

Circle of Grace

Safe Environment Training

Coping with Stress and Pressure

Grade 5- Lesson Plan

Philosophy

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

According to research, one in four girls and one in seven boys will be sexually abused by age eighteen.¹ Many protection programs focus on “stranger danger,” however, up to ninety percent of the time the perpetrator is a relative, family friend or other person known to the child/young person. *Circle of Grace* goes beyond just protection by helping children understand the sacredness of who they are and how to seek help through their relationships with trusted adults.

Goal of the Circle of Grace Curriculum - Grades K-12

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

Objectives of the Circle of Grace Curriculum- Grades K-12

- Children/Young People will understand they are created by God and live in the love of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- Children/Young People will be able to describe the *Circle of Grace* which God gives each of us.
- Children/Young People will be able to identify, discern and maintain appropriate physical, emotional, spiritual, and sexual boundaries.
- Children/Young People will be able to identify all types of boundary violations.
- Children/Young People will demonstrate how to take action if any boundary is threatened or violated.

¹ www.usccb.org, or <http://nccanch.acf.hhs.gov>

Grade 5 Leader Guidelines

- A **Leader** is defined as clergy (priest or deacon) school administrator, director of religious education/formation, teacher, or catechist who has been trained to teach the *Circle of Grace* Curriculum.
- Every leader should read the Philosophy, Goals and Key Concepts to better understand and prepare to teach the *Circle of Grace*. The Key Concepts review the essence of the curriculum, that God is always present in our *Circle of Grace* because He desires an intimate relationship with His children.
- The time frame may vary depending on size of class, age of children, amount of discussion, etc.
- Vocabularies with definitions are intended for the leader. The explanation of vocabulary should be integrated within the context of the lessons to assist the children in their understanding of the *Circle of Grace Curriculum*. The depth of the children's understanding will depend upon their age and developmental stage. A master vocabulary list of the *Circle of Grace* Program is included in the administration/director section. The pertinent vocabulary is listed in each lesson.
- Leader's instructions for each lesson are italicized. Non-italicized text needs to be presented by the leader to the students.
- If possible, it is always "best practice" to have two adults in the room during the lesson due to the sensitive nature of the material.
- There are five alternative lessons plus a retreat available for grades 5-8 on the Circle of Grace Partner's website.
- Ongoing reinforcement of the concepts is encouraged throughout the year. Hopefully, the language of *Circle of Grace* will become a part of a positive culture of respect, care, and faith that will help protect our children and help them to know what to do when they feel unsafe.
- Your School Administrator or Religious Education Director will be sending out a letter to all parents regarding *Circle of Grace*. Lesson specific parent information should be handed out as directed. Parent information is included in the curriculum. Every parish/school is encouraged to provide parent education opportunities both to inform parents about the *Circle of Grace* curriculum and to foster greater communication in families.
- Evaluations for each grade are to be completed and returned to the School Administrator or the Director of Religious Education/Formation. The evaluations will be used to complete the Summary Evaluation that is used for ongoing improvement of the curriculum and for the audit records.

Summary of the Key Concepts of “Circle of Grace”



God gives each of us a Circle of Grace (see below) where He is always Present:

*Raise your hands above your head, then bring your outstretched arms slowly down.
Extend your arms in front of you and then behind you embrace all of the space around you
slowly reach down to your feet.
Knowing that **God** is in this space with you. This is your **Circle of Grace**; you are in it.*

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 several trusted adults, in addition to our parents, to talk to about our worries, concerns or “funny/ uncomfortable feelings” so they can help us be safe. If a parent or trusted adult is not available or unable to help us, God wants us to go to another trusted adult until we get the help needed to be safe.

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

Sometimes children reveal personal information or details about incidents that, in order to respect confidentiality, need to be handled outside of the classroom. If this happens, tell the child, "Thank you for sharing that, _____. That sounds really important. I will talk to you about that later" (at the end of class, at the break, as soon as humanly possible, etc.) When this happens, be sure you talk to the child at your first opportunity and alert the administration. Remember that you are the responsible reporter in cases of suspected abuse.

