

Stoplight Game

By Diane Cranley

Author of 8 Ways to Create their Fate: Protecting the Sexual Innocence of Children in Youth-Serving Organizations

How do you help your students tell when they don't have the words?

Use the analogy of a stoplight as a conversation starter. This comparison gives your students a means to tell you if someone makes them feel safe, uneasy, or scared without even having to use words. Then you can continue the conversation and limit access appropriately.

Using the concept of a stoplight is a great way for you to start a conversation with your students about how they feel when they are with people and empower them to use those feelings to make choices. It's a positive and light hearted way to give your students permission to tell you or other trusted adults about potential danger when they may not have the words to explain.

Use this example and the worksheet to explain the stoplight analogy to your students, adjusting it to be age appropriate...

We all have "instincts" – it's something inside that tells us when something doesn't feel safe or right and it's really important to pay attention to those feelings. Even adults don't always do a good job of paying attention so I found a game to help us all get better at it.

The game uses a stoplight as an example. You know, green means go, right? So we use green to say when everything is okay, when we feel safe, and when we feel comfortable with the person we're talking about. These are people we would like to spend more time with.

Yellow is a warning. Like at an intersection, the yellow light warns us that it is about to turn red and then it would be dangerous to be in the intersection. So we use the yellow light whenever someone makes us feel uncomfortable, uneasy, scared, or if we just have a yucky feeling in our tummy, even if we don't know why. These feelings are a warning that there may be danger ahead so we should pay close attention and don't spend time alone with that person. It doesn't matter if it's an adult or a friend.

Now what about red? It means STOP! It means don't go into the intersection because it would be scary and dangerous right now and we could get hurt. So we use red to tell when somebody is doing something dangerous, scary, or that we have never seen before, and we feel unsafe being with them. These are people we don't want to spend time with right now, even if we can't say exactly why, other than the fact that our tummy tells us so.

So let's try it.

Use the worksheet yourself to show your students how it is done – choose three people to share your feelings about, write their names on the lines provided. Then circle Red–Unsafe, Yellow – Uneasy, or Green – Okay on the stoplight above each person's name. It would be best to use an example of red, yellow, and green – perhaps using figures you are studying in your classroom, current events, or people in your life that they do not know.

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Modeling is very important so when you give an example of someone who makes you feel uncomfortable, take the opportunity to tell your students about your feelings and what it is about that person or their behavior that makes you feel uncomfortable. This will show them how to share more detail after they have shared their concern.

Now have your students fill out their own worksheets, selecting three people in their lives. You might want to start by having them share their feelings about people you are studying as well, then later choose people they know. You can even use this process to help them talk about strangers or situations that make them feel uncomfortable versus people they know.

Use this as a group exercise every so often to reinforce the concept. Then if a child is struggling and having a hard time telling you what is wrong, you can ask them if they want to use the stoplight game to share how they are feeling about the people around them.

Keep it fun and light as much as possible so your students will want to participate. Remember this is just the start of the conversation. As your students raise concerns about specific people, just say, "tell me more about how you feel" or "tell me about why you feel that way?" Use open ended questions to keep the conversation going. It is most difficult for children to start the conversation but once they have told you who it is and how they feel, the details will come more easily.

Using this process empowers children and they may end up disclosing that someone is hurting them. Be prepared to take appropriate action whether it is disciplining another student or reporting abuse to the authorities.

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Unsafe - Stop

Uneasy - Slow

Okay - Go

Name



Unsafe - Stop

Uneasy - Slow

Okay - Go

Name



Unsafe - Stop

Uneasy - Slow

Okay - Go

Name