

Lane Tech Small Group Counseling—Grief and Loss

Name of Group:

To be determined by group members

Focus of Group:

To provide students with tools for managing grief and loss, help them to understand that experiencing grief is normal and they are not alone in their grief, and offer a safe space to discuss feelings and reactions to grief and loss.

Number of Students:

8-10

Adult Leader:

School Counselor

Number of Sessions:

4

Standards:

A.2 Confidentiality, A.6 Group Work

Competencies:

PS:A1.3 Learn the goal-setting process, PS:A1.5 Identify and express feelings,
PS:A2.2 Respect alternative points of view

Additional materials included below:

- Pre and Post Survey
- Group member consent form
- Selection process letter for Division Room teachers
- Student referral form
- Identification of feeling worksheet
- Suicide Warning List sheet

Session 1: Introduction to feelings towards grief/loss

Goals:

- To help students feel comfortable in the group setting
- To choose rules and norm for the group to follow
- To help students begin to understand and express their feelings about grief/loss

Materials: Feelings chart, journals, poster board, markers

Session 1 will begin with introductions of the group members and adult leader. Each member will share their name, the weirdest food they have eaten, and, if comfortable, something about the person in their life they have lost. After introductions are finished, students will discuss their expectations of the group, what they hope to learn, what loss means to them, and finally, choose a name for the group. Students will agree upon goals for the group to achieve. These goals will be written on poster board, signed by each member, and posted somewhere visible.

After goals are created, the group will then decide on what the group norms will include. The adult leader will explain that group norms are like rules and help everyone remain focused on what the group wants to accomplish. This is where the leader will emphasize the importance of confidentiality. After the group norms are established, they will also be posted for everyone to see as a constant reminder of what interactions and behavior should look and feel like during each session.

Each student will then be handed a chart with images of feelings. The leader will ask the students to think about some of the feelings they have towards grief and loss and circle a few on the chart that match those feelings. Students will then share with group. Discussion questions might include:

- Is it okay to have these kinds of feelings about loss?
- How do your feelings differ from other group member's feelings?
- Do you notice patterns about your feelings?
- How can this group help to manage what you are feeling?

When the discussion concludes, leader will thank each member for participating and ask if there are any closing thoughts or reactions to the first group session. After reminding students about confidentiality, each student will be given a journal. The leader will explain that this journal will be used for members to write down thoughts and reflections during the sessions. Students are welcome to share entries or keep their writing private. The session will end with a pre-test evaluation. The adult leader will also mention that next week the group will be making memorials in honor of the person they lost and they should bring any materials from home they may want to include in the memorial.

Session 2: Creating a Personal Memorial

Materials: Any variety of art supplies to create memorial

Goals:

- To provide students with the opportunity to create something lasting representing the person they have lost
- To allow students to be creative and share their thoughts with the group

Open the session by welcoming the students back and asking if anyone has any lingering thoughts from last weeks session. Review some highlights of last week's session. Remind students of the goals of the group and the group norms directing them to the posters hanging on the wall.

Discuss with the group why it's important to remember the people they've lost. Ask the students if they can think of some ways that people choose to remember the person they lost. Examples might include a funeral, visiting a gravesite, or creating something artistic. Then ask the students some of the things they remember most about the person they lost. If comfortable, students can share with the group some of these memories.

Reiterate how it is helpful in coping with grief to find ways to remember the person one lost. Explain to the students that in this session they will create their own personal memorial to help them express their thoughts and feelings about the person they lost. They can use the materials provided in any way they want. They can draw, write poems, create a structure, etc. When creating their memorial, students may want to include some of the following information:

- Person's name
- Student's relationship to the person they lost
- A special memory with the person
- The person's favorite things or activities
- A special event the person experienced
- Favorite personality traits of the person

Make sure to allow time towards the end of the session for students to share their memorials with the group. The following questions may be helpful in leading the discussion:

- What feelings were brought out when creating your memorial?
- What kinds of things did you include in your memorial about the person you lost?
- How do you think this memorial will help you to remember the person you lost?
- What did it feel like to share your creation with the group?

Ask the students what they liked or disliked about making the memorial about the person they lost. Discuss whether students would be interested in going further with their memorial (creating a scrapbook, getting support from other family or friends in remembering special moments, conducting interviews, writing a blog, etc.) Ask students to brainstorm other ways they can remember the person they lost.

Before finishing up, ask the students if they have any last thoughts about making their memorial. Let them know they may take these memorials home and continue to work on them or keep them in a special place. Thank everyone for participating and close the session.

