



Saint Mary Faith Formation

Circle of Grace



Dear Parents,

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People calls on all Dioceses to provide safe environment education for children and youth. The Fall River Diocese has been providing this training through several resources in the past. Our diocese began implementing the Circle of Grace curriculum within our Faith Formation programs, as a means to supplement the lessons of our primary faith formation curriculum.

These Circle of Grace lessons have been created with your child(ren)'s age and developmental level in mind and they build upon each other each year to address the important areas of safety and protection. Information for each grade level will be sent home after the lesson as a follow-up to help you reinforce and discuss the concepts at home. Listed below are the dates that each grade will be covering the Circle of Grace lessons. Opt-Out forms are available in the office along with an at-home lesson (for their grade) that you can cover with your child(ren) should you choose to opt-out.

Circle of Grace Dates

January 11, 2026

January 11, 2026

January 12, 2026

Grades 6-9

Grades 1-5 (Sunday classes)

Grades 1-5 (Monday classes)

*This is a one day lesson. If you choose to opt your child(ren) out of the lesson, you **MUST** have your opt-out form turned in to the Faith Formation Office prior to the date of that lesson. Any absence that occurs that day without a form will be considered an unexcused absence.*

The Diocese of Fall River is firmly committed to the safety and protection of children in our schools and parishes, and Circle of Grace is one of many tools that aid in this commitment. For questions about Circle of Grace, you can contact us at dre@stmarysnorton.com or (508) 285-3237 or the diocesan coordinator, Carolyn Shipp, LICSW, at (508)985-6508.

In Christ,

Elizabeth MacDonald
Director of Faith Formation

Circle of Grace
Safe Environment Program
Grade K through Grade 9
“Respecting All God’s People”



Dear Parent,

Out of concern for all God’s people and in response to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People, we have a program for the safe environment education of children and young people supported and mandated by

Diocese/eparchies will establish ‘safe environment’ programs. They will cooperate with parents, civil authorities, educators, and community organizations to provide education and training for children, youth, parents, ministers, educators, and others about ways to make and maintain a safe environment for children. Dioceses/eparchies will make clear to clergy and members of the community the standards of conduct for clergy and other persons in positions of trust with regard to sexual abuse.

Article 12 – Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People

This program is called Circle of Grace. It is meant to supplement and be integrated into the excellent programs and curricula for the formation of children and young people in our schools and religious education programs. Circle of Grace aims to equip our children and young people by arming them with essential knowledge and skills grounded in the richness of our faith. This program helps children and young people to understand their own (and other’s) dignity in mind, body, and spirit.

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 children and 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 children 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 children and 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, especially parents, as they strive to provide a safe and protective environment, hold the responsibility to help children and young people understand and respect their own dignity and that of others. A truly safe and protective environment is one where children and 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 Program different from other protection programs?

According to research, one in four girls and one in seven boys will be abused by age eighteen.² Many protection programs focus on “stranger danger”; however, up to ninety percent (90%) of the time the perpetrator of abuse is known to the child or young person such as a relative or family friend. Circle of Grace goes beyond just protection by helping children and young people understand the sacredness of who they are and how to seek help through their relationships with trusted adults.

Please feel free to contact Elizabeth MacDonald at the Faith Formation Office if you have questions or want more information.

CIRCLE OF GRACE PROGRAM GOAL

The goal of the Circle of Grace program is to educate and empower children and young people to actively participate in a safe environment for themselves and others

CIRCLE OF GRACE OBJECTIVES

Children/young people will understand they are created by God and live in the love of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

- *God is "present" in everyone's Circle of Grace*

Children/young people will be able to describe the Circle of Grace which God gives each of us.

- *God is "present" because He desires a relationship with us*

Children/young people will be able to identify and maintain appropriate physical, emotional, spiritual and sexual boundaries.

- *God helps us know what belongs in our Circle of Grace*

Children/young people will be able to identify all types of boundary violations.

- *God helps us know what does not belong in our Circle of Grace*

Children/young people will demonstrate how to take action if any boundary is threatened or violated.

- *God helps us know when to ask for help from someone who we trust*

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Take a moment to review our Circle of Grace.

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 people in our lives to help us when we are troubled or struggling with a concern.
- God wants us to talk to trusted adults about our worries, concerns or "uncomfortable feelings" so they can help us be safe and take the right action.