

Circle of Grace

Honoring Relationships:

Different Boundaries for Different Relationships

Philosophy

What is a Circle of Grace?

The Catholic Church teaches that God has created each of us as unique and special. Genesis 1:27 tells us that we are created “male and female in God’s image” and that God saw this as “very good.” In that goodness, we are meant to respect ourselves and everyone else as persons created and loved by God.

Adults assist children to recognize God’s love by helping them to understand that each of us lives and moves in a *Circle of Grace*. You can imagine your own *Circle of Grace* by putting your arms above your head then circle down in front of your body including side to side. This circle, front to back, holds who you are in your body and through your senses. It holds your very essence in mind, heart, soul, and sexuality.

Why is it important to help our children understand the Circle of Grace?

God intends our relationships in life to be experiences of divine love. Respectful, nurturing, loving relationships increase our understanding of our own value and help us to love others. It is never too early to help children understand how very special they are and how relationships in life are called to be sacred. Understanding this can help them to protect the special person they are and to be respectful of others.

Adults, as they strive to provide a safe and protective environment, hold the responsibility to help children understand and respect their own dignity and that of others. A truly safe and protective environment is one where children recognize when they are safe or unsafe and know how to bring their concerns, fears, and uncertainties to the trusted adults in their lives.

How is the Circle of Grace Program different from other protection programs?

According to research, one in four girls and one in seven boys will be sexually abused by age eighteen.¹ Many protection programs focus on “stranger danger,” however, up to ninety percent of the time the perpetrator is a relative, family friend or other person known to the child/young person. *Circle of Grace* goes beyond just protection by helping children understand the sacredness of who they are and how to seek help through their relationships with trusted adults.

Goal of the Circle of Grace Program - Grades K-12

The goal of the *Circle of Grace* program is to educate and empower children and young people to actively participate in a safe environment for themselves and others.

Objectives of the Circle of Grace Program - Grades K-12

- Children/Young People will understand they are created by God and live in the love of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- Children/Young People will be able to describe the *Circle of Grace* that God gives each of us.
- Children/Young People will be able to identify, discern and maintain appropriate physical, emotional, spiritual, and sexual boundaries.
- Children/Young People will be able to identify all types of boundary violations.
- Children/Young People will demonstrate how to take action if any boundary is threatened or violated.

¹ www.usccb.org, or <http://nccanch.acf.hhs.gov>

Leader Guidelines

- **Leader** is defined as clergy, administrator, director of religious education/formation, teacher, or catechist who has been trained to teach the *Circle of Grace* Program.
- Every leader should read the Philosophy, Goals and Key Concepts to better understand and prepare to teach the *Circle of Grace*. The Key Concepts review the essence of the curriculum, that God is always present in our *Circle of Grace* because He desires an intimate relationship with His children.
- The time frame for lessons may vary depending on size of class, age of children, amount of discussion, etc.
- Vocabularies with definitions are intended for the leader. The explanation of vocabulary should be integrated within the context of the lessons to assist the children in their understanding of the *Circle of Grace* Program. The depth of the children's understanding will depend upon their age and developmental stage. A master vocabulary list of the *Circle of Grace* Program is included in all lesson plans. The pertinent vocabulary is listed in each lesson.
- If possible it is always "best practice" to have two adults in the room during the lesson due to the sensitive nature of the material.
- Ongoing reinforcement of the concepts is encouraged throughout the year. Hopefully, the language of *Circle of Grace* will become a part of a positive culture of respect, care, and faith that will help protect our children and help them to know what to do when they feel unsafe.
- Your Administrator or Religious Education Director will be sending out a letter to all parents regarding *Circle of Grace*. Lesson specific parent information should be handed out as directed. The Parent Packet is included in the Program. Every parish/school is encouraged to provide parent education opportunities both to inform parents about the *Circle of Grace* program and to foster greater communication in families.
- Evaluations for each grade are to be completed and returned to the School Administrator or the Director of Religious Education/Formation. The evaluations will be used to complete the Summary Evaluation that is used for ongoing improvement of the program and for the audit records.

