

CIRCLE OF GRACE

Curriculum for Children and Young People

Grade 9 through Grade 12

Safe Environment Training

2023 Revised Edition

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Archdiocese
of Omaha

ONE CHURCH
ENCOUNTERING JESUS
EQUIPPING DISCIPLES
LIVING MERCY

March 20, 2023

Mary Beth Hanus
Director of Victim Outreach and Prevention
2222 N. 111 Street
Omaha, NE 68164

Dear Mary Beth,

With this letter, I promulgate the updated Circle of Grace curriculum for grades K-12 in the Archdiocese of Omaha and mandate that it continue to be used in all Catholic schools and religious education programs.

Circle of Grace contributes to the protection of young children and affirms them as beloved children of God.

I am grateful for your good work in keeping children safe. The ongoing support you receive from the GRACES Committee is a blessing to the good people of the archdiocese and me.

With best wishes and prayers, I am,

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend George J. Lucas
Archbishop of Omaha

Nihil Obstat

Rev. Matthew Gutowski, S.T.L.
Censor librorum

Imprimatur

Most Reverend George J. Lucas,
Archbishop of Omaha
March 11, 2013 Omaha, NE

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Acknowledgments

Circle of Grace Curriculum

The Archdiocese of Omaha would like to express its gratitude and appreciation of the past and current Circle of Grace contributors. Their commitment, creativity, expertise, and countless hours of dedication have had a profound impact in the lives of children and youth throughout the nation and beyond. The original committee was comprised of the superintendent of schools, teachers, principals, and school counselors. It also included clergy, directors of religious education, catechists, youth ministers and mental health professionals.

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Introduction

Development of the Circle of Grace Curriculum has been a passionate journey for all involved. The Archdiocesan committee was brought together by the mandate of the U.S. Bishops' Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People. The charter mandates that each diocese must have a safe environment curriculum for children and youth which includes an audit to ensure compliance.

The committee set a goal early on that we wanted a curriculum rich in our Catholic faith and clinically sound. The committee knew the program needed to first meet the standards of the U. S. Bishop's audit, but we also wanted much more for our children and youth. Thus, we decided that our main commitment was above and beyond meeting the needs of the U.S. Bishops' audit; we want to ensure the safety, well-being, and spiritual formation of our children and youth. With these goals in mind, we have developed a curriculum which includes teaching a culture of respect and faith that goes beyond protection. This curriculum helps children and young people understand their own sacredness, the sacredness of others, boundaries, and how to seek help through their relationships with trusted adults. Consequently, the Circle of Grace concept was born.

What is the Circle of Grace? It is a metaphor for the love and goodness of God that surrounds us and all others. It is the recognition that God is with us always and is there to help us in difficult situations. Through the Circle of Grace curriculum, adults assist children and youth to recognize God's love by understanding that each of us lives and moves within a Circle of Grace. Our Circle of Grace encompasses who we are in our body and through our senses. It holds your very essence in mind, heart, soul, and sexuality.

This holistic concept allows children and youth to identify uncomfortable situations long before any inappropriate touch may occur. Those who molest children start to groom by manipulating them to break rules and keep secrets such as consuming alcohol and viewing pornography. This manipulation usually occurs before any attempt at inappropriate touch. The Circle of Grace curriculum helps children and youth to identify early on when they are uncomfortable with a situation and includes ways to seek the help of a trusted adult. The Circle of Grace PreK-12 curriculum goals and objectives are met in all grades. The curriculum is self-contained for each grade with everything needed to teach the material.

One of the benefits of the Circle of Grace curriculum is that the instructors also have the opportunity to ponder their own belief and experience of God's presence in their lives. During a training session, an operating room nurse, who was a catechist, asked the following question: "So Jesus is right with us in the operating room?" Her prior faith formation taught this belief but the Circle of Grace Curriculum finally allowed her to understand God's love in a very visual and real way for her life.

With that realization in mind, ponder the Circle of Grace Meditation. It is profound in its simplicity.

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.

What would our world look like if we all lived believing and truly knowing that God is that close?

Mary Beth Hanus LCSW, LMHP, Victim Outreach and Prevention Director, Archdiocese of Omaha

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 the 9-12 alternate lessons or retreat to teach to the class or group.

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Guidelines

School Administrators, Directors of Religious Education, and Youth Ministry Directors

- Leader is defined as clergy (priests or deacons) school administrator, director of religious education/formation, teacher, catechist, or youth minister who has been trained to teach the Circle of Grace Curriculum. All leaders must be adults and certified in Safe Environment.
- 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. Each lesson is correlated with Catholic teachings.
- Administrators/Director needs to review how to handle sensitive situations with each leader. It is important for leaders to report all concerning situations to their Administrator/Director and understand your state's child abuse/neglect reporting laws. A Quick Reference Guide for Leaders is located in this section.
- This curriculum may bring up past issues with leaders which may make it difficult for them to teach the lessons. Please encourage leaders in this situation to speak with their Administrator/ Director, Pastor, or they can call the Safe Environment Coordinator directly. Supportive resources are available in their community to help them.
- The time frame for lessons may vary depending on size of class, age of young people, amount of discussion, etc. Sometimes there is a need to combine grades. If so, pick the most appropriate grade lesson to teach the group. It must be taught in its entirety.
- 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 this section.
- The USCCB Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People requires a safe environment curriculum be implemented in all grades each year. The Circle of Grace curriculum fulfills this requirement.
- Leader's instructions for each lesson are italicized. Non-italicized text needs to be presented by the leader to the young people. All the information and handouts are provided for each grade.
- 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.

- Lesson should be taught in one session if possible. If not, the lesson should be completed the following week. 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 young people and help them to know what to do when they feel unsafe.
- There are pre and post assessments for grades 3, 6, and 9. This tool will assist in evaluating the children/young people's understanding and assimilation of the concepts. The results are to be recorded on the grade evaluation and are not to be shared with the children/young people.
- The curriculum is formatted to be used in two ways:
 - The traditional way: lessons to the identified grade.
 - Grade 12 should only be for seniors.
 - The second way: select one of the grades 9-12 alternate lessons or retreat
 - Leaders will need to keep a record of what lesson is taught each year.
- The School Administrator, Religious Education Director, or Director of Youth Ministry needs to send out the provided letter to all parents regarding Circle of Grace prior to starting the curriculum. All parents should receive the "Common Questions of Parents" handout. Grade specific parent information should be handed out as directed. The parent information included in this section for every parish/school is to assist in providing parent education both to inform parents about the Circle of Grace curriculum and to foster greater communication in families. The "Parent First" newsletter is a great resource for parent and child discussions on healthy sexuality. They are located in the resource file of the flash drive and the Circle of Grace Partner website. **There is a parent letter that addresses technology and unsafe behaviors. Use this at your discretion. It must be sent to the parents directly and not delivered by their child.**
- Evaluations for each lesson are to be completed and returned to the School Administrator, the Director of Youth Ministry, or the Director of Religious Education/Formation. The Administrator/ Director will use these evaluations to complete the Summary Evaluation (located in this section). The Summary Evaluation should be sent to the diocesan administrator for audit documentation and ongoing improvement of the curriculum.
- Curriculum, additional resources including a Parent Handout on Technology and Circle of Grace, are located on the Circle of Grace Flash Drive and Partner website: COGpartners.org.
- The following pages include the Circle of Grace Meditation, Key Concepts of Circle of Grace and PASTE (guide to talking to kids about difficult situations) and more. These additional resources can be displayed in the classroom and are great additions to the curriculum.



