

# *Circle of Grace*

Safe Environment Training

## *Navigating Uncomfortable Situations with Peers* *Grade 9-12 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.

---

<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* Program is in the administration 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.
- 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 an alternate lesson 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 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 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.

# *Circle of Grace*

## *Navigating Uncomfortable Situations with Peers*

### *Grade 9-12 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:**

- 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 steps to be safe in uncomfortable situations
2. Understand the connection between acting safe and our *Circle of Grace*
3. Recognize that acting safe protects the true person.
4. Recognize ways they are pressured to ignore taking actions in unsafe situations.
5. Identify appropriate responses when they are confronted with inappropriate interactions or violations.

#### **Materials Needed**

1. Summary of the Key Concepts of Circle of Grace Handout for each student (front of lesson)
2. Whiteboard or chalkboard
3. Writing utensils
4. Sample Scenarios handout (see the end of lesson)
5. Blessed Carlo Acutis Closing Prayer handout (see the end of lesson)

## Opening Prayer:

*Invite youth into a time of prayer. Encourage students to find a comfortable yet reverent prayer position and to close their eyes. Have them take a few deep, slow breaths in and out while they listen to your words.*

Say: Today we will be learning to recognize how God is with us, even in moments where we may find ourselves feeling awkward, uncomfortable, or even unsafe.

**Heavenly Father, as we begin this lesson, we ask that you open our ears, our minds, and our hearts to the messages that will be shared today. Help us to recognize and trust in your love for us, and trust that we are strong enough to make the right choices, especially in times when it may be difficult to do so. May we remember these words shared in Scripture:**

*Read Deuteronomy 31:6:*

**“Be strong and of good courage, do not fear or be in dread of them: for it is the LORD your God who goes with you; he will not fail you or forsake you.”**

**Amen.**

**Getting Started** *Distribute and review the Summary of Key Concepts of the Circle of Grace. Discuss how each key concept relates to their lives.*

Today we are going to talk about how to navigate through situations that may be difficult, uncomfortable, or even unsafe. Being aware of our Circle of Grace can help us to recognize such situations.

Who can tell us what they remember about our Circle of Grace? (*pause and get response from youth*)

Our **Circle of Grace** is the love and goodness of God that always surrounds oneself and others. Remember that our openness to having an intimate relationship with God will allow one to hear the Holy Spirit’s prompting more clearly in unsafe situations. Having a relationship with God and listening to the Holy Spirit will also help us to live a more holy life.

**Ask:**

- Do you think it’s possible to live a life of holiness?
- What are some roadblocks to being holy?

Let’s take some time to look at one teen’s journey to holiness...

## Lesson Development

At first glance, Blessed Carlo Acutis may have seemed like any other teenager. He enjoyed spending time with family and friends, was an avid soccer player, loved playing video games, and was a gifted computer programmer.

He was born in London on May 3, 1991, but was raised in Milan. Carlo had such a great love for God and for the Eucharist, that he made it a priority to attend Mass every day after receiving his First Holy Communion at the age of seven!

Carlo was diagnosed with leukemia as a teenager, succumbing to his illness at the age of 16. He offered his sufferings for Pope Benedict XVI and for the Church, saying "'I offer all the suffering I will have to suffer for the Lord, for the Pope, and the Church.'" While his earthly life was short-lived, he lived it so well that he is on his way to becoming a canonized saint!

*Read the following statements on the life of Blessed Carlo Acutis. Take time to read the discussion questions under each and get responses from the youth.*

Blessed Carlo Acutis devoted his life to documenting Eucharistic miracles from all over the world, creating a website for people to visit so that "everyone may love God above all else." His website is still up and running to this day! See links below.

[The Eucharistic Miracles of the World](http://miracolieucaristici.org)  
[miracolieucaristici.org](http://miracolieucaristici.org)

[carloacutis-en.org](http://carloacutis-en.org)  
<https://carloacutis-en.org>

*Discussion Questions:*

1. How do most teenagers spend their time on-line?
2. What are some examples of uncomfortable or unsafe situations that can occur while using the internet (use of internet includes social media apps, on-line gaming, and streaming shows and movies)?
3. What are some ways we can stay safe and protect our Circle of Grace while using the internet?
4. In what ways can you live out your faith or share your faith with others on-line?

Blessed Carlo Acutis was known for standing up for those who couldn't stand-up for themselves, often defending kids who were being bullied. Many of the children being picked on were disabled students.

*Discussion Questions:*

1. When is a time that you have witnessed someone being bullied or picked-on?

2. Would you be brave enough to say something to someone who is teasing or putting down another person? Why or why not?
3. How else might you help someone that you know is victim of bullying?
4. If you were the victim of bullying and someone stood up for you or comforted you after, how would it make you feel?

Divorce is never easy on a family. When Carlo had friends or classmates whose parents were going through a divorce, he would spend extra time with them to show his support and be there to comfort them.

*Discussion Questions:*

1. Sometimes when our friends are going through a hard time, it may make us uncomfortable because we may not know what to do or say. Can you think of a time you needed to offer comfort to a friend?
2. What are some ways we can be there for a friend who is struggling?
3. While it is great to be there for your friends in their time of need, we must also remember we shouldn't be expected to take care of everything on our own and that oftentimes more help is needed. How do you know when to ask for help, and who to go to?
  - *It is important that youth understand that they must report to a Trusted Adult whenever someone is unsafe or someone's safety is at risk, whether it is risk of physical, sexual, or mental abuse, risk of self-harm, or making choices that put them at risk.*

It is important to be able to identify our Trusted Adults. Trusted adults want what is best for you; they want your Circle of Grace to be respected. Take a moment and think of three people besides your parents whom you can trust.

