



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 5, 2025

January 12, 2025

January 13, 2025

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 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*

©Archdiocese of Omaha 2007

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.

Office of Safe Environment
Diocese of Fall River
Circle of Grace
Safe Environment Training "Opt-Out" Form

Date: _____

Child's Full Name: _____

School/Parish: _____

City: _____ Grade/Class: _____

Please verify by *initialing* all applicable statements:

_____ The Circle of Grace Safe Environment Program was offered to my child.

_____ It is my choice that my child NOT participate in the program.

_____ I have received the materials (Circle of Grace Curriculum) from the parish and/or school for me to use to instruct my child on this topic.

Printed Name of Parent/Guardian _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

DRE Section Only

I verify the following (please check the most accurate box):

- I gave the parent(s) a copy of the Safe Environment Circle of Grace Program designated for this child's grade; or
- I offered the parent the appropriate Safe Environment materials and the parent(s) refused; or
- The parent stated s/he wanted the child to be opted out but the parent refused to sign the form.

Printed Name of DRE/Coordinator/Principal: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

- ***Please send original to the Office of Safe Environment and keep a copy in parish/school files.***

The Circle of Grace, the Stoplight and Safety Plan **(Grade1)**

Home Activity Sheet for Parents

Your child's first lesson reviewed the Circle of Grace concept outlined in the previous letter you received about the Circle of Grace curriculum. The Stoplight and Safety Plan lesson is to help children identify safe and unsafe situations/secrets and know how to talk to a trusted adult. The children are taught that God does not want or cause bad things to happen to them, to understand that God is with them and for them even when they are hurting or sad. They are able to identify when someone comes into their Circle of Grace, and to recognize safe and unsafe touch/situations and how to talk to a trusted adult if they feel unsafe or are confused.

In this lesson, we use the analogy of a stoplight to connect a green signal with safe situations, a red signal with unsafe situations, and a yellow signal with situations in which a child might feel confused or unsure. We also talk about secrets. Most offenders use secrecy as a tactic to control the child from telling about the abuse. It is important that the students understand the difference between a good secret and a bad secret. This understanding could be key to them seeking help. Sometimes it is hard for a child to distinguish between the yellow and red situations. When that happens, children need to talk to someone they trust like their parents, leader, or other trusted adult. Learning to be more aware of these signals helps children recognize them as one of the main ways the Holy Spirit helps to guide us.

It is important for you as parents and guardians to reinforce this lesson at home with your child. You are encouraged to talk with your child about real situations in his or her everyday life and invite your child to identify whether the situations are green (GO AHEAD, this is safe), red (STOP, this is unsafe always talk to a trusted adult before acting), or yellow (BE CAREFUL, always talk to a trusted adult before acting). There is a take home "secrets" and "how to ask for help" handout for you to review with your child.

The last part of the lesson is the safety plan. It includes asking children to name and draw a picture of trusted adults (in addition to their parents). Please ask your child to show you this drawing. If your child names someone you find inappropriate, please help him/her to identify someone else. Please contact these individuals to let them know you and your child have identified them as trusted adults. This can be done in person, by phone, or a letter. (Letter-writing is a fun activity you can do with your child.) Being identified as a trusted adult will most likely make them feel honored as well as alert them to your safety plan for your child.

Please have your child return the drawing with your signature as a confirmation for us that you received this information and discussed it with your child. Please call the Faith Formation Office if you have questions.

Thank you for your cooperation!

The Circle of Grace, the Stoplight and Safety Plan

(Grade 2)

Home Activity Sheet for Parents

Your child's first lesson reviewed the Circle of Grace concept outlined in the previous letter you received about the Circle of Grace curriculum. The Stoplight and Safety Plan lesson is to help children identify safe and unsafe situations/secrets and know how to talk to a trusted adult. The children are taught that God does not want or cause bad things to happen to them, to understand that God is with them and for them even when they are hurting or sad. They are able to identify when someone comes into their Circle of Grace, and to recognize safe and unsafe touch/situations and how to talk to a trusted adult if they feel unsafe or are confused.

