

Sexual Assault Support Services of Midcoast Maine

Curriculum Assessment of the Child Protective Unit of *Second Step*

Types of Touches

Examples	Explanation	SASSMM Example
<p>“<i>Unsafe touches</i> hurt your body.” (Kindergarten, L3)</p> <p>“<i>Safe touches</i> help you feel cared for and loved. They’re good for your body. Dion feels safe and loved when his dad tucks him in at night.” (Grade 2, L3)</p> <p>“I will say some touches. Put your thumbs up if it’s safe, and put your thumbs down if it’s unsafe: Hugs. Pinching. Kicking. Holding hands. Pats on the back. Hitting. Pushing. Remember, unsafe touches are never okay. What can you say to refuse unsafe touches?” (Grade 1, L3)</p>	<p>The safe vs. unsafe touch dichotomy does not recognize that touches constituting sexual abuse do not necessarily read as “unsafe” to a child. If a child is thinking about the way “safe” touches are defined and not thinking about the “private body parts rule”, the concept of safe touches could potentially reinforce that an abusive situation is okay if the touch does not hurt.</p> <p>This perspective also ignores a common aspect of CSA—grooming, which is when the abuser makes the child feel loved and cared for to gain trust. In cases of grooming, “safe” touches may be happening, though we know it’s an unsafe situation.</p> <p>It is also possible for a “safe” touch such a handshake or hug to be “unsafe” if it is too hard or aggressive. These rigid categories could potentially prevent a child</p>	<p>N/A</p>

	<p>from being able to trust their own feelings about a touch or a situation.</p>	
<p>“An unwanted touch is any touch you don’t like. Even safe touches can be unwanted. If you don’t like it or it makes you feel uncomfortable, it’s an unwanted touch, and you can refuse it.” (Grade 4, L3)</p> <p>“What is the difference between an unsafe and unwanted touch? (An unsafe touch is any touch that hurts your body. An unwanted touch is any touch you don’t like or that makes you feel uncomfortable.)” (Grade 4, L3)</p> <p>“You can say no to unsafe and unwanted touches.” (Grade 3, L6)</p> <p>“Is it okay for someone to put an arm around someone else and stroke his or her hair? (Yes.) This touch is not hurting Sarina’s body, but today it’s making her feel uncomfortable. It’s important to say words that mean no to touches you don’t want.” (Grade 3, L3)</p>	<p>It is inherently confusing that a touch could be both “safe” and “unwanted” at the same time. Focusing on whether a touch is “okay” or “safe” distracts from the more important question of whether there is consent.</p> <p>It won’t always be easy for a kid to determine that a certain touch is “unwanted”. The curriculum spends too much time helping children distinguish between these two definitions at the expense of empowering them with clear messages about bodily autonomy and the right to say no to any touch.</p>	<p>“Most of the time, people share bubble space with each other a lot. Sharing bubble space means being close or touching. Sometimes we like being close or touching, and sometimes we don’t. Sometimes we want our bubble all to ourselves, and that’s okay.”</p> <p>“It’s important to ask before we get into someone’s bubble, and to listen to their answer, because there are lots of different reasons why someone might not want to share their bubble. If we ask and they say yes, that means we have their permission. If they say no, we don’t touch them. Sometimes people change their minds, and that’s okay, too.”</p>
<p>“How did David know Uncle Terry was breaking the Touching Rule?” (Uncle Terry was not trying to keep him healthy. Uncle Terry touched his private body parts. David felt uncomfortable.) (Grade 2, L6)</p> <p>“Paying attention to uncomfortable feelings in your body can help you recognize when someone is breaking the Touching Rule.” (Grade 3, L4)</p>	<p>Labeling specific types of touches as uncomfortable could make child who has had a different experience feel alienated, even in the case of sexual touching.</p> <p>A child being abused may experience a range of conflicting emotions, with many being more prominent than discomfort. It is important to not always link situations of abuse with uncomfortable</p>	<p>“How do you know whether or not you want to share your bubble with someone? Your feelings. We get all sorts of feelings that help us decide. We get happy feelings, like when you are snuggling with someone you love. You feel safe and uncomfortable. We get uncomfortable feelings, like when</p>

