

# Circle of Grace

## Safe Environment Training *Navigating an “Anything Goes” Culture* Grade 5-8 Alternate Lesson

### *Philosophy*

#### *What is a Circle of Grace?*

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

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

#### *Why is it important to help our young people understand the Circle of Grace?*

God intends our relationships in life to be experiences of divine love. Respectful, nurturing, loving relationships increase our understanding of our own value and help us to love others. It is never too early to help young people understand how very special they are and how relationships in life are called to be sacred. Understanding this can help them to protect the special person they are and to be respectful of others.

Adults, as they strive to provide a safe and protective environment, hold the responsibility to help young people understand and respect their own dignity and that of others. A truly safe and protective environment is one where young people recognize when they are safe or unsafe and know how to bring their concerns, fears, and uncertainties to the trusted adults in their lives.

#### *How is the Circle of Grace Curriculum different from other safety programs?*

According to research, one in four girls and one in seven boys will be sexually abused by age eighteen.<sup>1</sup> Many protection programs focus on “stranger danger,” however, up to ninety percent of the time the perpetrator is a relative, family friend or other person known to the child/young person. *Circle of Grace* goes beyond just protection by helping young people understand the sacredness of who they are and how to seek help through their relationships with trusted adults.

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

The goal of the *Circle of Grace* curriculum 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 Curriculum - 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.

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

## *Leader Guidelines*

- A **Leader** is defined as clergy (priests or deacons) school administrator, director of religious education/formation, teacher, or catechist who has been trained to teach the *Circle of Grace* curriculum.
- Every leader should read the Philosophy, Goals and Key Concepts to better understand and prepare to teach the *Circle of Grace*. The Key Concepts review the essence of the curriculum, that God is always present in our *Circle of Grace* because He desires an intimate relationship with His children.
- The time frame may vary depending on size of class, age of young people, amount of discussion, etc.
- Vocabularies with definitions are intended for the leader. The explanation of vocabulary should be integrated within the context of the lessons to assist the young people in their understanding of the *Circle of Grace* Curriculum. The depth of the young people's understanding will depend upon their age and developmental stage. A master vocabulary list is in the administration/director section. The pertinent vocabulary is listed in each lesson.
- If possible it is always "best practice" to have two adults in the room during the lesson due to the sensitive nature of the material.
- Leaders will need to keep a record of what lesson is taught each year.
- Ongoing reinforcement of the concepts is encouraged throughout the year. Hopefully, the language of *Circle of Grace* will become a part of a positive culture of respect, care, and faith that will help protect our young people and help them to know what to do when they feel unsafe.
- Your School Administrator, Religious Education Director, or Youth Minister Director will be sending out a letter to all parents regarding *Circle of Grace*. Lesson specific parent Letter should be handed out as directed. The Parent information is included in the curriculum. Every parish/school is encouraged to provide parent education opportunities both to inform parents about the *Circle of Grace* curriculum and to foster greater communication in families.
- Evaluations for each grade are to be completed and returned to the School Administrator or the Director of Religious Education/Formation. The evaluations will be used to complete the Summary Evaluation that is sent to the for ongoing improvement of the curriculum and for the audit records.

# Summary of the Key Concepts of “Circle of Grace”



## **God gives each of us a Circle of Grace (see below) where He is always Present:**

*Raise your hands above your head, then bring your outstretched arms slowly down.  
Extend your arms in front of you and then behind you  
embrace all of the space around you  
slowly reach down to your feet.  
Knowing that God is in this space with you. This is your Circle of Grace; you are in it.*

## **God is Present because He desires a relationship with us.**

- God is with us when we are happy and sad. God does not cause bad things to happen to us. He loves us very much.
- God desires to help us when we are hurt, scared, or confused (unsafe).
- Having faith may not take away all of life’s struggles. It is because of these struggles, God promised to always be present; providing guidance and comfort in our time of need.

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

- Our feelings help us know about ourselves and the world around us.
- God helps us know what belongs in our *Circle of Grace* by allowing us to experience peace, love or contentment when something or someone good comes into our *Circle of Grace*.

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

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

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

- God gives us trusted adults, in addition to our parents, to talk to about our worries, concerns or “funny/uncomfortable feelings” so they can help us be safe. If a parent or trusted adult is not available or unable to help us, God wants us to go to another trusted adult until we get the help, we need to be safe.

