

Circle of Grace High School Summary

Safe Environment Training

Philosophy

What is a Circle of Grace? The Catholic Church teaches that God has created each of us as unique and special. Genesis 1:27 tells us that we are created “male and female in God’s image” and that God saw this as “very good.” In that goodness, we are meant to respect ourselves and everyone else as persons created and loved by God. Adults assist young people to recognize God’s love by helping them to understand that each of us lives and moves in a Circle of Grace.

You can imagine your own Circle of Grace by putting your arms above your head then circle down in front of your body, including side to side. This circle, front to back, holds who you are in your body and through your senses. It holds your very essence in mind, heart, soul, and sexuality.

Why is it important to help our young people understand the Circle of Grace? God intends our relationships in life to be experiences of divine love. Respectful, nurturing, loving relationships increase our understanding of our own value and help us to love others. It is never too early to help young people understand how very special they are and how relationships in life are called to be sacred. Understanding this can help them to protect the special person they are and to be respectful of others.

Adults, as they strive to provide a safe and protective environment, hold the responsibility of helping young people understand and respect their own dignity and that of others. A truly safe and protective environment is one where young people recognize when they are safe or unsafe and know how to bring their concerns, fears, and uncertainties to the trusted adults in their lives.

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 Program - 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 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 act if any boundary is threatened or violated.

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

Circle of Grace Vocabulary Words through 8th Grade

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 others and me.

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.

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.

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 grownup 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 me or others.

Unsafe Touch: Touch that is disrespectful and hurts, scares, or makes me feel uncomfortable or confused.

Vocabulary Words Introduced in Ninth Grade

Compliment: A polite expression of praise or admiration.

Flattery: Excessive or insincere praise, given especially to further one's own interest.

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

Moral Responsibility: As we grow into mature adults, we 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 his or her personal responsibility. We should never blame or accuse people who are victims of abuse or have been manipulated or exploited in unequal relationships.

Vocabulary 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.

Vocabulary 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: seeing and/or treating a person as an object.

Sexting: Sexually explicit images or texts sent by way of the phone or other electronic devices. There may be legal consequences if one or both people involved are minors.

Pornography: 1: The depiction of erotic behavior (pictures/writing, online or video) intended to cause sexual excitement. 2: material (books, video, or photographs) that depicts erotic behavior and is intended to cause sexual excitement. The depiction of acts in a sensational manner to arouse a quick intense emotional reaction, Merriam Webster.

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

Vocabulary Words Introduced in 12th 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.

Discussions for Teens and Parents

Discussion 1-Human Beings are the only creatures on Earth that God willed for their own sake. Humans are unique because we are made in the divine image enabling us to share in God's own life. *See Genesis 1:27, 31 New American Bible, See CCC 2319.*

All persons possess God-given dignity. Violating the emotional, physical, sexual, and spiritual boundaries of another person causes great harm that can cause them great pain throughout their life.

Think for a moment about someone you do not like or currently do not get along with or haven't gotten along with in the past...

Now, remember that person is also made in the image of God.

Can you recognize in them a gift that you have not recognized before?

Could recognizing their gifts change your perspective regarding this person?

Discussion 2 -With all adults there is an imbalance of power or influence with children and teens. The adult may be a teacher, coach, youth minister, priest, scout, musician or even an older youth. All of these have significant influences or power over you. It is good to recognize this and protect yourselves from getting into an unsafe situation. We can be friendly with those who have power or influence over us, but we can never be friends as equals.

What does it mean to have an imbalance of power or influence? Can you give an example? *(They make rules, talk about you with your parents, more playing time on the field).*

Why is it even more important for you to be aware of people who have significant power over you now that you are a teen? *You have less supervision by parents and other adults to help keep you safe, the older you get the less difference there is in the age of you and other young adults so the difference in power may be less obvious.*

What does it mean to be friendly as opposed to being friends? *Friends have equal power and influence or status. They are also the same age and can be called your peers.*

Is there anyone over whom you have more power or influence? *(younger siblings or neighbors, children you babysit for, teams or activities for younger students that you assist adults with)*

Discussion 3

N.O.T.I.C.E. when boundaries are challenged. For this lesson we will define an offender as someone who exhibits behaviors for the sole purpose of putting youth in a vulnerable position to be abused or exploited. They cannot be identified based on race, sex, gender, age or their relationship to the targeted person. It is possible, however, to identify offenders by their behavior.

The acronym N.O.T.I.C.E. has key behaviors to look for when boundaries are violated or challenged. Sometime someone may be unaware that they crossed a boundary. In these situations, the person, when confronted with the behavior, usually acknowledges the mistake and changes the behavior. However, offenders, when confronted, usually become defensive or deny concern. The offender's behaviors may be at odds with rules or practices put in place to protect youth. They may use their power as someone who works with youth not to bring them closer to God, but to use or exploit them.

N – Nontransparent (Secrets, secluded meetings, and conversations)

What do you do if someone is asking you to keep your interactions or relationship a secret?

What if an adult asks to meet you alone in a room with the door closed?

What would your parents or trusted adult say about a secret interaction or relationship?

O – Over Involvement (Involvement in a youth's life not consistent with their role or relationship.)

What do you do when someone in authority treats you like a friend or in a way that makes you uncomfortable?

Someone in their twenties shows a romantic interest in you. You notice they have more power, status or resources than you. What do you do?

What is meant by someone being overly involved in a youth's life?

T – Telltale behaviors (Excess physical or emotional interactions and resources (gifts, trips etc.)

What is the difference between a compliment and flattery?

How do you know when physical contact is excessive?

How do you know when something is freely given or if there are expectations attached?

I – Inappropriate behaviors (Interactions are not consistent with the relationship/role or not respectful of the difference in power or influence.)

What type of personal attention makes you uncomfortable?

What do you think of an adult who dresses and acts like a teen?

Can an authority or another adult ever be your peer? If yes, why?

C – Chips away at safeguards (Challenges or pressures a youth to break the rules)

Why do you think your parents or trusted adults have rules in place?

Is someone thinking about his/her needs or yours if they pressure you to break the rules?

Why would someone want you to believe that he/she is the ONLY one who understands you?

E- Engages youth in inappropriate adult behaviors/conversations. (face to face or electronically)

What do you say to someone who wants you to look at a pornographic website?

What if you receive midnight texts from an adult leader? Should you tell someone? If so, why? If not, why?

What if a young adult invites you to a party? You get there and they offer you a beer. What do you do?