

Family, Faith and Circle of Grace

Grade 6

Coping with Stress and Pressure: Who are You Leaning On?

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

This lesson complements the following Catholic teachings:

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

Lesson Objectives

Young People will be able to:

1. Understand the difference between stress and pressure
2. Understand that stress usually comes from within. It can be healthy or unhealthy
3. Understand that pressure is usually applied from an external source. It can be healthy or unhealthy.
4. Define priorities and manage healthy boundaries
5. Recognize that a prayer-filled life is an antidote for stress
6. Identify a trusted adult they can talk to if someone is pressuring them to ignore their conscience

Vocabulary

1. **Boundary**: The borders or limits we need to keep ourselves safe within our *Circle of Grace*.
2. **Stress**: An internal state of mental/emotional strain resulting from adverse or demanding circumstances.
3. **Pressure**: Typically applied from an external source (peers, teachers, family, etc.) in a demand for high performance or enticement to healthy/unhealthy behavior.

4. **Circle of Grace:** The love and goodness of God which always surrounds me and all others.
5. **Safe Secret:** A secret is safe when it does not hurt oneself or others.
6. **Unsafe Secret:** A secret is unsafe when one thinks that someone, including oneself, might be hurt or get in trouble if one does not tell.
7. **Trust:** Being able to count on someone to help one stay safe within one's *Circle of Grace*.
8. **Trusted Adult:** A grown-up who helps one to stay safe in their *Circle of Grace* and to respect others within their *Circle of Grace*.

Materials Needed:

1. Summary of Key Concepts of the "Circle of Grace".
2. Large paper for the students and a whiteboard
3. Markers, pens or other writing utensils
4. Parent Letter (at the end of the lesson)

It is important to begin the lesson by explaining that God does not want or cause bad things to happen. There will be young people who have already experienced unsafe or hurtful situations. It is important to reinforce that it is not their fault, and it is never too late to tell a trusted adult. We want our young people to understand that God is with them and for them even when they are hurting or sad.

Getting Started

Discuss the difference between stress and pressure and how they affect our *Circle of Grace*. Reinforce that stress is usually internal and can happen when there are too many demands on time, energy, etc., and not enough resources to meet those demands. Pressure usually comes from an external source with a demand for high performance or enticement to healthy/unhealthy behaviors.

What can be done when feeling stressed?

- Exercise and/or go for a walk. It will get the endorphins in motion, reducing stress
- Talk to a trusted adult about ways to reduce feelings of stress
- Pray and meditate with scripture

Responding to Stress vs. Pressure:

In most stressful situations, stress reduction or feeling less overwhelmed is a goal, but in most pressure situations, performing successfully or engaging in healthy/unhealthy behavior is a goal.

What can be done when feeling pressured?

- Realize that all pressure is not necessarily bad. Pressure that comes from parents and teachers may actually assist in reaching potential
- Realize that sometimes pressure can encourage unhealthy behavior that is not in concert with our Circle of Grace
- Talk to a trusted adult about the pressure felt
- Reduce some activity overload
- Pay attention to the workings of the Holy Spirit in our lives

Opening Activity

Write these four categories on the board: **academics, athletics, peers and family.**

Divide the students in small groups and give each a large piece of paper. Ask each group to name some healthy expectations and unhealthy expectations (things that belong in our *Circle of Grace* and things that do not) that may come from the above four categories and name an action that is needed for each. Try to discover at least two healthy and unhealthy situations for each of the four categories. As each group member gives an example, have it written down on the paper to discuss later. *Example- peer expectations:*

- *Unhealthy: A friend pressures you to go to a party that you know will have alcohol. What do you do?*
- *Healthy: A friend says a group of them are going bowling and asks if you are able to join them. What do you do?*

Large Group Discussion:

Discuss the below questions with the youth.

- *What types of situations did your group come up with?*
- *Were they unhealthy or healthy in our *Circle of Grace*?*
- *Were any of the unhealthy situations also unsafe? Why?*
- *Which did you see more of?*
- *In which category was it easier to find healthy situations?*
- *In which category was it easier to find unhealthy situations?*
- *Which categories seem to give more stress or pressure? Why do you think that?*

Discuss any situations that students might have identified as healthy that were actually unhealthy and vice versa. What were their responses (actions) to each of the situations?

Why did they choose those actions? Were they listening to the prompting of the Holy Spirit?

Were they good or bad actions to each pressure or stressful situation?

Who Do You Lean On?

- *Review the definition of "Trusted Adult"*
- *Discuss who they can talk to when they feel pressured by others to do things that are unhealthy or unsafe.*
- *Discuss what can be done when they feel pressured by others to do things that are unhealthy or unsafe*
- *Discuss how their faith and their Circle of Grace help with stress and pressure?*

Allow for some answers.

Remember Faith Makes a Difference Handout: *Distribute the handout to discuss in the class. Students need to take the handout home (located at the end of the lesson).*

Let's review your handout. Have you done any of these before? Can you think of additional ones?

Take the Next Right Step (Action Plan):

Have students write a **1-2-3 Plan** to assist when they are stressed or pressured:

- 1- Name of a trusted adult
- 2- Action to be taken if a situation is unhealthy
- 3- Write a short prayer (Jesus, help me!!!)

Below are some things to consider before students write their prayer. You can read them or have them on the board.

St. Francis de Sales called anxiety the greatest evil that can befall the soul, except sin, because it causes us to lose the strength necessary to maintain virtue.

Stress is one of the devil's most-used tactics to get us to fall away from a close relationship with God.

