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GROUP COUNSELLING WITH ADOLESCENTS IN SCHOOLS

BY

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MASTER OF COUNSELLING

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DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to three very special young people: Joseph, Summer, and Cory. Although your time with us on this earth was much too short, your influence on my life and on the lives of others is greater than you could imagine. I am indebted to the three of you for giving me the courage and perseverance to pursue my studies in counselling psychology. It is my hope that I will be able to effectively guide other adolescents as they make that often difficult journey from childhood to adulthood.

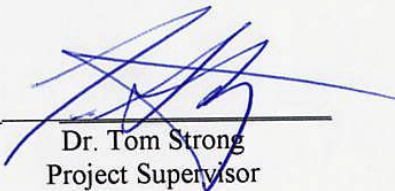
CAMPUS ALBERTA APPLIED PSYCHOLOGY:

COUNSELLING INITIATIVE

SUPERVISOR SIGNATORY PAGE

Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research

The undersigned certifies that she or he has read and recommends to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a final project entitled Group Counselling with Adolescents in Schools submitted by Jody Primeau in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Counselling.




Dr. Tom Strong
Project Supervisor

February 21st, 2005

Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research

The undersigned certifies that she or he has read and recommends to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a final project entitled "Group Counselling with Adolescents in Schools" submitted by Jody Primeau in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Counselling.



Dr. Jim Henry
Second Reader

February 21, 2005

ABSTRACT

Group counselling interventions with adolescents in a school setting have received widespread support in a number of studies. In this project, I have utilized the research in this area, as well as survey responses from counsellors within the Calgary Separate School District (CSSD), to create a group counselling “starter kit”. The intent of the starter kit is to provide counsellors with a practical tool to help implement group counselling interventions into their current counselling practice. A further document, a bereavement manual, was developed in order to demonstrate how the starter kit could be utilized with a specific group topic, based on the needs of a school community. The bereavement manual follows the step-by-step process outlined in the starter kit. Finally, a PowerPoint presentation was created to present to counsellors of the CSSD the findings and products of the project. The anticipated outcome of this project is an increased use of group counselling interventions in schools of the CSSD as a means to address counselling needs within individual schools.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Adolescence is a time of rapid transitions and many adolescents have difficulty adjusting to the multitude of changes from childhood to adulthood (Gladding, 1999). School counselling programs play an important role in offering support to young people as they adapt to these changes. Unfortunately, much needed school counselling programs have been faced with funding cuts, which has raised the need to restructure the delivery of such programs. Traditional one-on-one counselling utilizes much of the counsellors' time, which is becoming more and more limited. With increasing demands on counsellors, group counselling offers an effective, viable option that may help reduce the strain currently experienced by school counselling programs.

Not only is group counselling a cost and time-efficient intervention (Prout & Prout, 1998; Zinck & Littrell, 2000), but the process inherent in group counselling offers a natural fit with the developmental stage of adolescence and the culture of the school environment. It promotes peer interaction, helps build trusting relationships, offers a model for effective communication, and provides support. It also offers a safe context for adolescents to “reality-test” ideas, develop their self-identity, and to share with others who may be experiencing similar struggles, thereby normalizing their situation (Corey & Corey, 2002).

The purpose of this project is to identify and address needs of school counsellors within the Calgary Separate School District (CSSD) in developing counselling groups responsive to emergent issues within their respective schools. In responding to these needs, the anticipated outcome is to increase and enhance the current practice of group

interventions in schools. The project explores current practice in regards to group interventions by school counsellors within the CSSD at the junior and senior high levels.

In addition, by surveying school counsellors, the project identifies counsellor needs and strengths in initiating counselling groups that address needs within their schools. The project pinpoints specific issues that are impeding the development and implementation of group programs in the schools. Areas explored include counsellors' confidence and knowledge in implementing group programs based on school needs, perceived obstacles to group implementation, and other impediments that are unique to the school culture. One major concern cited by counsellors in the literature (Bowman, 1987; Dansby, 1996) and echoed by counsellors within the district is lack of time. By providing counsellors with a generic plan demonstrating how to assess needs and plan, implement, and evaluate a counselling group, this project aims to address some of the challenges associated with developing counselling groups, despite such time constraints. Through concurrently reviewing the literature, the project further highlight factors that generally contribute to successful group programs. The survey and literature review provides the foundation for the next phase of this project.

Finally, the project provides counsellors with tools to facilitate the implementation of group counselling initiatives and to help alleviate concerns pertaining to group counselling. To this end, a generic group counselling starter kit has been developed. The starter kit serves as a model to assess school needs and implement a counselling group on a specific counselling need. This model will be presented to counsellors of the CSSD at a future workshop as a prototype, illustrating how counsellors could develop a group counselling response to an emergent issue. In order to provide a practical, working

example of the process outlined in the starter kit, a bereavement group manual has been created based on the model provided by the generic starter kit.

As indicated, the goal of this project is to facilitate the task of school counsellors in incorporating group counselling as an essential component of their counselling program. The substantial support found in the literature for the success of group counselling and the benefits it derives for the individual, the counsellor, the group and the school community at large makes this project an important and worthwhile endeavour. Although tailored to a specific school district, the project can easily be adapted to other school districts as well as a wide array of agencies that provide support services to adolescents.

This document presents the research project and is organized into several pertinent sections. First, theoretical support for group counselling with adolescents will be explored, along with best practice guidelines for the implementation of group counselling initiatives in schools. Although it is beyond the scope of this project to provide an exhaustive review of the literature in this area, the focus is on areas emphasized in the literature, as well as areas of need indicated by counsellors in the survey.

Next, the procedures followed in the development of this project will be outlined. Following the procedures, the specific product of the research project will be presented: the generic starter kit. Sub-products of the project, the bereavement manual and the PowerPoint presentation for an inservice for counsellors can be found in the appendices. Finally, possible implications of the project will be discussed.

CHAPTER TWO

Theoretical Foundations

The purpose of this review is twofold. First, the review will examine the literature to determine the effectiveness of group counselling with the adolescent population and the benefits it incurs with this population. Once the effectiveness of groups is established, a closer look at the issues that specifically relate to assessing need and implementing group counselling programs with adolescents in a school context will be examined. To this end, relevant topics will be explored to highlight factors that contribute to successful group counselling programs. This investigation provides concrete ideas of how to adapt group process to fit the needs of adolescents and to overcome challenges faced by school counsellors. Practical tools to aid in this endeavour are included in a separate resource, the starter kit.

Effectiveness of Group Interventions in Schools

Empirical Support

Research in the area of the effectiveness of group interventions with adolescents has not reached the same degree of conclusiveness one finds with adults (Hoag & Burlingame, 1997; Prout & Prout, 1998; Whiston & Sexton, 1998). However, in recent years, more attention has focused on research on group interventions with this population. The expanding literature in the area of group counselling with adolescents supports the effectiveness of group process with this age group, and contends that schools are an ideal context to implement such practice.

Three recent meta-analytic reviews cited empirical support for the benefits to be derived from group interventions in schools (Hoag & Burlingame, 1997; Prout & Prout, 1998; Whiston & Sexton, 1998). In these reviews, support was found for the use of group

counselling as an effective intervention with students in areas such as social skills training, family problems, discipline problems, middle school dropouts, and stress management (Whiston & Sexton, 1998). Findings from these meta-analytical reviews suggest that school counselling programs would benefit from an increased use of group interventions as they are effective, cost and time efficient, and allow counsellors to reach a greater number of students. They further pointed to a need for more training in group process in counsellor education and more inservice programs for school counsellors.

Rigorous studies, beyond those reviewed in the above meta-analyses, also support group practice with this population (Carter & Brooks, 1990; Gerler & Drew, 1990; Hains, 1994; Lafountain, 1993; Phillips & Phillips, 1992; Zinck & Littrell, 2000), demonstrated through measurements of positive changes in feelings, attitudes, and behaviours of participants following group interventions. One study of a high school's group counselling program (Phillips & Phillips, 1992) found that group counselling interventions resulted in the following positive outcomes: efficient use of counsellor time; healthy interactions with peers; increased self-awareness; higher profile of the counselling program; a safe place to communicate concerns; trusting relationships; learning of skills; and, increased knowledge of available resources.

Benefits Specific to the Adolescent Population

Developmentally, group counselling is an appropriate strategy as it can ease the transition from childhood to adulthood by offering a natural environment for young people to learn ways of coping with life that can be generalized outside of the counselling room (Gladding, 1999). Furthermore, adolescents place a large importance on peer relationships.

Because of their increasing concern about peers, as well as the number of adolescent needs that involve the improvement of specific skills, group approaches to counseling have the potential to be particularly effective in helping adolescents deal with the age-related issues that confront them (George & Dustin, 1988, p. 141).

Peer feedback is a powerful tool to promote change (Gladding, 1999), and is generally more welcomed than feedback from adults (George & Dustin, 1988). Students with a common concern can provide support, share coping strategies, give and receive feedback, and challenge others to change (Borders & Drury, 1992).

The support found in the literature for the effectiveness of group counselling interventions with adolescents provides the foundation for this project. However, for group counselling interventions to be effective in a school setting with this population, a number of practical considerations need to be addressed. With this in mind, the remainder of this review will focus on how to assess individual school needs that can be best met through group counselling initiatives, and will highlight unique factors to take into account when implementing group interventions in this special setting.

Assessing Needs and Implementing a Group Intervention

Needs Assessment in School Counselling

Conducting a needs assessment is an important first step in developing and providing effective group counselling interventions. Successful school counselling programs provide responsive services by identifying problems that interfere most often with students' personal, social, career, or educational development (Gysbers & Henderson, 2000). Stroh and Sink (2002) argue that it would be highly antithetical to a learner-centered philosophy to make decisions in regards to group topics, and then find

students who fit the predetermined agenda. In addition to sound practice, basing group interventions on needs assessments provides accountability to administration and teaching staff, which often translates to much needed support (Smead, 2000).

One question that arises when considering how to assess students' needs relates to whose perceptions of students' needs should be elicited. Scholars in the field agree that multiple sources of information should be obtained (Barrow, Cox, Sepich, & Spivak, 1989; Greenberg, 2003; Gysbers & Henderson, 2000; Rye & Sparks, 1999). Clearly, students are in the best position to understand their own needs. However, findings reported in the literature suggest that input from individuals close to the students, such as parents, teachers, and counsellors, are essential in obtaining a comprehensive analysis on which to base programming (Barrow et al., 1989). Furthermore, when parents and teachers are involved in the entire process, they are more willing to offer their support (Gysbers & Henderson, 2000).

One option in assessing students' needs is to conduct a formal needs assessment survey on a regular basis with students, parents, and teachers. Surveys can be easily administered in a relatively short period of time. There are a number of formats for such assessments in the literature; however, regardless of the format, Rye and Sparks (1999) recommend surveys that are comprehensive, quantitative in nature, and address needs specific to the students and the school community at large.

Barrow et al. (1989) conducted research to determine if responses on student needs assessment surveys effectively predict the use of services. The results of this study show that such surveys only modestly predict service use, indicating that self-report surveys are "only one piece of the puzzle" (p. 80). The data provides an argument for the use multiple sources for assessing student need.

There are several other methods, both formal and informal, to assess student needs. One example is illustrated in a study conducted by Sullivan and Wright (2002). The researchers implemented and tested a collaborative, interaction-focused group counselling referral process between teachers and counsellors that teachers supported because it was simple and efficient. In this process, meetings are held throughout the year where teachers describe concerns they have for individual students. Groups are then created in response to the identified concerns.

Needs that could be addressed by group interventions could also be assessed through individual counselling; identification of several students who share a concern; a student crisis, such as violence, suicide or a drug bust (Greenberg, 2003); a suggestion box; or, informal referrals from teachers and parents. Needs assessment need not be time consuming or complicated to arrive at a decision to implement a group intervention.

Before implementing any group counselling intervention, counsellors must identify the needs of the students in their school and decide if group counselling interventions could effectively meet those needs. Counsellors are faced with the decision as to how comprehensive they wish their needs assessment to be. Whatever method is chosen, it needs to be accurate yet practical. Any of the strategies described above could be utilized in this task. For those wishing to use a formal assessment procedure, an example of a needs assessment survey that can be conducted with teachers, students, and parents is included in the starter kit.

Recruitment, Screening, and Group Composition

Recruitment. Once student needs have been identified, the next step in the recruitment and selection process involves publicizing the groups based on the assessment of emergent needs. One option chosen by many schools is to ask teachers, peers, or school

resource teams for referrals (Corey & Corey, 2002; Gladding, 1999). Other options include advertising the groups through classroom presentations, hallway posters, public announcements, newspaper articles, parent letters or bulletins, or student handbooks (Lambert & Ceraso, as cited in Corey & Corey, 2002).

The “Best Practice Guidelines” of the Association for Specialists in Group Work (ASGW, 1998) outline relevant information to include in advertising to prospective members from the onset. For adolescents in schools, this includes: a professional disclosure statement; goals and purposes of the group; policies for entering and exiting the group; expectations of group participation; the rights and responsibilities of group members and leader; disclosure of information to others (in particular parents/teachers); guidelines around involvement among members; techniques and procedures that may be used; guidelines around consultation between leader and members; education, training, and qualifications of the group leader; time parameters; and, potential impacts, including risks, of group participation.

Screening. Ethical codes for both the American Counseling Association (ACA, 1995) and the ASGW (1998) mandate the screening of potential group members. With youth in schools, the recruitment and selection process can adopt traditional, as well as some unique methods: individual interviews, group interviews, screening instruments, interviews with teaching staff, direct observations, and historical knowledge (Corey & Corey, 2002; LaTurno-Hines & Fields, 2002; Ritchie & Huss, 2000).

Both individual and group interviews are helpful in selecting group members. In an individual interview, the main purpose is to assess the appropriateness of the match between the group and the individual. In addition, the individual interview allows the leader to learn more about the student experience and his/her readiness for the group,

establishes rapport, initiates the sharing of information about the group, introduces ground rules, and includes an initial exploration of the topic (Moore & Herlihy, 1993).

On the other hand, group interviews enable leaders to observe the interaction skills of potential members. One drawback of group interviews is that members may not be as candid to express concerns, and ask or answer questions (Ritchie & Huss, 2000). Jacobs, Masson, and Harvill (2002) maintain that the best way to screen potential members is to conduct a brief interview to find out why they want to be in the group.

From the selection process, the leader needs to determine if the individual will contribute to and benefit from the group process (Corey, 2000). It is important for the group leader to remember that groups may not be appropriate for all individuals. If the leader deems that someone is not suitable for the group, he or she must give reasons for exclusion and an appropriate referral (Corey, Corey, Callanan, & Russell, 2004).

Criteria for selection. The principal area of dissension among scholars with respect to recruitment and screening young people involves the criteria for group selection and exclusion. Criteria that are essential when selecting members of any age comprise: members with compatible needs and goals, members who will not impede group process, and clients who will not be jeopardized by the group experience (ACA, 1995; ASGW, 1998). Specifically, criteria to consider with youth include: age; gender; diversity issues; group fit and role balance issues; compatibility; group contribution issues; emotional readiness; and attractiveness to the group (Corey & Corey, 2002; Gladding, 1999; Jacobs et al., 2002; LaTurno-Hines & Fields, 2002; Ritchie & Huss, 2000).

Areas of special interest for working with adolescents in a school context are age and gender. Age is an important factor to consider when working with adolescents due to the different developmental stages that children and adolescents experience. Corey and

Corey (2002) suggest that there be no more than a 2-year age difference among members, with age differences being less of a concern for students in the higher grades.

In regards to gender, counsellors need to be sensitive to the role that gender may play in the effectiveness of the group, and make decisions based on their clientele and the purpose of the group. Jacobs et al. (2002) contend “because there is a lot to learn about the opposite sex during the adolescent years, a coed group can be a good place to do so” (p. 360). Smead (as cited in LaTurno-Hines & Fields, 2002) agrees, and recommends groups of both sexes unless prohibited by the topic. There is evidence that if trust and comfort are developed, mixed gender groups are more beneficial (Capuzzi & Gross, as cited in Ritchie & Huss, 2000).

Criteria for exclusion. It is advisable to exclude an adolescent who exhibits any of the following characteristics: homicidal/suicidal risk; hallucinations/delusions; severe sleep/appetite disturbances; a history of instability; very poor social skills; extremely withdrawn; paranoid/psychopathic ideation; current emotional/physical abuse; and/or, severe behavioural problems (Bergin, 1999; Freeman, 1991; Janowiak, Mei-Tal, & Drapkin, 1995; Smead, 1995; Worden, 2002). Members who share a close relationship with one another outside of the group, such as siblings, best friends, or worst enemies, could also impede the group process due to their strong emotional ties (Smead, 1995).

Homogeneity versus heterogeneity. Homogeneous groups consist of members sharing a common concern (problem-specific) and often have a common characteristic, such as age or gender. Heterogeneous groups deal with a wide array of problems, and are often made up of individuals from various walks of life. This research project targets topic-specific, or homogeneous groups. The benefits of a homogeneous group include

faster cohesion, offering of immediate support, more rapid relief of symptoms, and a shared sense of humanity (Smead, 1995).

However, within a group of individuals with common concerns lie opportunities for heterogeneity. Diversity between members may include differences in social or cultural backgrounds, as well as differences in attitudes and coping skills towards specific concerns (Smead, 1995), and past experience in groups. Such group diversity “adds to the interchange of ideas” (Bergin, 1999, p. 307). Corey and Corey (2002) support heterogeneous groups and maintain, “the ideal group should contain a variety of resources, worldviews, and behavioral skills” (p. 104). Gender and age differences, as discussed above, offer another option for heterogeneity.

Purposeful recruitment and careful screening are essential in creating a group that will be effective in working towards identified goals and result in positive change in its members. Unfortunately, lack of time often interferes with the thoroughness of this task. For this reason, the starter kit includes a generic recruitment poster designed in accordance with the ASGW’s “Best Practice Guidelines” (1998) for advertising group topics. A standard screening interview is also included to enable counsellors in selecting members who will most benefit from the group.

Leadership and Facilitation of Adolescent Groups

Leadership qualities. Although careful selection of group members is essential, the success of adolescent groups relies heavily on effective leadership. A number of leadership qualities are related to successful facilitation of adolescent groups. Of all of the factors, research shows that adolescents place the greatest value on humour (Shaw, as cited in MacLennan & Dies, 1992). Effective leaders of adolescents have also been found to be sensitive to teenagers’ moods and behaviours; honest and genuine; clear and open-

minded; non-defensive; real; willing to admit when wrong; good problem-solvers; and, energetic (MacLennan & Dies, 1992). Other effective leadership qualities highlighted in the literature include: understanding, firmness, facilitative, active, trusting of the group process, enjoyment in working with adolescents, and respect by this client population (Gladding, 1999; MacLennan & Dies, 1992; Waterman & Walker, 2001)

Effective leadership style. Between the two extreme styles of leadership - autocratic and laissez-faire - there should exist a balance between its counterparts: too much structure, which negatively affects creativity and fosters dependence, and not enough structure, which results in a lack of focus (Corey & Corey, 2002; Greenberg, 2003). Particularly with adolescent groups, a lack of structure or direction risks resulting in discussions that are often irrelevant and shallow (Jacobs et al., 2002). However, Stroh and Sink (2002) contend that a group must be learner-centered, with the needs, abilities, and interest of members driving the content and process of the group. With this in mind, the ideal leader of adolescent groups has a goal-directed style with active leadership, and encourages strong group involvement. The ideal degree of leadership control, however, is also dependent on the topic and purpose of the group (Greenberg, 2003).

Leader role and responsibilities. The leadership role in adolescent groups can be both frustrating and highly rewarding (George & Dustin, 1988). The main functions of a leader is to bring members together; help identify group goals; teach group functioning; keep group focused on task; model appropriate group behaviour; present a value system; and, facilitate termination (Greenberg, 2003; MacLennan & Dies, 1992). With adolescent groups, another important and sometimes difficult role is to set limits and structure that allow members to take responsibility within those limits (MacLennan & Dies, 1992). Leadership in junior and senior high school requires more attention to discipline,

enforcement of group rules, and protection of group members than with adult groups (Greenberg, 2003).

Strong leadership is essential to a successful group. Leadership of adolescent groups not only requires that leaders be knowledgeable of group process, but also that they possess certain qualities desired by members at this developmental stage. Self-reflection and ongoing feedback is essential in growing and developing as an effective leader of adolescent groups. To enhance effective leadership, the starter kit contains a self-reflection exercise for leaders as well as a leadership assessment designed for members to provide the leader with constructive feedback. A list of resources on group process is also provided for leaders who wish to expand their knowledge and expertise in this area.

Selecting Group Counselling Topics

In the past 25 years, there has been an increase in the number of problem-specific groups in schools (MacLennan & Dies, 1992). A possible explanation for this trend is the belief that such groups may be more effective and require less time. For this reason, leaders must not only be proficient in facilitating group process, but also be knowledgeable in a number of specific areas, and have access to specialized support and resources. When considering problem-specific groups, the most common topics in schools are academic and behavioural in nature (Stoiber & Kratochwill, 1998).

Some group topics are better to avoid as they carry with them a stronger probability to result in emotional harm to a child or serious concern for a parent, particularly if there is potential for negative stigmatization (Greenberg, 2003). For example, a group topic of teens and sexuality issues may not be an appropriate topic in a religious or conservative school community. It is important for the counsellor to consider

the characteristics of the school community and confer with colleagues and administration in making decisions regarding appropriateness of sensitive topics.

To help counsellors select and develop counselling topics to meet the needs of their students, a list of resources for group topics is included in the starter kit. These resources contain a complete curriculum for a number of relevant groups. The resources are available to counsellors to help them plan topic specific group interventions for their students.

Written Proposals

Creating a written proposal for a group ensures that the group's goals, procedures, and evaluation have been considered ahead of time and implies that the leader has put thought into planning an effective group. A well-designed proposal further enhances the likelihood of administrative support (Smead, 2000). Corey and Corey (2002) offer clear parameters for creating a sound and practical proposal that includes five general areas: rationale, objectives, practical considerations, procedures, and evaluation.

A convincing rationale clearly states the value of the group to both the member as well as the school community and provides the 'why' of the group proposal. Effective objectives are specific, measurable, and attainable within the time frame of the group. Objectives define not only what the group aims to attain, but also how it will do so.

Practical and supported decisions need to be made regarding logistics of the group, which will be further discussed in the following section: group composition, size, length, frequency and duration of the group, and pre-group preparation. Procedures articulate the actions that will be taken in order to achieve the objectives of the group (Corey & Corey, 2002), outlining the techniques to be used, ethical guidelines to be followed, and topics to

be covered (Smead, 2000). Finally, the proposal will include strategies to evaluate progress and outcomes related to individual and group experience.

Due to the importance of creating a well-designed proposal prior to implementing a group, the starter kit provides a generic proposal outline. Within this outline are specific questions designed to focus the leader on relevant information necessary to include in the proposal. Areas that require special consideration in a group proposal relate to group logistics. The following section will underscore specific factors that influence decisions regarding group logistics within an adolescent group.

Group Logistics

Group size. According to Gladding (1999), “the number in a group ultimately affects its outcome and rate of progress” (p. 274). He contends that groups of five to ten members are ideal when working with adolescents. Jacobs et al. (2002) suggest there be no more than eight members, with the ideal being six. Smaller groups do not promote much discussion or diversity, while larger groups tend not to allow time for participation from all members (Waterman & Walker, 2001).

Other factors may influence a group leader’s decision in determining group size. For example, exceptions from the aforementioned suggestions can be made if the focus of the group is psycho-educational in nature (MacLennan & Dies, 1992). The nature of the members must also be taken into consideration. For example, shy members may experience more success in small groups where they can more easily get involved. On the other hand, poorly motivated members may benefit from larger groups where there are more members to share in the contributions.

Frequency, duration, and length of group sessions. From her work with adolescent groups, Smead (1995) suggests that 45 to 60 minutes is appropriate for adolescents 13-

years of age and older. In a school setting, the length of group sessions is usually determined in part by the school schedule. To accommodate this schedule, groups are often organized in schools to coincide with the class periods, which range from 40 to 90 minutes in length (Jacobs et al., 2002), and take place regularly once a week. To encourage teacher and administrative support, it is important that the counsellor show sensitivity to concerns in regards to children missing class time, especially if they are already struggling academically. Blum (1990) suggests a rotating schedule for group sessions so that members will not miss the same class every week.

Many group programs for adolescents cited in the literature were programmed for approximately ten class-length sessions (Carter & Brooks, 1990; Gerler & Drew, 1990; Jacobs et al., 2002; Phillips & Phillips, 1992; Zinck & Littrell, 2000); however, the seriousness of the concern could be reflected in a longer length (Gladding, 1999). Again, the number of sessions may also be influenced by the school calendar, with groups being limited to a session or quarter. In most cases, it is advisable to set a termination date at the onset of a group regardless of the duration (Corey & Corey, 2002). Time-limited groups provide greater motivation for individuals to attain their goals.

Open versus closed groups. Due to the nature of the school counselling program, groups are normally short-term, often problem-oriented groups. Such groups may be open or closed; however, within closed groups members have an opportunity to get to know one another more intimately, which is effective in creating an atmosphere of trust more quickly, an essential element when working with short-term groups (Corey, 2000). Closed short-term groups tend to work through the typical group process and help members develop intimacy or resolve specific relationship problems (MacLennan & Dies, 1992). On the other hand, open groups allow for more flexibility in responding to the needs of

students. Members can join the group when a problem presents itself, and are free to leave when they feel they have met their goals. Also, open groups allow members to interact with a greater variety of people (Corey & Corey, 2002).

With adolescents in school settings, my preference is for closed groups. The reasons for this are twofold. First, developmentally, adolescents are still learning and experimenting in forming relationships. The relationship building that occurs within the confines of a closed group provides a learning experience for adolescents in and of itself. Second, the school calendar limits the flexibility necessary for running open groups.

Physical setting. The environment does have an impact on the climate and quality of the interaction within the group (MacLennan & Dies, 1992). Wherever the group is held, privacy must be a primary consideration due to the necessity of protecting confidentiality and promoting openness (Smead, 1995). Although the realities of the school may limit the choice of meeting areas, if possible, a room size that encourages intimacy but not confinement, is bright, clean, and has good lighting is ideal. Preferably, seating arrangements have members sitting face to face in a circle, with no tables and no predetermined leadership position in order to avoid the development of hierarchy. The leader sets the tone within the school of the importance of privacy and ensures that there will be no distractions.

Adolescent groups require unique considerations in regards to group logistics. The counsellor must be aware of these distinct needs when developing a group intervention. To serve as a reminder when creating such groups, a checklist of the most common logistical issues is included in the starter kit.

