

Family Based Catechesis

Dioceses and parishes have used *Circle of Grace* in family based catechesis successfully in a variety of ways. It is best practice to have the children meet separately from parents when being taught the sections on recognizing and reporting boundary violations.

There are several reasons for this. Statistics show that 90% of abuse occurs by people known to the child (parents, step-parents, siblings, extended family, friends, coaches, teachers, etc.). **Being in a separate group with peers, led by a catechist/facilitator, allows children to better receive the age-appropriate lessons about boundary violations, how to ask for help and how to ask questions.**

Even with a close parent/child relationship, children may be hesitant to talk to their parents about abuse. One of the most successful components of *Circle of Grace* is having children choose several trusted adults, in addition to their parents, to turn to if something happens. When the child and parents have identified several other trusted adults that God has placed in their child's life, a bigger safety net is developed to protect them if abuse occurs.

While the children are in small groups experiencing the lessons, it is a great opportunity to have clergy or another leader available to talk to parents on an adult level about child protection, topical concerns or even handling questions about sexuality with their children. This would also be a good time to distribute the *Parents First* handouts.

One of the formats for presenting *Circle of Grace* in a large group event would be to begin with opening prayer and activities chosen from a lesson before sending children to grade-level groups (see above). To end the event, families can join together for a wrap up (like having parents talk with their children about what they learned and help them pick their trusted adults) and close with a prayer from one of the lessons.

Outline of the Program

Circle of Grace 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.

- Children in Pre-K through Gr. 3 and Gr. 6 have multiple lessons. Psychologists identify children as especially vulnerable when they are younger or in a time of transition. These lessons should be scheduled within two weeks of each other
- Grades 4, 5, 7 and 8 are taught *Circle of Grace* through the lens of a specific topic. These lessons take one class and still fully meet the requirements of the USCCB for child protection..

Pre-Kindergarten - Grade 2

What is the *Circle of Grace*?

The Stoplight: Feelings, Touch, Secrets and Safety Plan

Grade 3 - What is the *Circle of Grace*?

Boundaries, limits of our *Circle of Grace* and Action Plan

Grade 4 - Internet Safety

Grade 5 - Understanding the Influence of the Media on our *Circle of Grace*

Grade 6 - *Circle of Grace*: Pieces of the Puzzle

Safe Relationships, Boundaries, Safety PLAN

Grade 7 - Saying "No" to Disrespect: Honoring Everyone's *Circle of Grace*

Grade 8 - How to be Morally Responsible in Today's Culture

Middle School Alternate Lessons

- ◇ Coping with Stress and Pressure
- ◇ Honoring Relationships

High School Lessons

Please see our brochure of helpful 'Guide for Using *Circle of Grace* in High School classes, R.E. and Youth Ministry'.

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:

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I have 20 years experience as a DRE for a very large program which used *Circle of Grace* and was part of the initial implementation. It is a blessing to share the experiences of sharing our faith and our *Circle of Grace* with children, youth and adults.

Circle of Grace

Guide for Using *Circle of Grace* in Religious Education



Pre-Kindergarten through Grade 8

Archdiocese of Omaha

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Archbishop of Omaha
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For Religious Education Directors or Coordinators

When planning for child protection lessons, every Religious Education Director's first concern is "How am I ever going to fit one more thing into an already overfilled calendar?"

Since *Circle of Grace* is faith-based, the lessons are built on Catholic teachings that are already the basis of the curriculum: respect for ourselves and others as children of God, Creation, the Ten Commandments, Beatitudes, conscience formation, responsible relationships and the sanctity of life are just a few.

Circle of Grace is easy for the catechists to teach. In fact, the lessons are no different than following their regular religion lesson plans! The success of *Circle of Grace* depends on the catechist's ability to teach that God is truly present in our lives and desires to keep His children safe. The curriculum does not require teaching any sex education or human physiology.

Many catechists are volunteers and come with a variety of gifts and skill levels. It is important as a DRE that we know they will have the tools they need to teach these important lessons and that it will be done appropriately. *Circle of Grace* provides this for catechists of each grade-level.

There is a strong parent component that respects parents as the primary catechists of their children. In addition to parent letters included with lessons, there are *Parents First* educational fliers for each grade to give parents information and resources to help answer questions their children may ask about human dignity, sacred relationships and sexuality in an age-appropriate manner.

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. **It is good to remind adults each year of our common goal to create a safe environment in our parishes and schools and to teach our children and youth how to keep themselves safe in the world they live and navigate each day.**

Catechists 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 catechist meetings. It can be combined with a reminder that since we are teaching faith, any lesson or discussion all year can bring forth a disclosure of abuse. It can also be a good time to review how to handle a disclosure with catechists. Check for mandatory reporting laws in your state.

It is no wonder catechists say *Circle of Grace* lessons have the best student participation for the whole year because it shows how our faith affects every relationship in our lives. **It won't be long before *Circle of Grace* becomes part of your parish culture.**

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 in its Pre-K- gr. 8 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.

***Circle of Grace* lessons 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.**

Circle of Grace makes your job easier!

Circle of Grace is easy to manage by providing your catechists with the lessons and tools they need to teach.



- **Philosophy and goals are consistent throughout the Pre-K- Gr. 8 curriculum, so you and all of your catechists are on the same page!** The Catholic teachings that are being taught are listed at the beginning of each lesson, helping you see where *Circle of Grace* may reinforce or enhance your current religion lessons.
- **Comprehensive and self-contained materials for each grade.** Leader guidelines, key concepts, goals and objectives, vocabulary, list of materials needed, complete lessons with opening and closing prayers, lesson development and activities, copy masters of handouts, activity sheets, pre- and post- tests (in appropriate grades), parent letters and a lesson evaluation.
- **This means as DRE, you can copy or email one file to catechists with all the materials needed for each grade,** keeping you from searching all over to find the correct parent letters, handouts, etc.
- **An administrator's section is included with resources just for you,** including help with implementation, special needs students, suicide prevention and how to handle a disclosure of abuse by a child. It has additional information about the program, common questions parents ask, abuse and neglect recognition and other topics that you can send directly to parents, catechists and others in the parish.