

Circle of Grace

Safe Environment Training

Coping with Stress and Pressure: Who are You Leaning On?

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 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.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 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, 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.

¹ www.usccb.org, or <http://nccanch.acf.hhs.gov>

Grade Leader Guidelines

- A **Leader** is defined as clergy, administrator, director of religious education/formation, teacher, or catechist who has been trained to teach the *Circle of Grace* Program.
- 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* because He desires an intimate relationship with His children.
- The time frame may vary depending on size of class, age of children, 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 children in their understanding of the *Circle of Grace* Program. The depth of the children'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.
- 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 children and help them to know what to do when they feel unsafe.
- Your Administrator or Religious Education 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 grownups 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

Bullying: Repeatedly being mean to someone on purpose

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 (app) 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. In the near future, it may go to 280 characters.

Photo Sharing App: Captures, edits & shares photos, videos & messages with friends & family.

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.

Mobile Video App: Allows you to send videos and pictures, both of which will disappear after about 10 seconds of a person viewing them. You can view them after the 10 seconds if you did a screen shot.

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 or other means 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 and/or photo between cell phones or other handheld devices.

Webcam: A front facing video camera that attaches to a computer or is built into 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, words that are spoken or written, that make one feel uncomfortable or scared. This type of media is disrespectful to people and would be something your parent/trusted adult would not approve.

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 good for you in mind, body, and spirit.

Relationship: An authentic 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 behaviors (physical, verbal or social) by a person or group with the intent to inflict harm on or make fun of 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 Middle School Alternate Lessons

Stress: A state of mental/emotional strain resulting from adverse or demanding circumstances

Pressure: Typically applied from an external source (peers, teachers, family, etc.) in a demand for high performance or healthy/unhealthy behavior,

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.

Words Introduced in the High School Alternate Lessons

Human Trafficking: Modern Day Slavery

Human Trafficking: Slavery in the form of *forced labor* or *sex trafficking* in which the victim is under 18 years of age, or is compelled by force, fraud or coercion, respectively, to provide labor or services, or to engage in a commercial sex act. There is no requirement that the victim be transported or travel across a *national* border.

Coercion: Threatening physical or non-physical harm (psychological or financial) against someone in order to manipulate them into doing something they do not want to do or would not normally do.

Modesty: A thing of the Past or Not?

Humility: Understanding of the truth of God and who we truly are; made in His image.

What is Your Motto?

Motto/Theme: A maxim adopted as a guide to one's conduct. This motto can be derived from our Catholic or popular culture

Tech Savvy or Tech Safe?

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

Pornography: 1: The depiction of erotic behavior (pictures or writing) intended to cause sexual excitement. 2: material (as books or a photograph) that depicts erotic behavior and is intended to cause sexual excitement 3: the depiction of acts in a sensational manner so as to arouse a quick intense emotional reaction, *Merriam Webster*

Circle of Grace

Coping with Stress and Pressure: Who are You Leaning On?

Sometimes children reveal personal information or details about incidents that, in order to respect confidentiality, need to be handled outside of the classroom. If this happens, tell the child, "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 child 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:

Lesson Objectives

Young People will be able to:

1. Understand the difference between stress and pressure
2. Understand that stress usually comes from within. It can be healthy or unhealthy
3. Understand that pressure is usually applied from an external source. It can be healthy or unhealthy.
4. Define priorities and manage healthy boundaries
5. Recognize that a prayer-filled life is an antidote for stress
6. Identify a trusted adult they can talk to if someone is pressuring them to ignore their conscience

Review

1. **Boundary:** The borders or limits we need to keep ourselves safe within our *Circle of Grace*.
2. **Stress:** An internal state of mental/emotional strain resulting from adverse or demanding circumstances
3. **Pressure:** Typically applied from an external source (peers, teachers, family, etc.) in a demand for high performance or healthy/unhealthy behavior,
4. **Circle of Grace:** The love and goodness of God which always surrounds me and all others.
5. **Safe Secret:** A secret is safe when it does not hurt oneself or others.
6. **Unsafe Secret:** A secret is unsafe when one thinks that someone, including oneself, might be hurt or get in trouble if one does not tell.
7. **Trust:** Being able to count on someone to help one to stay safe within one's *Circle of Grace*. Trust will also include to be safe from one's *Circle of Grace* to another person's *Circle of Grace*.
8. **Trusted Adult:** A grown-up who helps one to stay safe in their *Circle of Grace* and to respect others within their *Circle of Grace*.