This lesson complements the following Catholic teachings:

- Jesus' life as a model for our own
- God calls us to be responsible for our actions
- Jesus modeled how we should serve others
- God teaches us to lead healthy lives and make good choices
- God has made each of us in His image
- Our conscience helps us to know what is right and do what we believe is right
- God calls us to be responsible for our own actions

Lesson Goal

Students will be able to identify how to cope with stress and pressure and how these can contribute to unsafe behaviors/situations.

Lesson Objectives

Young People will be able to:

1. Understand the difference between stress and pressure
2. Understand that stress usually comes from within. It can be healthy or unhealthy
3. Understand that pressure is usually applied from an external source. It can be healthy or unhealthy.
4. Define priorities and manage healthy boundaries
5. Recognize that a prayer-filled life is an antidote for stress
6. Identify a trusted adult they can talk to if someone is pressuring them to ignore their conscience

Vocabulary *(Students are not expected to memorize vocabulary)*

1. **Boundary**: The border or limit we need to keep ourselves safe within our *Circle of Grace*.
2. **Stress**: An internal state of mental/emotional strain resulting from adverse or demanding circumstances
3. **Pressure**: Typically applied from an external source (peers, teachers, family, etc.) in a demand for high performance or healthy/unhealthy behavior,

4. **Circle of Grace:** The love and goodness of God which always surrounds me and all others.
5. **Safe Secret:** A secret is safe when it does not hurt oneself or others.
6. **Unsafe Secret:** A secret is unsafe when one thinks that someone, including oneself, might be hurt or get in trouble if one does not tell. A secret is always unsafe if someone states you are not to tell your parents or trusted adults.
7. **Trust:** Being able to count on someone to help one to stay safe within one's *Circle of Grace*.
8. **Trusted Adult:** A grown-up who helps one to stay safe in their *Circle of Grace* and to respect others within their *Circle of Grace*.

Materials Needed:

1. **Circle of Grace Logo** (to be provided)
2. **Summary of Key Concepts of Circle of Grace** (to be provided)
3. **Blackboard/chalk or Whiteboard/markers** (provided in classroom)
4. **Paper or newsprint, 1-2 sheets per student** (obtain from RE workroom)
5. **Remember Faith Makes a Difference** worksheet, 1 per student (to be provided)
6. **Markers, pens or other writing utensils** (found in the classroom, your class bin or grab some from the RE workroom as needed)
7. **Parent Letter**, 1 per student to be sent home at the end of class (copies to be provided)

Opening Prayer

Leader calls class to prayer by asking youth to quiet down and join in the Sign of the Cross. Then say together,

God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change;
courage to change the things I can;
and wisdom to know the difference.

Help me live one day at a time, enjoying each moment.

Help me to realize hardships can lead to peace and You are always by my side and will make things alright.

In Jesus' Name. Amen.

It is important to begin the lesson by explaining that God does not want or cause bad things to happen. There will be children who may have already experienced unsafe or hurtful situations. It is important to reinforce it is not their fault. We want our children to understand that God is with them and for them even when they are hurting or sad.

Getting Started

Discuss the difference between stress and pressure. Stress is usually internal and can happen when there are too many demands on time, energy, etc., and not enough resources to meet those demands. Pressure usually comes from an external source with a demand for high performance or enticement to healthy/unhealthy behaviors.

What can be done when feeling stressed?

- Exercise and/or go for a walk. It will get the endorphins in motion, reducing stress
- Talk to a trusted adult about ways to reduce feelings of stress
- Pray and meditate with scripture

Responding to Stress vs. Pressure:

In most stressful situations, stress reduction or feeling less overwhelmed is a goal, but in most pressure situations, performing successfully or engaging in healthy/unhealthy behavior is a goal.

