

CIRCLE OF GRACE

Program for Children and Young People

Grade 9 through Grade 12

Respecting All God's People

Safe Environment Training

2018 Revised Edition

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Omaha, NE 68132

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February 1, 2018

Mary Beth Hanus
Manager of Victim Outreach and Prevention
Archdiocese of Omaha
Mercy Hall
3300 N. 60th Street
Omaha, NE 68104

Dear Mary Beth,

With this letter I hereby promulgate the revised "Circle of Grace" curriculum for grades K-12 in the Archdiocese of Omaha, and mandate that it continue to be used in all Catholic schools and religious education programs.

"Circle of Grace" contributes to the protection of our young children and affirms them as beloved children of God.

I am grateful for your good work in keeping children safe. The ongoing support you receive from the GRACES Committee is a blessing to me and the good people of this archdiocese.

With best wishes and prayers, I am,

Sincerely in Christ,

Most Reverend George J. Lucas
Archbishop of Omaha

Deacon Timothy F. McNeil
Chancellor

Nihil Obstat

Rev. Matthew Gutowski, S.T.L.
Censor librorum

Imprimatur

Most Reverend George J. Lucas
Archbishop of Omaha
February 1, 2018 Omaha, NE

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Acknowledgments

Circle of Grace Program

The Archdiocese of Omaha would like to express its gratitude and appreciation of the past and current *Circle of Grace* contributors. Their commitment, creativity, expertise, and countless hours of dedication have had a profound impact in the lives of children and youth throughout the nation and beyond. The original committee was comprised of the superintendent of schools, teachers, principals, and school counselors. It also included our faith formation director, directors of religious education, catechists, youth ministers and mental health professionals

Thanks to Mark Zimmer, LCSW, LMHP for the design of the Circle of Grace logo.

Special thanks to Archbishop George J. Lucas, Archbishop Elden F. Curtiss, Rev. Michael Gutsell, J.C.L., Rev. Joseph Taphorn, J.C.L. and Deacon Timothy McNeil, J.C.L. for their support and leadership in the Archdiocese of Omaha Safe Environment efforts (2003-2018)

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Introduction

Developing of the *Circle of Grace* Program has been a passionate journey for all involved. The Archdiocesan committee was brought together by the mandate of the U.S. Bishops' *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*. The charter mandates that each diocese must have a safe environment program for children and youth which includes an audit to ensure compliance.

The committee set a goal early on that we wanted a program rich in our Catholic faith and clinically sound. The committee knew the program needed to first meet the standards of the U. S. Bishop's audit, but we also wanted much more for our children and youth. Thus, we decided that our main commitment was above and beyond meeting the needs of the U.S. Bishops' audit; we want to ensure the safety, well-being, and spiritual formation of our children and youth. With these goals in mind, we have developed a program which includes teaching a culture of respect and faith that goes beyond mere protection. This program helps children and young people understand their own sacredness, the sacredness of others, and how to seek help through their relationships with trusted adults. Consequently, the *Circle of Grace* concept was born.

What is the *Circle of Grace*? It is a metaphor for the love and goodness of God that surrounds us and all others. It is the recognition that God is with us always and is there to help us in difficult situations. Through the *Circle of Grace* Program, adults assist children and youth to recognize God's love by understanding that each of us lives and moves within a *Circle of Grace*. Your *Circle of Grace* encompasses who you are in your body and including your senses. It holds your very essence in mind, heart, soul, and sexuality.

This holistic concept allows children and youth to identify uncomfortable situations long before any inappropriate touch may occur. Those who molest children start to groom them by manipulating them to break rules and keep secrets such as consuming alcohol and viewing pornography. This manipulation usually occurs before any attempt at inappropriate touch. The *Circle of Grace* program helps children and youth to identify early on when they are uncomfortable with a situation and includes ways to seek the help of a trusted adult. The *Circle of Grace* PreK-12 Program goals and objectives are met in all grades. The program is self-contained for each grade with everything needed to teach the material.

One of the benefits of the *Circle of Grace* program is that the instructors also have the opportunity to ponder their own belief and experience of God's presence in their lives. During a training session an operating room nurse, who was a catechist, asked the following question: "So Jesus is right with us in the operating room?" Her prior faith formation taught this belief but the *Circle of Grace* Program finally allowed her to understand God's love in a very visual and real way for her life.

With that realization in mind, ponder the *Circle of Grace Meditation*. It is profound in its simplicity.

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.

What would our world look like if we all lived believing and truly knowing that God is that close?

Mary Beth Hanus LCSW, LMHP, Victim Outreach and Prevention Manager, Archdiocese of Omaha.

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The 9-12 curriculum is formatted to be used in two ways:

- ✓ *The traditional way: lessons taught to the identified grade.*
***The lesson for grade 12 is only to be taught to seniors.*
- ✓ *The second way: select any one of the 9-11 sections or alternate lessons to teach to the class or group. Remember that all four lessons in grade 9 equal a section and must be taught together. One may consider presenting the 9th grade lessons as a retreat. Leaders will need to keep a record of what lesson is taught each year.*

I. Administrator/Director information

Administrator/Director Information
Steps of How to Handle Sensitive Situations
Program Summary Evaluation (data meets national audit requirements)
Parent Program Letter and resource information
Child Abuse/Neglect Information and Suicide Prevention Information

II. Grade 9 – Comprehensive

Lesson 1-Communion of Saints,
Lesson 2-Mary and Joseph say “Yes”
Lesson 3 – When the Circle is Broken
Lesson 4 – Action PLAAN

III. Grade 10 – Focus

Lesson – Levels of Intimacy and Influence

IV. Grade 11 – Focus

Lesson – N.O.T.I.C.E.: When Boundaries Go Wrong

V. Grade 12 – Focus (Lesson is only for seniors)

Lesson – Love and the Theology of the Body

VI. Alternate Lessons – Focus

Lesson- What is your Motto?
Lesson- A.C.T.I.O.N.: Steps Needed When Concerns Don’t Go Away
Lesson- Modesty: A Thing of the Past or Not?
Lesson- Tech Savvy or Tech Safe?
Lesson- *Circle of Grace* Again... Really?
Lesson- Human Trafficking: Modern Day Slavery

