

CIRCLE OF GRACE

Program for Children and Young People

Grade Kindergarten through Grade 8

Safe Environment Training

2018 *Revised Edition*

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Nihil Obstat Rev. Matthew Gutowski, S.T.L.
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Archbishop of Omaha
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ADD NEW LETTER

Acknowledgments

Circle of Grace Program

The Archdiocese of Omaha would like to express its gratitude and appreciation of the past and current *Circle of Grace* contributors. Their commitment, creativity, expertise, and countless hours of dedication have had a profound impact in the lives of children and youth throughout the nation and beyond. The original committee was comprised of the superintendent of schools, teachers, principals, and school counselors. It also included our faith formation director, directors of religious education, catechists, youth ministers and mental health professionals.

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Introduction

Development of the *Circle of Grace* Program has been a passionate journey for all involved. The Archdiocesan committee was brought together by the mandate of the U.S. Bishops' *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*. The charter mandates that each diocese must have a safe environment program for children and youth which includes an audit to ensure compliance.

The committee set a goal early on that we wanted a program rich in our Catholic faith and clinically sound. The committee knew the program needed to first meet the standards of the U. S. Bishop's audit, but we also wanted much more for our children and youth. Thus, we decided that our main commitment was above and beyond meeting the needs of the U.S. Bishops' audit; we want to ensure the safety, well-being, and spiritual formation of our children and youth. With these goals in mind, we have developed a program which includes teaching a culture of respect and faith that goes beyond mere protection. This program helps children and young people understand their own sacredness, the sacredness of others, and how to seek help through their relationships with trusted adults. Consequently, the *Circle of Grace* concept was born.

What is the *Circle of Grace*? It is a metaphor for the love and goodness of God that surrounds us and all others. It is the recognition that God is with us always and is there to help us in difficult situations. Through the *Circle of Grace* Program, adults assist children and youth to recognize God's love by understanding that each of us lives and moves within a *Circle of Grace*. Your *Circle of Grace* encompasses who you are in your body and including your senses. It holds your very essence in mind, heart, soul, and sexuality.

This holistic concept allows children and youth to identify uncomfortable situations long before any inappropriate touch may occur. Those who molest children start to groom them by manipulating them to break rules and keep secrets such as consuming alcohol and viewing pornography. This manipulation usually occurs before any attempt at inappropriate touch. The *Circle of Grace* program helps children and youth to identify early on when they are uncomfortable with a situation and includes ways to seek the help of a trusted adult. The *Circle of Grace* PreK-12 Program goals and objectives are met in all grades. The program is self-contained for each grade with everything needed to teach the material.

One of the benefits of the *Circle of Grace* program is that the instructors also have the opportunity to ponder their own belief and experience of God's presence in their lives. During a training session an operating room nurse, who was a catechist, asked the following question: "So Jesus is right with us in the operating room?" Her prior faith formation taught this belief but the *Circle of Grace* Program finally allowed her to understand God's love in a very visual and real way for her life.

With that realization in mind, ponder the *Circle of Grace Meditation*. It is profound in its simplicity.

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.

What would our world look like if we all lived believing and truly knowing that God is that close?

Mary Beth Hanus LCSW, LMHP, Victim Outreach and Prevention Manager, Archdiocese of Omaha.

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Guidelines

School Administrators, Directors of Religious Education, and Youth Ministry Directors

- **Leader** is defined as clergy, administrator, director of religious education/formation, teacher, catechist, or youth minister who has been trained to teach the *Circle of Grace* Program. All leaders must be adults and certified in Safe Environment training.
- 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. Each lesson is correlated with Catholic teachings.
- Administrators/Director needs to review how to handle sensitive situations with each leader. It is important for leaders to report all concerning situations to their Administrator/Directors and understand your state's child abuse/neglect reporting laws. A Quick Reference Card for Leaders is located in this section.
- This program may bring up past issues with leaders which may make it difficult for them to teach the lessons. Please encourage leaders in this situation to speak with their Administrator/ Director, Pastor, or they can call the Safe Environment Coordinator directly. Supportive resources are available in their community to help them.
- *Circle of Grace* Curriculum has both comprehensive and focus grades. The comprehensive grades have two lessons in K-3. This is due to vulnerability and need for repetition. Grade 6 has three lessons due to insecurity of transitional years. The focus grades have a lesson on one particular area.
- The time frame for lessons may vary depending on size of class, age of children/young people, amount of discussion, etc. Grade 6 lessons can be done as a retreat night. Sometimes there is a need to combine grades. If so, pick the most appropriate curriculum to teach the group. It must be a complete grade section.
- 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 and young people in their understanding of the *Circle of Grace* Program. The depth of the children/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 the packet for each grade.
- The USCCB Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People requires a safe environment program be implemented in all grades each year. The *Circle of Grace* program fulfills this requirement.
- The Kindergarten through Grade 2 lessons are very similar. Children in this developmental phase learn through intentional repetition.

- Leader's instructions for each lesson are italicized. Non-italicized text needs to be presented by the leader to the children or young people. All the information and handouts are provided for each grade.
- 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.
- There should be no more than two weeks between the last two lessons in grades K, 1, 2, 3, and 6. 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 young people and help them to know what to do when they feel unsafe.
- There are pre and post assessments for grades 3, 6, and 9. This tool will assist in evaluating the children/young people's understanding and assimilation of the concepts. The results are to be recorded on the grade evaluation and are not to be shared with the children/young people.
- The School Administrator, Religious Education Director, or **Director of Youth Ministry** need to send out the provided letter to all parents regarding *Circle of Grace* prior to starting the program. All parents should receive the "Common Questions of Parents" handout. Lesson specific parent information should be handed out as directed. The parent information included in this chapter for every parish/school is to assist in providing parent education both to inform parents about the *Circle of Grace* program and to foster greater communication in families.
- **A child and youth code of conduct is included. It can be used as needed in any grade at the administrator/director discretion. It is also included in Grade 7 lesson.**
- Evaluations for each lesson are to be completed and returned to the School Administrator, the Director of Youth Ministry, or the Director of Religious Education/Formation. The **Administrator/ Director** will use these evaluations to complete the Summary Evaluation (located in this chapter). The Summary Evaluation should be sent to the _____ for ongoing improvement of the program, for parish/ school documentation of the implementation of the program, and for audit records.
- **Additional resources are located on *Circle of Grace* Resource Flash Drive/ CD**
- The following pages include the *Circle of Grace* Meditation, Key Concepts of *Circle of Grace* and a Code of Conduct/Anti Bullying Contract for Children/Youth. These additional resources can be displayed in the classroom and are great additions to the curriculum.
- **There are alternate lessons for Grade 6, 7 and 8. These lessons can be taught in place of the traditional grade lessons.**
- **Administrator section has a "Youth Assistant in Ministry" booklet**



CIRCLE OF GRACE

*Raise your hands above your head and 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
then 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.*

What would our world look like if we all lived believing and truly knowing that God is that close?

Summary of Key Concepts of “Circle of Grace”

(Video of Circle of Grace Meditation Link :<https://vimeo.com/207836764>)

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 “funny/ uncomfortable feelings” so they can help us be safe and take the right action.

The Circle of Grace Song

Circle of Grace

(Lyricist) Christina Buhta

♩ = 120 ♩ = 150

God gave me my cir - cle of grace. From my hands to my beau - ti - ful

face. From my head to my toes, my

knees and my nose, God wants me to keep it safe.