<p>“What might it mean that her body feels uncomfortable?” (That the touch isn’t okay. That the touch is unwanted.) “Uncomfortable feelings in your body might mean a situation is not okay. Avanti paid attention to the uncomfortable feelings in her body. They helped her recognize that her uncle was breaking the Touching Rule.” (Grade 3, L4)</p>	<p>feelings. It is better to speak generally about how our feelings can help us decide if we want a touch or not.</p>	<p>we feel squished. We might also get feelings that we’re not sure about. Sometimes we feel mixed up or confused. Feelings are messages from your body. But sometimes they can be confusing. Everybody needs help with feelings sometimes. It’s always okay to ask a grown-up for help with your feelings.”</p>
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Refusing Touches

Specific Examples	Explanation	SASSMM Example
<p>“Refuse is one of the ways to stay safe.” “Ways to Stay Safe” mini poster, Kindergarten Lesson 1</p> <p>“Think about which Way to Stay Safe Marcus could do next. (Report the touch. <i>Refuse the touch.</i>)” Kindergarten, Lesson 4</p> <p>“Julie remembered the Touching Rule, and she refused to let Eric touch her.” (Kindergarten, L6)</p> <p>“Think about what Sarah could say to Nancy to stop the unsafe touches.” (Grade 3, L3)</p> <p>“Think about which of Hannah’s decisions did not help keep her safe. What should she have done differently to help keep herself safe?” (Grade 4, L6)</p>	<p>These statements perpetuate the untrue idea that refusing a touch will make abuse stop, and places an unfair and unrealistic demand on children to keep themselves safe.</p> <p>In scenarios, the person initiating the inappropriate behavior always stops when the kid stands up to them. This could give students the impression that they have the power and responsibility to stop the behavior of adults who have power over them. In reality, saying no to an abuser can sometimes put a child in greater danger.</p>	<p>“We share bubble space with each other a lot. Sharing bubble space means being close to someone else. It might also mean touching, like giving a hug, a high-five, or snuggling. Sometimes we like being close or touching, and sometimes we don’t want to share our bubble. It’s always okay to say no to touching, or ask someone to leave your bubble. This is because your body and your bubble belong to you.”</p>

<p>“You need to refuse unsafe touches.” (Kindergarten & Grade 1, L4)</p> <p>“It’s important to say words that mean no to touches you don’t want.” (Grade 3, L3)</p> <p>“So, what should you say to touches you don’t want? Let’s say it together: No!” (Grade 3, L4)</p> <p>“Marcus quickly moved away from his uncle. He told his uncle in a strong, respectful voice, “Stop. Don’t touch me.” His uncle left the room, and Marcus went to bed.” (Kindergarten, L4)</p>	<p>Absolutist language surrounding refusal puts a negative value on kids who can’t or don’t say no. Whether refusal feels possible will depend on the child and the situation. Refusing a touch is not always the “right” choice; a child’s intuition may tell them it is safer to endure abuse in the moment and to ask for help later on.</p> <p>While more open language such as kids “can” refuse touches sometimes appears, the overall message is that kids should be saying no to abuse.</p>	<p>“Kyle could also ask for help if he felt too shy to use his words. Sometimes it feels really hard to say, ‘No, stop!’ to somebody, especially a grown-up. We might feel stuck or frozen instead...If Kyle was too nervous to ask his mom for help when Uncle Willy was nearby, could Kyle wait until later? Of course. It’s never too late to ask for help.”</p>
<p>“When you refuse unsafe or unwanted touches, you need to use your Second Step skill: Be assertive. Stand up straight, face the person you’re refusing, and use a strong, respectful voice.” (Kindergarten, L2)</p> <p><i>Describe specific ways the students demonstrated assertiveness:</i> “I noticed you standing up straight and using a strong voice.” (Grade 1, L3)</p> <p>“Iman remembers from her safety lesson that she can be assertive and say no to unwanted touches. She stands up straight with her shoulders back, faces her uncle, and says in a strong, respectful voice, “Please stop. I don’t want to play that game anymore.” (Grade 2, L3)</p>	<p>The way the educator is directed to validate student’s refusal skills is harmful. It perpetuates the idea that if kids are assertive/use a strong voice to refuse a touch, they won’t be abused, which is simply untrue. All of this sends the message that not only must children refuse touches even if they feel scared or frozen, but that there is also a right way to refuse a touch.</p> <p>By only focusing on using assertive words to fend off unwanted touch, this curriculum focuses only on the response of the victim and doesn't hold the person who is violating accountable for their behavior.</p>	<p>SASSMM’s curriculum gives students permission to be assertive, but doesn’t mandate that students are assertive or refuse touches.</p>
<p>“If you think Kim’s plan to stop the unwanted touch without disappointing her grandpa worked, raise your hand.” (Grade 4, L3)</p>	<p>Students are urged to refuse touches, but to do so in a “respectful” way and to be protective of others’ feelings. In younger grades, what</p>	<p>“Was it okay that Kyle used a loud voice and said, ‘No, stop!’? Yes, because Uncle Willy was not</p>

