

Circle of Grace

Kindergarten – Grade 12
Christian Safe Environment Program

Developed by
Archdiocese of Omaha

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Introduction

Brief history of *Circle of Grace* and **why** it is crucial to establish policies and provide safety programs in our faith communities

The Development of Circle of Grace Program

- The subcommittee of GRACES started to meet in 2004. The goal of the committee was to develop a faith based and clinically sound program.
- The committee experienced early on that the **Holy Spirit** guided their passion to develop a program that honored the Christian faith.

Authors of the Program

Circle of Grace was developed by the Archdiocese of Omaha's "GRACES" committee:

- Clergy
- Directors of Religious Education
- Principals
- Youth Ministers
- Community Members
- Mental Health Providers
- School Social Workers
- Archdiocesan Ministry Coordinators

* The Protestant version had minimal revisions made based on the review by several Christian denominations*

Circle of Grace Outreach

AOO

- The curriculum has been implemented for 5 years
- Changes were made based on the evaluations
- 148 parishes and 76 schools, urban and rural

Other
Dioceses

- Curriculum is currently in 15 other dioceses
- Summary evaluations have been excellent

Other
Christians

- The curriculum was reviewed by several protestant denominations and has been being piloted. To review testimonies go to: <http://protestant.COGrace.org>

Why Promote Safety in Our Churches?

- God, our creator, desires his little ones, children/youth, to be safe more than we could ever imagine.
- It is an important lesson for children/youth to know their church community cares about their well being and that they are sacred in God's and the church's eyes. This knowledge builds trust which enables them to more fully embrace their faith
- Teaching that each of us are sacred in God's eyes along with healthy/unhealthy boundaries and an action plan maximizes the child/youth's ability to seek help.

Importance of Safe Environment efforts in a Church Setting

National Statistics

Help us to realize the world that kids need to navigate

- One in four girls and one in six boys will experience some sort of sexual abuse/exploitation by the age of eighteen.*
- Up to 90 percent of the time the perpetrator is known to child/youth.*
- Juveniles commit approximately one third of all sex offenses against children*
- 1 in 5 children (10-17 year olds) receive unwanted sexual solicitation on line.

These statistics reveal that today's children/youth have a much higher risk of being abused by someone they know as opposed to a stranger.

<http://nccanch.acf.hhs.gov>

Key Elements to a Safe Environment

- F- Faith communities need to have policies in place regarding child abuse/neglect and ministerial conduct.
- A- All adults involved with children and youth need to be educated in these policies and in identification/reporting of child abuse/neglect to the local authorities.
- C- Checking criminal backgrounds is highly advised for all who work with children and youth.
- E- Educate your children on healthy relationships and boundaries by teaching *Circle of Grace*.

Commitment to our Children

All children and youth should experience a welcoming, secure and protected environment allowing them to embrace all aspects of their Christian faith and engage in healthy relationships.

What is the "Circle of Grace"?

A look at the concept, philosophy and objectives which are all rooted in faith

Circle of Grace is...

- The love and goodness of God that surrounds us and all others.
- The reCOGNition that God is always with us and is there to help us in difficult situations.
- Holds your very essence in mind, heart, soul, body and sexuality encompassing all of your senses.

Circle of Grace Meditation

Imagine the following :

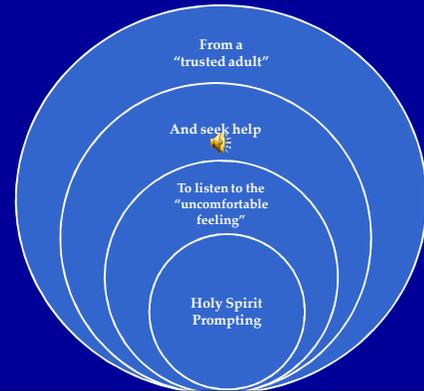
*Raising your hands above your head
And then bring your arms slowly down
Keeping them outstretched
Extending your arms in front of you then behind you
Knowing that **God** is in this space with you
Then slowly reach down to your feet.
This is your Circle of Grace
You are in it.*



Circle of Grace is Relational

- God is in our *Circle of Grace* because He desires a relationship with each of us!
- *Circle of Grace* is taught in the context of a relationship.
- Moral development and discernment matures with real “face to face” relationships not with “technology” relationships.