The song was composed by Christina Buhta from the Diocese of Sioux Falls SD
The Archdiocese of Omaha is **grateful** for her contribution.



Code of Conduct for Children and Young People

I understand that I am created by God and live in the love of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

I understand that God does not want or cause bad things to happen.

I understand that God is with me even when I am hurting or sad.

I understand the *Circle of Grace* that God gives me and others.

I understand that I can help stamp out “bullying” by not being a silent bystander.

I understand that speaking out and taking positive actions when bullying occurs, makes a difference.

Because of this understanding when I interact with someone, either in person or when using technology such as texting and social networking, I will strive to:

- Have my actions be safe and show respect toward myself and others.
- Have my words and actions represent the truth.
- Identify and maintain appropriate and healthy boundaries and relationships.
- Talk with my parents/trusted adult if I have concerns (bullying) or if there is a question that any boundary was violated.

Student_____ Teacher_____

Parent_____ Date_____

Circle of Grace and Family Faith Formation

Article 12 of the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People* states, “Dioceses/eparchies are to maintain “safe environment” programs which the diocesan/eparchial bishop deems to be in accord with Catholic moral principles. They are to be conducted cooperatively with parents, civil authorities, educators and community organizations to provide education and training for children, youth, parents ministers, educators, volunteers, and others about ways to make and maintain a safe environment for children and young people....”

A number of dioceses have adopted the *Circle of Grace* curriculum to assist them in being compliant with the above Article 12 and a number of parishes throughout the country have adopted the *Family Faith Formation* model of parish catechesis which supports parents in their role as the primary educators of their children in the Catholic faith.

The following are suggested ways to implement the *Circle of Grace* curriculum into the *Family Formation* model:

1. In planning the yearly calendar, identify the date/dates on which the *Circle of Grace* curriculum will be taught. Some parishes find it helpful to start the year out with this curriculum, others choose to get to know students better before introducing it.
2. Plan the curriculum so that there be no more than two weeks between lessons.
3. Become familiar with the *Circle of Grace* vocabulary and reinforce it throughout the year and within parent sessions. Ask parents to do the same at home.
4. The *Circle of Grace* parent letter as well as, “The Common Questions of Parents” must be sent out prior to the implementation of the curriculum.
5. An advantage to the *Family Formation* model is that parent attendance is required monthly. While the students are being taught, this is a prime opportunity to present the concept, philosophy and objectives of *Circle of Grace* as well as *K-12 Parents First* resource to parents.
6. Administrator/Director should review how to handle sensitive issues with each leader. It is important for leaders to report all concerning situations to their Administrator/Director. A “Quick Reference Guide” is included in the Administrator/Director section of the *Circle of Grace* manual.

The above are intended to assist those using the *Family Formation* approach to Parish Religious Education with the implementation of the *Circle of Grace* curriculum.

If you have found additional ways to implement and would like to share them with others, please contact Mary Beth Hanus (mbhanus@archomaha.org)

Circle of Grace Adaptations for Children with Special Needs

A number of dioceses have adopted the *Circle of Grace* curriculum to assist them in being compliant with Article 12 of the USCCB Charter. Among the many children in our schools are those who need adaptation of the original curriculum to accomplish the goals of each lesson. The following general suggestions are a result of consultation with professional educators working with children with special needs.

1. The best resource for adaptation ideas is the child's family. Be sure to consult with them when determining the needs of the child.
2. Know your students and utilize their strengths
3. Materials that are available for each activity may be adapted to meet the needs of children with a range of developmental levels.
4. All children learn through repetition. Allow time for repetition, practice and role play.
5. Focus on key phrases or words in the curriculum.
6. Use music and sing songs that may assist with the objectives in a lesson. Use pictures, videos and objects to demonstrate ideas (see activities materials at the end of each lesson)
7. Keep the goal of each lesson in mind and adapt as needed:

The below are general suggestions and lesson adaptations created by **Erin Jeffries**, Catechesis Consultant for teachers working with special needs children in the Archdiocese of Indianapolis. We are grateful to her for sharing her expertise with others who use the *Circle of Grace* curriculum!

General Suggestions

Vocabulary: There are a lot of new words- expect to spend extra time going over them, and using different ways to go over them- here are a few ideas:

- Use pictures/images as often as possible to illustrate a word or its meaning
- Rainbow words: trace over a word many times with different colored pens
- Tactile/sensory words: flash cards with vocabulary words with rice, un-popped popcorn or Jell-O-powder, or some similar material glued over the letters
- Games: a crossword, a word find, matching the word to what it means or to a picture.

Prayers:

- Put the words to the prayer to the tune of a familiar song (like the "Gilligan's Island" theme or "Row, Row Row your boat")
- Provide a large copy for the class to see and pray together (like on poster board)

Songs/Music: Music can be very helpful in relaxing, focusing, and learning concepts, but notice if someone seems to be bothered by the music (covering ears, rocking etc.)

Those who are less or non-verbal: You may need to provide more examples or pictures. Drawing is a great communication tool, as is acting. Gestures and Sign language can be a powerful tool as well. Another tool is to use word banks that they can manipulate to indicate an answer, or a gesture (thumbs up or down) if appropriate.

Those who have difficulty with writing: Allowing verbal answers that are then transcribed, drawing instead of writing, word banks, slips of paper with words printed on them, letter tiles from games like *Bananagrams* or *Scrabble* to build words can be useful tools.

Pictures really are worth a thousand words: Any time you can utilize a picture, artwork, statue etc. to talk about a concept or tell a story, the more likely you are to engage visual learners, and evoke responses.

Don't be afraid to break up a lesson into smaller chunks for those who need more processing time, or have difficulty sitting and attending for longer periods of time, it is better to take a little longer with it and ensure that they are understanding this important information!

Grade Specific

Kindergarten

Goals –

- Children will come to understand and/or describe the concept of *Circle of Grace*.
- Children will be better able to identify safe and unsafe situations.
- Children will demonstrate how to take action if their *Circle of Grace* (COG) boundaries have been threatened or crossed.

- Lesson 1.

- Activity: Happy and Sad Face Chart
 - Keep in mind those who are less or non-verbal, allow them to act out the nice or hurtful things people do.

- Lesson 2.

- Discussion:
 - Prior to Discussion: play “Red light, Green light” to help reinforce the colors in the stoplight and what they mean.
- Red Signal, Green Signal Activity:

- Plan to help name and describe the feelings, and have them show what those feelings look like on their faces (mirror) and on their friend's faces.
 - You may need to take a brief water or stretch break before going into the second 'secret' portion of the activity.
- Introduction:
 - "Trust" and "trusted adult" are concepts that may require more time and guidance, in the form of examples to develop.
 - Activity:
 - Consider those who are less or non-verbal, as they draw their pictures, you can help identify who is in them by asking questions, determining a signal for response (such as a thumbs up or down, signing yes or no etc.)
 - Skill Introduction:
 - Introduce and practice one piece of the process at a time, using the poster provided.
 - Again, consider those who are less or non-verbal, reminding them of ways they have to communicate, i.e. drawing, making a noise to get attention, communication board if available, sign language etc... and have them practice using that method.

Grade 1

Goals –

- Children will come to understand and/or describe the concept of *Circle of Grace*.
- Children will be better able to identify safe and unsafe situations.
- Children will demonstrate how to take action if their *Circle of Grace* (COG) boundaries have been threatened or crossed.