Summary of the Key Concepts of “Circle of Grace”



God gives each of us a Circle of Grace (see below) where He is always “Present”:

Raise your hands above your head, then bring your outstretched arms slowly down.

*Extend your arms in front of you and then behind you embrace all of the space around you
slowly reach down to your feet.*

Knowing that God is in this space with you. This is your Circle of Grace; you are in it.

God is “Present” because He desires a relationship with us.

- God is with us when we are happy and sad. God does not cause bad things to happen to us. He loves us very much.
- God desires to help us when we are hurt, scared or confused (unsafe).
- Having faith may not take away all of life’s struggles. It is because of these struggles, God promised to always “be present”; providing guidance and comfort in our time of need.

God helps us know what belongs in our Circle of Grace

- Our feelings help us know about ourselves and the world around us.
- God helps us know what belongs in our Circle of Grace by allowing us to experience peace, love or contentment when something or someone good comes into our Circle of Grace.

God helps us know what does not belong in our Circle of Grace

- God desires to help us when we are hurt, scared or confused (unsafe).
- The Holy Spirit prompts (alerts) us that something does not belong in our Circle of Grace by giving us “a funny or uncomfortable feeling” that something is not safe. This feeling is there because God wants us to be safe.

God helps us know when to ask for help from someone we trust.

- God gives us people in our lives to help us when we are troubled or struggling with a concern.
- God wants us to talk to trusted adults about our worries, concerns or “uncomfortable feelings” so they can help us be safe and take the right action.

Circle of Grace Vocabulary

Words introduced in Kindergarten

Bullying: Repeatedly being mean to someone on purpose

Children of God: All people are made and loved by God.

Circle of Grace: The love and goodness of God which always surrounds me and all others.

Feelings: Something I sense inside myself (e.g. angry, sad, happy, afraid, embarrassed, confused, excited, peaceful, etc.) which gives me information about others or myself.

Grace: The gift of God's goodness and love to help me live as his child.

Holy: Special because of a connection with God.

Holy Spirit: God present with and within me. The Holy Spirit helps me to remember that I belong to God. The Holy Spirit helps me to experience and live God's love.

Respect: Being kind to others and doing what's best for myself and others because I honor all people as Children of God.

Safe: I am safe when my body and my feelings are respected by me and by others.

Safe Touch: Touch that respects others and me.

Secret: A secret is something I know but do not tell.

Safe Secret: A secret is safe when it does not hurt others or me.

Unsafe Secret: A secret is unsafe when I think that someone, including me, might be hurt or get in trouble if I do not tell.

Signal: A sign that tells me something may be safe or unsafe. This may be internal or external.

Stoplight: A traffic light (red, yellow, green) that is a visual signal for keeping vehicles and people safe.

Trust: Being able to count on someone to help me to stay safe within my *Circle of Grace*.

Trusted Adult: A grown-up who helps me to stay safe in my *Circle of Grace* and to respect others within their *Circle of Grace*.

Unsafe: Anything that causes harm to myself or others.

Unsafe Touch: Touch that is disrespectful and hurts, scares, or makes me feel uncomfortable or confused.

Words Introduced in First Grade

Symbol: A picture or object that stands for something else.

Words Introduced in Second Grade

No new words.

Words Introduced in Third Grade

Boundary: The borders or limits we need to keep ourselves safe within our *Circle of Grace*.

Treasured: We are so unique and precious that we could not be replaced in God's eyes.

Violate: To break a law, promise, or boundary.

Words Introduced in Fourth Grade

Social Media/Networking

Blog: An online journal. Personal stories or thoughts can be posted as in a personal journal. This is a public journal that anyone can access.

Chat Room: The name given to a place or page in a website or online service where people can chat with each other by typing messages which are displayed almost instantly on the screens of others who are in the chat room.

