

Circle of Grace

Safe Environment Training

What is Your Motto?

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 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 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 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>

Leader Guidelines

- 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* and 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* Program. The depth of the 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 all lesson plans. The pertinent vocabulary is listed in each lesson.
- If possible it is always "best practice" to have two adults in the room during the lesson due to the sensitive nature of the material.
- The 9-12 curriculum is formatted to be used in two ways:
 - ✓ The traditional way: lessons taught to the identified grade.
The lesson for grade 12 is only to be taught to seniors.
 - ✓ The second way: select any one of the 9-11 sections or alternate lessons to teach the class or group. Remember that all four lessons in grade 9 equal a section and must be taught together. One may consider presenting the 9th grade lessons as a retreat. 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 Administrator, Religious Education Director, or Youth Minister Director will be sending out a letter to all parents regarding *Circle of Grace*. Lesson specific parent information should be handed out as directed. The Parent Packet is included in the Program. Every parish/school is encouraged to provide parent education opportunities both to inform parents about the *Circle of Grace* program and to foster greater communication in families.
- Evaluations for each grade are to be completed and returned to the School Administrator or the Director of Religious Education/Formation. The evaluations will be used to complete the Summary Evaluation that is used for ongoing improvement of the program and for the audit records.

Summary of the Key Concepts of “Circle of Grace”



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

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

God is “Present” because He desires a relationship with us.

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

God helps us know what belongs in our Circle of Grace

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

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

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

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

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

Circle of Grace Vocabulary

Words introduced in Kindergarten

Children of God: All people are made and loved by God.

Circle of Grace: The love and goodness of God which always surrounds me and all others.

Feelings: Something I sense inside myself (e.g. angry, sad, happy, afraid, embarrassed, confused, excited, peaceful, etc.) which gives me information about others or myself.

Grace: The gift of God's goodness and love to help me live as his child.

Holy: Special because of a connection with God.

Holy Spirit: God present with and within me. The Holy Spirit helps me to remember that I belong to God. The Holy Spirit helps me to experience and live God's love.

Respect: Being kind to others and doing what's best for myself and others because I honor all people as Children of God.

Safe: I am safe when my body and my feelings are respected by me and by others.

Safe Touch: Touch that respects others and me.

Secret: A secret is something I know but do not tell.

Safe Secret: A secret is safe when it does not hurt others or me.

Unsafe Secret: A secret is unsafe when I think that someone, including me, might be hurt or get in trouble if I do not tell.

Signal: A sign that tells me something may be safe or unsafe. This may be internal or external.

Stoplight: A traffic light (red, yellow, green) that is a visual signal for keeping vehicles and people safe.

Trust: Being able to count on someone to help me to stay safe within my *Circle of Grace*.

Trusted Adult: A grown-up who helps me to stay safe in my *Circle of Grace* and to respect others within their *Circle of Grace*.

Unsafe: Anything that causes harm to myself or others.

Unsafe Touch: Touch that is disrespectful and hurts, scares, or makes me feel uncomfortable or confused.

Words Introduced in First Grade

Symbol: A picture or object that stands for something else.

Words Introduced in Second Grade

No new words.

Words Introduced in Third Grade

Boundary: The borders or limits we need to keep ourselves safe within our *Circle of Grace*.

Treasured: We are so unique and precious that we could not be replaced in God's eyes.

Violate: To break a law, promise, or boundary.

Words Introduced in Fourth Grade

Social Media/Networking

Blog: An online journal. Personal stories or thoughts can be posted as in a personal journal.

This is a public journal that anyone can access.

Chat Room: The name given to a place or page in a website or online service where people can chat with each other by typing messages which are displayed almost instantly on the screens of others who are in the chat room.

Instant Messaging (IM): Technology similar to that of chat rooms which notifies a user when a person is online allowing them to converse by exchanging text messages.

Location Application: An application used in phones to find a location of a popular spot (restaurant, park etc.). People use the application to check in and it broadcasts the location to all of their friends.

Micro Blogging: This service allows users to give updates about what they are doing in less than 140 characters

Social Networking Service and Websites: These services and websites are used to communicate with (a person) or search for information about (a person).

Video Sharing Service: This service allows users to watch videos posted by others and to upload videos of their own.

Other Terms

Cyber Bullying: Use of the internet, cell phone or other electronic device to send or post texts or images intended to hurt or embarrass another person.

E-mail: Electronic mail. Sending/ receiving a type written message from one screen to another.

Flaming: Sending a deliberately confrontational message to others on the internet.

Inappropriate Material: Pictures or words on the internet that makes one feel uncomfortable, scared, or that intentionally degrades a human person.

Netiquette: Courteous, honest, and polite behavior practiced on the internet.

Personal Contact Information: Information that allows an individual to be contacted or located in the physical world, i.e. a telephone number or an address.

Phishing: An identity theft scam in which criminals send out spam that imitates the look and language of legitimate correspondence from e-commerce sites. The fake messages generally link to websites that are similarly faked to look like the sites of respected companies. On the sites, users are directed to enter their personal information for authentication or confirmation purposes. The information, when submitted, goes to the thieves not to the “spoofed” company.

