

# *Circle of Grace*

## *Safe Environment Training*

### *Levels of Intimacy and Influence*

#### *Grade 10 - Lesson Plan*

## *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 young people 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 young people 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 young people 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 young people understand and respect their own dignity and that of others. A truly safe and protective environment is one where young people 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 Curriculum different from other safety programs?*

According to research, one in four girls and one in seven boys will be sexually abused by age eighteen.<sup>1</sup> 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 young people understand the sacredness of who they are and how to seek help through their relationships with trusted adults.

### *Goal of the Circle of Grace Curriculum - Grades K-12*

The goal of the *Circle of Grace* curriculum 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 Curriculum - 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* which 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.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.usccb.org](http://www.usccb.org), or <http://nccanch.acf.hhs.gov>

## *Grade 10 Leader Guidelines*

- A **Leader** is defined as clergy (priest or deacon) school administrator, director of religious education/formation, teacher, or catechist who has been trained to teach the *Circle of Grace* Curriculum.
- 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 may vary depending on size of class, age of young people, 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 young people in their understanding of the *Circle of Grace* Curriculum. A master vocabulary list of the *Circle of Grace* Curriculum is in the administration/director section. The pertinent vocabulary is listed in each lesson.
- Leader's instructions for each lesson are italicized. Non-italicized text needs to be presented by the leader to the students.
- 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.
- The 9-12 curriculum is formatted to be used in two ways:
  - ✓ The traditional way: lessons taught to the identified grade. The lesson for grade 12 is only to be taught to seniors.
  - ✓ The second way: select any one of alternate lessons or retreat to teach the class or group. Leaders will need to keep a record of what lesson is taught each year.
- 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 young people and help them to know what to do when they feel unsafe.
- Your School Administrator, Religious Education Director, or Youth Minister 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 information is included in the Curriculum. Every parish/school is encouraged to provide parent education opportunities both to inform parents about the *Circle of Grace* Curriculum 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 Curriculum 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 several trusted adults, in addition to our parents, to talk to about our worries, concerns or “funny/ uncomfortable feelings” so they can help us be safe. If a parent or trusted adult is not available or unable to help us, God wants us to go to another trusted adult until we get the help needed to be safe.

# *Levels of Intimacy and Influence*

*Sometimes young people 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 young person, "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 young person 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:**

- Church teachings revealed in the Creed apply in our daily lives
- Human relationships are intended to be experiences of Divine Love
- Personal covenant with God
- Live responsibly as fully initiated members of the Church
- Discipleship is our call to holiness
- The relationship between the love of God our love of self and our love of others
- The image of God is in ourselves and others

## **Lesson Objective**

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

## **Young People will be able to:**

1. Identify and define the three levels of in- person relationships which determine boundaries.
2. Understand that "online only" connections are limited and not the same as in-person relationships.
3. Identify indicators of concern/boundary violations of each level of relationship
4. Know appropriate responses to boundary violations (concrete and abstract)
5. Know appropriate responses to having been previously exploited or abused by someone.

## **Materials Needed**

1. Copy of The Summary of Key Concepts of Circle of Grace Handout for each student (front of lesson)
2. Copy of Levels of Intimacy and Influence (diagrams and questions) Handout for each student (end of lesson)
3. Copy of Levels of On-Line Connection (diagram and questions) Handout for each student (end of lesson)

4. Very large piece of paper
5. File cards
6. Whiteboard/Blackboard

## **Opening Prayer:**

*Leader calls class to prayer by asking youth to quiet down and join in the Sign of the Cross. Then say together,*

**God,  
We ask for Your guidance and a little more:  
guidance in relationships,  
guidance in decisions,  
guidance in love,  
and guidance in worshipping You. Amen.**

## **Getting Started**

**Review and distribute the Summary of the Circle of Grace Concepts with the students.**

*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.*

*Help the young people understand the relationship between the Circle of Virtue and the Circle of Grace. The Circle of Grace is always present and never leaves us. Our Circle of Virtue is our response to our Circle of Grace and can change due to our free will.*

**Circle of Grace:** The love and goodness of God that always surrounds me and others.

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

## **Introduction**

The reverence and respect we must have for all human life is based upon our creation in His divine image. 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.

