

Dear Parents,

One of the important duties in these uncertain times is our obligation to protect our children and youth and keep them safe.

It is required that all children and youth from Kindergarten through 12th grade, who attend a Catholic School, Religious Education or Youth Ministry program, to be taught *Circle of Grace* lessons each year. Because of the unexpected disruption of classes and parish life recently, your children or teens did not receive these important lessons this academic year.

We are asking you, as the primary and most important catechists of your children, to help us provide for the safety of our children by discussing the attached "Circle of Grace Discussion and Activity" packet with your family. There are questions and activities for Kind. - grade 2, grades 3-5, grades 6-8 and high school students.

Please read over this packet and use the questions and activities as a springboard for discussion with your children about how they are made in the image and likeness of God, that God wants them to be safe even more than we can imagine, and that God puts people in their lives (parents and trusted adults like teachers, grandparents, etc.) to help them be safe and help them if something bad does occur.

A little about the *Circle of Grace* curriculum:

Circle of Grace educates and empowers children and young people to actively participate in a safe environment for themselves and others, while being taught in the framework of our Catholic faith.

Circle of Grace lessons bring God and our Catholic beliefs into the center of child protection by teaching:

- *God's presence and assistance in difficult and confusing situations as an essential component in the Pre-K– gr. 12 curriculum.*
- *a philosophy that can always be used that reinforces God's real presence in our lives, respect for self and others, and skills for good decision making.*
- *the sacredness of each person and how relationships are called to be experiences of divine love.*

Circle of Grace contributes to the protection of our young children and affirms them as beloved children of God. Please help us by discussing these especially important lessons with your children and family.

If you have any questions or would like some additional age/grade-specific activities for your children, please do not hesitate to ask.

God bless you and your family,

St. Helen of the Cross Catholic Parish – Eloy, Arizona

Summary of the Key Concepts of “Circle of Grace”

Circle of Grace Concept (see below) is a way to describe God’s constant “Presence”

*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.*

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

Discussions and Activities from the Circle of Grace Curriculum

Kindergarten through grade 2 lessons introduce and reinforce the material with varied activities. All three grades have the Stoplight analogy to help them identify green, yellow, and red situations, feelings attached to these situations and when to talk to a trusted adult.

Below are discussion points and activity help children identify what belongs in and outside their Circle of Grace:

Discussion

1. Now, let us remember why it is important that we know about our Circle of Grace.
2. *Ask the children the following review questions:*
 - Does Jesus always love us? (*Yes*)
 - Is Jesus always with us? (*Yes*)
 - If God is always with us, we are always in a special, holy place. What do we call that special, holy place? (Our Circle of Grace – *prompt with Circle of Grace movement if needed*).
 - This is the place the Holy Spirit is with us and within us.
 - If we can remember that we are in a Circle of Grace, with God and surrounded by God’s love, what will that help us remember to do? (*Respect ourselves and others*)
3. *Write terms “Holy”, “Holy Spirit”, “Respect”, and “Trust” on the board and define them.*

Activity – Circle of Grace Cards

A set of cards can be made from pictures or simple drawings of the following or similar objects: rosary, heart, cigarette, gun, people fighting, people screaming at each other, clenched fist, little boy and mom holding hands, puppy dog growling and showing his teeth, beautiful flower, trash, open hand reaching.

1. *Have child/ 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 outside his or her Circle of Grace. If the card shows something loving and kind, they should put it in the Circle of Grace Logo (begin or continue a pile). If it shows something scary, mean, or unhealthy, he or she should put it outside the Circle of Grace logo (begins or continue a pile). 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). See the end of the packet for the Circle of Grace Logo.*

Closing Activity

Trusted adults want what is best for your child. They want your child's Circle of Grace to be respected. Discuss with your child the three other persons 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. Today is a good day to start those conversations

For **grades 3-5** is the below activity. Children learn about being treasured by God, boundaries, and how to seek help from a trusted adult. Below is discussion development and activity which focuses on helping children understand that as Children of God we are treasured and filled with grace.

Lesson Development

Today we are going to discuss how God treasures all of us by giving each of us a Circle of Grace.

1. *Show students pictures or examples of precious items that, because they are so special, receive extra care. Possibilities might include:*
 - The American Flag
 - A special set of china dishes that are a family heirloom
 - Ask the children for other examples

Make a point that everything that is considered extra special, rare, or valuable is given extra care and protection.

1. *The final and MOST IMPORTANT example of care given to precious items are the special measures taken to protect and care for...*
 - A Consecrated Host, The Blessed Sacrament
 - Not only do we keep it in a special vessel and in a special locked box but also when we handle it, we do so with the ultimate reverence and respect.
 - We even build a special building, the church, where it is housed, and there are many special behaviors for when we are in the presence of Christ in The Blessed Sacrament.
 - *Ask students for examples of special behaviors we use in church to show respect.*
 - Folding hands

- Genuflecting
- Reverent silence

Activity – Precious Gift-Wrapped Box

(Use a box with a lid that you can wrap. Inside the box is a mirror of some sort so that the students will see their reflection when they look inside the box.)

1. Show the children a gift-wrapped box. Tell them: “It contains something very precious, something that both you and God treasure very highly. This is so special, unique, and valuable that it should be handled with the highest level of care and respect. Each of us should do everything in our power to keep it safe.”
 - You are invited to come up one at a time and investigate the box, to see this precious gift.
 - Once you have seen the contents of the box, do not tell anyone else what you have seen. The beauty of the gift is that everyone will see something quite different.
 - While they are waiting to take their turn to view the special gift, have the children make a list of their ten most precious possessions.

