

# *Circle of Grace*

Safe Environment Training

## *Circle of Grace Again... Really?*

### *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 to help 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.

#### *How is the Circle of Grace Program different from other protection programs?*

According to research, one in four girls and one in seven boys will be sexually abused by age eighteen.<sup>1</sup> 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 young people understand the sacredness of who they are and how to seek help through their relationships with trusted adults.

#### *Goal of the Circle of Grace Program - Grades K-12*

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 take action if any boundary is threatened or violated.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.usccb.org](http://www.usccb.org), or <http://nccanch.acf.hhs.gov>

## *Leader Guidelines*

- Every leader should read the Philosophy, Goals and Key Concepts to better understand and prepare to teach the *Circle of Grace*. The Key Concepts review the essence of the curriculum, that God is always present in our *Circle of Grace* and desires an intimate relationship with His children.
- The time frame may vary depending on size of class, age of young people, amount of discussion, etc.
- Vocabularies with definitions are intended for the leader. The explanation of vocabulary should be integrated within the context of the lessons to assist the young people in their understanding of the *Circle of Grace* Program. The depth of the young people's understanding will depend upon their age and developmental stage. A master vocabulary list of the *Circle of Grace* Program is included in all lesson plans. The pertinent vocabulary is listed in each lesson.
- If possible it is always "best practice" to have two adults in the room during the lesson due to the sensitive nature of the material.
- The 9-12 curriculum is formatted to be used in two ways:
  - ✓ The traditional way: lessons to the identified grade.  
The lesson for grade 12 is only to be taught to seniors.
  - ✓ The second way: select any one of the 9-11 sections or alternate lessons to teach the class or group. Remember that all four lessons in grade 9 equal a section and must be taught together. One may consider presenting the 9<sup>th</sup> grade lessons as a retreat. Leaders will need to keep a record of what lesson is taught each year.
- Ongoing reinforcement of the concepts is encouraged throughout the year. Hopefully, the language of *Circle of Grace* will become a part of a positive culture of respect, care, and faith that will help protect our young people and help them to know what to do when they feel unsafe.
- Your Administrator, Religious Education Director, or Youth Minister Director will be sending out a letter to all parents regarding *Circle of Grace*. Lesson specific parent information should be handed out as directed. The Parent Packet is included in the Program. Every parish/school is encouraged to provide parent education opportunities both to inform parents about the *Circle of Grace* program and to foster greater communication in families.
- Evaluations for each grade are to be completed and returned to the School Administrator or the Director of Religious Education/Formation. The evaluations will be used to complete the Summary Evaluation that is used for ongoing improvement of the program and for the audit records.

# 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 introduced in Kindergarten**

**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.

**Stoplight:** A traffic light (red, yellow, green) that is a visual signal for keeping vehicles and people safe.

**Trust:** Being able to count on someone to help me to stay safe within my *Circle of Grace*.

**Trusted Adult:** A grown-up 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 myself or others.

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

## **Words Introduced in First Grade**

**Symbol:** A picture or object that stands for something else.

## **Words Introduced in Second Grade**

No new words.

## **Words Introduced in Third Grade**

**Boundary:** The borders or limits we need to keep ourselves safe within our *Circle of Grace*.

**Treasured:** We are so unique and precious that we could not be replaced in God's eyes.

**Violate:** To break a law, promise, or boundary.

## Words Introduced in Fourth Grade

### **Social Media/Networking**

**Blog**: An online journal. Personal stories or thoughts can be posted as in a personal journal.

This is a public journal that anyone can access.

**Chat Room**: The name given to a place or page in a website or online service where people can chat with each other by typing messages which are displayed almost instantly on the screens of others who are in the chat room.

**Instant Messaging (IM)**: Technology similar to that of chat rooms which notifies a user when a person is online allowing them to converse by exchanging text messages.

**Location Application**: An application used in phones to find a location of a popular spot (restaurant, park etc.). People use the application to check in and it broadcasts the location to all of their friends.

