



DIOCESE OF PUEBLO  
C O L O R A D O

OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

October 22, 2018

Dear Brothers and Sisters of the Diocese of Pueblo,

Following the adoption of the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People promulgated by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops in 2002, the Diocese of Pueblo has worked diligently in protecting children, youth and vulnerable adults in our community.

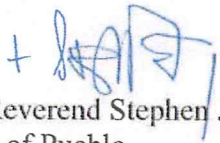
**As Bishop of the Diocese of Pueblo, I hereby promulgate the following safe environment programs for use in our diocese. This letter supersedes all previous letters of promulgation.**

The Safe Environment Program for the Diocese of Pueblo consists of the following:

- **Screening One** background screening program for clergy, religious, lay employees, educators and covered volunteers. Background screenings must be completed before the person begins their service. There can be no exceptions regarding this aspect of our Safe Environment Program.
- **Catholic Mutual Group CMG Connect Safe Environment Program** training for is designed to educate clergy, religious, lay employees, educators and covered volunteers. Training must be completed in full.
- **Circle of Grace Program** designed to help children and youth to establish and maintain their own personal safety. Training is to be used in our school and parish religious education programs.

Thank you for your continued support of the Diocese of Pueblo's Safe Environment programs and for continuing to provide a safe environment for our children and vulnerable adults.

Sincerely yours in Christ,



Most Reverend Stephen J. Berg, D.D.  
Bishop of Pueblo

CIRCLE OF GRACE  
*Safe Environment Program*  
*Grade K through Grade 8*  
*"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 The Diocese of Pueblo.

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

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

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

*What is a Circle of Grace?*

The Catholic Church teaches that God has created each of us as unique and special. Genesis 1:27 tells us that we are created "male and female in God's image" and that God saw this as "very good." In that goodness, we are meant to respect ourselves and everyone else as persons created and loved by God.

Adults assist children and young people to recognize God's love by helping them to understand that each of us lives and moves in a *Circle of Grace*. You can imagine your own *Circle of Grace* by putting your arms above your head then circle down in front of your body including side to side. This circle, front to back, holds who you are in your body and through your senses. It holds your very essence in mind, heart, soul, and sexuality.

*Why is it important to help our children understand the Circle of Grace?*

God intends our relationships in life to be experiences of divine love. Respectful, nurturing, loving relationships increase our understanding of our own value and help us to love others. It is never too early to help children and young people understand how very special they are and how relationships in life are called to be sacred. Understanding this can help them to protect the special person they are and to be respectful of others.

Adults, especially parents, as they strive to provide a safe and protective environment, hold the responsibility to help children and young people understand and respect their own dignity and that of others. A truly safe and protective environment is one where children and young people recognize when they are safe or unsafe and know how to bring their concerns, fears, and uncertainties to the trusted adults in their lives.

*How is the Circle of Grace Program different from other protection programs?*

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

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

---

<sup>2</sup> [www.usccb.org](http://www.usccb.org) or <http://nccanch.acfhhs.gov>

# 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.  
Know 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 grownups about our worries, concerns or “funny/ uncomfortable feelings” so they can help us be safe and take the right action.

*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

## *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.

# *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.

# *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](http://www.usccb.org/ocyp/index.shtml)

Technology Safety Through the Eyes of Faith , [www.faihandsafety.org](http://www.faihandsafety.org)

NetSmartzKids.org

ProtectKids.com: Protecting Children in Cyberspace [www.ProtectKids.com](http://www.ProtectKids.com)

[www.archomaha.org](http://www.archomaha.org) , (Safe Environment/ P.A.T.H. (Anti-Pornography) resouces

### Scripture Text

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

### Books

Good Picture Bad Picture Jr. by Kristen A. Jenson and Gail Poyner (3-6 year olds)

Good Picture Bad Picture by Kristen A. Jenson and Gail Poyner (7-9 year olds)

*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: Nancy Martinez - Diocese of Pueblo, CO

719-544-9861 ext. 1110

➤

### Other

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