Content and Structure of Group Sessions

Content or process? Once logistical considerations are made, focus turns to the content and structure of individual group sessions. There is some debate as to whether the focus of adolescent groups in schools should be on content or on process. Group content refers to the “what” of the group, whereas group process is the “how” of what is happening. Most literature contends that both process and content are important, although advises that content be put aside for the immediate needs of the group (Corey & Corey, 2002; Greenberg, 2003; Smead, 1995).

Content. Ripley and Goodnough (2001) support that groups with adolescents work best when their learning activities are structured around a theme. They suggest that flexibility can be built in, but limited flexibility is recommended. When working with adolescent groups, Greenberg (2003) proposes preparing more content than not enough, as leaders cannot depend on members to talk spontaneously. However, planned activities should be formulated with the purpose of stimulating discussions, and the leader must be flexible and aware that not all planned topics will be addressed.

Process. Stroh and Sink (2002), however, argue that process is key. Although the focus is often on teaching students certain behaviours, skills, and information, it should also be on relationships, reflections, and exchanges (Smead, as cited in Stroh & Sink, 2002). It is through these interactions that students gain self-awareness, a prerequisite for change. Curriculum driven and content-focused groups can be revised to ensure that they are more student-focused (Stroh & Sink, 2002).

Structure of group sessions. Group plans provide a structured approach for achieving group goals (Greenberg, 2003). Consider a session plan as a road map. The activities, interventions, topics, and sub-goals of a session provide the directions that will

lead to the final destination: the group goals. Scholars in the area of group counselling recommend similar structures that represent a variation of the following three themes: check-in, working time, and check-out.

The check-in portion of the group reconnects members (Waterman & Walker, 2001). It opens the session, allowing members to share reactions from the previous session, identify connections between sessions, share between session practice, complete any unfinished work, and revisit confidentiality and ground rules (Corey & Corey, 2002; Corey et al., 2004; Smead, 2000).

The working section of the plan includes the activities that specifically focus on the goals and objectives and provides the content of topic-driven groups (Smead, 2000). Here, the leader includes creative ways that the group can achieve goals and stimulate deeper discussion (Greenberg, 2003). The working section should consist of approximately half of the total session time (Smead, 2000).

A minimum of 10 minutes should be set aside for the closing of the group session (Corey & Corey, 2002). The purpose of the check-out, or processing time, is to get feedback on the day's session and activities, to allow members to give feedback to one another, to highlight an important objective of the session, and to reflect on their own participation and investment in the group (Corey et al., 2004; Waterman & Walker, 2001). According to Smead (2000), processing is the most important part of the group as it maximizes learning, insight, and understanding.

A high quality group session contains both important and useful content, yet remains flexible to allow members to learn from the actual process in groups. The suggested structure described above enables counsellors to plan for a balance of both. A

session plan outline that follows this structure, as well as an example of a session, can be found in the starter kit.

Goal Setting

Whether a group focuses more on content or process, setting and working towards goals must take centre stage. In groups, goal setting requires developing both group goals as well as individual goals that fit with the purpose of the group. Stroh and Sink (2002) stress that with an adolescent population, goal setting in groups provides an interesting opportunity for students to learn how to form and articulate both personal and group goals. The process of articulating group goals helps to promote group cohesion and collaboration.

Individual goals. The establishment of meaningful personal goals enhances individual progress and increases members' understanding as to how they can use the group to achieve their goals (Corey et al., 2004). Individual goals can be determined during the screening interview or at a pre-group session. Collaboration between the counsellor and the client is required in establishing well-defined goals that reflect the desires of the client (Walter & Peller, 1992) and focus on an area that needs the most immediate attention (Cormier & Nurius, 2003). Walter and Peller (1992) offer solution-focused recommendations for creating well-defined goals that are: in a positive statement; in process form; in the here-and-now; as specific as possible; within the client's control; and, in the client's language. Corey et al. (2004) stress that any goal established be realistic, attainable within the length of the group, and relate to group goals.

The literature emphasizes the importance of putting goals in writing (Corey & Corey, 2002; Corey et al., 2004; Cormier & Nurius, 2003, Walter & Peller, 1992). Contracting is a technique that helps articulate goals and places responsibility on the

group member (Corey & Corey, 2002). It is important to stress, however, that goal definition is an ongoing process, and goals need to be revisited regularly.

Group goals. Group goals are instrumental in providing direction and purpose to the group (Smead, 1995), and can be a source of motivation for group members. Group goals help members look realistically at what can be accomplished within the time frame of the group, and highlight the necessity of planning for a future direction after the group.

In topic specific groups, general group goals are often predetermined by the leader, and include both behavioural goals specific to the group topic as well as process-oriented goals. Examples of process-oriented goals include: recognition of the struggles of others; provision of useful feedback to others; or, sensitivity to the needs of others. Regardless of the type of group, when working with students, the purpose of the group must be meaningful and relevant, and relate to their own interests, needs, and goals.

The importance of setting clear, meaningful, and realistic group and individual goals in group counselling interventions cannot be understated. To aid counsellors in setting group goals and to help members in developing and attaining individual goals, a list of possible group goals and an individual goal contract are included in the starter kit.

Ethical Concerns

The ASGW's (1998) ethical guidelines clarify issues specific to group leadership such as informed consent, screening members, confidentiality, dual relationships, and professional competency. In a school counselling setting, the gray areas of ethical codes are multiplied due to the minority status of the clientele involved, especially in junior and senior high school where the client may be considered a mature minor. There exist conflicting points of view in the literature in regards to issues of informed consent, confidentiality, and privacy of minors.

Informed consent. Specific to groups, the ASGW (1998) Best Practice Guidelines suggest that leaders provide the following information to group members prior to obtaining informed consent: nature, purpose, and goals of the group; confidentiality and limitations to confidentiality; leader's theoretical orientation; group services that can be provided; the role and responsibility of group members and leaders; and, qualifications of the leader to lead a particular group. This information could be included in a written informed consent form and could also be shared in the screening interview.

In regards to obtaining informed consent from a minor to participate in a counselling group, if looking at the issue from an ethical standpoint, the minor has a right to choose the type of group and to decide if he/she wants to participate (Ritchie & Huss, 2000). From an Alberta perspective, the College of Alberta Psychologists (CAP, 1999) states: "Mature minors can provide their own consent provided that they have sufficient understanding and intelligence to enable them to understand fully what is being proposed" (p. 2). Legally, however, the parent has the right to make decisions regarding his/her minor child, and must give consent for a minor.

Despite the ambiguity, parental involvement may be instrumental in protecting and promoting the welfare of the client. School counsellors must carefully weigh the costs and benefits in each individual situation, and also refer to the guidelines within their school district.

Limitations to confidentiality. Of course, the same limitations to confidentiality that apply to adults also apply to minors: imminent harm to self or others, abuse or neglect of a minor, and court subpoenas (Sinclair & Pettifor, 2001). There is some debate in regards to safeguarding confidentiality between the minor client and his/her parent. CAP (1999) supports confidentiality protections in cases of mature minors, and states: "the

parent no longer has the right to access to the mature minor's confidential information unless the mature minor provides written consent"(p. 2). On the other hand, the ACA, in its Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice (1995), ambiguously states that when working with minors, counsellors may include parents or guardians, but must act in the best interests of the client, taking action to protect his/her confidentiality.

Literature cites several options available to the counsellor when confronting this dilemma in group practice. First of all, it is important to explain the limits to confidentiality at public meetings to parents, students, and teachers (LaTurno-Hines & Fields, 2002). Secondly, it is helpful to negotiate with the student at the onset of counselling, what information would be beneficial to disclose and to whom (Cram & Dobson, 1993). Finally, the counsellor must weigh the benefits of disclosing information to parents in order to protect the welfare of the young client (Hesson, Bakal, & Dobson, 1993).

Confidentiality between group members. Confidentiality is a unique concern in group counselling as sharing of personal information between members is an integral part of the process. Jacobs et al. (2002) highlight the importance of stressing confidentiality, particularly with this population, as adolescents may be more prone to gossip or be vindictive than other groups. Also, confidentiality is especially critical (and even more difficult to ensure) in a school environment where members know one another and have common associations (Corey & Corey, 2002).

To protect against breaches of confidentiality, the following strategies can be implemented: make all students aware of confidentiality issues; get a commitment of confidentiality as early as the screening process; require students to sign a confidentiality contract; state the rules of confidentiality at the beginning of every session as well as

following a particularly sensitive disclosure; decide as a group what actions to take if confidentiality is breached; and, remind members that the confidentiality agreement extends beyond the life of the group (Corey & Corey, 2002; Gladding, 1999; LaTurno-Hines & Fields, 2002). A discussion about what it means to break confidentiality may also be in order. Corey and Corey (2002) use the following rule of thumb: members usually do not breach confidentiality when they talk about *what* they learned in group sessions, but are in danger of violations when they talk about *how* they interacted and learned from others (p. 76).

Despite efforts in implementing these precautions, the fact is that confidentiality in groups cannot be guaranteed. The ACA's Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice (1995) requires that this fact be clearly communicated to group members.

Privacy. Due to the developmental stage of adolescence, privacy issues are vital as they represent the minor's independence and self-differentiation (Stanley & Sieber, 1992). In order to safeguard students' privacy in using groups, it may be necessary to disguise the actual topic of the group, to allow students to make appointments to express interest in a group, and to get input from teachers by identification of specific observable behaviours, rather than general labels (LaTurno-Hines & Fields, 2002; Ritchie & Huss, 2000).

Ethical issues pose a particularly complex concern for school counsellors due to the minority status of their clients. The possibilities for potential ethical dilemmas are numerous. This project identifies many of these common concerns, and to further assist counsellors through the ethical maze, the following items have been included in the starter kit: informed consent forms for both parents and students; a poster outlining the limits to confidentiality; a written script of a potential manner in which confidentiality can be

explained to members; and, a student contract. Working through these complex ethical issues is a challenge faced by school counsellors who wish to implement group interventions into their programs. Other challenges faced by school counsellors will be explored in the subsequent section.

Overcoming Challenges

The empirical support for group counselling interventions is not being reflected in use of group practice, despite its demonstrated benefits with this population (Dansby, 1996). Bowman (1987) recognized the contradiction found in practice, and discovered that there was little reference in the literature as to why counsellors were not practicing group counselling in schools. What difficulties do counsellors encounter in implementing groups?

A survey of school counsellors conducted by Bowman (1987) revealed some of the perceived roadblocks counsellors faced: 71% of counsellors indicated that they felt resistance from some teachers, and approximately one-third of counsellors felt interference from some students or parents. The most frequent roadblock perceived by counsellors was lack of time, followed closely by challenges getting students out of class.

As a follow-up to Bowman's research, Dansby (1996) conducted a similar research following the same format and with a similar intent. Once again, counsellors identified lack of time and scheduling problems as the major roadblocks; with some teachers as interfering with group counselling the most, and administrators as the second greatest source of interference.

Teachers. Both research surveys conducted by Bowman (1987) and Dansby (1996) revealed that counsellors perceived teachers as providing the most resistance to their group counselling initiatives. This is not surprising considering the increased

pressure put on teachers from administrators, governments, and parents to reap high results from their students on provincial achievement tests. Time is a valuable resource. The literature provides suggestions of ways to acquire cooperation from teachers and other staff members.

Borders and Drury (1992) pointed out, “teachers and other school staff who perceive themselves as part of the student support system typically increase their understanding and support of the program” (p. 488). While implementing a group counselling program in a high school where the cultural climate was not conducive to a group counselling program, Ripley and Goodnough (2001) found the following strategies to be helpful in eliciting teacher support: orient staff at the beginning of the year; share ideas to dispel any myths and concerns regarding groups; ensure continuous communication throughout the year; and, provide a summary report at the end of the year indicating types of groups offered and number of students who took part.

LaTurno-Hines and Fields (2002) found that creativity on the part of the counsellor in scheduling meeting times, as well as developing a program with input from the faculty, will increase teacher flexibility in allowing students to attend group sessions during class time. Furthermore, teachers are more cooperative if they know in advance the dates and times of student absences, and if it is an explicit expectation that students are responsible for assignments missed during absences (Blum, 1990). Although each individual school will need to individualize these suggestions in order to make them viable for their school culture, it is very clear in the literature that increasing the visibility and credibility of the counselling program will help in reducing teacher resistance to group counselling programs.

Parents. Parental concern has also been highlighted as an interference to group counselling (Bowman, 1987; Dansby, 1996). Although some concerns may be perceived as illegitimate, many are justifiable. Some parents express concerns about the real intention, techniques, and materials used in small groups (Kaplan, 1996). Another concern of parents, discussed in the previous section, is the issue of confidentiality when working with minor clients. Finally, some parents may not uphold the same values that are being promoted in the counselling program, especially those that reflect an individualistic culture.

When parents react defensively, it is often out of fear of what might happen to their children. An open, positive, and collaborative relationship carried out with professional detachment can help offset these fears (Gysbers & Henderson, 2000). Reducing resistance in regards to group work can also be accomplished by clearly explaining the expectations and purposes of the group through an evening presentation or a letter that can be sent home with the parental consent letter (Corey & Corey, 2002).

Administration. Obtaining administrative support for group programs has a profound effect on other obstacles reported by counsellors (Dansby, 1996). Administrators are pressured by an array of programs and groups within and outside a school. In order to promote group counselling, there needs to be some support of its contribution to the school community. Blum (1990) suggests providing a written plan of the group to administrators so that they can justify student absences from class. A follow-up evaluation on outcomes from members of the group solidifies the support and justification for group interventions.

From their research, Ripley and Goodnough (2001) found that involving administration in school policy changes regarding group interventions resulted in

strengthened support for their programs. In the modified policies, group counselling was incorporated as a school sponsored activity meriting student absences from class, and teachers could not deny access to students, as with any other approved activity. In return, students were responsible for arriving to the group on time and completing missed work in an allotted amount of time. Such changes bring merit to group counselling interventions, and offset some of the teachers' concerns.

Although there are many challenges that counsellors may encounter when implementing group counselling interventions, teachers, parents, and administration are three of the most commonly identified obstacles. They also represent obstacles over which the counsellor can have some influence. To further help counsellors turn these obstacles into supports, the starter kit contains a letter for teachers introducing group interventions, a similar article for the newsletter aimed at parents, as well as a teacher notification letter to enhance ongoing counsellor-teacher communication.

Assessment of Group Interventions

As with any program initiative, support is gained once success has been demonstrated. Effective assessment can be utilized to measure success. Not only can data from assessment help elicit support from parents, teacher, and administration (Stoiber & Kratochwill, 1998), but it also enhances effectiveness of the group by reinforcing good practice and discarding the bad (Dwivedi & Mymin, 1993). Furthermore, the ASGW Best Practice Guidelines (1998) support assessment as an integral part of ethical practice, stating that group leaders need to assess both process and outcomes.

Evaluation of both individual sessions as well as the total group experience is necessary. First, session-by-session evaluations provide important feedback to both the leader and the members in many areas (Greenberg, 2003). Integrating self-monitoring

throughout the group allows members to evaluate their contributions and progress towards individual goals, and help the leader to be more aware of members' perceptions and feelings in regards to group climate and therapeutic factors (Dwivedi & Mymin, 1993). Simply having one or two members share their perceptions or learning experiences at the end of a session can be an effective assessment tool. Feedback can then be applied in order to maximize the benefits of the group experience.

Post-group assessment focuses on a number of areas, and data can later be used to improve and revise group programs. Post-group assessment measures both goal achievement (outcome) and procedures (process) used in the group. Possible topics for post-group assessment include: satisfaction with the group; recollection of group highlights or critical incidents; specific actions taken to make changes; techniques that were most and least useful; changes in members' behaviours, attitudes, and beliefs; group process; and, level of personal and group goal attainment (Corey et al., 2004; Delucia-Waack, 1997; Greenberg, 2003; Stroh & Sink, 2002). Methods of evaluating the effectiveness of the group include follow-up interviews, classroom observations, post-group meetings, and questionnaires (Corey & Corey, 2002).

It is evident that evaluations are an essential component to any program. Feedback from such assessments can be integrated into new group interventions in order to improve service delivery. The starter kit includes both an ongoing assessment as well as a final evaluation.

Conclusion

Overall, the findings of this review support the practice of group counselling as a viable intervention in schools that fits with the developmental stage of the adolescent, is effective, and is time efficient. The exploration of relevant issues in this review has

practical implications for counsellors who are wishing to implement or improve group counselling interventions in their current school counselling programs.

Although initial implementation of group counselling interventions requires a certain time commitment from counsellors, long-term results include a more efficient and effective method of dealing with student concerns. Group counselling may be the answer to the increasing responsibilities attached to the counsellor's role.

CHAPTER THREE

Procedures

Introduction

This project was undertaken in collaboration with the Calgary Separate School District (CSSD), and specifically, the Guidance and Counselling Department. The goal was to develop a project to enhance counselling practice within the junior and senior high schools. Through a series of meetings with the supervisor of Guidance and Counselling and the Superintendent of Human Resources, it was determined that there was a need to provide counsellors with support in implementing and enhancing group counselling interventions within their school counselling programs. The topic of group counselling interventions with adolescents in schools fit the needs of the school district as well as the personal interests of the researcher.

The project involved five general steps: 1) a review of relevant literature; 2) identification of district counsellors' needs through a survey; 3) analysis of survey results and subsequent review of the literature; 4) development of resources to support counsellors in this endeavour; and, finally, 5) provision of necessary resources to counsellors. This section will discuss in more detail the procedures that were followed in completing each of these steps of the project.

First Step: Review of the Literature

The first step of the project was to conduct a review of the literature in the area of group counselling interventions with adolescents in a school context. The purpose of this review was twofold. First, I examined the literature to determine the effectiveness of group counselling with the adolescent population and to identify factors that influence its effectiveness. Second, the review sought to identify issues that relate specifically to

implementing group counselling programs with adolescents in a school context. To more fully respond to the specific needs and concerns of district counsellors, a further review of the literature was conducted following the analysis of the survey results.

The literature review was initiated by searching the following databases: PsycINFO, Psychology and Behavioral Sciences Collection, and Academic Search Premier. Key words that relate to group counselling with adolescents in a school context were used. Such terms included group counselling, group process, adolescents, and high school. A further search of pertinent references identified in the articles retrieved through the initial electronic searches was undertaken. The *School Counselor* journal was searched independently. Finally, books that focused on group counselling processes with children and adolescents were utilized. Only articles dated from 1990 to the present were used in the review, with the exception of resources used for comparative reasons.

Second Step: Identify Counsellors' Needs

In order to tailor the project to the needs of counsellors within the CSSD, a survey was developed and conducted with the District counsellors (see Appendix A). The survey was designed as a voluntary and self-administered questionnaire with both open-ended and closed questions to elicit background information, current practice, attitudes, methods of assessing student needs, strengths, and needs of counsellors in regards to group counselling interventions. The sample of targeted respondents included all 58 of the junior and senior high school counsellors in the District. Letters of invitation, including a link to the online survey, were distributed through the board's internal e-mail system, and confidential responses were forwarded to the researcher.

Third Step: Analysis of the Data

Twenty-eight of the 58 school counsellors responded to the survey over a 3-week period. Their responses were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. Responses to numerically weighted questions were analyzed by determining the number of respondents for each question, and calculating the number of respondents for each weighted answer provided. Content analysis was used for analyzing responses to the open questions in order to assist in identifying thematic patterns in the survey responses (Berg, 2001). The researcher manually coded and grouped together the ideas, words, and phrases that captured the salient elements of the responses, creating categories of responses. Responses in the specific categories were then tallied and recorded on the same format as the initial survey (see Appendix B). For topics that were particularly relevant to the starter kit, graphs were developed to provide a visual representation of the results. These graphs will be integrated into a PowerPoint presentation for the workshop to be presented to counsellors in order to illustrate and highlight their current practice and needs.

Of the 28 counsellors who responded, 14 identified having implemented at least one counselling group in the past 12 months. The majority of these 14 respondents had facilitated one or two groups during this time period (see Figure 1). The benefits of group counselling interventions cited by district counsellors were numerous. The most common benefits were: efficiency, universality, and positive interaction among members (see Figure 2). Counsellors also cited various obstacles to the implementation of groups in schools, with lack of time being the most widely cited roadblock (see Figure 3). Interpersonal issues was the group topic that counsellors thought was the most pressing current need that could be addressed through group counselling interventions (see Figure 4). In regards to strengths and successes, the counsellors surveyed identified several

effective strategies; with the most commonly cited strategies being the implementation of a comprehensive needs assessment and clear communication with teachers (see Figure 5).

Figure 1. Number of groups run by individual counsellors in the past 12 months.

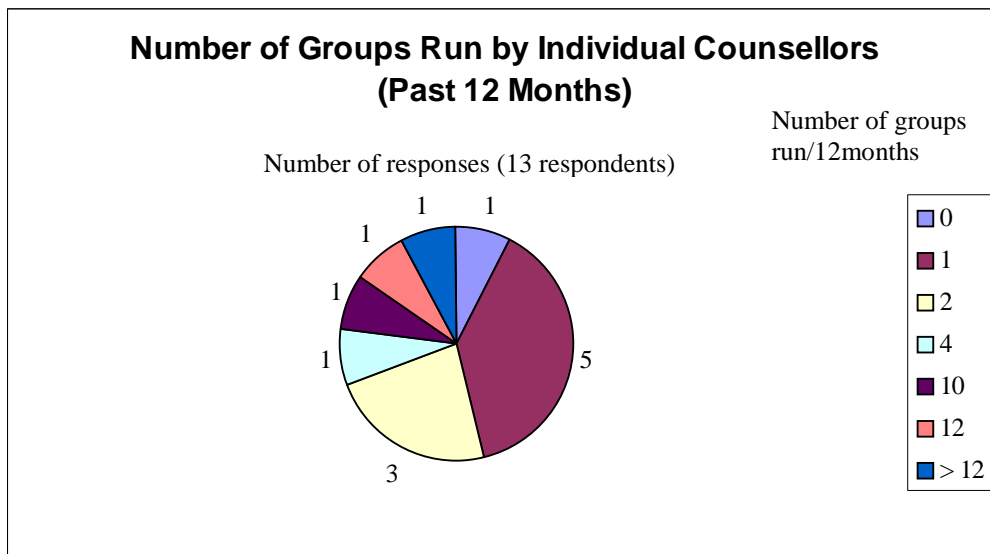


Figure 2. Benefits of groups.

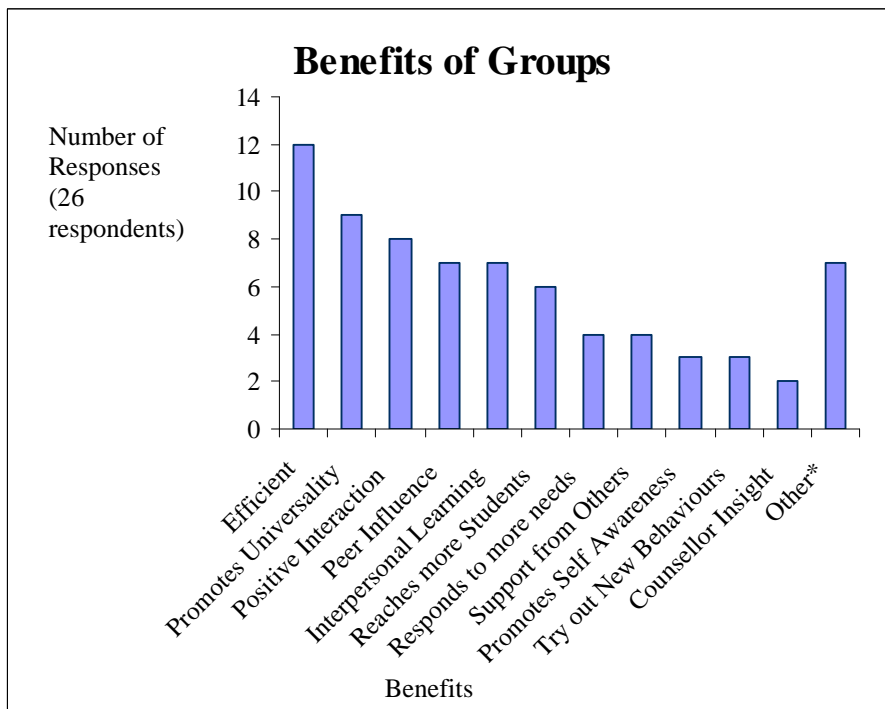


Figure 3. Perceived obstacles.

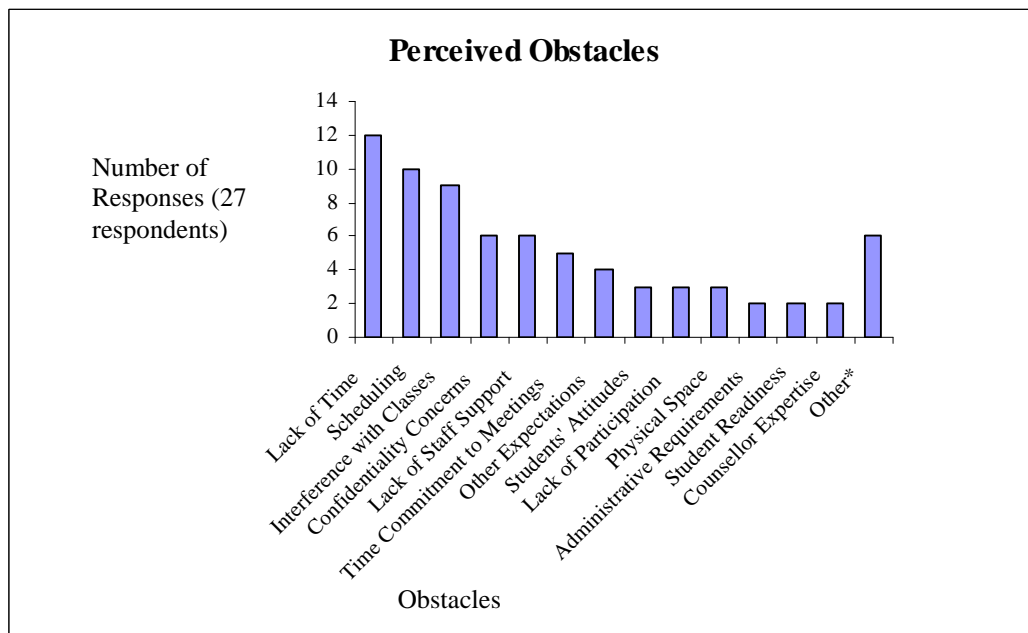


Figure 4. Current needs.