**Micro Blogging**: This service allows users to give updates about what they are doing in less than 140 characters

**Social Networking Service and Websites**: These services and websites are used to communicate with (a person) or search for information about (a person).

**Video Sharing Service**: This service allows users to watch videos posted by others and to upload videos of their own.

### **Other Terms**

**Cyber Bullying**: Use of the internet, cell phone or other electronic device to send or post texts or images intended to hurt or embarrass another person.

**E-mail**: Electronic mail. Sending/ receiving a type written message from one screen to another.

**Flaming**: Sending a deliberately confrontational message to others on the internet.

**Inappropriate Material**: Pictures or words on the internet that makes one feel uncomfortable, scared, or that intentionally degrades a human person.

**Netiquette**: Courteous, honest, and polite behavior practiced on the internet.

**Personal Contact Information**: Information that allows an individual to be contacted or located in the physical world, i.e. a telephone number or an address.

**Phishing**: An identity theft scam in which criminals send out spam that imitates the look and language of legitimate correspondence from e-commerce sites. The fake messages generally link to websites that are similarly faked to look like the sites of respected companies. On the sites, users are directed to enter their personal information for authentication or confirmation purposes. The information, when submitted, goes to the thieves not to the “spoofed” company.

**Pop Up**: A term for unsolicited advertising that appears as its own browser window.

**Predator**: Someone who uses the internet to obtain personal information about others with the intent to do harm.

**Smart Phone**: Is a mobile phone that offers advanced features like the internet, a camera and applications such as games and special interest information.

**Texting**: Sending a short text (typed) message between cell phones or other handheld devices.

**Webcam**: A front facing video camera that attaches to a computer or is built into a laptop.

## **Words Introduced in Fifth Grade**

**Media**: Mass communication formats (music, TV, magazines, movies, videos, internet, computer games, books, advertisements, news, newspapers, radio, etc.) which provide education, information, entertainment, and advertising.

**Inappropriate Media**: Images or words, spoken or written, that makes one feel uncomfortable, scared, or that intentionally degrade a human person.

## **Words Introduced in Sixth Grade**

**Admiration**: A feeling of high regard or sense of awe.

**Dream**: A hope or aspiration which we imagine will become real.

**Empathy**: The ability to understand the feelings of another person.

**Healthy**: That which is sound and vigorous in mind, body, and spirit.

**Relationship**: A connection with God or others.

**Response**: Something said or done as a reaction or answer.

**Talent**: A special God-given ability or gift.

**Value**: A principle standard or quality considered desirable.

**Violation**: A break or infringement of another person's rights.

## **Words Introduced in Seventh Grade**

**Bullying**: Any deliberate aggressive act, by a person or group, with the intent to inflict harm (physical or emotional) on another person.

**Bystander**: Someone who witnesses the bullying. They can have a negative or positive influence on the bullying behavior.

**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.

**Disrespect**: Treating with rudeness, insult, or lack of respect.

## **Words Introduced in Eighth Grade**

**Conscience**: The gift from God that helps us to know the difference between right and wrong.

**Modesty**: The virtue that respects, honors, and protects privacy: the quality of avoiding extremes of emotion, action, dress, and language. Modesty respects my boundaries and the boundaries of others.

**Morality**: The way we put our beliefs into action for good.

**Sexuality**: Everything that makes us female or male. This includes feelings, attitudes, values, relationships, and ideas.

## **Words Introduced in Ninth Grade**

**Exploit**: To take unfair advantage of someone/some situation in order to get some benefit.

**Forced Isolation**: When someone forces/pressures another to be separated from others in order to gain control.

**Secrecy**: The condition of being hidden or concealed. The habit or practice of keeping secrets or maintaining privacy or concealment.

**Sexting**: Sexually explicit images or text messages sent by way of a phone. There may be legal consequences if one or both persons involved are minors.

