

We share a common goal, to create a safe environment in our parishes and schools and to teach our youth to protect and keep themselves safe in the world they live and navigate each day.

And yet, most people who work with teens dread having to have these conversations with their students. By their very nature, young people don't want to be lectured to about their personal lives by adults. Many teens like to believe that nothing bad can happen to them or their friends, and minimize the caring and life experience of adults around them.

Sadly, our youth are put at risk by these very beliefs. Teens today are one of the highest risk groups for physical, sexual, emotional or psychological abuse, including by their peers.

***Circle of Grace* can help you open the discussion about these topics and lead you through lessons that engage the youth, while teaching God's love for them and his desire for them to be safe.**

Teens can feel very alone, and the realization that God is always with you and loves you more than you can imagine can be a life-altering encounter with Christ for them.

***Circle of Grace* helps raise our youth's awareness of the world around them and provides the tools they need to recognize unsafe situations and an action plan for how to contact a trusted adult and get help.**

Outline of the Program

Circle of Grace provides a wide variety of lesson choices for Catholic High Schools, Youth Ministry and R.E. programs.

- **High School *Circle of Grace* lessons are taught through the lens of a specific topic. All traditional grade-level and alternate lessons must be taught exactly as written to fully meet the requirements of the USCCB for child and youth protection. They cannot be altered or replaced by a lesson on a similar topic.**
- If you have a group with mixed ages or grade-levels, you can pick a lesson or topic that interests the youth or where you feel they are most vulnerable.
- There is a comprehensive approach for youth in 9th grade. Psychologists identify them as especially vulnerable because they are at a time of transition in their lives. These lessons should be scheduled within two weeks of each other or done in a retreat setting.
- The grade 12 lesson on *Theology of the Body* is usually reserved for seniors or mature students due to the focus on sacred adult relationships.

Traditional High School Lessons

- Grade 9** - Communion of Saints, Mary and Joseph
When the Circle is Broken, Action PLAN
- Grade 10** - Levels of Intimacy and Influence
- Grade 11** - When Boundaries Go Wrong
- Grade 12** - Love and the Theology of the Body

High School Alternate Lessons

- ◇ What is Your Motto?
- ◇ A.C.T.I.O.N Steps when Concerns Don't Go Away
- ◇ Modesty: A thing of the Past or Not?
- ◇ Tech Savvy or Tech Safe?
- ◇ *Circle of Grace* Again...Really?
- ◇ Human Trafficking: Modern Day Slavery

*If you have any *Circle of Grace* ideas or stories to share (successes or failures!) or if you have a question or need some assistance, please contact me at:*

Mary K. Maguire, Safe Environment Specialist
Archdiocese of Omaha Nebraska
mkmaguire@archomaha.org or 402-557-5562

Our young people are our most precious resource. They are the leaders of our Church and of the world of the future.

Let us help God protect them
in the way He intended.

Circle of Grace

Guide for Using Circle of Grace in grades 9-12



Catholic High Schools, Youth Ministry and Religious Education

Archdiocese of Omaha

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Circle of Grace provides faith based lessons that are taught in relationship: the student's relationship with God, God's relationship with them, and their relationship with others in their family and community.

Our experience with teachers and youth leaders is that they very much enjoy the discussions and questions that *Circle of Grace* generates with their youth. Teens easily become immersed in a conversation about safe environment that they find relatable to their own lives.

It is no wonder teachers say *Circle of Grace* lessons can lead to some of the best student participation for the whole year, because it shows how our faith affects every relationship in our lives.

Circle of Grace protects children and teens by teaching them to recognize safe boundaries and when a boundary has been violated, and how to get help by telling a trusted adult.

Invite parents to be a part of keeping their teens safe. It is important to respect parents as the primary catechists of their children and youth.

One of the most successful components of *Circle of Grace* is having youth choose several trusted adults, in addition to their parents, to turn to if something happens. Even with a close parent/child relationship, teens may be hesitant to talk to their parents about abuse or dangerous situations they may have encountered.

When teens and parents work together to identify several other trusted adults, a bigger safety net is developed to protect them if abuse occurs.

In addition, there are *Parents First* educational fliers for each high school level to give parents information and resources to help answer questions their teens may ask about sexuality, human dignity and sacred relationships in an age-appropriate manner.

Circle of Grace brings God and our Catholic beliefs into the center of child protection by teaching:

- God's presence and assistance in difficult and confusing situations as an essential component of its high school curriculum.
- a philosophy that can be used at all times that reinforces God's real presence in our lives, respect for self and others, and skills for good decision making.
- the sacredness of each person and how relationships are called to be experiences of divine love.

The *Circle of Grace* curriculum is a safety program that complements Church teaching on healthy sexuality. The focus of *Circle of Grace* is safety, not sexuality, and it cannot be replaced by *Theology of the Body* or any other sexuality or safety programs. *Circle of Grace* lessons must be taught in their entirety to meet USCCB requirements for child and youth protection.

Circle of Grace is very easy to adapt to different settings. You can use the lessons as part of a retreat with a similar theme or use them as the basis for the retreat. Or consider having a parent night on a *Circle of Grace* topic. Invite parents to come and discuss the lesson in one room, while the youth are gathered in another exploring the lesson with their leader. This could lead to a great discussion at the end between parents and youth.

Just like there are many places teens receive faith formation, there are multiple options for teaching *Circle of Grace* to high school youth. Please see the other side of this brochure for more about the lessons and alternate topics.



For Program Administrators and Leaders

Circle of Grace gives administrators the entire program, lessons and resources in one place, making it easy to provide teachers and youth leaders with the materials and tools they need.

An administrator's section is included with resources just for you, including help with implementation, additional program information, common questions parents ask, abuse and neglect recognition, suicide prevention, how to handle a disclosure of abuse by a child or youth and other topics that you can send directly to parents, teachers/catechists and others in the parish or school.

Your leadership is very important in implementing *Circle of Grace* and keeping the passion alive in future years. When you begin, it helps to build excitement by sharing program information in the bulletin, newsletters and social media.

Your teachers, leaders and parents also need to have their enthusiasm for child protection reignited each year before teaching *Circle of Grace*. It is a great topic to discuss at teacher or parent meetings each year.

For administrators, yearly meetings or in-services can be a good time to remind teachers, catechists and youth leaders who will teach the lessons that since we are teaching faith, any lesson or discussion all year can bring forth a disclosure of abuse. This can also be a good time to review how to handle a disclosure with those who will be teaching or leading the lessons. Check for mandatory reporting laws in your state.

You will see that it won't be long before *Circle of Grace* becomes part of your parish or school culture.