*Review the following:*

- Human beings are the only creatures on earth that God willed for their own sake. Humans are unique because we are made in the divine image enabling us to share in God's own life.
- "God created man in his image; in the divine image he created him; male and female he created them. God looked at everything he had made, and he found it very good." (Genesis 1:27, 31 from the New American Bible)
- "Every human life, from the moment of conception until death, is sacred because the human person has been willed for its sake in the image and likeness of the living and holy God." (Catechism of the Catholic Church 2319)
- All persons possess God-given dignity, and inappropriately violating the emotional, physical, sexual, and spiritual boundaries of a person is both harmful and potentially dangerous.

## **Lesson Development** *It would be helpful to have a description of each level displayed.*

### **Discussion**

Today we are going to discuss the relational boundaries of our *Circle of Grace*.

### **In Person Relationships:**

*Refers to the ability to interact face to face with others which can build a genuine connection and trust. You have the ability to see facial and body reactions to conversations. You have the opportunity to see them in other settings (family, friends, school). You can see if you have done or said something to hurt/upset them. This gives you the opportunity to apologize. Moral development occurs with real in-person relationships. Below are the levels.*

**The Familial** is typically the most intimate. In most families intimacy usually means a high level of trust. Unfortunately, some families do not trust each other very much. We know families are usually the place where the most historical/current relational interactions occur. We usually do not “choose” who is in our family. Families are where we first learn about boundaries. The desire to have loving connections with our family is core to our being.

**The Personal** typically has relationships that are chosen such as friends. Friends are peers with whom we feel safe and share common interests. These relationships usually have a balance of power, status and resources, i.e. same age, same grade level and interests.

**The Institutional** relationships are based on our community, school, or groups. This is where groups gather to have something in common such as churches, neighborhoods, schools, sporting, or club activities. This level has both adults and children/youth working together on a common goal. This level usually has adults who are in charge of the wellbeing of the children/youth.

### **The “On-Line Only” Connection**

*An “on-line only” connection is when the only interaction is on-line (social media, texting, phone, photo sharing, gaming). This is a limited interpersonal connection that cannot be called a relationship due to no in-person interactions. Many times, someone can present a false persona, so you don’t know who they really are. On-line only interactions do not allow us and our family/friends to observe tone of voice, facial expression, body language and how one interacts with others.*

**Initial Stages of Online Connections-** the getting to know you stage. The problem is that there is no way to verify if the personal information shared is real.

**False Sense of Intimacy** – You begin to believe you know this person because of the initial stages of connection. You may develop deep feelings for this person. The problem is this person may not be who they portray online.

**Connection Influences Your Behavior and Perceptions-** You may start to isolate yourself from others. You believe this person is the only one who understands you. You may do things that you would not normally do such as keep secrets, send compromising photos, agree to meet in person.

## **Activity - Levels of Relationships and Connection**

*This activity is to highlight the difference between in-person relationships and “on-line only” connection. There are some positive on-line only connections such as support groups and educational instruction. This lesson goal will focus on potential deception and danger in these connections.*

1. *Divide the youth into several groups.*
2. *Distribute the Levels of Intimacy and Influence and Levels of On-Line Connection Diagram and Questions. (end of lesson)*
3. *Give them time to discuss the questions on the handout and then bring them back to a large group.*
4. *Review the questions, allowing each group to give input.*
5. *As a large group, review the additional questions:*
  - *Are there behaviors you would do in one level but not another? Why? What are they?*
  - *Is it ok for some people to be in several levels? If so, why is it ok? When is it not ok?*
  - *What do we mean when we say each level has unique boundaries?*
  - *How would you describe a boundary?*

## **Discussion** – Violations Circle of Grace – Circle of Virtue

- We have just completed the levels of relationship and connection activity. This activity helped us understand the different levels of intimacy and influence in both areas. Let’s briefly discussed boundaries. Boundaries are borders or limits that help keep us safe and separate from another person or entity. They help define our relationships. They can be concrete (physical/ visual/ audio) or abstract (emotions/ beliefs/ internal guidelines/ rules). Many times, a situation can have both concrete and abstract boundaries. Example: Someone sees the sign posting the 40-mile speed limit and decides to decrease their speed. The concrete boundary is the posted sign, and the abstract boundary is the knowledge that you may get a speeding ticket. (*Invite the youth to think of other examples of concrete and abstract boundaries.*) Many times, we are unclear if a behavior is crossing a boundary. It is important to listen/discern what our “gut” is telling us. This is the prompting of the Holy Spirit to make safe choices and seek help when we are unclear.
- Now let’s brainstorm behaviors which violate our concrete or abstract boundaries within our Circle of Grace. These boundary violations could happen at any or all of the relationship levels both in person and on-line only connection.
- *Distribute the boundary questions (end of lesson). Discuss each question. write the young people’s responses to questions on a board or a flip chart. Be sure to include key physical, emotional, and sexual violations such as bodily harming someone, bullying and sexual exploitation/abuse. Question one and two address that the examples can have both concrete and abstract boundaries. Before moving on to the subsequent question have them vote on the current question’s top three responses that impact teens.*