**Unequal Power**: When one person has more power in a relationship. This can be in the area of age, size, position, resources, status or knowledge.

## **Words Introduced in Tenth Grade**

**Boundary**: A border or limit that helps keep us safe and separate from another person or entity. Boundaries help define relationships. They are either concrete (physical/ visual/audio) or abstract (emotions/beliefs/internal guidelines/rules).

**Circle of Virtue**: Our response to the invitation of God's grace by cultivating goodness and virtue in our lives.

## **Words Introduced in Eleventh 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.

**Moral Responsibility**: As we grow into mature adults, we must take greater responsibility for protecting ourselves and others from violations of God's plan for our spiritual, sexual, and moral lives.

**Offender**: Someone who exhibits behaviors for the sole purpose of putting another person in a vulnerable position to be exploited/abused.

**Survivor**: A person who not only lives through but thrives despite abuse, affliction, or adversity.

**Victim**: A person who has suffered injury/harm (physical or emotional) by forces beyond his or her control and not of his or her personal responsibility.

## **Words Introduced in Twelfth Grade**

- No new words.

# *Circle of Grace Again...Really?*

## *High School Alternate Lesson*

Sometimes young people reveal personal information or details about incidents that, in order to respect confidentiality, need to be handled outside of the group environment. If this happens, tell the young person, "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 young person 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:**

- Church teaching revealed in the Creed that applies to our daily lives
- Human relationships are intended to be experiences of Divine Love
- Personal relationship with God
- Belief in the Communion of Saints
- Live responsibly as fully initiated members of the Church
- Discipleship is our call to holiness
- The relationship between the love of God our love of self and our love of others
- The image of God is in ourselves and others

### **Lesson Objective**

#### **Young People will be able to:**

1. Identify and define the key components of the *Circle of Grace* and Circle of Virtue
2. Identify realistic ways to cultivate a relationship with God
3. Know appropriate responses to unsafe situations

### **Materials Needed**

1. Copies of the Summary of the Key Concepts of *Circle of Grace*, *Circle of Grace Collage* and the Circle of Virtue Worksheet for each student.
2. White poster board for each group
3. Newspaper, magazines, art supplies (supplied by leader) for each group.
4. Whiteboard/Blackboard
5. (Optional) *Unmasking Sexual Con Games 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, Helping Teens Avoid Emotional Grooming and Dating Violence* by Kathleen M. McGee and Laura J. Buddenberg
6. *How to Pray: 6 Tips for a Better Prayer Life, Aaron Hosteller, Life Teen*



## Opening Prayer:

God,  
We ask for Your guidance and a little more:  
guidance in relationships,  
guidance in decisions,  
guidance in love,  
and guidance in worshiping You. Amen.

## Getting Started

### Vocabulary Review -

**Circle of Grace**: The love and goodness of God that always surrounds me and all others.

**Circle of Virtue**: Our response to the invitation of God's grace by cultivating goodness and virtue in our lives.

### Introduction and Discussion-

Many of you have participated in the *Circle of Grace* curriculum for several years. You may be thinking "I already know this stuff". Now that you are teens, let's explore the following question: "Do you really BELIEVE the curriculum's core concept?"

This concept is:

**God gives each of us a *Circle of Grace* where He is always "Present".  
He is "Present" because He desires a relationship with us!**

*Give the youth an opportunity to respond to the question. Prompt them to identify when it is hard to believe this concept and when it is easy. Write the responses on the board.*

The more we cultivate our relationship with God (*Circle of Virtue*) the more He is able to guide and help us in our lives.

- What does cultivate mean?
- Does cultivating a relationship with God take time?
- What other elements does it take?
- Is it hard to cultivate a relationship with God in a culture that is so immediate?