- Lesson 1.

- Happy/Sad Face Chart Activity: role play positive words and actions and negative words and actions- have them clearly show the feeling face they would have if that word or action happened to them.
 - OR have them draw what is happening, and put that on the chart so they have visuals for the actions
 - OR if a child is less verbal, have pictures ready of positive and negative actions, and have them show a smile or a sad face in response.

- Using puppets to role-play can make it easier for some

- Lesson 2.

- Review:
 - Have them show a word or action they liked or did not like
- Prior to Discussion portion:
 - Play the game Red Light, Green Light as a reminder of what the lights tell us
- Red Signal, Green Signal Activity:
 - You may act out or provide pictures of the red, yellow and green situations you give them.
 - Help them express- and give names to the feelings they feel when those situations arise.
 - Utilize the feeling face sheets
 - Have them make faces at each other!
- You may want to take a brief break, either to get a drink or stretch, etc. between the situations and the secret portion (it could get long for some)
- The concept of “trust” and who is a “trusted adult” is one that may need more time, as well as some examples and suggestions.
- Some will probably need help labeling the pictures of their trusted adults
- Introduce and practice steps to asking for help one at a time- then give/send home the adapted skill poster.

Grade 2

Goals –

- Children will come to understand and/or describe the concept of *Circle of Grace*.
- Children will be better able to identify safe and unsafe situations.
- Children will demonstrate how to take action if their *Circle of Grace* (COG) boundaries have been threatened or crossed.

- Lesson 1.

- Discussion:
 - You may need to incorporate alternate means of answering questions, such as signing yes or no, or thumbs up and thumbs down.

- Lesson 2.

- Introduction:
 - Play Red Light, Green Light as a reminder of what the colors mean

- Red Signal Green Signal Activity:
 - Use pictures, to illustrate the situation you are describing
 - If possible, let the class identify what color the situation or secret would be (i.e., give them red, green and yellow objects to hold up)
 - Use feeling chart to talk about feelings
- This may be a long time to sit for some, so you might want to take a brief break before the Discussion session.
- Activity:
 - Consider those who are less or non-verbal, ways for them to express who their trusted adults are- this may be by drawing, he or she may need some suggestions, and provide a thumbs up or no to give an answer.
 - Be ready to help label drawings for those who have difficulty writing
- **Role Playing:** you may need to help the class “notice” what was done well, and what they might want to do differently next time.

Grade 3

Goals –

- The concept of COG will be reinforced
- Children will be better able to identify safe and unsafe situations
- Children will better understand how to take action if boundaries are threatened or violate.

Pre and Post Assessments:

Consider alternate means of evaluating, such as allowing verbal response, doing the evaluation in chunks rather than all together, words that are cut out so the student can match them to the definition, thumbs up or thumbs down for True/False questions etc.

- Lesson 1.

- Consider taking the class over to the Church, so they can have the visual of the tabernacle and the beautiful space.
 - Also the familiar environment will help them remember the actions of reverence we use in Church.

- Lesson 2.

- Boundaries:
 - It may be very useful to have pictures of the physical and symbolic boundaries available as you talk about them.
 - Internal boundaries are a little more abstract, so it may be useful to model these, at least briefly.

o Boundary Scenarios:

- Depending on the individual abilities in the class, it may be more appropriate to act out scenarios as a whole group
- Be prepared to prompt in discussion questions if needed.

o Action Plan:

- Visuals, such as a poster will be very helpful, along with the words. One idea could be to photos of the students doing the three steps.
 - Consider alternatives for children who are less or non-verbal, such as making a noise to draw attention, or a signal, some are taught to vocalize. Ask if needed.
 - Remind them of other ways they can tell their trusted adult- such as drawing, or their communication board, or their best means.
 - You will most likely need to model the tone of voice you expect them to use in these situations.

Grade 4

Goal-

- o Children will come to understand the concept of a COG in relationship to use of the internet on computers, phones, etc.
- Vocabulary: There is a LOT of new vocabulary this year. Where appropriate, it might be very useful to show examples on the computer as you talk about some of these things.
- Don't be afraid to break up this lesson, it is a lot of new information, and there are some very easy places to do so.
- Be prepared to guide discussion regarding destructive and constructive uses of the internet, by way of scenarios and suggestions.

o Rules for Internet Safety:

- As you discuss these, it could be useful to come up with a symbol for each one, to help with correlation and memory.
- A thumbs up, thumbs down column approach could work well- and develop a "10 Commandments" type poster.

o Vocabulary Matching Game:

- Cut out the word bank so they can glue the word next to the definition or have the words and definitions (and symbols if you used them!) on notecards and allow them to physically match them.
- Action Plan:
 - Remember, some children are MUCH more adept at computer use than with communication skills, consider ways they can follow the action plan, such as writing, drawing, or showing- whatever is their best method.

Grade 5

Goal-

- Children will be able to recognize the influence of the media on their COG.
- Review: possibly utilize charts/ symbols used in 4th grade to help with memory
 - Ways to Communicate:
 - If needed, include pictures of different types of media as you discuss
 - Four Uses of Media:
 - A symbol or model photo for each of the four uses of media could be very helpful in organizing information.
 - Positive and Negative Influences of Media:
 - Depending on your group, this may be a good way to utilize volunteers (to facilitate discussion) or to have it as a whole group.
 - Be prepared to lead this discussion, and give examples.
 - 10 Commandments Activity: you could utilize PowerPoint slides to illustrate the stories/examples as you tell them

Grade 6

Goals-

- Young people will come to a deeper understanding of their COG.
- Young people will be better able to identify, form and maintain healthy relationships
- Young people will be able to distinguish between healthy and unhealthy relationships
- Young people will be better able to safeguard their COG from violations

Pre and Post Assessments:

Consider alternate means of evaluating, such as allowing verbal response, doing the evaluation in chunks rather than all together, words that are cut out so the student can match them to the definition, thumbs up or thumbs down for True/False questions etc.

- Lesson 1:

o Lesson Presentation:

- Use an actual puzzle to illustrate the ideas you are talking about

o Activity:

- Be mindful of motor skills in your group, whether some will need pre-cut puzzle pieces.

- Lesson 2:

o Getting started discussion:

- Be prepared to give examples of how we show respect.

o Who we have relationships with:

- If needed, some photos representing those we have relationships may be useful

o “Actions and Words” discussion

- Depending on the group, it may be useful to role play examples they give and have them show their response to the words and or actions.

- Lesson 3:

o Quiet/instrumental music can be helpful in maintaining quiet prayer time

o Safe/Unsafe Scenarios:

- Be mindful of motor skills in your group, noting anyone who may need help turning their tent, or allow them to answer in an alternative manner.
- Allow plenty of time to consider the scenario before discussing the situation.

- Lesson 4:

o Introduction to “PLAAN”

- A symbol to go along with each letter can help differentiate and aid memory of the meaning- or a physical action to correlate.
- Utilize the mnemonic device too ☺

o Letter ‘L’ Activity- provide a word bank, or the feeling words on slips of paper that they can glue on and match that way- also consider verbal answers.

- Second letter 'A' Activity:
 - Brainstorm how to express these more difficult needs, and practice as a group.
 - Again, consider those who are less or non-verbal, and the methods they can use to express what they need.
- Utilize actions and or symbols to help review at the end.