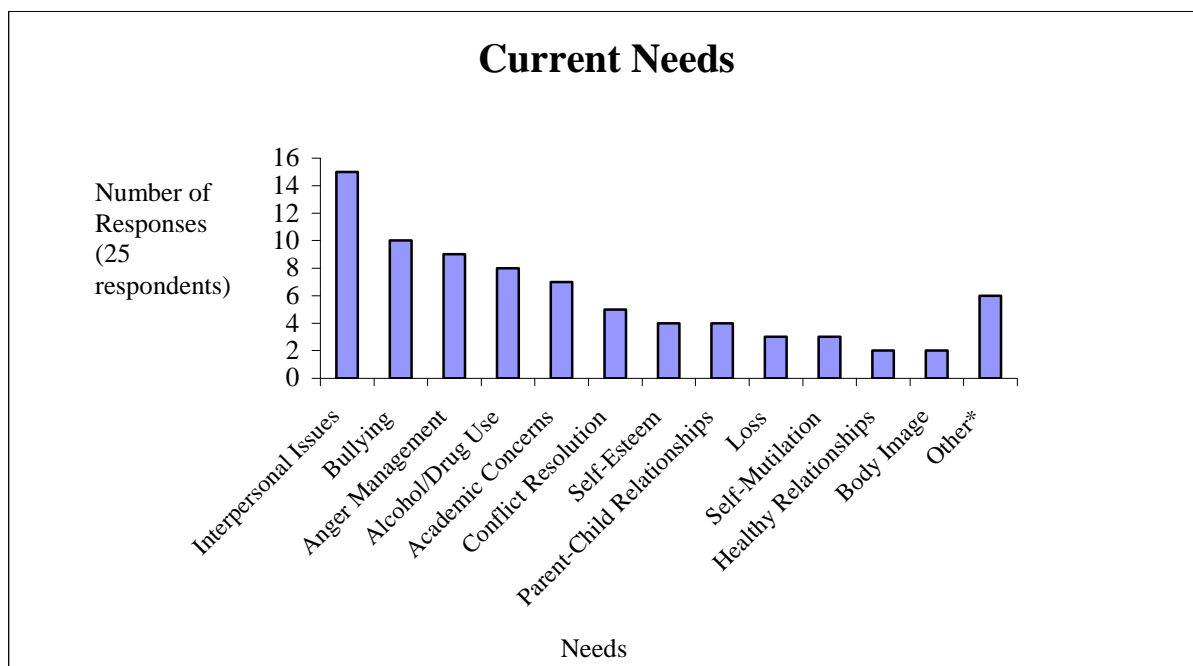
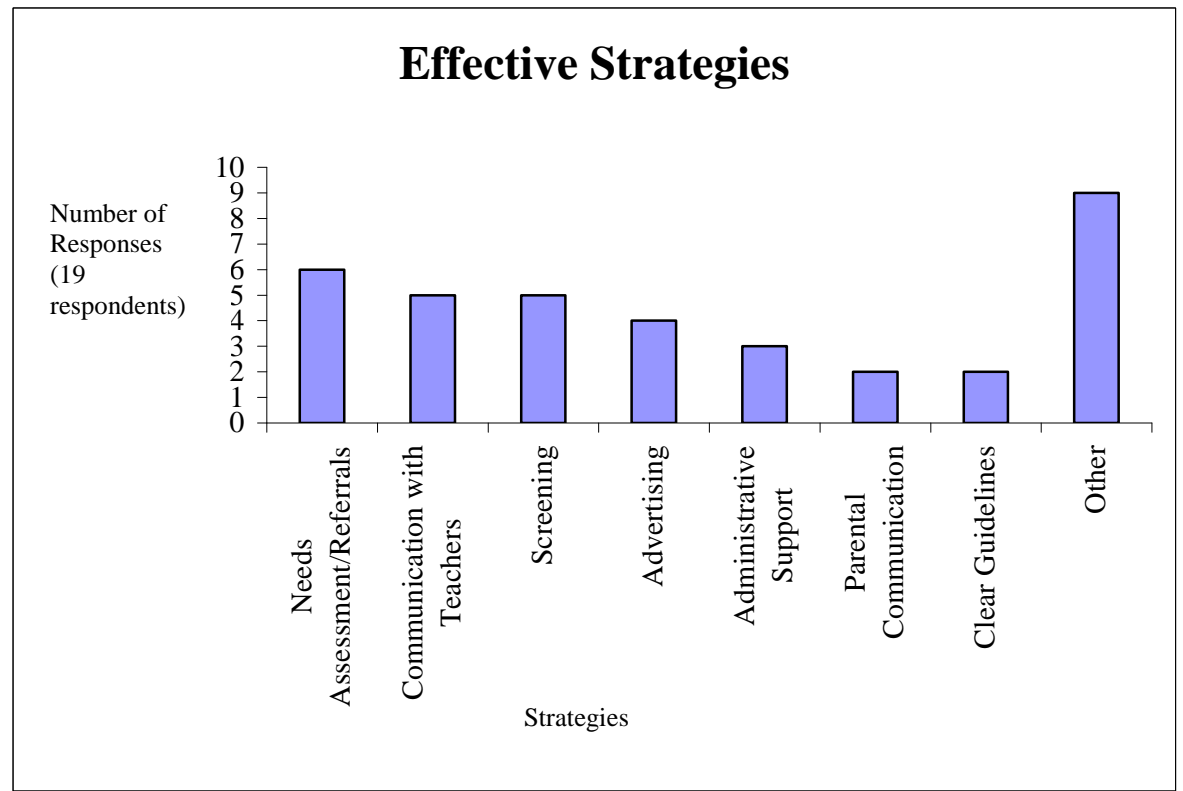


Figure 5. Effective strategies.



Fourth Step: Develop Resources

Following the review of the literature and the survey, a generic starter kit was developed to help counsellors in assessing school needs, and in developing and implementing relevant counselling groups. The starter kit is presented in the following chapter. The starter kit was organized into themes relevant to the literature review and the survey results; themes that relate to starting and facilitating groups in secondary schools. Themes included, for example: needs assessment, ethical concerns, written proposals, and group logistics. Practical tools for counsellors such as forms, assessment instruments, letters, and resource lists were developed to correspond with information relating to each of the themes. As an additional resource, a group manual for grief counselling (see Appendix C) was developed to act as an example of how the starter kit could be

implemented by counsellors. This manual follows the procedures presented in the starter kit.

Fifth Step: Provide Resources

The final step in the project was to provide the school counsellors of the CCSD with further resources that would offer them support and confidence in assessing school needs and overcoming some of the obstacles met when implementing counselling groups into their counselling program. To this end, the curriculum for a workshop was developed in the form of a PowerPoint presentation (see Appendix D). This future workshop will present the step-by-step generic model for implementing a group in schools using the group manual for grief counselling as a guide. Obtaining feedback on the workshop and starter kit was beyond the scope of this research project.

Resources for facilitating specific counselling groups identified in the starter kit and workshop have been purchased, and will be stored in the District's Guidance and Counselling Department for counsellors' use. As counsellors indicated lack of time as a major obstacle in developing and implementing group counselling initiatives, it was evident that providing counsellors with an abundance of resources on specific group counselling topics would be necessary to achieve the anticipated outcome of this project: to increase the current practice of group interventions in schools.

The literature review, the survey and survey analysis, the starter kit, and the workshop are all important steps in achieving the goal of enhancing group counselling practice within secondary schools of the CCSD. The main product of the research project, the group counselling starter kit, will be provided in the following section.

CHAPTER 4

Specific Product

Introduction

The main product of this research project is the creation of the Group Counselling Starter Kit. The starter kit will be included in its entirety in this section. Several practical resources are available within this kit in order to facilitate the task of school counsellors in assessing needs, and creating and implementing group counselling interventions. As an example of this implementation process, a bereavement manual has also been developed as a sub-product of this project (see Appendix C). Finally, a PowerPoint presentation was developed to provide an outline for a workshop to be presented to counsellors of the CSSD (see Appendix D).

Group Counselling Starter

Kit:



A Resource for Secondary School

Counsellors

By Jody Primeau

Group Counselling Starter Kit

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Starter Kit

Overview

The intent of this project is to facilitate the task of implementing counselling groups into school programs for counsellors wishing to do so. To this end, this starter kit has been developed to illustrate how counsellors could develop a group counselling response to an emergent issue. In the development of this kit, special attention was given to the issues faced by school counsellors as identified in the survey of CSSD counsellors and in pertinent literature on this subject.

The material in the starter kit is not exhaustive; however, it contains the elements necessary for implementing a group on almost any topic. As time is identified as the major challenge faced by school counsellors in including group counselling initiatives into their programs, it is hoped that the material included in this starter kit will support counsellors in overcoming this very real problem.

Needs Assessment for Group Interventions

- Needs Assessment for Group Interventions for Teachers
- Needs Assessment for Group Interventions for Students
- Needs Assessment for Group Interventions for Parents

Needs Assessment for Group Interventions

For Teachers

To: Teaching staff at _____ School

From: Student Services

Date: _____

Re: Identification of student needs for group counselling

As an integral part of the counselling program, I (we) will be implementing group counselling interventions throughout the year based on the needs of the students in _____ school. Group counselling interventions are extremely effective with this age group, and allow counsellors to provide much needed support to several students at one time. I (we) would like your input in identifying areas of need within the school community, which, if addressed, would be beneficial to both you and your students.

Groups will consist of 6 to 10 students led by a counsellor, who will meet for 8 one-hour sessions once per week. Academic learning will remain a top priority, and in order to minimize interruptions of classroom learning, meeting times will be staggered so students will not miss the same class more than 2 or 3 times. Furthermore, we will elicit your input in scheduling the group sessions. Students will also be responsible for making up assignments missed during class time.

Please indicate by a check mark the topics from the attached list that you believe are areas of need in the school. Once we have identified priorities, we will recruit students to form the groups. Your input will be requested at that time, as well. Students and parents have been given similar forms to fill out.

Feel free to add a topic that you feel is not addressed by the following areas. Return to the Student Services office by _____.

Thank you so much! Your input is greatly valued.

List of possible group counselling topics
(Please check the topics that you feel are a need in the school.)

- Anger management skills
- Social skills
- Study/organizational skills
- Conflict resolution/Problem solving skills
- Career/post-secondary planning
- Coping with loss from death
- Dealing with divorce
- Dealing with bullies and cliques
- Developing self-esteem
- Making healthy decisions (alcohol and drugs)
- Relationships at home
- Healthy relationships with friends
- Dating relationships
- School transitions
- New faces to the school community
- Stress management
- Other (Concerns you have identified through your interactions with students)

Teacher's name: _____

Date: _____

Needs Assessment for Group Interventions

For Students

To: Students of _____ School

From: Student Services

Date: _____

Re: Group counselling opportunities

Dear student,

Your counsellor(s) will be organizing group counselling experiences throughout the year. In counselling groups, a counsellor meets with 6 to 10 students with the same concern. Members offer one another support and learn from one another how to deal with the challenges they face. Groups operate under very strict rules of confidentiality (what is said in the group, stays in the group), providing a place where you can feel safe to talk about your thoughts and feelings. Groups will meet for one hour each week for an 8-week period. Sessions will be scheduled so that you won't be missing the same class more than 2 or 3 times. Group members are responsible for making up any assignments missed during class time.

Please indicate which of the following topics interest you, and if you would like to be considered for a group. You may check off more than one. If you are interested in being contacted for one of the groups, it is important to include your name at the bottom of the form. The counsellor will contact you if a group is formed on any of the topics that you indicate as an interest. If your needs are compatible with the goals of the group, you will be invited to join the group. Parental permission will be required for you to take part in any of the groups offered. Your parents and teachers have been given similar forms.

Feel free to add a topic that you feel is not addressed by the following areas. Please return to the Student Services office by _____.

List of possible group counselling topics
(Please check the topics that you feel are a need in the school.)

- Anger management skills
- Social skills
- Study/organizational skills
- Conflict resolution/Problem solving skills
- Career/post-secondary planning
- Coping with loss from death
- Dealing with divorce
- Dealing with bullies and cliques
- Developing self-esteem
- Making healthy decisions (alcohol and drugs)
- Relationships at home
- Healthy relationships with friends
- Dating relationships
- School transitions (adjusting to Grade 7/Grade 10)
- New faces to the school community
- Stress management
- Other

<input type="checkbox"/> I would like to be contacted to discuss the possibility of becoming a member of a group in an area of interest to me.
<input type="checkbox"/> I am not interested in being a part of a group at this time, but may be in the future.
<input type="checkbox"/> I am not interested in being a member of a group.

Name: _____

Grade/Homeroom: _____

Needs Assessment for Group Interventions

For Parents

To: Parents of students at _____ School

From: Student Services

Date: _____

Re: Identification of student needs for group counselling

As an integral part of the counselling program, I (we) will be implementing group counselling interventions throughout the year based on the needs of the students in _____ school. Group counselling interventions are extremely effective with this age group, and allow students to offer one another support and realize that they are not alone in the challenges they face. I (we) would like your input in identifying areas of need within the school community, which, if addressed, would be beneficial to both you and your child.

Groups will consist of 6 to 10 students led by a counsellor, who will meet for 8 one-hour sessions once per week. Students will be excused from classes to attend sessions, however meeting times will be staggered so that your child would not miss the same class more than 2 or 3 times. Furthermore, students will also be responsible for making up assignments missed during class time.

Please check off the topics from the attached list that you believe would be an area of need and interest to your child. Your child, as well as all of the teachers, have been given a similar form to complete. Once we have identified priorities, we will recruit students to form the groups, and your child will be informed that you have suggested him/her for a particular group. Please be aware, however, that it may not be possible to include your child in the groups. A selection process will take place to identify students who would most benefit from the group experience. If a group fits the needs of your child, you will be given more information on the content of the group. Although discussions in the group will remain confidential, all students will require parental permission before becoming a member of any group.

Feel free to add a topic that is not addressed by the following areas. Return to the Student Services office by _____.

List of possible group counselling topics
(Please check the topics that you feel are a need in the school.)

- Anger management skills
- Social skills
- Study/organizational skills
- Conflict resolution/Problem solving skills
- Career/post-secondary planning
- Coping with loss from death
- Dealing with divorce
- Dealing with bullies and cliques
- Developing self-esteem
- Making healthy decisions (alcohol and drugs)
- Relationships at home
- Healthy relationships with friends
- Dating relationships
- School transitions (adjusting to Grade 7/Grade 10)
- New faces to the school community
- Stress management
- Other

- | |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> I would like my child to be considered for a group indicated above.<input type="checkbox"/> I do not want my child to be a member of a group.<input type="checkbox"/> I would like to have more information before making a decision in this regard. |
|---|

Name/Phone number: _____

Child: _____

Date: _____

Recruitment, Screening, and Group Composition

➤ Recruitment Poster

➤ Screening Interview

Recruitment poster

*This template can be utilized for any group by simply filling in the information as it applies to your specific group.

Group



Ethical issues and guidelines:

- Limits to confidentiality
- Expectations of confidentiality
- Informed consent

Group information

- Number, length, and duration of sessions
- Topics to be covered

Title

Goals and purposes of the group

- Expectations of group members
- Rights and responsibilities of members/leader
- Some techniques/procedures that may be used
- Potential impact of group participation (both possible risks and benefits)
- Group leader qualifications
- Contact information

Screening Interview

Examples of Screening Questions:

Match of group and individual:

- Why do you want to join the group?*
- Have you taken part in any counselling in the past? How was that helpful for you?*
- What would you like to gain from this group?*
- What are some specific concerns that you would like to address in this group?*

Readiness for group:

- What are your possible fears in joining a group?*
- How willing are you to share your experiences with other group members?*
- How do you feel about listening to the concerns of others, and helping them with those concerns?*
- How ready do you feel to take a look at yourself and take action for change?*
- **Check for relevant reasons for exclusion (from Screening Checklist)*

Willingness to follow group guidelines:

- Would you have a problem with keeping discussions in the group confidential?*
- Would you be able to obtain informed consent from your parents?*
- In order to protect the rights of all of the members in the group, there are some rules/guidelines that need to be followed. Would you be willing to abide by these rules?*
- The group will be meeting for 8 sessions. Would you be able to attend all of the sessions?*
- You would be responsible for completing any work missed during class time. Is this a problem for you?*

Questions for interaction:

- Do you have any questions about the group?*
- Do you have any questions about your responsibility as a group member?*
- Do you have any questions about me, as the group leader?*
- Do you feel that the group would be a good fit for you?*

For concluding the interview:

Thank you for answering all of my questions. Do you have any others questions that you would like to ask me? We will be starting the group soon, and I will get back to you and let you know if I think the group is a good fit for you. Groups are not ideal for everyone, and if the group is found not to be a good match for you at this time, we will find other ways to help you meet your goals.

*Some questions adapted from Blum, 1990; Corey & Corey, 2002; Corey, Corey,

Callanan, & Russell, 2004; Greenberg, 2003; Waterman & Walker, 2001

Screening Checklist

Group Topic: _____ Name: _____

Grade/Homeroom _____ Birthday/age: _____

Sex: male female Ethnicity: _____

Date: _____

Match of group and individual: Yes Maybe No

Comments _____

Readiness for group: Yes Maybe No

Comments _____

Willingness to follow group guidelines: Yes Maybe No

Comments _____

Reasons for exclusion:

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> homicidal/suicidal risk | <input type="checkbox"/> hallucinations/delusions |
| <input type="checkbox"/> sleep/appetite disturbances | <input type="checkbox"/> history of instability |
| <input type="checkbox"/> very poor social skills | <input type="checkbox"/> extremely withdrawn |
| <input type="checkbox"/> paranoid/psychopathic | <input type="checkbox"/> current emotional/physical abuse |
| <input type="checkbox"/> severe behavioural problems | <input type="checkbox"/> close friend/enemy in the group |
| <input type="checkbox"/> family member in the group | <input type="checkbox"/> other? |

Final decision:

- Acceptance into group – send letter of consent
- Not accepted at the time – alternative action taken

Explain _____

Leadership and Facilitation of Adolescent Groups

➤ Leadership: Self-reflection

➤ Leadership Feedback

➤ Resources

Leadership: Self-Reflection

The following questions can be used to reflect on and assess one's group leadership skills and attitudes, and to identify areas for growth.

1 = not at all 2 = rarely 3 = sometimes 4 = almost always 5 = always

- _____ 1. I look forward to meeting with the group.
- _____ 2. I am able to maintain necessary discipline within the group
- _____ 3. I am effective in keeping the group focused.
- _____ 4. I include group members in establishing rules and decision-making.
- _____ 5. I can effectively enforce the group rules.
- _____ 6. I intervene immediately when a member is being verbally attacked.
- _____ 7. I encourage all members to participate fully.
- _____ 8. I help members establish realistic goals and move in the direction of goal attainment.
- _____ 9. I am able to link members' experiences.
- _____ 10. I actively listen to members and ask questions at relevant times.
- _____ 11. I am a model for appropriate group behaviour.
- _____ 12. I am well prepared for the sessions.
- _____ 13. I am flexible, putting the needs of the group before my own agenda.
- _____ 14. I am honest and empathic in the group, and am able to communicate these qualities to the members.
- _____ 15. I am an active leader.
- _____ 16. I show respect to each of the group members through my words and my behaviour.
- _____ 17. I am able to challenge members in a respectful yet direct manner.
- _____ 18. I use techniques for which I am qualified in an appropriate and timely fashion.
- _____ 19. I provide time at the end of a session to process the work accomplished in the group.
- _____ 20. I use self-disclosure when I feel that it will benefit the member or the group as a whole.
- _____ 21. I am sensitive to each member's cultural background.
- _____ 22. I am open to feedback, and elicit it frequently.
- _____ 23. I periodically assess the group's progress.
- _____ 24. I maintain confidentiality, and am prepared to respond immediately to breaches of confidentiality or situations that require confidentiality to be broken.
- _____ 25. I continuously assess my strengths and areas for growth.
- _____ 26. I teach members how to assess their own progress towards accomplishing their goals.
- _____ 27. I openly express my reactions to what is going on "in the moment".
- _____ 28. I feel confident in dealing with issues common to adolescent groups (silent members, disruptive members, monopolizing, conflict, scape-goating, defensiveness)
- _____ 29. I believe in the group process.

*Some criteria adapted from Blum, 1990; Corey & Corey, 2002; Corey, Corey, Callanan, & Russell, 2004; Dwivedi & Mymin, 1993; Greenberg, 2003; Waterman & Walker, 2001

Leadership Feedback

Rate the leadership according to the following statements. Space is provided for comments.

1 = not at all 2 = rarely 3 = sometimes 4 = almost always 5 = always

- _____ 1. The leader provides an environment where I feel safe to share.
- _____ 2. The leader is successful in keeping us focused on the group goals.
- _____ 3. The leader clearly communicates the guidelines, expectations, and rules of the group and takes the necessary steps to enforce them.
- _____ 4. The leader shares the responsibility for the group process with the members.
- _____ 5. I feel listened to by the leader.
- _____ 6. I feel respected and accepted by the leader.
- _____ 7. The leader is open, honest, and genuine.
- _____ 8. The leader guides discussions, but does not control them.
- _____ 9. The leader is flexible, allowing time for us to focus on the important issues 'in-the-moment'.
- _____ 10. The leader allows me to express myself.
- _____ 11. The leader encourages me to participate without making me feel singled out.
- _____ 12. The leader challenges me to take a good, hard look at myself.
- _____ 13. The leader invites all members to share their experiences/opinions.
- _____ 14. The leader seems very confident.
- _____ 15. The leader uses techniques and activities that get me thinking about my thoughts feelings, and behaviours.
- _____ 16. I trust the group leader.

Comments:

*Some criteria adapted from Blum, 1990; Corey & Corey, 2002; Corey, Corey, Callanan, & Russell, 2004; Dwivedi & Mymin, 1993; Greenberg, 2003; Waterman & Walker, 2001

Resources

The following books are excellent resources that can aid counsellors in implementing group interventions in their schools. The resources are accessible to district counsellors of the CSSD through the Guidance and Counselling Department.

Brown, N.W. (1994). *Group counseling for elementary and middle school children*. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers.

An overview of group counselling theory and therapeutic factors are provided in this book. Furthermore, this resource contains excellent suggestions on how to integrate art, fairytales, drama, music, and imagery into group counselling interventions. Finally, two chapters are dedicated to dealing with feelings and emotions in group settings.

Corey, M. S., & Corey, G. (2002). *Groups: Process and practice* (6th ed.). Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole.

This book provides an introduction to the basics of group work. It includes chapters on how to form a group, and highlights the four different stages of counselling groups: initial stage, transition stage, working stage, and termination stage. Different tasks and possible problems that may occur at each stage are examined. There is also a separate chapter for groups for adolescents, which outlines issues and challenges in adolescent groups, and proposes groups on a variety of adolescent topics.

Corey, G., Corey, M. S., Callanan, P., & Russell, J. M. (2004). *Group techniques* (3rd ed.). Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole.

This is an excellent resource for outlining a wide array of group techniques. The book is divided into the different stages of group, and examines specific techniques to be used at the different stages.

Gladding, S.T. (1999). *Group work: A counseling specialty* (3rd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Gladding's text provides an excellent overview of group interventions, covering similar topics as the Corey and Corey text. There is also a chapter on adolescent group work, which outlines some unique considerations for this population and some common problems and how to work through them. In addition, there are chapters that explore group leadership from particular theoretical perspectives, such as psycho-analytical, REBT, and person-centered.

Jacobs, E.E., Masson, R.L., & Harvill, R.L. (2002). *Group Counseling: Strategies and skills* (4th ed.). Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole.

This book offers a complete overview of the stages, skills, issues, exercises, and problems involved in leading groups. It includes practical tips and concrete examples of group leadership. There is also a separate chapter that speaks to working with specific populations. The book is a very user-friendly resource.

Smead, R. (1995). *Skills and techniques for group work with children and adolescents*. Champaign, IL: Research Press.

This is an excellent resource to guide any counsellor through working with an adolescent group. The book is divided into three sections: professional and organizational issues; leadership skills; and, therapeutic interaction techniques. Examples of needs assessments, client goals, assessment forms, consent forms, leadership assessments, behavioural contracts, directions for specific techniques, and many more practical tools are included in the appendix.

Selecting Group Counselling Topics

➤ Resources for Group Topics

Resources for Group Topics

The following resources are available through the CSSD's Guidance and Counselling Department. They include topic-specific group outlines.

Greenberg, K.R. (2003). *Group counseling in K-12 schools: A handbook for school counselors*. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

This book includes a complete overview of implementing successful group counselling interventions in the school counselling program. A chapter is dedicated to both group counselling in the middle and junior high school as well as in the high school. Other pertinent chapters highlight how to get a program started, group leadership, problems and solutions, multicultural group counselling, and professional issues. Specific group plans are included for the following topics: developing self-esteem; academic underachievers; stress reduction; attention problems; and, grief/bereavement. Each session outline includes session objectives and specific strategies with instructions.

Smead, R. (2000). *Skills for living: Group counseling activities for young adolescents (Volume 2)*. Champaign, IL: Research Press.

Provides detailed, individual session plans for a number of group counselling topics relevant to children in middle school/junior high. Each session plan includes session objectives, materials, and detailed instructions for check-in, working time, and processing time. Issues related to group counselling for adolescents are also included, for example: techniques for success, ethical issues, leadership issues, and organization of the group. Topics include: understanding and managing friendships; middle school transition issues; male/female relationship issues; understanding and valuing individual and cultural differences; relationships at home; cognitive coping skills; learning to manage anger; and,

issues from a male perspective. Activity sheets and assessment forms are also included for each topic.

Smead, R.S. (1990). *Skills for living: Group counseling activities for young adolescents (Volume 1).* Champaign, Ill: Research Press.

This resource is an earlier volume of group counselling for adolescents by Rosemarie Smead, although with different topics. Topics included in this volume include: dealing with divorce; developing friendships; communication skills; developing self-esteem; stress management; anger management skills; school success; and, coping with grief and loss.

Waterman, J., & Walker, E. (2001). *Helping at-risk students: A group counseling approach for grades 6-9.* New York: Guilford Press.

This book offers a comprehensive group counselling intervention for at-risk students at the junior high level. Included in the group guide are guidelines for setting up and leading the group. Each session includes session objectives, curriculum for check-in, working, and processing activities, and necessary materials. Session topics are divided into seven modules that could also be adapted for other group topics: trust building and communication skills; anger management and problem-solving skills; ethnic identity and anti-prejudice; educational aspirations; peer pressure and gangs; exposure to community violence and posttraumatic stress reactions; and family relationships.

Zins, J.E., & Elias, M.J. (1993). *Promoting student success through group interventions.* Binghamton, NY: Haworth Press.

This book contains a compilation of articles from scholars in the field of group counselling. Topics covered in these articles include: children of divorce; bereaved children; behavioural problems; peer leadership training; and, social skills training.

Written Proposals

➤ Proposal for a Group

Proposal for a Group

Topic: _____

These questions can guide the development of a sound rationale when considering a counselling group. Not all questions need to be answered, and other pertinent information may be included.

I. Rationale:

- Why is there a need for the group?
- What is the purpose of the group?
- Whose needs will the group meet?
- What topics will be covered in the group?
- How will the group benefit the individual member?
- How will the group benefit the school community as a whole?
- What type of group will it be (psycho-educational, skill-building, growth group, etc.)?

