

# *Circle of Grace*

Safe Environment Training

*New Age: Is this coming from God or something else?*

*Grade 9-12 Alternative 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 (priest or deacon) 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. A master vocabulary list of the *Circle of Grace* Curriculum is in the administration section. The pertinent vocabulary is listed in each lesson.
- Leader's instructions for each lesson are italicized. Non-italicized text needs to be presented by the leader to the students.
- 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 to the identified grade.  
The lesson for grade 12 is only to be taught to seniors.
  - ✓ The second way: Select alternate lessons or the retreat to teach the class or group.  
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*. 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 used 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 several 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 needed to be safe.

# *New Age: Is this coming from God or something else?*

*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:**

- God created all and is above all.
- God desires a personal relationship with us.
- Since we are created by God, we have been given free will in the choices we make. The choices we make will lead us closer to Him or move us away from Him. God does not move away from us.
- The Holy Spirit gives us the gift of discernment to help reveal God's will for us.
- God's will for us is to follow in His truth.

## **Lesson Goal:**

Students will be able to identify what beliefs, truths, and practices come from God or something other than God.

## **Lesson Objectives:**

### **Youth will be able to:**

- Understand that God created us to be unique individuals with whom He desires to have a relationship.
- Identify when something comes from God and when something is drawing them away from God.
- Know God is good and wants good for us.
- Be aware of choices and what they allow in their *Circle of Grace*. Choices may lead to a good and safe situation or a not.

## **Vocabulary:**

**Astrology:** Claims that position of planet and stars affect how people behave

**Astronomy:** A science which studies the universe and space

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

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

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

**Crystals:** A practice that claims minerals will promote and support feelings or desires of individuals.

**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.

**Horoscopes:** A practice that claims to have information about an individual's personality and their course in life depending on the positions of the planets.

**Ouija Board:** A board game that claims to be able to communicate with spirits.

**Psychic:** A person who claims to see into the future

**Relationship:** An authentic connection with God and others.

**Truth:** A virtue of goodness which leads us to have a relationship with God and will help us recognize what is safe or unsafe.

## **Materials Needed**

1. Whiteboard or chalkboard
2. Summary of Key Concepts of Circle of Grace handout for each student (front of lesson)
3. Large paper or poster board
4. Writing materials: Markers

## **Opening Prayer:**

**God,**

**There is so much out in the world that appears good and harmless,  
but what sometimes seems good can lead us to harm.**

**Please send your Holy Spirit upon us to guide us to what is truly good and safe.**

**You are good and You created good.**

**We thank you for your goodness and love.**

**Help always in our choices.**

**Amen**

## **Introduction and Review:**

Before we start in groups and discussion let's reference some key points from what we have learned in the lessons of *Circle of Grace* and your understanding of it. (Distribute and review the Summary of the key concepts of *Circle of Grace* handout)

*(On the whiteboard, make a column for each statement: Our creation. Free will. Discernment. Boundaries. Read each statement and question to class. Write answers on the board. This is short review and will help the class prepare for the curriculum that will be presented.)*

1. God created us to be unique. What does that mean to you? *(Key is that we all unique and different and God desires us to have a relationship with him)*
2. God gives us free will to make choices every day. How does God help us with those choices?
3. Discernment. How do we know what comes from God and what does not?
4. Boundaries. Why did God give us our Circle of Grace? Why is it important to have our Circle of Grace and why is it important to know what we are letting into it? *(Setting boundaries even with things that we think are "harmless or "fun.")*

## **Discussion:**

Many of you may be aware of some practices that claim that they can tell the future, bring insight to your life and/or attract you to specific “energies.” Examples of such practices are psychic readings, horoscopes, and crystals. Most of you may think “what is the harm?” or “I do it because it’s fun.”

*On the whiteboard/chalk board write the following topics in columns:*

Psychic. Horoscopes. Crystals. Ouija Board

I would like you to share what you know about each practice and what each practice claims to do.

*Allow the students to share what they know about each practice and write some of their answers on the board.*

*Then share with them what is in the parentheses. (This activity should take 5-10 minutes)*

1. Psychic- (someone who claims to see into the future)
2. Horoscopes- (claims to have information about individuals personalities and their course in life depending on the positions of the planets)
3. Crystals- (claims to promote and support feelings or desires of individuals)
4. Ouija Boards- (claims to be able to communicate with spirits)

Now that you have shared with me what you know, let’s talk about each. *(This activity can be done in a large group discussion or small groups. Either way, answers will be shared with the class. Read each scenario. Pause. Ask the seven questions after each scenario. If the class is broken into small groups, give time for each group to answer each question before sharing)* I am going to give three scenarios for each: Psychic Readings, Horoscopes and Crystals. After each scenario, let’s talk about it.