In this lesson, we use the analogy of a stoplight to connect a green signal with safe situations, a red signal with unsafe situations, and a yellow signal with situations in which a child might feel confused or unsure. We also talk about secrets. Most offenders use secrecy as a tactic to control the child from telling about the abuse. It is important that the students understand the difference between a safe secret and an unsafe secret. This understanding could be key to them seeking help. Sometimes it is hard for a child to distinguish between the yellow and red situations. When that happens, children need to talk to someone they trust like their parents, leader, or other trusted adult. Learning to be more aware of these signals helps children recognize them as one of the main ways the Holy Spirit helps to guide us.

It is important for you as parents and guardians to reinforce this lesson at home with your child. You are encouraged to talk with your child about real situations in his or her everyday life and invite your child to identify whether the situations are green (GO AHEAD, this is safe), red (STOP, this is unsafe always talk to a trusted adult before acting), or yellow (BE CAREFUL, always talk to a trusted adult before acting). There is a take home "secret's" and "how to ask for help" handout for you to review with your child.

The last part of the lesson is the safety plan. It includes asking children to name and draw a picture of trusted adults (in addition to their parents). Please ask your child to show you this drawing. If your child names someone you find inappropriate, please help him/her to identify someone else. Please contact these individuals to let them know you and your child have identified them as trusted adults. This can be done in person, by phone, or a letter. (Letter-writing is a fun activity you can do with your child.) Being identified as a trusted adult will most likely make them feel honored as well as alert them to your safety plan for your child.

Please have your child return the drawing with your signature as a confirmation for us that you received this information and discussed it with your child. Please call the Faith Formation Office if you have questions.

Thank you for your cooperation!

Home Activity for Parents – Discussion Questions (Grade 3)

Dear Parent,

Your child participates in the Circle of Grace program today. Below is a list of the key concepts being taught:

1. Grace: The gift of God's goodness and love to help me live as his child.
2. Children of God: All people are made by and loved by God.
3. Holy: Special because of a connection with God.
4. Holy Spirit: God is present with and within me in a special way. The Holy Spirit helps me to remember that I belong to God. The Holy Spirit helps me to experience and live God's love.
5. Respect: Being kind to others and doing what's best for myself and others because I honor all people as Children of God.
6. Circle of Grace: The love and goodness of God which always surrounds us.
7. Symbol: A picture or object that stands for something else.
8. Treasured: We are so unique and precious that we could not be replaced in God's eyes.

It is important for you as parents and guardians to reinforce these concepts at your home with your child. A good time for these conversations might be:

In the car
Dinner time
Bed time
Homework time

This lesson discusses the precious things and people we encounter in our daily lives. Below are several questions to help with the discussion.

- Ask your child what are five of his/her most precious items.
- Discuss with your child how precious he/she is to the family.
- Discuss that he/she is even more precious to God. We are so precious in God's eyes that HE encircles us in HIS Circle of Grace. It is a holy place!
- Ask your child what would not belong in their Circle of Grace (such as behaviors, words, ideas, objects, etc.).

Thank you for your support of the Circle of Grace program. It is essential and very much appreciated as we strive to provide the safest possible environment for our children. If you have questions please call the Faith Formation Office.

Parent Information Sheet
Children's Rules and Guidelines for Internet Safety
(Grade 4)

- Never give out personal information such as your address, telephone number, parents' names and phone numbers, or where you go to school or grade level.
- Never assume someone is who they say they are. They are not "friends" if you have never met them in person.
- Treat everyone that you encounter online as a stranger, using the same rules for dealing with strangers online as you would for strangers you see on the street.
- Never agree to meet someone that introduced themselves on the internet without a parent's or trusted adult's approval.
- Never send a picture or anything else to someone who requests it.
- Tell a trusted adult if someone sends you a picture or message that makes you uncomfortable or you know your parents would not approve.
- If you come across information on the internet that makes you feel uncomfortable, tell a trusted adult immediately.
- Never respond to any messages or send any messages that are mean, threatening, or make anyone feel uncomfortable. Go tell a trusted adult immediately.
- Follow the rules established by your parents for computer, phone and internet usage.
- Never download or install software or do anything that could jeopardize a family's privacy. If you do this accidentally, go tell a trusted adult immediately.
- Other than your parents, do not share your internet password with anyone and change it regularly.

Action Plan A: _____

Action Plan B: _____

If you have questions please call the Faith Formation Office.