- Do these people respect your *Circle of Grace*?
- Do they respect their own *Circle of Grace*?
- Do they respect the *Circle of Grace* of other people that you know?

**Activity: Scenario Navigation Skits** (sample scenarios at the end of the lesson)

Now that we've spent some time looking at different situations from the life of Blessed Carlo Acutis, let's look at other real-life scenarios and decide how to respond in each situation.

*Divide youth into small groups. Each group will create a short skit reflecting a scenario that could be uncomfortable or unsafe. These skits will be performed for the large group as part of the next activity. You can assign each group a scenario from the Sample Scenario handout or encourage youth to come up with a scenario on their own, perhaps from their own experiences. Remind students that their skit must be kept appropriate, and that they can come to you if they have questions. **Note:** If youth are coming up with a scenario on their own, be sure that you approve it and know what their topic will be before they present.*

## **Large Group Discussion/Review:**

*Gather the youth back together for the presentation of the skits. Remind youth that it is important to be quiet and respectful during each performance, and that this is a safe space.*

*Ask the following questions after each skit, allowing time for youth to respond:*

1. What are some reasons that this scenario was uncomfortable or unsafe?
2. What boundaries were being crossed?
3. How would you respond in this situation? What are some steps to either get out of the situation or to make it safe?

## **Final Summary:**

We are all called to holiness, and even as young people we have the power to make a strong impact on the lives around us. We will sometimes find ourselves in situations that are uncomfortable or that will not lead us toward Christ, but the Holy Spirit is always there to help guide us. Remember the steps talked about today on navigating our way through difficult situations and know who your trusted adults are.

And, to quote Blessed Carlo Acutis, **“The only thing we have to ask God for, in prayer, is the desire to be holy.”**



## **Closing Prayer:**

### **Official prayer asking for the Beatification and Canonization of Blessed Carlo Acutis**

Oh Father,  
who has given us the ardent testimony,  
of the young Blessed Carlo Acutis,  
who made the Eucharist the core of his life  
and the strength of his daily commitments  
so that everybody may love You above all else,  
let him soon be counted among the Blessed and the Saints in Your Church.

Confirm my faith,  
nurture my hope,  
strengthen my charity,  
in the image of young Carlo  
who, growing in these virtues,  
now lives with You.  
Grant me the grace that I need ...

*(Pause and invite youth to silently offer their prayer intentions)*

I trust in You, Father,  
and your Beloved Son Jesus,  
in the Virgin Mary, our Dearest Mother,  
and in the intervention of Your Blessed Carlo Acutis. Amen.

## Opening Prayer

Say: Today we will be learning to recognize how God is with us, even in moments where we may find ourselves feeling awkward, uncomfortable, or even unsafe.

**Heavenly Father, as we begin this lesson, we ask that you open our ears, our minds, and our hearts to the messages that will be shared today. Help us to recognize and trust in your love for us, and trust that we are strong enough to make the right choices, especially in times when it may be difficult to do so. May we remember these words shared in Scripture:**

*Read Deuteronomy 31:6:*

**“Be strong and of good courage, do not fear or be in dread of them: for it is the LORD your God who goes with you; he will not fail you or forsake you.”**

**Amen.**

## Closing Prayer

### **Official prayer asking for the Beatification and Canonization of Blessed Carlo Acutis**

Oh Father,  
who has given us the ardent testimony,  
of the young Blessed Carlo Acutis,  
who made the Eucharist the core of his life  
and the strength of his daily commitments  
so that everybody may love You above all else,  
let him soon be counted among the Blessed and the Saints in Your Church.

Confirm my faith,  
nurture my hope,  
strengthen my charity,  
in the image of young Carlo  
who, growing in these virtues,  
now lives with You.  
Grant me the grace that I need ...

*(Pause and invite youth to silently offer their prayer intentions)*

I trust in You, Father,  
and your Beloved Son Jesus,  
in the Virgin Mary, our Dearest Mother,  
and in the intervention of Your Blessed Carlo Acutis. Amen.

## Sample Scenarios

1. You and your friend are at a school sporting event. Your friend says she's bored and invites you to leave with her and drive around in her car. You decide to join her. After she drives around for a while, your friend reaches underneath the driver's seat and pulls out a bottle of alcohol. She takes a swig and offers you some.
2. You and your boyfriend/girlfriend are chatting through a social media app while being apart over a school break. Your boyfriend/girlfriend says that they really miss you and want you to send a provocative picture of yourself. This person promises they would never share it with anyone else, and that you would send the picture if you really loved him/her.
3. You witness another student being picked on in the cafeteria during lunch. There is a group of upperclassmen calling the student names, making fun, and laughing.
4. While taking your dog for a walk around the park, you recognize a girl from your school arguing with a boy who looks about her age. He grabs her arms and yells in her face before storming away. When you approach her and ask if everything is alright, she responds "Oh, yeah. I'm fine. That's just my boyfriend."
5. While scrolling through your social media feed, you see a recent post from one of your friends. It appears to be a picture of deep scratches across your friend's wrist, and you suspect this person has been "cutting" or committing self-harm.
6. You notice that your brother has not been eating much lately, and when he does eat it's only from a list of his "approved foods." He often makes excuses to miss family dinner. He has been making self-deprecating jokes about his body and has seemed obsessed with his new strenuous workout routine.

## *Grade 9-12 Alternate 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 can identify keys steps to take to stay safe in an uncomfortable situation.
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.**