Instant Messaging (IM): Technology similar to that of chat rooms which notifies a user when a person is online allowing them to converse by exchanging text messages.

Location Application: An application (app) used in phones to find a location of a popular spot (restaurant, park etc.). People use the application to check in and it broadcasts the location to all of their friends.

Micro Blogging: This service allows users to give updates about what they are doing in less than 140 characters. In the near future, it may go to 280 characters.

Photo Sharing App: Captures, edits & shares photos, videos & messages with friends & family.

Social Networking Service and Websites: These services and websites are used to communicate with (a person) or search for information about (a person).

Video Sharing Service: This service allows users to watch videos posted by others and to upload videos of their own.

Mobile Video App: Allows you to send videos and pictures, both of which will disappear after about 10 seconds of a person viewing them. You can view them after the 10 seconds if you did a screen shot.

Other Terms

Cyber Bullying: Use of the internet, cell phone or other electronic device to send or post texts or images intended to hurt or embarrass another person.

E-mail: Electronic mail. Sending/ receiving a type written message from one screen to another.

Flaming: Sending a deliberately confrontational message to others on the internet.

Inappropriate Material: Pictures or words on the internet that makes one feel uncomfortable, scared, or that intentionally degrades a human person.

Netiquette: Courteous, honest, and polite behavior practiced on the internet.

Personal Contact Information: Information that allows an individual to be contacted or located in the physical world, i.e. a telephone number or an address.

Phishing: An identity theft scam in which criminals send out spam that imitates the look and language of legitimate correspondence from e-commerce sites. The fake messages generally link to websites that are similarly faked to look like the sites of respected companies. On the sites, users are directed to enter their personal information for authentication or confirmation purposes. The information, when submitted, goes to the thieves not to the "spoofed" company.

Pop Up: A term for unsolicited advertising that appears as its own browser window.

Predator: Someone who uses the internet or other means to obtain personal information about others with the intent to do harm.

Smart Phone: Is a mobile phone that offers advanced features like the internet, a camera and applications such as games and special interest information.

Texting: Sending a short text (typed) message and/or photo between cell phones or other handheld devices.

Webcam: A front facing video camera that attaches to a computer or is built into laptop.

Words Introduced in Fifth Grade

Media: Mass communication formats (music, TV, magazines, movies, videos, internet, computer games, books, advertisements, news, newspapers, radio, etc.) which provide education, information, entertainment, and advertising.

Inappropriate Media: Images, words that are spoken or written, that make one feel uncomfortable or scared. This type of media is disrespectful to people and would be something your parent/trusted adult would not approve.

Words Introduced in Sixth Grade

Admiration: A feeling of high regard or sense of awe.

Dream: A hope or aspiration which we imagine will become real.

Empathy: The ability to understand the feelings of another person.

Healthy: That which is sound and good for you in mind, body, and spirit.

Relationship: An authentic connection with God or others.

Response: Something said or done as a reaction or answer.

Talent: A special God-given ability or gift.

Value: A principle standard or quality considered desirable.

Violation: A break or infringement of another person's rights.

Words Introduced in Seventh Grade

Bullying: Any deliberate aggressive behaviors (physical, verbal or social) by a person or group with the intent to inflict harm on or make fun of another person.

Bystander: Someone who witnesses the bullying. They can have a negative or positive influence on the bullying behavior.

Cyber Bullying: The use of the internet, cell phones or other electronic devices to send or post texts or images intended to hurt or embarrass another person.

Disrespect: Treating with rudeness, insult, or lack of respect.

Words Introduced in Eighth Grade

Conscience: The gift from God that helps us to know the difference between right and wrong.

Modesty: The virtue that respects, honors, and protects privacy: the quality of avoiding extremes of emotion, action, dress, and language. Modesty respects my boundaries and

the boundaries of others.

Morality: The way we put our beliefs into action for good.

Sexuality: Everything that makes us female or male. This includes feelings, attitudes, values, relationships, and ideas.