<p>“If you think Marcus’s plan to refuse the unwanted touch without upsetting Allie worked, raise your hand.” (Grade 5, L3)</p> <p>“Sometimes a person won’t know he or she is touching you in an unwanted way. Explaining why the touch is unwanted can be a good way to refuse the touch without hurting that person’s feelings.” (Grade 5, L3)</p>	<p>“respectful” means is not clearly defined, but as students get older the curriculum mis ore explicit that they should aim to refuse touches without upsetting the person who is violating them. Although the scenarios paired with this message are not abusive in nature, there is no distinction made. Therefore, this message will teach children that they should seek to please others, including those who are abusing them.</p> <p>It is important to unequivocally reassure children that it is okay to disappoint or upset someone else, and that they are not responsible for explaining why a touch is unwanted or making sure that the other person isn’t angry or hurt.</p>	<p>listening. Kyle’s body and bubble belong to Kyle, and that’s more important than being polite.”</p> <p>If they don’t listen, it’s okay to use a loud voice and say “STOP, I told you to get out of my bubble!” Your bubble is more important than being polite.</p>
<p>“Hold up your hand in a stop signal and say: Refuse: Say words that mean no. What could you say? <i>Call on a few students at random to stand and say words that mean no.</i>” (Kindergarten, L1)</p> <p>“What can you say to refuse the unsafe/unwanted touch?” <i>Call on a few students at random to stand, face the empty chair, and refuse the touch.</i> (Kindergarten, L3)</p> <p>“Take turns practicing what to say to refuse this touch. When you and your partner have both practiced, sit down.” (Grades 4 & 5, L3)</p>	<p>Asking students to perform, in any way, in front of a classroom as a method of abuse prevention is not trauma-informed. This is not an activity for students, but a test. Many students are likely to feel embarrassed by this exercise, but for those who have experienced abuse, it could exacerbate feelings of shame and self-blame. In addition to the potential harm, this activity is also rather silly and is unlikely to engage students seriously, especially in older grades.</p> <p>Similarly, the “turn and tell” activity where students are directed to discuss a sensitive question with a peer sitting beside them could feel unsafe for students.</p>	<p>“You don’t have to do the activities if you don’t want to, but if you do, please follow my directions. Do these rules sound fair?”</p>