Guidelines

School Administrators, Directors of Religious Education, and Youth Ministry Directors

- **Leader** is defined as clergy, administrator, director of religious education/formation, teacher, catechist, or youth minister who has been trained to teach the *Circle of Grace* Program. All leaders must be adults and certified in Safe Environment training.
- 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. Each lesson is correlated with Catholic teaching.
- Administrators/Director needs to review how to handle sensitive situations with each leader. It is important for leaders to report all concerning situations to their Administrator/Directors and understands child abuse/neglect reporting laws. A Quick Reference Card for Leaders is located in this section.
- This program may bring up past issues with leaders which may make it difficult for them to teach the lessons. Please encourage leaders in this situation to speak with their Administrator/ Director, Pastor, or they can call the Safe Environment Coordinator directly. Supportive resources are available in their community to help them.
- *Circle of Grace* Curriculum has both comprehensive and focus grades. Ninth grade has multiple lessons due to insecurity of transitional years. The focus grades have a lesson on one particular area.
- The time frame for lessons may vary depending on size of class, age of children/young people, amount of discussion, etc.
- Vocabulary definitions are intended for the leader. The vocabulary should be integrated within the context of the lessons to assist the children and young people in their understanding of the Program. The depth of the young people's understanding will depend upon their age and developmental stage. A master vocabulary list is included in the packet for each grade.
- The USCCB Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People requires a safe environment program be implemented in all grades each year. The *Circle of Grace* program fulfills this requirement.
- The Grade 9-12 curriculum is formatted to be used in two ways:
 - ✓ The traditional way is teaching the lessons for the identified grade. The lesson for grade 12 is only to be taught to seniors.
 - ✓ The second way is for one to select any one of the 9-11 sections or alternate lessons to teach to the class or group. Remember that all four lessons in grade 9 equal a section and must be taught together. One may consider presenting the 9th grade lessons as a retreat. Leaders will need to keep a record of what lesson is taught each year.

- Leader's instructions for each lesson are italicized. Non-italicized text needs to be presented by the leader to the children or young people. All the information and handouts are provided for each grade.
- 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 should be no more than two to three weeks between the last two lessons in Grade 9. 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 young people and help them to know what to do when they feel unsafe.
- There are pre and post assessments for grades 3, 6, and 9. This tool will assist in evaluating the children/young people's understanding and assimilation of the concepts. The results are to be recorded on the grade evaluation and are not to be shared with the children/young people.
- The School Administrator, Religious Education Director, or Youth Minister Director need to send out the provided updated letter to all parents of teens regarding *Circle of Grace* prior to starting the program. All parents should receive the "Common Questions of Parents" Handout. Lesson specific parent information should be handed out as directed. The parent information included in this chapter for every parish/school is to assist in providing parent education both to inform parents about the *Circle of Grace* program and to foster greater communication in families.
- Evaluations for each lesson are to be completed and returned to the School Administrator, the Director of Youth Ministry, or the Director of Religious Education/Formation. The Administrator/Director will use these evaluations to complete the Summary Evaluation (located in this chapter). The Summary Evaluation needs to be sent to the for ongoing improvement of the program, for parish and school documentation of the implementation of the program, and for audit records.
- The following pages include the *Circle of Grace* Prayer, Key Concepts of *Circle of Grace* and a Code of Conduct/Anti Bullying Contract for Children/Youth. These additional resources can be displayed in the classroom and are great additions to the curriculum.
- Additional Resources are located on *Circle of Grace* Resource Flash Drive/CD:
 - Circle of Grace Brochure and Logo*
 - Circle of Grace Training CD*
 - Parents First Newsletter for each grade*
 - "Youth Assistant in Ministry" Booklet*



CIRCLE OF GRACE

*Raise your hands above your head and 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
then 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.

What would our world look like if we all lived believing and truly knowing that God is that close?

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 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.



Code of Conduct for Young People

I understand that I am created by God and live in the love of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

I understand that God does not want or cause bad things to happen.

I understand that God is with me even when I am hurting or sad.

I understand the *Circle of Grace* that God gives me and others.

I understand that God is present in my *Circle of Grace* because He desires a relationship with me.

I understand that I can help stamp out “bullying” by not being a silent bystander.

I understand that speaking out and taking positive actions when bullying occurs, makes a difference.

Because of this understanding when I interact with someone, either in person or when using technology such as texting and social networking, I will strive to:

- Have my actions be safe and show respect toward myself and others.
- Have my words and actions represent the truth.
- Identify and maintain appropriate and healthy boundaries and relationships.
- Talk with my parents/trusted adult if I have concerns (bullying) or if there is a question that that any boundary was violated.

Student _____ Teacher _____

Parent _____ Date _____

Guidelines

Non-Participating Children/Young People

The guidelines from the Office of Child and Youth Protection state:

WHEN A PARENT/GUARDIAN REFUSES TO ALLOW THEIR CHILD/YOUNG PERSON TO PARTICIPATE IN THE *CIRCLE OF GRACE* PROGRAM:

A parent may refuse to allow their child to participate, but it must be done on a case by case basis. Parents must submit the following in writing with a signature:

- Safe Environment Training was offered to their child/young person
- They refused to allow their child/young person to participate in the training
- They received Safe Environment training materials for their child/young person.

Administrators/Directors will provide parents with the age appropriate lessons and parent packet. A record of parent's written documentation needs to be maintained to ensure full accountability.

Please call
if there are any questions or concerns.

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/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/young people 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/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, as they strive to provide a safe and protective environment, hold the responsibility to help children/young people understand and respect their own dignity and that of others. A truly safe and protective environment is one where children/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 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/young people understand the sacredness of who they are and how to seek help through their relationships with trusted adults.

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

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.

Objectives of the Circle of Grace Program - 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>

History

Background

The United States Catholic Conference of Bishops developed the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People* during a three-day meeting in June 2002 in Dallas Texas. This document was the first united response by the bishops to the revelation by the secular media that priests had physically and sexually abused minors over a period of many years. The stories of abuse would appear in dioceses across the United States implicating an increasing number of priests and even bishops.

