

Family Faith and Circle of Grace Family Gatherings

Family Gathering Guidelines

This section contains guidance for the director to prepare for and present the *Circle of Grace* family gatherings. The family gatherings are designed to be a one-time (yearly) event and should take 60- 90 minutes, depending on the size of your group and the proximity of the spaces you use.

Although faith-based, Circle of Grace is a safety and protection curriculum that meets the requirements of the USCCB *Charter for the Protection of Children and Youth*.

These Family Faith lesson plans for *Circle of Grace* are only to be used when parents and children can come together in a large group to learn about *Circle of Grace* in the format written here. If children will be meeting by themselves without parents, or if children and parents meet separately for whole the event, or any situation when this family gathering format can't be used exactly as written, children should be taught the regular *Circle of Grace* curriculum. This is because several critical parts of the *Circle of Grace* lessons are taught or reinforced within the family group discussions and are not included in these Family Faith youth lessons.

As discussed in the Administrator section, the gatherings consist of group prayer and families gathering first, then children/youth and parents receiving separate formation, and ending with family discussions to share what they have learned about *Circle of Grace*.

There are 5 different options for Family Gatherings in this section for you to choose one each year. *Although all 5 options are similar in order to fulfill the requirements to be a safety and protection curriculum, each family gathering has an individual theme.*

- a. Gathering A- What would our world look like if we all believed that that God is always present in our Circle of Grace? How does that belief affect our lives, ie. a child being bullied, firefighter going to a fire, a surgeon in an operating room? (Blessing of children by parents, small crosses or crucifixes may be given.)
- b. Gathering B- God wants us to be safe because He loves us more than we can imagine. (Families may be given blessed Holy Family medals or Saint medals.)
- c. Gathering C- God is truly present and puts Trusted Adults in our lives to help keep us safe. Discuss safe/unsafe feelings. (Parents name what is special about each child and make the Sign of the Cross on each child's forehead with Holy Water.)
- d. Gathering D- God gave us each special talents or gifts. How can we use them to help keep ourselves and others safe? (Family Tree activity, included)
- e. Gathering E- God wants us to be safe. How can we help keep ourselves and others safe? Going to Trusted adults; getting help for friends who are being

bullied, being unsafe on the internet, sad or depressed... (Holy Family prayer cards may be distributed.)

There is a Family Gathering Leader Guide for each optional lesson. This lets the leader know what to say and do during the gathering. An agenda for parents and other adults who attend, which includes family discussion questions, can be found at the end of the leader guide.

There will be time for families to discuss in their family group at the beginning of the gathering and after the breakout sessions. Family discussion topics are easily identifiable in the leader guide and parent agenda by a *Circle of Grace* symbol next to each topic for conversation.



During the breakout session, children are taught the age-appropriate lessons in this book while their parents have an adult session to learn about an adult topic of your choice. (See 'Adult Sessions' section for more information)

First Steps

(The steps below can assist the leader in the planning of a *Family Faith and Circle of Grace* Gathering)

Know Your Environment and Staff/Volunteers

Space plays an important role especially when you have several different groupings of people. Pre-planning how you use your space will make for a successful evening. Some programs may not have regular volunteers. You may need to recruit volunteers to teach the *Circle of Grace* to the students. You may consider other parish leaders who work with children and youth.

Staff/ volunteer orientation to safe environment and *Circle of Grace* is crucial to their ability to feel confident and passionate about teaching the curriculum. They need to understand the importance for the curriculum to be effective.

Choose a date and time for the *Circle of Grace* gathering

Be sure to check the availability of presenters (pastor, clergy, DRE, special guest) to visit with the parents on that date. Once a date is set, reserving the space needed and communicating to parents and parish about the special event is essential. Remember, the reason you are offering this is because of the importance of child safety and not just because it is a "have to". Leaders' passion and attitude about the curriculum will set the stage for a fruitful gathering.

Know Who is Attending and the Number of Students in Each Grade

Activities and prayers for students and families will be easier to plan if you know the audience who will be attending.

This will help you decide what supplies and handouts are needed to teach the children and youth, and anything necessary for your chosen adult break-out session.

Circle of Grace has the flexibility to accommodate multi-age groups (grouping several similar ages or grades together to participate in a preselected COG grade section). If you combine ages or grades together, you will need to choose one grade level lesson and teach it in its entirety. If you continue using multi-age groups, be sure to teach a lesson from a different grade level the following year.

Reinforce Circle of Grace Throughout Your Family Faith Program

It is important to reinforce the *Circle of Grace* concept/message throughout the year. Modeling how to use the concept and language will help the parents/guardians to incorporate it into their daily lives. Children/youth are more likely to tell us their concerns if they see that the adults in their lives regularly check in about their safety and have a shared vocabulary for discussion.