## **Activity and Group Discussion:**

1. **Psychic Readings:** You and a few friends decide to go to a psychic on your day off. At first, you are little excited to go to hear what the psychic will say about your future and relationships. As the day gets closer, you become anxious and worried that the psychic may tell you something bad will happen to you, a friend, or a family member. The day comes for you and friends to go. You have butterflies in your stomach. Your friends seem excited and not worried. As you arrive, you notice that the room doesn’t have much light, and has many symbols on the walls. The psychic greets you all and asks you to complete a form which asks for your personal contact information and what you are hoping to have answered during the reading. She leaves you all in the main room and says she needs to prepare the backroom for the readings. When she returns, she instructs you all to have a seat. Only one person at a time can go back for a reading. You decide to go first. The backroom is lit by many candles with a table in the middle of the room. The psychic turns on a small floor fan and tells you that she turns it on to block out any noise. She asks you to take a seat. She sits across from you. She tells you to close your eyes and take deep breaths. You feel her grab your hands. You feel uncomfortable.

*Pause a moment and then ask the following questions to the students. Allow the students to answer each question within their small groups. Have each group share their answers. Write answers on the board.*

- What comes from God?
- What is not coming from God?
- Could there have been boundaries established and how?
- Is this a safe or unsafe situation?
- Is it something that you would need to tell a trusted adult?
- If yes, what would you say to a trusted adult?
- Where was God in this scenario?

There are times when we wish we could know the future, so we feel better or maybe prepare ourselves. In our Christian faith, we are taught not to worry and put our faith and trust in God and to live in the present moment. In this scenario, God is speaking to you several times to help you keep safe.

**Isaiah 8:19 -When they say to you, “Consult the mediums and the spiritists who whisper and mutter,” should not a people consult their God?**

2. **Horoscopes:** You read your horoscope that says “You are a person who knows what you want. No force or person can stop you from your desires of happiness, finance, and love. Don’t wait. Go get what you want!”

You become aware of a party that you really want to go to. Your friends are going, and it is going to be really big. You don’t know the person having the party but others know of him. You have heard his parties are the best. You know his parents will be out of town, and he has alcohol there. If you ask your parents’ permission to go, they will want to know if his parents will be there. If you tell the truth, your parents will not let you go.

You want to go, and you remembered what your horoscope said “no force or person can stop you.” *Pause a moment and then ask the following questions to the students. Write the answers on the board.*

- What comes from God?
- What is not coming from God?
- Could there have been boundaries established and how?
- Is this a safe or unsafe situation?
- Is it something that you would need to tell a trusted adult?
- If yes, what would you say to a trusted adult?
- How was God speaking to you in this scenario?

Reading horoscopes can lead us to unsafe situations when we begin to believe them and hold value to what they say. Horoscopes are written to be very general so the reader can apply it to his or her life as seems fit. Horoscopes come from Astrology, which claims that the position of the planets,

stars, sun and moon can affect people's behavior and future. It also looks at the time one was born and the position of planets to describe a person's personality and characteristics. This idea places people in boxes with no individuality and uniqueness to call their own. God created us to be unique! Astronomy, on the other hand, is the study of the universe and space (planets, stars, etc.). In the bible, Astronomy is mentioned. For example, the 3 Wise Man and following the Star of Bethlehem.

**2 Timothy 4:3-4 The time is sure to come when people will not accept sound teaching, but their ears will be itching for anything new and they will collect themselves a whole series of teachers according to their own tastes; and will stop listening to the truth and will be diverted to myths.**

3. **Crystals:** Since you started high school, you have joined school clubs, made the soccer team, and started a part-time job. You love being involved, meeting new people, and always having something to do. You seem to have a good balance of everything. As time goes on, you are feeling a little overwhelmed and you are feeling physically and mentally tired. As you think of all your obligations, you feel your heart racing and a pit in your stomach. You take a few deep breaths to help calm down. You keep telling yourself that you must keep going. The members in your club, teammates and co-workers are counting on you. Your parents say they are proud of you and that everything you are doing will look good on college applications. You have heard that certain crystals claim to help with energy and stress. You have seen many other students wear them and those students are involved in much more than you. You see no harm in it so you go out and buy a few crystals. A few weeks later, you notice that you are not sleeping well, your stomach is hurting, and you are having more trouble breathing. You try to focus on the crystals, but you can't stop thinking of the commitments of the clubs, the soccer tournament, the hours that you decided to pick up at work and the finals that are coming up. You are feeling like someone is suffocating you. *Pause a moment and then ask the following questions to the students. Write the answers on the board.*

- What comes from God?
- What is not coming from God?
- Could there have been boundaries established and how?
- Is this a safe or unsafe situation?
- Is it something that you would need to tell a trusted adult?
- If yes, what would you say to a trusted adult?
- How was God speaking to you in this scenario?