Closing Activity

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Sixth, Seventh, and Eighth grades cover boundaries, relationships, respect, bullying, and how to be morally responsible in today’s culture. The PLAAN concept is introduced in these grades. Please discuss potential situations that you would want your child to remember PLAAN.

PLAAN SUMMARY

1. Write on the board:

P – Protect

L – Listen

A – Ask

A – Act

N – Notify

2. Review

➤ The first letter “P” stands for Protect with Respect.

- How do you think respect can help us protect our Circle of Grace?
 - Answers should include:
 - respecting ourselves as a child of God respecting others because they are also Children of God keeping unsafe words, touches, and images out of our Circle of Grace

- The letter “P” is about knowing that each of us has a Circle of Grace and respecting it.

➤ The letter “L” stands for Listen.

- 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.
- The letter “L” connects us with the Communion of Saints and the qualities we have been given as expressions of God’s love.

➤ The letter “A” stands for Ask.

- When you have an uncomfortable feeling, you are recognizing the Holy Spirit helping you know that something is not right.
- The letter “A” asks: “Does this say, “Yes,” to what God has called me to be? Does this belong in my Circle of Grace?”
- There are some questions that the letter “A” reminds us to ask ourselves whenever we are in a situation that makes us feel uncomfortable or that just does not feel quite right. The questions are also good ones to ask every so often even when we do not get a gut feeling. Sometimes asking the questions helps us to hear the Holy Spirit when we did not remember that we needed to listen.
- *Read each question allowing a few moments for quiet reflection*
 1. How long have you known this person?
 2. Is your knowledge of this person face-to-face?
 3. Is the relationship respectful of your boundaries and the other person’s?
 4. Are you able to say, “No,” to this person?
 5. Does this person’s age or status influence your behavior in the relationship? . . .

➤ The next letter “A” stands for Act.

- To protect your Circle of Grace you need to tell trusted adults you need help.
- 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:
 1. Do not reveal personal information on the Internet. This 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. Be particularly cautious of social networking websites such as myspace.com and personal blogs.
 2. Stay away or get away from situations that make you feel uncomfortable. . .
 3. . . .Be cautious about situations in which one is left alone with an adult.

➤ The last letter “N” stands for Notify.

- Notify your parents or another trusted adult whenever someone or has violated your boundaries, such as manipulating to control you or not respecting your Circle of Grace or someone else’s Circle of Grace.
- Think of three people besides your parents whom you can trust, whom you feel will listen and would offer help. Ask yourself these questions:
- Do these people respect your Circle of Grace?
- Do they respect their own Circle of Grace?
- Do they respect the Circle of Grace of other people that you know?

Closing Activity

Trusted adults want what is best for your child. They want your child's Circle of Grace to be respected. Discuss with your child the three other persons 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. Today is a good day to start those conversations

Ninth, Tenth, Eleventh, and Twelfth grades includes topics such as relating to the Saints; media and cultural influences on how youth view their sexuality; relationships; boundaries; grooming tactics; love and theology of the body. The *Circle of Virtue* is introduced as one's response to the invitation of God's grace by cultivating goodness and virtue in one's life. Scenarios are used to help young people to apply the information to potentially real situations.

Please discuss a few of the scenarios with your teen:

4. One of your coaches thinks you can make the select team if you work a little harder on some skills. The coach offers to stay late and work one on one with you to help improve skills after everyone else has gone home. *Pause.*

This situation is unsafe. What is unsafe here?

- An adult arranges to be with a young person alone.

What would need to change to make this situation safe? (*Brainstorm ideas with the young people to address the unsafe circumstances listed above.*)

5. Your best friend confides that she tried some beer at a party she attended last week. She says it made her laugh and made her sick. She says it was not a great experience, but she asks you to keep it secret from your parents and hers. *Pause.*

This situation is not safe. What is unsafe here?

- A young person is asked to keep a secret from an adult.
- The friend is put at risk for future problems.
- The person who provided the alcohol is protected.

What would need to change to make this situation safe? (*Brainstorm ideas with the young people to address the unsafe circumstances listed above.*)

These scenarios are followed with a discussion of safe and unsafe relationships:

Ask the following questions:

1. Do you remember the last Circle of Grace lesson in which we provided you scenarios about unsafe behavior? Today we are going to talk about a practical plan for times when you might find yourself in those types of situations. Please see the below discussion questions to review with your child:

Do your friends, boyfriends/girlfriends, or family members...

_____ Embarrass you by calling you names/put downs?

_____ Look or act in ways that scare you?

_____ Like to control your friends and whom you hang out with?

_____ Pressure you into doing something that makes you feel uneasy. . .

Discuss other events in your lives and schools in which youth have been in unsafe situations and relationships.

Review the following points:

- All unsafe relationships have the potential to become dangerous. Anytime a person is in a relationship where the other does not respect your Circle of Grace, it is a time when hurt and damage may occur. Unsafe relationships are particularly hurtful and dangerous when there is abuse. Often, young people who are in unsafe situations/relationships don't tell their parents because they don't think they can handle it. Unsafe situations usually happen when there are no witnesses so young people are afraid that they will not be believed even if they do tell someone.

Young people who are in unsafe situations, who believe they have experienced boundary violations or who are confused about a relationship should always tell a trusted adult