We wish to thank Erin again for her contribution and invite you to submit other ideas for adaptation of *Circle of Grace* to Mary Beth Hanus (mbhanus@archomaha.org)

Guidelines

Non-Participating Children/Young People

The guidelines from the Secretariat of Child and Youth Protection state:

WHEN A PARENT/GUARDIAN REFUSES TO ALLOW THEIR CHILD/YOUNG PERSON TO PARTICIPATE IN THE *CIRCLE OF GRACE* PROGRAM:

A parent may refuse to allow their child to participate, but it must be done on a case by case basis. Parents must submit the following in writing with a signature:

- Safe Environment training was offered to their child/young person
- They refused to allow their child/young person to participate in the training
- They received Safe Environment training materials for their child/young person.

Administrator/**Directors** will provide parents with the age appropriate lessons and parent packet. A record of parent's written documentation needs to be maintained to ensure full accountability. A copy of the documentation must be submitted to the Arch/Diocesan Safe Environment Office.

Please call
if there are any questions or concerns.

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/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 children/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 children/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 children/young people understand and respect their own dignity and that of others. A truly safe and protective environment is one where children/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.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/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, **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>

History

Background

The United States Catholic Conference of Bishops developed the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People* during a three-day meeting in June 2002 in Dallas Texas. This document was the first united response by the bishops to the revelation by the secular media that priests had physically and sexually abused minors over a period of many years. The stories of abuse would appear in dioceses across the United States implicating an increasing number of priests and even bishops.

The Bishops gathered in Washington, D.C. in November 2002 to confirm a revised Charter, to develop a set of canonical norms for Vatican approval as particular law in the dioceses of the United States, to organize procedures for a compliance audit of dioceses, to commission a data gathering project on abuse of minors by priests over the previous 50 years, and to set in motion studies that would discover the causes, trace the patterns, and offer strategies for preventing future abuse and protecting minors effectively.

Diocese/eparchies will establish “safe environment” programs. They will cooperate with parents, civil authorities, educators, and community organizations to provide education and training for children, youth, parents, ministers, educators, and others about ways to make and maintain a safe environment for children. Dioceses/eparchies will make clear to clergy and members of the community the standards of conduct for clergy and other persons in positions of trust with regard to sexual abuse.

Article 12 - Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People

The Archdiocese of Omaha, out of concern for all God’s people and in response to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops’ *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*, has developed a safe environment education program for children and young people. This program is called *Circle of Grace*. There are many Catholic Dioceses and Protestant churches across the United States using the Circle of Grace Curriculum. Go to www.cograce.org to read their testimonies.

CIRCLE OF GRACE SUMMARY EVALUATION FORM

Date _____ School/ Parish _____ City: _____

Circle one.

School Administrator Director of Religious Education Director Youth Ministry Other

Name: _____ Phone: _____

DATA: Please enter the number of children/youth who completed the program for each grade. This information is required for the national audit.

K _____ 1st _____ 2nd _____ 3rd _____ 4th _____ 5th _____ 6th _____

7th _____ 8th _____ 9th _____ 10th _____ 11th _____ 12th _____

Number of children/young people who did not participate in program per parents' requests: _____
(Attach a copy of the written documentation of the parents' requests.)

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

Please review your leader's evaluations. Based on this review has the program adequately met these overall objectives? Yes _____ No _____

1. Children/Young People will understand they are created by God and live in the love of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
2. Children/Young People will be able to describe the *Circle of Grace* that God gives each of us.
3. Children/ Young People will be able to identify and maintain appropriate boundaries.
4. Children/ Young People can identify types of boundary violations.
5. Children/Young People will demonstrate how to take action if a boundary is threatened or violated.

Grade 3 (tally of leader's evaluation)

Number of children who got 70% or better on their pre-assessment _____

Number of children who got below 70% on their pre-assessment _____

Number of children who got 70% or better on the post-assessment _____

Number of children who got below 70% on the post-assessment _____

Grade 6 (tally of leader's evaluation)

Number of Young people who got 70% or better on their pre-assessment _____

Number of Young people who got below 70% on their pre-assessment _____

Number of Young people who got 70% or better on the post-assessment _____

Number of Young people who got below 70% on the post-assessment _____

Grade 9 (tally of leader's evaluation)

Number of Young people who got 70% or better on their pre-assessment _____

Number of Young people who got below 70% on their pre-assessment _____

Number of Young people who got 70% or better on the post-assessment _____

Number of Young people who got below 70% on the post-assessment _____

Circle of Grace – Administrator/Directors

Your feedback is very important in making *Circle of Grace* the best program possible for our children and young people. You may summarize your leader comments here or send the original evaluations.

Please list what worked well and any resources you would like to share.

Please list any suggestions that would improve the program.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Below is a sample of a quick reference card that **Directors** and **Administrators** can give their leaders. It will assist them in knowing what action steps to take regarding sensitive situations. “Key Steps When You Have a Sensitive/Concerning Situation” can be found in this section.

Quick Reference Card for Leaders

- A Be **Attentive** to comments and behaviors during class.
- C **Contact** **Administrators/Directors** prior to the dismissal of class if comments or behaviors are concerning.
- T **Team** approach is always best. Collaborate with your administrator/director/pastor to help clarify child’s statement/behavior and to determine if there is a need to report to the authorities.
- I **Initial Report** to the authorities may be needed. The child abuse hotline number is
- O **Other Resources** are available through the
The Safe Environment Coordinator,
can be reached at
- N **Note** all observations/statements and actions taken, make a file.

Key Steps for Administrators, Directors of Religious Education, Youth Ministry Directors, and Leaders When There is a Sensitive or Concerning Situation

If a child discloses clear information of abuse and immediate safety is a concern the following steps should occur:

- Assure the child that you will contact people who can help them be safe.
- Ask Director/Administrator for help reporting and with your further interaction with the child/family. (Refer to your diocesan policies.)
- Authorities will be responsible for interviewing the child so keep questions to a minimum.
- Ask authorities who will contact the parents and when this will occur.
- Assure the child that you will be there for them during the process as much as possible.

When a child discloses information that is concerning but not threatening immediate safety, the following steps should be considered:

- Always coordinate with your Director/Administrator when dealing with these situations.
- Decide when and if the parents should be notified depending on relationship with parents and issues around the concern (example: a parent is very sick in the hospital and you become aware that the young grade school child is left home alone). Consider approaching parents to offer assistance.
- Keep written documentation of your concerns.
- Use your best judgment in sharing information with parents regarding your conversation with their child.
- Consider reporting to the authorities (refer to diocesan policies).

There May Be Many Reasons That a Child Approaches You Upset or Discloses Potentially Concerning Information. Only ask enough questions to determine if there is reasonable cause to report. Below are general guidelines when you find yourself in this type of situation.

Open-ended questions are best. These questions help you enter into the world of a child without coloring it with assumptions.

(Child starts crying in class.) Below are examples:

- If your tears had words, what would they say?

- I am here to listen.
- Tell me more.
- And then what?
- I want to understand your hurt.

Directed questions when there is more information:

(Child states they are upset with their Uncle/Aunt)

- Tell me more about your Uncle/Aunt.
- What are the things that are upsetting you?

Avoid Leading Questions:

- Did your Uncle hurt you?
- Did your Aunt touch you in your privates?
- Did they tell you not to tell?