# *Navigating an “Anything Goes” Culture*

*Sometimes young people reveal personal information or details about incidents that, in order to respect confidentiality, need to be handled outside of the group environment. If this happens, tell the young person, “Thank you for sharing that, \_\_\_\_\_. That sounds really important. I will talk to you about that later (at the end of class, at the break, as soon as humanly possible, etc.).” When this happens, be sure you talk to the young person at your first opportunity and alert the administration. Remember that you are the responsible reporter in cases of suspected abuse.*

## **This lesson complements the following Catholic teachings:**

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

## **Lesson Objective**

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

1. Recognize what is harmful to them spiritually, morally, and physically
2. Understand the connection between making safe decisions and our *Circle of Grace*
3. Discern safe choices from those that are not so safe
4. Recognize that making safe decisions protects the true self
5. Discern how they are pressured to be unsafe by an “Anything Goes” attitude

## **Materials Needed**

1. Whiteboard or chalkboard
2. Copy of the Summary of Key Concepts of Circle of Grace for each student (front of lesson)
3. Definitions of Circle of Grace and Discernment written on the board
4. Decision Making Guide and 1 sheet of paper for each scenario (5) for each student
5. Bible
6. Scripture and Discernment Review for each student
7. Parent Letter for each student to take home

## Opening Prayer:

Leader calls class to prayer by asking youth to quiet down and join in the Sign of the Cross. Then say together,

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

## Getting Started

Distribute and review the Summary of the Circle of Grace Concepts in the front of the lesson. Spend some time helping the youth to relate each section of the summary to their everyday life.

## Vocabulary

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

**Discernment:** The ability to define and act upon the difference between safe and unsafe.

*Briefly present the definitions of Circle of Grace and Discernment.*

Today we are going to talk about an “Anything Goes” culture. What does that mean? How does this attitude affect our *Circle of Grace*? Think of yourself as a fish and of culture as the water we swim in – it is all around us. We can be heavily influenced by culture. But, within culture an attitude of “Anything Goes” has developed – nothing is right, and nothing is wrong. Movies, TV, the internet, music and even the news sometimes seem to tell us that “Anything Goes” But is it true that nothing is right, and nothing is wrong? God has created us with the ability to reason what is right and what is wrong. That process is called DISCERNMENT. Let’s look at the acronym D.I.S.C.E.R.N. It will help us identify how we can use our God-given reason in determining what is a safe choice and what is unsafe.

*Write the acronym D.I.S.C.E.R.N. on the board. Distribute the Decision-Making Guide and sheets of paper. Review how to use the guide. Student answers can be written on the Board. The Decision-Making Guide should be used for their discussion.*

**D** - Develop a habit of prayer before making choices

**I** - Influences affect our choices and our safety – Be aware

**S** - Seek advice

**C** - Choose to listen to parents and other trusted adults

**E** - Experience God’s blessings

**R** - Respectful language is a choice and defines who you are

**N** - Notice the results

Now we will discuss each of the letters of the acronym

## **D**evelop a habit of prayer before making choices.

Slowing down and turning to God before making a decision enables us to give some thought to the situation and ask for God's guidance. God never wants to see us hurt by making an unsafe choice.

**Scenario:** Your friend wants you to go see an R rated movie with her, but you know your parents would not approve. Your friend tells you to say you are going to see a PG rated movie.

*Refer students to their **Decision-Making Guide** to help them decide what they are going to do. Write the students' answers on the board.*

*What does God's word say? Read and Discuss: Mark 11:24*

## **I**nfluences affect our choices and safety- be aware

Many times, what others do cause us to just go along. We do not want to stand out as "not cool" and sometimes we worry that we will lose friends if we don't do what they want.

**Scenario:** You are invited to a party where you know there will be alcohol and no adult supervision. Your friend says that if you won't go, she won't be your friend anymore.

*Refer students to their **Decision-Making Guide** to help them decide what they are going to do. Write the students' answers on the board.*

*What does God's word say? Read and discuss: 1 Corinthians 15:33*

## **S**eek Advice

Before making a decision that you know may affect your life, it is good to seek advice of parents and trusted adults. Listen with an open mind then weigh the pros and cons.

