



## Safe Environment Program Overview

The foundation for *Circles of Care* is rooted in our faith as Catholic Christians: we are created in God's image and likeness, we share a common dignity as human persons, God's declaration that all creation is "good," and that, created in God's image and likeness, we are called to relationship, to community, and to care for one another, especially those most in need. *Circles of Care* also addresses topics presented in *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*; in particular, Section Three: Life in Christ (pp 421- 611) which addresses The Dignity of the Human Person, The Human Community, God's Salvation: Law and Grace, and The Ten Commandments.

The name of the program is rooted in the universal symbol for wholeness, the circle. Throughout the history of humankind the circle has signified completeness, infinity, and the sphere within which communication and dialogue happen best. A variety of cultures have expressed these understandings by gathering physically in circles for decision-making and/or prayer and using rings to symbolize commitment and interrelationship.

The lessons in *Circles of Care* are intended to strengthen and complement the care that is already part of the catechetical ministry in our Catholic schools. Throughout the lessons students will be introduced to foundational principles of living our faith, especially personal safety, making good decisions, developing wholesome relationships, and self-esteem. This is done within the context of the religion curriculum for each high school grade. Also included in the *Circles of Care* program is a letter to parents, an opt-out form for parents to sign if they do not want their child/children to participate, class activity sheets, and forms for reporting attendance to the Diocese of Rockford. The parents letters for each of grades 9 through 12 serve to explain the subject of that grade's lesson. Timely information sheets from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children and the *Connect Safely* website are included with the parent letters for parents' use in the home.

Diocesan High Schools have the option as well to use materials from *Netsmartz* in combination with the *Circles of Care* lesson plans for grades 9 and 10. *Netsmartz* is an interactive, educational safety resource developed by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children and the Boys & Girls Clubs of America to teach children and youth how to stay safer on the internet. Certain videos and corresponding lesson plans from the *Netsmartz*

website have been selected by the Diocese for use in the classroom. The use of a *Netsmartz* video or videos is not a substitute for the *Circles of Care* Lesson; but may be used in addition to the *Circles of Care* Lesson.

In preparing this curriculum, the intention and hope has been that all of the materials will assist parents and educators in continuing the ministry we share with all of you, that of caring for and forming in faith the young members of the Church.

## **Recommendations for Teachers and Catechists**

In working with the *Circles of Care* program, educators should understand the basic philosophy that is proper in this approach to education. The parent is the primary teacher. However, schools have a valuable role to play. They will assist with the preparation and support of parents; they also provide the moral teaching of the Church for the young people in their classrooms.

Educators do get questions from students that require responses. In such situations educators should ask themselves this question: What part of this child's question can be answered from the moral doctrines of the Church, and what part is personal developmental information that should be referred back to the parent? Essentially, specific questions about the physical development or strictly biological information are always appropriate for parents to deal with. If a child seems to have many unanswered questions in this area, the teacher or catechist might want to give the parent a call and advise them of the matter.

## **Directions to Administrators**

Prior to teaching the *Circles of Care* safe environment curriculum each year, the school must offer a meeting for parents. Attendance by parents at the parent session is optional, but offering the annual meeting is not. A single annual meeting can be scheduled to include parents of school students as well as parents of students in the parish religious education program. The parent session shall address the following:

- General guidelines to assist parents in protecting their children from abuse;
- Appropriate boundaries for adults working with children;  
How parents can discuss personal safety issues with their children, including touching safety and Internet safety; and
- A review of the content of the school's safe environment curriculum for children.

Guest speakers, such as law enforcement officials, DCFS personnel, social workers, and counselors from Catholic Charities, may be enlisted to assist the School in making this presentation to parents. Schools are required to document the date of the meeting and the

estimated number of parents in attendance on a verification form (see “Documentation of Annual Parent Meeting” form, to be completed by the Principal, under the Forms Section of this Document), as well as retain copies of school newsletters or announcements promoting the annual parent meeting.