CIRCLE OF GRACE

*Raise your hands above your head and 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
then 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.

*What would our world look like if we all lived believing and truly knowing that God is
that close?*

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 experiencing 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.
- God wants us to talk to trusted grownups 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 we need to be safe.

High School Vocabulary

General Circle of Grace Words

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 self and others.

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 and will eventually be revealed.

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. A secret is always unsafe if someone states you are not to tell your parents or trusted adults.

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

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 Ninth Grade

Compliment: A polite expression of praise or admiration.

Flattery: excessive and insincere praise, given especially to further one's own interests.

Imbalance of Power/Influence: An unequal distribution of control, power, and influence in a relationship.

Moral Responsibility: As we grow into mature adults, we can become aware of safe boundaries to help protect ourselves from violations of God's plan for our physical, emotional, sexual, and spiritual well-being.

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

Victim: A person who has suffered injury/harm (physical, emotional, sexual, or spiritual) by forces beyond his or her control and not of his or her personal responsibility. We should never blame or accuse persons who are victims of abuse or have been manipulated or exploited in unequal relationships.

Words Introduced in Tenth Grade

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

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.

Objectification: the seeing and/or treating a person, usually a woman, as an object

Sexting: Sexually explicit images or text sent by way of the phone or other electronic devices.

There may be legal consequences if one or both persons involved are minors.

Pornography: 1: The depiction of erotic behavior (pictures/writing/on-line or video) intended to cause sexual excitement. 2: material (as books, video or 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.

Catfishing: luring someone into a relationship by means of a fictional online persona.

Words Introduced in Twelfth 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.

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

Words Introduced in the High School Alternate Lessons

Action: Steps Needed When Concerns Don't Go Away

No new vocabulary words.

Modesty: A thing of the Past or Not?

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

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.

New Age: Is it Coming from God or Something Else?

Astrology: Claims that position of planets and stars affect how people behave

Astronomy: Is a science which studies the universe and space

Discernment: the ability to define and act upon the difference between safe and unsafe Crystals: A practice that claims minerals will promote and support feelings or desires of individuals.

Horoscopes: A practice that claims to have information about an individual's personality and their course in life depending on the positions of the planets.

Ouija Board: A board game that claims to be able to communicate with spirits.

Psychic: A person who claims to see into the future

Relationship: An authentic connection with God and others.

Truth: A virtue of goodness which leads us to have a relationship with God and will help us recognize what is safe or unsafe.

Navigating an "Anything Goes" Culture

Discernment: The ability to define and act upon the difference between safe and unsafe.

Navigating Uncomfortable Situations with Peers

No new vocabulary words.

Retreat: Our Path to Wholeness Through Holiness

No New vocabulary words.

Below is a sample of a quick reference guide that Directors and Administrators can give their leaders. It will assist them in knowing what action steps to take regarding sensitive situations. “Key Steps When You Have a Sensitive/Concerning Situation” can be found in this section.

Quick Reference Guide for Leaders

- A **Be Attentive** to comments and behaviors during class.
- C **Contact administrators/directors** prior to the dismissal of class if comments or behaviors are concerning.
- T **Team approach is always best.** Collaborate with your administrator/ director/pastor to help clarify child’s statement/behavior and to determine if there is a need to report to the authorities.
- I **Initial Report** to the authorities may be needed. Contact your local child abuse hotline or law enforcement.
- O **Other Resources** are available through your safe environment diocesan coordinator.
- N **Note all** observations/statements and actions taken, make a file.

Suicide Prevention Information

This information is included because we all want children and young people to be safe. Prevention programs such as Circle of Grace primarily focuses on how to identify and seek help when abuse or boundary violations occur.

The Circle of Grace concept is to tell their trusted adults not only about potential harm from someone outside their Circle of Grace but also about self-harm. All of us strive for the safety of all children and young people from outside sources, but we must recognize the real crisis of our youth considering self-harm or suicide.

Below are some facts, warning signs, questions to ask and resources. Please share them with your staff and volunteers because one life lost is too many.

Facts:

- In 2020, Suicide was the second leading cause of death among those ages 10-34.
- Every 13 minutes someone dies of suicide. While more females attempt suicide, males are four times more likely to die by suicide.
- 20 percent of American high school students report having seriously considered suicide during the previous 12 months.
- 8 percent of high school students make a suicide attempt.
- 70 percent of youth who make a suicide attempt frequently use alcohol and/or drugs.
- Being bullied and suicide-related behavior is closely related.

Warning Signs:

- Talking about or making plans for suicide
- Expressing hopelessness about the future
- Talking about being a burden
- Displaying severe or overwhelming emotional pain or distress/ mood swings
- Withdrawing from or changing social connections or situations
- Changes in sleep (increase or decrease)
- Anger or hostility that seems out of character or out of context
- Recent increase in anxiety, agitation, irritability or behaving recklessly
- Telling people good bye
- Giving away possessions
- Excessive drinking or substance abuse

Ask Questions:

Ask the Question (it is a myth that asking will give the youth the “idea” of suicide. Be sure to have suicide crisis information in hand, plenty of time to listen ad a private place to visit)

- “I have the feeling you are thinking about suicide but are having trouble bringing it up”
- “Are you thinking about suicide?”
- “Sometimes people in certain situations feel suicidal. Have you been thinking about killing yourself?”
- “Have you ever wanted to stop living?”
- “Do you have a plan to kill yourself?”
- “If so, ask how, where and if they have a means (such as gun/pills/rope or other means)?”

Listen, Reassure and Persuade:

- Listen and look for warning signs/risk factors.
- Validate their feelings.
- Find out what is important to the person and why they choose to live.
- Inform them that you need to contact their parents/guardians so they can get professional help. Assure them you will help them talk to their parents.
- Remind the person that seeking help isn’t a sign of weakness and treatment is available to help them feel better.
- Provide them with resources:
 - 1- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline -988
 - 2- Boys Town National Hotline (1-800-448-3000, text VOICE to 20121 or www.yourlifeyourvoice.org)

Take Action:

- Don’t leave youth alone once you have determined he or she is at risk.
- Contact parents/guardians and review the following:
 - 1- Need to seek professional help or call 911 if safety is an immediate issue
 - 2- Instruct the parents to remove means like guns and pills from the home
 - 3- Provide them with resources:
 - a) National Suicide Prevention Lifeline -988
 - b) Boys Town National Hotline (1-800-448-3000, text VOICE to 20121 or www.yourlifeyourvoice.org)

Remember that not seeking help for a suicidal child/youth is considered neglect. If you have concerns about the parents getting help for their child or youth you must contact the authorities.