Materials Needed:

1. Newsprint paper for the students and a whiteboard
2. Markers, pens or other writing utensils
3. Parent Letter (at the end of the lesson)

Opening Prayer

God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change;
courage to change the things I can;
and wisdom to know the difference.

Help me live one day at a time, enjoying each moment.

Help me to realize hardships can lead to peace and You are always by my side and will
make things alright.

In Jesus' Name. Amen.

It is important to begin the lesson by explaining that God does not want or cause bad things to happen. There will be children who may have already experienced unsafe or hurtful situations. It is important to reinforce it is not their fault. We want our children to understand that God is with them and for them even when they are hurting or sad.

Getting Started

Discuss the difference between stress and pressure. Stress is usually internal and can happen when there are too many demands on time, energy, etc., and not enough resources to meet those demands. Pressure usually comes from an external source with a demand for high performance or enticement to healthy/unhealthy behaviors.

What can be done when feeling stressed?

- Exercise and/or go for a walk. It will get the endorphins in motion, reducing stress
- Talk to a trusted adult about ways to reduce feelings of stress
- Pray and meditate with scripture

Responding to Stress vs. Pressure:

In most stressful situations, stress reduction or feeling less overwhelmed is a goal, but in most pressure situations, performing successfully or engaging in healthy/unhealthy behavior is a goal.

What can be done when feeling pressured?

- Realize that all pressure is not necessarily bad. Pressure that comes from parents and teachers may actually assist in reaching potential
- Realize that sometimes pressure can encourage unhealthy behavior that is not in concert with our Circle of Grace
- Talk to a trusted adult about the pressure felt
- Reduce some activity overload
- Pay attention to the workings of the Holy Spirit in our lives

Opening Activity

Write these four categories on the board: **academics, athletics, peers and family.**

Divide the students in small groups and give them newspaper. Ask each group to name some healthy expectations and unhealthy expectations from the above four groups and name an action that is needed for each. Try to discover at least two healthy and unhealthy situations for each of the four categories. As each group member gives an example, have it written down on the newspaper to discuss later. *Example- peer expectations:*

- *Unhealthy: A friend pressures you to go to a party that you know will have alcohol. What do you do?*
- *Healthy: A friend says a group of them are going bowling and asks if you are able to join them. What do you do?*

Large Group Discussion:

Discuss the below questions with the youth.

- What types of situations did your group come up with?
- Were they unhealthy or healthy?
- Were any of the unhealthy situations also unsafe? Why?
- Which did you see more of?
- In which category was it easier to find healthy situations?
- In which category was it easier to find unhealthy situations?
- Did the student seem to have more stress or pressure about academics, athletics, peers, or family? Why or why not?

Discuss any situations that students might have identified as healthy that were actually unhealthy and vice versa.

What were their responses (actions) to each of the situations?

Why did they choose those actions?

Were they good or bad actions to each pressure or stressful situation?

Who Do You Lean On?

- *Review the definition of "Trusted Adult"*
- *Discuss who they can talk to when they feel pressured by others to do things that are unhealthy or unsafe.*
- *Discuss what can be done when they feel pressured by others to do things that are unhealthy or unsafe*
- *Discuss how their faith and their Circle of Grace help with stress and pressure?*

Allow for some answers.

Remember Faith Makes a Difference: *(Provide the handout to discuss in the class then take home)*

Let's review your handout. Have you done any of these before? Can you think of additional ones?

Take the Next Right Step (Action Plan):

Have students write a **1-2-3 Plan** to assist when they are stressed or pressured:

- 1- Name of a trusted adult
- 2- Action to be taken if a situation is unhealthy
- 3- Compose a short prayer (Jesus, help me!!!)

Below are some things to consider when students write their short prayer. You can read them or have them on the board.

St. Francis de Sales called anxiety the greatest evil that can befall the soul, except sin, because it causes us to lose the strength necessary to maintain virtue.

Stress is one of the devil's most-used tactics to get us to fall away from a close relationship with God.

Stress can cause us to lose our peace. The more the soul is at peace, the more you can feel the peace of God's presence.

Review the Key Concepts of "Circle of Grace" to explain how God is present within us, and wants the best for us in all things, therefore he created us with the Circle of Grace to help keep us safe.