II. Objectives/Goals:

- What are the main objectives for the group?
- Are the objectives relevant for this age group?
- Are the objectives clear, measurable, and attainable?
- How will the group experience help attain the objectives?

III. Practical considerations:

- Who is the leader, and what are his/her qualifications?
- Will there be a co-leader?
- How will group members be recruited and selected?
- What are the logistics of the group (size, frequency, duration, and length of group; open/closed; homogeneous/heterogeneous; physical setting)?

IV. Procedures:

- What techniques will be used (i.e. homework assignments, role-plays, modeling, psycho-educational interventions, etc.)?
- How will ethical issues be communicated and dealt with (i.e. informed consent, confidentiality, limitations to confidentiality, working with minors, risks of groups, protection of group members, privacy)?
- How will members be prepared for the group?

V. Evaluation:

- How will the group process be assessed?
- How will goal attainment/progress be assessed?
- What follow-up procedures will be undertaken?
- Will there be an assessment of the leader?
- How will the feedback be utilized?
- Are the assessment methods objective, practical, and relevant?

*Some questions adapted from Corey & Corey, 2002

Group Logistics

- Logistical Considerations and Recommendations
for an Adolescent Group

Logistical Considerations and Recommendations for an Adolescent Group

- 5 – 10 members (more in psycho-educational groups)
- 40 – 90 minutes in length
- 8 - 10 sessions (time-limited)
- Closed group
- Topic specific group
- Diversity of membership
- Physical space allows for privacy, ultimate group interaction
- No more than 2 years age difference
- Co-ed groups, with the exception of topic-sensitive groups

Content and Structure of Group Sessions

➤ Session Plan

➤ Example of a Session Plan

Session Plan

Session plans for _____

Session Number/Title:

Topic:

Group Goals:

Session Objectives:

Structure:

Check-in

Working time

Check-out

Example of a Session Plan

Session plans for: Bereavement Group

Session Number/Title: Session 6: Changes.

Topic: Facing change and adopting healthy coping skills.

Group Goal(s):

3. To help one another to overcome the challenges of adapting to the readjustment (Worden, 2002).
5. To share one's needs and goals in dealing with the grief (Freeman, 1991).

Session Objectives:

1. To explore changes that have taken place since the death.
2. To examine defenses and coping styles.
3. To evaluate the effectiveness of current coping skills.

Structure:

1. Check-in (20 minutes).

For today's check-in, members will be given a list of sentence starters that focus on changes and coping strategies. After a few moments of reflection, they will be asked to complete one of the sentences. Once all members have shared, the leader will initiate linking some of the adolescent's experiences by asking the members to share how they connected with the statements of another member in the group. The leader could simply ask members to share any connections they felt while listening to other members share. If the group seems to have had difficulty expressing such statements in past sessions, the leader could suggest that they use the following formula:

I connected with you, _____, when you said _____, and I felt or thought _____ (Smead, 1995).

Linking is a way to teach members to empathize with one another, and it causes members to feel emotionally connected and fosters a sense of universality. In this session, it is also an effective introduction to the remainder of the time, which will be spent on sharing and assessing individual coping strategies.

Working Time:

2. Changes and coping strategies (40 minutes).

The leader will focus discussion on changes resulting from the death and how members are coping with the changes. Changes will be different for each member, depending on the relationship with the one who died. For those who have lost a parent, changes may involve financial difficulties, adapting to new roles within the family, increased responsibility, and dealing with parental dating. For an adolescent who has lost a friend, changes may center on building new relationships or finding new leisure activities. Expressing and grieving losses involved in the changes can help adolescents to cope (Kandt, 1994). Verbalizing feelings and focusing on both negative and positive aspects of change is important in promoting acceptance and understanding (Schwartz, 1999).

Through an examination of the changes that members have gone through or are going through, coping strategies in dealing with those changes are brought to the forefront. Some coping styles may indicate effective behaviour and others may not. A common negative coping strategy among the bereaved is increased use of drugs and alcohol (Worden, 2002). It is important for the leader to follow up on any suspected drug or alcohol related coping strategies. Referral to resources that deal with drug and alcohol abuse may be necessary. If coping through alcohol and drugs comes up as an issue within the group, the leader will share an excerpt from *Straight Talk About Death for Teenagers*

(Grollman, 1993), *Lengthening Grief through Harmful Shortcuts: Drugs and Drinking*.

Other coping strategies that are prolonging the grieving and standing in the way of the natural process will be confronted. Members will also share coping strategies that have worked for them. It is also important for the leader to ensure that members consider ideas for self-care.

The linking intervention at the beginning of the session will serve as a catalyst for further discussion. As the group continues to move towards a working stage, the leader will take a step back and allow for more interaction between members, gently guiding empathic reactions and feedback concerning the effectiveness of particular coping strategies.

3. Check-out (10 minutes).

At this stage of the group, members should be making progress towards their goals. At today's check-out, members will be asked to share their progress with the group. If any members feel that they are not making progress, or have difficulty identifying it, the leader will ask members to think about what they can do within the group that will help them achieve their goals, and what the group could do for them. This may be the topic of reflection in the journal for certain members. Self-care is another important issue, and members could make up a plan for self-care in this week's journal reflection.

The leader will also acknowledge that this is the sixth session, and challenge members to prepare to bring forward any unexpressed thoughts and feelings, and any unfinished business, to the next session. To challenge members to think about their contributions to the group, the leader will pose the following question:

If the group were to end today, how would you feel about what you have done, and what would you wish you had done differently (Corey & Corey, 2002)?

Goal Setting

- Group Goals
- Individual Goal Contract

Group Goals

A list of possible group goals is provided. These goals are very general, and could be applied to any group. Goals may be adapted to specifically address the needs of a particular topic.

- To facilitate the development of a trusting, supportive environment where members feel safe to take risks and share personal experiences
- To raise members' self-awareness
- To recognize that others experience similar challenges
- To overcome feelings of isolation and alienation
- To learn how to cope with and/or resolve personal problems
- To develop and improve relationship and communication skills
- To provide useful feedback to others
- To be sensitive to the feelings and needs of others
- To challenge one's current behaviours
- To clarify what is important to oneself (values)
- To better understand the perspectives of others
- To be more open and honest with others
- To learn how to transfer knowledge obtained in group to real-life situations
- To develop positive self-concepts
- To help members clarify, recognize, and understand their feelings
- To openly listen to others in a non-judgmental manner
- To set and work towards individual goals

*Some goals adapted from Blum, 1990; Corey & Corey, 2002; Corey, Corey, Callanan, & Russell, 2004; Smead, 2000; Waterman & Walker, 2001

Individual Goal Contract

Group Title: _____

Goals must be:

- In *my own* words
- In a *positive* statement (“I will . . .” not “I won’t . . .”)
- As *specific* as possible
- Within *my control* (realistic!)
- Expressed as *actions* (what will I be *doing* differently)

What specific behaviours/attitudes do I want to change?

-
-
-
-

What is my timeline for making these changes? (short-term/long-term)

What will I do in and outside the group to work towards these changes?

-
-
-

What setbacks might I encounter?

How can I prepare myself to deal with these setbacks?

Signed _____ Date _____

*Goals may be revised as I learn more about myself, and what I want.

Ethical Concerns

- Informed Consent Letter for Parents
- Informed Consent Letter for Students
 - Limits to Confidentiality Poster
 - Confidentiality Explained
 - Student Contract

Informed Consent Letter for Parents

Dear Parents:

Following a needs assessment at the school, students, parents, and teachers identified _____ as an area of need. In order to fulfill this need, we will be running a _____ group beginning _____ and running once a week for _____ weeks. Each session will last _____, and students are responsible for catching up on missed work.

Your son/daughter has expressed an interest in this group. The purpose of the group is to _____.

Some of the themes to be covered during the _____ sessions include: _____
_____.

I will be leading the group. My qualifications include _____.

Group counselling is a great way to learn new skills and behaviours, and receive and offer support to peers who are experiencing similar challenges. However, as with any counselling intervention, there are inherent risks. (*State possible risks and how these risks will be addressed*) _____
_____.

Due to the importance of trust in the group process, I will keep information shared by group members confidential, unless a situation arises where I am ethically required to share information. You will be notified if:

- 1) Your child reveals that he/she is a physical danger to him/herself or to someone else
- 2) Your child reveals information regarding the abuse or neglect of a minor
- 3) My records are subpoenaed by the courts (an extremely unlikely occurrence)

If you have any questions or concerns in regards to your son/daughter during the group intervention, we can set up a meeting with you and your child.

Members are reminded of the importance of keeping any information shared in the group confidential. However, it is important for both you and your child to understand that, due to the nature of group counselling, confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

(*If consent is sent home before screening, include the following paragraph.)

(If you would like your child to be considered for this group, please sign the attached permission form and return to the school counselling department. Screening interviews will be conducted over the next two weeks. Groups are not ideal for everyone, and only those who I feel will benefit from this type of counselling intervention will be invited to take part.)

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me at the Student Services department.

Sincerely,

School Counsellor/Group Facilitator

I acknowledge and give my support for my son/daughter to participate in the _____ group *(if he/she is selected)*. I understand and accept that anything my child shares in the group will be kept confidential, with the aforementioned exceptions.

Parent/guardian signatures

Date

Student signature

Date

Informed Consent Letter for Students

Dear Student;

Following your expressed interest in the _____ group, you are invited to take part in this group. The _____ group begins _____ and will take place once a week for _____ minutes over a ____-week period. You will be missing class time for this group, and are responsible for completing missed work during this time.

The purpose of the group is: _____.

In order to gain from this group, you must be ready and willing to participate. Some of the themes to be covered during the eight sessions include: _____

_____.

I will be leading the _____ group. My qualifications are _____

_____.

Group counselling is a great way to learn new skills and behaviours, and receive and offer support to peers who are experiencing similar challenges. However, as with any counselling intervention, there are inherent risks. (*State possible risks and how these risks will be addressed*) _____

_____.

Due to the importance of trust in the group process, I will keep information shared by group members confidential, unless a situation arises where I am ethically required to share information. Your parents and/or others will be informed if:

- 1) You reveal that you are a physical danger to yourself or to someone else
- 2) You reveal information regarding the abuse or neglect of a minor
- 3) My records are subpoenaed by the courts (an extremely unlikely occurrence)

Members are reminded of the importance of keeping any information shared in the group confidential. However, it is important for you to understand that, due to the nature of group counselling, confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

If you are still interested in taking part in this group, please sign the attached consent form to acknowledge that you are aware of the possible benefits and risks of the _____ group, and are giving your consent to participate. If you have any questions, you can contact me at the counselling department.

Sincerely,

School Counsellor/Group Facilitator

I acknowledge and give my consent to participate in the _____ group for adolescents. I understand and accept that anything shared in the group will be kept confidential, with the aforementioned exceptions, and that I must abide by the confidentiality agreement as it pertains to other group members.

Student signature

Date

Parent/guardian signatures

Date

Our Limits to Confidentiality:

Risk of harm to
myself or others.

Emotional or
physical abuse of
a minor.

Court subpoenas.

Confidentiality Explained

*The following script can be utilized when explaining confidentiality or adapted to be used as a handout to give group members.

It is very important that everyone understand the significance of confidentiality. In order to build trust within the group, each of us needs to feel safe: that what we talk about in the group will not leave this room. I will remind you often of the importance of confidentiality, but you are responsible for guarding confidentiality both between sessions and after the termination of the group. Our confidentiality agreement does not end with the group.

You will probably experience and learn things in the group that you would like to share with others. This confidentiality agreement allows you to tell others about what you learned in the group, without talking about how you learned it. In other words, you can talk about your reactions and insights, but not the problems, comments, and reactions of other members.

It is also important for you to understand, however, that unlike individual counselling, I cannot guarantee confidentiality, as I do not have control over other members. Even though we all agree to keep our discussions confidential, you need to be aware that there may be breaches, and weigh that in when considering disclosing information. As we build trust, we may feel more comfortable in sharing personal information.

Also, it is important to remember that, as with any counselling relationship, there are limitations to our confidentiality agreement: if I feel that you may be a risk to yourself or to others; if I hear about the abuse or neglect of a minor; and, if I am

subpoenaed by the courts. If your parents request information, we will discuss their concerns together, and decide what you would like to disclose.

*Explanation of confidentiality adapted from Corey & Corey, 2002

Student Contract

I, _____, understand the importance of the expectations and guidelines of the group. I especially understand the importance of confidentiality, and will respect the confidentiality of all group members. I have been informed that I will be responsible for completing any classroom work that I may miss while attending the group sessions within the allotted time. I also understand that breaking any of the rules will result in serious consequences. I will do my best to be a good group member.

Student signature: _____

Group leader signature: _____

Date: _____

*Adapted from Blum, 1990

Overcoming Challenges

- Letter to Teaching Staff
- Article in Newsletter
- Teacher Notification

Letter to Teaching Staff

To: All teaching staff

From: Student Services

Date: _____

Re: Group Counselling Interventions

In an effort to better meet the needs of a greater student population, the student services department will increase its focus on group counselling interventions as an integral part of its school guidance program during this school year. As this change in practice will have an impact on you, we will be seeking your input and collaboration throughout the year. The intent of this letter is to give you a brief description of group counselling and its benefits, and provide you with an overview of how this service may be delivered.

What is group counselling?

In group counselling, a small number of students (usually 6 to 10) meet and share common concerns, explore personal issues, and learn new skills under the guidance of a qualified group leader. Group members help one another by providing support and feedback. Within the group, members learn about themselves and how they relate to others through sharing perception/thoughts/feelings, trying out new behaviours, giving and receiving feedback, and observing how others deal with specific situations. During group counselling, members begin to realize that they are not alone. It is encouraging for members to relate to others who have similar concerns.

Why group counselling with adolescents?

Group counselling is receiving an increased focus in our counselling services due to the many benefits that can be derived from group interventions. Some of the benefits include:

- Efficient use of counsellor time as counsellors can reach a larger number of students
- Healthy interactions with peers
- Higher profile of the counselling program
- A safe place to communicate concerns
- Improved relationship and communication skills
- The learning of new skills
- Increased knowledge of available resources
- Support for the transition from childhood to adulthood
- Opportunities for peer feedback, which is a powerful tool to promote change
- Opportunity to provide support, share coping strategies, give and receive feedback, and challenge others who share similar concerns.
- Reduction of feelings of isolation
- A non-threatening environment to practice new behaviours

Service Delivery

In order to provide group interventions that meet the needs of the students, a needs assessment will be conducted with all students, teachers, and parents. From this assessment, areas of high need will be identified, and group counselling interventions will be developed to focus on specific needs. Groups will be advertised, and students wishing to take part will be carefully screened to assess their compatibility with the group. For students to be part of a group, they must receive parental consent.

Groups will meet for approximately 8 sessions, equivalent in time to one class period. As we understand how important it is for students to regularly attend class, the sessions will be planned on a rotating schedule, with your input, in order to reduce any negative impact on the classroom. In other words, the group will be offered during different blocks each week in order to avoid conflict with the same class. You will be informed of student participation, and will be invited to offer any feedback. Students will be expected to complete any missed homework and/or assignments, as is the case with any other school-sponsored event.

At the end of the year, we will provide you with a summary of the groups offered, and the number of students affected. We will also be seeking feedback from you on how to improve the delivery of this service.

Thank you for your support of this initiative. Our goal is to provide students with the support they need so that they are better equipped to achieve their academic goals.

Please approach us with any comments, questions, or concerns.

Sincerely,

Student Services Department

Article in Newsletter

Counsellors'



Corner

Today's Topic: Group Counselling

In an effort to better meet the needs of a greater student population, the student services department will increase its focus on group counselling interventions as an integral part of its school guidance program during this school year. Group counselling is a great way to address issues that are faced by a number of students. Here is just a brief description of group counselling and its benefits

What is group counselling? In group counselling, a small number of students (usually 6 to 10) meet and share common concerns, explore personal issues, and learn new skills under the guidance of a qualified group leader. Group members help one another by providing support and feedback. Within the group, members learn about themselves and how they relate to others through sharing perception/thoughts/feelings, trying out new behaviours, giving and receiving feedback, and observing how others deal with specific situations. During group counselling, members begin to realize that they are not alone. It is encouraging for members to relate to others who have similar concerns.

Why group counselling with adolescents? Group counselling is receiving an increased focus in our counselling services due to the many benefits that can be derived from group interventions. Some of the benefits include:

- Efficient use of counsellor time as counsellors can reach a larger number of students
- Healthy interactions with peers
- Higher profile of the counselling program
- A safe place to communicate concerns

- Improved relationship and communication skills
- The learning of new skills
- Increased knowledge of available resources
- Support for the transition from childhood to adulthood
- Opportunities for peer feedback, which is a powerful tool to promote change
- Opportunity to provide support, share coping strategies, give and receive feedback, and challenge others who share similar concerns.
- Reduction of feelings of isolation
- A non-threatening environment to practice new behaviours

Service Delivery

In order to provide group interventions that meet the needs of the students, a needs assessment will be conducted with all students, teachers, and parents. From this assessment, areas of high need will be identified, and group counselling interventions will be developed to focus on that need. Groups will be advertised, and students wishing to take part will be carefully screened to assess their compatibility with the group. For students to be part of a group, they must receive parental consent.

We will keep you posted of groups that will be offered throughout the year. Feel free to drop by the Student Services Department, or give us a call!

Teacher Notification

Date: _____

To: _____ (*teacher(s)*)

From: _____ (*counsellor*)

Re: Group counselling for _____ (*name of group*)

_____ has been selected and has parental permission to participate in a group entitled _____. The rotating schedule, including dates of group sessions, is attached.

This student is responsible for completing any missed assignments during absences due to the group sessions, and has signed a contract addressing this issue. If assignments are not completed within a reasonable time, please let me know and I will help you deal with the problem.

Members will be excused from the group the day of any scheduled exams, but will be required to attend all other sessions, as regular attendance by all group members is essential to the success of the group. If there are any reasons that you feel this student should not take part in this group, please discuss them with me. I appreciate your cooperation.

Thank you for allowing _____ to be excused from class. If you have any questions or concerns, please see me.

Assessment of Group Interventions

- Assessment of Group Experience: Ongoing
- Assessment of Group Experience: Final Evaluation

Assessment of Group Experience: Ongoing

Possible questions to ask members at the end of each session.

1. How is the group going so far?
2. What has been the most satisfying part of the group?
3. What could we do to make the group more meaningful?
4. What could you do differently to get more out of the group experience?
5. How do you see yourself in this group?
6. In general, how do you feel as a member of this group?
7. What did you learn from today's session? How did you learn it?
8. In what ways is the group helping you to move towards your goals?
9. How do you feel about your participation in the group so far?
10. If you continue in the same way, how will you feel at the termination of the group?
11. What have you found to be particularly helpful? How has it helped?
12. How willing have you been to share in an open and honest manner? What has contributed to that willingness/lack of willingness?
13. How comfortable do you feel sharing your experiences with the other members in the group? What may help to increase your comfort level?
14. What experiences, thoughts, and/or feelings of other members have you most identified with?
15. What things have helped you participate in the group?
16. What things have held you back from participating in the group?

*Some questions adapted from Blum, 1990; Corey & Corey, 2002; Corey, Corey, Callanan, & Russell, 2004; Smead, 2000

Assessment of Group Experience: Final Evaluation

Please respond openly, honestly, and as completely as possible to the following questions:

1. In your opinion, did the group make progress toward accomplishing its goals? Explain.
2. Did the group help you progress towards your individual goals? Explain.
3. What did you do in the group that helped you progress towards your goals?
4. What did you do differently outside of the group to help you achieve your goals? Was it helpful? Explain.
5. What changes have you made that you can attribute to being a member in this group (behaviour, attitude, feelings)?
6. Were your expectations for this group met? Explain.
7. What did you like most about the group?
8. What did you like least about the group?
9. Which techniques/activities did you find had the most impact on you? The least?
10. What was the highlight of the group for you?
11. How has this experience helped you to understand yourself?
12. Would you recommend this group to others? Explain.
13. What changes would you recommend for future groups?
14. Add any other comments that you would like to share.

*Some questions adapted from Blum, 1990; Corey & Corey, 2002; Corey, Corey, Callanan, & Russell, 2004; Smead, 2000

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CHAPTER FIVE

Synthesis and Implications

Project Impact

The goal of this project, from its inception, was to enhance the use of group counselling interventions within secondary schools of the Calgary Separate School District (CSSD). It would be advantageous for counsellors and the clients they serve to find ways to overcome obstacles in implementing this proven intervention (Corey & Corey, 2002) that is effective, affordable, and efficient. Introducing and furthering possibilities for group counselling interventions would provide another option that counsellors could include in their repertoire of services.

My review of the literature provided strong support for the use of group counselling with this population. Through conducting the review, specific issues and topics related to implementing group counselling with adolescents were highlighted. Support for a number of best practice guidelines relating to these specific issues were identified and integrated into both the literature review and the final product.

The analysis of survey responses (see Appendix B) provided further direction to the project, and enabled me to identify and address some of the needs and concerns of counsellors specific to the CSSD. The responses were very helpful in directing the project and providing pertinent topics for the literature review and starter kit. It is in understanding the problem that one can work towards a solution.

The survey was of further benefit as it provided an overview of current group counselling practices within the CSSD, which, when presented to the counsellors, will give an overall picture of the current situation and provide a baseline upon which they could build. In addition, the survey results demonstrated that over half of the respondents

are currently running groups, and a number of group topics have been undertaken in the past. Counsellors also identified a number of benefits to running groups as well as effective strategies for group implementation. These results suggest grounds for optimism in obtaining counsellor support for achieving the goal of the project.

The main benefit of this project is reflected in the specific product: the group counselling “starter kit”. The starter kit provides counsellors with practical tools to aid the implementation of group interventions within their schools, and to counteract many of the obstacles identified in the review of literature and survey responses. It will give them another means of tackling specific counselling issues as they arise. The starter kit lays out the process for identifying school needs while suggesting responses to those needs through group interventions. In this way, it allows counsellors to tackle the most prominently identified obstacle of all: lack of time. In addition, the Bereavement Manual (see Appendix C) offers an example of the process, allowing counsellors to envision the way in which the starter kit can be effectively and efficiently applied to a specific topic.

Finally, the curriculum for a workshop, shown in the PowerPoint presentation (see Appendix D), offers a framework for showcasing the group counselling starter kit. The workshop will provide counsellors of the CSSD with a tangible, practical product aimed to facilitate their task of implementing counselling groups in their schools. The PowerPoint presentation is also accessible to counsellors of the CSSD as a support as they work through the starter kit independently.

As indicated, the project’s intention to help counsellors facilitate more group counselling has been met, in different ways, through the literature review, starter kit, bereavement manual, and PowerPoint presentation. The potential impact of the project is much more far-reaching than the school counsellors, however. Group counselling, when

responding to identified needs within the school, provides emotional support needed by many students, enabling them to be more focused and successful in the classroom. The potential positive outcomes are a benefit to all involved parties. Also, if school personnel are able to recognize the positive results emerging from group counselling, they will be more willing to support it.

Application in Other Counselling Settings

This research project and specific products are not only of benefit to the school counsellors within the CSSD, but could also be a helpful resource to school counsellors in other districts wanting a guide for responding to emergent group counselling needs within secondary schools. This is a practical, research-supported project that will be made available as an online resource so that counsellors everywhere interested in counselling groups of students can use or adapt the step-by-step guidelines and forms in initiating, facilitating, and evaluating groups.

Furthermore, the steps of the project, including the starter kit and grief counselling example, are clearly outlined, enabling other researchers, wishing to conduct a similar project, to tailor it to the needs of their agency. Although the project was intended to meet the needs of counsellors in a school setting, many of the resources developed are pertinent to other counselling agencies that provide services to adolescents.

Limitations of the Project

The project was conducted to respond to the needs of school counsellors within a specific school district in regards to group counselling interventions. Its limited focus derives from its concentration on adolescent populations in a school environment. Those wishing to adapt the project to different populations and/or settings would need to conduct their own background research. In addition, the quantitative data that was

obtained for the project was based on a small, specialized, local group and may not generalize well to the personnel in other school districts. Priorities of individual school districts, government funding discrepancies across provinces, and differences in counsellor training programs are a few examples of specific factors that could affect and possibly alter the implementation of this project.

Finally, the project is intended to be put into practice with counsellors who have received some training in group counselling facilitation. Due to the limited scope of the project, it was not possible to include group process training. Counsellors interested in learning more about group counselling interventions can be directed to local universities, workshops, and books on this subject, some of which have been included in the list of resources found in the group counselling starter kit.

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Appendix A: Survey Questions

Group Counselling

In responding to the following questions, please feel free to use as much space as required.

I. Background Information

1. What percentage of your responsibilities is spent in a counselling role (as opposed to teaching)?

- 100%
- More than 50%
- Less than 50%

2. What level do you counsel?

- Junior High
- Senior High
- Both

3. How many schools do you counsel in?

- One
- Two
- More than two

4. For how many years have you been a counsellor with the Calgary Separate School District?

- More than 20 years
- 10 – 20 years
- 5 – 10 years
- Less than 5 years

5. What formal training do you have in counselling?

- Graduate level training in counselling
- Graduate level training with courses in group work
- No graduate level training
- Other. Please specify _____

II. Current Practice

1. Do you use groups as a part of your counselling program?

- Yes
- No

If yes, please answer the following two questions.

2. How many groups have you facilitated in the past 12 months?

3. What were the specific topics/focus of those groups?

III. Attitudes

1. What benefits do you see for your students in running groups as a part of your counselling program?

2. What are some of the obstacles that you foresee in running groups with students in your school?

3. What, if any, obstacles or barriers have gotten in the way of offering a group intervention at your school in the last 3 years?

IV. Assessing needs

1. How do you currently assess the students' counselling needs in your school?

2. What factors help you decide when group counselling may be a viable option for intervention to meet student needs?

3. What current needs have you assessed in your school that could be effectively met through group counselling?

V. Strengths

1. What skills, training, and/or experiences do you have that you believe have prepared you to lead a counselling group?

2. What strategies have you found helpful in implementing group interventions in your schools?

3. What groups have you offered that you believe have made a positive contribution to the students and the school community? Explain.

VI. Counsellor needs

1. How prepared do you currently feel to:

a) assess the group counselling needs within your school?

_____ a little

_____ a lot

_____ not at all

b) develop a group in response to an emergent need if it is in your area of expertise? (For example, if there is a suicide in your school community, how prepared to you feel to run a suicide postvention group?)

- _____ a little
- _____ a lot
- _____ not at all

c) develop a group in response to an emergent need for which you have not previously provided counselling?

- _____ a little
- _____ a lot
- _____ not at all

2. What further training would help you feel better prepared for responding to the needs in your school?

3. What specific areas of training/inservicing would you find useful in helping develop and offer more group experiences for your students?