Information obtained from CDC.gov, Nebraska Health and Human Service

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/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 children/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 children/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 children/young people understand and respect their own dignity and that of others. A truly safe and protective environment is one where children/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 children/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 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 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>

History

Background

The United States Catholic Conference of Bishops developed the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People during a three-day meeting in June 2002 in Dallas Texas. This document was the first united response by the bishops to the revelation by the secular media that priests had physically and sexually abused minors over a period of many years. The stories of abuse would appear in dioceses across the United States implicating an increasing number of priests and even bishops.

The Bishops gathered in Washington, D.C. in November 2002 to confirm a revised Charter, to develop a set of canonical norms for Vatican approval as particular law in the dioceses of the United States, to organize procedures for a compliance audit of dioceses, to commission a data gathering project on abuse of minors by priests over the previous 50 years, and to set in motion, studies that would discover the causes, trace the patterns, and offer strategies for preventing future abuse and protecting minors effectively.

Diocese/eparchies are to maintain “safe environment” programs which the diocesan/eparchial bishop deems to be in accord with Catholic moral principles. They are to be conducted cooperatively with parents, civil authorities, educators, and community organizations to provide education and training for minors, parents, ministers, educators, and others about ways to sustain and foster a safe environment for minors. Dioceses/eparchies are to make clear to clergy and members of the community the standards of conduct for clergy and other persons with regard to their conduct with minors.

Article 12 - Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People

The Archdiocese of Omaha, out of concern for all God’s people and in response to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People, has developed a safe environment education curriculum for children and young people. This program is called Circle of Grace. There are many Catholic Dioceses and Protestant churches across the United States using the Circle of Grace Curriculum.

Go to www.cograce.org to read their testimonies.

CIRCLE OF GRACE SUMMARY EVALUATION FORM

Date _____ School/ Parish _____ City: _____

Circle one.

School Administrator Director of Religious Education Director Youth Ministry Other

Name: _____ Phone: _____

DATA: Please enter the number of children/youth who completed the program for each grade. This information is required for the national audit.

K _____ 1st _____ 2nd _____ 3rd _____ 4th _____ 5th _____ 6th _____

7th _____ 8th _____ 9th _____ 10th _____ 11th _____ 12th _____

Number of children/young people who did not participate in program per parents' requests: _____
(Attach a copy of the written documentation of the parents' requests.)

Each grade's curriculum was designed to meet the overall program objectives. Please review your leader's evaluations. Based on this review, has the program adequately met these overall objectives? Yes _____ No _____

1. Children/Young People will understand they are created by God and live in the love of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
2. Children/Young People will be able to describe the Circle of Grace that God gives each of us.
3. Children/ Young People will be able to identify and maintain appropriate boundaries.
4. Children/ Young People can identify types of boundary violations.
5. Children/Young People will demonstrate how to take action if a boundary is threatened or violated.

Grade 3 (tally of leader's evaluation)

Number of children who got 70% or better on their pre-assessment _____

Number of children who got below 70% on their pre-assessment _____

Number of children who got 70% or better on the post-assessment _____

Number of children who got below 70% on the post-assessment _____

Grade 6 (tally of leader's evaluation)

Number of Young people who got 70% or better on their pre-assessment _____

Number of Young people who got below 70% on their pre-assessment _____

Number of Young people who got 70% or better on the post-assessment _____

Number of Young people who got below 70% on the post-assessment _____

Grade 9 (tally of leader's evaluation)

Number of Young people who got 70% or better on their pre-assessment _____

Number of Young people who got below 70% on their pre-assessment _____

Number of Young people who got 70% or better on the post-assessment _____

Number of Young people who got below 70% on the post-assessment _____

Your feedback is very important in making Circle of Grace the best program possible for our children and young people. You may summarize your leader comments here or send the original evaluations.

Please list what worked well and any resources you would like to share.

Please list any suggestions that would improve the program.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Circle of Grace
Curriculum Resources
For
Special Situations



Key Steps for Administrators, Directors of Religious Education, Youth Ministry Directors, and Leaders When There is a Sensitive or Concerning Situation

If a child discloses clear information of abuse and immediate safety is a concern the following steps should occur:

- Assure the child that you will contact people who can help them be safe.
- Ask Director/Administrator for help reporting and with your further interaction with the child/family. (Refer to your diocesan policies)
- Authorities will be responsible for interviewing the child so keep questions to a minimum.
- Ask authorities who will contact the parents and when this will occur.
- Assure the child that you will be there for them during the process as much as possible.

When a child discloses information that is concerning but not threatening immediate safety, the following steps should be considered:

- Always coordinate with your Director/Administrator when dealing with these situations.
- Decide when and if the parents should be notified depending on relationship with parents and issues around the concern (example: a parent is very sick in the hospital and you become aware that the young grade school child is left home alone). Consider approaching parents to offer assistance.
- Keep written documentation of your concerns.
- Use your best judgment in sharing information with parents regarding your conversation with their child.
- Consider reporting to the authorities (refer to diocesan policies).

There May Be Many Reasons That a Child Approaches You Upset or Discloses Potentially Concerning Information. Only ask enough questions to determine if there is reasonable cause to report. Below are general guidelines when you find yourself in this type of situation.

Open-ended questions are best. These questions help you enter into the world of a child without coloring it with assumptions.

(Child starts crying in class.) Below are examples:

- If your tears had words, what would they say?
- I am here to listen.
- Tell me more.
- And then what?
- I want to understand your hurt.

Directed questions when there is more information:

(Child states they are upset with their Uncle/Aunt) □ Tell me more about your Uncle/Aunt.

- What are the things that are upsetting you?

Avoid Leading Questions:

- Did your Uncle hurt you?
- Did your Aunt touch you in your privates?
- Did they tell you not to tell?

Working with Parents in Sensitive Situations:

Talk in a confidential area and when asking questions remember to keep them open ended and non-accusatory.

When immediate safety is a concern and a report has been made:

- Seek advice from the authorities (CPS and Police) as to who will contact parents. (You may interfere with the investigation if you contact parents before authorities.)
- Always coordinate with your Director/Administrator when dealing with parents in these situations.
- If parents become aware of your report: reinforce that you are a mandatory reporter and need to defer to the authorities during the investigation.
- It is not your role to determine guilt but to report concerns per the law.

When immediate safety is not a concern, and a report has NOT been made:

- Share the facts in a calm and nonjudgmental manner.
- Avoid assumptions. For example: Ted was crying in class and told you someone is bothering him. He did not define bother or identify the person. It is important not to assume guilt of the parents.
- Assume parents will be supportive and concerned unless they demonstrate otherwise.
- Offer supportive resources such as counseling.