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 grownups about our worries, concerns or funny/ uncomfortable feelings so they can help us be safe and take the right action.

Closing Reminders

Maintaining peace can be quite challenging. Maybe today we can commit to starting with these essential steps to help us begin our journey toward peace of soul:

1. Cultivate a disposition to “purity of heart.” A person with purity of heart is determined to say “yes” to God in all things.
2. Be not afraid. It is said that the words “Be not afraid” occur in Scripture well more than 300 times. Clearly there is a message that God is telling us. We want to believe in God’s power over stressful situations in our lives, but we don’t.
3. The Bible is clear that stressful situations are not to be avoided. Jesus encourages each of us to pick up our cross, not avoid it.
4. Our faith is not something to help us escape from our troubles, but to help us tackle them head-on. Stress and pressure can be a good thing. It can help us rise to challenges and grow as individuals

Make sure the Parent Letter is sent to them by the end of the lesson. Please see instructions:

Important Parent Letter Instructions:
The Parent Letter is not to be sent home with young people due to the sensitive information regarding unsafe sexual behaviors. Suggested methods of delivery to parents: include in a mailing, hand to parents personally, or make available at the parish office for parents to pick up.
AGAIN: DO NOT send the parent letter home with the young people.

Closing Prayer

Almighty God, we bless you for our lives, we give you praise for your abundant mercy and grace we receive. We thank you for Your faithfulness even though we are not that faithful to You. Lord Jesus, we ask you to give us all around peace in our mind, body, soul and spirit. We ask you to heal and remove everything that is causing stress, grief, and sorrow in our lives.

Please guide our path through life and make our enemies be at peace with us. Let Your peace reign in our family, at our school and in everything we lay our hands on.

Let Your angels of peace go out ahead of us when we go out and stay by our side when we return. In Jesus' Name, Amen

Remember: Faith Makes a Difference

It's the little acts of faith that make a big difference, below are a few:

- 1. Just be quiet with Jesus for a few minutes. This break from your hectic day will help. Stress and pressure is not new. Check out what our faith say about it in Scripture (Below)**
- 2. Pray instantly when anxiety begins to creep in. A short prayer is good enough.**
- 3. Celebrate the sacraments (a little more than you do now). Christ's grace can help us achieve the peace that will make us saints.**
- 4. Read and meditate on Scripture, specifically the many passages that address worry and peace.**
- 5. Take advantage of sacramentals (they confer an actual grace!): holy water, icons, medals.**
- 6. Cultivate joy. Peace and joy are unified. Try new things that are healthy and holy. Get out of your comfort zone. Keeping life interesting makes daily life full of joy, and nothing promotes peace like joy.**

Overcoming anxiety is actually a central tenant of our Catholic faith! Getting rid of stress in your life is necessary for maintaining peace, without which you cannot be a saint or help others become saints.

Scripture Verses Dealing with Stress

- Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid. John 14: 27
- In the world you will have trouble, but take courage, I have conquered the world. John 16:33
- In this you rejoice, although now for a little while you may have to suffer through various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold that is perishable even though tested by fire, may prove to be for praise, glory, and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. 1 Peter 1: 6-7
- "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat [or drink], or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Matthew 6:25
- No trial has come to you but what is human. God is faithful and will not let you be tried beyond your strength; but with the trial he will also provide a way out, so that you may be able to bear it. 1 Corinthians 10:13

Opening Prayer

God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change;
courage to change the things I can;
and wisdom to know the difference.

Help me live one day at a time, enjoying one moment.

Help me to realize hardships can lead to peace and You are always by my side and will
make things alright.

In Jesus' Name. Amen.

Closing Prayer

Almighty God, we bless you for our lives, we give you praise for your abundant mercy and grace we receive. We thank you for Your faithfulness even though we are not that faithful to You. Lord Jesus, we ask you to give us all around peace in our mind, body, soul and spirit. We ask you to heal and remove everything that is causing stress, grief, and sorrow in our lives.

Please guide our path through life and make our enemies be at peace with us. Let Your peace reign in our family, at our school and in everything we lay our hands on.

Let Your angels of peace go out ahead of us when we go out and stay by our side when we return. In Jesus' Name, Amen

Coping with Stress and Pressure: Who are you Leaning On?