Appendix B: Data analysis

28 respondents/58 surveys

I. Background Information

1. Percentage of time spent in counselling role.

of responses 28

14 100%
7 More than 50%
7 Less than 50%

2. Level counselled:

of responses 28

14 Junior High
13 Senior High
1 Both

3. Number of schools :

of responses 28

24 One
4 Two
0 More than two

4. Years of experience :

of responses 28

3 More than 20 years
6 10 – 20 years
8 5 – 10 years
11 Less than 5 years

5. Formal training :

of responses 28

11 Graduate level training in counselling
15 Graduate level training with courses in group work
2 No graduate level training
0 Other.

Please specify _____
of responses 8

- 2 Graduate degree in progress
- 2 Graduate course in group process
- 2 Master in Guidance and Counselling/Counselling Psychology
- 1 Master of Arts – counselling certificate in progress
- 1 Provisional psychologist
- 1 Experience with groups

II. Current Practice

1. Do you use groups as a part of your counselling program?
of responses 27

- 14 Yes
- 13 No

2. Number of groups (past 12 months)
of responses 13/14

- 1 0
- 5 1
- 3 2
- 1 4
- 1 10
- 1 12
- 1 more than 12

3. Specific topics of groups
of responses 18

- 7 Conflict Resolution
- 7 Interpersonal/social skills/difficulties (teachers/peers)
- 6 Academic skills/behaviours (Study/organization/attendance)
- 5 AADAC (Drug and Alcohol prevention)
- 4 Anger management
- 4 Career/post-secondary planning
- 3 bullying
- 2 Children of divorce/blended families
- 2 Various groups in health class
- 2 Grief
- 2 Non-abusive futures
- 1 Children of Alcoholics
- 1 Students with ADHD
- 1 Self-esteem groups
- 1 Summer school.

- 1 New Kid on the Block.
- 1 Guidance orientation
- 1 Student depression
- 1 Student Council
- 1 Farewell Committee for Gr.9's
- 1 Risk management
- 1 Eating disorders

III. Attitudes

1. Benefits of groups

of responses 26

- 12 Efficient/time management
- 9 Promotes Universality "I am not alone"
- 8 Positive interaction/connection among members
- 7 Peer influence
- 7 Interpersonal learning
- 6 Reaches more students
- 4 Respond to more needs
- 4 Support from others
- 3 Promotes self-awareness
- 3 Opportunity to try out new behaviours/attitudes/ideas
- 2 Counsellor gains insight into school/student needs
- 1 Level of trust enhanced
- 1 Build school community cohesiveness
- 1 Gain knowledge (psycho-educational groups)
- 1 Forum for students to be heard
- 1 Safe environment
- 1 Student engagement in school
- 1 Connection with an adult

2. Perceived obstacles

of responses 27

- 10 Lack of time/human resources (general)
- 10 Timetable/scheduling
- 9 Interference with academics/class time
- 6 Confidentiality concerns
- 6 Lack of staff cooperation, support, and understanding of group process
- 5 Large time commitment to group meetings (Student and counsellor)
- 4 Too many other expectations of counsellor role
- 3 Students' lack of understanding and negative attitudes towards groups
- 3 Lack of members' participation/willingness to share
- 3 Lack of private physical space
- 2 Administrative requirements (paperwork)
- 2 Lack of student readiness to participate in groups

- 2 Lack of counsellor experience/expertise
- 2 Time required to plan
- 1 Need to maintain academic focus
- 1 Ineffective in limited available time
- 1 Stigmatization
- 1 Difficulty finding co-facilitator
- 1 Lack of parental support
- 1 No obstacles

3. Obstacles experienced (past 3 years)
of responses 22

- 9 Lack of time/human resources
- 9 Too many other expectations/commitments
- 4 Scheduling concerns
- 3 Student reluctance to attend groups
- 3 Lack of counsellor experience/training/comfort
- 2 Takes away from academics
- 2 No obstacles
- 1 Brand new school
- 1 Lack of administrative support
- 1 Students not respecting group rules/expectations
- 1 Lack of understanding of goals of groups (parents/teachers/students)
- 1 lack of physical space

IV. Assessing needs

1. Current means of assessment :
of responses 25

- 16 Survey to students, parents, teachers
- 12 Staff referrals
- 6 Student informal input
- 5 Needs assessment
- 5 Parent communication
- 4 Other referrals (outside)
- 3 Individual interviews/counselling sessions
- 2 Past identified needs
- 2 Student self-referral
- 1 Meeting (SRT/Staff)
- 1 Observation
- 1 No time for adequate needs assessment

2. Factors related to decision to run a group :

of responses 24

- 11 Many students presenting with similar concerns/common issues
- 4 Student interest/comfort level
- 4 Topics where group interaction would be beneficial
- 4 Staff concern
- 4 Availability of time to run group
- 3 Feedback from needs assessment
- 3 Support from administration
- 2 Student factors (age, readiness)
- 1 Problem interferes with academic progress
- 1 Availability of outside resources
- 1 Sensitivity of the issue
- 1 Parental approval/support
- 1 Crisis/immediate concerns
- 1 Time restraints that inhibit one-on-one

3. Current needs that can be met through groups :

of responses 25

- 15 Interpersonal issues (social skills, friendships, peer pressure)
- 10 Bullying/victim and bully
- 9 Anger management
- 8 Alcohol/Drug use (AADAC)
- 7 Academic-related concerns (study skills/organization/attendance/learning strategies)
- 5 Conflict resolution
- 4 Respect of Self/self-esteem
- 4 Issues/relationships with parents/step-parents
- 3 Loss (death/divorce)
- 3 Stress management related to self-mutilation
- 2 Healthy relationships/dating
- 2 Body image
- 1 Behavior Related skills
- 1 Violence
- 1 High school awareness, preparation
- 1 Suicide intervention strategies
- 1 High school course selection
- 1 Vocational issues

V. Strengths

1. Skills/training/experiences

of responses 26

- 12 Graduate level training
- 12 Experience working with youth as a teacher/counsellor
- 11 Courses in Group dynamics
- 8 Experience running groups
- 6 Attended inservices/workshops/training seminars
- 3 Personal experience in some of the areas
- 2 Reading books (group process)
- 2 Being a parent
- 1 Co-facilitated a group with an experienced person
- 1 Psychology degree
- 1 Support from school district
- 1 Classroom presentations on specific topics
- 1 Insufficient preparation

2. Strategies for group implementation

of responses 19

- 6 Assessing needs/gaining referrals through various means
- 5 Communication/support/participation of teachers
- 5 Screening/ purposeful inclusion of diverse members
- 4 Eliciting student support/interest through advertising and p.r.
- 3 Attaining administrative support
- 2 Parental support/communication
- 2 Establishing clear guidelines/rules
- 1 Seek outside support and resources
- 1 Student choice to attend (not mandated)
- 1 Co-facilitation
- 1 Meeting students one-on-one
- 1 Positive student-counsellor relationship
- 1 Seeking input from members in planning stage
- 1 Evaluation of the group experience
- 1 Maintain a positive environment
- 1 Use of non-school time

3a. Groups with positive contribution
of responses 20

- 4 _____ Drug and alcohol awareness/abuse
- 4 _____ Academic issues (study skills/attendance)
- 3 _____ Non-Abusive Futures/Healthy relationships
- 3 _____ Conflict resolution
- 2 _____ Peer Mediation/Peer support
- 2 _____ Social skills
- 2 _____ Post-secondary preparation
- 1 _____ Suicide Awareness
- 1 _____ Girls' self esteem group
- 1 _____ Community of caring group
- 1 _____ Children of Divorce
- 1 _____ Coping with Death
- 1 _____ Risk behaviour
- 1 _____ Anger management
- 1 _____ Student Council
- 1 _____ Bullying
- 1 _____ Dance Group (Belonging)

3b. Explain
of responses 10

- 3 _____ Students know that an adult cares/connection with adult.
- 2 _____ Well received by students/staff/school community
- 2 _____ Learn to handle emotions/reduce anxiety
- 2 _____ Learn skills that are transferable to real-life
- 1 _____ Prevention oriented.
- 1 _____ Students are better able to cope.
- 1 _____ Large groups allowed for access from more students
- 1 _____ Supportive environment for learning
- 1 _____ Insight for counsellors/understanding of student issues
- 1 _____ Better engagement in school
- 1 _____ Build new relationships
- 1 _____ Build self-esteem
- 1 _____ Time-management

VI. Counsellor needs

1. Preparedness to assess group counselling needs :

of responses 28

16 a little

12 a lot

0 not at all

2. Preparedness to respond to need in your area of expertise

of responses 28

13 a little

12 a lot

3 not at all

3. Preparedness to respond to need **not** in your area of expertise

of responses 28

17 a little

5 a lot

6 not at all

4. Type of further training

of responses 22

Types of Training/General

4 PD day/in-service

4 Protocol/guidelines in schools/school district

2 Not a priority

2 Handbook

2 Community resources

1 Web site

1 Not necessary - already qualified

1 Developed format

1 List of Resources

1 Consultation opportunities

1 Co-facilitating with someone who has experience running groups

1 Experiencing a group myself

1 Further formal education

Group Process

- 4 Running group/group process
- 1 Evaluating group
- 1 Group management

Topic Specific

- 3 Prepared material on specific topics
- 1 Information about loss
- 1 Dealing with outside pressures
- 1 Parent child relationship
- 1 Peer relationships
- 1 Suicide postvention
- 1 Strategies for student success

5. Specific area of further training
of responses 22

Types of Training/General

- 3 Discussion/sharing with other counsellors
- 2 Observing more groups/co-facilitating
- 2 Available community/other resources
- 1 reputable speaker/facilitator
- 1 Specifics of groups in schools protocol/guidelines
- 1 Experiencing a group myself
- 1 Workshops
- 1 Group lesson plans
- 1 All areas
- 1 Not applicable

Group Process

- 3 Group process
- 1 Evaluating group

Topic Specific

- 4 Positive relationship building/boundaries
- 3 Anger management
- 1 Bullying,
- 1 Sexual assault,
- 1 Stress
- 1 Suicide
- 1 Sexual orientation

- 1 Self-mutilation
- 1 Social skills
- 1 Grief
- 1 Transitory issues post-high school
- 1 Sensitive issues (sexuality)
- 1 Inservicing in specific areas of concern

Gently Guiding the
Journey Through Grief:
A Bereavement Manual for
Adolescent Groups
By Jody Primeau

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Gently Guiding the Journey Through Grief:

A Bereavement Manual for Adolescent Groups

Introduction

Adolescence is a time of rapid developmental transitions. Young people who are faced with coping with the death of a loved one during this already challenging developmental stage may have difficulty resolving their grief, which can lead to physical and psychological problems (Worden, 2002).

Literature endorses the effectiveness of group counselling interventions with this population, and contends that schools are an ideal place for groups (Lafountain, 1993; Phillips & Phillips, 1992; Zinck & Littrell, 2000). The purpose of this document is to provide a model and sample curriculum, base don material from the starter kit, for conducting bereavement groups with adolescents in schools. The manual will address both the theoretical and practical considerations necessary for developing such a group. First, an overview of the grieving process is provided. Following this overview, a group proposal for a bereavement group is presented. A detailed 8-session plan, along with samples of necessary forms, activities, and resources for the group is included in the manual.

Overview of Grief

Attachment Theory

In order to understand the process of grief, it is important to briefly look at Bowlby's (as cited in Worden, 2002) attachment theory, as it provides a foundation for understanding grief. Throughout the different stages of our lives, we make strong affectional bonds with others. Bowlby proposes that humans seek these close emotional attachments to fulfill a need for security and safety. When these bonds are broken through

separation or death, the result is an intense emotional reaction commonly referred to as grief.

Normal Grief

Grieving is a normal process that allows us to heal from the broken bonds of our attachment. Hamilton and Masecar (2003) define grief as “a naturally occurring, often intense, emotional reaction to any perceived loss” (p. 10).

In an early study of grieving family members, Lindemann (as cited in Worden, 2002) found five characteristics of grief: (a) somatic symptoms of distress; (b) preoccupation with the deceased; (c) guilt related to the deceased and/or circumstances surrounding the death; (d) hostility; and (e) inability to function. Forty years later, Worden (2002) found similar reactions in grieving individuals, but classified them according to feelings, somatic reactions, cognitions, and behaviours. Feelings of sadness, anger, guilt, anxiety, loneliness, and helplessness are some of the common feelings associated with the loss of a loved one. Physical symptoms include: hollowness in the stomach, tightness in the chest and throat, breathlessness, and a lack of energy. Cognitions common in grieving individuals, depending on the stage of the grief, include disbelief, confusion, preoccupation with the loved one, and even hallucinations. Finally, behaviours such as sleep and appetite disturbances, absentmindedness, social withdrawal, and crying are associated with grief.

There are also individuals who experience complicated grief. Complicated grief involves unusually intense, enduring reactions (Hamilton & Masecar, 2003). Certain situational and personal characteristics influence whether or not an individual will experience complicated grief. Possible determinants include a sudden, unexpected death, ambivalent feelings surrounding the death, an abnormally dependent relationship with the

deceased, multiple life stressors, lack of emotional support, or a personal tendency to avoid stress and conflict. Individuals who are still caught in the crisis of the death and are suffering from serious complicated grief are not ideal candidates for group counselling, and may be best served by individual therapy (Smead, 1995).

Stages, Phases, and Tasks of Grief

Kubler-Ross (as cited in Greenberg, 2003) is well known for her concept of the five stages of grief. She claims that individuals must pass through the stages of denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance, before being able to move forward in their lives (Schwartz, 1999).

Other scholars, such as Parkes (as cited in Worden, 2002), have introduced the concept of phases of grief. In his model, Parkes identifies four phases of mourning. Phase I is a state of numbness that occurs directly following the loss. Phase II consists of a yearning for the loved one, and is often accompanied by anger. Phase III finds the individual in a state of disorganization and despair, having difficulty functioning. Finally, Stage IV involves a reorganization of one's behaviour and a reintegration into the world. Despite their limitations, these models of grief are helpful in assisting others to understand the grieving process.

Critics of these models, however, are numerous. Corr and Doka (as cited in Schwartz, 1999) claim that stage and phase models are not sufficient in accurately representing the unique grieving experiences of individuals. They argue that such models have a tendency to stereotype individual experiences by creating specific expectations of behaviour. Worden (2002) further critiques such models, arguing that they imply passivity on the part of the person in mourning, and promote a sense of powerlessness.

Worden (2002) proposes tasks of mourning, a framework that is more compatible with my personal understanding of grief and the needs of those dealing with loss. Approaching the grief process with a task approach empowers clients and offers hope that something can be done.

Worden's (2002) model consists of four tasks through which an individual passes when going through the grieving process. According to Worden, "it is essential that the grieving person accomplish these tasks before mourning can be completed" (p. 27). The underlying themes of the model involve confronting the loss and recreating one's life.

The first task is *to accept the reality of the loss*. According to Worden (2002), accepting the reality and finality of death is instrumental at the beginning of the healing process. Denial can interfere with the completion of this task. Denial is a normal reaction to death, but can be detrimental if it continues over the long-term. Denial may also include a minimization of the significance of the loss.

The second task is *to work through the pain and grief* (Worden, 2002). Regardless of individual differences, everyone experiences some level of pain in response to the loss of a loved one. It is essential to acknowledge the pain, and allow oneself to experience it. According to Parkes, (as cited in Worden, 2002) "anything that continually allows the person to avoid or suppress this pain can be expected to prolong the course of mourning" (p. 30). Individuals can avoid the second task by cutting off their feelings or avoiding painful thoughts. A common goal of counselling is to help individuals confront the pain and work through it.

Worden's (2002) third task is that of adjustment. He identifies three areas of adjustment: external, internal, and spiritual. External adjustment means adjusting to the outside world without the presence of the loved one. Internal adjustment refers to the

changes that need to take place in terms of readjusting one's definition of self. Finally, death can challenge one's fundamental understanding and basic beliefs about their world. Questioning one's belief system on a spiritual level is particularly common in the event of an unexpected death. Tackling this third task of adjustment involves redesigning an individual's sense of self and the world, and allowing him/herself to move forward in this new, and often frightening, world.

Finally, the fourth task is *to emotionally relocate the deceased and move on with life* (Worden, 2002). Simply put, the surviving individual must find a way to stay connected with the deceased, yet allow him/herself to continue living. For many people, this is the most difficult task. The challenge of counselling becomes helping the mourner find an appropriate place for the deceased in his/her life, without giving up the relationship.

Although Worden's (2002) tasks of mourning are very applicable to a group counselling intervention, it is important to understand that the completion of these tasks does not occur in a linear manner. Group members will revisit certain tasks, and various tasks can be worked on simultaneously.

The following proposal for a bereavement group is based upon these findings in the literature. A needs assessment identifying a need for bereavement counselling would precede the proposal and would provide further rationale for implementing this group within a particular school.

Proposal for a Group

Topic: Bereavement

I. Rationale

Although most adolescents possess the maturity to understand the finality and inevitable nature of death, unique developmental characteristics render the grief process particularly difficult (Hamilton & Masecar, 2003). Such characteristics include: an exaggerated focus on the present; lack of experience (and therefore coping strategies) in dealing with traumatic events (Kandt, 1994); preoccupation with what others think of them (Hamilton & Masecar, 2003); and, a desire to be independent, particularly from parents and other adult figures, which may cause them to turn away from much needed support (Bishop, as cited in Kandt, 1994). For these reasons, emotional support is essential in promoting a healthy grieving process. Peer support is particularly important for adolescents working through the grieving tasks (Vachon, Lyall, Rogers, Freedman-Letofsky, & Freeman, as cited in Kandt, 1994). Piaget (as cited in Schwartz, 1999) further confirms that adolescents feel more comfortable discussing the subject of death with their peers. These claims offer strong support for group counselling interventions with this population.

In terms of counselling topics, literature supports a focus on the following themes in working with bereaved adolescents in a group: the stages of grief; reforming relationships after death; coping with change; recounting the story of the loss; bringing the reality of the loss into present awareness; saying goodbye to the loss; and accepting and expressing feelings (Lamb, as cited in Toth, Stockton, & Browne, 2000; Schwartz, 1999; Worden, as cited in Toth et al., 2000). These themes, when worked through in the presence of ongoing support, can help adolescents through a healthy grieving process.

The themes identified in the literature will be applied to a counselling group for adolescents who have experienced a significant loss in their lives. The session activities include a lot of content material. Content is important to stimulate change among members, and is used as a catalyst to develop new insights and interpersonal growth (Smead, 1995). However, it is important to highlight the need to balance the content with the process. The leader needs to be willing to put aside content in order to deal with the process: what is happening in the here-and-now. "By focusing on process, group members learn to express and hear feelings, give and receive feedback, and support one another in the here and now" (Smead, 1995, p. 10).

II. Objectives/Goals:

The tasks of mourning outlined by Worden (2002) have guided the formation of goals for this grief group. The goals may differ in importance to individual members, depending on their stage of grief. For the proposed group, these will include:

- 1. To increase the reality of the loss for each member (Worden, 2002).*
- 2. To help each member identify and express his/her emotions, and resolve difficult feelings of guilt, depression, and anger (Jongsma, as cited in Worden, 2002).*
- 3. To help one another to overcome the challenges of adapting to the readjustment (Worden, 2002).*
- 4. To help one another to find ways to treasure the memory of the deceased while taking a risk to reinvest in life and relationships (Worden, 2002).*
- 5. To share one's needs and goals in dealing with the grief (Freeman, 1991)*
- 6. To offer support to others who have been affected by the death of a loved one, allowing them to grieve in an emotionally supportive environment (Freeman, 1999; Jongsma, as cited in Worden, 2002).*

Further to these group goals, members will be guided through a process of developing individual goals that are relevant to their developmental stage and personal need, and are objective, clear, and measurable. Such goals must be compatible with the purpose of the group outlined above. Members will be asked to record their goals in written format (see Appendix A).

III. Practical Considerations

I will be leading the bereavement group. I have a Graduate Degree in Counselling Psychology, and have completed a graduate level course in group counselling. I have done extensive research in the area of adolescent grief and group counselling interventions with this population. I also have several years of experience working with junior and senior high students in a school setting.

Through my experience working with adolescents, I have come to value the importance of structure and guidance, which are important leadership qualities when working with adolescent groups. At the same time, I strongly believe in providing a forum where adolescents take responsibility and test out their independence. I have learned to be flexible and allow myself to be in the moment, altering my agenda for the more immediate needs of the group. This is a reflection of my great faith in the powerful capacity for change inherent in the group process.

For this bereavement group, members will be recruited through announcements posted throughout the school (see Appendix B). Clarification of the group's purpose and process will be provided in these announcements. The initial needs assessment will also be utilized to identify possible candidates, and teachers may refer individual students.

Prior to this group, an individual assessment will take place during a screening interview with the purpose of assessing members' compatibility with the group (see

Appendix C). *In addition, the individual interview allows the leader to learn more about the student's experience and his/her readiness for the group, establishes rapport, initiates the sharing of information about the group, introduces ground rules, and includes an initial exploration of the process of grief (Moore & Herlihy, 1993). The individual will also be encouraged to ask questions.*

Group work may not always be the intervention of choice when working with a grieving adolescent. When screening grieving adolescents, Worden (2002) suggests that care be taken to rule out any emotional problems that may have been triggered by the loss, and that members wait at least six weeks after the loss to join a group. It is vital to carefully evaluate the inclusion of individuals who have suffered multiple losses or losses that may be very uncomfortable to talk about, such as suicide and AIDS. Survivors of these traumatic experiences may not only be enduring complicated grief, but these members may feel isolated in the group, and other members may feel uncomfortable hearing about their experiences. Finally, group counselling may not be an appropriate choice for an individual who is in a crisis, as may be the case in complicated grief (Freeman, 1991).

Although this grief group is developed with a built-in flexibility to serve adolescents from 13 to 17 years of age, it strongly recommends that student age and developmental stage be considered a priority in the selection process (no more than a two-year age difference is recommended). In regards to gender, my personal philosophy supports the benefits derived from a mixed gender group, particularly for a subject such as grief that is not gender-sensitive.

Furthermore, I strongly believe in the benefits of creating a heterogeneous mix. Diversity between members may include differences in social or cultural backgrounds,

differences in attitudes and coping skills towards grief, and different stages of grief (Smead, 1995). Other possibilities for heterogeneity include circumstances surrounding the loss, time since the loss, and relationship to loved one. Such group diversity “adds to the interchange of ideas” (Bergin, 1999, p. 307). Furthermore, individuals who are better adjusted to the loss can be a support for those who are just beginning the process. Corey and Corey (2002) support heterogeneity and maintain, “the ideal group should contain a variety of resources, worldviews, and behavioral skills” (p. 104).

Due to the emotionally laden topic of grief, the grief group will be kept relatively small, with no more than six members. Bergin (1999) cautions, however, that running a group with fewer than five members “runs the risk of limiting the opportunities for individuals to interact with a variety of peers and benefit from a broader range of suggestions and support” (p. 308). Group size will be influenced, however, by the needs within the school.

As far as the length of each session, the grief group will be organized to coincide with the 80-minute class periods, and will alternate periods in order to ensure that the students are not missing the same class every week. Eight group meetings will be arranged. Teachers will be notified in advance of students’ participation in this group and the effect it will have on their attendance (see Appendix D).

Due to the sensitive nature of a grief group, this group will also run in a closed format. Within closed groups, members have an opportunity to get to know one another more intimately, which is effective in creating an atmosphere of trust, an essential element when working with grief. Privacy will be a primary consideration due to the necessity of protecting confidentiality and promoting openness (Smead, 1995). For this reason, groups will convene in the counselling office.

IV. Procedures

The goal of the group, as well as any technique or activity, is to help the members explore their feelings, values, attitudes, and ideas in relationship to their grief and to incite positive change. Homework assignments and journal writing will also be important components of the group

In order to help members increase the reality of the loss, help readjust one's life, and learn to reinvest in life, it is critically important that members work at applying their learning to everyday situations. As Corey, Corey, Callanan, and Russell (2004) maintain, in order to make changes, members must be prepared to work outside of the group. In regards to the grief group, this may involve seeking out new relationships, visiting places that serve as reminders of the loved one, trying out new activities, writing a good-bye letter to the deceased, or opening up to family members and/or close friends.

Journal writing can serve multiple purposes. A journal is a place where grieving adolescents can write down and sort out their feelings. Journal writing can act as a vessel to stay connected with their loved one. It can also serve as a way of monitoring members' progress (Corey et al., 2004). Due to the cyclical nature of the grieving process, it may sometimes be difficult for grieving individuals to be aware of progress. This perception can lead to a sense of discouragement. The ability to reflect on journal entries can help highlight personal growth that has taken place.

This grief group attempts to provide a holistic approach to the grieving process by looking at the psychosocial, spiritual, and physical influences of grief (Hamilton & Masecar, 2003). The spiritual dimension includes religious and philosophical backgrounds, value systems, beliefs of afterlife, making sense of death, and questions regarding life/death. These issues are the premises of existential theory. However, the

spiritual dimension is not addressed explicitly in the grief group, but rather is integrated within the group sessions. Depending on the group context, spiritual and religious beliefs may need to be approached more explicitly, and could be the focus of an additional session.

Ethical issues will be of primary importance. A letter of informed consent will be explained to potential members, and members and their parents will be required to sign an informed consent form (see Appendices E & F). Confidentiality and the limits to confidentiality will be carefully explained to the members, and each participant will complete a confidentiality agreement (see Appendix G). Only techniques for which the counsellor is qualified will be utilized. Members will be prepared for the group through the initial selection interview as described above. The initial session will provide further orientation in regards to the guidelines, procedures, and expectations of the group.

V. Evaluation

Members of this grief group will be asked to complete a pre-post assessment using the Expanded Texas Inventory of Grief (Zisook, Devaul, & Click, 1982). This measurement is a reliable and valid instrument that measures “the frequency and time course of present grief-related behaviors and feelings” (p. 1590). The items reflect many of the group and session goals. It will be administered before the commencement of the group and following termination. Results will be shared with members individually at a one-on-one meeting with the counsellor.

The purpose of this assessment is twofold. First, it allows the leader to evaluate the effectiveness of the group and identify common areas of progress and/or difficulty among members. Second, it helps students become aware of their current thoughts and feelings, and identify progress in the grieving process.

The way in which members perceive the group and how connected they feel contribute to the perceived effectiveness of the group (DeLucia-Waack, 1997). In order to measure the effectiveness of the group process for this group, focus will be on the three important therapeutic factors: instillation of hope, universality, and group cohesiveness. A questionnaire has been developed to identify group members' thoughts in regards to these three therapeutic factors as they relate to the group (see Appendix H). The questionnaire will be administered following the third and sixth session. The results of the questionnaire can be utilized to identify areas for group growth. As members complete the questionnaire, it will also stimulate reflection into their own needs and contributions in regards to the group process.

