Parent Resource Packet

Circle of Grace

Safe Environment Training

Coping with Stress and Pressure

Grade 5- Lesson Plan

Philosophy

What is a Circle of Grace?

The Catholic Church teaches that God has created each of us as unique and special. Genesis 1:27 tells us that we are created "male and female in God's image" and that God saw this as "very good." In that goodness, we are meant to respect ourselves and everyone else as persons created and loved by God.

Adults assist children 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 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 understand and respect their own dignity and that of others. A truly safe and protective environment is one where children 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 understand the sacredness of who they are and how to seek help through their relationships with trusted adults.

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

The goal of the *Circle of Grace* curriculum is to educate and empower children and young people to actively participate in a safe environment for themselves and others.

Objectives of the Circle of Grace Curriculum- Grades K-12

- Children/Young People will understand they are created by God and live in the love of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- Children/Young People will be able to describe the *Circle of Grace* which God gives each of us.
- Children/Young People will be able to identify, discern and maintain appropriate physical, emotional, spiritual, and sexual boundaries.
- Children/Young People will be able to identify all types of boundary violations.
- Children/Young People will demonstrate how to take action if any boundary is threatened or violated.

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[1] www.usccb.org, or http://nccanch.acf.hhs.gov

Summary of the Key Concepts of "Circle of Grace"

God gives each of us a Circle of Grace (see below) where He is always Present:

Raise your hands above your head, then bring your outstretched arms slowly down.
Extend your arms in front of you and then behind you embrace all of the space around you
slowly reach down to your feet.
*Knowing that **God** is in this space with you. This is your **Circle of Grace**; you are in it.*

God is Present because He desires a relationship with us.

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

God helps us know what belongs in our Circle of Grace

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

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

- God desires to help us when we are hurt, scared or confused (unsafe).
- The Holy Spirit prompts (alerts) us that something does not belong in our *Circle of Grace* by giving us "a funny or uncomfortable feeling" that something is not safe. This feeling is there because God wants us to be safe.

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

- God gives us several trusted adults, in addition to our parents, to talk to about our worries, concerns or "funny/ uncomfortable feelings" so they can help us be safe. If a parent or trusted adult is not available or unable to help us, God wants us to go to another trusted adult until we get the help needed to be safe.

Prevention: What Parents Need to Know

Discussion Guide

Circle of Grace©

Keeping Children and Youth Safe

www.archomaha.org/circleofgrace/ mbhanus@archomaha.org

Circle of Grace is a faith-based safe environment curriculum that helps to form and educate children and youth about the value of positive relationships with God and others. It teaches children and youth how to identify and maintain appropriate physical, emotional, spiritual, and sexual boundaries; recognize when boundary violations are about to occur or have occurred; and demonstrate how to take action when boundaries are threatened or violated.

Adults assist children and young people to recognize God's love by helping them 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 circling them down in front of your body, including side to side. This circle holds your very essence in mind, heart, soul and sexuality.

Your diocese has chosen *Circle of Grace*© as a safety and prevention training program. We all know a parent is a child's first teacher! God has a vision for healthy relationships where all are respected, cared for and loved.

Circle of Grace is not a sexuality education program. It provides a spiritual framework that will encourage parent-child communication, including sexuality. There are grade-specific *Parents First* newsletters to assist you in these conversations.

Thank you for partnering with us to keep kids safe!

Perfect prevention is impossible.
But children are safer when they:

1. know their own boundaries and how to respond to inappropriate behavior;
2. know how to take action and ask for help from a parent or trusted adult
3. are monitored and supervised by aware and supportive adults.

This discussion guide includes age- specific suggestions as well as questions to promote conversations. It covers sacredness, boundaries and how to take action/get help from a trusted adult, as well as parenting practices. The discussion topics can be presented in one session or split into several. This guide can be used in small groups, parenting groups and more.

As a parent, grandparent, caregiver, or teacher, or other ministry leader, this provides suggestions for building children's skills in cultivating loving and faithful relationships.

For more information, please contact your parish, school or your diocesan Safe Environment office. Working together, we can continue to increase the safety of all our children.

Circle of Grace©
Safe Environment Training
for Children and Young People
2023 Revised Edition
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Thank you to Dove's Nest© for their contribution to this discussion guide.

Sacredness and Boundaries

All children need to know that they are made in the image of God.

How can we equip them to respect themselves and others?