Reporting

Specific examples	Explanation	SASSMM example
<p>“Domingo knows he has to keep reporting until someone believes and helps him.” (Kindergarten, L5)</p> <p>“You need to keep reporting until someone believes you and helps you with the touching problem.” (Grade 3, L5)</p> <p>“What should you do if the adult you report to doesn’t help you?” (Report to another adult.) “Keep reporting until an adult believes you.” (Grade 4, L5)</p> <p>“Always report a broken Private Body Parts Rule, no matter what.” (Grade 4, L6)</p>	<p>This rhetoric is shaming towards abused children who have not disclosed. If children feel they have done something wrong, they are even less likely to share their story with an adult.</p> <p>Validating how difficult it can feel to talk to an adult about scary or embarrassing problems, and how discouraging it can be to report and not be believed, would be more effective at building trust with students.</p>	<p>“Sometimes it feels hard to say no to touching, especially with your family. Remember before, when we pretended to be frozen like ice cubes? Sometimes people feel stuck or frozen when someone comes into their bubble. And if that happens, it's a really good idea to ask a grown up for help. It's never too late to ask for help.”</p> <p>“It’s always okay to ask a grown up for help if you aren’t sure about someone touching you, or if you have a question about your body. Touching is never a secret. Do you have any questions?”</p>
<p>“When you report you need to be assertive.” (Grade 2, L4)</p> <p><i>Have students stand, face the empty chair, and say in a strong, respectful voice together: I need to report a broken Touching Rule. Reinforce students’ assertiveness skills.</i> (Kindergarten, Lesson 5)</p>	<p>The expectation that children assertively disclose abuse does not recognize the intense fear, shame, and self-blame that many survivors overcome in order to disclose. This rhetoric does not give children permission to feel scared or vulnerable, and to express that to adults they feel safe with.</p> <p>The lessons also suggest that if children are assertive when disclosing abuse, they are more</p>	<p>N/A</p>

<p>“Sometimes the person you want to talk to might be busy. It’s important to be assertive and say you need to talk as soon as possible.” (Grade 2, L5)</p> <p>“Why didn’t Kyle’s mother and brother believe him?” (His mother thinks Mr. Tully is nice. His brother thinks he’s trying to get attention. Kyle wasn’t assertive.) . . . “Why do you think Kyle’s teacher believed him?” (She didn’t know Mr. Tully. Kyle reported assertively.) (Grade 4, L5)</p>	<p>likely to be believed. This is a deeply shaming notion, as children who were not believed will think this was their fault for not being assertive enough.</p>	
<p>“An adult can help stop the unwanted touching.” Kindergarten, L4</p> <p>“Refusing and reporting when someone has broken the Touching Rule can help make sure the touching stops.” Kindergarten, L4</p>	<p>While we hope this will be true, it is important not to make promises to children about what will occur as a result of them disclosing abuse.</p>	<p>“It’s adults’ job to help keep kids safe.”</p>
<p>“Remember, if unsafe or unwanted touches don’t stop, you need to tell an adult.” (Kindergarten, L4)</p> <p>“And if you can’t get the unsafe touching to stop, tell an adult.” (Grade 2, L3)</p> <p>“Sometimes you can’t stop the unsafe or unwanted touches by yourself. It is important to tell an adult you trust.” (Grade 1, L3)</p>	<p>These statements send the message that children should attempt to stop the touching by refusing before asking for help from an adult.</p> <p>It keeps the focus on stopping the touching, rather than giving the child options and helping them get support with their feelings or needs.</p>	<p>N/A</p>
<p>“Do you think it’s okay to keep a secret about someone breaking the Touching Rule?” (No.) “That’s right. The rule is to never keep <i>secrets</i> about touching.” (Kindergarten, L4)</p> <p>“If someone breaks the Private Body Parts Rule, you must report to an adult, even if someone tells you to keep it secret.” (Grade 4, L5)</p>	<p>We know that most children do keep secrets about abuse, at least until a point when they feel safe to tell. This often coincides with when they are no longer interacting with the perpetrator. While of course we want children to disclose abuse to trusted adults who can help them, we must recognize that in many cases the children</p>	<p>“It’s always okay to ask a grown up for help if you aren’t sure about someone touching you, or if you have a question about your body. Touching is never a secret.”</p> <p>“Can you think of a grown up in your life who is a really good listener?”</p>