Session 3: Understanding Suicide

Goals:

- to teach students the suicide warning signs
- to explain that suicide is often a permanent solution to a temporary problem
- to help students explore feelings toward suicide and realize why it might be more difficult to deal with than other kinds of deaths

Materials:

- Suicide warning signs list
- Journals
- Writing utensils

Review last week's session on the student's personal memorials. Ask the students if they have thought about their memorial since last week. Have they made any changes? Have they shared their memorial with any friends or family? Finally, ask the students if they have done any writing in their journals and allow them to share with the group anything they choose.

Next, transition into this week's topic by briefly discussing the goals of the meeting. Explain that when someone takes his or her life, it can have a major impact on those who were close to the person, or even those who just knew the person perhaps in school or in the community. Family and friends may experience a wide range of emotions towards the death and oftentimes people wonder if there was anything they could have done to help the individual. Discuss the following questions:

- Why might people affected by a suicide experience strong feelings of guilt?
- What are some things people can do to help understand their feelings of dealing with suicide?
- Have any of you been affected by a suicide and like to share some thoughts?

Explain that while there are many feelings that go along with a death by suicide, guilt and anger are often the most common. Ask the students why someone might feel angry about a family member or friend who has taken his or her life. Explain that people might be angry because they feel the person did not let them help when they needed it most. Explain how people often don't realize in the moment that suicide is a final decision. Stress that getting the right kind of help for friends, family, or themselves is essential. Remind students of the services offered in the school and community to support those thinking about suicide or dealing with a death by suicide of a friend or family member.

In their journals, ask the students to create a list of reasons why a person might take their life. Possible reasons might include:

- Feeling depressed
- Feeling constant emotional or physical pain
- Feeling unloved or unimportant
- Wanting attention
- Feeling too much stress
- Feeling too much stress
- Losing a loved one

Show students the suicide warning signs list and discuss some of the warning signs. Explain that it is normal for students to feel some of these things from time to time and does not necessarily mean they are thinking about suicide. However, feeling a number of them often can lead to more serious problems. People directly stating they are thinking about suicide should be addressed by a counselor or adult in the school immediately. Explain that these warning signs are ways for people to communicate what they are feeling to friends and family. Some of these signs are more direct and easier to notice while others are more subtle and indirect.

Discuss ways that students might be able to help or intervene if they sense a friend or family member is feeling this way. The following are important points to bring up in conversation:

- Don't be afraid to ask the person whether he or she is considering committing suicide. This will not influence the person or give them ideas. This will only help to know how serious the person is about suicide.
- While it may seem scary to talk to someone who might be thinking about suicide, try not to avoid the situation. If it is too difficult to talk to the person, find a counselor who can help.
- Don't keep the person's serious feelings a secret, you do not need to protect them. Getting them help is the most important thing to do.
- Try to understand how you are feeling through the process of helping others through their feelings.

In closing the session, review with the group things they can do when they think a family member or friend might be considering suicide or if they are considering suicide themselves. Remind them about the support services within and outside of the school offered to students. Allow some time at the end for general questions and journaling to process thoughts from the session.

Session 4: Saying Goodbye

Goals:

- Review past sessions
- Provide students with closure of the group
- Provide students with further resources and ways to follow-up

Materials:

- List of support services in and outside of school

Open the session by asking the students if they have any lingering thoughts from last week's session about suicide. Students may have had strong reactions to this session, so be sure to leave enough time to wrap up any thoughts or ideas the students have.

Next, go through each session and discuss how the students felt about them:

Session 1: Discuss the feelings each student has about the person they lost and how they have handled those feelings since group started. Ask them to remember what it was like sharing these feelings with the group for the first time compared to sharing thoughts and feelings with the other students now that the group is ending.

Session 2: Ask students to think about their personal memorial they created. Have the students discuss whether creating this memorial was helpful for them or not.

Session 3: Discuss some of the reasons someone might consider suicide. Ask students what are some things they can do if they think someone is having suicidal thoughts.

Discuss how relationships can come to an end whether it's with a friend who has moved away, a death, or other reasons. Ask students to talk about their own experiences with relationships ending and how they reacted to the situation. What worked for them? What did not work for them?

Point out that saying goodbye is important when seeking closure with something or someone. It can help to deal with sadness and unwanted emotions. Invite the students to share what the group has meant to them and what it means to have to say goodbye. Also, invite group members (adult leader can participate as well) to share one positive statement about each member of the group. This can be a characteristic or personality trait the person likes about the group member or something they have learned from the group member.

Finally, allow some time for journaling and sharing if the students would like. Thank the students for participating in the group and remind them what confidentiality means. Tell the students that even though the group is ending, you

are here for them at any time and that the students can be a resource to each other as well. Give each student the list of support services. End the group with any final thoughts.

