



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.

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.



Faith, Family and 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 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.

Outline of the Program

Circle of Grace, although faith based, was created for the protection of child and youth. To fulfill that purpose, children's lessons must be taught exactly as written. They cannot be altered or replaced by a lesson on a similar topic and it must be taught each year to fully meet the requirements of the USCCB for child and youth protection.

The suggested grade levels for each lesson are listed below.

If you group students into multi-age groups or children with similar abilities, the curriculum assists you in how to choose the appropriate lessons for your students.

- Children in Pre-K through Gr. 3 and Gr. 6 have more comprehensive lessons because psychologists identify children as especially vulnerable when they are younger or in a time of transition. Parents may be given extra materials to reinforce the lessons at home for children at these ages.
- Grades 4, 5, 7 and 8 are taught *Circle of Grace* through the lens of a specific topic. Although topical, these lessons still fully meet the requirements of the USCCB for child and youth 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 an 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

Grades 6-8 Alternate Lessons

- Coping with Stress and Pressure
- Honoring Relationships

High School

- A.C.T.I.O.N. Steps Needed When Concerns Don't Go Away
- Modesty: What is it Anyway?

Family, Faith and Circle of Grace[©]



"The child is the beauty of God present in the world, that greatest gift to a family."
-Saint Teresa of Calcutta

Archdiocese of Omaha

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Family, Faith and Circle of Grace

If your parish has a family-based faith formation program, you are probably considering how to incorporate *Circle of Grace*, your diocese's safety curriculum, into your program. You may also be wondering why it's so important to do that in the precious time you have with families.

The USCCB '*Charter for the Protection of Children and Youth*' requires all dioceses to teach a safety program to their children and youth each year. This requirement spans all the faith formation ministries and education programs, including family faith formation, schools and youth ministry.



Circle of Grace lessons are built on Catholic beliefs such as 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 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.

It is always an exciting time when parents are involved in their child's faith formation.

We recognize the importance of providing our parishes and our *Circle of Grace* partners guidance on incorporating the curriculum in your program.

Our *Family, Faith and Circle of Grace* lessons can be used for parishes with family faith formation or traditional religious education programs. We invite parish schools, as well, to consider having a *Family, Faith and Circle of Grace* night with their students and parents.

Each lesson teaches three key components:

1) sacredness of the person, 2) boundaries and 3) what action needs to be taken when there is a concern (tell a trusted adult).

During a *Family, Faith and Circle of Grace* gathering, we recommend the model of families gathering first, then children/youth and parents receive formation on safety separately, then gathering again as family.

There are several reasons for this model. First, it gives the parents time to discuss key topics without being guarded because children and youth are present. Secondly, it gives the children and youth a chance to discuss the lesson with their peers under the guidance of a leader.

Children may be reluctant to participate when parents are present. Although their parents love and do everything to protect them, there are many reasons kids might not tell parents when there are concerns about boundaries or abuse.

The reasons can range from wanting to protect their parents, to believing the abuse/boundary violation was their fault. Those who hurt children do everything possible to silence the child including telling them their parents won't believe them.

Parents should know that statistics show that 90% of abuse occurs by people known to the child. This is why the *Circle of Grace* has the child identify trusted adults in addition to their parents.

What you need to know...

Faith, Family and Circle of Grace helps make it easy for you to implement these safety lessons by providing you help organizing the gathering, choosing the lessons or topics and supporting your group leaders. (More detailed help is provided in the curriculum binder.)

- **Philosophy and goals are consistent throughout the *Circle of Grace* curriculum, so you, your children and their parents are on the same page!** The Catholic teachings that are taught are listed at the beginning of each lesson, helping you see how you can connect the child, parent and large group activities. *Circle of Grace* can even reinforce or enhance your current faith formation lessons.
- **There is a strong parent component with *Circle of Grace* 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 level 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.
- **The success of *Circle of Grace* depends on our belief that God is truly present in our lives and desires to keep His children safe.** This is a child safety and protection curriculum, so the lessons do not require teaching any sex education or human physiology.
- If you need to choose group leaders for the students/youth lessons, it is important to know that the tools they need to lead these important lessons are provided in the lesson plans.
- 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 what their children are learning during their session. You may also choose to discuss other child protection concerns or even give guidance on handling questions about sexuality with their children. This would also be a good time to distribute the *Parents First* handouts.
- **The *Circle of Grace* Partners website** contains all of the curricula, resources, administrator and implementation support.

Safety programs for your children and youth may never be more important than right now!

Having parents/guardians present and part of the gathering reinforces to their children the value of these important safety and protection lessons.