

Circle of Grace

Safe Environment Training

A.C.T.I.O.N.-Steps Needed When Concerns Don't Go Away *Grade 9-12 Alternate Lesson*

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.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 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.

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

Leader Guidelines

- A **Leader** is defined as clergy (priest or deacon) 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 included in all lesson plans. 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 to the identified grade.
The lesson for grade 12 is only to be taught to seniors.
 - ✓ The second way: select one of the alternate lessons 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*. 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 sent to the 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.

A.C.T.I.O.N.-Steps Needed When Concerns Don't Go Away

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 teaching revealed in the Creed applies to 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

Young People will be able to:

1. Identify and understand key steps to be safe in uncomfortable situations.
2. Understand the connection between acting safe and our *Circle of Grace*
3. Recognize that acting safe protects the true person.
4. Recognize ways they are pressured to ignore taking actions in unsafe situations.
5. Identify appropriate responses when they are confronted with inappropriate interactions or violations.

Materials Needed

1. Whiteboard or chalkboard
2. Summary of the Key Concepts of Circle of Grace for each student
3. Art supplies for the skits
4. Props for the skits

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 worshiping You.
Amen.**

Getting Started

Today we are going to talk about how to take action in unsafe situations. Sometimes it is hard to know what to do when we are in an uncomfortable situation. We may worry about what others think, about making someone angry or about becoming unpopular by going against the crowd. Let's look at the acronym A.C.T.I.O.N. It will help us identify and discuss what to do in unsafe situations. *Write the acronym A.C.T.I.O.N. on the board.*

A – Attention: WHY you are uncomfortable?

C – Conscience: WHAT is it telling you?

T - Trust your instincts: The Holy Spirit PROMPTS us to be safe.

I – Information: What are friends or family saying about the person/situation?

O – Options: Look at all CHOICES. Which ones will keep you safe?

N - No one is alone: SEEK help from a trusted adult!

Let's discuss each of the letters of the acronym.

Attention: WHY are you uncomfortable?

Pay attention to who or what makes you uncomfortable. Are you uncomfortable with what someone else is saying or doing? With an activity or situation? Did someone change plans without telling you?

Example: You tell your parents that you are going to a movie with a friend. When the friend picks you up, she tells you the plans have changed and the two of you are now going to a party instead. What are some other examples? *List them on the board.*

Conscience: WHAT is it telling you?

Is someone asking you to do something that you know, deep down, is wrong?

Example: Some friends are over at your house. One friend suggests going to an unpopular classmate's social media page and pretend to be someone who is "interested" in him/her.

You know this is lying and may hurt someone, but you worry what your friends will think. Why is it so difficult to stand up for what is right? What are some other examples? *List them on the board.*

Trust your instincts: The Holy Spirit PROMPTS us to be safe.

If you think it might not be safe, then it probably isn't. Those thoughts and gut feelings are promptings from the Holy Spirit to help us stay safe. Pay attention to the internal warning signs that someone or something is not safe.

Example: Your friend has been distant lately. She seems depressed and has dropped out of most activities. You have noticed that she is wearing long sleeve shirts even when it is warm outside. You are concerned that she might be cutting. What should you do? Should you listen to the prompting of the Holy Spirit or ignore it? What other information do you need? What are some examples? *List them on the board.*

Information: What are your friends and family saying about the person/situation?

It is important to listen to the prompting of the Holy Spirit and to those people in our lives that care for us.

Example: You are currently "going out" with an upper classmate. One of your friends saw him romantically kissing someone else on social media. If your friend were to tell you, would you believe it? What might one of your trusted adults say about this? What are some other examples?

List them on the board.

Options: Look at all your CHOICES, which choices will keep you safe?

It is important to look at all the options when in a difficult situation. There may be several safe choices.

Example: You are at a party with a friend and a lot of other people you don't know. Someone starts taking pictures with a phone asking for suggestive poses. When asked, you say something funny to get out of the situation. What are some other ways you could handle the situation? What are some other examples? *List them on the board.*

No one is alone: SEEK help from a trusted adult.

Many teens think no one understands what they are going through. When you are confused or in an uncomfortable situation it is important to discuss it with an adult you trust.

Example: Your family has been going through a difficult time lately and there is a lot of arguing at home. It has disrupted your sleep and you are finding it difficult to concentrate at school. You finally get the courage to make an appointment with the school counselor. Who are some other adults you could go to? What would you tell a friend to do who was having this problem? What are some other examples? *List on the board*

Activity: What Would You Do?

Divide the youth into several groups.

Give each group at least two of the examples (the examples above and those identified by youth)

Have them develop a skit using the examples. Remind them to act out the skits respectfully.

Each skit should have a couple of endings. One ending should be the safe way out and the other would be a poor choice and not a safe ending.

The group should identify a narrator for the skit.

The narrator will ask "What would you do?" (before they act out the first ending)

The Audience will vote for the:

- *Safest ending*
- *Not so safe ending*

The leader will keep track of the votes for each skit.

Large Group Discussion:

Let's discuss the skits and the different endings.

How hard is it to make safe choices? Do adults see safety differently than youth? Why or why not? Do you believe that the Holy Spirit can prompt us to be safe as the *Circle of Grace* concept tell us? *Distribute the Summary of Key Concepts of Circle of Grace to each student (in the front of the lesson). Review the concepts and ask the students to apply to their lives.*

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

Review *Distribute the Summary of Key Concepts of Circle of Grace Handout. Briefly discuss how it relates to their everyday lives.*

It is important for young people to understand the relationship between the Circle of Grace and the Circle of Virtue. 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.

Remember that our openness to having an intimate relationship with God will allow one to hear the Holy Spirit's prompting more clearly in unsafe situations.

Final Summary:

Below are some ways a young person can seek help if they are pressured or experience violations of their personal boundaries. Do you have other ideas on how to be safe?

Give youth a chance to respond to the question. Write each bullet and the youths'

responses on the board. Ask the youth to write down the bullet points on a piece of paper.

Have them list under each bullet an example talked about in class or in their experience.

Identify why it is hard to follow these bullet points. Encourage students to take it home and discuss with their parents.

- Listen to your gut, it is the Holy Spirit prompting you that something is wrong. Learn to recognize the settings and interactions that can get you into uncomfortable situations.
 - When someone pressures you, try to take yourself out of the situation.
 - Take a break from social media so you can discern the situation without negative input
 - If you are worried that a relationship is unhealthy, talk to someone you trust – parent, professional, counselor, or other trusted adults.
 - Talking about it with an adult you trust will help you identify what might be unhealthy in the relationship and any needed steps to be taken.
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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

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*.
3. YES ____ NO ____ Young People will be able to describe Circle of Virtue.
4. YES ____ NO ____ Young People can identify keys steps to take to stay safe in an uncomfortable situation.
5. YES ____ NO ____ Young People understand that acting safely protects the true person.
6. YES ____ NO ____ Young People will identify ways in which they are pressured to ignore being safe in uncomfortable situations.
7. YES ____ NO ____ Young People will identify what action to take when being pressured or experiencing other boundary violations.

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.