in, the molester will lure the child into social networks and, eventually is often able to convince the child to defy parents, grandparents, and/or guardians and meet the molester outside the home. The child is convinced that the molester is trustworthy and believes this person is a friend, someone that really likes and understands the child. The child may be convinced the online friend is the same age and has the same issues. Molesters know it is important to talk to children and young people on their level. They communicate in a way that children and young people understand and convince the young people that they are someone who can be trusted —someone just like them.

On the Internet, this psychological grooming is particularly effective because none of the natural barriers of distrust or apprehension that might arise for a child are present. The physical appearance and real age of the molester are hidden from the child's view. The Internet provides a wall for the molester to hide behind and the child can't see the molester or the wall. Children and young people are particularly vulnerable to this approach because of their natural tendency to trust others. Threats about not telling or threats about harming someone or something the child loves are not needed in this situation. The child's resistance is broken down through the communication process. Remember, the child often thinks that he or she is talking with another child. There is really nothing to tell mom and dad. After all, they are older. They would not really understand. Sometimes the child is conflicted but most of the time, unfortunately, what really happens is that the child bonds more to the molester. On the Internet, there is no grooming of the community. In fact, the intention of the molester is to bypass the community altogether. In online seduction, the molester wants to remain hidden from view. He or she will create a relationship with the child that goes around parents, grandparents, and/or guardians and encourages the child to keep the conversations secret. This works because the child thinks the person on the other end of the communication is telling the truth.

Continue with Lessons 7:

The behavioral warning signs of a potential predator are evident in online communications but they are much more difficult for adults to identify. There is a barrier between the parents or caring adults and the predator that distorts everything about the relationship. That is why it is so important for parents and caring adults to be aware of the communications their children and young people are engaged in on the Internet and look for the signs that something is off. Among the ways that behavioral warning signs show up in new and different ways because of Internet seduction are:

> 1. Always wants to be alone with children. On the Internet, the predator has one-on-one access to children and young people through email and social networks. Email communications, though, are more risky. Parents can read email on the computer. Social networks are places for private, real time conversations that are more difficult and sometimes impossible to recover and read. Predators will invite children and young people to join them in social networks for "private" conversations.

> 2. Give gifts to teens, often without permission. In person or on the Internet, predators find ways to give gifts to young people and tell them to keep it secret. The gift may be as simple as gif cards that parents won't allow. However, gifts are often more than that, particularly when they come from someone who made contact with the teens over the Internet. In that case, the gift is likely to be entirely inappropriate—gifts such as perfume, flowers, lingerie, or expensive items.

> 3. Allows a child to engage in activities that parents would not allow. When meeting with children and young people online, predators lure them into online social networks and encourage secrecy. This activity is extremely effective at driving a wedge between the child and his/her parent(s). Child molesters look for children that are alone after school. They prefer to contact the young people between the time school is out and the time parents come home from work. This is another factor that convinces children and young people that the person "talking" to them is someone their own age. Why else would he or she be home and able to chat or email after school?

> 4. Uses sexually explicit language and tells dirty jokes. If parents and caring adults are monitoring young people's communications online, they can often see that this is happening and intervene. If, as is often the case, children and young people are allowed on the Internet unsupervised, it is possible for knowledgeable parents to recover this information but it may not be discovered early enough to protect a child from harm.

Knowing the warning signs means little where the Internet is concerned if parents are not monitoring their children's Internet activities. Find out where they are going on the Internet. Read email messages. Check out their social network. Put limits and filters on any computer children and young people can use and check regularly to make sure that filters are in place and working. Generally, the grooming process is complex. On the Internet, it is even more difficult to identify and interrupt. This lesson is designed to focus on two things that children and young people can do to protect themselves from predators on the Internet. Two simple rules that can be the difference between safety and danger for children are:

> 1) Keeping personal information private and
> 2) Children need to follow their parent's rules in order to stay safe.

Concentrating on these two rules will reinforce the message from parents and others about Internet dangers while keeping the benefits of the Internet available for everyone to enjoy and be safe at all times.

Prayer to end the lesson:
My holy Angel Guardian, ask the Lord to bless the journey that I undertake, that it may benefit the health of my soul and body; that I may reach its end, and that, returning safe and sound, I may find my family in good health. Guard, guide and preserve us throughout the day and night.