The Bishops gathered in Washington, D.C. in November 2002 to confirm a revised Charter, to develop a set of canonical norms for Vatican approval as particular law in the dioceses of the United States, to organize procedures for a compliance audit of dioceses, to commission a data gathering project on abuse of minors by priests over the previous 50 years, and to set in motion studies that would discover the causes, trace the patterns, and offer strategies for preventing future abuse and protecting minors effectively.

“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

The Archdiocese of Omaha, 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*, has developed a program for the safe environment education of children and young people. This program is called *Circle of Grace*. There are many Catholic Dioceses and Protestant churches across the United States using the Circle of Grace Curriculum. Go to www.cograce.org to read their testimonies.

CIRCLE OF GRACE SUMMARY EVALUATION FORM

Date _____ School/ Parish _____ City: _____

Circle one.

School Administrator Director of Religious Education Director Youth Ministry Other

Name: _____ Phone: _____

DATA: Please enter the number of children/youth who completed the program for each grade. This information is required for the national audit.

K _____ 1st _____ 2nd _____ 3rd _____ 4th _____ 5th _____ 6th _____

7th _____ 8th _____ 9th _____ 10th _____ 11th _____ 12th _____

Number of children/young people who did not participate in program per parents' requests: _____
(Attach a copy of the written documentation of the parents' requests.)

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

Please review your leader's evaluations. Based on this review has the program adequately met these overall objectives? Yes _____ No _____

1. Children/Young People will understand they are created by God and live in the love of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
2. Children/Young People will be able to describe the *Circle of Grace* that God gives each of us.
3. Children/ Young People will be able to identify and maintain appropriate boundaries.
4. Children/ Young People can identify types of boundary violations.
5. Children/Young People will demonstrate how to take action if a boundary is threatened or violated.

Grade 3 (tally of leader's evaluation)

Number of children who got 70% or better on their pre-assessment _____

Number of children who got below 70% on their pre-assessment _____

Number of children who got 70% or better on the post-assessment _____

Number of children who got below 70% on the post-assessment _____

Grade 6 (tally of leader's evaluation)

Number of Young people who got 70% or better on their pre-assessment _____

Number of Young people who got below 70% on their pre-assessment _____

Number of Young people who got 70% or better on the post-assessment _____

Number of Young people who got below 70% on the post-assessment _____

Grade 9 (tally of leader's evaluation)

Number of Young people who got 70% or better on their pre-assessment _____

Number of Young people who got below 70% on their pre-assessment _____

Number of Young people who got 70% or better on the post-assessment _____

Number of Young people who got below 70% on the post-assessment _____

Your feedback is very important in making *Circle of Grace* the best program possible for our children and young people. You may summarize your leader comments here or send the original evaluations.

Please list what worked well and any resources you would like to share.

Please list any suggestions that would improve the program.

Signature:_____ Date:_____

CIRCLE OF GRACE
Safe Environment Program
Grade 9 through Grade 12
"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

Circle of Grace – Administrator/Directors

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 sexually 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.

What are the topics of the high school curriculum?

Grades 9-12 curriculum is formatted to be used in two ways. The traditional way, in which the lessons are taught to the identified grade. The second way is to use the Grades 9-11 alternate lessons for any grade or setting. We encourage you to have a conversation with your youth about these important lessons below:

Grade 9 - Lesson 1: Communion of Saints,

Lesson 2: Mary and Joseph say “Yes”

Lesson 3: When the Circle is Broken

Lesson 4: Action PLAAN- How Safe are your relationships?

Grade 10 - Levels of Intimacy and Influence

Grade 11 - N.O.T.I.C.E.: When Boundaries Go Wrong

Grade 12 - Love and the Theology of the Body, How Healthy are your relationships?

*****Lesson is only for seniors*****

Alternate Lessons

1. What is your Motto?
2. A.C.T.I.O.N.: Steps Needed When Concerns Don't Go Away
3. Modesty: A Thing of the Past or Not?
4. Tech Savvy or Tech Safe?
5. Circle of Grace Again... Really?
6. Human Trafficking: Modern Day Slavery

Please feel free to contact your school or parish office if you have questions or want more information.

² www.usccb.org or <http://nccanch.acfhhs.gov>

Below is a sample of a quick reference card that Directors and Administrators can give their leaders. It will assist them in knowing what action steps to take regarding sensitive situations. “Key Steps When You Have a Sensitive/Concerning Situation” can be found in this section.

Quick Reference Card for Leaders

- A Be **Attentive** to comments and behaviors during class.
- C **Contact** Administrators/Directors prior to the dismissal of class if comments or behaviors are concerning.
- T **Team** approach is always best. Collaborate with your administrator/director/pastor to help clarify child’s statement/behavior and to determine if there is a need to report to the authorities.
- I **Initial Report** to the authorities may be needed. The child abuse hotline number is
- O **Other Resources** are available through the
The Safe Environment Coordinator,
can be reached at
- N **Note** all observations/statements and actions taken, make a file.

Key Steps for Administrators, Directors of Religious Education, Youth Ministry Directors, and Leaders When There is a Sensitive or Concerning Situation

If a child discloses clear information of abuse and immediate safety is a concern the following steps should occur:

- Assure the child that you will contact people who can help them be safe.
- Ask Director/Administrator for help reporting and with your further interaction with the child/family. (Refer to your diocesan policies.)
- Authorities will be responsible for interviewing the child so keep questions to a minimum.
- Ask authorities who will contact the parents and when this will occur.
- Assure the child that you will be there for them during the process as much as possible.

When a child discloses information that is concerning but not threatening immediate safety, the following steps should be considered:

- Always coordinate with your Director/Administrator when dealing with these situations.
- Decide when and if the parents should be notified depending on relationship with parents and issues around the concern (example: a parent is very sick in the hospital and you become aware that the young grade school child is left home alone). Consider approaching parents to offer assistance.
- Keep written documentation of your concerns.
- Use your best judgment in sharing information with parents regarding your conversation with their child.
- Consider reporting to the authorities (refer to diocesan policies).

There May Be Many Reasons That a Child Approaches You Upset or Discloses Potentially Concerning Information. Only ask enough questions to determine if there is reasonable cause to report. Below are general guidelines when you find yourself in this type of situation.