Leadership will also be assessed formally, through a written questionnaire (see Appendix I), and informally, through verbal feedback, throughout the course of the group, as well as upon termination. The feedback will be used to improve the experience of the members.

Session Plan

Session plans for: Bereavement Group

Session Number/Title: Session 1: Sharing our stories.

Topic: Getting to know one another and sharing the death experience.

Group Goal(s) (numbers refer to group goals identified in the proposal):

1. To increase the reality of the loss for each member (Worden, 2002).
6. To offer support to others who have been affected by the death of a loved one, allowing them to grieve in an emotionally supportive environment (Freeman, 1991; Jongsma, as cited in Worden, 2002).

Session Objectives:

1. To establish the norms for the group in regards to confidentiality, attendance, rights, and guidelines.
2. To review the group purpose and goals.
3. To begin to build an atmosphere of trust by getting acquainted with one another.
4. To alleviate some of the initial anxiety by sharing the death experience (Kandt, 1994).

Structure:

Check-in (15 minutes)

The purpose of today's check-in is to establish norms and review the group's purpose with the members. Much of this work should be completed during the initial interview with the members; however, group guidelines and confidentiality may need to be reviewed initially with the group as a whole. The Golden Guidelines (see Appendix J) will be posted, and additions made as necessary. Issues of diversity will be brought into the open, and respect for one another will be emphasized. Confidentiality needs to be clearly defined by the group leader, limitations of confidentiality should be highlighted,

and consequences for breaches of confidentiality must be discussed. It is also necessary to make clear that confidentiality in a group setting cannot be guaranteed (Roback, Moore, Bloch, & Shelton, 1996). To clarify the parameters around confidentiality, the leader will explain that members can tell others what they learned in group and how they reacted, but must be careful in describing the details of how they learned something as this description would most likely involve problems and comments of other participants (Corey & Corey, 2002).

Rules will be established following a short discussion around topics such as attendance, eating during sessions, bringing non-members to sessions, and intimacy with other members (Corey & Corey, 2002). It is important to emphasize that not all group guidelines and rules will be clearly established at the onset of the group and are open to discussion as issues arise. The goals of the group will be shared, and any questions as to the purpose of the group and/or the expectations of the group members will be discussed.

Working Time:

1. *The Elephant in the Room* (15 minutes).

Introduce the poem, *The Elephant in the Room*, by Terry Kettering (as cited in Grollman, 1993). Process the poem by eliciting reactions of the group members. Possible processing questions include:

- What are some reactions to the poem?*
- What aspects of the poem could you relate to?*
- Are there times when you feel like there is an elephant in the room?*
- What do you do when you feel this way?*
- Who do you find it easiest to talk to? What is it about this person?*
- How do you feel after you have talked to someone?*

2. Introductions and sharing the death experience (30 minutes).

Initially, the leader will introduce him/herself to the group. In the introduction, the leader will share pertinent information as the leader of the group, such as qualifications, and also disclose some personal experiences with death and/or grief. This disclosure will act as a model for members as they share personal thoughts and feelings and get to know one another.

Sharing the death event in the first session is important as it alleviates some initial anxiety and brings the reality of the death to the forefront (Freeman, 1991; Kandt, 1994; Moore & Herlihy, 1993). How the members talk about the death, the details they give and those they leave out, and the way in which they respond to the disclosures of others is also very informative. The leader will initiate the introductions in a manner similar to the following:

We do not want to leave one another all alone in the room with the elephant! So, I would like to invite you to introduce yourself in a different manner today. Some of you already know one another, but it would be helpful to all of us if you could tell us your name, and a bit about what it is like for you to be here today. Then, share your story by telling the group who died, revealing some of the circumstances around the event, and providing a brief description about the person and what you appreciated about him/her. Feel free to share only what you feel comfortable sharing.

As the members tell their stories, the counsellor focuses on offering support and normalizing responses and feelings (Freeman, 1991). Use of the word death will help emphasize the reality of the loss. Leader feedback and support acts as a model for communication between members, and members are encouraged to provide feedback to one another. During the initial stage, members will be tentative to disclose, as they are

uncertain of the group structure and limits, and are preoccupied with being accepted (Corey, 2000). As the group progresses, members will begin to determine the group structure, get to know one another, and explore expectations.

3. Introducing journal writing (10 minutes).

Journal writing is an important aspect of this group. When working through grief, journal writing helps the bereaved identify, express, and organize their thoughts and feelings (Hamilton & Masecar, 2003; Kandt, 1994). It allows individuals to see and hear what they are thinking and feeling, initiates the re-authoring of their stories, and validates individual progress. Group members will be asked to write about their thoughts and feelings following each session, and may journal more frequently, if desired. Specific topics will be suggested for those who have difficulty getting started, but the journal can also be an open, personal experience. Journals could also include drawings, poems, or other forms of personal expression. Members may share parts of their journal entries during the check-in at each session in order to help stimulate discussions and personal sharing; however, it is made very clear that sharing journal entries is optional.

For those who wish to write on a specific topic, the following idea will be presented to them:

Today, you were invited to share your experience of loss with others who have also experienced the death of a loved one. What was that like for you? How did it feel to talk about your loved one's death? What did you find most difficult to talk about? What would you like to discuss further in this group?

Check-out (10 minutes)

Check-out with group members by asking them to respond to the following question:

What are a few things that you are taking away with you from this session

(Corey et al., 2004)?

Members will be reminded to write in their journals, and to begin thinking about a personal goal for the group. Goals need to be specific and meaningful to the member. Development of goals will be further discussed in sessions 2 and 3. It is also important to remind members that they may feel an increase in sadness following the first session (Freeman, 1991). This is to be expected following an emotionally draining group session where the story of the death is shared and relived. The importance of confidentiality will be emphasized at the end of this, and each of the subsequent sessions (Gladding, 1999).

Session Plan

Session plans for: Bereavement Group

Session Number/Title: Session 2: The tasks of grief.

Topic: Identifying the tasks of grief and normalizing the grieving process.

Group Goal(s):

3. To help one another to overcome the challenges of adapting to the readjustment (Worden, 2002).
5. To share one's needs and goals in dealing with the grief (Freeman, 1991)

Session Objectives:

1. To learn about the tasks of grief and possible effects.
2. To better understand the unique progression of each individual through the stages.
3. To normalize the grieving process.
4. To assess where one is in the process.
5. To strengthen universality of the death experience.

Structure:

Check-in (10 minutes)

Members are encouraged during the check-in to share any thoughts or feelings left over from last week's session. They will be asked to share how they are feeling today. They may read excerpts from their journal, if desired.

Working Time

1. Presentation of the tasks of grief (20 minutes).

There are a number of different models of the stages, phases, and tasks of grief. Worden's (2002) *Tasks of Mourning* will be presented to this group as I feel that approaching the grief process with a task approach empowers clients and instills hope for

change. It is also a great introduction to the establishment of individual goals, as the tasks are action-oriented.

Worden's (2002) model consists of four tasks through which an individual passes when going through the grieving process. Individuals do not necessarily go through the tasks in any particular order, and may recycle through the different tasks. The underlying themes of the model involve confronting the loss and recreating one's life. The tasks of mourning and the different effects of grief will be presented in a PowerPoint presentation (see Appendix K).

2. Processing the information (30 minutes).

Following the presentation, the information will be processed as a group. It is important to highlight individual progression through the stages, discuss how the tasks fit for the members, and reflect on where the individual identifies him/herself in the stages at this time (Moore & Herlihy, 1993). During the processing time, the leader will encourage questions, relate personal experiences, promote an understanding of grief as a process, normalize the grieving process, and empower individual members to work through their grief (Freeman, 1991).

3. Developing goals (10 minutes).

In connecting the tasks of grieving with possible personal goals, the leader will open discussion on where the members feel they are in the tasks of grief, where they would like to be at the end of this group, and how they are going to get there. This is the first step in establishing goals. As members begin to formulate goals, it is common that their goals will be vague and thus difficult to work with in the group (Corey et al., 2004). Through this initial discussion of goals, the leader will ask questions to help members clarify and specify their goals. It is important to communicate that goal definition is an

ongoing process, and goals can be revised throughout the life of the group (Corey & Corey, 2002). The leader will ask members to reflect on possible goals and write them down. They will be further formulated in the next session.

Check-out (10 minutes)

As a check-out, members will be asked to comment on how they were impacted by today's presentation of the grieving process. The excerpt *Passing Gently Through Grief* (as cited in Grollman, 1993) will be handed out to members to further normalize the process and bring deeper understanding. Reactions and reflections from the excerpt can be the focus of the journal for this week for those who want to structure their entries.

Session Plan

Session plans for: Bereavement Group

Session Number/Title: Session 3: Building on the reality of the loss.

Topic: Retelling stories in more detail.

Group Goal(s):

1. To increase the reality of the loss for each member (Worden, 2002).
5. To share one's needs and goals in dealing with the grief (Freeman, 1991)
6. To offer support to others who have been affected by the death of a loved one, allowing them to grieve in an emotionally supportive environment (Freeman, 1991; Jongsma, as cited in Worden, 2002).

Session Objectives:

1. To share one's fears and anxieties in opening up to the group.
2. To clarify and establish personal goals.
3. To share personal beliefs and values as they relate to death and grieving.
4. To provide emotional relief and promote further self-exploration through the retelling of the event.

Structure:

Check-in (20 minutes)

As a check-in for today's session, members will be asked to share their ideas for goals. Discussion could be initiated as follows. The questions are listed as possible ways of exploring personal goals.

Last week, we talked about what you might want to gain from being a part of this group. We looked at the tasks of mourning, and discussed which of the tasks you feel you may still need to work on. How are you feeling this week? Do you feel you have made

some progress? What have you done to make that progress? Where would you like to be at the termination of this group? Where are you at now? What, specifically, would you like to see yourself doing? Feeling? Thinking? Have you thought of how you might get there? How could you use the time in the group to help you move towards your goals? What could you do between sessions to support your progress?

Goal-setting is an important part of any counselling relationship. The Association for Specialists in Group Work (ASGW, 1998) guidelines state that it is the leader's responsibility to collaboratively work with members to identify and define personal goals. Walter and Peller (1992) offer a solution-focused approach to achieving well-defined goals that reflect the desires of the client. According to this approach, well-defined goals are: in a positive statement; in process form; in the here-and-now; as specific as possible; within the client's control; and in the client's language. Furthermore, they reflect an area of concern that needs the most immediate attention (Cormier & Nurius, 2003).

Keeping these qualities in mind, the leader will work with clients to establish goals. Not all members may be able to clarify their goals in this session. It is an ongoing process. However, goals will need to be clarified in order to provide direction, to elucidate client expectations, and to ensure client commitment (Cormier & Nurius, 2003).

Working time:

1. Addressing fears (20 minutes).

This first activity today will focus on acknowledging members' fears in being a part of this grief group. During the initial stages of the group, it is a good idea to bring these fears out into the open so that resistance can be challenged and the group can evolve and build deeper levels of trust (Corey & Corey, 2002). As the group consists of only eight sessions, it is important to identify and explore such fears early in the process. The

initial sharing will take place in dyads so that members feel more comfortable expressing some of their expectations and fears. This activity will be introduced as follows:

As a group leader, it is important to me that each member of this group will get the most from the group experience. We have already talked about some of the “Golden Guidelines” (review poster). In order to get the most from the group, it is important that you feel comfortable participating in the group. Now that you have an idea of how the group will work, let’s take a few minutes today to explore what your fears may be in sharing with this group. You will do this with a partner. Take a moment to reflect on some of the common fears experienced by group members (see Appendix L). With your partner, talk about some of your own fears. In about 10 minutes, we will return to the larger group and you can share some of your concerns.

Following this initial exploration, the dyads will join the larger group, and each member will share with the group one of his/her fears. The leader will promote further exploration of identified fears.

2. Retelling stories and details of the death experience (30 minutes)

Telling the story of the loss is an important task of grieving (Sedney, Baker, & Gross, as cited in Toth et al., 2000). It reaffirms the reality of the loss, brings emotional relief, and builds on group cohesiveness as members listen to one another’s stories and offer support. Although discussion may be open-ended, two themes will be used as a catalyst for exploration: the funeral and the return to school and reaction from peers (Freeman, 1991; Kandt, 1994; Moore & Herlihy, 1993; Schwartz, 1999).

In discussing the funeral, focus is on how the individuals experienced it, including both positive and negative reactions, and what they wished would have happened.

Personal beliefs and values that are influenced by social, ethnic, and religious backgrounds will be introduced through this discussion.

In reference to the return to school and reactions from peers, discussion will center on what was helpful and what brought more hurt and anger. Possible questions include:

-How did others react?

-How did you react to comments and remarks that you found hurtful?

-What was it like to return to “normal life” as if nothing had happened?

-How did you express your emotions while at school? (Grollman, 1993)

Members will be invited to bring up other themes as they relate to the death experience, and the leader will facilitate interaction between members.

Check-out (10 minutes)

For today’s checkout, members will be asked to identify any similar concerns reflected in what others said (Corey et al., 2004). The purpose of this check out is to further promote universality and normalize the individual’s thoughts and feelings surrounding the death. Members will also be asked to bring a memory object to the next session. This could be a photo, a piece of clothing, a gift from the deceased, or any object that the member holds dearly as a reminder of the deceased. As a topic for this week’s journal entry, members could read and reflect on the poem *The After Loss Credo* (LesStrang, 1992), which emphasizes the importance of talking to others about the loss. The leader will suggest that members share the poem with someone close to them, and share with that person what parts of the poem they related to the most.

Session Plan

Session plans for: Bereavement Group

Session Number/Title: Session 4: Experiencing our feelings.

Topic: Identifying and experiencing feelings related to the loss.

Group Goal(s):

2. To help each member identify and express his/her emotions, and resolve difficult feelings of guilt, depression, and anger (Jongsma, as cited in Worden, 2002).
6. To offer support to others who have been affected by the death of a loved one, allowing them to grieve in an emotionally supportive environment (Freeman, 1991; Jongsma, as cited in Worden, 2002).

Session Objectives:

1. To share a keepsake of the loved one.
2. To explore problematic feelings related to the loss.
3. To accept and work through the pain.
4. To build group cohesiveness through open and honest sharing.

Structure:

Check-in (10 minutes).

For this week's check-in, members will be first asked to share how they feel they are progressing towards their goals, and if there is anything they would like to ask the group in order to help them continue to strive towards goals. Reactions from last week's journal writing will also be shared.

Working Time

1. Song (10 minutes).

Today's activities have the potential to be very powerful. At the beginning of the session, the leader must prepare the members for the intense feelings they may experience. As a precaution, it may be necessary to ask members how comfortable they feel sharing very personal feelings, and incorporate special guidelines for sharing. It may also be helpful to discuss possible reactions, and ask members how they would like those reactions dealt with by the leader and the group.

As today's topic is identifying feelings, the first activity will be used to set the tone for the session. The group will listen to a song, *If I Had Only Known* (Morris & Stanfield, as cited in Canfield & Hansen, 1996), which was recorded by Reba McEntire following the death of her band members who were killed in a plane crash. The song touches upon many emotions often experienced by individuals following the death of a loved one. After listening to the song, group members will be invited to share their feelings and reactions to the song. Possible questions for initiating discussion include: *Have you had similar feelings of regret? How do you feel about those regrets now? As you listen to other group members, with whose experiences do you connect the most with? What would you like to say to him/her?*

2. Share a keepsake (20 minutes).

Bringing an object that reminds the member of the loss helps to bring the emotional experience into the present, reminds them of the person they are grieving, and encourages the expression of feelings (Toth et al., 1996), which is fundamental to working through grief (Worden, 2002). A trusting bond between members can be built on empathy and concern expressed during sharing (Furman & Pratt, as cited in Kandt, 1994). The sharing will serve as a stepping-stone to the group's focus this week: expressing and experiencing feelings.

Processing is an important part of the activity. Possible questions for processing this activity, taken from Smead (1995), include:

- What was it like for you to share your special keepsake with the group?*
- What were you thinking or feeling while waiting to share?*
- What did you notice other group members doing?*
- What feelings or behaviours did you notice going on?*
- What was it like for you to be a group member?*

3. Expression of feelings (30 minutes).

The leader will encourage members to identify, express, and experience their feelings. Many feelings are not recognized or fully experienced by the bereaved due to the high level of pain that accompanies them (Worden, 2002). Most problematic feelings include anger, guilt, anxiety, helplessness, and loneliness. The goal is not to simply express the feelings, but to experience them. "Sadness must be accompanied by an awareness of what one has lost; anger needs to be properly and effectively targeted; guilt needs to be evaluated and resolved; and anxiety needs to be identified and managed" (Worden, 2002, p. 61-62).

First, the leader will validate how difficult it may be to express feelings. As members share their feelings, the leader will highlight common feelings, struggles, and accomplishments as they relate to the tasks of grief. Members will be encouraged to share what they miss most about their loved one, as well as what they don't miss. Balancing the discussion in this way may lead to identification of difficult emotions that have not yet been acknowledged or explored (Freeman, 1991). Members will also be asked to share what they would like to say to the deceased and what they regretted not saying before his/her death. This will help adolescents work towards acceptance (Kandt, 1994).

Throughout the discussion, recurring feelings such as sadness and depression can be normalized, and support and feedback from other members is encouraged.

There may be members who find it difficult to talk about feelings and are reluctant to share. They may protect themselves by questioning the rationale behind openly expressing emotions. If this occurs, there are a few techniques the leader can use to explore their difficulty in expressing emotions. The following techniques from Corey et al. (2004) may be useful:

-When in your life might you have learned that it is better to keep feelings to yourself?

-What feelings do you find to be particularly troublesome?

-You have seen several members here be fairly emotional. Would you be willing to tell each of them why you are hesitant to do so?

-Go to each person and speculate on what he or she would think of you if you expressed more emotion.

-Suppose you decided today to keep your feelings very much to yourself. How do you picture your life 10 years from now if you stick to this decision?

A member's reluctance to openly discuss feelings may also be a sign that they are not ready to express those feelings. The leader must be sensitive to each individual member's needs, and respect them.

It is likely that the group is well into the transition stage in this session. Members are dealing with their anxiety, resistance, and conflict, and leaders will need to be prepared to help members recognize, express, and deal with these uncomfortable feelings in order for the group to evolve to a working stage (Corey, 2000). Children, however, tend to move to the working stage more quickly than adults (Smead, 1995).

Check-out (10 minutes)

Today's session will most likely be a very emotional and draining experience for the members. For this reason, it is important that the leader checks how each member is doing following the session, and ensures that they are not carrying with them any unexpressed emotions that are just below the surface. The leader can help members brainstorm ways in which they can take care of themselves in light of new feelings that may have emerged. The journal for this week can focus on exploration of feelings: *What feelings was I aware of before this group session? What new feelings am I aware of? Are there any feelings that I am ignoring? What is it about these feelings that cause me to push them into the background? How could I best express these feelings? Am I disguising some feelings with other feelings?*

Session Plan

Session plans for: Bereavement Group

Session Number/Title: Session 5: Surviving special days.

Topic: Facing special occasions and family rituals.

Group Goal(s):

3. To help one another to overcome the challenges of adapting to the readjustment (Worden, 2002).

Session Objectives:

1. To psychologically prepare for special occasions and family rituals in the absence of the loved one.
2. To share with others who may have faced similar challenges.
3. To begin to think about experiencing joy, even while missing the deceased (Moore & Herlihy, 1993).
4. To begin to prepare for the termination of the group.

Structure:

Check-in (20 minutes)

The last session required a lot of sharing and self-disclosure on sensitive issues. Some members may feel uncomfortable returning to the group this week, particularly if they were quite emotional and disclosed very sensitive and personal thoughts and feelings. This is a common occurrence following a particularly intense and productive session (Corey & Corey, 2002). Extra time will be spent this week at check-in to ensure that members express what they are thinking and feeling and to process any left over feelings from last session. To begin discussion, the leader will proceed as follows:

Last week was a pretty intense session. It was evident that members felt trust in this room, and were able to share a lot of deep emotions. I would like to start today's session by hearing how each of you feel being here today. You could begin by sharing with us what you were most aware of as you were getting ready to come to today's group.

Following individual responses, the leader will ask if anyone wants to share an excerpt from their journal.

Working Time:

1. Surviving Special Days (10 minutes).

To introduce this session's topic, an excerpt from *Straight Talk About Death for Teenagers* (Grollman, 1993), *Surviving Special Days*, will be handed out and read together. The excerpt focuses on the difficulty of facing celebrations and holidays following a loss, and the importance of planning for the pain that may accompany such holidays. The purpose for providing a reading is to normalize the anxiety and fears, and promote further discussion on the subject.

2. Discussion of concerns related to holidays and family rituals (30 minutes).

Special occasions are often difficult for adolescents, particularly during the first year following the death (Kandt, 1994). Realizing that holidays will continue to occur, even without the loved one, promotes an awareness that life must go on (Freeman, 1991) and touches upon Worden's (2002) final task.

For example, Christmas has so many cultural expectations associated with it: joy, generosity, giving/receiving gifts, and family get-togethers. There are also many family rituals that cause strong emotional reactions, such as visiting the cemetery, celebrating family birthdays, recognizing the anniversary of the death, and family gatherings. The bereaved may experience ambiguous feelings during these times. Anxiety, fear, guilt,

loneliness, and sadness are common feelings that conflict with the happiness, joy, and togetherness of these holidays.

As the group has been working together for four sessions, less structure will be provided for this discussion. The main goal of the session is to bring concerns out into the open, and share experiences between those who are anxious of upcoming holidays and family rituals, and those who have already been through such experiences. From this sharing, members will feel better prepared to face these events, and have a new awareness of how they can experience joy of the holiday, and at the same time, miss the deceased.

As the group moves into the working stage, members begin to realize that they are responsible for their lives (Corey, 2000). The group will become more cohesive, and with increased trust and acceptance, members will be more willing to take risks.

3. Termination preparation (10 minutes).

Preparing the group for termination is extremely important when working with a bereavement group, as the theme of loss is already so prominent in their lives. For this reason, it is important to broach the topic of termination early in the group. The leader will promote an open discussion on feelings that accompany the eventual termination of the group, such as members' fears, concerns, and anxieties. The topic of termination will be introduced as follows.

As we are learning, we all differ in the way we cope with the loss of our loved one. We will also cope with the ending of the group differently. Some of us may feel some of the same feelings of loss. Like grief, however, we can't avoid the feelings that may accompany leaving the group; however, we can think of ways to manage them. What feelings do you anticipate in leaving the group? How might you react? How might the loss in your personal life affect your reactions to the ending of the group?

4. Check-out (10 minutes)

Members will be asked today to share one strategy or step in a plan that will enable them to be better prepared for an upcoming holiday or special occasion. The leader will suggest that members reflect on a plan in their journal entry for this week.

Session Plan

Session plans for: Bereavement Group

Session Number/Title: Session 6: Changes.

Topic: Facing change and adopting healthy coping skills.

Group Goal(s):

3. To help one another to overcome the challenges of adapting to the readjustment

(Worden, 2002).

5. To share one's needs and goals in dealing with the grief (Freeman, 1991).

Session Objectives:

1. To explore changes that have taken place since the death.

2. To examine defenses and coping styles.

3. To evaluate the effectiveness of current coping skills.

Structure:

Check-in (20 minutes)

For today's check-in, members will be given a list of sentence starters that focus on changes and coping strategies (see Appendix M). After a few moments of reflection, they will be asked to complete one of the sentences. Once all members have shared, the leader will initiate linking some of the adolescent's experiences by asking the members to share how they connected with the statements of another member in the group. The leader could simply ask members to share any connections they felt while listening to other members share. If the group seems to have had difficulty expressing such statements in past sessions, the leader could suggest that they use the following formula:

I connected with you, _____, when you said _____, and I felt or thought _____ (Smead, 1995).

Linking is a way to teach members to empathize with one another, and it causes members to feel emotionally connected and fosters a sense of universality. In this session, it is also an effective introduction to the remainder of the time, which will be spent on sharing and assessing individual coping strategies.

Working Time:

1. Changes and coping strategies (40 minutes).

The leader will focus discussion on changes resulting from the death and how members are coping with the changes. Changes will be different for each member, depending on the relationship with the one who died. For those who have lost a parent, changes may involve financial difficulties, adapting to new roles within the family, increased responsibility, and dealing with parental dating. For an adolescent who has lost a friend, changes may center on building new relationships or finding new leisure activities. Expressing and grieving losses involved in the changes can help adolescents to cope (Kandt, 1994). Verbalizing feelings and focusing on both negative and positive aspects of change is important in promoting acceptance and understanding (Schwartz, 1999).

Through an examination of the changes that members have gone through or are going through, coping strategies in dealing with those changes are brought to the forefront. Some coping styles may indicate effective behaviour and others may not. A common negative coping strategy among the bereaved is increased use of drugs and alcohol (Worden, 2002). It is important for the leader to follow up on any suspected drug or alcohol related coping strategies. Referral to resources that deal with drug and alcohol abuse may be necessary. If coping through alcohol and drugs comes up as an issue within the group, the leader will share an excerpt from *Straight Talk About Death for Teenagers*

(Grollman, 1993), *Lengthening Grief through Harmful Shortcuts: Drugs and Drinking*.

Other coping strategies that are prolonging the grieving and standing in the way of the natural process will be confronted. Members will also share coping strategies that have worked for them. It is also important for the leader to ensure that members consider ideas for self-care.

The linking intervention at the beginning of the session will serve as a catalyst for further discussion. As the group continues to move towards a working stage, the leader will take a step back and allow for more interaction between members, gently guiding empathic reactions and feedback concerning the effectiveness of particular coping strategies.

Check-out (10 minutes)

At this stage of the group, members should be making progress towards their goals. At today's check-out, members will be asked to share their progress with the group. If any members feel that they are not making progress, or have difficulty identifying it, the leader will ask members to think about what they can do within the group that will help them achieve their goals, and what the group could do for them. This may be the topic of reflection in the journal for certain members. Self-care is another important issue, and members could make up a plan for self-care in this week's journal reflection.

The leader will also acknowledge that this is the sixth session, and challenge members to prepare to bring forward any unexpressed thoughts and feelings, and any unfinished business, to the next session. To challenge members to think about their contributions to the group, the leader will pose the following question:

If the group were to end today, how would you feel about what you have done, and what would you wish you had done differently (Corey & Corey, 2002)?

Session Plan

Session plans for: Bereavement Group

Session Number/Title: Session 7: Saying good-bye and moving forward.

Topic: Finding a new relationship with the loved one that allows the bereaved to reinvest in life.

Group Goal(s):

3. To help one another to overcome the challenges of adapting to the readjustment (Worden, 2002).
4. To help one another to find ways to treasure the memory of the deceased while taking a risk to reinvest in life and relationships (Worden, 2002).