Working with Parents in Sensitive Situations:

Talk in a confidential area and when asking questions remember to keep them open ended and non-accusatory.

When immediate safety is a concern and a report has been made:

- Seek advice from the authorities (CPS and Police) as to who will contact parents. (You may interfere with the investigation if you contact parents before authorities.)
- Always coordinate with your Director/Administrator when dealing with parents in these situations.
- If parents become aware of your report: reinforce that you are a mandatory reporter and need to defer to the authorities during the investigation.
- It is not your role to determine guilt but to report concerns per the law.

When immediate safety is not a concern and a report has NOT been made:

- Share the facts in a calm and nonjudgmental manner.
- Avoid assumptions. For example: Ted was crying in class and told you someone is bothering him. He did not define bother or identify the person. It is important not to assume guilt of the parents.
- Assume parents will be supportive and **concerned** unless they demonstrate otherwise.
- Offer supportive resources such as counseling.

Suicide Prevention Information

This information is included because we all want children and young people to be safe. Prevention programs such as *Circle of Grace* primarily focuses on how to identify and seek help when abuse or boundary violations occur.

The Circle of Grace concept is to tell their trusted adults not only about potential harm from someone outside their Circle of Grace but also about self-harm. All of us strive for the safety of all children and young people from outside sources but we must recognize the real crisis of our youth considering self-harm or suicide.

Below are some facts, warning signs, questions to ask and resources. Please share them with your staff and volunteers because one life lost is too many.

Facts:

- Since 1999 suicide rates have increased 24%. Suicide is now the tenth leading cause of death in the US.
- Suicide is the third leading cause of death among the ages 10-14 and the second leading cause of death for youth/adults ages 15-34.
- Every 13 minutes someone dies of suicide. While more females attempt suicide, males are four times more likely to die by suicide.
- 20 percent of American high school students report having seriously considered suicide during the previous 12 months.
- 8 percent of high school students make a suicide attempt.
- 70 percent of youth who make a suicide attempt frequently use alcohol and/or drugs
- Being bullied and suicide-related behavior is closely related.

Warning Signs:

- Talking about or making plans for suicide
- Expressing hopelessness about the future
- Talking about being a burden
- Displaying severe or overwhelming emotional pain or distress/ mood swings
- Withdrawing from or changing social connections or situations
- Changes in sleep (increase or decrease)
- Anger or hostility that seems out of character or out of context
- Recent increase in anxiety, agitation, irritability or behaving recklessly
- Telling people good bye
- Giving away possessions
- Excessive drinking or substance abuse

Ask Questions:

Ask the Question (*it is a myth that asking will give the youth the “idea” of suicide. Be sure to have suicide crisis information in hand, plenty of time to listen and a private place to visit*)

- “I have the feeling you are thinking about suicide but are having trouble bringing it up”
- “Are you thinking about suicide?”
- “Sometimes people in certain situations feel suicidal. Have you been thinking about killing yourself?”
- “Have you ever wanted to stop living?”
- “Do you have a plan to kill yourself?”
- “If so, ask how, where and if they have a means (such as gun/pills/rope or other means)?”

Listen, Reassure and Persuade:

- Listen and look for warning signs/risk factors.
- Validate their feelings.
- Find out what is important to the person and why they choose to live.
- Inform them that you need to contact their parents/guardians so they can get professional help. Assure them you will help them talk to their parents.
- Remind the person that seeking help isn’t a sign of weakness and treatment is available to help them feel better.
- Provide them with resources:
 - 1- **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (1800-273-TALK (8255))**
 - 2- **Boys Town National Hotline (1-800-448-30000, text VOICE to 20121 or www.yourlifeyourvoice.org**

Take Action:

- Don’t leave youth alone once you have determined he or she is at risk.
- Contact parents/guardians and review the following:
 - 1- Need to seek professional help or call 911 if safety is an immediate issue
 - 2- Instruct the parents to remove means like guns and pills from the home
 - 3- Provide them with resources:
 - a) **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (1800-273-TALK (8255))**
 - b) **Boys Town National Hotline (1-800-448-30000, text VOICE to 20121 or www.yourlifeyourvoice.org**

Remember that not seeking help for a suicidal child/youth is considered neglect. If you have concerns about the parents getting help or their child or youth you must contact the authorities.

Information obtained from CDC.gov and Nebraska Health and Human Service- dhhs.ne.gov

Circle of Grace

General Code of Conduct for Children and Young People

I understand that I am created by God and live in the love of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

I understand that God does not want or cause bad things to happen.

I understand that God is with me even when I am hurting or sad.

I can describe/demonstrate the *Circle of Grace* that God gives me.

Because of this:

- My actions will be safe and show respect within my *Circle of Grace*.
- I will act safe and show respect towards others' *Circle of Grace*.
- My words and actions will represent the truth.
- I will identify and maintain appropriate and healthy boundaries.
- If there is a question that these boundaries are violated I will talk with my parents/trusted adult.

Parent Information



The following is general information for parents regarding *Circle of Grace*, parent-child communication, safety tips, and child abuse/neglect. Administrators and Directors need to make this information available to parents. This can be done in several ways such as copies, parent meetings, bulletin board, web page, newsletter, etc. It is recommended that every parent receive the *Parent Letter* introducing the program, *Key concepts of Circle of Grace*, *Common Questions of Parents and Parenting and Sexuality*.

CIRCLE OF GRACE
Safe Environment Program
Grade K through Grade 8
"Respecting All God's People"

Dear Parent,

Out of concern for all God's people and in response to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*, we have a program for the safe environment education of children and young people supported and mandated by

Diocese/eparchies will establish 'safe environment' programs. They will cooperate with parents, civil authorities, educators, and community organizations to provide education and training for children, youth, parents, ministers, educators, and others about ways to make and maintain a safe environment for children. Dioceses/eparchies will make clear to clergy and members of the community the standards of conduct for clergy and other persons in positions of trust with regard to sexual abuse.

Article 12 – Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People

This program is called ***Circle of Grace***. It is meant to supplement and be integrated into the excellent programs and curricula for the formation of children and young people in our schools and religious education programs. ***Circle of Grace*** aims to equip our children and young people by arming them with essential knowledge and skills grounded in the richness of our faith. This program helps children and young people to understand their own (and other's) dignity in mind, body, and spirit.

What is a Circle of Grace?

The Catholic Church teaches that God has created each of us as unique and special. Genesis 1:27 tells us that we are created "male and female in God's image" and that God saw this as "very good." In that goodness, we are meant to respect ourselves and everyone else as persons created and loved by God.

Adults assist children and young people to recognize God's love by helping them to understand that each of us lives and moves in a *Circle of Grace*. You can imagine your own *Circle of Grace* by putting your arms above your head then circle down in front of your body including side to side. This circle, front to back, holds who you are in your body and through your senses. It holds your very essence in mind, heart, soul, and sexuality.

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 and 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, especially parents, as they strive to provide a safe and protective environment, hold the responsibility to help children and young people understand and respect their own dignity and that of others. A truly safe and protective environment is one where children and 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.² Many protection programs focus on “stranger danger”; however, up to ninety percent (90%) of the time the perpetrator of abuse is known to the child or young person such as a relative or family friend. *Circle of Grace* goes beyond just protection by helping children and young people understand the sacredness of who they are and how to seek help through their relationships with trusted adults.

Please feel free to contact your school or parish office if you have questions or want more information.