Words introduced in Middle School Alternate Lessons

Stress: A state of mental/emotional strain resulting from adverse or demanding circumstances

Pressure: Typically applied from an external source (peers, teachers, family, etc.) in a demand for high performance or healthy/unhealthy behavior,

Words Introduced in Ninth Grade

Exploit: To take unfair advantage of someone/some situation in order to get some benefit.

Forced Isolation: When someone forces/pressures another to be separated from others in order to gain control.

Secrecy: The condition of being hidden or concealed. The habit or practice of keeping secrets or maintaining privacy or concealment.

Sexting: Sexually explicit images or text messages sent by way of a phone. There may be legal consequences if one or both persons involved are minors.

Unequal Power: When one person has more power in a relationship. This can be in the area of age, size, position, resources, status or knowledge.

Words Introduced in Tenth Grade

Boundary: A border or limit that helps keep us safe and separate from another person or entity. Boundaries help define relationships. They are either concrete (physical/visual/audio) or abstract (emotions/beliefs/internal guidelines/rules).

Circle of Virtue: Our response to the invitation of God's grace by cultivating goodness and virtue in our lives.

Words Introduced in Eleventh Grade

Freely Chosen Violations: Every person is responsible for those violations they freely choose and know are wrong. We should never blame or accuse persons who are victims of abuse and manipulated or exploited in unequal relationships.

Moral Responsibility: As we grow into mature adults, we must take greater responsibility for protecting ourselves and others from violations of God's plan for our spiritual, sexual, and moral lives.

Offender: Someone who exhibits behaviors for the sole purpose of putting another person in a vulnerable position to be exploited/abused.

Survivor: A person who not only lives through but thrives despite abuse, affliction, or adversity.

Victim: A person who has suffered injury/harm (physical or emotional) by forces beyond his or her control and not of his or her personal responsibility.

Words Introduced in Twelfth Grade

No new words.

Words Introduced in the High School Alternate Lessons

Human Trafficking: Modern Day Slavery

Human Trafficking: Slavery in the form of *forced labor* or *sex trafficking* in which the victim is under 18 years of age, or is compelled by force, fraud or coercion, respectively, to provide labor or services, or to engage in a commercial sex act.

There is no requirement that the victim be transported or travel across a *national* border.

Coercion: Threatening physical or non-physical harm (psychological or financial) against someone in order to manipulate them into doing something they do not want to do or would not normally do.

Modesty: A thing of the Past or Not?

Humility: Understanding of the truth of God and who we truly are; made in His image.

What is Your Motto?

Motto/Theme: A maxim adopted as a guide to one's conduct. This motto can be derived from our Catholic or popular culture

Tech Savvy or Tech Safe?

Sexting: Sexually explicit images or texts sent by way of the phone. There may be legal consequences if one or both persons involved are minors.

Pornography: 1: The depiction of erotic behavior (pictures or writing) intended to cause sexual excitement. 2: material (as books or a photograph) that depicts erotic behavior and is intended to cause sexual excitement 3: the depiction of acts in a sensational manner so as to arouse a quick intense emotional reaction, *Merriam Webster*

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Middle School Alternate Lesson

Sometimes children reveal personal information or details about incidents that, in order to respect confidentiality, need to be handled outside of the group environment. If this happens, tell the child, "Thank you for sharing that, _____. That sounds really important. I will talk to you about that later (at the end of class, at the break, as soon as humanly possible, etc.)." When this happens, be sure you talk to the child at your first opportunity and alert the administration. Remember that you are the responsible reporter in cases of suspected abuse.

This lesson complements the following Catholic teachings:

- Jesus' life as a model for our own
- God calls us to be responsible for our actions
- The importance of serving others as Jesus did
- God teaches us to lead healthy lives and make good choices
- God has made each of us in His image
- Our conscience helps us to know what is right and do what we believe is right
- God calls us to be responsible for our own actions

Lesson Objectives

Youth will be able to:

1. Understand and describe their *Circle of Grace*.
2. Recognize the key elements of behavior that are consistent with Catholic teaching.
3. Understand that living a Christian life requires appropriate boundaries.
4. Recognize ways young people are pressured to ignore appropriate boundaries
5. Develop a strategy to resist pressure to ignore appropriate boundaries.