What can be done when feeling pressured?

- Realize that all pressure is not necessarily bad. Pressure that comes from parents and teachers may actually assist in reaching potential
- Realize that sometimes pressure can encourage unhealthy behavior that is not in concert with our Circle of Grace
- Talk to a trusted adult about the pressure felt
- Reduce some activity overload
- Pay attention to the workings of the Holy Spirit in our lives

Opening Activity

Write these four categories on the board: **academics, athletics, peers and family.**

Divide the students in small groups and give them newsprint paper. Ask each group to name some healthy expectations and unhealthy expectations from the above four groups and name an action that is needed for each. Try to discover at least two healthy and unhealthy situations for each of the four categories. As each group member gives an example, have it written down on the newsprint to discuss later. *Example- peer expectations:*

- *Unhealthy: A friend pressures you to go to a party that you know will have alcohol. What do you do?*
- *Healthy: A friend says a group of them are going bowling and asks if you are able to join them. What do you do?*

Large Group Discussion:

Discuss the questions below with the youth.

- What types of situations did your group come up with?
- Were they unhealthy or healthy?
- Were any of the unhealthy situations also unsafe? Why?
- Did you see more healthy or unhealthy situations?
- In which category was it easier to find healthy situations?
- In which category was it easier to find unhealthy situations?
- Did the student seem to have more stress or pressure about academics, athletics, peers, or family? Why or why not?

Discuss any situations that students might have identified as healthy that were actually unhealthy and vice versa. What were their responses (actions) to each of the situations?

Why did they choose those actions?

Were they healthy or unhealthy actions to each pressure or stressful situation?

Who Do You Lean On?

- *Review the definition of “Trusted Adult.”*
- *Discuss what adult they can talk to when feeling pressured by others to do things that are unhealthy or unsafe.*
- *Discuss what can be done when they feel pressured by others to do things that are unhealthy or unsafe.*
- *Discuss how their faith and their Circle of Grace help with stress and pressure?*

Allow for some answers.

Remember Faith Makes a Difference: *(Provide the handout to discuss in the class then take home)*

Let’s review your handout. Have you done any of these before? Can you think of additional ones?

Take the Next Right Step (Action Plan):

Have students write a **1-2-3 Plan** to assist when they are stressed or pressured:

- 1- Name of a trusted adult
- 2- Action to be taken if a situation is unhealthy
- 3- Compose a short prayer (Jesus, help me!!!)

Below are some things to consider when students write their short prayer. You can read them or have them on the board.

St. Francis de Sales called anxiety the greatest evil that can befall the soul, except sin, because it causes us to lose the strength necessary to maintain virtue.

Stress is one of the devil’s most-used tactics to get us to fall away from a close relationship with God.

Stress can cause us to lose our peace. The more the soul is at peace, the more we can feel the peace of God’s presence.

It is important to review the below Summary of the Circle of Grace Concepts. It is also in the front of the lesson. Spend some time helping the youth to relate each section of the summary to their everyday life. Have the summary available for youth to reference. It is helpful to have the Circle of Grace Logo available.

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.

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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 gives us several trusted adults, in addition to our parents, to talk to about our worries, concerns or "funny/ uncomfortable feelings" so they can help us be safe. If a parent or trusted adult is not available or unable to help us, God wants us to go to another trusted adult until we get the help needed to be safe.

Closing Reminders

Maintaining peace can be quite challenging. Maybe today we can commit to starting with these essential steps to help us begin our journey toward peace of soul:

1. Cultivate a disposition to "purity of heart." A person with purity of heart is determined to say "yes" to God in all things.
2. Be not afraid. It is said that the words "Be not afraid" occur in Scripture well more than 300 times. Clearly there is a message that God is telling us. We should believe in God's power over stressful situations in our lives.
3. The Bible is clear that stressful situations are not to be avoided. Jesus encourages each of us to pick up our cross, not avoid it.