Middle School Alternate Circle of Grace Lesson Parent Letter

Dear Parent,

Your young person has just completed the “Coping with Stress and Pressure” alternate lesson in the *Circle of Grace* Program. The lesson describes the difference between stress and pressure. Through discussion and activities, the lesson assists your child in understanding the difference between healthy and unhealthy stress and pressure. It also helps them to identify how to respond when the stress or pressure is unhealthy.

The lesson encourages them to talk to a trusted adult when feeling stress or pressure.

Many times young people feel stress/pressure in unhealthy/unsafe interactions via social media and technology including texting on phones. Although this was not specifically reviewed in this lesson we believed it is important to provide important information that can help keep their children safe. We encourage you to review the below questions with your child to help them discern their interactions with individuals via social media, networking, texting, gaming or other ways to communicating through technology. Many times young people will consider individuals they only met through technology as “friends”.

1. How long have you known this person?
2. Is your knowledge of this person face-to-face?
3. How much do you know about this person?
4. How have you verified what this person has told you about themselves?
5. What do your feelings (instincts) tell you about this person or situation?
6. How many things do you have in common with this person?
7. Is the relationship respectful of your boundaries and the other person’s?
8. Are you able to say, “No,” to this person?
9. Does this person’s age or status influence your behavior in the relationship?
10. Does this person ever ask you to keep secrets?

Caution your young person:

1. Not to reveal personal information on the internet. That includes full names, school, grade, address, phone, sports teams, church groups, etc. Perpetrators try to identify young people by learning about their activities and schedule patterns.
2. To let you know about any time they feel bullied. Help them understand how to respond to bullies, whether that is on social media, a text, at school, or in another setting.
3. To be sensitive to comments that devalue or criticize others for their physical attributes, race, religion, economic status, etc. Model appropriate respectful behavior yourself. Watch the jokes you tell, your children do.
4. To avoid unsafe situations involving alcohol, drugs, and smoking.
5. To be cautious about situations in which they are alone with an adult.

Unsafe Behaviors

We wanted to make you aware of the below information NOT included in the lesson but important for parents to know. We encourage you to discuss this with your young person.

- Cutting is a form of self-harm in which a young person cuts or scratches themselves deep enough that it may bleed. This cutting can be on their wrists, arms, legs or stomachs, places where they can hide the scars that will form. Cutting can be a symptom of deeper emotional issues so it is important to seek professional help for your young person. Cutting can lead to suicide ideation. If you have any concerns about this call the Suicide Prevention Lifeline (1-800-273-8255, Boys Town National Hotline 10800-273-8255 or text VOICE to 20121
- Suicide is the third leading cause of death in ages 10-14 and the second leading cause for those 15-34 years old. Someone dies of suicide every 13 minutes.
- Sexting is when someone sends sexually suggestive photos/texts to another person by way of the cell phone or social networking site. This behavior has significant legal and emotional consequences.
- In recent years, both nationally and locally, young people have died playing asphyxiation games (also known as the choking game and the fainting game) either alone or in groups.
- There is also a prevalence of potentially dangerous behaviors including genital contact (Rainbow Parties, Chicken Games). In these situations, problem-solve with your young people the appropriate ways to remove themselves from this environment (e.g. I have to call my mom/dad now, I have to go to the bathroom, I don't feel good, etc.).
- Netflix and Chill is an internet slang term used as an invitation to watch Netflix together and have sex.

Thank you for your support of the Circle of Grace Program. It is essential and appreciated as we strive to provide the safest possible environment for our young people. If you have any questions, please call your school or parish office.

Coping with Stress and Pressure: Who are You Leaning On? Evaluation

Date _____

Parish/School _____ *City* _____

Leader _____ *Number of children in class* _____

Each grade's curriculum was designed to meet the overall program objectives.
Please check if each of the objectives of the *Circle of Grace* Program were met.

1. YES ____ NO ____ Young People understand the difference between stress and pressure.
2. YES ____ NO ____ Young People understand that stress and pressure can have healthy or unhealthy outcomes,
3. YES ____ NO ____ Young People understand that they can lean on their faith when dealing with stress or pressure,
4. YES ____ NO ____ Young people recognize that a prayer-filled life is an antidote for unhealthy stress and pressure.
5. YES ____ NO ____ Young people and demonstrate how to take action if stress or pressure becomes more than they can handle.

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

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

Return to your School Administrator or Director of Religious Education.