God’s Desire to Keep Kids Safe is Core to the *Circle of Grace* Concept



Key to Teaching the *Circle of Grace*

- The key to teaching *Circle of Grace* is truly believing, as the meditation expresses, that God is that close to us and is all around us!
 - Unlike secular programs, it is an invitation for adults to re-examine their own spirituality.
 - What would the world look like if our actions reflected this belief?

Circle of Grace Philosophy

- The Christian faith 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.

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

What does Popular Culture Wants Young People to Believe ?

- Relationships are more about “taking” less about ‘giving”
- Relationships can be obtained by consuming the latest products, clothing, music and looks.
- What you do with your body is separate from who you are: a disconnect

Circle of Grace Culture

- The *Circle of Grace* philosophy represents the core teaching of our Christian faith: the belief and knowledge of God’s real presence in our lives.
 - This presence embraces the very essence of each person.
 - Awareness and integration of this knowledge has the ability to transform every aspect of a person’s life.

How does the *Circle of Grace* Concept Protect Kids?

- It gives the children/youth and adults a framework and language to address safety concerns
- It gives children/youth an opportunity to tell us about whatever makes them uncomfortable which many times is before inappropriate touch has occurred.
- An offender is alerted when a child or youth states “ you are in my *Circle of Grace*”. This is a clue that the child/youth has had safety education and may deter further contacts

What about Offenders?

- You cannot identify an offender based on race, sex, age, or their relationship to the child.
- We can identify some behaviors they exhibit that are for the sole purpose of putting the child/youth in a vulnerable position to be abused

Offender's Behaviors

- Offenders usually start to “groom” children/ youth by chipping away at the safe guards put in place by trusted adults . Offenders:
 - Encourage children/youth to lie to their parents
 - Insist the child/youth breaks family rules i.e.; not allowing any one in the home when the child/youth is alone
 - Entice the child or youth to drink alcohol or view pornography or other immoral acts
 - Pressure the child or youth to keep the relationship or aspects of it secret

“Safety Net”

Common reasons kids do not tell their parents:

- They believe it is their fault or that they will get into trouble
- They may believe their parents will be disappointed
- The offender may have said that they would hurt them or their family

Giving the child/youth other options of trusted adults to go to will build a bigger net of support to keep them safe

“Walk the Talk”

Leaders need to model a “trusted adult” by integrating the philosophy of *Circle of Grace* into their lives.

This will greatly assist children and youth to embrace the knowledge of God's real presence in their lives

Goal of the *Circle of Grace* 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.

God is "present" in everyone's Circle of Grace

- Children/Young People will be able to describe the Circle of Grace which God gives each of us.

God is "present" because He desires a relationship with us

Objectives of the *Circle of Grace* Program (Continued)

- Children/young people will be able to identify and maintain appropriate physical, emotional, spiritual, and sexual boundaries.

God helps us know what belongs in our Circle of Grace



- Children/young people will be able to identify all types of boundary violations

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

- Children/young people will demonstrate how to take action if any boundary is threatened or violated

God helps us know when to ask for help from a trusted adult

Circle of Grace Curriculum



How to implement and teach the program

Self Contained Material in Every Grade

Each Grade section includes:

- ✓ Philosophy and Goals
- ✓ Leader Guidelines
- ✓ Full Vocabulary for Program
- ✓ Pre and Post Assessments in Identified Grades
- ✓ Easy to follow Lessons
- ✓ Lesson Evaluation
- ✓ Copies of Prayers
- ✓ Handouts and Parent Take Home Sheets
- ✓ Curriculum is available in Spanish

Curriculum's Framework

Comprehensive lessons in the crucial grades:

- Kindergarten - 3 lessons
- First Grade - 3 lessons
- Second Grade - 3 lessons
- Third Grade - 3 lessons (Pre and Post Test)
- Sixth Grade - 4 lessons (Pre and Post Test)
- Ninth grade - 4 lessons (Pre and Post Test)

Rational for Comprehensive Grades

Kindergarten through Grade 3

- Younger and more vulnerable
- Benefits from repetition

Grade 6th and Grade 9th

- Transitional years
- Research shows an increase in bullying

SAMPLE ACTIVITY- GRADE 2

Circle of Grace Cards (see the end of Grade 2 lessons)

- Have the children sit together in groups of 3 (or 4).
- Give each group a set of cards and a copy of the Circle of Grace logo.
- Have children take turns drawing a card from the top of the pile and decide if this is something he or she would welcome in their Circle of Grace or something he or she would like to keep far out side his or her Circle of Grace. If the card shows something loving and kind they should put it in the Circle of Grace Logo. If it shows something scary, mean, or unhealthy, he or she should put it outside the Circle of Grace logo. If the child is not sure, the child should put the card outside the pile until he or she asks for help from the leader (Trusted Adult).

Curriculum's Framework Continued

Focus grades have a lesson on a particular area:

- Fourth Grade - Internet
- Fifth Grade - The Influence of Media
- Seventh Grade - Respect
- Eighth Grade - Morality and Popular Culture
- Tenth Grade - Boundaries
- Eleventh Grade - Emotional Grooming
- Twelfth Grade - Real Love vs. Counterfeit Love

SAMPLE ACTIVITY-GRADE 8

- Today we are going to compare what our faith values versus what popular culture tells us is important. The Ten Commandment worksheet will help you do this task. One example would be that our faith tells us to put God first and only worship him. Popular culture many times tells us that we are the most important.
- *Hand out the Ten Commandments Worksheet for them to complete.*
- *When the worksheet is completed, have the young people make their personal list of things they value, both concrete and abstract (e.g. friends, family, faith, music, and independence) on a blank sheet of paper.*
- *Talk specifically about moral values that Christians have and how they compare to popular culture's values. Have them share what they put on their worksheet.*
- *Discuss how both sets of values relate to the sacredness of your Circle of Grace.*
- *Have the young people look at their personal list of things which they value. Where do they fit into the Circle of Grace?*
- *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.*

TEN COMMANDMENT ACTIVITY EXAMPLE

- I am the LORD your God:
- You shall not have strange Gods before me.
- *-put God first, worship only HIM*
What does popular culture say about this commandment?
- You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain.
- *-use God's name with respect*
What does popular culture say about this commandment?

Implementation Tips



- Realize that you have to **believe** in what you are teaching for it to be effective with the children and youth
- Teach the lessons once you **had** a chance to know the children and youth
- Comprehensive grades need to have the last two lessons taught close together
- When combining classes, assess what grade best fits the group.

Implementation Tips



- Parent letter needs to be sent out before teaching the curriculum
- Action Card(located in the Administration section) for leaders is helpful
- Be aware that the content may trigger past issues for some leaders
- It is Helpful for churches and schools to be aware of the general concept

Final Implementation Tips



- Leaders/teachers are aware of how to handle a child's disclosure.
- Be aware of child abuse and neglect laws in your state
- Review the administration/directors section before implementation

Parents/Guardians

Circle of Grace's Comprehensive Approach

- *Parent introductory letter*
- *Lesson take home letters/activities*
- *Parent information on sexuality*
- *Additional parent information*
- *Provides safety language and framework*

Additional Resources

- Child Abuse Reporting Packet
- Parent information
- Preschool Lessons
- Logo Availability
- Circle of Grace Brochure Customized with Local Information
- Power Point CD to use for Future Trainings
- Curriculum in Spanish
- Copy of "Let the Children Come" *Preparing Faith Communities to End Child Abuse and Neglect*

QUESTIONS?