² www.usccb.org or <http://nccanch.acfhhs.gov>

Common Questions of Parents

1) How is this connected to the “Safe Environment” program?

Circle of Grace is the safe environment program for children/youth. The goal is to help children/youth understand the sacredness of who they are and how to seek help when needed through their relationships with trusted adults.

2) What information can this program give my child that they are not getting already?

The *Circle of Grace* Program reinforces in a peer setting that their faith community cares about their safety and wants them to understand how to seek help if they feel unsafe for any reason. It will help them identify potentially unsafe situations and know how to handle them by seeking help from trusted adults.

3) You indicate that this program will provide them with “life skills”, what do you mean by this?

It reinforces that they are valued by God and others. It gives them information on boundaries and practical directives of what to do if someone makes them feel uncomfortable when in their *Circle of Grace*. It is a good foundation for healthy relationships that will help them throughout their lives.

4) Will this program be age appropriate?

Yes! The lessons were written with great attention to the stages of child development.

5) How can parents support what is being taught in the program?

Parents will receive parent letters as well as take home activities for several of the lessons to do with their children. Talking with your children about the *Circle of Grace* at home will help your children to understand the importance of the lessons and that the lessons apply everywhere, not just at school. Additionally, you are your child’s most important teacher in the area of relationships. Much of what your child will learn and later imitate about relationships comes from what they learn by your example. Creating an atmosphere where they know that they can talk to you about anything provides a valuable safety net for your child because they know they have you to turn to whenever they have a concern.

6) Is there accountability attached to this program implementation?

Yes! There will be an ongoing evaluation of the program to ensure its effectiveness and to incorporate any suggestions that would improve the quality of the program.

7) Will there be resources (people and material) available if I have questions?

Yes! There will be a parent packet given to all parents that includes contact numbers.

8) Shouldn’t parents be the ones teaching their children about sexuality?

Absolutely! This is NOT a sex education program. *Circle of Grace* will provide children with a sound understanding of their own value and of God’s care and presence in their lives. It will also help them notice the signals that tell them when they do not feel safe and how to talk to a trusted adult. All of this will be a good foundation for healthy relationships. However, this is not a sexuality education program. Many parents will appreciate that this program will provide a spiritual framework that will allow parent-child communication about the value of all that they are, including their sexuality. Those conversations are most effective between parent and child. There are grade specific Parents First newsletters to assist you in these conversations.

9) Is this a mandatory program for my child?

The United States Catholic Conference of Bishops (USCCB) developed the Charter for Protection of Children and Young People. Article 12 of this document states that each Diocese will have a safe environment program for adults and children/youth. If you have questions or concerns about your child participating in the *Circle of Grace* Program, please contact your Director of Religious Education, Principal, etc.

Parenting and Sexuality

"The Basics"

Be attentive and respectful.

Your child is a precious child of God. Especially in the area of sexuality, you want your children to appreciate that they are made in the image and likeness of God and that sexuality is a gift. Your respect for them as you hold them, bathe them, care for them will teach them better than words that their bodies are to be respected. They will learn of their value in your care. When they are told about their *Circle of Grace* in religious education and/or school, it helps them to believe that God is with them and for them because they have already experienced your love and your care. They will grow up knowing that they are meant to respect others and are to expect respect from others.

Teaching children about their bodies must happen in an age appropriate way. For young children, the best guideline is to answer their questions as they arise. Try to always connect sexuality and spirituality in simple, short ways. Include God in the answer to help them recognize that sexuality is something special and created by God. For older children, it may be necessary to initiate discussions. More about that below.

Know what you really believe and why.

If you don't know what the Church teaches in regards to sexuality and why, there are many great resources available.

Saint John Paul II's explanation of the Church's teaching on sexuality, "Theology of the Body," is an excellent approach explaining the "Why's" behind Catholic teaching in regards to sexuality and our bodies. His work is a new way of conveying the Church's teaching on God's design for male and female. Since the Church teachings are not malleable, understanding the "Why's" is a great motivator which encourages youth and all faithful to strive to live a life in accord with Christ and His Church. This teaching beautifully articulates how we are meant to be a total gift to another.

At the time that many of today's parents were being formed in the faith regarding our bodies and sexuality, the Church did not have the fullness of Pope John Paul's Theology of the Body. Unfortunately for many, sexuality was reduced to a bunch of "rules." This lack of knowledge has led many individuals down paths that they otherwise would not choose for themselves today, and most likely not for their children. Even a minimal grasp of St. John Paul's Theology of the Body can assist in the inevitable conversations you will have with your children on these matters.

It is vital that you think about what you really believe about the place of sexuality in human life and why. Your own sexual history will considerably influence how you feel about sexual expression. If you were sexually active outside of marriage, you may find it difficult to tell your child to wait until marriage. If you waited until marriage, you may fear that your child will find you woefully outdated. Or you may find you are much more able to explain the benefits of waiting until marriage by talking about how that strengthened your own marriage.

Anticipate how you will respond if your child asks what you did. Whether or not you answer the question directly depends on you. Some parents who were sexually active before

marriage decide at some point, usually when the child is older, to tell the truth. However, if you fear that telling them will not be helpful to them or your relationship with them, it is not necessary to reveal your own history. It is important that you consider how your answer will impact future communication with your child. Be as honest as you can, not only about your actions but also about your feelings, then and now, as well as about the consequences in your own life and relationships. Children are naturally curious about Mom and Dad and how they handled things.

Carefully consider how you will explain to your child why sex belongs in marriage. It is not enough to just say that it does. In advance, make a list of reasons why you believe sex belongs in marriage. Helping your children understand *why* will help them to make this value their own. Think about how you will react to questions about not only where babies come from but questions about oral sex, masturbation, family members who are not married and have children, and many other issues that will arise. These questions are not just possibilities — they are questions every child should talk about at some time with their parent(s). If you ignore their initial questions, you may not get another chance. They will sense your discomfort and go other places with their questions.

Talk often but not necessarily long.

When something related to sexuality comes up in a conversation, respond appropriately but do not take every opportunity to preach or lecture. If you do, your child will soon “tune” you out. Frequent matter of fact responses that state your values with sensitivity to what they are concerned about will be sufficient.

Know their world.

Pay attention to the environment your children live in. Watch television with them. If they have access to the internet, take an interest in what they enjoy. Given the many sexualized messages in media, you will find many opportunities to engage your children in conversation. Listen to their music with them and talk with them about what they enjoy. When you are in the car, allow them to tune the radio and just listen. Ask them to explain songs to you, objectionable ones or wonderful ones. Something about talking to Mom or Dad about the music often teaches young people a great deal. It gives them a chance to talk about what they believe and it gives you a chance to hear it. Resist the impulse to launch into a lecture. Ask open-ended questions like:

What do you like about this song/movie/video?

Tell me the story of the song.

What do you think of the message of the song/movie/video?

How do you think that song makes women/men feel?

Take time when they want to talk.

Children often ask questions or make comments at very inopportune times. If you are in a public place, tell your child you will talk later when you are alone – and do so at the earliest opportunity. If you are not in a public place, make it a priority to respond as soon as possible, preferably when they ask, because that is when they are most interested in your answer. If you feel you don't know how to answer, explain what you know and assure them you will think more about it and talk more later. And do it! If you fail to come back and fully respond, they will think you are uncomfortable and will be less likely to ask you again.