Open-ended questions are best. These questions help you enter into the world of a child without coloring it with assumptions.

(Child starts crying in class.) Below are examples:

- If your tears had words, what would they say?

- I am here to listen.
- Tell me more.
- And then what?
- I want to understand your hurt.

Directed questions when there is more information:

(Child states they are upset with their Uncle/Aunt)

- Tell me more about your Uncle/Aunt.
- What are the things that are upsetting you?

Avoid Leading Questions:

- Did your Uncle hurt you?
- Did your Aunt touch you in your privates?
- Did they tell you not to tell?

Working with Parents in Sensitive Situations:

Talk in a confidential area and when asking questions remember to keep them open ended and non-accusatory.

When immediate safety is a concern and a report has been made:

- Seek advice from the authorities (CPS and Police) as to who will contact parents. (You may interfere with the investigation if you contact parents before authorities.)
- Always coordinate with your Director/Administrator when dealing with parents in these situations.
- If parents become aware of your report: reinforce that you are a mandatory reporter and need to defer to the authorities during the investigation.
- It is not your role to determine guilt but to report concerns per the law.

When immediate safety is not a concern and a report has NOT been made:

- Share the facts in a calm and nonjudgmental manner.
- Avoid assumptions. For example: Ted was crying in class and told you someone is bothering him. He did not define bother or identify the person. It is important not to assume guilt of the parents.
- Assume parents will be supportive and concerned unless they demonstrate otherwise.
- Offer supportive resources such as counseling.

Suicide Prevention Information

This information is included because we all want children and young people to be safe. Prevention programs such as *Circle of Grace* primarily focuses on how to identify and seek help when abuse or boundary violations occur.

The Circle of Grace concept is to tell their trusted adults not only about potential harm from someone outside their Circle of Grace but also about self-harm. All of us strive for the safety of all children and young people from outside sources but we must recognize the real crisis of our youth considering self-harm or suicide.

Below are some facts, warning signs, questions to ask and resources. Please share them with your staff and volunteers because one life lost is too many.

Facts:

- Since 1999 suicide rates have increased 24%. Suicide is now the tenth leading cause of death in the US.
- Suicide is the third leading cause of death among the youth ages 10-14 and the second leading cause of death for youth/adults ages 15-34.
- Every 13 minutes someone dies of suicide. While more females attempt suicide, males are four times more likely to die by suicide.
- 20 percent of American high school students report having seriously considered suicide during the previous 12 months.
- 8 percent of high school students make a suicide attempt.
- 70 percent of youth who make a suicide attempt frequently use alcohol and/or drugs
- Being bullied and suicide-related behavior is closely related.

Warning Signs:

- Talking about or making plans for suicide
- Expressing hopelessness about the future
- Talking about being a burden
- Displaying severe or overwhelming emotional pain or distress/ mood swings
- Withdrawing from or changing social connections or situations
- Changes in sleep (increase or decrease)
- Anger or hostility that seems out of character or out of context
- Recent increase in anxiety, agitation, irritability or behaving recklessly
- Telling people good bye
- Giving away possessions
- Excessive drinking or substance abuse

Ask Questions:

Ask the Question (*it is a myth that asking will give the youth the “idea” of suicide. Be sure to have suicide crisis information in hand, plenty of time to listen and a private place to visit*)

- “I have the feeling you are thinking about suicide but are having trouble bringing it up”
- “Are you thinking about suicide?”
- “Sometimes people in certain situations feel suicidal. Have you been thinking about killing yourself?”
- “Have you ever wanted to stop living?”
- “Do you have a plan to kill yourself?”
- “If so, ask how, where and if they have a means (such as gun/pills/rope or other means)?”

Listen, Reassure and Persuade:

- Listen and look for warning signs/risk factors.
- Validate their feelings.
- Find out what is important to the person and why they choose to live.
- Inform them that you need to contact their parents/guardians so they can get professional help. Assure them you will help them talk to their parents.
- Remind the person that seeking help isn’t a sign of weakness and treatment is available to help them feel better.
- Provide them with resources:
 - 1- **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (1800-273-TALK (8255))**
 - 2- **Boys Town National Hotline (1-800-448-30000, text VOICE to 20121 or www.yourlifeyourvoice.org**

Take Action:

- Don’t leave youth alone once you have determined he or she is at risk.
- Contact parents/guardians and review the following:
 - 1- Need to seek professional help or call 911 if safety is an immediate issue
 - 2- Instruct the parents to remove means like guns and pills from the home
 - 3- Provide them with resources:
 - a) **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (1800-273-TALK (8255))**
 - b) **Boys Town National Hotline (1-800-448-30000, text VOICE to 20121 or www.yourlifeyourvoice.org**

Remember that not seeking help for a suicidal child/youth is considered neglect. If you have concerns about the parents getting help or their child or youth you must contact the authorities.

Information obtained from CDC.gov and Nebraska Health and Human Service- dhhs.ne.gov

Circle of Grace

Code of Conduct for Children and Young People

I understand that I am created by God and live in the love of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

I understand that God does not want or cause bad things to happen.

I understand that God is with me even when I am hurting or sad.

I can describe/demonstrate the *Circle of Grace* that God gives me.

Because of this:

- My actions will be safe and show respect within my *Circle of Grace*.
- I will act safe and show respect towards others' *Circle of Grace*.
- My words and actions will represent the truth.
- I will identify and maintain appropriate and healthy boundaries.
- If there is a question that these boundaries are violated I will talk with my parents/trusted adult.

Parent Information



The following is general information for parents regarding *Circle of Grace*, parent-child communication, safety tips, and child abuse/neglect. Administrators and Directors should make this information available to parents. This can be done in several ways such as parent copies or at meetings, bulletin board, web page, newsletter, etc. It is recommended that every parent receive the *Parent Letter* introducing the program, *Key Concepts of Circle of Grace*, *Common Questions of Parents and Parenting and Sexuality*.

Common Questions of Parents

1) How is this connected to the “Safe Environment” program?

Circle of Grace is the safe environment program for children/youth. The goal is to help children/youth understand the sacredness of who they are and how to seek help when needed through their relationships with trusted adults.