Session Objectives:

1. To begin to think about future growth and grief management (Furman & Pratt, as cited in Kandt, 1994).
2. To face the finality of the loss and the continuance of life.
3. To emotionally relocate the deceased (Worden, 2002).
4. To bring up any unfinished business within the group.

Structure:

Check-in (10 minutes)

Today's check-in will consist of bringing forward any unresolved thoughts or feelings from the past sessions. Members will be reminded that the group is coming to a close, and next session will not be a good time to bring up unfinished business as the group will not have the time to effectively process new material.

Working Time

1. Letting go and saying good-bye (15 minutes).

The focus of this week's session is finding ways to rechannel one's energy (Furman & Pratt, as cited in Kandt, 1996). Moving on with life is, for many people, the most difficult task to accomplish (Worden, 2002). To make the task easier, the bereaved must come to an understanding that the grief process and the love for the deceased never ends, but "one must eventually leave the heart of grief behind" (Toth et al., 2000 p. 246). To initiate this week's topic of reinvesting in life, members will be asked:

What does letting go and saying good-bye mean to you?

Through this discussion, the fear, guilt, anxiety and sadness of leaving the loved one can be normalized. New insights as to how to continue a relationship, yet allow one to reinvest in life, can be discovered. Not all members may be ready to take this step; however, observing others go through this process instills hope and incites action to change.

2. Role-play as a symbolic parting (30 minutes).

Role-playing a symbolic parting can be a liberating and healing experience, not only for the individual saying good-bye, but also for the other member involved in the role-play and for the group members observing. It is most likely not possible that all members will be ready to role-play, or that all members will have the time to take part in a role-play in this session. What is important is to involve all members in the intervention by processing the thoughts, feelings, and reactions of all members.

Role-playing allows the members to experience new thoughts, feelings, and ideas in a safe environment and aids in the development of new insights and perspectives (Smead, 1995). To initiate a role-play, the leader can proceed as follows:

You have all shared your understandings of letting go and saying good-bye to your loved one. This is a very difficult task to do, and it will most likely take time and

effort on your part, but it is a very important step in the healing process (refer to the hindrances of Task IV from PowerPoint presentation). Today, I would like one or two of you to role-play saying good-bye to your loved one. You may not be ready to do that yet, so take a moment, and think about what you would like to say to him/her (pause).

_____ (a member who the leader senses is ready to tackle this task), would you like to role-play a symbolic good-bye to _____ (deceased) with someone in the group? Who would you feel comfortable doing that with? _____, would you be willing to help him/her with the role-play?

Upon initiating the role-play, the leader will ask the member to say what he/she would like to say to his/her loved one in preparation for moving on with life. The other member may or may not respond.

Following the role-play, it is important to check in with both members about how they are currently feeling. Once the leader has checked in with the two members, the leader processes the role-play with the other members. Possible questions include:

-How did the role-play affect you?

-What feelings did it bring up for you?

-What would you like to share with _____ in regards to your current thoughts and feelings?

-In what ways could you relate to the role-play?

Depending on the group, other members could role-play a good-bye with their loved one.

3. Writing a good-bye letter (15 minutes).

The role-play activity will be built upon by encouraging members to write a good-bye letter to the deceased. This could take place of the journal entry for the week. Some members may already have many ideas of what they would like to say in their letter.

Others may find this task difficult. To aid members in this task, an outline with ideas for the letter will be provided (see Appendix N). The intent of this activity is not to rush the grieving process, but to allow the bereaved adolescent to take a step towards saying goodbye and moving forward in life. As with other tasks, the individual may need to revisit this task several times. The letter provides the adolescent with the opportunity to express things that they want to say to the person. The next session, the group's final session, will include a balloon lift where members will attach their letter, or a symbolic representation of their letter, to helium balloons and let them go into the air (Kandt, 1994).

Check-out (10 minutes)

Today's check-out will consist of sharing members' thoughts and feelings about the group ending, and how they may deal with the sense of loss they may feel upon termination of the group. The sense of loss may be multiplied for members of this group due to the topic of grief. Although the topic of termination has been covered in other sessions, the leader will further explore feelings of loss and how they parallel with losses in their lives (Corey et al., 2004).

Session Plan

Session plans for: Bereavement Group

Session Number/Title: Session 8: Celebrating life.

Topic: Termination of the group and future support.

Group Goal(s):

4. To help one another to find ways to treasure the memory of the deceased while taking a risk to reinvest in life and relationships (Worden, 2002).

Session Objectives:

1. To evaluate the group process and personal growth and accomplishments.
2. To celebrate the completion of the group and taking another step in the direction of healing.
3. To identify and increase current support system.
4. To say good-bye to the deceased and to the group.

Structure:

Check-in: Balloon Lift (20 minutes)

Today's check-in will focus on members' feelings of the good-bye letter writing activity. Immediately following check-in, the group will attach their letters or representation of their letters to a helium balloon. When outside, members will be asked to find their own space, take their time, and say good-bye in their own way. Members will be at different stages of the grieving process, and it should be emphasized that some may not be ready to say a final good-bye, but can say good-bye to an aspect of the loss (for example, an activity that they used to do together).

Once members have completed the balloon lift, the group will reconvene in the counselling room. As this may be a very emotional activity for the members to complete,

it is important that it be processed within the group. Questions from the leader could include:

-How was that experience for you?

-What feelings or thoughts did you have as you let go of the balloon?

-Did you feel ready to say good-bye?

-What made it easier/more difficult than you had imagined?

Working Time

1. Reviewing the group experience (15 minutes).

As a termination activity, members will review what they learned from the group experience. During this discussion, the leader will facilitate concrete, descriptive accounts of their experiences as this helps members apply what they learned to their daily life (Corey & Corey, 2002). To begin the discussion, the leader will ask members to respond to three questions:

-What was the most valuable thing that you learned from this group?

-How did you learn this?

-How do you plan to put your learning into practice in your life?

2. Giving and receiving feedback (20 minutes).

Following group interaction on the learning experiences, members will be asked to provide specific feedback to one another. Suggestions of ideas for constructive feedback will be provided (see Appendix O). To personalize this intervention, members will separate into dyads and change partners until they have had the opportunity to share feedback with each individual member. The leader could also be involved in this activity. The process will be introduced as follows:

It sounds like we have all learned a lot from one another over the past 8 weeks. Before we leave this group, I think it is important that we give each other some meaningful feedback, something that we would like the member to leave the group with. It's not the time to unload negative reactions on one another, but rather a gift that we would like to give. Following any feedback given to you, I would ask that you comment on the feedback to the individual giving it to you.

Take a moment to look over the list of suggestions. You may decide to choose your own, but these suggestions help focus meaningful feedback. Feel free to finish more than one of the sentences. Once you have shared and received feedback in your dyads, change partners. When you have had the opportunity to share with each group member, return to the group and we will talk about how it was for you.

Once members have provided feedback to one another, the group will reconvene and process the giving and receiving of feedback.

3. Ongoing support (15 minutes).

The leader will highlight that the group is a means to an end, and not an end in itself (Corey & Corey, 2002). The process of grief will be briefly reviewed, emphasizing that there is no time line or set progression of grief. Members will continue to experience good days and bad days, and this is not to be considered as a setback, but rather as a natural process. To emphasize that the students do not need to be alone in their grief, possible resources will be discussed.

Before terminating the group, the members will brainstorm naturally occurring supportive resources (Schwartz, 1999). These resources could include one another, friends, family members, school counsellors, or teachers. Members will be invited to make individual appointments with the leader for further support. The leader will increase

the member's current support system by providing a list of possible community resources that members could access if they are feeling stuck (see Appendix P). The leader may feel that specific referrals would be helpful for certain members, and these could be discussed following the termination session.

Check-out (10 minutes)

1. Continued Progress (10 minutes)

The goal of this session's checkout is to increase the likelihood of continuing progress through the stages of grief following the termination of the group. Members are asked what they would like to accomplish before meeting again at the follow up session, which will take place four weeks following termination. They will write these goals in their journal. This question can help members to focus on specific changes they would like to see take place over a specific period of time. There is also an element of accountability, as members will be sharing their progress with others at the follow-up session.

It is important to reiterate the importance of confidentiality, even after the group is over (Smead, 1995). The confidentiality agreement does not end with the termination of the group.

2. Celebration.

This final session is scheduled at the end of the day in order to provide some time for celebration. Food and fun time highlight the accomplishment of another step in the process of grief (Kandt, 1994). It is a healthy step for the group to end, and for individuals to get on with their lives (Moore & Herlihy, 1993).

Follow-up session. To continue to meet the needs of members of this grief group, a follow-up session will take place four weeks following the termination of the group.

According to the ASGW (1998), some form of follow-up is recommended to further process the outcomes of the group. The purpose of the follow-up session is to check in on members' progress and offer further support as necessary (Smead, 1995). When members are aware that they will be meeting again in the future, they are more motivated to continue taking steps towards their goals (Corey & Corey, 2002).

The follow up meeting offers an opportunity for members to discuss and reflect on the group experience, and put its influence into perspective (Corey, 2000). Possible topics of the follow-up session include: assessing efforts in implementing learning; sharing successes and difficulties encountered; working through any after-thoughts of the group; reminding members of their personal responsibility to themselves; and discussing other avenues to achieve goals.

Conclusion

Developing and implementing a bereavement group for adolescents requires an understanding of the grief process and how it applies to the unique developmental stage of adolescents. The framework outlined in this paper provides the theoretical foundation for a group manual for bereavement. From this foundation will emerge an effective group intervention intended to help the many young people who are currently coping with grief. Bereavement groups for this population have the potential to free individuals from the grips of grief, and help them heal.

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Appendix A: Individual Goal Contract

Group Title: Bereavement Group

Goals must be:

- In *my own* words
- In a *positive* statement (“I will . . .” not “I won’t . . .”)
- As *specific* as possible
- Within *my control* (realistic!)
- Expressed as *actions* (what will I be *doing* differently)

What specific behaviours/attitudes do I want to change?

- *I will talk openly about my experience with the death of my sister in this group, contributing to a minimum of one discussion per session.*
- *Each time that I feel like going to my room to cry alone, I will tell my mom how I am feeling.*
- *I will help my mom sort out my sister’s room when we both feel ready.*
- *When I feel overwhelmed in the class, I will tell the teacher I need a time-out and go to the library.*

What is my timeline for making these changes? (short-term/long-term)
I will begin the changes for goals 1, 2, and 4 immediately. I will work towards completing goal 3 by March.

What will I do in and outside the group to work towards these changes?

- *I will ask members to monitor my contributions, and let me know when I am not contributing.*
- *I will tell my mom of my second goal, and set up a system with her.*
- *I will first begin talking with my mom about my sister’s room.*
- *I will arrange with my teachers and the librarian to carry out the 4th goal.*

What setbacks might I encounter?

There may be difficult days when I fail at these goals.

How can I prepare myself to deal with these setbacks?

If I am unable to attain my goal, I will forgive myself, and talk about it in the group at the next session.

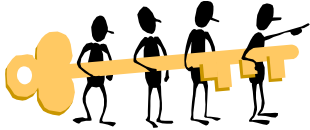
Signed _____ Date _____

*Goals may be revised as I learn more about myself and what I want.

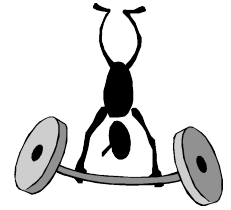
Bereavement Group



For Teens



Confidentiality is key to building trust.



Be prepared to work hard! Sharing your emotions can bring relief, but requires perseverance!

If you have lost someone you love, and are interested in sharing with others who are coping with a loss, this group may be just the thing for you. You are not alone!
Others can help you on the road to healing!

Our purpose: *"To support one another through the process of grieving by exploring, learning, journal writing, listening, and sharing in an honest, open, and safe environment"*.

- ♥ Topics to be covered in the group include: the tasks of grief; reforming relationships; coping with change; sharing the loss; facing its reality; saying good-bye; and accepting and expressing feelings.
- ♥ 8 - 80 minute sessions over an 8-week period, alternating periods and days, beginning March 1st.
- ♥ If you agree to participate, you are expected to attend *every* session.
- ♥ Permission to participate *must* be granted by a parent or guardian - NO exceptions.
- ♥ Remember - groups are not for everyone. I will be meeting with those interested to see if the group is right for you.
- ♥ I will be facilitating the group. I have a Master Degree in Counselling and am qualified to conduct groups.
- ♥ If you are interested in joining, or would like more information, please drop by the counselling department office.

Mme Primeau

Appendix C: Screening Interview

Screening interview questions for a grief group

1. Tell me about your loss.
2. How long ago did it take place?
3. Whose decision was it for you to come here today to talk about the group?
4. How do you feel about talking about your grief with your peers?
5. What are some of your fears in joining the group?
6. In what ways do you think the group could be helpful in helping you work through your grief?
7. What changes would you like to see for yourself?
8. What would you most like to learn in this grief group?
9. If you become a part of the group, how willing would you be to attend every session?
10. Are you going to any other counselling at this time?

Appendix D: Teacher Notification

Date: September 21, 2004

To: Mr. Jones; Mrs. Brown; Ms. Smith

From: Ms. Primeau, Counsellor

Re: Group counselling for Bereavement Group

Jason Miller has been selected and has parental permission to participate in a group entitled Bereavement. The rotating schedule, including dates of group sessions, is attached.

This student is responsible for completing any missed assignments during absences due to the group sessions, and has signed a contract addressing this issue. If assignments are not completed within a reasonable time, please let me know and I will help you deal with the problem.

Members will be excused from the group the day of any scheduled exams, but will be required to attend all other sessions, as regular attendance by all group members is essential to the success of the group. If there are any reasons that you feel this student should not take part in this group, please discuss them with me. I appreciate your cooperation.

Thank you for allowing Jason to be excused from class. If you have any questions or concerns, please see me.

Rotating Schedule

Session 1	Monday, October 4 th	Periods 1/2
Session 2	Tuesday, October 12 th	Periods 3/4
Session 3	Monday, October 18 th	Periods 5/6
Session 4	Monday, October 25 th	Periods 7/8
Session 5	Wednesday, November 3 rd	Periods 1/2
Session 6	Wednesday, November 10 th	Periods 3/4
Session 7	Wednesday, November 17 th	Periods 5/6
Session 8	Wednesday, November 18 th	Periods 7/8 (and after school)

Appendix E: Informed Consent Letter for Parents

Dear Parents:

Following a needs assessment at the school, it became apparent that there are many students who are currently grieving the loss of a loved one and are in need of some support. In order to fulfill this need, we will be running a bereavement group for teens beginning October 4th and running once a week for 8 weeks. Each session will last for one 80-minute class, and students are responsible for catching up on missed work.

Your son/daughter has expressed an interest in this group. The purpose of the group is to offer mutual support through the process of grieving by exploring, journal writing, listening, and sharing in an honest, open, and safe environment. Some of the themes to be covered during the eight sessions include: the stages of grieving; reforming relationships after death; coping with change; recounting the story of the loss; facing the reality of the loss; saying goodbye to the loss; and accepting and expressing feelings. I will be leading the bereavement group. I have my Master Degree in Counselling, and have the necessary qualifications to lead groups of this nature.

Research strongly supports the benefit of groups such as this one for helping young people heal from such losses. However, as with any counselling intervention, there are inherent risks. Sharing our grief with others can bring relief; however, facing our emotions can be a very difficult and painful task. Students will be taught some relaxation exercises to help them through the painful emotions. If your child is having difficulty coping with his/her emotions, he/she will stay with me after the group to work through them before returning to class.

Due to the importance of trust in the group process, I will keep information shared by group members confidential, unless a situation arises where I am ethically required to share information. You will be notified if:

- 1) Your child reveals that he/she is a physical danger to him/herself or to someone else
- 2) Your child reveals information regarding the abuse or neglect of a minor
- 3) My records are subpoenaed by the courts (an extremely unlikely occurrence)

If you have any questions or concerns in regards to your son/daughter during the group intervention, we can set up a meeting with you and your child.

Members are reminded of the importance of keeping any information shared in the group confidential. However, it is important for both you and your child to understand that, due to the nature of group counselling, confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

If you would like your child to be considered for this group, please sign the attached permission form and return to the school counselling department. Screening interviews will be conducted over the next two weeks. Groups are not ideal for everyone, and only those who I feel will benefit from this type of intervention will be invited to take part.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me at the school counselling department.

Sincerely,

Jody Primeau

I acknowledge and give my support for my son/daughter to participate in the bereavement group if he/she is selected. I understand and accept that anything my child shares in the group will be kept confidential, with the aforementioned exceptions.

Parent/guardian signatures

Date

Student signature

Date

Appendix F: Informed Consent Letter for Students

Dear Student:

Following your expressed interest in our adolescent grief group, you are invited to take part in this group. The bereavement group begins October 4th and will take place once a week for an 80 minute block over an 8-week period. You will be missing class time for this group, and are responsible for completing missed work during this time.

The purpose of the group is to offer mutual support through the process of grieving by exploring, journal writing, listening, and sharing in an honest, open, and safe environment. In order to gain from this group, you must be ready and willing to participate. Some of the themes to be covered during the eight sessions include: the stages of grieving; reforming relationships after death; coping with change; recounting the story of the loss; facing the reality of the loss; saying goodbye to the loss; and accepting and expressing feelings. I will be leading the bereavement group. I have my Master Degree in Counselling, and have the necessary qualifications to lead groups of this nature.

There is a lot of support that shows that groups such as this one are very helpful in helping young people like you heal from such losses. However, as with any counselling intervention, there are inherent risks. Sharing our grief with others can bring relief; however, facing our emotions can be a very difficult and painful task. I will do whatever I can to help you through any difficulties you may encounter.

Due to the importance of trust in the group process, I will keep information shared by group members confidential, unless a situation arises where I am ethically required to share information. Your parents and/or others will be informed if:

- 1) You reveal that you are a physical danger to yourself or to someone else
- 2) You reveal information regarding the abuse or neglect of a minor

3) My records are subpoenaed by the courts (an extremely unlikely occurrence)

Members are reminded of the importance of keeping any information shared in the group confidential. However, it is important for you to understand that, due to the nature of group counselling, confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

If you are still interested in taking part in this group, please sign the attached consent form to acknowledge that you are aware of the possible benefits and risks of the bereavement group, and are giving your consent to participate. If you have any questions, you can contact me at the counselling department.

Sincerely,

Mme Primeau

School Counsellor/Group Facilitator

I acknowledge and give my consent to participate in the bereavement group for adolescents. I understand and accept that anything shared in the group will be kept confidential, with the aforementioned exceptions, and that I must abide by the confidentiality agreement as it pertains to other group members.

Student signature

Date

Parent/guardian signatures

Date

Appendix G: Student Contract

I, Jason Miller, understand the importance of the expectations and guidelines of the Bereavement Group. I especially understand the importance of confidentiality, and will respect the confidentiality of all group members. I have been informed that I will be responsible for completing any classroom work that I may miss while attending the group sessions within the allotted time. I also understand that breaking any of the rules will result in serious consequences. I will do my best to be a good group member.

Student signature: Jason Miller

Group leader signature: Ms. Primeau

Date: October 1st, 2004

*Adapted from Blum, 1990

Appendix H: Assessment of Group Process

Measuring Therapeutic Factors: Instillation of Hope, Universality, and Group Cohesion.

I. Instillation of Hope

1. How hopeful did you feel at the initiation of the group that you would be able to work through your grief?

(not at all) 1 2 3 4 5 (very)

2. How hopeful do you feel today?

(not at all) 1 2 3 4 5 (very)

3. What specific events have happened in the group that have increased/decreased your level of hope?

4. Which member in particular has inspired you? What is it about him/her that offers you hope?

5. What have you been doing differently since this group that has been helpful in working through your grief?

6. How has it helped?

II. Universality

1. As other members have shared their stories, what experiences, thoughts, and/or feelings have you identified with?

2. Which member's experience do you feel most reflects your own? What is it about this member's experience that makes you feel connected?

3. How do you feel when you hear about the experiences of others who are working through grief?

4. How do you feel when you share your own experiences with others who are working through grief?

III. Group Cohesiveness

1. How connected did you feel with the members of the group at the initial session?

(not at all) 1 2 3 4 5 (very)

2. How connected with them do you feel now?

(not at all) 1 2 3 4 5 (very)

3. What has contributed to an increase/decrease in feelings of connectedness?

4. How accepted do you feel in this group?

(not at all) 1 2 3 4 5 (very)

Explain

5. How willing have you been in this group to share in an open and honest manner?

(not at all) 1 2 3 4 5 (very)

6. What has contributed to your willingness/lack of willingness to share?

7. How comfortable do you feel dealing with conflict in this group?

(not at all) 1 2 3 4 5 (very)

Explain.

8. In what ways has the group contributed to your growth?

9. In general, how do you feel as a member of this group?

10. How were diversity issues approached in the group? Did you feel that members from diverse groups were shown respect and understanding?

Appendix I: Leadership Feedback

Rate the leadership according to the following statements. Space is provided for comments.

1 = not at all 2 = rarely 3 = sometimes 4 = almost always 5 = always

- _____ 1. The leader provides an environment where I feel safe to share my thoughts and feelings about the loss.
- _____ 2. The leader is successful in keeping us focused on the group goals.
- _____ 3. The leader clearly communicates the guidelines, expectations, and rules of the group and takes the necessary steps to enforce them.
- _____ 4. The leader shares the responsibility for the group process with the members.
- _____ 5. I feel listened to by the leader.
- _____ 6. I feel respected and accepted by the leader.
- _____ 7. The leader is open, honest, and genuine.
- _____ 8. The leader guides discussions, but does not control them.
- _____ 9. The leader is flexible, allowing time for us to focus on the important issues 'in-the-moment'.
- _____ 10. The leader allows me to express my feelings related to my loss.
- _____ 11. The leader encourages me to participate without making me feel singled out.
- _____ 12. The leader gently challenges me to move through the tasks of grieving.
- _____ 13. The leader invites all members to share their experiences with their loss.
- _____ 14. The leader seems very confident and knowledgeable of the grieving process.
- _____ 15. The leader uses techniques and activities that get me thinking about my thoughts, feelings, and behaviours related to the loss.
- _____ 16. I trust the group leader.

Comments:

*Some criteria adapted from Blum, 1990; Corey & Corey, 2002; Corey, Corey, Callanan, & Russell, 2004; Dwivedi & Mymin, 1993; Greenberg, 2003; Waterman & Walker, 2001

The Golden Guidelines

I. Respect confidentiality

II. Pay attention to and express feelings

III. Have a focus

IV. Don't expect change to be instantaneous

V. Give and be open to feedback

VI. Decide how much to disclose

VII. Carry out work outside the group

VIII. Write in a journal

IX. Be respectful of differences

Appendix K: PowerPoint of Tasks of Mourning

Tasks of Mourning (Worden, 2002)

The Tasks of Grief

Passing Gently Through Grief

Worden's 4 Tasks of Mourning (Worden, 2002)

- ◆ There are certain tasks that are common to individuals going through the mourning process.
- ◆ Worden identified 4 tasks of mourning.
- ◆ According to Worden, you need to work through all of the tasks in order to complete the grieving process.
- ◆ If you don't work through all of the tasks, it may cause you problems in the future.

Task I: To accept the reality of the loss.

- ◆ It can be very difficult to believe that "IT" really happened.
- ◆ Acceptance is crucial in walking through our grief.
- ◆ Completing this task requires accepting that the person is really gone.
- ◆ It is normal to have some type of denial initially, but refusing to believe it is real can get you stuck.
- ◆ Acceptance takes time, and we often go from belief to disbelief.

Hindrances to Task I

- ◆ Sometimes we refuse to believe the death is real.
- ◆ We may deny the significance of the loss.
- ◆ We may practice "selective forgetting".
- ◆ We may deny the death is irreversible.

Reflection Questions

- ◆ Do you sometimes see your loved one in the crowd, even though you know he/she is no longer around?
- ◆ Have you picked up the phone to call, only to realize he/she won't answer?
- ◆ Have you said or done things to minimize the loss of your loved one (I don't miss him that much)?
- ◆ Do you have difficulty seeing his/her face, recalling precious memories?

Task II: To work through the pain and grief

- ◆ To get through grief, we cannot walk around it – we have to walk through it.
- ◆ It is important to allow ourselves to feel what we are feeling, to cry, to feel the pain.
- ◆ We experience physical, emotional, and behavioural pain associated with the loss of a loved one.
- ◆ Sadness, anxiety, anger, guilt, and loneliness are all common feelings

Hindrances to Task II

- ◆ Sometimes others can interfere with working through the pain, because of their own discomfort.
 - “It’s been long enough”
 - “You’re strong – You’ll get over it.”
 - “Life is for the living.”
 - “He’d want you to get over it.”

Hindrances to Task II

- ◆ Idealizing the dead.
- ◆ Avoiding reminders of the deceased.
- ◆ Using drugs/alcohol.
- ◆ Keeping busy.
- ◆ These are all unhealthy ways we protect ourselves from our feelings, and they stand in the way of completing Task II.

Reflection Questions

- ◆ Have you found people you feel comfortable talking to about the loss?
- ◆ Do you find yourself avoiding the pain of your loss in some of the ways described above?
- ◆ What feelings have you been feeling associated with the loss?

Task III: To adjust to an environment in which the deceased is missing.

- ◆ We begin to take responsibility for ourselves.
- ◆ There are three areas of adjustment
- ◆ 1. External
 - Learning new skills.

- Taking on new roles.
- Developing new interests.

◆ Internal

- Questioning who we are now that our loved one is no longer around.
- Low self-esteem.
- Questioning our belief in ourselves and the control we have in our lives
- Learning new ways of dealing with the world.

◆ Spiritual

- Searching for meaning in life.
- Feeling you have lost direction.
- Basic beliefs and values are challenged.

Hindrances to Task III

◆ Not adapting to the loss by:

- Not developing skills needed to cope.
- Withdrawing from the world.
- Not facing challenges.

Reflection Questions

- ◆ Have you found yourself developing new skills and interests since the loss?
- ◆ Do you feel out of control of your own life at times?
- ◆ Have your spiritual beliefs been challenged or strengthened since the death?

Task IV: To emotionally relocate the deceased and move on with life.

- ◆ While our loved one was alive, much of our energy was focused on him/her.
- ◆ Now, we must redirect that energy to new places, yet find ways to keep the memory alive.
- ◆ We want to continue to feel connected with our loved one, but still be able to go on with life, and find room for new relationships.
- ◆ We also need to take care of ourselves!

Hindrances to Task IV

- ◆ Not loving.

- ◆ Holding on to past attachments, rather than going on and forming new relationships.
- ◆ Not taking care of ourselves.
- ◆ *We need to realize that loving others does NOT mean loving the deceased any less.