Remember: PASTE

(When Talking to Kids About Trauma)

Praise them for bringing their question to a trusted adult

Answer only what they are asking... truthfully

Safety is paramount- assure them that their safety and wellbeing is important

Tell them you are there for them if they have other questions

Encourage prayers for all involved

When you get a tough question, listen for what the youth is really asking.

Don't rush to answer. Pause and ask for clarification. This does a few things. First, it buys you time to choose your words carefully. It also stops you from answering the wrong question. In an age appropriate way, always be truthful. Consider asking a simple question back to him: "Why are you asking?" They may not actually be asking what you think they're asking.

Give them facts, but at a pace they can manage.

Whether you're breaking news about the death of a loved one, a job loss or a serious illness or a traumatic event/news, it's important to understand that children process information a little bit at a time. That means you should be prepared to revisit the topic, perhaps many times. When the answer to their question meets their needs, they can move on fairly quickly.

Reassure them that they are safe and loved.

Often when youth grapple with a scary or uncertain subject, their questions will have one fundamental motivation: What's going to happen to me? Will I be safe? Will I be taken care of? Those are the questions you need to answer, even if they aren't being asked explicitly. Consider using Circle of Grace language when reassuring the child. Tell them their wellbeing is important to you.

Take care of yourself, don't be afraid to share your emotions with others

Adults need to have their own support system — and time — when we deal with hard things. Without taking care of yourselves, it's very difficult to help our children.

Circle of Grace

General Code of Conduct for Children and Young People

I understand that I am created by God and live in the love of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

I understand that God does not want or cause bad things to happen.

I understand that God is with me even when I am hurting or sad.

I can describe/demonstrate the Circle of Grace that God gives me.

Because of this:

- My actions will be safe and show respect within my Circle of Grace.
- I will act safely and show respect towards others' Circle of Grace.
- My words and actions will represent the truth.
- I will identify and maintain appropriate and healthy boundaries.
- If there is a question that these boundaries are violated, I will talk with my parents/trusted adult.

“The Don’t Be Duped” Safety Plan.

It can be used in high school per the administrator/director discretion.

“DON’T BE DUPED” SAFETY PLAN

We want you to remember this safety plan by using the acronym DUPE.

1. Write on the board

D- Discern

U- Understand

P- Protect

E- Execute your plan

Read each question allowing a few moments for quiet reflection before discussing

The letter “D” stands for Discern

- What prompting is the Holy Spirit giving you about this person or situation?
- Does this person or situation respect your Circle of Grace?
- What would your parents or others who love you say about this situation?
- What trusted adult can you talk to about the situation?

The letter “U” stands for Understand

- In every situation we need to remember that the Holy Spirit is always with us to help us stay safe.
- The Holy Spirit gives us feelings or instincts and we need to listen to them.
- Understanding a situation and our response to it requires us to listen to the Holy Spirit, our family and friends.
- Answering the following questions will help you understand if a relationship is healthy and belongs in our Circle of Grace
 1. How long have you known this person?
 2. Is your knowledge of this person face-to-face?
 3. How much do you know about this person?
 4. How have you verified what this person has told you about themselves?
 5. What do your feelings (instincts) tell you about this person or situation?
 6. How many things do you have in common with this person?
 7. Is the relationship respectful of your boundaries and the other person’s?
 8. Are you able to say, “No,” to this person?
 9. Does this person’s age or status influence your behavior in the relationship?
 10. Does this person ever ask you to keep secrets?
 11. Are people around you apprehensive/concerned about the relationship?

The Letter P stands for Protect

Part of protecting oneself in uncomfortable situations is to know the following 3 key areas

That may make a situation or person unsafe. They are :

Unequal Power

- Are they significantly older, more popular, or a bigger size than you?
- Are they in a position of authority?
- Do they have access to more resources such as money, knowledge, car etc. than you?
- Are you afraid of them?

Secrecy

- Are they asking you to keep secrets from your parents, friends or other adults?
- Are they asking you not to tell about gifts, time together on line, in person or activities you do together?
- Do they say no one will understand your relationship?

Forced Isolation-

- Do they get angry when you want to hang out with your friends?
- Are they angry if you don't answer your phone or text right away?
- Do you feel like they are trying to control you with their words and actions?

The letter "E" is for Execute your Plan

- There are other things you can do to protect your Circle of Grace when your parents or trusted adults may not be around. Some of them are:
 1. Don't reveal personal information on the internet/social media. That includes full names, school, grade, address, phone number, sports teams, church groups, etc. Perpetrators try to identify young people by learning about their activities and schedule patterns. Be particularly cautious of social networking websites and personal blogs.
 2. Stay away or get away from situations that make you feel uncomfortable.
 3. Tactics may include saying, "No," walking away, calling a parent.
 4. Avoid unsafe situations, which involve alcohol, drugs, or smoking.
 5. Be cautious about situations in which one is left alone with a not well known adult.
- To protect your Circle of Grace, you need to tell trusted adults you need help.
- Notify your parents or another trusted adult whenever someone has violated your boundaries, such as manipulating/controlling you or not respecting your Circle of Grace or someone else's Circle of Grace.

Parent Information



The following is general information for parents regarding *Circle of Grace*, parent-child communication, safety tips, and child abuse/neglect. Administrators and Directors need to make this information available to parents. This can be done in several ways such as copies, parent meetings, bulletin board, web page, newsletter, etc. It is recommended that every parent receive the Parent Letter introducing the curriculum, *Key concepts of Circle of Grace*, *Common Questions of Parents and Parenting and Sexuality*.

CIRCLE OF GRACE

Safe Environment Curriculum

Grade 9 through Grade 12

Dear Parent,

Out of concern for all God's people and in response to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People, we have a curriculum for the safe environment education of children and young people supported and mandated by

Diocese/eparchies are to maintain "safe environment" programs which the diocesan/eparchial bishop deems to be in accord with Catholic moral principles. They are to be conducted cooperatively with parents, civil authorities, educators, and community organizations to provide education and training for minors, parents, ministers, educators, and others about ways to sustain and foster a safe environment for minors. Dioceses/eparchies are to make clear to clergy and members of the community the standards of conduct for clergy and other persons with regard to their conduct with minors.

Article 12 - Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People

This curriculum is called Circle of Grace. It is meant to supplement and be integrated into the excellent programs and curricula for the formation of children and young people in our schools and religious education programs. Circle of Grace aims to equip our children and young people by arming them with essential knowledge and skills grounded in the richness of our faith. This curriculum helps children and young people to understand their own (and other's) dignity in mind, body, and spirit.

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 and 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 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 and 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, especially parents, as they strive to provide a safe and protective environment, hold the responsibility to help children and young people understand and respect their own dignity and that of others. A truly safe and protective environment is one where children and 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 protection programs?