Crystals can be very pretty. It's okay to wear stones and crystals as jewelry, but we cross boundaries when we believe crystals have healing power to take our worries, anxieties, and stress away. When we give them power, we neglect our true selves and tune out God. We become disconnected from our one true Creator who knows us and knows our needs. God gifted us with others, such as trusted adults, to help us receive what we need, especially when it comes to sorting out our life's schedule. We sometimes tend to take on more than we should.



**Proverbs 11:14 Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counselors there is safety.**

4. **Ouija Boards**-You are at a party with friends and some other classmates. Someone there brought alcohol and it's being passed around. You don't like that people are drinking but you have plans to stay the night at this house with your friends. One of the people drinking brings out a Ouija board and wants everyone to play. Everyone agrees to play, but you really don't want to. One of your good friends senses the hesitation from you and asks you if you want to leave. Another person, you don't know well, overhears the conversation, and starts giving you a hard time because you don't want to stay. *Pause a moment and then ask the following questions to the students. Write the answers on the board.*

- What comes from God?
- What is not coming from God?
- Could there have been boundaries established and how?
- Is this a safe or unsafe situation?
- Is it something that you would need to tell a trusted adult?
- If yes, what would you say to a trusted adult?
- How was God speaking to you in this scenario?

Ouija boards claim to communicate with spirits. This is different than praying for loved ones who have died or asking the deceased loved ones for help. God knows when something is not good for us, and that is why we get feelings of hesitation or "gut feelings" when something is not right. Sometimes we may feel pressured to do something that God is telling us otherwise. Believing we are speaking to "Spirits" can lead us away from God and may cause harm to us or others.

**Leviticus 19:31 Do not turn to ghosts or consult spirits, by which you will be defiled. I, the Lord, am your God.**

**"Bringing it all together" discussion:**

- Setting boundaries is important when it comes to things that claim they hold truth, but don't. These things can lead us away or distract us from the truth the Holy Spirit is telling us. In fact, these things can lead us to getting hurt emotionally, physically and spiritually.
- Searching for answers from things like psychics, horoscopes, crystals and Ouija boards, is not truth. Truth comes from God. He created us in His image and likeness and created us to be unique. Since God created us, He knows us and wants us to come to Him. He desires to have a relationship with us.
- We don't need to search outside of God. He is truth and God is in our Circle of Grace, which means truth is in our Circle of Grace. You shared in the beginning how you know God's truth (*review some of the answers that the group shared*)
- We see how giving power to things can harm us. God would never harm us. He wants to keep us safe and wants us to receive help, and he puts others in our lives to do just that.

- God will never give us more than we can handle.

### **Closing Prayer:**

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

**Loving God, we thank you for creating us in Your image,  
yet uniquely different from each other.**

**We especially give you thanks and gratitude for Your faithfulness,  
even though at times we are not faithful to You.**

**Lord Jesus, open our eyes and ears to Your truth.**

**Lead us to seek You when we are searching for answers to know ourselves and needing  
help in situations.**

**We trust in you Jesus.**

**Amen**

## Opening Prayer

God,

There is so much out in the world that appears good and harmless,  
but what sometimes seems good can lead us to harm.

Please send your Holy Spirit upon us to guide us to what is truly good and safe.

You are good and You created good.

We thank you for your goodness and love.

Help always in our choices.

Amen

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Lead us to seek You when we are searching for answers to know ourselves and needing  
help in situations.

We trust in you Jesus.

Amen

## Grade 9-12 Alternate Evaluation

Date \_\_\_\_\_ Leader \_\_\_\_\_

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

Number of young people in class \_\_\_\_\_ Grade-level/s of students \_\_\_\_\_

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 understand how having an intimate relationship with God helps us know who we truly are.
4. YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_ Young People understand that through our freewill we make choices that can lead us closer to God or lead us away from God. The Holy Spirit helps us make choices that lead us closer to God.
5. YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_ Young People will identify what comes from God and what does not by where it leads us.
6. YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_ Young People will know how to set boundaries with things that appear to be harmless at first, but may lead us in danger of emotional, physical and spiritual hurt.

*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 or Director of Religious Education.**