Pop Up: A term for unsolicited advertising that appears as its own browser window.

Predator: Someone who uses the internet to obtain personal information about others with the intent to do harm.

Smart Phone: Is a mobile phone that offers advanced features like the internet, a camera and applications such as games and special interest information.

Texting: Sending a short text (typed) message between cell phones or other handheld devices.

Webcam: A front facing video camera that attaches to a computer or is built into a laptop.

Words Introduced in Fifth Grade

Media: Mass communication formats (music, TV, magazines, movies, videos, internet, computer games, books, advertisements, news, newspapers, radio, etc.) which provide education, information, entertainment, and advertising.

Inappropriate Media: Images or words, spoken or written, that makes one feel uncomfortable, scared, or that intentionally degrade a human person.

Words Introduced in Sixth Grade

Admiration: A feeling of high regard or sense of awe.

Dream: A hope or aspiration which we imagine will become real.

Empathy: The ability to understand the feelings of another person.

Healthy: That which is sound and vigorous in mind, body, and spirit.

Relationship: A connection with God or others.

Response: Something said or done as a reaction or answer.

Talent: A special God-given ability or gift.

Value: A principle standard or quality considered desirable.

Violation: A break or infringement of another person's rights.

Words Introduced in Seventh Grade

Bullying: Any deliberate aggressive act, by a person or group, with the intent to inflict harm (physical or emotional) on another person.

Bystander: Someone who witnesses the bullying. They can have a negative or positive influence on the bullying behavior.

Cyber Bullying: The use of the internet, cell phones or other electronic devices to send or post texts or images intended to hurt or embarrass another person.

Disrespect: Treating with rudeness, insult, or lack of respect.

Words Introduced in Eighth Grade

Conscience: The gift from God that helps us to know the difference between right and wrong.

Modesty: The virtue that respects, honors, and protects privacy: the quality of avoiding extremes of emotion, action, dress, and language. Modesty respects my boundaries and the boundaries of others.

Morality: The way we put our beliefs into action for good.

Sexuality: Everything that makes us female or male. This includes feelings, attitudes, values, relationships, and ideas.

Words Introduced in Ninth Grade

Exploit: To take unfair advantage of someone/some situation in order to get some benefit.

Forced Isolation: When someone forces/pressures another to be separated from others in order to gain control.

Secrecy: The condition of being hidden or concealed. The habit or practice of keeping secrets or maintaining privacy or concealment.

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

Unequal Power: When one person has more power in a relationship. This can be in the area of age, size, position, resources, status or knowledge.

Words Introduced in Tenth Grade

Boundary: A border or limit that helps keep us safe and separate from another person or entity. Boundaries help define relationships. They are either concrete (physical/visual/audio) or abstract (emotions/beliefs/internal guidelines/rules).

Circle of Virtue: Our response to the invitation of God's grace by cultivating goodness and virtue in our lives.

Words Introduced in Eleventh Grade

Freely Chosen Violations: Every person is responsible for those violations they freely choose and know are wrong. We should never blame or accuse persons who are victims of abuse and manipulated or exploited in unequal relationships.

Moral Responsibility: As we grow into mature adults, we must take greater responsibility for protecting ourselves and others from violations of God's plan for our spiritual, sexual, and moral lives.

Offender: Someone who exhibits behaviors for the sole purpose of putting another person in a vulnerable position to be exploited/abused.

Survivor: A person who not only lives through but thrives despite abuse, affliction, or adversity.

Victim: A person who has suffered injury/harm (physical or emotional) by forces beyond his or her control and not of his or her personal responsibility.

Words Introduced in Twelfth Grade

No new words.

Circle of Grace

What is Your Motto?

High School Alternate Lesson

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 in 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. Identify and understand key Catholic beliefs/mottos and the beliefs/mottos that popular culture wants youth to believe
2. Recognize the key elements of how to discern when a belief/motto is consistent with our Catholic teaching
3. Understand the connection one’s motto has with the *Circle of Grace*
4. Recognize that living one’s Christian beliefs/mottos reflect the true person
5. Recognize ways youth are pressured to ignore Catholic beliefs/mottos
6. Know appropriate responses when one is confronted with inappropriate messages/interactions of popular culture

Materials Needed

1. Index Cards for the Opening Activity
2. Whiteboard or chalkboard
3. Art supplies for the Closing Activity
4. Approved magazines for the Closing Activity

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.**

Getting Started

Today we are going to talk about mottos.

You may be asking yourself “What is a motto and how does it fit into my *Circle of Grace*?”

The Farlex Dictionary defines a motto as:

1. A brief statement used to express a principle, goal, or ideal.
2. A sentence, phrase, or word of appropriate character inscribed on or attached to an object.
3. A maxim adopted as a guide to one's conduct.
4. A short saying expressing the guiding maxim or ideal of a family, organization, etc

Write these definitions on the board.