1. **How do people violate an individual's concrete boundaries?**  
*Examples: destruction of property, bullying, rumors, sexting*
  
2. **How do people violate an individual's abstract boundaries?**  
*Examples: ignoring or excluding someone, posting hateful messages*
  
3. **Can someone violate his/her own boundaries? If so, how do they do this and why? Examples: Cutting, alcohol/ drug abuse, suicide attempts**  
*(If needed, suicide prevention information is located in the Administrator/Director section)*
  
4. **Are boundary violations common when using technology and on-line only connections? What are these violations? catfishing, posting hateful and inappropriate messages and images**
  
5. **Is it easier to violate a boundary using technology/on-line only connection or face to face? Why is it easier?**  
*Examples: forwarding hateful texts, sexually suggestive interactions with an online "friend", posing as someone else on a social network*
  
6. **Name some behaviors that indicate a person has an underdeveloped or no sense of boundaries.**  
*Examples: texts you at all hours, becomes upset/hostile if you don't respond to a text immediately, considers everyone they encounter online as their friend, will do anything to fit in to be popular.*
  
7. **Name some ways you protect your boundaries when using technology and social media, and how these suggestions can be useful.**  
*Examples: Make sure parents/guardians have access and passwords to devices and social media apps/accounts. Don't "friend" or follow someone that you wouldn't socialize with in person. Have designated "No screen time" i.e. no phone with you after you go to bed.*
  
8. **What are some ways a person can seek help if he/she is currently or has already been exploited/abused in a relationship? (Be sure to highlight the importance of talking to a trusted adult about their feeling and how to stay safe. Many times, youth believe it is their fault. Remind them no one deserves to be exploited or abused. Emphasize that no matter what has happened in the past, we deserve to be safe and loved because we are children of God.)**



### **Optional Activity** – “Collage of your *Circle of Grace*”

Each *Circle of Grace* can be supported or invaded by the world around us. The following activity should allow youth to visually identify ways in which the world either supports or invades the Circle of God’s Grace that surrounds us.

- *Give each young person a piece of paper and have markers available. Invite youth to draw a large circle.*
- *Using the magazines, have the young person make a collage of words and images that belong in their Circle of Grace. Show the values and images that best express what God wants for you.*
- *Next, have youth clip words or phrases that violate their Circle of Grace, and glue those on the outside of the Circle.*
- *Have young people share with the large or small groups two things that they have in their collage that belong inside their Circle of Grace as well as two things that belong outside their Circle of Grace.*

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### **Closing Prayer**

*Leader calls class to prayer by asking youth to quiet down and join in the Sign of the Cross. Then say together,*

**God help me slow down  
and be present to Your everlasting love.  
Help me have REAL conversations with You  
that guide and heal my brokenness.  
Cultivate in my heart Your truth  
and help me respond to Your Grace.  
Give me courage to reject the lie  
that You are a “distant” God.  
Bless me with the gift of discernment,  
knowing Your compassion and love is not relative  
but eternal.  
Your greatest desire from me  
is my sincere “yes”.**

**Amen**

## Opening Prayer

God,  
We ask for Your guidance and a little more:  
guidance in relationships,  
guidance in decisions,  
guidance in love,  
and guidance in worshiping You. Amen.

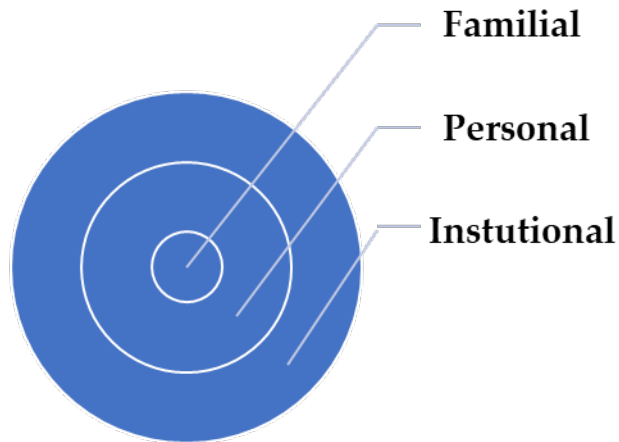
## Closing Prayer

God help me slow down  
and be present to Your everlasting love.  
Help me have REAL conversations with You  
that guide and heal my brokenness.  
Cultivate in my heart Your truth  
and help me respond to Your Grace.  
Give me courage to reject the lie  
that You are a "distant" God.  
Bless me with the gift of discernment,  
knowing Your compassion and love is not relative  
but eternal.  
Your greatest desire from me  
is my sincere "yes".

