

October 24, 2018

Dear Parents,

Here at Holy Spirit Catholic School, the school has once again settled into a year of learning together. Attached you will find information about the **Circle of Grace** program, a curriculum for the safe environment education of children and young people supported and mandated by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). This program is designed to help to insure that children and youth in the care of the Church are protected from physical, emotional, and sexual abuse. The Circle of Grace also helps the children to understand the sacredness of who they are and how to seek help through their relationships with trusted adults. Please read the note from our Bishop supporting our participation in this mandated program.

Beginning the first week in November, 2018, this program will be implemented in all the classrooms at the school from Kindergarten through 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Below is an opt-out form if you choose not to have your child participate.

A **Code of Conduct for children and Young People** will be sent home with each child participating in this program for you to sign and verify your agreement for your child's participation in the program. Please have your child return the signed **Code of Contact** sheet to his/her teacher.

Sincerely,

Sister Mary Colman Pyle, F.S.E.

School Counselor (208) 233-9383 Cell: 241-2269

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If you **DO NOT** wish for your child to participate in the program, please read and sign the following and return it with your child:

The Safe Environment training (Circle of Grace) was offered to me for my child. I **DO NOT WISH FOR MY CHILD TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS PROGRAM AT THIS TIME.** I am aware that materials are available for me to work with my child at home.

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Parent Signature

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Date

## **Note from the Bishop**

*“The Diocese of Boise is committed to the responsibility to care for the spiritual, moral and pastoral well-being of all God’s people. Pastoral ministry is the principal mission of the Church. It is built on a sacred trust that is shared by all the members of the Church. Whenever it is alleged or proven that this sacred trust has been broken or violated, those charged with the governance of the Church must respond in justice and with the mercy of God to protect and safeguard the rights of all. Sexual misconduct, including sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, violation of sexual ethics, and sexual harassment, are serious breaches of this sacred trust and cannot be ignored without compromising the integrity of the church’s mission and causing grave damage to the whole Body of Christ. When any of these forms of sexual misconduct occur, the church must address the issue responsibly and promptly.*

*By recognizing that all people are susceptible to such breaches of trust, we can act to prevent sexual misconduct by educating those who work for the church, instituting standards of behavior, and responding effectively to allegations of such misconduct in an atmosphere of listening, understanding, Christian love, mutual respect, and social justice.*

*In particular, the Diocese of Boise is determined to provide a safe environment for the children and young people involved in its ministries, implementing policies and procedures to assist in preventing sexual abuse, and to assist Diocesan personnel in recognizing, reporting and attending to the needs of abused children and their families.” – From the Roman Catholic Diocese of Boise Sexual Misconduct Policies.*

If you, or someone you know, is a victim of sexual misconduct by a person (clergy or lay person) acting on behalf of the Church, you are invited to contact us. My staff in the Office of Child, Youth and Adult Protection (CYAP) is here to assist you as you seek healing and wholeness.

**Most Reverend Peter F. Christensen, DD**  
**Bishop of Boise**

## Summary of the Key concepts of *Circle of Grace*

### **God gives each of us a *Circle of Grace* where He is always present:**

*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 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 to know what belongs in our *Circle of Grace*.**

- Our feelings help us to know about ourselves and our world around us.
- God helps us know what belongs in our *Circle of Grace* by experiencing peace, love and 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 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 of 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, 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 who 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 a theft instead. Watch out for children who are often alone.

### **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

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 the 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 Childhelp USA @National Child Abuse Hotline. (1-800-4-a-child).**

### **Recognizing child abuse:**

The following signs may signal the presence of child abuse:

#### **The Child:**

- Shows hidden changes in behavior or school performance.
- Has not received help for physical or medical problems brought to the caregiver's 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 Caregiver:**

- Shows little concern for the child.
- Denies the existence of, or blames the child for the child's problems at 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 Caregiver 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 adult caregiver:

- Offers conflicting or 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 home/available to provide care.

Consider the possibility of neglect when the adult caregiver:

- Appears to be indifferent to the child.
- Seems apathetic or depressed.
- Behaves irrationally or in a bizarre manner.
- Is abusing alcohol or 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 bedwetting.
- 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 the age of 14.
- Runs away.
- Reports sexual abuse by an adult caregiver.

Consider the possibility of sexual abuse when the adult care giver:

- 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 adult.

Consider the possibility of emotional maltreatment when the adult caregiver:

- Consistently 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.