

Circle of Grace Middle School Level Summary

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.

Circle of Grace Meditation

God gives us each a Circle of Grace where He is always present. In the Circle of Grace Meditation, children outline their Circle of Grace while an adult says these words:

*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 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.*

This video demonstrates the Circle of Grace Meditation: <https://vimeo.com/207836764>

Summary of the Key Concepts of “Circle of Grace”

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

Social Media’s Influence on our Relationships

Vocabulary

1. Circle of Grace: The love and goodness of God which always surrounds me and all others.
2. Safe Secret: A secret is safe when it does not hurt others or me.
3. Unsafe Secret: A secret is unsafe when I think that someone, including me, could 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.
4. Trust: Being able to count on someone to help me to stay safe within my Circle of Grace.
5. Trusted Adult: An adult that helps me stay safe in my Circle of Grace and helps me respect others in their Circle of Grace.
6. Boundary: The border or limit we need to keep ourselves safe within our Circle of Grace.
7. Media: Mass communication formats (music, TV, magazines, movies, videos, internet, computer games, books, advertisements, news, newspapers, radio, etc.) that provide education, information, entertainment, and advertising.
8. Inappropriate Media: Images, words that are spoken or written, that make one feel uncomfortable or scared, is disrespectful to people or would be something your parent/trusted adult would not approve of.
9. In-Person Relationships: Refers to the ability to interact face to face with others which can build a genuine connection and trust.
10. On- Line Connection: An internet/social media connection that is between people who have met on-line, and in many cases know each other and only via the internet/social media.

Getting Started

Summarize Circle of Grace with the following:

1. Review the vocabulary with your child.
2. Have your child summarize the Circle of Grace in their own words.
3. Discuss the following with your child:
 - a. God is with us and within us in a special way. God is with us because He desires a close relationship with each of us. The Holy Spirit helps us to remember that we belong to God. We are always in a special, holy place.
 - b. If we can remember that we are in a Circle of Grace, with God and surrounded by His love, we will remember to behave with the respect for ourselves and others.

4. Identify what trusted adults are and how they help protect us in your Circle of Grace.
5. Ask your child:
 - a. How can the internet and social media be used in both safe and unsafe ways?
 - b. What are some of the rules for using the internet in a safe manner so your boundaries will not be violated? Be sure the following are included in the responses:
 - i. Never give out personal information.
 - ii. Never send a picture or anything else to someone who requests it.
 - iii. Tell a trusted adult if someone sends a picture or message that makes you uncomfortable or you know your parents would not approve.
 - iv. It is important that you are comfortable with a trusted adult seeing what you are writing/doing on the computer/tablet/gaming system or cellphone. It is important that you are comfortable with a trusted adult seeing what you are looking at on the computer/tablet/gaming system or cell phone.
 - v. If you are in a site where you feel like you should lie or if you wonder if what it says is true, you are not in a safe place. You must get a trusted adult to help you.

Today we are going to talk about social media and how it can influence our view of relationships in our Circle of Grace. We may never have considered connecting with someone on social media as violating our Circle of Grace. It is important to be able to discern that online relationships are not the same as in person relationships. Those online may present themselves as real but may not be who they say they are. Many times, people pose as someone they are not (such as being like you in age and interests). This deception can be unsafe especially if they are asking you to do something that makes you uncomfortable, against the rules or that your parents/trusted adults would think is unsafe.

Discussion – In-Person Relationships vs. Online Connections

1. Review in-person relationships and online connections definitions.
2. Have them list the positives and negatives of in-person relationships and online connections.
3. Review and discuss their lists of in person relationships and online connections. Reinforce the following:

- a. In-Person Relationships:
 - i. You have the ability to see facial and body reactions to conversations.
 - ii. You have the opportunity to see them in other settings (family, friends, school).

- iii. You can see if you have done or said something to hurt/upset them. This gives you the opportunity to apologize.
 - iv. Moral development occurs with real in-person relationships.
- b. Online Connections:
 - i. It's easy to be mean online because you can't see the reaction of the other person. The other can act like things are fine by text and emojis, when they have really been hurt.
 - ii. Also, it is easy to pretend to be someone else in online connections. Because of this, you may never really know the person.

Safety Plan – Don't be Duped

We need to have a safety plan for how to handle unsafe or uncomfortable situations in-person or online. We will be reviewing the DUPE safety plan. We want you to remember this safety plan by using the acronym DUPE.