Parent Take Home Activity
Grade 5: Understanding the Influence
of the Media on our Circle of Grace

Dear Parent,

We presented the Circle of Grace Lesson “Understanding the Influence of the Media on our Circle of Grace” to your child. The goal of the lesson was to help the children recognize that all forms of media influence our Circle of Grace. The media can have a positive or negative influence in our desire to obey the Ten Commandments and live our faith to its fullest.

Please choose a form of medium (TV show, Movie, Newspaper, article, Video Game, etc.) to review with your child. Discuss the influence on their Circle of Grace of what they see, hear, or read.

Thank you for your support of the Circle of Grace program. It is essential and appreciated as we strive to provide the safest possible environment for our children. If you have questions please call the Faith Formation Office.

Parent Letter

Grade 6: Safe Relationships

Putting the Puzzle Together

Dear Parent,

Your young person has just completed the Circle of Grace Program. Lesson one focused on the Circle of Grace as the love and goodness of God which always surrounds him or her. The focus of lesson two was healthy relationships and situations. Lesson three was about boundaries. The goal of lesson three was: “Young people will be better able to distinguish between healthy and unhealthy relationships.” The activities and discussion will help them be better able to recognize safe and unsafe situations, acknowledge and respect the boundaries surrounding their own Circle of Grace and those of others, and identify actions or words that violate one’s Circle of Grace.

Your young person was given the following guidelines to help him or her decide whether a relationship or situation is safe or unsafe.

1. How long have you known this person?
2. Is your knowledge of this person face-to-face?
3. How much do you know about this person?
4. How have you verified what this person has told you about themselves?
5. What do your feelings (instincts) tell you about this person or situation?
6. How many things do you have in common with this person?
7. Is the relationship respectful of your boundaries and the other person’s?
8. Are you able to say, “No,” to this person?
9. Does this person’s age or status influence your behavior in the relationship?
10. Does this person ever ask you to keep secrets?

Your young person also learned about potentially unsafe and dangerous situations and relationships. Ask your young person what they learned after Lesson Three. Your ongoing conversations with your young person are very important. It is important to reinforce that they can come to you with any situation and that you are willing to talk with them and help them. In Lesson Four, they will learn that they are to talk to a trusted adult about any situation that confuses them or is unsafe.

Caution your young person:

1. Not to reveal personal information on the internet. That includes full names, school, grade, address, phone, sports teams, church groups, etc. Perpetrators try to identify young people by learning about their activities and schedule patterns.
2. To let you know about any time they feel bullied. Help them understand how to respond to bullies, whether that is on social media, a text, at school, or in another setting.
3. To be sensitive to comments that devalue or criticize others for their physical attributes, race, religion, economic status, etc. Model appropriate respectful behavior yourself. Watch the jokes you tell, your children do.
4. To avoid unsafe situations involving alcohol, drugs, and smoking.
5. To be cautious about situations in which they are alone with an adult.

Unsafe Behaviors

The young people will NOT be presented the following information about unsafe and potentially dangerous behaviors. They will be asked to talk with you about it. We encourage you to discuss this with your young person.

Cutting is a form of self-harm in which a young person cuts or scratches themselves deep enough that it may bleed. This cutting can be on their wrists, arms, legs or stomachs, places where they can hide the scars that will form. Cutting can be a symptom of deeper emotional issues so it is important to seek professional help for your young person. Cutting can lead to suicide ideation. If you have any concerns about this call the Suicide Prevention Lifeline (1-800-273-8255, Boys Town National Hotline 10800-273-8255 or text VOICE to 20121 Suicide is the third leading cause of death in ages 10-14 and the second leading cause for those 15-34 years old. Someone dies of suicide every 13 minutes.

Sexting is when someone sends sexually suggestive photos/texts to another person by way of the cell phone or social networking site. This behavior has significant legal and emotional consequences.

In recent years, both nationally and locally, young people have died playing asphyxiation games (also known as the choking game and the fainting game) either alone or in groups.

There is also a prevalence of potentially dangerous behaviors including genital contact (Rainbow Parties, Chicken Games). In these situations, problem-solve with your young people the appropriate ways to remove themselves from this environment (e.g. I have to call my mom/dad now, I have to go to the bathroom, I don't feel good, etc.).

Nexflix and Chill is an internet slang term used as a invitation to watch Netflix together and have sex.