How do we reduce the horrifying amount of sexual violence in this country? We talk to our children. Parents, family members, educators, clergy and other leaders have the opportunity and responsibility to model and teach sacredness and appropriate boundaries from the time kids are old enough to walk.

a) **Model respect yourself.** Each individual is a precious child of God. You want all children to appreciate that they are made in the image and likeness of God and that sexuality is a gift.

b) **Start young.** More than 30 percent of abuse is committed by people under eighteen. Talk often, but not necessarily long. Short, clear reminders, perhaps that relate to something on the television or social media, are more effective teaching moments than "the talk" or long lectures.

c) **Talk about boundaries in age-appropriate ways.** Use sentences like "Make sure to ask instead of grabbing that toy," "You can say no to that if it makes you uncomfortable" or "We are respectful when people don't want to be touched."

d) **Be aware that most sexual assaults occur between people who know one another.** Statistics show that 90% of abuse occurs by people known to the child (parents, step-parents, siblings, extended family, friends, coaches, teachers, etc.)

e) **Name the consequences.** Consequences can include serious harm to one's self and to others from sexual violence.

f) **Talk about the media.** Discuss ways that it provides a warped vision of healthy boundaries and sexuality.

g) **Talk about power imbalance.** This includes differences in age, gender or status, and group pressure.

h) **Talk about pornography, and monitor internet and phone use.** Pornography use is widespread among adolescents, males in particular, and often includes nonconsensual sexual behavior, which evidence suggests is shaping their behavior and understanding. [1]

Discussion Questions:

1. God wants our relationships to be experiences of Divine Love. What does this mean to you?

2. How have you talked to the children in your life about healthy and sacred relationships?

3. What do you think your children would say about healthy relationships if you asked them?

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[1] Foubert, John D., 'The Public Heather Harms of Pornography The Brain, Erectile Dysfunction and Sexual Violence,: Dignity: A Journal on Sexual Exploitation and Violence, Vol. 2, Issue 3, Article 6 (2017)

Action/ Trusted Adults

Children need to know what is and is not appropriate behavior from those around them.

How can we equip them to report boundary violations to a parent or trusted adult?

"The child is the beauty of God present in the world, that greatest gift to a family."

-St. Teresa of Calcutta

a) **Teach children about their bodies.** Use correct anatomical names when you talk. *Parents First* newsletters provide parents with age-appropriate information to help guide your discussion with your child.

b) **Encourage them to say no.** A child who never says no to a parent or caregiver will never say no to another adult. Back them up if they don't want to give or receive hugs or are feeling uncomfortable in a situation.

c) **Encourage communication.** Take children seriously. Listen carefully and help them name feelings.

d) **Trust children.** Encourage them to report things that happen that frighten them or make them uncomfortable.Practice talking about emotions and difficult experiences. Respond calmly with love and trust.

e) **Talk with children.** Talk about setting boundaries, making choices before situations arise, the risks associated with early sexual activity, and the dangers of power imbalances in relationships. Also name anddiscuss situations that should be avoided, the risks associated with drug and alcohol use, and techniques tostay safe.

f) **Know their Trusted Adults.** Even with a close parent/child relationship, children may be hesitant to talk to their parents about abuse. One of the most successful components of *Circle of Grace* is having children choose several trusted adults, in addition to their parents, to turn to if something happens. This gives them a bigger safety net to protect them if abuse occurs or could occur.

Discussion Questions:

1. How have you talked about appropriate physical boundaries with your children? If you have not, do you have ideas for starting the conversation? What concerns do you have?
2. How have you talked about sex and faithfulness with your children?
3. How did your parents talk with you about sex?
4. How can you support healthy boundary development in children as a family or in our community?

Parenting Practices

As parents or caregivers, there are many things we can do to keep our children safe. What suggestions would you add to this list?

a) **Model good boundaries.** Treat your children and the children in your life with respect. Respect their desire to not be touched if at all possible. This will help them say "no" when they are uncomfortable with others.

b) **Build relationships of trust.** Set appropriate boundaries for your child but give freedom within those boundaries. Be clear and honest about what you do and do not monitor. Be curious rather than accusatory. Tell the truth about sexuality. Clear, honest explanations help build a framework of understanding.

c) **Know what your children are up to.** Know where they are and who they are with. Encourage a buddy system—go with a trusted peer, or don't go at all. Teach your children how to contact you and encourage them to do so.

d) **Watch for grooming behavior.** Pay attention to people who want to be alone with your children, give them individualized attention, or seem overly generous. Don't give in or go along. Abusers—who are almost always people parents know and trust—are experts at manipulation, using flattery, minimization, jealousy, intimidation, and anger to cover their behavior.

e) **Trust.** Trust children if they report. Report their concerns to local authorities, not just to a pastor, principal or other professional.

f) **Look for the "real question."** Often children will bring a trial balloon to see how you respond before digging into a more serious problem.

g) **Recognize changes in a child's behavior.** Change in behavior is a signal of change in a child's life. It is important to tell your children "I will 78 always love you" while asking them about the changed behavior. Make sure you continue to observe carefully and inquire with others who care for and about your child.

h) **Encourage good practices in your communities.** Encourage two adults at every function, education for adults, windows in doors, etc. If communities won't take basic preventative steps, don't participate, and be public as to why you're not participating.

i) **Trust your instincts.** Listen to your gut feelings. When you have an uncomfortable feeling, it can be the Holy Spirit helping you know that something is not right. The Holy Spirit is always with us to help us stay safe. The Holy Spirit gives us feelings or instincts and we should listen to them.

Discussion Questions:

1. Are there suggestions on this list that caught your attention or ones that you have questions about?
2. Are there any things you might add?
3. Are there ways that your parish, school or local community might do better?