

My Body, My Choice: A Teaching Resource **for Irish Primary Schools**

This resource is designed to support the SPHE curriculum in a child-appropriate manner, focusing on bodily autonomy, personal safety, and boundaries. The content is suitable for junior and senior infants, and first and second class (ages 3-8). It can be used as a standalone lesson or integrated into broader SPHE themes.

Unit 1: My Body Belongs to Me

This introductory unit establishes the core concept of bodily autonomy. The goal is to empower children by teaching them that they have control over their own bodies and that it is okay to decide who touches them and how.

Key Concepts:

- Each person has their own body.
- Your body is yours alone.
- You get to decide what happens to your body.
- You can use your body for fun and movement.

Discussion Points for the Classroom

Facilitate a circle time discussion with the following prompts. Remember to keep it positive and listen to the children's responses.

- 'Can you wiggle your fingers? Can you jump up and down? What are some things you love to do with your body?'
- 'We all have a wonderful body, and it's ours to look after. What do you think that means?'
- 'Your body is like your house—it's yours and you get to decide what happens to it. You get to make the rules.'
- 'What if a friend or even a grown-up wants to give you a hug, but you don't want one right now? What can you say or do?'

Activity: The 'Yes' and 'No' Game

This is a simple, physical activity to reinforce the power of 'yes' and 'no' in a safe and playful way.

1. Explain that you will use two different actions to show how they feel about touch.
2. **For 'Yes':** Ask children to stand with their arms open wide, like they are ready for a hug or a high-five.
3. **For 'No':** Ask children to stand with their arms crossed over their chest and hold up a hand in a 'stop' signal.
4. Call out different scenarios, and have the children use the 'yes' or 'no' action to show their answer.
 - 'A family member wants to give you a hug.' (Children can show 'yes' or 'no'.)

- ‘Your friend wants to hold your hand.’ (Children can show ‘yes’ or ‘no’.)
 - ‘Someone you don't know wants to pick you up.’ (The correct answer is always ‘no’.)
5. Emphasise that their ‘no’ is always a good and right choice.

Teacher Tip: This activity should be done in a light-hearted, non-threatening way. Avoid scenarios that might cause anxiety and always praise children for making a choice that is right for them.

Unit 2: Setting My Boundaries

This unit builds on the first by introducing the concepts of personal space and private parts in a way that is empowering and respectful. The focus is on teaching children to recognise their own feelings and trust their instincts about when a touch is okay and when it is not.

Key Concepts:

- Everyone has personal space around their body.
- It is okay to say ‘NO’ to a hug or any touch you don't want.
- Some parts of our bodies are private.
- Only a few trusted grown-ups can touch private parts, and only for specific reasons (e.g., for washing or at the doctor).

Discussion Points for the Classroom

Use these prompts to guide a sensitive conversation. Reassure the children that all feelings are okay.

- ‘Let's think about our personal space. Imagine a bubble around your body. That bubble is your space. How does it feel when someone gets too close without asking?’
- ‘Can we practice saying the word ‘NO’ together? What does a strong, clear ‘NO’ sound like?’
- ‘Our bodies have some parts that are private. We call them private parts because we usually cover them with our underwear or swimming costume. It's important to know that these parts belong just to you, and nobody else should touch them.’
- ‘Who are the people who are sometimes allowed to touch your private parts?’ (This might be a parent or guardian when washing or changing a nappy, or a doctor to make sure you're healthy. Emphasise that they must always explain why and get permission, and that a parent or guardian should always be present with a doctor.)

Activity: The Hula Hoop Boundary

This activity is a great way to visually represent and respect personal space.

1. Give each child a hula hoop to stand inside. Explain that this is their own personal bubble.
2. Have the children move around the room, making sure their hula hoops don't touch anyone else's.
3. Discuss what it feels like when someone bumps into their hula hoop. Relate this back to their personal space.

4. You can also do this without hula hoops and ask the children to show with their arms how much space they need to feel comfortable.

A Note on Handling Sensitive Topics

When discussing private parts and boundaries, it is crucial to use calm, matter-of-fact language. Avoid creating a sense of shame or fear. The goal is to normalise these discussions and empower children to speak up if something feels wrong. Be prepared to answer questions simply and honestly, and know when to refer a child to a designated person in the school for additional support.

Unit 3: Good Secrets, Bad Secrets, and Trusted Grown-Ups

This final unit provides children with the language and tools to identify harmful situations and seek help. The distinction between good and bad secrets is a simple and effective way to teach children that some things must be shared to keep them safe.

Key Concepts:

- There are two types of secrets: good secrets and bad secrets.
- Good secrets make you feel happy and excited.
- Bad secrets make you feel sad, scared, or nervous.
- You must always tell a trusted grown-up about a bad secret.
- If the first person doesn't listen, you must keep telling until you find someone who does.

Discussion Points for the Classroom

Start with a general discussion about secrets and move towards the more serious topic.

- ‘Can anyone think of a secret? Maybe a birthday surprise or a surprise party for someone?’ (These are examples of good secrets.)
- ‘How do you feel when you have a secret like that? Do you feel excited? Happy?’
- ‘What if someone told you a secret that made you feel sad or scared or nervous? What would you do with a secret like that?’ (For example if an adult has made you uncomfortable or they have stolen something and asked you not to tell anyone)
- ‘That kind of secret is a bad secret. Bad secrets should never be kept inside. Who is a grown-up you can tell anything to? Who are your trusted grown-ups?’ (Brainstorm a list with the class: parents, guardians, teachers, principals, school nurses, etc. Remind them that they can also tell an aunt, uncle, grandparent, or a close friend of the family.)

Activity: The Feelings Chart

Use a visual chart with simple emojis or faces showing happy, sad, scared, and nervous.

1. Create four sections on the chart: Happy, Sad, Scared, and Nervous.

2. Read out different scenarios and have the children point to the face that shows how they would feel.
 - ‘Someone tells you about a surprise party.’ (Happy)
 - ‘Someone wants you to keep a secret that makes you feel a little nervous.’ (Nervous)
 - ‘A grown-up asks you to touch their private parts.’ (Scared/Nervous/Sad - all are correct, discuss why.)
3. Emphasise that if a secret makes them feel sad, scared, or nervous, it is a bad secret and they must tell a trusted grown-up.

A Message for Teachers: The Importance of Listening

The final message in this resource is crucial. Children must know that they will be heard and believed. If a child makes a disclosure, no matter how small or seemingly insignificant, it is vital to listen, believe them, and take action. Follow the school’s child protection procedures immediately. Reinforce the message that they did the right thing by telling, and that you will help them.