

Circle of Grace

Safe Environment Training

New Age: Is this coming from God Or something else?

Grade 5-8 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.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 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.

¹ 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. 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* Curriculum is in the administration/director 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.
- 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 information 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 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.
- God gives us free will to make choices. The choices we make will either lead us closer to Him or away from Him. God does not move away from us.
- God's truth is in the teachings of the Gospels. We are to live our lives following the Gospel teachings.
- We receive help from the Holy Spirit and the Gospel teachings in making choices that will lead us to God.
- The Father, The Son and the Holy Spirit are always with us.

Lesson Goal:

Students will be able to identify what beliefs, truths, and practices come from God or something other than God. The beliefs, truths and practices that come from God is what helps us be safe.

Lesson Objectives:

Youth will be able to:

- Understand that God created us to be unique individuals, with unique personalities and talents.
- Identify when something comes from God and when something is drawing us away from God.
- Set boundaries with the things that may lead us away from God.
- Know when to seek help from a trusted adult.

Vocabulary

1. **Astrology**: Claims that the position of planets and stars affect how people behave
2. **Astronomy**: A science which studies the universe and space
3. **Boundary**: The borders or limits we need to keep ourselves safe within our *Circle of Grace*
4. **Circle of Grace**: The love and goodness of God that always surrounds me and all others.
5. **Crystals**: A practice that claims minerals will promote and support feelings or desires of individuals.

6. **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.
7. **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.
8. **Ouija Board:** A board game that claims to be able to communicate with spirits.
9. **Relationship:** An authentic connection with God and others.
10. **Tarot Cards:** A practice using cards that claims to have insight of self and the future.
11. **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 for each student (front of lesson)
3. Large paper or poster board
4. Writing materials: markers
5. Parent Letter to send 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 thank you for your spirit who is always leading us to you. In our heart we know
You are the truth.**

**There are many things that appear to guide us to truth, but they only lead to falsehood
and sometimes danger.**

Please God,

**Guide us in our choices so we know what comes from you and what does not,
so we can always be near you.**

Amen

Introduction and Review: *(Distribute and review the Summary of Key Concepts of Circle of Grace Handout)*

Before we start in groups and discuss, let's review some key points of *Circle of Grace* and your understanding of it.

(Next, make a column for each statement on a white board: Our creation. Free will. Truth. 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 are 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. Truth. How do we know what comes from God and what does not?
4. Boundaries. Why did God give us our Circle of Grace, and why is it important? Why is it important to know what we are letting into our Circle of Grace? (*Setting boundaries even with things that we think are "harmless or "fun."*)

Discussion:

Many of you may have been introduced and are aware of some practices that claim that they can tell the future, talk to the dead (spirits) and/or attract you to specific "energies." Examples of such practices are tarot cards, zodiac signs (horoscopes), Ouija boards, 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:

Tarot Card. Horoscopes. Ouija Board. Crystals.

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. Tarot Cards- (claims to have insight to the future and to self)
2. Horoscopes- (claims to have information about an individual's personality and their course in life depending on the positions of the planets)
3. Ouija Boards- (claims to be able to communicate with spirits)
4. Crystals- (claims to promote and support feelings or desires of individuals)

Now that you have shared with me what you know, let's talk about each. (*The leader determines if a large group discussion or if dividing the class up into small groups to answer questions following each of the four scenarios. Small groups should have time to answer each of the questions amongst themselves then share with the whole class. The leader will write shared answers on the board.*)

I am going to give four scenarios for each: Tarot Cards, Horoscopes, Ouija Board, Crystals. After each scenario, let's talk about it.

Activity and Group Discussion:

1. **Tarot Cards**-You and a few friends go to the mall to hang out. You all decide that you want to check out your favorite stores and the brand new one that is called Mystic. As you and friends enter Mystic you can smell incense burning. The store is filled with different scents of incense, incense holders, candles, crystals, stones, jewelry, scarves, books and cards. You see the deck of tarot cards and have always wondered about them and what they mean. You ask the salesperson at the front about the cards. She informs you that each card represents or symbolizes a different aspect of a person's life. She asks if you would like a free reading. You see no harm in it and it sounds fun, so you say "sure." She instructs you to go to the back room for a private reading. Once there, she instructs you to shuffle the cards and while doing that,

ask yourself a question you desire to know. After you are done shuffling, you hand the cards to her, and she pulls 5 cards out. Each card has a picture. She tells you what each card represents and how they may relate to you. Remember the salesperson has never met you. You thank her for the free reading, and she lets you know that if you would like a full reading with 10 cards it only costs \$25. You tell her that you don't have the money. She lets you know there will be drawing for a free full reading. She gives you a card to fill out with your name, date of birth, phone number, email, and address. If your card is picked, someone will contact you. *Pause a moment and then ask the following questions to the students. Write answers on 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?