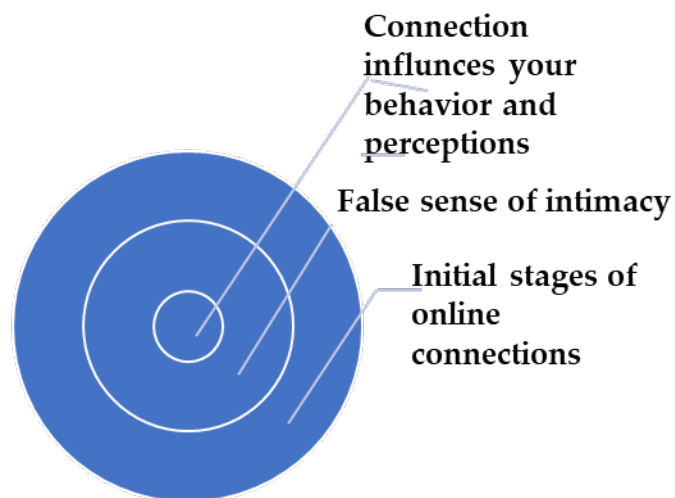
Amen

# *Levels of Intimacy and Influence Diagrams*

## *In Person Relationships*



## *“On- Líne” Only Connections*



## Levels of Intimacy and Influence Questions

### **In Person Relationships (Refer to the diagram)**

In Person Relationships are familial, personal, and institutional. You have the ability to see facial and body reactions to conversations. You have the opportunity to see them in other settings (family, friends, school). You can see if you have done or said something to hurt/upset them. This gives you the opportunity to apologize. Moral development occurs with real in-person relationships.

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- a. Is your *Circle of Grace* different in each relational level? If so, how?
- b. How is your *Circle of Grace* similar in each level?
- c. List people in each of your levels.
- d. How does each level's boundaries protect you?
- e. What action do you take if you are uncomfortable with a boundary being crossed?

### **Levels of "On-Line Only" Connection (Refer to the diagram)**

**On-Line Connection** is when the only interaction is on-line (social media, texting, phone, social network site, gaming). This is a limited interpersonal connection that cannot be called a relationship due to no in-person interactions. Many times, one can present a false persona, so you really don't know who they really are. Interpersonal interactions allow us and our family/friends to observe tone of voice, facial expression, body language and how one interacts with.

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- a. Is your *Circle of Grace* affected different in each level? If so, how?
- b. Is it easy to not notice a boundary violation in each level? If so, why?
- c. What are some "red flags" that this on-line connection is not real?
- d. What do you do when you start to notice "red flags" and boundary violations?
- e. What action do you take if you are uncomfortable with the connection?

## ***Boundary Questions Handout***

- 1. How do people violate an individual's concrete boundaries?**
- 2. How do people violate an individual's abstract boundaries?**
- 3. Can someone violate his/her own boundaries? If so, how do they do this and why?**
- 4. Are boundary violations common when using technology and on-line only connections? What are these violations?**
- 5. Is it easier to violate a boundary using technology/on-line only connection or face to face? Why is it easier?**
- 6. Name some behaviors that indicate a person has an underdeveloped or no sense of boundaries.**
- 7. Name some ways you protect your boundaries when using technology and social media, and how these suggestions can be useful.**
- 8. What are some ways a person can seek help if he/she is currently or has already been exploited/abused in a relationship?**

# Grade 10 Evaluation

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Parish/School \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_

Leader \_\_\_\_\_ Number of young people in class \_\_\_\_\_

Each grade's curriculum was designed to meet the overall program objectives.

Please check whether the objectives of the *Circle of Grace* Program were met.

1. YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_ Young People understand they are created by God and live in the love of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
2. YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_ Young People will be able to describe the *Circle of Grace* which God gives each of us.
3. YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_ Young People will be able to identify and maintain appropriate boundaries.
4. YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_ Young People can identify types of boundary violations.
5. YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_ Young People 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 with others (use back if necessary).*

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

**Return to your School Administrator, Director of Religious Education, or Director of Youth Ministry.**