According to research, one in four girls and one in seven boys will be sexually abused by age eighteen.² Many protection programs focus on “stranger danger”; however, up to ninety percent (90%) of the time the perpetrator of abuse is known to the child or young person such as a relative or family friend. Circle of Grace goes beyond just protection by helping children and young people understand the sacredness of who they are and how to seek help through their relationships with trusted adults. It has a strong parent component throughout the curriculum.

Please feel free to contact your school or parish office if you have questions or want more information.

² www.usccb.org or <http://nccanch.acf/hhs.gov>

Special Parent Letter

Technology and Unsafe Behaviors

Dear Parent,

Circle of Grace is a faith-based safety curriculum used by your arch/diocese. Each grade teaches sacredness, boundaries, and action plan if a child feels unsafe or uncomfortable. The lessons focus on the many safety challenges the student faces in technology and every day life.

This letter was sent to you directly because it's important that you know about popular unsafe behaviors your child may encounter in today's culture. The technology guidelines have been discussed in the classroom but NOT the listed unsafe behaviors. We do encourage you to have a conversation with your child about the technology guidelines and these unsafe situations. Here are some guidelines you can review with your child about how to know if a relationship is safe. The guidelines can apply to real life or online relationships.

1. How long have you known this person?
2. Is your knowledge of this person face-to-face?
3. How much do you know about this person?
4. How have you verified what this person has told you about themselves?
5. What do your feelings (instincts) tell you about this person or situation?
6. How many things do you have in common with this person?
7. Is the relationship respectful of your boundaries and the other person's?
8. Are you able to say, "No," to this person?
9. Does this person's age or status influence your behavior in the relationship?
10. Does this person ever ask you to keep secrets?

Caution your youth:

1. Not to reveal personal information on the internet. That includes full names, school, grade, address, phone, sports teams, church groups, etc. Perpetrators try to identify young people by learning about their activities and schedule patterns.
2. To let you know about any time they feel bullied. Help them understand how to respond to bullies, whether that is on social media, a text, at school, or in another setting.
3. To be sensitive to comments that devalue or criticize others for their physical attributes, race, religion, economic status, etc. Model appropriate respectful behavior yourself.
4. To avoid unsafe situations involving alcohol, drugs, and smoking.
5. To be cautious about situations in which they are alone with an adult.

Unsafe Behaviors

The young people will not be presented the following information about unsafe and potentially dangerous behaviors.

- Cutting is a form of self-harm in which a young person cuts or scratches themselves deep enough that it may bleed. This cutting can be on their wrists, arms, legs or stomachs, places where they can hide the scars that will form. Cutting can be a symptom of deeper emotional issues so it is important to seek professional help for your young person. Cutting can lead to suicide ideation. If you have any concerns about the call the Suicide Prevention Lifeline- 988, Boys Town National Hotline 1-800-448-3000 or text VOICE to 20121
- In 2020, Suicide was the second leading cause of death in ages 10- 24 and 24 -34 years old. Someone dies of suicide every 13 minutes.
- Sexting is when someone sends sexually suggestive photos/texts to another person by way of the cell phone or social networking site. This behavior has significant legal and emotional consequences.
- In recent years, both nationally and locally, young people have died playing asphyxiation games (also known as the choking game and the fainting game) either alone or in groups. © There is also a prevalence of potentially dangerous behaviors including genital contact (Rainbow Parties, Chicken Games). In these situations, problem-solve with your young people the appropriate ways to remove themselves from this environment (e.g. I have to call my mom/dad now, I have to go to the bathroom, I don't feel good, etc.).
- Netflix and Chill is an internet slang term used as a invitation to watch Netflix together and have sex.

Thank you for your support of the Circle of Grace Curriculum. It is essential and appreciated as we strive to provide the safest possible environment for our child. If you have any questions, please call your school or parish office.

Common Circle of Grace Questions of Parents

1) How is this connected to the “Safe Environment” ?

Circle of Grace is the safe environment curriculum for children/youth. The goal is to help children/youth understand the sacredness of who they are and how to seek help when needed through their relationships with trusted adults.

2) What information can this curriculum give my child that they are not getting already?

The *Circle of Grace* Curriculum reinforces in a peer setting that their faith community cares about their safety and wants them to understand how to seek help if they feel unsafe for any reason. It will help them identify potentially unsafe situations and know how to handle them by seeking help from trusted adults.

3) You indicate that this curriculum will provide them with “life skills”, what do you mean by this?

It reinforces that they are valued by God and others. It gives them information on boundaries and practical directives of what to do if someone makes them feel uncomfortable when in their *Circle of Grace*. It is a good foundation for healthy relationships that will help them throughout their lives.

4) Will this curriculum be age appropriate?

Yes! The lessons were written with great attention to the stages of child development.

5) How can parents support what is being taught?

Parents will receive parent letters as well as take home activities for several of the lessons to do with their children. Talking with your children about the *Circle of Grace* at home will help your children to understand the importance of the lessons and that the lessons apply everywhere. Additionally, you are your child’s most important teacher in the area of relationships. Much of what your child will learn and later imitate about relationships comes from what they learn by your example. Creating an atmosphere where they know that they can talk to you about anything provides a valuable safety net for your child because they know they have you to turn to whenever they have a concern. The *Parents First* Newsletter has excellent information on parent to child dialogue on healthy sexuality.

6) Is there accountability attached to this curriculum implementation?

Yes! There will be an ongoing evaluation of the curriculum to ensure its effectiveness and to incorporate any suggestions that would improve the quality of the program.

7) Will there be resources (people and material) available if I have questions?

Yes! Your parish/school along with your diocesan safe environment coordinator is there to help you with any questions.

8) Shouldn’t parents be the ones teaching their children about sexuality?

Absolutely! This is NOT a sex education program. *Circle of Grace* will provide children with a sound understanding of their own value and of God’s care and presence in their lives. It will also help them notice the signals that tell them when they do not feel safe and how to talk to a trusted adult. All of this will be a good foundation for healthy relationships. However, this is not a sexuality education program. Many parents will appreciate that this program will provide a spiritual framework that will allow parent-child communication about the value of all that they are, including their sexuality. Those conversations are most effective between parent and child. There are grade specific Parents First newsletters to assist you in these conversations.

9) Is this a mandatory curriculum for my child?

The United States Catholic Conference of Bishops (USCCB) developed the Charter for Protection of Children and Young People. Article 12 of this document states that each Diocese will have a safe environment program for adults and minors. If you have questions or concerns about your child participating in the *Circle of Grace* Curriculum, please contact your Director of Religious Education, Principal, etc.

Parenting and Sexuality

“The Basics”

Be attentive and respectful.

Your child is a precious child of God. Especially in the area of sexuality, you want your children to appreciate that they are made in the image and likeness of God and that sexuality is a gift. Your respect for them as you hold them, bathe them, care for them will teach them better than words that their bodies are to be respected. They will learn of their value in your care. When they are told about their Circle of Grace in religious education and/or school, it helps them to believe that God is with them and for them because they have already experienced your love and your care. They will grow up knowing that they are meant to respect others and are to expect respect from others.