*Give the youth an opportunity to respond to the questions. Prompt them to identify when it is hard to believe the *Circle of Virtue* concept and when it is easy. Write the responses on the board.*

### Activity -

- 1) *Pass out the Summary of the Key Concepts of Circle of Grace, Circle of Grace Collage and a Circle of Virtue Worksheet. (Copies at the end of the lesson)*
- 2) *Divide the class into several groups.*
- 3) *Supply them with newspapers, magazines, art supplies and a white poster board.*

- 4) *Give the group 20-30 minutes to make a collage using the Circle of Grace Collage .*
- 5) *Next, have the group complete the Circle of Virtue worksheet.*
- 6) *Bring them together in a large group.*
- 7) *Have each group present and explain their collage.*
- 8) *Lead a large group discussion reviewing the Circle of Virtue worksheet.*

**Discussion** –

Hopefully we now have a better understanding of the *Circle of Grace* and the Circle of Virtue. It is important to remember that all relationships take time and need cultivation. Let's brainstorm ways to help remind us of these concepts. In our "texting" culture, OMG is frequently used but in a disrespectful and negative way. Let's develop positive text abbreviations that will remind us of what we learned today. We are going to take the five points under each concept and brainstorm possible abbreviations. An example is COG can represent God is "present" in our *Circle of Grace*.

*Write each of the five points (on the handouts) under the headings Circle of Grace and Circle of Virtue. Write down the youth's ideas under each point. After you have several ideas have the youth vote for their favorite one under each heading. Pass out file cards and instruct the students to write down these abbreviations. Have them write down the name of 2-3 adults they can talk to if they have concerns.*

**Take Home Activity** - Instruct the youth to take home the handouts and cards to review with their parents. Handouts and cards need to be signed by a parent and brought back to the next session.

**Closing Prayer:**

**God help me slow down  
and be present to Your everlasting love.  
Help me have REAL conversations with You  
that guide and heal my brokenness.  
Cultivate in my heart Your truth  
and help me respond to Your Grace.  
Give me courage to reject the lie  
that You are a “distant” God.  
Bless me with the gift of discernment,  
knowing Your compassion and love is not relative  
but eternal.  
Your greatest desire from me  
is my sincere “yes”.**

**Amen**

# “Circle of Grace” Collage



1. **God gives each of us a Circle of Grace where He is always “Present”:**

How do we know He is “Present”?

*Display section one of your collage with images that answer this question.*

2. **God is “Present” because He desires a relationship with us.**

What does a relationship with God look like?

*Display section two of your collage with images that answer this question.*

3. **God helps us know what belongs in our Circle of Grace**

How does God let us know when something/someone is safe?

What signs/prompts does He give us?

*Display section three of your collage with images that answers these questions.*

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

How does God let us know when something/someone is not safe?

What signs/prompts does He give us?

*Display section four of your collage with images that answers these questions.*

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

How do we know when we need to ask for help? How do we know who to go to?

*Display section five of your collage with images that answers these questions.*

# **“Circle of Virtue” Handout**

*Please put the answers on the back of this handout*

**1) God gives us the free will to respond positively to His grace.**

**This response is the Circle of Virtue**

Name several virtues that indicate that someone has a close relationship with God

Who in your life exhibits these virtues?

What do these virtues tell us about the person?

Name someone in the media who models these virtues

**2) God is “Present” because He desires a relationship with us.**

Why does HE desire a relationship with us?

Do we believe that our relationship with God is both real and “relational”?

What makes it real?

What makes it relational?

**3. God can guide and help us in our lives when we cultivate a relationship with Him**

Is this a true statement? If so, why? If not, why?

Would a stranger or a friend be better equipped to help you with your concerns?

Are friends better able to help us because they truly “know” us?

What steps can be taken to make sure God is not a stranger in our lives?

What virtues do we need to cultivate a relationship with Him?

**4. God gives us signs/promptings (internal and external) that something is wrong**

Name some internal and external signs.

How do we know that these are from God?

Is it possible not to recognize the signs? Why?

What virtues do we need in order to be able to listen to God’s prompting?