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:

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

- 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. Someone may pressure you to do something that makes you uncomfortable. You may feel confused because you admire them.

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 this person?
- 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 online, 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:

- 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.
- Stay away or get away from situations that make you feel uncomfortable.
 - Tactics may include saying, "No," walking away, calling a parent.
- Avoid unsafe situations, which involve alcohol, drugs, or smoking.
- Be cautious about situations in which you are 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.

Trusted adults want what is best for you; they want your Circle of Grace to be respected. Discuss with your parents the three other people whom you feel are trusted adults. Then let the trusted adults know you have chosen them. Share with them what Circle of Grace means to you and the safety plan, "Don't be Duped." Today is a good day to start those conversations.

Post-Assessment

Write the correct word or phrase for each definition.

Circle of Grace

Trusted Adult

Boundary

_____ 1. A border or limit that defines our Circle of Grace. It tells us whether something belongs or does not belong in our Circle of Grace.

_____ 2. The love and goodness of God that always surrounds me and all others.

_____ 3. A grown-up who helps me to stay safe in my Circle of Grace and to respect others within their Circle of Grace.

Circle the correct answer.

True False 4. Feelings are something I sense inside myself (angry, sad, embarrassed, confused, etc.) that give me information about myself or others.

True False 5. Respect is being kind to others and doing what is best for myself and others because I honor all people as Children of God.

True False 6. Anytime a person is in a relationship where the other does not respect your Circle of Grace is a time when hurt or damage may occur.

Safe Unsafe 7. Your big brother's friend wants you to watch a movie your mom or dad told you not to watch.

Safe Unsafe 8. A person you know from the social media wants you to meet at the mall this weekend and told you not to tell your parents. Although you are curious, you feel uncomfortable in keeping a secret from your parents.

Safe Unsafe 9. An instructor at your school invites you and a friend to go to a movie on a Friday night. The instructor offers to take you and bring you home. He says he will pay for the movie and refreshments.

10. Dupe stands for:

D _____ U _____ P _____ E _____

Saying No to Disrespect: Honoring Everyone's Circle of Grace

Discussion

We don't always act in ways that are respectful. Take just a minute and think of a time when someone your age was not respectful of your Circle of Grace. Did it make you feel unsafe?

Now think of a time when you said or did something that was hurtful to someone your age. Did that make the person feel unsafe? These words and actions don't belong in anyone's Circle of Grace.

Together we are going to make a list of some of the disrespectful behaviors that include bullying.

1. Discuss the definitions of Bullying, Cyber Bullying and Bystander. Have the child identify how a bystander could have negative or positive influence on bullying behavior. Be sure these behaviors are identified and discussed.
 - a. Negative: Instigate, encourage, join in, passively accept.
 - b. Positive: Directly intervene by discouraging the bullying behavior, defending the victim or redirecting the situation away from the bullying, getting help by rallying support or reporting the behavior to a trusted adult.
2. Have the young people brainstorm ideas of disrespectful behaviors/bullying.
3. Prompt as needed to include: Peer Pressure, Bullying, Excluding, Teasing, Purposefully Embarrassing, Gossiping, Being Dishonest, Being a False Friend.

Activity

1. Have the child select one or two disrespectful behaviors. Have them make a chart listing ways to resist the pressure to participate in those behaviors and a listing of how to be a helpful bystander if one is witnessing bullying behavior. Have the youth role play resisting pressure and being a helpful bystander. Examples of resisting pressure are: "No, that doesn't interest me," or, "I have decided not to do that." Examples of helpful bystanders are: Engaging the person being bullied in conversation like "Did you see that game last night? "It was great! Would you like to watch the next game at my house?" A group of you can sit with the person being bullied at the lunch table to discourage further bullying.
2. Conclude discussion by summarizing the following:
 - a. Standing up for what is right sometimes means taking a risk.
 - b. If no one laughs (joins in) you are taking the bully's power away.
 - c. You can stand up for another person's Circle of Grace by not joining in.
 - d. If you are the one being made fun of or disrespected, look around for the people who are not laughing. They are resisting the pressure to join in the disrespectful behaviors. They have qualities of someone who would be a good friend. They are respecting your Circle of Grace.
 - e. Always report behaviors to a Trusted Adult if you think they are unsafe.

IMAGINE

Imagine a bullying scenario that a middle school student might experience. Write one or two paragraphs using as many of the vocabulary words below as possible.