Take time to celebrate transitions with special times spent together. Growing up with the accompanying body changes is usually a time of uncertainty and confusion for children. Having a celebration says, "This is a good and wonderful thing." Be honest about your own struggles, fears, and discomforts when you were going through the same transitions. Children usually like to know what it was like for you to go through the same things.

*"To maintain a joyful family
requires much from both the
parents and the children.
Each member of the family
has to become, in a special way,
the servant of the others."
Pope John Paul II*

Use correct terminology even when it makes you a little uncomfortable.

Sometimes, your parents may not have used correct terminology and therefore using it is uncomfortable for you. Break the cycle by using the appropriate language that is correct and respectful of the body as created by God. Remember that God created all the amazing parts of your beautiful child and they are simply learning about God's creation. This teaches them to respectfully name their body and gives you an opportunity to teach them about respecting their *Circle of Grace*. Be sure you explain any terms that are unclear. If you show discomfort, you are sending them a negative message about their bodies that will not lead them to respect and reverence themselves and others.

What is the real question?

Sometimes children ask a question to "test the water". But there is a bigger question they really want to know about that they either are hesitant to ask or cannot figure out how to say. Gently listening and drawing them into a conversation is important. Respond to what they ask, always watching for clues that they need more information or reassurance. They need to know that it is OK to ask you anything. You should be their "expert" even if you don't feel like one. Otherwise, they will look for their answers someplace else.

Talk about risk behaviors.

Don't wait too long to discuss risk behaviors like sexually transmitted diseases, broken hearts, pregnancy, and the myriad consequences that result from early sexual activity. Many parents are unaware how very early children are learning about sexuality from their peers and the media. But much of their information is inaccurate and certainly not value-based. Talking with your child about these things will not make them more likely to be sexually active. In fact, studies show that children whose parents talk openly with them and communicate their values are less likely to be sexually active.

Tell stories.

Recounting stories is a good way to communicate. Use the stories of friends, acquaintances, a story from the news, even your own, if you are comfortable doing so. You can change the details and names if you are concerned about them knowing who it is. A good story communicates in very effective ways. And we all remember stories. Resist too much explanation after you have talked about the values you are trying to communicate. In your own life, you have been touched often by others who have suffered by their sexual choices. Helping your children to understand that sex outside of marriage can result in painful consequences is important.

Talk about humans.

When you talk about human sexuality, talk about human beings. As obvious as this may seem, countless stories exist about parents who tried to explain the "birds and the bees" by talking about birds and bees. Children need to learn about their bodies and those of the opposite sex by talking with you about human bodies. When correct language is used, you are honoring yourselves and your bodies as created by God. Of course, all such conversations must happen in the context of the child's age and level of understanding. However, consider

that children often have access to information about sexuality long before you did at their same age.

Create a trusting relationship

Children and teens need appropriate limits and boundaries. These help them to know they are cared for. It is appropriate to know where your child is and to expect that they communicate with you if plans change. They should be faithful to the time they agreed to return and open and honest about their activities.

Discuss together why you are establishing the limit, rule, etc. Always make their safety and well-being the true priority and communicate that to them. Help them to see that limits will help them remember who they are and that they are loved.

As children grow, the respect between parent and child must also grow. Balancing appropriate boundaries and trust is not simple. However, if children feel they are not trusted, they will not be trustworthy. Asking detailed questions of an adolescent after every outing says, "I'm not sure I trust you so I have to check up on you." That is not to say that an interested inquiry like "Was the movie good?" is inappropriate. Children should know that their parents care about them and their activities. But interrogation on a regular basis does not lead to an increase in the trust in the relationship. Tell your children that the trust between you is very special and that you hope they appreciate that too.

If your child violates your trust, do not hesitate to let him/her know that you are very disappointed and that it will take some time to rebuild that trust. Additional boundaries (a more restrictive curfew, greater supervision, or other rules) may be appropriate until you are again confident that he/she can be trusted. This is all part of helping children understand that trust in relationships is fragile and important. It will help to prepare them to value trust in adulthood.

Respect your child's desire for some privacy, especially as they get older. That does not mean that you never go in their room, put their clothes away, or look in a drawer for something. What this means is you do not intentionally "snoop" around. You do not routinely rummage through drawers, closets, etc. You demonstrate trust, treating them as you would have liked to be treated at their age. It is important for your child to understand that you will check all their technical devices, phones and accounts to make sure they are safe.

Connect sexuality and spirituality.

Grow in your own understanding of the relationship between sexuality and spirituality. Help your children to understand sexuality is a basic component of personality in and through which each of us relates to God, self, and others. It is a wonderful gift of God which enables each of us, through our bodies, to lovingly and respectfully care for one another. As your children grow in appreciation of and respect for their bodies and the bodies of others, help them to understand why sexual activity belongs in marriage. Help them to see that waiting until marriage will lead to self-respect, commitment, and intimacy — not to mention a better sexual relationship in marriage.

Tell the truth.

Always tell the truth. Don't exaggerate to frighten them into or away from certain behaviors. If you are unsure how much to say, particularly to a very young child, respond to only the question they have asked. If they want more information and you have taken time to honestly respond, they will continue to ask about what they really want to know. On the other hand, by keeping your first response simple, you may have satisfied their curiosity for now and they may later — days, months, or years — return for more information.

Do not hesitate to honestly explain the consequences of sex outside of marriage. While very young children may not need detailed information, certainly by junior high, young people need to hear from their parents about the negative consequences of pre-marital sexual activity. Do not expect that they are receiving accurate information elsewhere about sexually transmitted disease, emotional harm, and pregnancy. Educate yourself and them. Their future happiness and choices depend on it.

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Theology of the Body Resources

Introduction

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MgXkNya6A0c>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dFw1VjuQvDI>

"Freedom of the Gift," by Anastasia Northrop (Our Father's Will Communications)

Theology of the body basics

"Theology of the Body Made Simple," by Father Anthony Percy

"Theology of the Body for Beginners, Revised Edition," by Christopher West

"Men, Women and the Mystery of Love: Practical Insights from John Paul II's "Love and Responsibility,"

"Body and Gift," by Sam Torode

"God's Plan For You: Life, Love, Marriage and Sex (The Theology of the Body for Young People)," by David Hajduk

"Theology of His Body and Theology of Her Body" (Teens), by Jason Evert

Going Deeper

"Theology of the Body Explained," by Christopher West

"Crossing the Threshold of Love: A New Vision of Marriage," by Mary Shivanandan

"Discovering the Feminine Genius: Every Woman's Journey," by Katrina Zeno

"The Christian Meaning of Human Sexuality," by Father Paul Quay

"Pope John Paul II's Theology of the Body: What It Means, Why it Matters," by Father Richard Hogan

Looking to go deeper into the philosophical, theological, psychological and cultural roots and ramifications of the theology of the body? Then check out these top-notch scholars and speakers as well.

Father Brian Bransfield, executive director of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops Secretariat for Evangelization and Catechesis;

Mary Beth Bonacci, author, speaker and founder of Real Love;

Philip Mango, psychotherapist and president of St. Michael's Institute for Human Sciences;

Gregory Popcak, Catholic counselor and founder of the Pastoral Solutions Institute;

Janet Smith, author and Father Michael J. McGivney Chair in Life Ethics, Sacred Heart Major Seminary, Detroit;

Edward Sri, author and professor at the Augustine Institute in Denver;

Michael Waldstein, Max Seckler professor of theology at Ave Maria University and translator of the definitive edition of Pope John Paul II's theology of the body, "Man and Woman He Created Them."