4. Our faith is not something to help us escape from our troubles, but to help us tackle them head-on. Stress and pressure can be a good thing. It can help us rise to challenges and grow as individuals.

Closing Prayer

Leader calls class to prayer by asking youth to quiet down and join in the Sign of the Cross. Then say together,

Almighty God, we bless you for our lives, we give you praise for your abundant mercy and grace we receive. We thank you for Your faithfulness even though we are not that faithful to You. Lord Jesus, we ask you to give us all around peace in our mind, body, soul and spirit. We ask you to heal and remove everything that is causing stress, grief, and sorrow in our lives.

Please guide our path through life and make our enemies be at peace with us. Let Your peace reign in our family, at our school and in everything we lay our hands on.

Let Your angels of peace go out ahead of us when we go out and stay by our side when we return. In Jesus' Name, Amen

Remember: Faith Makes a Difference

It's the little acts of faith that make a big difference, below are a few:

1. **Be quiet with Jesus for a few minutes. This break from your hectic day will help. Stress and pressure are not new. Check out what our faith says about it in Scripture (Below)**
2. **Pray instantly when anxiety begins to creep in. A short prayer is good enough.**
3. **Celebrate the sacraments (a little more than you do now). Christ's grace can help us achieve the peace that will make us saints.**
4. **Read and meditate on Scripture, specifically the many passages that address worry and peace.**
5. **Take advantage of sacramentals (they confer an actual grace!): holy water, icons, medals.**
6. **Cultivate joy. Peace and joy are unified. Try new things that are healthy and holy. Get out of your comfort zone. Keeping life interesting makes daily life full of joy, and nothing promotes peace like joy.**

Overcoming anxiety is actually a central tenant of our Catholic faith! Getting rid of stress in your life is necessary for maintaining peace, without which you cannot be a saint or help others become saints.

Scripture Verses Dealing with Stress

- Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid. John 14: 27
- In the world you will have trouble, but take courage, I have conquered the world. John 16:33
- In this you rejoice, although now for a little while you may have to suffer through various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold that is perishable even though tested by fire, may prove to be for praise, glory, and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. 1 Peter 1: 6-7
- "Therefore, I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat [or drink], or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Matthew 6:25
- No trial has come to you but what is human. God is faithful and will not let you be tried beyond your strength; but with the trial he will also provide a way out, so that you may be able to bear it. 1 Corinthians 10:13

Circle of Grace
Parent Letter
Coping with Stress and Pressure
Grade 5 Lesson

Dear Parent,

This week in CCE, we presented the *Circle of Grace* Lesson “*Coping with Stress and Pressure: Who are You Leaning On?*” to your child. *Circle of Grace* is a faith-based safety curriculum required by the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston to be annually presented to all children who attend faith formation classes in grades K-12.

The lesson presented this week describes the difference between stress and pressure. Through discussion and activities, the lesson assists the children 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 information that can help keep your child 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 we 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?

Thank you for allowing us to be a partner in providing a safe environment for your child!

Grade 5 Evaluation

Date _____

Parish/School _____ City _____

Leader _____ Number of children in class _____

Each grade's curriculum was designed to meet the overall program objectives.

Please check if each of the objectives of the *Circle of Grace* Program were met.

1. YES _____ NO _____ Young People understand the difference between stress and pressure.
2. YES _____ NO _____ Young People understand that stress and pressure can have healthy or unhealthy outcomes,
3. YES _____ NO _____ Young People understand that they can lean on their faith when dealing with stress or pressure,
4. YES _____ NO _____ Young people recognize that a prayer-filled life is an antidote for unhealthy stress and pressure.
5. YES _____ NO _____ Young people can demonstrate how to take action if stress or pressure becomes more than they can handle.

Please list what worked well and any resources that you would like to share (use back if necessary).

Please list any suggestions that would improve lessons (use back if necessary).

Return to your School Administrator or Director of Religious Education.