2) What information can this program give my child that they are not getting already?

The *Circle of Grace* Program reinforces in a peer setting that their faith community cares about their safety and wants them to understand how to seek help if they feel unsafe for any reason. It will help them identify potentially unsafe situations and know how to handle them by seeking help from trusted adults.

3) You indicate that this program will provide them with “life skills”, what do you mean by this?

It reinforces that they are valued by God and others. It gives them information on boundaries and practical directives of what to do if someone makes them feel uncomfortable when in their *Circle of Grace*. It is a good foundation for healthy relationships that will help them throughout their lives.

4) Will this program be age appropriate?

Yes! The lessons were written with great attention to the stages of child development.

5) How can parents support what is being taught in the program?

Parents will receive parent letters as well as take home activities for several of the lessons to do with their children. Talking with your children about the *Circle of Grace* at home will help your children to understand the importance of the lessons and that the lessons apply everywhere, not just at school. Additionally, you are your child’s most important teacher in the area of relationships. Much of what your child will learn and later imitate about relationships comes from what they learn by your example. Creating an atmosphere where they know that they can talk to you about anything provides a valuable safety net for your child because they know they have you to turn to whenever they have a concern.

6) Is there accountability attached to this program implementation?

Yes! There will be an ongoing evaluation of the program to ensure its effectiveness and to incorporate any suggestions that would improve the quality of the program.

7) Will there be resources (people and material) available if I have questions?

Yes! There will be a parent packet given to all parents that includes contact numbers.

8) Shouldn’t parents be the ones teaching their children about sexuality?

Absolutely! This is NOT a sex education program. *Circle of Grace* will provide children with a sound understanding of their own value and of God’s care and presence in their lives. It will also help them notice the signals that tell them when they do not feel safe and how to talk to a trusted adult. All of this will be a good foundation for healthy relationships. However, this is not a sexuality education program. Many parents will appreciate that this program will provide a spiritual framework that will allow parent-child communication about the value of all that they are, including their sexuality. Those conversations are most effective between parent and child. There are grade specific Parents First newsletters to assist you in these conversations.

9) Is this a mandatory program for my child?

The United States Catholic Conference of Bishops (USCCB) developed the Charter for Protection of Children and Young People. Article 12 of this document states that each Diocese will have a safe environment program for adults and children/youth. If you have questions or concerns about your child participating in the *Circle of Grace* Program, please contact your Director of Religious Education, Principal, etc.

Parenting and Sexuality

“The Basics”

Be attentive and respectful.

Your child is a precious child of God. Especially in the area of sexuality, you want your children to appreciate that they are made in the image and likeness of God and that sexuality is a gift. Your respect for them as you hold them, bathe them, care for them will teach them better than words that their bodies are to be respected. They will learn of their value in your care. When they are told about their *Circle of Grace* in religious education and/or school, it helps them to believe that God is with them and for them because they have already experienced your love and your care. They will grow up knowing that they are meant to respect others and are to expect respect from others.

Teaching children about their bodies must happen in an age appropriate way. For young children, the best guideline is to answer their questions as they arise. Try to always connect sexuality and spirituality in simple, short ways. Include God in the answer to help them recognize that sexuality is something special and created by God. For older children, it may be necessary to initiate discussions. More about that below.

Know what you really believe and why.

If you don't know what the Church teaches in regards to sexuality and why, there are many great resources available.

Saint John Paul II's explanation of the Church's teaching on sexuality, "Theology of the Body," is an excellent approach explaining the "Why's" behind Catholic teaching in regards to sexuality and our bodies. His work is a new way of conveying the Church's teaching on God's design for male and female. Since the Church teachings are not malleable, understanding the "Why's" is a great motivator which encourages youth and all faithful to strive to live a life in accord with Christ and His Church. This teaching beautifully articulates how we are meant to be a total gift to another.

At the time that many of today's parents were being formed in the faith regarding our bodies and sexuality, the Church did not have the fullness of Pope John Paul's Theology of the Body. Unfortunately for many, sexuality was reduced to a bunch of "rules." This lack of knowledge has led many individuals down paths that they otherwise would not choose for themselves today, and most likely not for their children. Even a minimal grasp of St. John Paul's Theology of the Body can assist in the inevitable conversations you will have with your children on these matters.

It is vital that you think about what you really believe about the place of sexuality in human life and why. Your own sexual history will considerably influence how you feel about sexual expression. If you were sexually active outside of marriage, you may find it difficult to tell your child to wait until marriage. If you waited until marriage, you may fear that your child will find you woefully outdated. Or you may find you are much more able to explain the benefits of waiting until marriage by talking about how that strengthened your own marriage.

Anticipate how you will respond if your child asks what you did. Whether or not you answer the question directly depends on you. Some parents who were sexually active before marriage decide at some point, usually when the child is older, to tell the truth. However, if you fear that telling them will not be helpful to them or your relationship with them, it is not necessary to reveal your own history. It is important that you consider how your answer will impact future communication with your child. Be as honest as you can, not only about your actions but also about your feelings, then and now, as well as about the consequences in your own life and relationships. Children are naturally curious about Mom and Dad and how they handled things.

Carefully consider how you will explain to your child why sex belongs in marriage. It is not enough to just say that it does. In advance, make a list of reasons why you believe sex belongs in marriage. Helping your children understand *why* will help them to make this value their own. Think about how you will react to questions about not only where babies come from but questions about oral sex, masturbation, family members who are not married and have children, and many other issues that will arise. These questions are not just possibilities — they are questions every child should talk about at some time with their parent(s). If you ignore their initial questions, you may not get another chance. They will sense your discomfort and go other places with their questions.

Talk often but not necessarily long.

When something related to sexuality comes up in a conversation, respond appropriately but do not take every opportunity to preach or lecture. If you do, your child will soon “tune” you out. Frequent matter of fact responses that state your values with sensitivity to what they are concerned about will be sufficient.

Know their world.