Our first activity will help us discuss this connection with the motto we follow and our *Circle of Grace*.

Opening Activity: Name that Motto

1. *Divide the youth into two groups.*
2. *Each group will come up with 5-10 mottos that are faith based and 5-10 mottos that come from popular culture. The mottos can be positive or negative.*
3. *Groups will take turns presenting a motto to the opposing group.
One hearing the motto will have to decide...*
 - *If it is a faith based or culture based motto. If they are correct they will get one point.*
 - *Where the motto came from. If they guess this correctly they will get two points.*
4. *Each group is to alternate presenting mottos to the opposing group.
The leader will be the final judge in any disagreement regarding the mottos.*
5. *The points are tallied up to determine the winner.*

Example 1: Motto - “The Lord is my Shepherd; there is nothing I shall want”. It is a faith based motto and comes from the book of Psalms in the Bible.

Example 2: Motto - “May the force be with you!” It is a popular motto that comes from the Star War series.

Large Group Discussion:

Mottos can also be described as an overall theme. Do you think people have mottos that they live by? Does a motto have a place in our everyday lives? Do people have mottos/themes that they are unaware of? Remember mottos can be positive or negative!

Allow for a few responses. Write them on the board.

Let's discuss the Opening Activity.

We are called to follow Jesus, so the theme/motto in our lives should be consistent with His teaching. The opening activity shows us mottos that are faith based and mottos that come from popular culture.

To which ones do we pay attention? How do these impact one's life?

Example: Popular culture motto- "You need to have a perfect body to be desirable and happy".

If one believed this motto, how would one live his/her life? Do you think someone would believe this motto but not realize the impact it has on his/her life?

Allow for a few responses. Prompt youth to identify key responses:

1. *Always dieting*
2. *Obsessed about going to the gym*
3. *Compare themselves to celebrities*
4. *Desire to have surgery to alter appearance.*

Example: Faith motto - "God is love and goodness is always present especially during difficult times." If one believed this motto, how would one live his/her life?

Allow for a few responses. Prompt youth to identify key responses:

1. *Desire to have a relationship with God*
2. *Participate in the sacraments*
3. *Call on God in difficult times*
4. *Ask others for prayers*

Encourage other examples of positive and negative faith based and culture based mottos. Write all responses on the board.

Review

It is important that that young people understand the relationship between the Circle of Virtue and the Circle of Grace. The Circle of Grace is always present and never leaves us. Our Circle of Virtue is our response to our Circle of Grace and can change due to our free will.

Circle of Grace: The love and goodness of God that always surrounds us.

Circle of Virtue: Our response to the invitation of God's grace by cultivating goodness and virtue in our lives.

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

1. **Circle of Grace:** God's presence always; the in - dwelling and out - dwelling of the Holy Spirit.
2. **Circle of Virtue:** Our positive response to God's Grace - this response springs from an intimate relationship with God.
3. **Motto:** We develop or adopt mottos/themes sometimes to help make sense of our lives.

We need to discern if our motto/theme is healthy or not. Unhealthy mottos may lead us into unsafe/uncomfortable situations. Healthy mottos are consistent with our faith's teaching. They usually bring a sense of comfort and peace.

Closing Activity - "Motto" Micro Blog

1. *Divide the class into two to four groups depending on size.*
2. *Each group will be asked to write a micro blog of 140 characters or less.*
3. *The micro blog should be about a positive faith motto or expose a negative culture motto.*
4. *Each group will then make a collage representing their micro blog using art supplies, approved magazines etc. The group could present their micro blogs as poem, rap or in some other musical form.*
5. *Bring the groups back together to present their micro blog, collage or song.*
6. *Ask the youth to give their impressions of the activity. Have the group vote on their favorite. Consider presenting it to the principal to be displayed or performed for the school.*

Final Discussion - What are some ways a young person can seek help if they are pressured to take on a motto/theme that would violate personal boundaries? *Give the youth a chance to respond to the question. Write the responses on the board. Prompt the following responses.*

- Listen to your gut, it is the Holy Spirit prompting you that something is wrong. Learn to recognize the settings and interactions that can get you into uncomfortable situations.
 - When someone pressures you, try to take yourself out of the situation.
 - You can free yourself from unhealthy relationships or mottos/themes by seeking help from a trusted adult.
 - Tell someone who can help you. Talk to someone you trust – parent, professional, counselor, or other trusted adults.
-

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 the 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

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Your greatest desire from me
is my sincere "yes".

Amen

What is your Motto? 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 Circle of Virtue.
4. YES _____ NO _____ Young People understand how having a healthy motto/theme helps them know who they truly are.
5. YES _____ NO _____ Young People understand that healthy mottos/themes are consistent with our Catholic teaching.
6. YES _____ NO _____ Young People will identify ways in which they are pressured to take on negative mottos/themes that do not honor who they truly are.
7. YES _____ NO _____ Young People will know what action to take when being pressured to take on negative mottos/themes that violate their boundaries.

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.