Teaching children about their bodies must happen in an age-appropriate way. For young children, the best guideline is to answer their questions as they arise. Try to always connect sexuality and spirituality in simple, short ways. Include God in the answer to help them recognize that sexuality is something special and created by God. For older children, it may be necessary to initiate discussions. More about that below.

Know what you really believe and why.

If you don't know what the Church teaches in regard to sexuality and why, there are many great resources available.

Saint John Paul II's explanation of the Church's teaching on sexuality, “Theology of the Body,” is an excellent approach explaining the “Why's” behind Catholic teaching in regards to sexuality and our bodies. His work is a new way of conveying the Church's teaching on God's design for male and female. Since the Church teachings are not malleable, understanding the “Why's” is a great motivator which encourages youth and all faithful to strive to live a life in accord with Christ and His Church. This teaching beautifully articulates how we are meant to be a total gift to another.

At the time that many of today's parents were being formed in the faith regarding our bodies and sexuality, the Church did not have the fullness of Pope John Paul's Theology of the Body. Unfortunately for many, sexuality was reduced to a bunch of “rules.” This lack of knowledge has led many individuals down paths that they otherwise would not choose for themselves today, and most likely not for their children. Even a minimal grasp of St. John Paul's Theology of the Body can assist in the inevitable conversations you will have with your children on these matters.

It is vital that you think about what you really believe about the place of sexuality in human life and why. Your own sexual history will considerably influence how you feel about sexual expression. If you were sexually active outside of marriage, you may find it difficult to tell your child to wait until marriage. If you waited until marriage, you may fear that your child will find you woefully outdated. Or you may find you are much more able to explain the benefits of waiting until marriage by talking about how that strengthened your own marriage.

Anticipate how you will respond if your child asks what you did. Whether or not you answer the question directly depends on you. Some parents who were sexually active before

marriage decide at some point, usually when the child is older, to tell the truth. However, if you fear that telling them will not be helpful to them or your relationship with them, it is not necessary to reveal your own history. It is important that you consider how your answer will impact future communication with your child. Be as honest as you can, not only about your actions but also about your feelings, then and now, as well as about the consequences in your own life and relationships. Children are naturally curious about Mom and Dad and how they handled things.

Carefully consider how you will explain to your child why sex belongs in marriage. It is not enough to just say that it does. In advance, make a list of reasons why you believe sex belongs in marriage. Helping your children understand why will help them to make this value their own. Think about how you will react to questions about not only where babies come from but questions about oral sex, masturbation, family members who are not married and have children, and many other issues that will arise. These questions are not just possibilities — they are questions every child should talk about at some time with their parent(s). If you ignore their initial questions, you may not get another chance. They will sense your discomfort and go other places with their questions.

Talk often but not necessarily long.

When something related to sexuality comes up in a conversation, respond appropriately but do not take every opportunity to preach or lecture. If you do, your child will soon “tune” you out. Frequent matter of fact responses that state your values with sensitivity to what they are concerned about will be sufficient.

Know their world.

Pay attention to the environment your children live in. Watch television with them. If they have access to the internet, take an interest in what they enjoy. Given the many sexualized messages in media, you will find many opportunities to engage your children in conversation. Listen to their music with them and talk with them about what they enjoy. When you are in the car, allow them to tune the radio and just listen. Ask them to explain songs to you, objectionable ones or wonderful ones. Something about talking to Mom or Dad about the music often teaches young people a great deal. It gives them a chance to talk about what they believe, and it gives you a chance to hear it. Resist the impulse to launch into a lecture. Ask open-ended questions like:

What do you like about this song/movie/video?

Tell me the story of the song.

What do you think of the message of the song/movie/video?

How do you think that song makes women/men feel?

Take time when they want to talk.

Children often ask questions or make comments at very inopportune times. If you are in a public place, tell your child you will talk later when you are alone – and do so at the earliest

opportunity. If you are not in a public place, make it a priority to respond as soon as possible, preferably when they ask, because that is when they are most interested in your answer. If you feel you don't know how to answer, explain what you know and assure them you will think more about it and talk more later. And do it! If you fail to come back and fully respond, they will think you are uncomfortable and will be less likely to ask you again. Take time to celebrate transitions with special times spent together. Growing up with the accompanying body changes is usually a time of uncertainty and confusion for children. Having a celebration says, "This is a good and wonderful thing." Be honest about your own struggles, fears, and discomforts when you were going through the same transitions. Children usually like to know what it was like for you to go through the same things.

*"To maintain a joyful family
requires much from both the parents
and the children.*

*Each member of the family
has to become, in a special way,
the servant of the others."*

Pope John Paul II

Use correct terminology even when it makes you a little uncomfortable.

Sometimes, your parents may not have used correct terminology and therefore using it is uncomfortable for you. Break the cycle by using the appropriate language that is correct and respectful of the body as created by God. Remember that God created all the amazing parts of your beautiful child, and they are simply learning about God's creation. This teaches them to respectfully name their body and gives you an opportunity to teach them about respecting their Circle of Grace. Be sure you explain any terms that are unclear. If you show discomfort, you are sending them a negative message about their bodies that will not lead them to respect and reverence themselves and others.

What is the real question?

Sometimes children ask a question to “test the water”. But there is a bigger question they really want to know about that they either are hesitant to ask or cannot figure out how to say. Gently listening and drawing them into a conversation is important. Respond to what they ask, always watching for clues that they need more information or reassurance. They need to know that it is OK to ask you anything. You should be their “expert” even if you don’t feel like one. Otherwise, they will look for their answers someplace else.

Talk about risk behaviors.

Don’t wait too long to discuss risk behaviors like sexually transmitted diseases, broken hearts, pregnancy, and the myriad consequences that result from early sexual activity. Many parents are unaware how very early children are learning about sexuality from their peers and the media. But much of their information is inaccurate and certainly not value-based. Talking with your child about these things will not make them more likely to be sexually active. In fact, studies show that children whose parents talk openly with them and communicate their values are less likely to be sexually active.

Tell stories.

Recounting stories is a good way to communicate. Use the stories of friends, acquaintances, a story from the news, even your own, if you are comfortable doing so. You can change the details and names if you are concerned about them knowing who it is. A good story communicates in very effective ways. And we all remember stories. Resist too much explanation after you have talked about the values you are trying to communicate. In your own life, you have been touched often by others who have suffered by their sexual choices. Helping your children to understand that sex outside of marriage can result in painful consequences is important.

Talk about humans.

When you talk about human sexuality, talk about human beings. As obvious as this may seem, countless stories exist about parents who tried to explain the “birds and the bees” by talking about birds and bees. Children need to learn about their bodies and those of the opposite sex by talking with you about human bodies. When correct language is used, you are honoring yourselves and your bodies as created by God. Of course, all such conversations must happen in the context of the child’s age and level of understanding. However, consider that children often have access to information about sexuality long before you did at their same age.