Pay attention to the environment your children live in. Watch television with them. If they have access to the internet, take an interest in what they enjoy. Given the many sexualized messages in media, you will find many opportunities to engage your children in conversation. Listen to their music with them and talk with them about what they enjoy. When you are in the car, allow them to tune the radio and just listen. Ask them to explain songs to you, objectionable ones or wonderful ones. Something about talking to Mom or Dad about the music often teaches young people a great deal. It gives them a chance to talk about what they believe and it gives you a chance to hear it. Resist the impulse to launch into a lecture. Ask open-ended questions like:

What do you like about this song/movie/video?

Tell me the story of the song.

What do you think of the message of the song/movie/video?

How do you think that song makes women/men feel?

Take time when they want to talk.

Children often ask questions or make comments at very inopportune times. If you are in a public place, tell your child you will talk later when you are alone – and do so at the earliest opportunity. If you are not in a public place, make it a priority to respond as soon as possible, preferably when they ask, because that is when they are most interested in your answer. If you feel you don't know how to answer, explain what you know and assure them you will think more about it and talk more later. And do it! If you fail to come back and fully respond, they will think you are uncomfortable and will be less likely to ask you again.

Take time to celebrate transitions with special times spent together. Growing up with the accompanying body changes is usually a time of uncertainty and confusion for children. Having a celebration says, "This is a good and wonderful thing." Be honest about your own struggles, fears, and discomforts when you were going through the same transitions. Children usually like to know what it was like for you to go through the same things.

*“To maintain a joyful family
requires much from both the
parents and the children.
Each member of the family
has to become, in a special way,
the servant of the others.”
Pope John Paul II*

Use correct terminology even when it makes you a little uncomfortable.

Sometimes, your parents may not have used correct terminology and therefore using it is uncomfortable for you. Break the cycle by using the appropriate language that is correct and respectful of the body as created by God. Remember that God created all the amazing parts of your beautiful child and they are simply learning about God's creation. This teaches them to respectfully name their body and gives you an opportunity to teach them about respecting their *Circle of Grace*. Be sure you explain any terms that are unclear. If you show discomfort, you are sending them a negative message about their bodies that will not lead them to respect and reverence themselves and others.

What is the real question?

Sometimes children ask a question to "test the water". But there is a bigger question they really want to know about that they either are hesitant to ask or cannot figure out how to say. Gently listening and drawing them into a conversation is important. Respond to what they ask, always watching for clues that they need more information or reassurance. They need to know that it is OK to ask you anything. You should be their "expert" even if you don't feel like one. Otherwise, they will look for their answers someplace else.

Talk about risk behaviors.

Don't wait too long to discuss risk behaviors like sexually transmitted diseases, broken hearts, pregnancy, and the myriad consequences that result from early sexual activity. Many parents are unaware how very early children are learning about sexuality from their peers and the media. But much of their information is inaccurate and certainly not value-based. Talking with your child about these things will not make them more likely to be sexually active. In fact, studies show that children whose parents talk openly with them and communicate their values are less likely to be sexually active.

Tell stories.

Recounting stories is a good way to communicate. Use the stories of friends, acquaintances, a story from the news, even your own, if you are comfortable doing so. You can change the details and names if you are concerned about them knowing who it is. A good story communicates in very effective ways. And we all remember stories. Resist too much explanation after you have talked about the values you are trying to communicate. In your own life, you have been touched often by others who have suffered by their sexual choices. Helping your children to understand that sex outside of marriage can result in painful consequences is important.

Talk about humans.

When you talk about human sexuality, talk about human beings. As obvious as this may seem, countless stories exist about parents who tried to explain the "birds and the bees" by talking about birds and bees. Children need to learn about their bodies and those of the opposite sex by talking with you about human bodies. When correct language is used, you are honoring yourselves and your bodies as created by God. Of course, all such conversations must happen in the context of the child's age and level of understanding. However, consider

that children often have access to information about sexuality long before you did at their same age.

Create a trusting relationship

Children and teens need appropriate limits and boundaries. These help them to know they are cared for. It is appropriate to know where your child is and to expect that they communicate with you if plans change. They should be faithful to the time they agreed to return and open and honest about their activities.

Discuss together why you are establishing the limit, rule, etc. Always make their safety and well-being the true priority and communicate that to them. Help them to see that limits will help them remember who they are and that they are loved.

As children grow, the respect between parent and child must also grow. Balancing appropriate boundaries and trust is not simple. However, if children feel they are not trusted, they will not be trustworthy. Asking detailed questions of an adolescent after every outing says, "I'm not sure I trust you so I have to check up on you." That is not to say that an interested inquiry like "Was the movie good?" is inappropriate. Children should know that their parents care about them and their activities. But interrogation on a regular basis does not lead to an increase in the trust in the relationship. Tell your children that the trust between you is very special and that you hope they appreciate that too.

If your child violates your trust, do not hesitate to let him/her know that you are very disappointed and that it will take some time to rebuild that trust. Additional boundaries (a more restrictive curfew, greater supervision, or other rules) may be appropriate until you are again confident that he/she can be trusted. This is all part of helping children understand that trust in relationships is fragile and important. It will help to prepare them to value trust in adulthood.

Respect your child's desire for some privacy, especially as they get older. That does not mean that you never go in their room, put their clothes away, or look in a drawer for a something. What this means is you do not intentionally "snoop" around. You do not routinely rummage through drawers, closets, etc. You demonstrate trust, treating them as you would have liked to be treated at their age. It is important for your child to understand that you will check all their technical devices, phones and accounts to make sure they are safe.

Connect sexuality and spirituality.

Grow in your own understanding of the relationship between sexuality and spirituality. Help your children to understand sexuality is a basic component of personality in and through which each of us relates to God, self, and others. It is a wonderful gift of God which enables each of us, through our bodies, to lovingly and respectfully care for one another. As your children grow in appreciation of and respect for their bodies and the bodies of others, help them to understand why sexual activity belongs in marriage. Help them to see that waiting until marriage will lead to self-respect, commitment, and intimacy — not to mention a better sexual relationship in marriage.

Tell the truth.

Always tell the truth. Don't exaggerate to frighten them into or away from certain behaviors. If you are unsure how much to say, particularly to a very young child, respond to only the question they have asked. If they want more information and you have taken time to honestly respond, they will continue to ask about what they really want to know. On the other hand, by keeping your first response simple, you may have satisfied their curiosity for now and they may later — days, months, or years — return for more information.