- Circle of Grace: The love and goodness of God that always surrounds me and all others.
- Trust: Being able to count on someone to help me to stay safe within my Circle of Grace.
- Respect: Being kind to others and doing what is best for myself and others because I honor all people as Children of God.
- Disrespect: Treating with rudeness, insult and lack of respect.
- Safe: I am safe when my body and my feelings are respected by me and by others.
- 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.
- 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, could 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.
- Trusted Adult: An adult who helps me to stay safe in my Circle of Grace and to respect others within their Circle of Grace.

Morally Responsible in Today's Culture: How Hard Can It Be?

Discussion

1. Discuss and define "Christian/Catholic Values."
2. Use the Ten Commandments Worksheet as a guideline (end of lesson).
3. What are some ways we learn about the values of today's "Popular Culture"?
Make a list e.g., news, TV, social media, movies, friends.
4. Today we are going to compare and contrast our Catholic values with what popular culture tells us is important. For example, our Catholic faith teaches us to put God first and worship only Him. On the other hand, popular culture often teaches us to put ourselves first, not God. The Ten Commandment Worksheet will help you begin to compare and contrast.
5. Have the child make a personal list of what they value, both concrete and abstract (e.g., friends, family, faith, music, and independence.)
6. Talk specifically about Catholic moral values and how they compare to popular culture's values.
7. Discuss how both sets of values relate to the sacredness of the Circle of Grace.
8. Direct the young people to look at their personal list of values. Where do these values fit into the Circle of Grace?
9. Discuss how some things might fit into both sets of values. For example, you have a friend who drinks. You value the friendship but must set boundaries as to how you spend time together. Always talk to a trusted adult.
10. Complete the Parent and Child Ten Commandments Worksheet.

Discussion - Being Morally Responsible

1. Who or what helps you to make the right choices or decisions based on Catholic values? According to the Ten Commandments, what behaviors are right and what behaviors are wrong? What choices should you make based on the discussion about the Ten Commandments?
2. Why is it sometimes hard to follow your Catholic values over cultural values?
3. What are some ways we can resist the pressure to choose popular cultural values over what our Catholic values?

Vocabulary Worksheet

List a value in popular culture that may be inconsistent with each vocabulary word.

FAITH'S PERSPECTIVE	CULTURE'S PERSPECTIVE
<p>1.Value - A principle, standard, or quality considered desirable.</p> <p><i>As Catholics we value "life."</i></p>	
<p>2. Conscience - The gift from God that helps us to know the difference between right and wrong.</p> <p><i>A conscience helps us stay close to God.</i></p>	
<p>3.Sexuality - Everything that makes us female or male. This includes feelings, attitudes, values, relationships, and ideas.</p> <p><i>Our sexuality is never separate from who we are as children of God.</i></p>	
<p>4.Modesty - The virtue that respects, honors, and protects privacy; the quality of avoiding extremes of emotion, action, dress, and language.</p> <p><i>Appearance and actions are consistent with who we really are.</i></p>	
<p>5.Morality - The way we put our beliefs into action for good.</p> <p><i>Our faith is evident by our actions.</i></p>	
<p>6.Trust - Counting on someone to help us to stay safe within our Circle of Grace.</p> <p><i>Our trust is in the Lord.</i></p>	
<p>7. Respect - Being kind to others and doing what is best for ourselves and others because we honor all people as Children of God.</p> <p><i>The Golden Rule</i></p>	

Parent and Child Ten Commandments Worksheet

List a value in popular culture that may be inconsistent with each commandment.

OUR FAITH'S 10 COMMANDMENTS

POPULAR CULTURE'S TOP 10 COMMANDMENTS

1. I am the LORD your God: You shall not have strange gods before me. -Put God first, worship only HIM	
2. You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain. -Use God's name with respect	
3. Remember to keep the Lord's Day holy. -Mass on Sunday and Holy Days	
4. Honor your father and mother. -Respect your parents	
5. You shall not kill. -Do not hurt others, physically or emotionally	
6. You shall not commit adultery. -Be faithful in marriage; respect the dignity of the body	
7. You shall not steal. -Respect other's belongings	
8. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. -Do not lie, gossip or spread rumors	
9. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife. -All are called to respect the relationship between a husband and a wife	

10. You shall not covet your neighbor's goods.	
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-Do not be envious of what others possess	
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