Create a trusting relationship

Children and teens need appropriate limits and boundaries. These help them to know they are cared for. It is appropriate to know where your child is and to expect that they communicate with you if plans change. They should be faithful to the time they agreed to return and open and honest about their activities.

Discuss together why you are establishing the limit, rule, etc. Always make their safety and well-being the true priority and communicate that to them. Help them to see that limits will help them remember who they are and that they are loved.

As children grow, the respect between parent and child must also grow. Balancing appropriate boundaries and trust is not simple. However, if children feel they are not trusted, they will not be trustworthy. Asking detailed questions of an adolescent after every outing says, "I'm not sure I trust you so I have to check up on you." That is not to say that an interested inquiry like "Was the movie good?" is inappropriate. Children should know that their parents care about them and their activities. But interrogation on a regular basis does not lead to an increase in the trust in the relationship. Tell your children that the trust between you is very special and that you hope they appreciate that too.

If your child violates your trust, do not hesitate to let him/her know that you are very disappointed and that it will take some time to rebuild that trust. Additional boundaries (a more restrictive curfew, greater supervision, or other rules) may be appropriate until you are again confident that he/she can be trusted. This is all part of helping children understand that trust in relationships is fragile and important. It will help to prepare them to value trust in adulthood.

Respect your child's desire for some privacy, especially as they get older. That does not mean that you never go in their room, put their clothes away, or look in a drawer for a something. What this means is you do not intentionally "snoop" around. You do not routinely rummage through drawers, closets, etc. You demonstrate trust, treating them as you would have liked to be treated at their age. It is important for your child to understand that you will check all their technical devices, phones and accounts to make sure they are safe.

Connect sexuality and spirituality.

Grow in your own understanding of the relationship between sexuality and spirituality. Help your children to understand sexuality is a basic component of personality in and through which each of us relates to God, self, and others. It is a wonderful gift of God which enables each of us, through our bodies, to lovingly and respectfully care for one another. As your children grow in appreciation of and respect for their bodies and the bodies of others, help them to understand why sexual activity belongs in marriage. Help them to see that waiting until marriage will lead to self-respect, commitment, and intimacy — not to mention a better sexual relationship in marriage.

Tell the truth.

Always tell the truth. Don't exaggerate to frighten them into or away from certain behaviors. If you are unsure how much to say, particularly to a very young child, respond to only the question they have asked. If they want more information and you have taken time to honestly respond, they will continue to ask about what they really want to know. On the other hand, by keeping your first response simple, you may have satisfied their curiosity for now and they may later — days, months, or years — return for more information.

Do not hesitate to honestly explain the consequences of sex outside of marriage. While very young children may not need detailed information, certainly by junior high, young people need to hear from their parents about the negative consequences of pre-marital sexual activity. Do not expect that they are receiving accurate information elsewhere about sexually transmitted disease, emotional harm, and pregnancy. Educate yourself and them. Their future happiness and choices depend on it.

Gender Identity and Gender Dysphoria

God created mankind in his image; In the image of God he created them; Male and Female he created them. (Gn 1:27)

Any discussion of sexuality should begin with our Catholic belief that “the dignity of the human person is rooted in his creation in the image and likeness of God.” Like human life itself, sexual difference is not arbitrary but is willed by God. Image and likeness find their expression in each of the two sexes as they provide an “image of the power and tenderness of God.” Men and women are equal in dignity and yet are different from one another in important ways, including in their bodies and how they relate to each other and to the world. Sexuality affects every aspect of who we are (see CCC 1700, 2332-35).

As Pope Francis said in *Amoris Laetitia*, our “biological sex and the socio-cultural role of sex (gender) can be distinguished but not separated.”

Today, the reality of creation, sex and gender is sometimes misunderstood and ignored. Young people are being taught by schools, peer groups and media that their identities are self-defined and that the body can be manipulated to match their self-perception (gender identity). People with gender dysphoria feel a conflict between their biological gender, how their body feels to them and the cultural role or expectations of their sex at birth.

The most vulnerable young people may believe the lies that their feelings of unhappiness, or not fitting in, prove that they are confused about their gender identity. Rejection can put them at risk for self-destructive behaviors like substance abuse, suicide and abusive relationships.

Parents must address gender ideology with their children in a straightforward way, by speaking the truth with love. Reinforce the truth- sex cannot change. And while parents need to encourage their children to treat kindly those who are experiencing confusion about their gender identity, parents must also reinforce the truth- hormones and surgery can alter the appearance of the body, but they cannot change the sex of even one cell of the body.

What if you become aware that your child is experiencing gender dysphoria? Maintain a loving relationship with your child and reflect God's unconditional love. Seek appropriate help to assist you and your child to deal with your child's feelings, and to provide information and moral guidance as you help your child realize the person who God created him or her to be.

Theology of the Body Resources

Introduction

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MgXkNya6A0c>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dFw1VjuQvDI>

“Freedom of the Gift,” by Anastasia Northrop (Our Father’s Will Communications)

Theology of the body basics

“Theology of the Body Made Simple,” by Father Anthony Percy

“Theology of the Body for Beginners, Revised Edition,” by Christopher West

“Men, Women and the Mystery of Love: Practical Insights from John Paul II’s “Love and Responsibility,”

“Body and Gift,” by Sam Torode

“God’s Plan For You: Life, Love, Marriage and Sex (The Theology of the Body for Young People),” by David Hajduk

“Theology of His Body and Theology of Her Body” (Teens), by Jason Evert

Going Deeper

“Theology of the Body Explained,” by Christopher West

“Crossing the Threshold of Love: A New Vision of Marriage,” by Mary Shivanandan

“Discovering the Feminine Genius: Every Woman’s Journey,” by Katrina Zeno

“The Christian Meaning of Human Sexuality,” by Father Paul Quay

“Pope John Paul II’s Theology of the Body: What It Means, Why it Matters,” by Father Richard Hogan

Looking to go deeper into the philosophical, theological, psychological and cultural roots and ramifications of the theology of the body? Then check out these top-notch scholars and speakers as well.

Father Brian Bransfield, executive director of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops Secretariat for Evangelization and Catechesis;

Mary Beth Bonacci, author, speaker and founder of Real Love;

Philip Mango, psychotherapist and president of St. Michael’s Institute for Human Sciences;

Gregory Popcak, Catholic counselor and founder of the Pastoral Solutions Institute;

Janet Smith, author and Father Michael J. McGivney Chair in Life Ethics, Sacred Heart Major Seminary, Detroit;

Edward Sri, author and professor at the Augustine Institute in Denver;

Michael Waldstein, Max Seckler professor of theology at Ave Maria University and translator of the definitive edition of Pope John Paul II’s theology of the body, “Man and Woman He Created Them.”