Pre/Post-Survey for Grief Group Counseling

Please answer the following questions about yourself:

	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
I can talk about my feelings.					
I know of ways to make myself feel better.					
I have people in my life I can talk to.					
I do well in school.					
I feel safe at school.					
I know how to solve my problems.					
I know there are people who care about me.					
I get good sleep at night.					
I socialize with people outside of school.					

(Pre-survey) What topics would you like to discuss in this group?

(Post-survey) What would you change about this group?

Name: _____

My loss is (please circle one):

Caretaker Family Member Friend Other

Grief and Loss Group Counseling Informed Consent Form

I, _____, agree to adhere to the following norms and expectations of this group:

- Be on time to each session
- Be respectful of others' thoughts, emotions, and methods of grieving
- Listen while group members are speaking
- Be respectful of member's decisions to share thoughts or keep them private

I also understand that confidentiality is of the utmost importance in a group such as this one. It is essential that group member's thoughts and feelings remain within the group at all times. I understand that this is the best way to build trust among group members. Nothing said within the sessions will ever be discussed with other individuals outside of the group. A couple of exceptions, such as indicating harm to one's self or another, is the only time a breach of confidentiality is required.

In signing this consent form, I acknowledge that the leader has provided the opportunity for group members to discuss and ask questions about the importance of confidentiality and abiding by group norms.

Student Signature _____ Date _____

Leader Signature _____ Date _____

Group Counseling Letter for Division Classrooms

Teachers, please read the following information first:

Good Grief?! No matter what Charlie Brown says, there is no such thing as “good grief”. Grief is confusing, unexpected, frustrating, and often painful. All of us have experienced grief in one way or another. Sometimes, grief can sneak up on us and we don’t even know that we’re experiencing it and are unsure of how to handle it. Usually, however, we can feel our grief because it hurts. If we deny or bury our grief, it remains unresolved and can have a destructive effect on our life and our relationships. It becomes like a wound that won’t go away because we refuse to treat it.

If you are experiencing feelings of pain, grief, or loss, please consider joining the Grief Counseling Group. This group is a 4-week long peer support group that connects you with students experiencing similar pain. Through shared experience, students can learn and grow together in facing their grief. The group will meet after school, one day per week.

If you have any questions, see your counselor in the counseling department.

Teachers, please pass out the referral forms, one to each student. Every student should write his or her name on it, and check either “yes” or “no”, indicating their interest in the group. You should get a form back from every student in your class. Please collect these and put them in my mailbox by the end of the day.

Thanks for your help,

The Counseling Department

Name: _____

Name: _____

Counselor: _____

Counselor: _____

Please circle one:

Please circle one:

I am interested in joining this group.

I am interested in this group.

Yes

No

Yes

No

Name: _____

Name: _____

Counselor: _____

Counselor: _____

Please circle one:

Please circle one:

I am interested in joining this group.

I am interested in this group.

Yes

No

Yes

No

Name: _____

Name: _____

Counselor: _____

Counselor: _____

Please circle one:

Please circle one:

I am interested in joining this group.

I am interested in this group.

Yes

No

Yes

No

Suicide Warning Signs

Things a person might do:

1. Give away prized possessions
2. Possess or get a weapon
3. Make a plan for committing suicide
4. Show sudden mood swings
5. Have attempted suicide before
6. Make a will
7. Be self-destructive physically or in other ways
8. Show a change in eating habits
9. Neglect to take care of physical appearance
10. Complain about physical problems
11. Get in trouble with the law
12. Break off relationships
13. Drive while drinking
14. Show a drop in grades or have frequent absences from school

Things a person might say:

1. Talk openly about committing suicide
2. Ask questions about suicide
3. Talk about not being around in the future
4. Talk about different ways to commit suicide
5. Say things that don't make sense
6. Talk about getting revenge
7. Say negative things about themselves

Things a person might feel:

1. Depression, apathy
2. Irritability restlessness, agitation, inability to relax
3. Fatigue or low energy nearly every day
4. Hostility
5. Indecision
6. Lack of concentration
7. Sense of being a failure or worthless
8. Hopelessness and helplessness
9. Dissatisfaction with everyone and everything
10. Sense of being unloved, unwanted, or rejected
11. Extreme stress, lack of control, and lack of support

Things that might have happened:

1. Losing a relative or friend to death, divorce, or moving away
2. Having family problems such as job loss or drug/alcohol abuse
3. Losing money or prestige and having to alter lifestyle
4. Failing in a class or being held back a grade in school
5. Having a boyfriend or girlfriend end the relationship
6. Finding out about a medical illness
7. Experiencing parents' divorce

Identifying Your Feelings

Check all of the emotional states that best describe how you are generally feeling at this point in your grief process.