Vocabulary

1. **Circle of Grace**: The love and goodness of God which always surrounds me and all others.
2. **Safe Secret**: A secret is safe when it does not hurt others or me.
3. **Unsafe Secret**: A secret is unsafe when I think that someone, including me, could be hurt or get in trouble if I do not tell.

4. **Trust:** Being able to count on someone to help me to stay safe within my *Circle of Grace*.
5. **Trusted Adult:** An adult that helps us stay safe in our *Circle of Grace* and helps us respect others in their *Circle of Grace*.
6. **Boundary:** The borders or limits we need to keep ourselves safe within our *Circle of Grace*.

Materials Needed

1. Newsprint paper
2. Pens or markers
3. Blackboard/chalk or Whiteboard/markers
4. Tape
5. Parent letter (back of lesson)

Opening Prayer:

Leader calls the class to prayer by asking the children to quiet themselves and join in the Sign of the Cross. Leader can read or the group can say together,

God our Father,
Today and always,
We ask you to guide us through your Holy Spirit,
In developing all of our relationships and decisions,
Help us to honor appropriate boundaries that respect who we truly are...
Children of God made in Your image.
Amen

Getting Started

It is important to begin the lesson by explaining that God does not want or cause bad things to happen. There will be children in every group who may have already experienced unsafe or hurtful situations. It is important to reinforce that it is not their fault. We want our children to understand that God is with them and for them even when they are hurting or sad.

It is important to review the Summary of the Circle of Grace Concepts in the front of the lesson. Spend some time helping the youth to relate each section of the summary to their everyday life.

Have the summary available for youth to reference. It is helpful to have the Circle of Grace Logo available. The points below will aid in the discussion.

- a. We have learned about *Circle of Grace* in the past. Our *Circle of Grace* is the love and goodness of God that always surround us.
 - What does this “look like” for a youth in middle school?
- b. God helps us know what belongs in our *Circle of Grace* by allowing us to experience peace, love or contentment when something or someone good comes into our *Circle of Grace*.
 - Name some “good things” that come into our *Circle of Grace*.
- c. The Holy Spirit prompts (alerts) us that something does not belong in our *Circle of Grace* by giving us “a funny or uncomfortable feeling” that something is not safe. This feeling is there because God wants us to be safe.
 - Name some things middle school youth encounter that does not belong in their *Circle of Grace*.
- d. God wants us to talk to trusted adults about our worries, concerns or “uncomfortable feelings” so they can help us be safe and take the right action.
 - Who would you talk to about an uncomfortable feeling?

Opening Activity – Family, Friends and School Relationships

Today we are going to talk about relationships. The type of relationship determines whether words/actions are appropriate or inappropriate. Our first activity will help us discuss these behaviors within different groups of people and how we can stay safe in our Circle of Grace by using guidelines for maintaining proper boundaries.

1. *Divide the class into groups of 4-5 youth.*
2. *Give each group a sheet of newsprint.*
3. *Have each group divide the newsprint into three horizontal sections. Have them write Family at the top of the First Column, Friends at the top of the second, and School at the top of the third as shown*

Family	Friends	School

4. *Have each group write down appropriate behaviors for each category in each column. Have them come up with as many as possible. Give them 7-10 minutes to complete this activity.*
5. *When time is completed, hang the newsprint on the wall or whiteboard so that everyone may see them. Discuss what the youth have written in each column and why these behaviors are appropriate.*
6. *Discuss how appropriate behavior can improve our relationship with God and how it respects our Circle of Grace*
7. *Now have the youth turn the newsprint over to the other side and divide the page into three columns just as before.*
8. *Each group will write down appropriate behaviors for each category in each column. Have them come up with as many as possible. Give them 7-10 minutes to complete this activity.*
9. *When time is completed, hang the newsprint so everyone can see them. Discuss what has been written in each column and why these behaviors are inappropriate and may be unsafe.*
10. *Discuss how these inappropriate behaviors can hurt our relationship with God and disrespect our Circle of Grace.*

