

Parents First

Special Edition

Parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children (Catechism of the Catholic Church 2223)

Your Family and Circle of Grace

Your home is the first place your child will experience the security and protection of God's love for him. And YOU are the first persons to communicate this profound truth of God's Circle of Grace to your child.

From the moment of birth, a child can know deep down inside if he is loved and secure. Your child experiences a circle of grace from the gentle way his parents and caregivers hold him, how they respond to his needs when he cries and reassure him when he is afraid or in danger. God provides his love and care for your child through your nurturing care for him.

At your child's Baptism, you were given a candle and asked to be a "light" to your child...shining the light of Christ's love and



presence on him. When you are a loving and responsible parent, your child learns about the circle of grace from you as you communicate God's love to him through your faithful care and protection.

Your words teach your child about God's protection and comfort. Use words to remind your child that God is with her, watching over her day and night. When she is afraid or anxious, remind her that she is never alone. Assure her that she is wonderfully made by God...just as she is; short, tall, freckled or plain.

Your actions teach too. Show respect for your child by allowing him age-appropriate privacy, not teasing him about his body, setting rules about bullying and name-calling, setting boundaries at home so that mutual respect is learned and practiced everyday in ordinary ways.

Your attitudes will communicate to your child in profound ways. An attitude of openness and acceptance of your child's dreams and fears is important to establish the sense of trust she needs to tell you what she is feeling. She needs to know that she can tell you anything and that you will listen and accept her feelings without retribution.

Establishing Traditions and Sacred Space

Simple family traditions and rituals help children have a sense of security and belonging that enhances their understanding of the circle of grace. Traditions act like glue holding families together. Some traditions are seasonal (snow sledding, raking leaves, bike riding, or camping in the back yard). Others occur in the rhythms of everyday (signing each child with the sign of the cross on the forehead as they leave the house, good-night prayers or story reading, notes in sack lunches on special days or Friday night pizza and a movie). Families who wrap their lives in ritual and tradition teach children that God's grace surrounds them in the ordinary moments of their lives as well as at special times.

Creating Sacred Space in your Home:
"Bidden or not bidden, God is present"

Place sacramentals in your home to remind yourself and your children that God is present all the time whether or not we are attentive to Him. Sacramentals (a cross or crucifix, pictures or statues of Mary, Jesus or the saints, a rosary, medal or scapular, or other religious art) are

objects that remind us of our faith. Placing the scriptures in a prominent place with a candle nearby is a way of acknowledging God's presence in His holy word. Or create a home altar with a symbol of Christ, a candle and objects that remind you of God's gracious presence all around you in nature, in photos of loved ones, or in mementos of happy times together.

Praying together...

*Gather whoever is at home at meal times or bed time and ask God's blessing on your family. Pray when someone is sick, sad or anxious. Pray when you have something to celebrate. Have a book of family prayers at home to help you remember to pray daily. In your prayer, acknowledge God's presence with you, ask for what you need and give thanks for your blessings. **Prayer is a dialogue with God in which we are reassured by His power and presence in our lives.***

Talking to your children about their *Circle of Grace*

Here are a few ideas to assist you in teaching your child that he is God's precious creation and he is never outside the circle of His love and grace.

- **Question: What are some ways God shows us how much he loves us?**
Response: God is with us always- when we are happy, sad, asleep, lonely or afraid. God loves us very much and He puts Trusted Adults in our lives to help us when we are hurt, scared or confused. 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*.
- **Question: How do we know when something doesn't belong in our *Circle of Grace*?**
Response: We may get a funny or uncomfortable feeling that something or someone is not safe, we may be afraid or feel like we want to get away.
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 does not cause bad things to happen to us. He loves us very much. Having faith does not take away all of life's struggles. But God promised to always "be present" providing guidance and comfort in our time of need.
- **Question: God gives us people in our lives (our parents, teachers and Trusted Adults) to help us when we are troubled or struggling with a concern. Ask your child what they would do if they were afraid that something unsafe may happen to them, or has already happened to them? (Tell our parents, or a Trusted Adult.)**
Response: God helps us know when to ask for help from someone we trust. God wants us to talk to a trusted adult about our worries, concerns, or "funny/uncomfortable feelings" so they can help us be safe and take the right action. *Circle of Grace* helps us learn skills for good decision making and reminds us of God's presence and assistance when we are facing difficult and confusing situations.

What is family?

Today's families may look quite different than generations past. Married parents, single parents, step-parents, foster parents, grandparents, extended family, friends and others may be responsible for providing a healthy, safe and loving environment to raise our children. **Families are central to God's plan for His children.** They are the fundamental building block of strong societies. Families are where we can feel love and learn how to love others.

"The Christian home is the place where children receive the first proclamation of the faith. For this reason **the family home is rightly called "the domestic church,"** a community of grace and prayer, a school of human virtues and of Christian charity." Catechism of the Catholic Church No. 1666



What *Circle of Grace* Teaches about God's Love

Circle of Grace is the love and goodness of God that surrounds us at all times. It is the recognition that He is with us always and desires a loving relationship with each of us, even in difficult and confusing situations. God is truly present not as a judge, but out of love, guiding us to make decisions that will bring us closer to Him. *Circle of Grace* teaches of the sacredness of each person and how relationships are called to be experiences of divine love.

May We Recommend...

Parents First Newsletters for Kind.- gr. 12-

Parents First complements *Circle of Grace* lessons by giving parents information and resources to help answer questions, in an age-appropriate manner, about sexuality, puberty, human dignity and sacred relationships. (Parents First newsletters for each grade and Parents First on special topics of interest to parents are available from your School, Religious Formation or Youth Ministry.)

Marriage and Family Life Ministries- Parents and Parenting:

www.usccb.org/topics/marriage-and-family-life-ministries/parents-and-parenting

'What Children Need From Their Parents'— Catholics Come Home:

www.catholiccomehome.org/your-questions/marriage/parenting/

Parenting for all Stages- Catholic Family Faith

www.catholicfamilyfaith.org/general1.html

(Partner Dioceses contact information here)