“Opt-Out” forms are to be used by Schools in circumstances where a parent requests that his or her child attending the School or the Religious Education program not participate in a particular chastity or safe environment lesson or lessons (see separate “Opt Out” Forms for School and Parish Religious Education Programs, under the Forms Section of this Document). It should be emphasized in the parent meeting and in any other communications with parents that the safe environment curriculum is not sex education; rather, the curriculum is an abuse prevention program to help create and maintain a safe environment for children and young adults.

Teachers and catechists will complete classroom attendance sheets when the Lessons are taught, to calculate accurate numbers of those who are receiving from the safe environment program. Pastors, principals, and Directors of Religious Education will complete Parish/School tally sheets adding classroom attendance sheets to provide accurate numbers for the each parish and school. (See “Classroom Attendance Sheet” forms and “Tally Sheet” forms, under the Forms Section of this Document.)

Date of Completion: Schools are to complete the curriculum for all students on or before April 30 of each year. Any requests for extensions must be approved in advance by the Superintendent of Schools.

Reporting: The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) periodically audits each diocese to ensure compliance with the principles and requirements outlined in the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*. Consequently, schools must maintain appropriate documentation of their safe environment programs and procedures. Specifically, each school is to submit a report to the Diocese stating the number of students enrolled in the school, the number of students trained, the number of students who opted out of the curriculum at the request of their parents, and the number of students remaining to be trained. This report must be submitted on or before May 1 of each year (See “Tally Sheet” under the Forms Section of this Document).

## **Program Details**

Details for the program are provided by grade level. They include both materials prepared for a classroom presentation and materials that are to be reproduced and provided to parents. A specific outline for each grade follows:

### **Grade 9**

#### For the home:

Parent Letter on Safe Environment Lesson: Protection from Abusive conduct  
Information sheet from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children on safety  
Information sheet on the Internet, social networking and telephone use

Information sheets from Connectsafely.com, “Social Web Tips for Parents,” “Social Web Tips for Teens,” “How to use Facebook Privacy Settings,” and “How Social Influencing Works”  
Opt Out form

For the classroom:

Lesson plan on Safe Environment: Protection from Abusive conduct  
*Netsmartz* videos Tracking Teresa and/or Amy’s Choice (high school version)  
*Netsmartz* Lesson plans for Tracking Teresa and/or Amy’s Choice (high school version)  
Prayer Resources document

**Grade 10**

For the home:

Parent Letter on Safe Environment Lesson: Bullying/Harassment  
Information sheet from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children on safety  
Information sheet on the Internet, social networking and telephone use  
Information sheet from Connectsafely.com, “Tips to Prevent Cyberbullying”  
Opt Out form

For the classroom:

Lesson plan on Safe Environment: Bullying/Harassment  
*Netsmartz* videos Cyberbullying: You can’t take it Back, and/or Cyberbullying: Broken Friendship  
*Netsmartz* Lesson plans for Cyberbullying: You can’t take it Back, and/or Cyberbullying: Broken Friendship  
Prayer Resources document

**Grade 11**

For the home:

Parent Letter on Safe Environment Lesson: Hazing  
Information sheet from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children on safety  
Information sheet on the Internet, social networking and telephone use  
Information sheets from Connectsafely.com, “Tips on Cell Phone Safety” and “Tips on Video-Sharing”  
Opt Out form

For the classroom:

Lesson plan on Safe Environment: Hazing  
Prayer Resources document

**Grade 12**

For the home:

Parent Letter one Safe Environment Lesson: Qualities of Relationships  
Information sheet from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children on safety  
Information sheet on the Internet, social networking and telephone use  
Information sheet from Connectsafely.com, “Tips to Prevent Sexting”  
Opt Out form

For the classroom:

Lesson plan on Safe Environment: Qualities of Relationships

Worksheets Attachment

Prayer Resources document

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Additional portions of the program are taken from *Netsmartz*, an interactive educational website developed by the National Center on Missing and Exploited Children and the Boys & Girls Clubs of America. The Internet, Social Networking and Telephone Use Information Sheet was adapted from materials from the Diocese of Joliet.

Some of the documents to be sent home to parents are borrowed and reprinted with permission from *Netsmartz*, [www.netsmartz.org](http://www.netsmartz.org) and *Connect Safely*, [www.connectsafely.com](http://www.connectsafely.com).

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