Thank you for your support of the Circle of Grace Program. It is essential and appreciated as we strive to provide the safest possible environment for our young people. If you have questions please call the Faith Formation Office.

Parent Take Home Activity
Grade 7: Saying No to Disrespect
Honoring Everyone's Circle of Grace

Dear Parent,

We presented the Circle of Grace Lesson "SAYING NO to Disrespect, Honoring Everyone's Circle of Grace" to your Child. The goal of the lesson was to help the youth understand and combat negative behavior especially bullying. Your child has received a Circle of Grace Code of Conduct contract. Please sign and review with your child. The contract should be sent back to class the following week.

Thank you for your support of the Circle of Grace program. It is essential and appreciated as we strive to provide the safest possible environment for our children.

Honoring Relationships:
Different Boundaries for Different Relationships
Middle School Alternate Circle of Grace Lesson Parent Letter

Dear Parent,

Your young person has just completed the “Honoring Relationships: Different Boundaries for Different Relationships” alternate lesson in the Circle of Grace Program. The lesson describes how the type of relationship (family, friends school) many times determines our behavior. Through discussion and activities, the lesson assists your child in understanding the difference between healthy and unhealthy behaviors within each type of relationships. It also helps them to identify how to respond when a behavior is unhealthy.

The lesson encourages them to talk to a trusted adult when this occurs.

Many times young people have a difficult time discerning unhealthy/unsafe interactions via social media and technology including texting on phones. Although this was not specifically reviewed in this lesson we believed it is important to provide important information that can help keep their children safe. We encourage you to review the below questions with your child to help them discern their interactions with individuals via social media, networking, texting, gaming or other ways to communicating through technology. Many times young people will consider individuals they only met through technology as “friends”.

1. How long have you known this person?
2. Is your knowledge of this person face-to-face?
3. How much do you know about this person?
4. How have you verified what this person has told you about themselves?
5. What do your feelings (instincts) tell you about this person or situation?
6. How many things do you have in common with this person?
7. Is the relationship respectful of your boundaries and the other person's?
8. Are you able to say, “No,” to this person?
9. Does this person's age or status influence your behavior in the relationship?
10. Does this person ever ask you to keep secrets?

Caution your young person:

1. Not to reveal personal information on the internet. That includes full names, school, grade, address, phone, sports teams, church groups, etc. Perpetrators try to identify young people by learning about their activities and schedule patterns.
2. To let you know about any time they feel bullied. Help them understand how to respond to bullies, whether that is on social media, a text, at school, or in another setting.
3. To be sensitive to comments that devalue or criticize others for their physical attributes, race, religion, economic status, etc. Model appropriate respectful behavior yourself. Watch the jokes you tell, your children do.
4. To avoid unsafe situations involving alcohol, drugs, and smoking.
5. To be cautious about situations in which they are alone with an adult.

Unsafe Behaviors

We wanted to make you aware of the below information NOT included in the lesson but important for parents to know. We encourage you to discuss this with your young person.

Cutting is a form of self-harm in which a young person cuts or scratches themselves deep enough that it may bleed. This cutting can be on their wrists, arms, legs or stomachs, places where they can hide the scars that will form. Cutting can be a symptom of deeper emotional issues so it is important to seek professional help for your young person. Cutting can lead to suicide ideation. If you have any concerns about this call the Suicide Prevention Lifeline (1-800-273-8255, Boys Town National Hotline 10800-273-8255 or text VOICE to 20121 Suicide is the third leading cause of death in ages 10-14 and the second leading cause for those 15-34 years old. Someone dies of suicide every 13 minutes.

Sexting is when someone sends sexually suggestive photos/texts to another person by way of the cell phone or social networking site. This behavior has significant legal and emotional consequences.

In recent years, both nationally and locally, young people have died playing asphyxiation games (also known as the choking game and the fainting game) either alone or in groups.

There is also a prevalence of potentially dangerous behaviors including genital contact (Rainbow Parties, Chicken Games). In these situations, problem-solve with your young people the appropriate ways to remove themselves from this environment (e.g. I have to call my mom/dad now, I have to go to the bathroom, I don't feel good, etc.).

Netflix and Chill is an internet slang term used as an invitation to watch Netflix together and have sex.

Thank you for your support of the Circle of Grace Program. It is essential and appreciated as we strive to provide the safest possible environment for our young people. If you have questions please call the Faith Formation Office.