Asking about the Tarot Cards was information you were seeking. The situation becomes unsafe when you go to the backroom and the tarot card reading begins. This is something that seems harmless but claims to give truth about who you are. A complete stranger was trying to tell you truth about yourself and trying to get identifying information. We must remember that God created us uniquely, He knows us, and wants to keep us safe in our Circle of Grace.

Jeremiah 1:5 Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born, I set you apart...

2. **Horoscopes**-You read your monthly horoscope that says "Planets are aligned and it's time to let loose. It's time to be with friends and do something you have never done before. Let friends take the driver seat. *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 are unsafe when we begin to believe them and hold value to it. That is where it can lead us into unsafe situations. Horoscopes come from Astrology, which claims that the position of the planets and stars affect how people behave. Astronomy is the study of the universe and space (planets, stars, etc.). In the bible, Astronomy is mentioned, the 3 Wise Men and following the Star of Bethlehem.

3. **Ouija Boards**-You are visiting friends, and they want to play with the Ouija board. You have always wondered about Ouija boards, but you have that weird feeling in your gut. You feel uneasy about it. Your friends are telling you that it's just for fun and nothing will happen. Just try it. You remember what your horoscope said: "let friends take the driver seat and do something that you have never done." You are not sure if you want to participate. As you are watching your friends, you have an overwhelming feeling. You are feeling scared and don't like it. You see your friends getting into it, so you just play along. *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 sometimes get those funny feelings. Sometimes we may feel pressured by friends, or even by family, 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.

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? Should they consult the dead on behalf of the living?

4. **Crystals**: You have a math test today. You didn't really study for it because you were texting your friends about the party with the Ouija board. You have a bag of crystals that you were told would bring you good luck, so you put them in your pocket. You take the test, and you feel pretty good about the test. Later that day, you receive your test back from the teacher and you scored 95% on it. You think that you were glad you had the bag of crystals. After school, you stop at a gas station for a drink and snack. Someone taps you on the shoulder, hands you the bag of crystals, and says "You must have dropped them. Are you into crystals?" You reply, "Kinda". I think they helped me get an A on my test." You and this stranger begin to talk crystals. The stranger offers to pay you \$20 for the crystals. You think this is your lucky day because someone is willing to give you \$20 for something you bought for \$5. You take him up on the offer. The stranger asks what school you attend, and without thinking, you tell them. The next day, you notice that the stranger is parked across the street from your school.

- 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 power. We begin to put trust in them when we start to believe that they may bring good luck, health, fortune, etc. However, the truth is that when we do this, we give power to them, and we begin to tune God out. We begin to disconnect from God. In this scenario, our desire to have good luck and fortune blocked out God and put us in an unsafe situation.

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.

Final Discussion:

- **Why is it important to set boundaries? (allow for some responses)**
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.
- **Why do we look toward worldly things for answers/truth? (allow for some responses)**
Searching for answers from things like horoscopes, Ouija boards, tarot cards or from people who don't know us (fortune tellers, tarot readers, etc.) 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*)
- **Why are we drawn to follow our peers even when we are uncomfortable? (allow for some responses)**
We see how peer pressure can lead us to do things that the Holy Spirit is telling us not to do. God gives us freewill. The Holy Spirit helps us make safe choices.

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 and 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,

We thank you for your spirit who is always leading us to you. In our heart we know

You are the truth.

**There are many things that appear to guide us to truth, but they only lead to falsehood
and sometimes danger.**

Please God,

**Guide us in our choices so we know what comes from you and what does not,
so we can always be near you.**

Amen

Closing Prayer

**Loving God, we thank you for creating us in Your image, yet uniquely and 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

Circle of Grace
Parent Letter
New Age: Is this coming from God or Something Else?
Grade 5-8 Alternate Lesson

Dear Parent,

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

Today your child learned about New Age practices and how they can lead to unsafe situations. The class was able to share what they know about the following New Age practices: Tarot Cards, Horoscopes, Ouija Boards and Crystals. After the class shared what they knew about the above practices and what they claim, each was generally discussed in a separate scenario.

Each of the above practices claims to provide “answers” or “truth” about one’s future, and the spirit world. When we begin to seek for something(s) outside of God’s truth we end up in situations that are unsafe for us. We discussed how God wants us to go to Him to seek help when we are unsure of ourselves or situations. He created us and therefore knows us. God will not lead us to harm or unsafe situations.

When we turn to new age practices, we can become distracted from God’s truth and what God wants us to know, and that can lead us in getting hurt emotionally, physically, and spiritually. It’s important to know what we allow in our Circle of Grace and know where it can lead us. As we make choices ask, “Is this coming from God or something else?”

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

Grade 5-8 Alternative 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.