<p>“Why should you never keep secrets about a broken Private Body Parts Rule?” (So adults can help keep you safe.) “What if the person is really nice to you or says you’ll get in trouble if you report?” (You should still report.) (Grade 4, L5)</p>	<p>will not feel safe to do so. Children might be manipulated or otherwise feel threatened by perpetrators. They may also have valid fears about the person hurting them getting in trouble. It only creates more shame, guilt and self-blame for a child survivor to create a rule demanding they disclose traumatic things that have happened to them.</p>	<p>(usually here kids will list grown-ups from home). Are there any grown-ups at school who can help with problems?”</p>
<p>“If someone has ever touched you in a way you didn’t want or that made you feel uncomfortable, raise your hand. Call on one or two students at random to report.” (Grade 4, L3)</p>	<p>The lesson scripts often direct teachers to “call on a few students randomly” to share experiences, answers, or to practice refusal skills in front of the class, beginning in Kindergarten. While it may not be the intention, the teacher is ultimately soliciting disclosures of abuse from students. Asking students to disclose this information in front of peers is unfair, embarrassing, and potentially triggering.</p>	<p>N/A</p>
<p>“Rico tells Shawna he’s sorry and didn’t mean to upset her. Show with your thumbs if you think Rico is telling the truth. Think about whether Shawna should still report the broken Private Body Parts Rule. Give think-time. Turn and tell your partner why you think she should or should not report. Call on a few students at random to report.”</p> <p>“Think back to the question about whether Rico was telling the truth about touching Shawna’s private body parts. Raise your hand if you’ve changed your mind about whether Rico was</p>	<p>There is a huge amount of focus placed on Shawna, who has been abused, and what Shawna “should” do. This is implicitly shaming of Shawna, as it implies Shawna’s behavior is the issue. Rather than focusing on placing accountability with Rico for his behavior, it focuses on what Shawna has done “wrong,” and makes it seem like the abuse she suffered is her fault. For example, Shawna does not follow the “Always Ask First” rule when giving Rico her number, and Rico later asks Shawna for a nude photo.</p> <p>The focus on whether or not Rico was “telling the truth” also implies Shawna shouldn’t have accepted his apology. It’s completely</p>	<p>N/A</p>

telling the truth. Comment on the number of raised hands.” Grade 5, L4	understandable that Shawna would trust her friend and accept his apology initially, and it’s not Shawna’s fault for believing he was telling the truth. Rather, it’s Rico’s behavior that needs to be addressed, and the responsibility shouldn’t be on Shawna to follow the rules to avoid her abuse.	
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The Touching Rule

Specific Examples	Explanation	SASSMM Example
“Today you’ll learn an important rule about touching private body parts. Show students the Touching Rule Card. This is the Touching Rule: a bigger person should never touch your private body parts except to keep you healthy.” (Kindergarten, L4).	The first lesson children receive where private parts are mentioned introduces them in a negative way. For example, rather than talking about bodies/defining body parts (which young children might not be familiar with), a hypothetical scenario of abuse is described. Doing this can be stigmatizing and induce shame. This is consistent throughout the curriculum.	N/A
“ <i>Private body parts</i> are the body parts covered by a bathing suit.” (Grade 1, L4)	“Bathing suit zone” is inaccurate & confusing. Showing a female child wearing a one-piece bathing suit makes it seem like the belly is a private area. Many different types of bathing suits exist, which also creates confusion about which specific areas of the body are private. Underwear is a better way of illustrating this concept because underwear is also a private piece of clothing. Talking about areas that are private/forbidden in the context of a piece of clothing worn publicly can create confusion.	“Kids might need help with lots of parts of their body, including their private parts. These are the parts covered by underwear.”