**Scenario:** You have a number of opportunities for activities over the summer: Football/Volleyball Camp; helping with Vacation Bible School; hanging out with your friend and his/her family at their summer beach home; taking summer classes to improve your grades.

*Refer students to their **Decision-Making Guide** to help them decide what they are going to do. Write the students' answers on the board.*

*What does God's word say? Read and discuss Proverbs 19:20-21*

## **C**hoose to listen to parents and other trusted adults.

God has placed us in the care of our parents/guardians and our Circle of Grace has taught us to choose trusted adults. They have a lifetime of experience and always have our best interest at heart.

**Scenario:** Your older neighbor who is 16 years old with a new driver's license, has invited you to a football game about an hour away. He will be driving and wants you

to go along as company. You really want to see this game. When you ask your parents if you can go, they express concern over your neighbor's lack of driving experience and difference in your ages. They tell you not to go with him.

*Refer to your **Decision-Making Guide** to help them decide what they are going to do. Write the students' answers on the board.*

*What does God's word say? Read and discuss Ephesians 6: 1-3*

## **E**xperience God's blessings

All decisions are not necessarily safe decisions. Prayer is essential to safe decision making. God is always present in this process and wants us to be safe and trust him. An awareness of God's presence really helps when making decisions. Even if our choice is unsafe, God is present and waiting for us to again be safe. Making safe decisions helps us experience God's blessings.

**Scenario:** Someone who you thought was a good friend begins to spread unkind and untruthful rumors about you. You ask him to stop, but he just laughs. You wonder what you should do about this.

*Refer students to their **Decision-Making Guide** to help them decide what they are going to do. Write the students' answers on the board.*

*What does God's word say? Read and discuss Isaiah 41:10*

## **R**espectful language is a choice and defines who you are.

What food goes into your mouth is your choice. What comes out of your mouth, the words you say, is also your choice. As a child of God, your goal should be to choose that whatever comes out of your mouth is helpful, kind, truthful and respectful to others' Circle of Grace. Studies have shown that using foul language can make you seem dishonest and less intelligent than those who choose not to use it. This is not necessarily true; however, this is how it can be perceived. Controlling your language is a choice.

What goes into your heart comes out of your mouth. The same is true of what you view with your eyes, what you read, even what you hear other people say or sing. If bad things are going into your head heart and mind, what can come out of your mouth?

**Scenario:** You have recently heard a song that you really like. It has great rhythm and beat. You really have not been paying much attention to the words because you are so caught up in the music. A friend asks what you think of the words, so you decide to pay attention. You are surprised that some of the words show great disrespect for women and girls.

*Refer students to their **Decision-Making Guide** to help them decide what they are going to do. Write the students' answers on the board.*

*What does God's word say? Read and discuss Luke 6:45*

## **N**otice the results of your safe and unsafe choices.

There is a chain of events associated with every decision we make. The impact can be safe or unsafe, but there is always a consequence. The effects of our decision-making can

change the world around us...either for the better or for the worst. You may be one small cog in the wheel, but your decisions as young people can help to determine who you are as an adult. We all make mistakes and can change especially when we remember our Circle of Grace and we ask for God's help.

*What does God's word say? Read and discuss Proverbs 3: 5-8*

Remember that our openness to having an intimate relationship with God will allow us to hear the Holy Spirit's prompting to make good decisions.

### **Final Summary:**

*Distribute the Scripture and Discernment Review. Have students complete the review quietly. Bring the class together and discuss their answers.*

ANSWERS: C, I, D, E,R,S,N

### **Closing Prayer:**

*Leader calls class to prayer by asking youth to quiet down and join in the Sign of the Cross. Then say together,*

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

**Amen**



## **Opening Prayer:**

**God,**

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

## **Closing Prayer:**

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

**Amen**



## Decision-Making Guide

USE THIS GUIDE IN YOUR DISCERNMENT. DO NOT WRITE ON THE GUIDE AS YOU WILL NEED IT FOR EACH SCENARIO. YOU CAN USE SEPARATE SHEETS OF PAPER FOR YOUR ANSWERS.