The Archdiocese of Omaha is grateful to the Diocese of Duluth’s contribution in the update of this parent information!

Physical Abuse

Definition

- Non-accidental infliction of injury or an act that poses substantial likelihood of bodily injury. Such injury is considered abuse regardless of whether the caregiver intended to hurt the child. Physical discipline, such as spanking, is not considered abuse as long as it is reasonable and causes no bodily injury to the child.

Indicators

- Unexplained injuries.
- Bruises or other marks.
- Arrives early to school and stays late.
- Parent tells teachers to use harsh physical discipline if child misbehaves.
- Parent offers conflicting, unconvincing, or no explanation for the child's injury, or provides an explanation that is not consistent with the injury.
- Unexplained burns, bites, bruises, broken bones, or black eyes.
- Has fading bruises or other marks noticeable after an absence from school. Child shrinks at the approach of adults or is generally afraid of adults.
- Child is reluctant to be around a particular person or seems frightened. Child discloses abuse.

Unreasonable Use of Confinement

Definition

- Any type of activity the caregiver uses to confine or restrict the child such as tying the child up with rope, duct tape, or chain to keep the child in one place.

Indicators

- Changes in behavior or school performance.
- Learning problems or difficulty concentrating.
- Overly compliant, passive, withdrawn.
- Unexplained bruises.
- Is reluctant to be around a particular person or seems frightened.

Cruel Punishment

Definition

- Any type of discipline that results in injury, cuts, bruising, withholding food, water, required care, or requiring a child to consume nonfood items or inappropriate amounts of food or water, or a parent or caregiver's use of sadistic measures or weapons.

Indicators

- Unexplained injuries.
- Bruises or other marks.
- Arrives early and stays late after school.
- Parent tells teachers to use harsh physical discipline if child misbehaves.
- Has fading bruises or other marks noticeable after an absence from school.
- Child shrinks at the approach of adults or is generally afraid of adults.

- Child is reluctant to be around a particular person or seems frightened.
- Parent offers conflicting, unconvincing, or no explanation for the child's injury, or provides an explanation that is not consistent with the injury.

Emotional Abuse

Definition

- The parent or caregiver demonstrates a pattern of criticizing, rejecting, insulting, isolating, terrorizing, or humiliating the child, resulting in serious emotional or behavioral issues.

Indicators

- Overly compliant, passive, withdrawn.
- Extreme changes in behavior.
- Signs of anxiety, depression, eating disorders, self-harming.
- Delays in developmental milestones.
- Parent uses rejecting, insulting or critical statements towards child; ☹ Parent uses humiliation or isolation tactics.

Sexual Abuse

Definition

- Sexual abuse means any sexually oriented act, practice, contact, or interaction in which the child is or has been used for the sexual stimulation of a parent, child, adult, or another person.

Indicators

- Has difficulty walking or sitting.
- Suddenly refuses to change for gym or to participate in physical activities.
- Reports nightmares or bedwetting.
- Experiences a sudden change in appetite.
- Demonstrates bizarre, sophisticated, or unusual sexual knowledge or behavior.
- Becomes pregnant or contracts a venereal disease, particularly if under age 14.
- Goes missing.
- Reports sexual abuse by a parent or another adult caregiver.
- Attaches very quickly to strangers or new adults in their environment.

Sexual Exploitation

Definition

- Includes, but is not limited to, any person causing, allowing, permitting, inflicting, or encouraging a child to engage in voyeurism, exhibitionism, or sexual acts in exchange for something, or in the production, distribution, or acquisition of pornographic photographs, films, or depiction of the child.

Indicators

- Has difficulty walking or sitting.
- Suddenly refuses to change for gym or to participate in physical activities.
- Reports nightmares or bedwetting.

- Experiences a sudden change in appetite.
- Demonstrates bizarre, sophisticated, or unusual sexual knowledge or behavior.
- Becomes pregnant or contracts a venereal disease, particularly if under age 14.
- Goes missing.
- Reports sexual abuse by a parent or another adult caregiver.
- Attaches very quickly to strangers or new adults in their environment.

Sex Trafficking

Definitions

- Sex trafficking is any attempt to have someone under 18 perform a commercial sex act, that is, a sex act for money or for anything else of value, like a place to sleep, food, transportation, or even drugs.

Indicators

- Chronic missing/homeless youth.
- Inconsistencies when describing and recounting events.
- Sexually explicit profiles on social networking sites.
- Demeanor exhibiting fear, anxiety, depression, submissiveness, tenseness, nervousness.
- Is not enrolled in school or repeated absence from school.
- Family relationships not clear (may or may not present as formal guardian).
- Child is fearful of family he/she lives with.
- Does not have access to their personal identification documents (e.g., ID card, social security card, driver's license);

Labor Trafficking

Definitions

- Labor trafficking is trying to force a minor to provide labor or services by physically harming or restraining the victim (or threatening to do so); threatening to have the victim arrested or deported; controlling the victim's access to drugs; exploiting a victim's functional or mental impairment; and claiming the victim cannot leave a job because of a real or imagined debt.

Indicators

- Chronic missing/homeless youth.
- Inconsistencies when describing and recounting events.
- Sexually explicit profiles on social networking sites.
- Demeanor exhibiting fear, anxiety, depression, submissiveness, tenseness, nervousness.
- Is not enrolled in school or repeated absence from school.
- Family relationships not clear (may or may not present as formal guardian).
- Child is fearful of family he/she lives with
- Does not have access to their personal identification documents (e.g., ID card, social security card, driver's license);

Resources

Identifying Child Abuse and Neglect

www.childwelfare.gov/can/identifying

Resources and information from the Child Welfare Information Gateway website about signs and symptoms of child maltreatment, including training resources.

Preventing Child Abuse and Neglect

www.childwelfare.gov/preventing

Resources and information from the Child Welfare Information Gateway website.

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<http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/factsheets/>

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Circle of Grace

Resources for Leaders and Parents

Websites

Child Welfare Information Gateway: <https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/can/>

United States Catholic Conference of Bishops:

Office of Child and Youth Protection:

<https://www.usccb.org/committees/protection-children-young-people>

Technology Safety Through the Eyes of Faith, www.faihandsafety.org

NetSmartzKids.org

<https://www.missingkids.org/netsmartz/home>

Scripture Text

New American Bible with Revised New Testament and Revised Psalms © 1991, 1986, 1970, Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Washington, D.C.

Book

The Theology of the Body: Human Love in the Divine Plan, John Paul II, Pauline Books and Media, 1997.

Church Documents

The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality: Guidelines for Education within the Family, Pontifical Council for the Family, 1996.

Promise to Protect – Pledge to Heal: Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2011.

USCCB “Create in Me a Clean Heart” document and pamphlets

Consultation

Contact your Diocesan Safe Environment Coordinator with any questions about safe environment.

Other

- Boys Town National Hotline 800-448-3000
- State Child Protective Service