Afraid

You're scared of what life will be like now. You may be fearful about your ability to cope emotionally, or you may be uncertain about practical concerns like money, raising the children, or where you'll live. You may just feel afraid, without really knowing why.

Angry

Anger often feels like a physical thing. Your muscles tense up, and you may feel like yelling at someone or hitting something. Your rage may be aimed at yourself or your lost loved one, or you may find yourself getting angry at other people, society, or your spiritual beliefs.

Anxious

Anxiety is distinct from fear, and is often a generalized feeling. If you're afraid, at least you know what scares you. If you're anxious, on the other hand, you're likely to feel agitated without knowing exactly why. You may experience cold sweats, hyperactivity, or edginess.

Ashamed

You may feel that you should be getting over your feelings, or may be ashamed to show them in front of family, friends, and others. You may also harbor feelings about the death, or the fact that you are still alive, that feel shameful to you and are difficult to share with others.

Bitter

Life may feel very unjust, and you may feel cheated and disappointed. You may feel jealous and resentful toward others who still have what has been taken from you, and you may feel victimized by fate.

Confused

You may be unsure of what you're feeling, or your feelings may change quickly. Your thoughts may be unfocused, and it may be difficult to concentrate; or you may have a hard time knowing what to do and how best to make decisions.

Depressed

Depression can be a general mood of melancholy, or a full-blown experience that is all-encompassing and seems to have no end. In a major depression your mood, appetite, sleep, memory, and ability to concentrate are seriously impaired. You may feel the impulse to do self-destructive things in an effort to find relief.

Despairing

Here you feel a sense of futility. It seems as though things will never get better, and the distress caused by the death may feel unbearable. Although you want to, you may not be able to get your feelings out by crying, or you may be unable to stop crying.

Detached

You feel disconnected from the death and detached from life in general. The experience seems unreal, as if it were happening to someone else. You simply pass through life each day, your actions detached from your thoughts and feelings.

Guilty

You may feel that you could have done more to help your loved one or to prevent the death. You may feel intense regret about the way you behaved toward your loved one, or promises you never kept. You may also feel guilty about negative feelings you harbor toward your loved one, or mixed feelings about the death itself. It is also common for the bereaved to feel guilty when they begin to laugh and find pleasure in life once again, or begin new relationships. Or you may experience survival guilt—a sense of remorse that you remain alive while your loved one has died.

Helpless

Things seem out of your control. You may think that if you were powerless to prevent the death, then you can't handle anything. You can't cope with the practicalities of everyday life, and feel unable to control or manage your feelings.

Hopeless

Life has no meaning. It seems there is no point to anything, and things will never get better. Your feelings and the tasks you face seem insurmountable, and you feel unable to ever overcome your loss.

Lonely

There is no one that can understand your pain. There seems to be no one to share things with or seek comfort from. These feelings may make you feel like withdrawing even further from those around you, or from the world at large.

Lost

Everything that you used to believe in is gone. You aren't sure where you fit in the world, or who you are. If you are religious or spiritual, your faith is shaken. If you are not, you feel it unwise to ever have faith in a world where nothing seems permanent.

Numb

You are shut down emotionally. You feel nothing. Everything is flat. Although you might be able to function and get through each day, it sometimes seems as if you are sleepwalking through life, unable to feel your emotions.

Sad

Sorrow and heartbreak color everything. You feel your loss deeply, and it affects and pervades all you do. It is a mood that simply won't go away.

Shocked

You are bewildered and confused. Even if you were prepared for the death, the situation doesn't seem real. The finality of the situation leaves you feeling stunned, and you may not be able to accept that your loved one is gone. You keep hoping to wake up from a bad dream.

Overwhelmed

You simply can't cope with the barrage of emotions, thoughts, and changes facing you. You feel like running away, or escaping by using alcohol or drugs. You want someone to come and rescue you, and make it all go away.

Preoccupied

You can't stop thinking about your loss. Perhaps you keep replaying certain scenes over and over in your mind, or agonize about who you might lose next. You can't concentrate on your everyday responsibilities or engage in a conversation without your mind wandering. Intrusive memories keep surfacing no matter what you do.

Vulnerable

Your faith in your own invulnerability is shattered. You are constantly aware of your own mortality, and the mortality of other important people in your life. You feel exposed, without protection, to whatever destiny or life hands you.

Yearning

You long for the deceased. It hurts so much that you feel a constant pit in your stomach. You are constantly aware of the absence of your loved one, and you feel empty. Nothing can fill the void.