<p>“On boys, bathing suits cover the penis in front and the buttocks, or bottom, in back. On girls, bathing suits cover the vulva, vagina, and breasts in front, and the buttocks, or bottom, in back.” (Grade 1, L4).</p>	<p>Labeling “breasts” and “nipples” as private parts for girls isn’t age-appropriate, as young children have not yet gone through puberty.</p> <p>Anatomically correct language is not inclusive of trans and gender nonconforming children.</p>	<p>“Everyone has private parts, but there are different kinds. Some words for these parts are penis, vagina, and bum or bottom. You might say different words at home, but if you went to the doctor, the doctor would say these words.”</p>
<p>“Their bathing suits cover their <i>private body parts</i>. They are private because they’re not to be seen or touched by others.” (Grade 2, L4)</p>	<p>It’s partially true that private means not seen/touched by others, but it’s also true that kids will have their private parts seen/touched by others and that isn’t inherently harmful. Kids take baths together, run around naked, etc., and those are developmentally expected behaviors. For this reason, making an absolutist statement around private areas not being seen or touched by others could be confusing/shame inducing for kids.</p>	<p>N/A</p>
<p>“Here is Marcus at the doctor’s office. Dr. Jensen might touch his private body parts during his well visit. This touch is okay because it keeps him healthy.” (Kindergarten, L4).</p> <p>“If you think a scenario breaks the Private Body Parts Rule, raise your hand. A friend asks to see your private body parts. (Hands up.) Your neighbor shows you pictures of someone with no clothes on. (Hands up.) A doctor touches your private body parts during a check-up. (Hands down.)” (Grade 4, L4)</p>	<p>It is problematic to label all touches to private body parts from doctors as okay and healthy, as there have been many instances of medical staff abusing their position to violate children. It is important to use more nuanced language that sends the message that just because a touch is coming from a doctor does not mean it is automatically okay.</p>	<p>“If you go to the doctor for a cough, does the doctor need to check your private parts then? No. Does the dentist ever need to look at your private parts? Of course not!”</p>
<p>“A bigger person should never touch your private body parts except to keep you healthy. Who might need to touch you to keep you healthy? (Various answers.) A doctor needs to</p>	<p>Without covering specific examples of touches to keep a kid healthy, it is not clear which touches to private areas are okay. Young children may get the message that they should not be getting help with their private areas, even from grownups they</p>	<p>“Can you think of any times where a grown up might need to look at or touch a kid’s private parts? (help in the bathroom, shower, doctor’s office, rash, tick check, etc.). Great examples.”</p>

<p>check your body parts to keep you healthy.” (Kindergarten, L4)</p> <p>“Why might a doctor or nurse ask to see your private body parts?” (To keep you healthy. To treat an infection or rash.) (Grade 4, L4)</p> <p>“Is it ever okay for a family member to touch or ask to see your private body parts?” (No.)</p> <p>“Only a doctor or nurse can touch or ask to see your private body parts.” (Grade 4, L4)</p>	<p>trust. A specific example of why a touch to private body parts might be needed doesn’t happen until Grade 4 in the curriculum.</p>	
<p>“And you should never touch anyone else’s private body parts.” (Grade 2, L4)</p> <p>“Show with your thumbs whether you think it’s okay for other people to ask to see or touch your private body parts. (No. Thumbs down.) Your private body parts are private. The only people who can ask to see or touch them are a doctor or nurse.” (Grade 5, L4)</p>	<p>It is possible to provide safety information without shaming children for natural and healthy sexual exploration with peers. The message “you shouldn’t touch anyone’s private body parts either” lumps children who are exploring together with abusers. A more nuanced conversation about consent and appropriateness of showing private parts at school is not offered. “Private body parts rule” also does not acknowledge onset of puberty and emergence of sexual feelings for 5th graders. “No one should ever touch yours” could be interpreted as “you should never do this.” “No one should touch your body without your consent” would be a more age-appropriate message that takes healthy sexual development into account.</p>	<p>N/A</p>
<p>“No one should ever make you look at his or her’s [private body parts] or anyone else’s.” (Private Body Parts Rule Mini-Poster, Grades 4 & 5, Lesson 4)</p>	<p>While we don’t take issue with this message, this message comes too late in the curriculum. It</p>	<p>“A grown up who is helping you should tell you if they need to touch your body, and it’s okay to ask questions. If a touch doesn’t feel ok, it’s always ok to say so to</p>

	should come earlier, and also explained in a more kid-friendly, trauma-informed way.	any grown up you trust. As kids get older, they can do more things themselves. Grown-ups should only help kids with their bodies, especially private parts, if a kid needs help. Grown-ups don't need help from kids with their private parts, and should never ask a kid for help."
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