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

Name a time when someone was truly there for you. Was God present?

Do we believe God gives us signs so we can seek help?

## **“Circle of Virtue” Handout**

### **Leaders Guide**

**1) God gives us the free will to respond positively to His grace.**

**This response is the Circle of Virtue**

Name several virtues that indicate that someone has a close relationship with God.

*Possible answers: Kindness, honesty, compassion*

Who in your life exhibits these virtues?

*Possible answers: Parents, friends, teachers*

What do these virtues tell us about the person?

*Possible answers: They are trustworthy, faithful, good friend*

Name someone in the media who models these virtues.

*Possible answers: First responders in tragedies, popular musicians raising money for hurricane survivors*

**2) God is “Present” because He desires a relationship with us.**

Why does He desire a relationship with us?

*Possible answers: Because He loves us, He sees our goodness*

Do we believe that our relationship with God is both real and “relational”?

What makes it real?

*Possible answers: Scripture, Liturgy, made in His image*

What makes it relational?

*Possible answers: He shows His love in the Sacraments, our loved ones reflect His compassion*

**3) God can guide and help us in our lives when we cultivate a relationship with Him**

Is this a true statement? If so, why? If not, why?

*Possible answers: Taking time in our relationship with God allows us access to His graces*

Would a stranger or a friend be better equipped to help you with your concerns?

*Possible answers: A friend because they know you, you can trust a friend*

Are friends better able to help us because they truly “know” us?

*Possible answers: Usually friends understand and can tell when something is bothering us.*

What steps can be taken to make sure God is not a stranger in our lives?

*Possible answers: We can take time to talk to Him, try to understand His Word (Scripture)*

What virtues do we need to cultivate a relationship with Him?

*Possible answers: Honesty, humility, openness*

**4) God gives us signs/prompting (internal and external) that something is wrong**

Name some internal and external signs

*Possible answers: Question what you are hearing or seeing in a situation, worry that you are going to get into trouble or be unsafe, friends warn you to stay away from a situation*

How do we know that these are from God?

*Possible answers: They warn us about potential concerns*

Is it possible not to recognize the signs? Why?

*Possible answers: Yes, if we are ignoring our relationships with God and our loved ones*

What virtues do we need to be able to listen to God’s prompting?

*Possible answers: Prudence, hope, understanding*

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

Name a time when someone was truly there for you. Was God present?

Do we believe God gives us signs so we can seek help?

## Opening Prayer

God,

We ask for Your guidance and a little more:  
guidance in relationships,  
guidance in decisions,  
guidance in love,  
and guidance in worshiping You.  
Amen.

## Closing Prayer

God help me slow down  
and be present to Your everlasting love.  
Help me have REAL conversations with You  
that guide and heal my brokenness.  
Cultivate in my heart Your truth  
and help me respond to Your Grace.  
Give me courage to reject the lie  
that You are a "distant" God.  
Bless me with the gift of discernment,  
knowing Your compassion and love is not relative  
but eternal.  
Your greatest desire from me  
is my sincere "yes".

Amen

# *Circle of Grace Again...Really? Evaluation*

*Date* \_\_\_\_\_

*Parish/School* \_\_\_\_\_ *City* \_\_\_\_\_

*Leader* \_\_\_\_\_ *Number of young people in class* \_\_\_\_\_

Each grade's curriculum was designed to meet the overall program objectives.

Please check whether the objectives of the *Circle of Grace* Program were met.

1. YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_ Young People understand they are created by God and live in the love of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
2. YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_ Young People will be able to describe the *Circle of Grace* which God gives each of us.
3. YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_ Young People will be able to identify and maintain appropriate boundaries.
4. YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_ Young People can identify types of boundary violations.
5. YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_ Young People can demonstrate how to take action if a boundary is threatened or violated.

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

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

**Return to your School Administrator, Director of Religious Education, or Director of Youth Ministry.**