1. Identify the problem. What decision do you have to make?
  2. Name the options. What possible actions could you take to be safe?
  3. Weigh the consequences. Name the pros and cons of each option.
  4. Consider your Circle of Grace and your values. What is important to you?
  5. Pray
  6. Decide and act. Describe what you will do. Explain your decision.
  7. Evaluate your choice. How do you feel about the action you took? Did you make a safe decision? Would you take a different action if faced with the same scenario again? What did you learn?
  8. Does your decision respect your *Circle of Grace* and that of others?
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## Scripture and Discernment Review

**Directions:** On the line after the scripture reading, write the letter of the acronym D.I.S.C.E.R.N. that is referenced.

Children, obey your parents [in the Lord], for this is right. “Honor your father and mother. This is the first commandment with a promise, that it may go well with you and that you may have a long life on earth.” \_\_\_\_\_

Do not be led astray: “Bad company corrupts good morals.” \_\_\_\_\_

Therefore I tell you, all that you ask for in prayer, believe that you will receive it and it shall be yours. \_\_\_\_\_

Do not fear I am with you; do not be anxious: I am your God. I will strengthen you; I will help you, I will uphold you with my victorious right hand. \_\_\_\_\_

A good person out of the store of goodness in his heart produces good, but an evil person out of a store of evil produces evil; for from the fullness of the heart the mouth speaks. \_\_\_\_\_

Listen to counsel and receive instruction, that you may eventually become wise. Many are the plans of the human heart, but it is the decision of the LORD that endures. \_\_\_\_\_

Trust in the LORD with all your heart, on your own intelligence do not rely; In all your ways be mindful of him, and he will make straight your paths. Do not be wise in your own eyes, Fear the LORD and turn away from evil; This will mean health for your flesh and vigor for your bones. \_\_\_\_\_

**D** - Develop a habit of prayer before making choices

**I** - Influences affect our choices and our safety – Be aware

**S** - Seek advice

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**E** - Experience God’s blessings

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**N** - Notice the results

*Circle of Grace*  
*Parent Letter*  
*Navigating an “Anything Goes” Culture*  
*Grade 5-8 Alternate Lesson*

Dear Parent,

*Circle of Grace* is a faith-based safety curriculum used by your arch/diocese.

Today your child had an alternate *Circle of Grace* lesson. We spoke about ways to navigate an “Anything Goes” culture and the importance of discernment before acting to keep themselves safe.

The objectives of this lesson follow.

1. Recognize what is harmful to them spiritually, morally, and physically
2. Understand the connection between making safe decisions and our *Circle of Grace*
3. Discern safe choices from those that are not so safe
4. Recognize that making safe decisions protects the true self
5. Discern how they are pressured to be unsafe by an “Anything Goes” attitude

Using the acronym DISCERN, students looked at various scenarios and using a decision-making guide, determined what does and does not belong in their Circle of Grace. They also used Scripture to determine what God’s word says about the scenarios. Please talk with your child about the acronym and what they have learned to keep themselves safe.

**D** - Develop a habit of prayer before making choices *Mark 11: 24*

**I** - Influences affect our choices and our safety – Be aware *1 Corinthians 15: 33*

**S** - Seek advice *Proverbs 19: 20-21*

**C** - Choose to listen to parents and other trusted adults *Ephesians 6: 1-3*

**E** - Experience God’s blessings *Isaiah 41: 10*

**R** - Respectful language is a choice and defines who you are *Luke 6: 45*

**N** - Notice the results *Proverbs 3: 5-8*

Thank you for allowing us to be a partner in providing a safe environment for your child.

# Grade 5-8 Alternative Evaluation

Date \_\_\_\_\_

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

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

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

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

1. YES \_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_ Young People understand they are created by God and live in the love of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
2. YES \_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_ Young People will be able to describe the *Circle of Grace*.
3. YES \_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_ Young People will be able to describe a process of Discernment.
4. YES \_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_ Young People understand the connection between a violation of their Circle of Grace and poor decision making.
5. YES \_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_ Young People understand that acting safely protects the true person.
6. YES \_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_ Young People will identify ways in which they are pressured to ignore being safe in uncomfortable situations.
7. YES \_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_ Young People will identify what action to take when being pressured or experiencing other boundary violations.

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

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

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