Stress can cause us to lose our peace. The more the soul is at peace, the more you can feel the peace of God's presence.

Distribute "Summary of the Key Concepts of "Circle of Grace" Handout (located at the end of the lesson) to each youth to take home. Review the handout and explain how God is present within us, and wants the best for us in all things, therefore he created us with the Circle of Grace to help keep us safe.

God is Present because He desires a relationship with us.

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

God helps us know what belongs in our Circle of Grace

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

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

- God desires to help us when we are hurt, scared or confused (unsafe).

- The Holy Spirit prompts (alerts) us that something does not belong in our *Circle of Grace* by giving us “a funny or uncomfortable feeling” that something is not safe. This feeling is there because God wants us to be safe.

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

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

Closing Reminders

Maintaining peace can be quite challenging. Maybe today we can commit to starting with these essential steps to help us begin our journey toward peace of soul:

1. Cultivate a disposition to “purity of heart.” A person with purity of heart is determined to say “yes” to God in all things.
2. Be not afraid. It is said that the words “Be not afraid” occur in Scripture well more than 300 times. Clearly there is a message that God is telling us. We want to believe in God’s power over stressful situations in our lives, but we don’t.
3. The Bible is clear that stressful situations are not to be avoided. Jesus encourages each of us to pick up our cross, not avoid it.
4. Our faith is not something to help us escape from our troubles, but to help us tackle them head-on. Stress and pressure can be a good thing if they help us rise to challenges and grow as individuals

Make sure the Parent Letter is sent to home upon completion of the lesson. Please see instructions:

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

Summary of the Key Concepts of “Circle of Grace”



God gives each of us a Circle of Grace 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.

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

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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 adults about our worries, concerns or “funny/ uncomfortable feelings” so they can help us be safe.

Remember: Faith Makes a Difference

It's the little acts of faith that make a big difference, below are a few:

- 1. Just be quiet with Jesus for a few minutes. This break from your hectic day will help. Stress and pressure is not new. Check out what our faith says about it in Scripture (Below)**
- 2. Pray instantly when anxiety begins to creep in. A short prayer is good enough.**
- 3. Celebrate the sacraments (a little more than you do now). Christ's grace can help us achieve the peace that will make us saints.**
- 4. Read and meditate on Scripture, specifically the many passages that address worry and peace.**
- 5. Take advantage of sacramentals (they confer an actual grace!): holy water, icons, medals.**
- 6. Cultivate joy. Peace and joy are unified. Try new things that are healthy and holy. Get out of your comfort zone. Keeping life interesting makes daily life full of joy, and nothing promotes peace like joy.**

Overcoming anxiety is actually a central tenant of our Catholic faith! Getting rid of stress in your life is necessary for maintaining peace, without which you cannot be a saint or help others become saints.

Scripture Verses Dealing with Stress

- Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid. John 14: 27
- In the world you will have trouble, but take courage, I have conquered the world. John 16:33
- In this you rejoice, although now for a little while you may have to suffer through various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold that is perishable even though tested by fire, may prove to be for praise, glory, and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. 1 Peter 1: 6-7
- "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat [or drink], or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Matthew 6:25
- No trial has come to you but what is human. God is faithful and will not let you be tried beyond your strength; but with the trial he will also provide a way out, so that you may be able to bear it. 1 Corinthians 10:13

Coping with Stress and Pressure: Who are you Leaning On?

Middle School Circle of Grace Lesson Parent Letter

Dear Parent,

Your young person has just completed the “Coping with Stress and Pressure” alternate lesson in the *Circle of Grace* Program. The lesson describes the difference between stress and pressure. Through discussion and activities, the lesson assists your child in understanding the difference between healthy and unhealthy stress and pressure. It also helps them to identify how to respond when the stress or pressure is unhealthy.

The lesson encourages them to talk to a trusted adult when feeling stress or pressure.

Many times young people feel stress/pressure in unhealthy/unsafe interactions via social media and technology including texting on phones. Although this was not specifically reviewed in this lesson we believed it is important to provide important information that can help keep their children safe. We encourage you to review the below questions with your child to help them discern their interactions with individuals via social media, networking, texting, gaming or other ways to communicating through technology. Many times young people will consider individuals they only met through technology as “friends”.

Questions to ask:

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 young person:

1. Not to reveal personal information on the internet. 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.
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. Watch the jokes you tell, your children do.
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

We wanted to make you aware of the below information NOT included in the lesson but important for parents to know. We encourage you to discuss this with your young person.

- 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 this call the Suicide Prevention Lifeline (1-800-273-8255, Boys Town National Hotline 10800-273-8255 or text VOICE to 20121
- Suicide is the third leading cause of death in ages 10-14 and the second leading cause for those 15-34 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 an invitation to watch Netflix together and have sex.

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

Family, Faith and Circle of Grace
Coping with Stress and Pressure:
Who are You Leaning On?
Evaluation

Date _____

Parish/School _____ *City* _____

Leader _____ *Number of children in class* _____

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

1. YES ____ NO ____ Young People understand the difference between stress and pressure.
2. YES ____ NO ____ Young People understand that stress and pressure can have healthy or unhealthy outcomes,
3. YES ____ NO ____ Young People understand that they can lean on their faith when dealing with stress or pressure,
4. YES ____ NO ____ Young people recognize that a prayer-filled life is an antidote for unhealthy stress and pressure.
5. YES ____ NO ____ Young people and demonstrate how to take action if stress or pressure becomes more than they can handle.

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

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

Return to your School Administrator or Director of Religious Education.