The Archdiocese of Omaha is grateful to the Diocese of Duluth's contribution in the update of this parent information!

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 experiencing peace, love or contentment when something or someone good comes into our Circle of Grace.

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

- God desires to help us when we are hurt, scared or confused (unsafe).
- The Holy Spirit prompts (alerts) us that something does not belong in our Circle of Grace by giving us “a funny or uncomfortable feeling” that something is not safe. This feeling is there because God wants us to be safe.

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

- God gives us people in our lives to help us
- God wants us to talk to trusted grownups about our worries, concerns or “funny/ uncomfortable feelings” so they can help us be safe.

Recognizing Child Abuse and Neglect: Signs and Symptoms

Author(s): Child Welfare Information Gateway

Year Published: 2006

The first step in helping abused or neglected children is learning to recognize the signs of child abuse and neglect. The presence of a single sign does not prove child abuse is occurring in a family; however, when these signs appear repeatedly or in combination you should take a closer look at the situation and consider the possibility of child abuse.

If you do suspect a child is being harmed, reporting your suspicions may protect the child and get help for the family. Contact your local child protective services agency or police department. **For more information about where and how to file a report, call the Childhelp USA® National Child Abuse Hotline (1.800.4.A.CHILD).**

Recognizing Child Abuse

The following signs may signal the presence of child abuse or neglect.

The Child:

- Shows sudden changes in behavior or school performance.
- Has not received help for physical or medical problems brought to the parents' attention.
- Has learning problems (or difficulty concentrating) that cannot be attributed to specific physical or psychological causes.
- Is always watchful, as though preparing for something bad to happen.
- Lacks adult supervision.
- Is overly compliant, passive, or withdrawn.
- Comes to school or other activities early, stays late, and does not want to go home.

The Parent:

- Shows little concern for the child.
- Denies the existence of — or blames the child for — the child's problems in school or at home.
- Asks teachers or other caretakers to use harsh physical discipline if the child misbehaves.
- Sees the child as entirely bad, worthless, or burdensome.
- Demands a level of physical or academic performance the child cannot achieve.
- Looks primarily to the child for care, attention, and satisfaction of emotional needs.

The Parent and Child:

- Rarely touch or look at each other.
- Consider their relationship entirely negative.
- State that they do not like each other.

Types of Abuse

The following are some signs often associated with particular types of child abuse and neglect: physical abuse, neglect, sexual abuse, and emotional abuse. It is important to note, however, these types of abuse are more typically found in combination than alone. A physically abused child, for example, is often emotionally abused as well, and a sexually abused child also may be neglected.

Signs of Physical Abuse

Consider the possibility of physical abuse when the **child**:

- Has unexplained burns, bites, bruises, broken bones, or black eyes.
- Has fading bruises or other marks noticeable after an absence from school.
- Seems frightened of the parents and protests or cries when it is time to go home.
- Shrinks at the approach of adults.
- Reports injury by a parent or another adult caregiver.

Consider the possibility of physical abuse when the **parent or other adult caregiver**:

- Offers conflicting, unconvincing, or no explanation for the child's injury.
- Describes the child as “evil,” or in some other very negative way.
- Uses harsh physical discipline with the child.
- Has a history of abuse as a child.

Signs of Neglect

Consider the possibility of neglect when the **child**:

- Is frequently absent from school.
- Begs or steals food or money.
- Lacks needed medical or dental care, immunizations, or glasses.
- Is consistently dirty and has severe body odor.
- Lacks sufficient clothing for the weather.
- Abuses alcohol or other drugs.
- States that there is no one at home to provide care.

Consider the possibility of neglect when the **parent or other adult caregiver**:

- Appears to be indifferent to the child.
- Seems apathetic or depressed.
- Behaves irrationally or in a bizarre manner.
- Is abusing alcohol or other drugs.

Signs of Sexual Abuse

Consider the possibility of sexual abuse when the **child**:

- Has difficulty walking or sitting.
- Suddenly refuses to change for gym or to participate in physical activities.
- Reports nightmares or bed wetting.
- Experiences a sudden change in appetite.
- Demonstrates bizarre, sophisticated, or unusual sexual knowledge or behavior.
- Becomes pregnant or contracts a venereal disease, particularly if under age 14.
- Runs away.
- Reports sexual abuse by a parent or another adult caregiver.

Consider the possibility of sexual abuse when the **parent or other adult caregiver**:

- Is unduly protective of the child or severely limits the child's contact with other children, especially of the opposite sex.
- Is secretive and isolated.
- Is jealous or controlling with family members.

Signs of Emotional Maltreatment

Consider the possibility of emotional maltreatment when the **child**:

- Shows extremes in behavior such as overly compliant or demanding behavior, extreme passivity, or aggression.
- Is either inappropriately adult (parenting other children, for example) or inappropriately infantile (frequently rocking or head-banging, for example).
- Is delayed in physical or emotional development.
- Has attempted suicide.
- Reports a lack of attachment to the parent.

Consider the possibility of emotional maltreatment when the **parent or other adult caregiver**:

- Constantly blames, belittles, or berates the child.
- Is unconcerned about the child and refuses to consider offers of help for the child's problems.
- Overtly rejects the child.

Resources

Identifying Child Abuse and Neglect

www.childwelfare.gov/can/identifying

Resources and information from the Child Welfare Information Gateway website about signs and symptoms of child maltreatment, including training resources.

Preventing Child Abuse and Neglect

www.childwelfare.gov/preventing

Resources and information from the Child Welfare Information Gateway website.

This factsheet was adapted, with permission, from *Recognizing Child Abuse: What Parents Should Know*. Prevent Child Abuse America © 2003.

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<http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/factsheets/>

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Circle of Grace

Resources for Leaders and Parents

Websites

National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect, 800-FYI-3366 <http://nccanch.acf.hhs.gov>

United States Catholic Conference of Bishops:

Office of Child and Youth Protection www.usccb.org/ocyp/index.shtml

Technology Safety Through the Eyes of Faith , www.faithandsafety.org

NetSmartzKids.org

ProtectKids.com: Protecting Children in Cyberspace www.ProtectKids.com

www.archomaha.org , (Safe Environment/ P.A.T.H. (Anti-Pornography) resources

Scripture Text

New American Bible with Revised New Testament and Revised Psalms © 1991, 1986, 1970, Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Washington, D.C.

Books

Good Picture Bad Picture Jr. by Kristen A. Jenson and Gail Poyner (3-6 year olds)

Good Picture Bad Picture by Kristen A. Jenson and Gail Poyner (7-9 year olds)

The Theology of the Body: Human Love in the Divine Plan, John Paul II, Pauline Books and Media, 1997.

Unmasking Sexual Con Games, 3rd Edition, Kathleen M. McGee and Laura J. Buddenberg, Boys Town Press, 2003.

Church Documents

The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality: Guidelines for Education within the Family, Pontifical Council for the Family, 1996.

Promise to Protect – Pledge to Heal: Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2011.

USCCB “*Create in Me a Clean Heart*” document and pamphlets

Consultation

➤ Safe Environment Coordinator:

➤

Other

➤ Boys Town National Hotline 800-448-3000

➤ State Child Protective Service