Do not hesitate to honestly explain the consequences of sex outside of marriage. While very young children may not need detailed information, certainly by junior high, young people need to hear from their parents about the negative consequences of pre-marital sexual activity. Do not expect that they are receiving accurate information elsewhere about sexually transmitted disease, emotional harm, and pregnancy. Educate yourself and them. Their future happiness and choices depend on it.

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Theology of the Body Resources

Introduction

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MgXkNya6A0c>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dFw1VjuQvDI>

"Freedom of the Gift," by Anastasia Northrop (Our Father's Will Communications)

Theology of the body basics

"Theology of the Body Made Simple," by Father Anthony Percy

"Theology of the Body for Beginners, Revised Edition," by Christopher West

"Men, Women and the Mystery of Love: Practical Insights from John Paul II's "Love and Responsibility,"

"Body and Gift," by Sam Torode

"God's Plan For You: Life, Love, Marriage and Sex (The Theology of the Body for Young People)," by David Hajduk

"Theology of His Body and Theology of Her Body" (Teens), by Jason Evert

Going Deeper

"Theology of the Body Explained," by Christopher West

"Crossing the Threshold of Love: A New Vision of Marriage," by Mary Shivanandan

"Discovering the Feminine Genius: Every Woman's Journey," by Katrina Zeno

"The Christian Meaning of Human Sexuality," by Father Paul Quay

"Pope John Paul II's Theology of the Body: What It Means, Why it Matters," by Father Richard Hogan

Looking to go deeper into the philosophical, theological, psychological and cultural roots and ramifications of the theology of the body? Then check out these top-notch scholars and speakers as well.

Father Brian Bransfield, executive director of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops Secretariat for Evangelization and Catechesis;

Mary Beth Bonacci, author, speaker and founder of Real Love;

Philip Mango, psychotherapist and president of St. Michael's Institute for Human Sciences;

Gregory Popcak, Catholic counselor and founder of the Pastoral Solutions Institute;

Janet Smith, author and Father Michael J. McGivney Chair in Life Ethics, Sacred Heart Major Seminary, Detroit;

Edward Sri, author and professor at the Augustine Institute in Denver;

Michael Waldstein, Max Seckler professor of theology at Ave Maria University and translator of the definitive edition of Pope John Paul II's theology of the body, "Man and Woman He Created Them."

The Archdiocese of Omaha is grateful to the Diocese of Duluth's contribution in the update of this parent information!

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 experiencing 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
- God wants us to talk to trusted grownups about our worries, concerns or “funny/ uncomfortable feelings” so they can help us be safe.

Children are the living letters we send into a time we will never see...

Neal Postman

Touch that makes a child feel uncomfortable needs to be disclosed to a trusted adult. When someone touches a child in private areas, shows them sexual pictures, uses sexual language, or asks a child to touch them in private areas of their body – it is a violation against the child. Suspected child abuse always needs to be reported to the authorities.

Developmental Dimensions and Stages

We have learned over the past several decades about how we develop. Human beings are complex, multi-dimensional creatures. Each person has his or her own unique journey toward God. There are six dimensions of development that are identifiable and seem to be reflected in some way in all of us.

- Physical: Who we are as gendered persons.
- Cognitive: Our beliefs, knowledge, and perceptions.
- Emotional: Our feelings and how those feelings affect our relationships.
- Social: How we relate to others and our capacity to share ourselves.
- Moral: What we value and how we make decisions based on our beliefs.
- Spiritual: Recognizing and acknowledging the presence of God in our relationships.

Psychosexual development is our personal journey toward integration as embodied human persons. It is a process of growth that embraces all aspects of our human reality.

There are five stages used to describe our journey:

- Infancy: Children learn about their world primarily through touch.
- Toddler: Children are totally delighted in their bodies and begin to recognize gender differences.
- Pre-school to Puberty: Children develop gender identity and a sense of privacy.
- Adolescence: Adolescents explore who they are in and through relationships as their bodies mature toward adulthood.
- Adulthood: Adults integrate self-knowledge, empathy, sensitivity, trust equality, spontaneity, and appropriate self-disclosure into their lives.

“Being in the image of God, the human individual possesses the dignity of a person, who is not just something, but someone.”

Catechism of the Catholic Church, Second Edition, 1997

Tips for Parents

Even “Nice” People Sometimes Do Mean Things.

Abusers are experts at looking friendly, nice, safe, kind, generous, and loving. A child is vulnerable when the other person has more: age (older), size (bigger), knowledge, resources, status, and/or power.

REMEMBER: Up to 30% of abusers/offenders are under the age of 18.

Abusers use manipulative behaviors to gain control: flattery, bribery, jealousy, intimidation, and anger. Abusers manipulate parents along with children.

Pay Close Attention To Who Is Around Your Children.

Parents should know where their children are and whom they are with. Children should know how to contact their parents. Use the buddy system: Take a buddy or don't go.

Refuse to leave your children with someone you don't trust. No job or event is worth your child's safety.

Listen To What Your Children Say.

Encourage communication by taking seriously what your children say. Increase your child's vocabulary by helping them name feelings. Back up your child's right to say “NO.”

Role Play: A child who never says “no” to a parent will never say “no” to another adult. Give children permission to yell for help.

Take A Second Look At Potential Danger.

Be cautious on the internet, experts recommend computer use be monitored regularly. Be selective when sharing personal information: including last name, telephone numbers, contact information, schools, activity schedules and occasions when someone is home alone. Talk about worse case scenarios and possible solutions to uncomfortable situations. Don't follow anyone who takes your bicycle, book bag or purse – report theft instead. Watch out for children who are alone often.

Trust Your Instincts.

Listen to your gut feelings, if you have doubts listen to them. Your body sometimes knows what your head hasn't yet figured out.

Recognize Change in Your Child's Behavior.

Change in behavior is a signal of change in your child's life. Tell your children: “I will always love you.”

Model Healthy Boundaries and Limit-Setting Behavior.

Be a good example.