Large Group Discussion Re-Cap:

Appropriate behavior has everything to do with the situation or group of people we are with at the time. Those groups of people might be family, personal friends, or the larger community, such as at school. Obviously we share more, dress differently, or sometimes act differently depending on which group of people we are with at that time. Ask the following questions.

1. Do you think people have different boundaries or levels of trust depending on which group of people they are with?
2. Should appropriate behavior be used in our everyday lives, even if others are not behaving as they ought to?
3. Do people sometimes use inappropriate behaviors or words that they are not aware they are using?
4. What would you do if an inappropriate behavior was unsafe? (Review the term "Trusted Adult")
5. Who is/are your trusted adult(s)?
6. When inappropriate behaviors happen, what do you do?

Allow for a few responses. Write them on the board.

Wrap Up Discussion and Activity

We are called to follow Jesus, so our behaviors, how we treat others, and the words we use should be consistent with His teaching and our Circle of Grace.

Ask the following questions of the group:

1. Which behaviors are more pleasing to God, others, and ourselves?
2. How do appropriate and inappropriate behaviors impact our lives and the lives of those with whom we have relationships?
3. What does God desire for our relationships?
4. How can we promote healthy behavior and boundaries in our relationships as Catholics?

Allow for a few responses. Prompt youth to identify key responses:

1. Desire to have a relationship with God & do what is right
2. Participate in the Sacrament of Reconciliation when we do wrong
3. Call on God in prayer when we have questions about right and wrong
4. Ask others to pray for us

Have youth write their own closing prayer. Include the three points below:

- Thank God for a relationship that is important to them
- Ask God to help a relationship that needs His grace
- Express what hope they have in their current and future relationships

Ask for a volunteer to read his/her prayer for the closing prayer.

If there are no volunteers the following may be used.

Make sure the Parent Letter is sent to them by the end of the lesson. Please see instructions:

Important Parent Letter Instructions:

The Parent Letter is not to be sent home with young people due to the sensitive information regarding unsafe sexual behaviors. Suggested methods of delivery to parents: include in a mailing, hand to parents personally, or make available at the parish office for parents to pick up. AGAIN: DO NOT send the parent letter home with the young people

Closing Prayer:

Almighty God, You know our weaknesses and difficulties. Strengthen and heal the connections in our lives, in our families, and with our friends. Lead us to do Your will in this world, to love and respect each other, and represent You in all we do. Bless us with peaceful and healthy relationships and help us share your love with the world. Thank you for being compassionate and sending Your Holy Spirit to help us do good for those whose lives we touch, and for all humankind. In Jesus' Name, Amen

*Honoring Relationships:
Different Boundaries for Different Relationships
Evaluation*

Date _____

Parish/School _____ *City* _____

Leader _____ *Number of youth in class* _____

Each grade's curriculum was designed to meet the overall program objectives.
Please check if each of the objectives of the *Circle of Grace* Program were met.

1. YES _____ NO _____ Youth understand they are created by God and live in the love of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
2. YES _____ NO _____ Youth will be able to describe the *Circle of Grace* that God gives each of us.
3. YES _____ NO _____ Youth will be able to identify and try to maintain appropriate boundaries within their families, friends and school.
4. YES _____ NO _____ Youth can identify inappropriate behaviors in families, friends and school.
5. YES _____ NO _____ Youth can demonstrate how to take action if a boundary is threatened or violated.

Please list what worked well and any resources that you would like to share (use back if necessary).

Please list any suggestions that would improve lessons (use back if necessary).

Return to your School Administrator or Director of Religious Education.