Coping with Stress and Pressure: Who are you Leaning On?

Middle School Alternate Circle of Grace Lesson Parent Letter

Dear Parent,

Your young person has just completed the “Coping with Stress and Pressure” alternate lesson in the Circle of Grace Program. The lesson describes the difference between stress and pressure. Through discussion and activities, the lesson assists your child in understanding the difference between healthy and unhealthy stress and pressure. It also helps them to identify how to respond when the stress or pressure is unhealthy.

The lesson encourages them to talk to a trusted adult when feeling stress or pressure. Many times young people feel stress/pressure in unhealthy/unsafe interactions via social media and technology including texting on phones. Although this was not specifically reviewed in this lesson we believed it is important to provide important information that can help keep their children safe. We encourage you to review the below questions with your child to help them discern their interactions with individuals via social media, networking, texting, gaming or other ways to communicate through technology. Many times young people will consider individuals they only met through technology as “friends”.

1. How long have you known this person?
2. Is your knowledge of this person face-to-face?
3. How much do you know about this person?
4. How have you verified what this person has told you about themselves?
5. What do your feelings (instincts) tell you about this person or situation?
6. How many things do you have in common with this person?
7. Is the relationship respectful of your boundaries and the other person's?
8. Are you able to say, “No,” to this person?
9. Does this person's age or status influence your behavior in the relationship?
10. Does this person ever ask you to keep secrets?

Caution your young person:

1. Not to reveal personal information on the internet. That includes full names, school, grade, address, phone, sports teams, church groups, etc. Perpetrators try to identify young people by learning about their activities and schedule patterns.
2. To let you know about any time they feel bullied. Help them understand how to respond to bullies, whether that is on social media, a text, at school, or in another setting.
3. To be sensitive to comments that devalue or criticize others for their physical attributes, race, religion, economic status, etc. Model appropriate respectful behavior yourself. Watch the jokes you tell, your children do.
4. To avoid unsafe situations involving alcohol, drugs, and smoking.
5. To be cautious about situations in which they are alone with an adult.

Unsafe Behaviors

We wanted to make you aware of the below information NOT included in the lesson but important for parents to know. We encourage you to discuss this with your young person.

Cutting is a form of self-harm in which a young person cuts or scratches themselves deep enough that it may bleed. This cutting can be on their wrists, arms, legs or stomachs, places where they can hide the scars that

will form. Cutting can be a symptom of deeper emotional issues so it is important to seek professional help for your young person. Cutting can lead to suicide ideation. If you have any concerns about this call the Suicide Prevention Lifeline (1-800-273-8255, Boys Town National Hotline 10800-273-8255 or text VOICE to 20121 Suicide is the third leading cause of death in ages 10-14 and the second leading cause for those 15-34 years old. Someone dies of suicide every 13 minutes.

Sexting is when someone sends sexually suggestive photos/texts to another person by way of the cell phone or social networking site. This behavior has significant legal and emotional consequences.

In recent years, both nationally and locally, young people have died playing asphyxiation games (also known as the choking game and the fainting game) either alone or in groups. There is also a prevalence of potentially dangerous behaviors including genital contact (Rainbow Parties, Chicken Games). In these situations, problem-solve with your young people the appropriate ways to remove themselves from this environment (e.g. I have to call my mom/dad now, I have to go to the bathroom, I don't feel good, etc.).

Nexflix and Chill is an internet slang term used as an invitation to watch Netflix together and have sex.

Thank you for your support of the Circle of Grace Program. It is essential and appreciated as we strive to provide the safest possible environment for our young people. If you have questions please call the Faith Formation Office.

Parent Take Home Activity
Grade 8: How to be Morally Responsible in Today's Culture

Dear Parent,

We presented the Circle of Grace Lesson” How To Be Morally Responsible in Today's Culture” to your child.

The goal of the lesson was to help the children recognize how popular culture can influence our Circle of Grace. Popular culture can have a positive or negative influence in our desire to obey the Ten Commandments and live our faith to its fullest.

Please complete and sign the Ten Commandment worksheet with your child. The worksheet needs to be returned at your child's next session.

Thank you for your support of the Circle of Grace program. It is essential and appreciated as we strive to provide the safest possible environment for our children. If you have questions please call the Faith Formation Office.