Recognizing Child Abuse and Neglect: Signs and Symptoms

Author(s): Child Welfare Information Gateway

Year Published: 2006

The first step in helping abused or neglected children is learning to recognize the signs of child abuse and neglect. The presence of a single sign does not prove child abuse is occurring in a family; however, when these signs appear repeatedly or in combination you should take a closer look at the situation and consider the possibility of child abuse.

If you do suspect a child is being harmed, reporting your suspicions may protect the child and get help for the family. Contact your local child protective services agency or police department. **For more information about where and how to file a report, call the Childhelp USA® National Child Abuse Hotline (1.800.4.A.CHILD).**

Recognizing Child Abuse

The following signs may signal the presence of child abuse or neglect.

The Child:

- Shows sudden changes in behavior or school performance.
- Has not received help for physical or medical problems brought to the parents' attention.
- Has learning problems (or difficulty concentrating) that cannot be attributed to specific physical or psychological causes.
- Is always watchful, as though preparing for something bad to happen.
- Lacks adult supervision.
- Is overly compliant, passive, or withdrawn.
- Comes to school or other activities early, stays late, and does not want to go home.

The Parent:

- Shows little concern for the child.
- Denies the existence of — or blames the child for — the child's problems in school or at home.
- Asks teachers or other caretakers to use harsh physical discipline if the child misbehaves.
- Sees the child as entirely bad, worthless, or burdensome.
- Demands a level of physical or academic performance the child cannot achieve.
- Looks primarily to the child for care, attention, and satisfaction of emotional needs.

The Parent and Child:

- Rarely touch or look at each other.
- Consider their relationship entirely negative.
- State that they do not like each other.

Types of Abuse

The following are some signs often associated with particular types of child abuse and neglect: physical abuse, neglect, sexual abuse, and emotional abuse. It is important to note, however, these types of abuse are more typically found in combination than alone. A physically abused child, for example, is often emotionally abused as well, and a sexually abused child also may be neglected.

Signs of Physical Abuse

Consider the possibility of physical abuse when the **child**:

- Has unexplained burns, bites, bruises, broken bones, or black eyes.
- Has fading bruises or other marks noticeable after an absence from school.
- Seems frightened of the parents and protests or cries when it is time to go home.
- Shrinks at the approach of adults.
- Reports injury by a parent or another adult caregiver.

Consider the possibility of physical abuse when the **parent or other adult caregiver**:

- Offers conflicting, unconvincing, or no explanation for the child's injury.
- Describes the child as “evil,” or in some other very negative way.
- Uses harsh physical discipline with the child.
- Has a history of abuse as a child.

Signs of Neglect

Consider the possibility of neglect when the **child**:

- Is frequently absent from school.
- Begs or steals food or money.
- Lacks needed medical or dental care, immunizations, or glasses.
- Is consistently dirty and has severe body odor.
- Lacks sufficient clothing for the weather.
- Abuses alcohol or other drugs.
- States that there is no one at home to provide care.

Consider the possibility of neglect when the **parent or other adult caregiver**:

- Appears to be indifferent to the child.
- Seems apathetic or depressed.
- Behaves irrationally or in a bizarre manner.
- Is abusing alcohol or other drugs.

Signs of Sexual Abuse

Consider the possibility of sexual abuse when the **child**:

- Has difficulty walking or sitting.
- Suddenly refuses to change for gym or to participate in physical activities.
- Reports nightmares or bed wetting.
- Experiences a sudden change in appetite.
- Demonstrates bizarre, sophisticated, or unusual sexual knowledge or behavior.
- Becomes pregnant or contracts a venereal disease, particularly if under age 14.
- Runs away.
- Reports sexual abuse by a parent or another adult caregiver.

Consider the possibility of sexual abuse when the **parent or other adult caregiver**:

- Is unduly protective of the child or severely limits the child's contact with other children, especially of the opposite sex.
- Is secretive and isolated.
- Is jealous or controlling with family members.

Signs of Emotional Maltreatment

Consider the possibility of emotional maltreatment when the **child**:

- Shows extremes in behavior such as overly compliant or demanding behavior, extreme passivity, or aggression.
- Is either inappropriately adult (parenting other children, for example) or inappropriately infantile (frequently rocking or head-banging, for example).
- Is delayed in physical or emotional development.
- Has attempted suicide.
- Reports a lack of attachment to the parent.

Consider the possibility of emotional maltreatment when the **parent or other adult caregiver**:

- Constantly blames, belittles, or berates the child.
- Is unconcerned about the child and refuses to consider offers of help for the child's problems.
- Overtly rejects the child.

Resources

Identifying Child Abuse and Neglect

www.childwelfare.gov/can/identifying

Resources and information from the Child Welfare Information Gateway website about signs and symptoms of child maltreatment, including training resources.

Preventing Child Abuse and Neglect

www.childwelfare.gov/preventing

Resources and information from the Child Welfare Information Gateway website.

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<http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/factsheets/> - skipfooter

Updated on June 21, 2006

Circle of Grace

Resources for Leaders and Parents

Websites

National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect, 800-FYI-3366 <http://nccanch.acf.hhs.gov>

United States Catholic Conference of Bishops:

Office of Child and Youth Protection www.usccb.org/ocyp/index.shtml

Technology Safety Through the Eyes of Faith , www.faithandsafety.org

NetSmartzKids.org

ProtectKids.com: Protecting Children in Cyberspace www.ProtectKids.com

www.archomaha.org , (Safe Environment/ P.A.T.H. (Anti-Pornography) resources

Scripture Text

New American Bible with Revised New Testament and Revised Psalms © 1991, 1986, 1970, Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Washington, D.C.

App

Life Teen app “Victory” helps teens be accountable regarding viewing pornography

Books

The Theology of the Body: Human Love in the Divine Plan, John Paul II, Pauline Books and Media, 1997.

Unmasking Sexual Con Games, 3rd Edition, Kathleen M. McGee and Laura J. Buddenberg, Boys Town Press, 2003.

Church Documents

The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality: Guidelines for Education within the Family, Pontifical Council for the Family, 1996.

Promise to Protect – Pledge to Heal: Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2011.

USCCB “Create in Me a Clean Heart” document and pamphlets

Consultation

- Safe Environment Coordinator:

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Other

- Boys Town National Hotline 800-448-3000
- State Child Protective Service