Reflection Questions

- ◆ How do you keep connected with your loved one?
- ◆ Are there areas/times of your life that you feel you are able to go on with life?
- ◆ Have you been able to develop new relationships?
- ◆ Do you make an effort to take care of yourself?

Remember . . .

- ◆ Tasks can be revisited and reworked over time.
- ◆ Various tasks can be worked on simultaneously.
- ◆ You may not work through the tasks in a specific order – it is a process!
- ◆ Individual progress is unique.
- ◆ There is no timeline for grief.

How grief can affect you physically:

- ◆ Tight chest
- ◆ Diarrhea, vomiting
- ◆ Lack of energy, weakness
- ◆ Restlessness
- ◆ Sleep disturbance
- ◆ Shortness of breath
- ◆ Crying, sighing
- ◆ Dizziness, shivering, faintness
- ◆ Change in appetite
- ◆ Alcohol, drug use

How grief can affect you mentally:

- ◆ Poor concentration
- ◆ Confusion: “This can’t be real!”
- ◆ Nightmares, dreams of loss.
- ◆ Constant thoughts about the deceased.
- ◆ Day dreaming.

How grief can affect you emotionally:

- ◆ Shock, numbness, emptiness
- ◆ Anger, rage, denial, disbelief
- ◆ Guilt, regrets
- ◆ Sadness, depression, despair
- ◆ Frustration
- ◆ Withdrawn
- ◆ Explosive moods
- ◆ Yearning
- ◆ Loneliness and isolation

How grief can affect you spiritually:

- ◆ Lack of meaning or purpose in life
- ◆ Asking: “Why did this happen?”
- ◆ Wanting to die so you can join the dead person
- ◆ Blaming or feeling separation from your spiritual power
- ◆ Blaming life, yourself, or the person who has died.

How grief can affect you socially:

- ◆ Unrealistic expectations
- ◆ Withdrawal from others
- ◆ Fear of being alone
- ◆ Rushing into new relationships
- ◆ Lack of interest in others’ activities
- ◆ Dependence on others
- ◆ Feeling out of place with previous friendships

Appendix L: Common Fears

Common Fears

(Adapted from Corey & Corey, 2002)

- Will I be accepted or rejected in here?
- Will I be able to express myself so that others can understand me?
- Can I really say what I feel, or do I have to choose my words carefully so others won't be offended?
- I'm afraid the others will judge me.
- I'm worried that I won't fit in with the other members.
- If I get scared, I may withdraw.
- Will I feel pressured or pushed to participate?
- Will I be able to take risks in here?
- I'm afraid I'll look stupid.
- Will I tell too much about myself?
- What if I get hurt?
- What if the group gangs up on me?
- What if I can't cope with what is going on?
- What will my friends and family think of me if I begin to change?
- What if I'm asked to do something that I don't want to?

Appendix M: Coping with Change Sentence Starters

The following is a list of sentence starters to initiate this week's discussion on changes and coping with changes. Take a moment to reflect on the following. When you feel ready, share with the group your completed sentence. You may decide to finish more than one of the sentences.

1. Since you have died, I have grown and changed by
2. The thing I miss most about you is
3. The one thing that I don't miss is
4. The one thing that has helped me the most since your death is
5. To better cope with the changes since your death, I know that I should
6. What I find the hardest now that you are gone is
7. Now that you are gone, I really resent
8. I am having difficulty accepting/coping with
9. When looking at the future without you, my biggest fear is
10. The most important thing that I have learned about myself since you died is

Appendix N: Good-Bye Letter

Good-bye Letter Ideas (adapted from Jongsma, Peterson, & McInnis, 1999)

Writing can be a great way to express feelings that have been kept inside. Writing a good-bye letter to your loved one can be very difficult, and you may not be ready to say a final good-bye. If you aren't ready to say good-bye, that's okay. Here are a few questions to get you started, even if you just want to write a letter telling your loved one how his/her death has affected you.

- 1. What do you miss about _____?*
- 2. What are some of the problems or disappointments you had with _____?*
- 3. What are some things you would have liked to have said to _____ before he/she died, but you didn't get the chance?*
- 4. What would you like to share with _____ about important events going on in your life right now?*
- 5. How would you like to keep the connection with _____?*
- 6. What dreams or goals do you have for yourself in the future that were influenced by _____?*
- 7. How would you like to say good-bye to _____?*
- 8. What would you like to tell him/her so that he/she knows that you will be okay?*

Appendix O: Giving and Receiving Feedback

Giving and Receiving Feedback

(adapted from Corey & Corey, 2002; Corey et al., 2004)

1. My greatest fear for you is . . .

2. My greatest hope for you is . . .

3. One thing I would like you to remember is . . .

4. You have helped me in this group by . . .

5. Some things that I hope you will think about doing for yourself are . . .

6. One thing I like best about you is . . .

7. One thing that brings me closer to you is . . .

8. One thing I would like to thank you for is . . .

Appendix P: Community Resources

Community Resources

Child, Youth, and Family Services/Hospice Calgary

**#900 - 833 4 Avenue SW
Calgary, Alberta T2P 3T5
403-263-4525**

Provides support and education to children, teens, and families who are facing the death of a terminally ill loved one, grieving the loss of a family member or friend, or facing their own life-threatening illness. Support offered through one-on-one counselling, groups, family support, or home outreach.

Airdrie Family Services

**604 Main Street
Airdrie, AB T4B 2B8
403-912-8451**

Grief Support offers a group program for those who have experienced the loss of a loved one and are interested in a greater understanding of the grief process and their own path to healing through sharing with others. Suicide Grief Support group is open to those who have lost a loved one through suicide. Counselling is available for children or adolescents who have lost a parent, sibling, other relative or friend and whose patterns of personal, social, and familial coping have been significantly affected by the loss.

Calgary Family Services Head Office

**#300 - 906 8th Avenue SW
Calgary, Alberta T2P 1H9
403-269-9888**

Offers bereavement counselling to help adults and children of all ages to cope with their loss.

The Catholic Family Service of Calgary

**#250 – 707 10th Avenue SW
Calgary, Alberta T2R 0B3
403-233-2360**

Provides counselling to individuals and families in distress without regard to race, religious affiliation, age, gender, sexual orientation, marital, or economic status. Offers a sliding fee-for-service scale.

Crisis Lines

Distress Centre Youth Program

Teen Line 403-264-8336

Youth Drug Line 403-269-3784

Offers a peer-to-peer support line that is answered 24 hours a day, and every night by trained teen volunteers from 4-11pm. The Youth Drug Line is answered 24 hours a day and every evening from 4-11pm by trained youth volunteers, some of who have had experience and recovery around drug and alcohol addiction issues. Call if you have questions surrounding drug or alcohol use, misuse, or addiction. In addition to support and information, teens can access referrals and counselling services.

Slide 1

Group Counselling with Adolescents in Schools

Workshop for School Counsellors of the Calgary Separate School District (CSSD)

Presented by Jody Primeau

Slide 2

Background on Project

- ◆ Project fulfills requirement for Master in Counselling degree through Campus Alberta
- ◆ Topic for project was chosen in collaboration with the Calgary Separate School District
- ◆ Project is anchored in research
- ◆ Project also reflects current needs of counsellors in the District
- ◆ Project includes the following main components: Literature review; survey of district counsellors; group counselling starter kit; and, bereavement manual

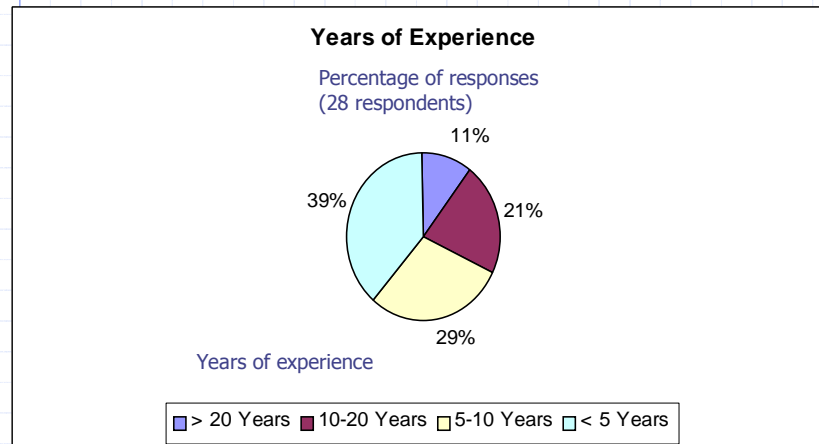
Slide 3

Survey Results

- ◆ 28 out of 58 school counsellors from the CSSD responded to the survey
- ◆ 14 junior high, 13 senior high, and one counsellor with both junior and senior high
- ◆ 14 full-time counsellors, 7 half-time counsellors, and 7 less than half-time
- ◆ 14/27 respondents use counselling groups as a part of their counselling program

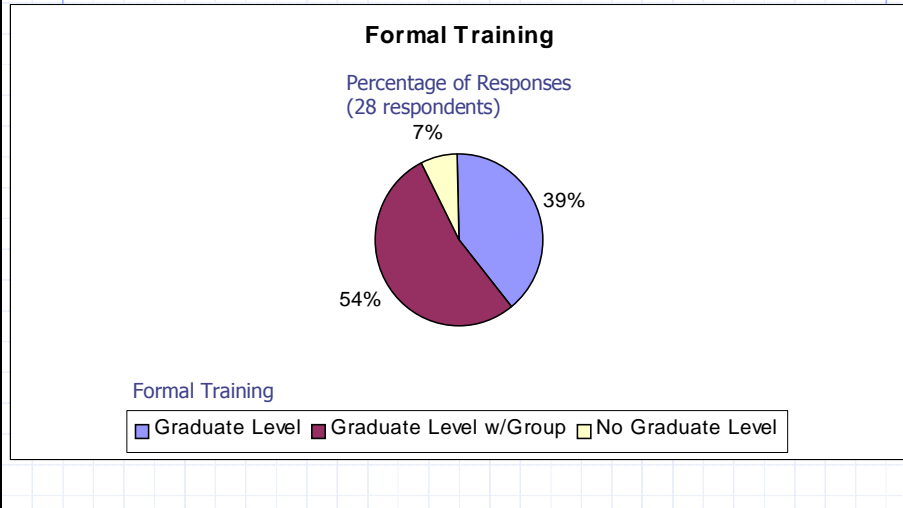
Slide 4

Years of Experience in Counselling



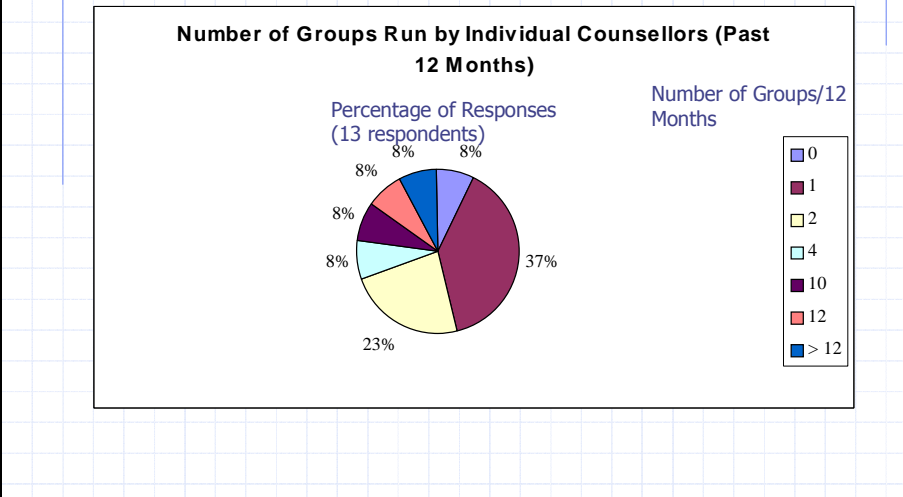
Slide 5

Formal Training



Slide 6

Number of Groups Run By Individual Counsellors in the CSSD (Past 12 Months)



Slide 7

Why Group Counselling? (from the literature)

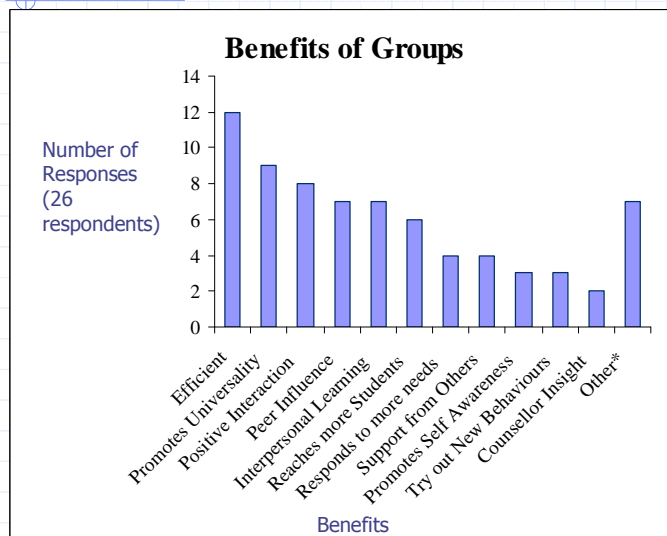
- ◆ Cost and time-efficient intervention
- ◆ Allows counsellor to reach a greater number of students
- ◆ A natural fit to the developmental stage of adolescence
- ◆ Promotes healthy peer interaction
- ◆ Utilizes powerful influence of peer feedback

Slide 8

- ◆ Increases self-awareness
- ◆ Enhances higher profile of counselling programs
- ◆ Normalizes experiences
- ◆ Learning of new skills

Slide 9

Benefits of Groups (from survey)



Slide 10

Needs Assessment

- ◆ Goal: To identify and respond to problems that interfere most with students' personal, social, career, or educational development.
- ◆ Involve teachers, students, and parents
- ◆ How do counsellors currently assess need?
- ◆ From survey: 1) Survey to students, parents and teachers; 2) Staff referrals; 3) Student informal input
- ◆ Starter Kit: Example of a formal needs assessment instrument for teachers, students and parents

Slide 11

Factors Related to Decision to Run A Group (from survey)

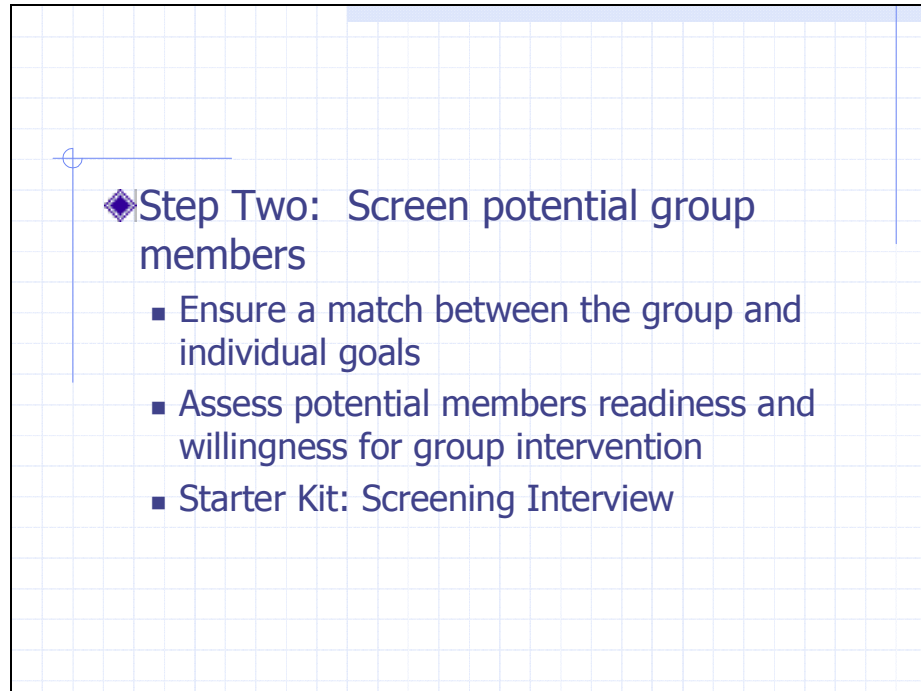
- ◆ Many students with similar concerns
- ◆ Student interest/comfort level
- ◆ Topics where group interaction would be beneficial
- ◆ Staff Concern
- ◆ Availability of time
- ◆ Feedback from school needs assessment
- ◆ Support from administration

Slide 12

Recruitment, Screening, and Group Composition

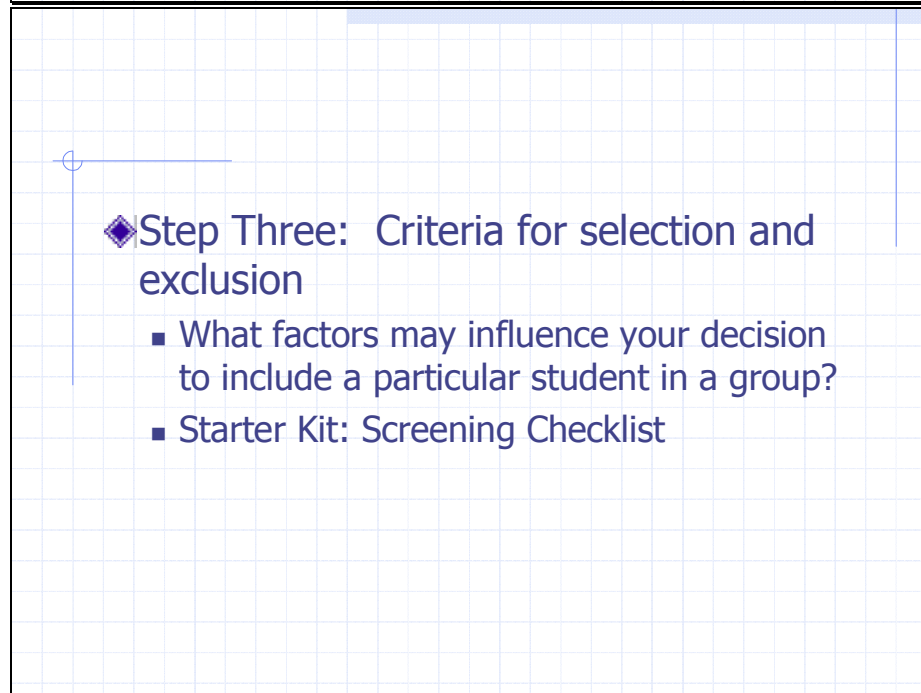
- ◆ Step One: Publicize the group
 - Referrals from SRT, classroom presentations, hallway posters, announcements, newsletters
 - Starter Kit: Example of a poster with recommended information (ASGW, 1998)
 - Bereavement Manual: Poster announcement for a grief group

Slide 13

A slide with a light blue grid background. It features a blue decorative line in the top-left corner. The main content is a list of bullet points starting with a diamond icon.

- ◆ Step Two: Screen potential group members
 - Ensure a match between the group and individual goals
 - Assess potential members readiness and willingness for group intervention
 - Starter Kit: Screening Interview

Slide 14

A slide with a light blue grid background. It features a blue decorative line in the top-left corner. The main content is a list of bullet points starting with a diamond icon.

- ◆ Step Three: Criteria for selection and exclusion
 - What factors may influence your decision to include a particular student in a group?
 - Starter Kit: Screening Checklist

Slide 15

● STOP AND REFLECT

Would you include the following students in a group? Why or why not? If not, what may you suggest instead?

1. A student who you know has recently dealt with a traumatic personal event (i.e. sexual abuse; death of a parent; suicide attempt)

Slide 16

2. A student who you have heard from others exhibits negative leadership among his/her peers in a classroom setting.

3. A child who is mildly developmentally delayed.

4. A student who you know is often a victim of bullying (and this is not a related topic)

5. An extremely shy child.

Slide 17

Leadership and Facilitation of Adolescent Groups

- ◆ Qualities of an effective leader:
 - Sense of humour
 - Sensitive to teenagers' moods and behaviours
 - Honest and genuine
 - Clear and open-minded
 - Non-defensive
 - Good problem-solver
 - Energetic
 - Willing to admit when wrong

Slide 18

- ◆ Balance between non-structured and too much structure
- ◆ Goal-directed style with active leadership
- ◆ Encourage strong group involvement
- ◆ Starter Kit: Leadership: Self-reflection; Leadership Feedback; Resources re: Group Process
- ◆ Bereavement Manual: Example of leadership feedback

Slide 19

● STOP AND REFLECT

What kind of a leader are you?

- Review the "Leadership: Self Reflection" in the Starter Kit
- What quality do you believe will enhance your effectiveness as a group leader?
- What quality may adversely affect your effectiveness as a leader of adolescent groups?
- In what ways could this quality be helpful?

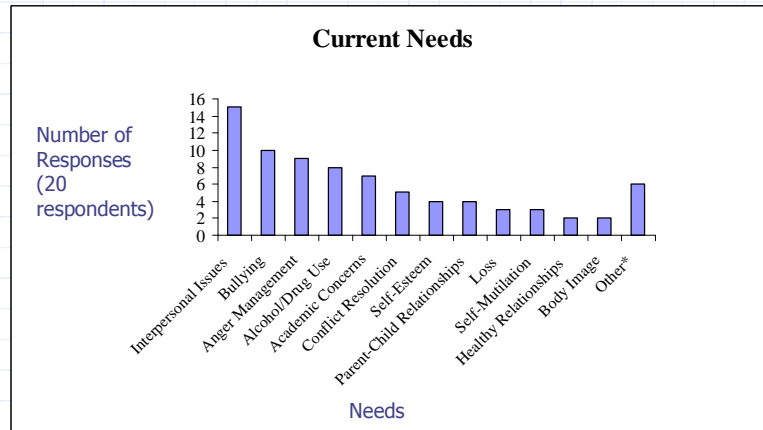
Slide 20

Selecting Group Counselling Topics

- ◆ Most topics in school are academic and/or behavioural in nature
- ◆ Some topics are better to avoid. Can you think of some topics that should be avoided?
- ◆ Starter Kit: Includes a list of resources for a number of specific group topics commonly used with adolescents

Slide 21

Identified Current Needs (from survey)



Slide 22

● STOP AND REFLECT

In a small group, share your experience.

- What groups have you run?
- With which topics do you feel competent to run a group?
- With which topics do you feel you could act as a resource for others who wish to run a similar group?
- *Take some time to review the topics in the resources provided in the starter kit.

Slide 23

Written Proposals

- ◆ Written proposals outline the group's rationale, goals, and objectives, practical considerations, procedures, and evaluation.
- ◆ A clear proposal goes a long way in eliciting support from teachers, administrators, and parents.
- ◆ Starter Kit: Proposal for a Group
- ◆ Bereavement Group Manual: Offers an example of a detailed written proposal

Slide 24

Group Logistics

- ◆ Several pertinent considerations when implementing a group for adolescents
- ◆ Group size: 5-10 members
- ◆ Frequency: Once a week
- ◆ Duration: 8-10 sessions
- ◆ Length: One class period (40-90 min.)
- ◆ What influence will the physical setting have on the group?
- ◆ Starter Kit: Logistical considerations for an adolescent group

Slide 25

● STOP AND REFLECT

Think of your own school.

- How do you see groups fitting into your school culture?
- When could you run them?
- Where?
- What other logistical considerations would you need to focus on?

Slide 26

Content and Structure of Group Sessions

- ◆ Content or process?
- ◆ Content=The "what" of the group
- ◆ Process=The "how" of the group
- ◆ Goal is to balance content and process, but be ready to put content aside for the immediate needs of the group.

Slide 27

● STOP AND REFLECT

Imagine you are leading a group.

- Give examples of process that you would find important to focus on.
- Share your examples in a small group.
- How might it be helpful to the counselling group to focus on process?

Slide 28

◆ Structure of the group session

- Check-in: Reconnects members
- Working section: Purposeful activities
- Check-out: Processing time/feedback

Starter Kit: Session plan outline;
example of a session plan

Bereavement Manual: 8 session plans

● STOP AND REFLECT

A session plan focuses on content.

- In a small group, choose a group topic.
- What 6 subtopics would you want to focus on during an 8-week group?
- Write these down. We will share them with the other counsellors.

Remember: Week one is focused on getting the group started, and week 8 is focused on termination.

Goal Setting

- ◆ Group goals and individual goals must be set
- ◆ Individual Goals: Well-defined goals that reflect the desires of the client and relate to group goals
- ◆ Group Goals: Provide direction and purpose to the group and can be a source of motivation
- ◆ Starter Kit: List of possible group goals; Individual goal contract
- ◆ Bereavement Manual: Example of individual goal contract

Slide 31

Ethical Concerns

- ◆ Informed Consent: Written informed consent is recommended from both the student and parent
- ◆ Limitations to Confidentiality: Imminent harm to self or others; abuse or neglect of a minor; court subpoenas
- ◆ Confidentiality between group members
- ◆ Privacy

Slide 32

◆ Starter Kit:

- Informed consent letter for parents
- Informed consent letter for students
- Limits to confidentiality poster
- Confidentiality explained
- Student contract

Bereavement Manual: Informed letters of consent; student contract

Slide 33

● STOP AND REFLECT

Imagine . . .

Confidentiality has been breached between group members. One of the members feels betrayed because another member has shared some information with a friend outside of the group.

➤ How would you handle this situation?

Slide 34

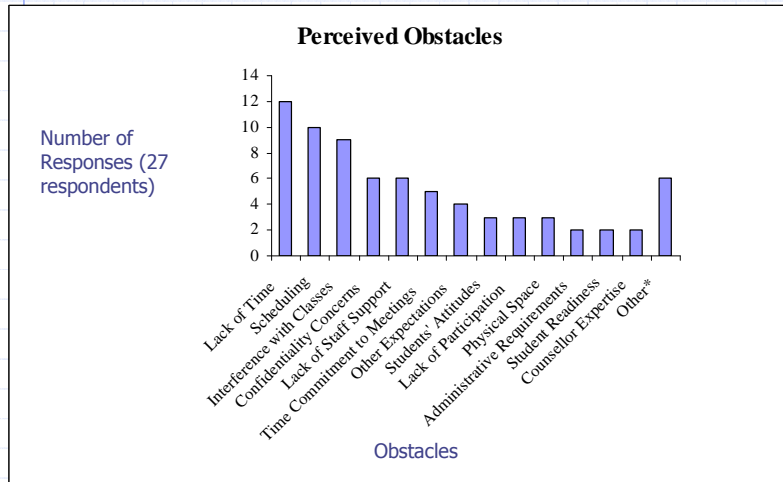
Overcoming Challenges

◆ What difficulties do counsellors face?
(from Bowman, 1987; Dansby, 1996)

- Resistance from teachers
- Interference from students, parents, or administration
- Lack of time
- Challenges getting students from class

Slide 35

Perceived Obstacles (from survey)



Slide 36

◆ How to overcome obstacles

- Orient staff
- Continuous communication with all parties
- Involvement throughout the process
- Clear guidelines/expectations and policies regarding group involvement
- Flexibility and creativity
- Written proposal

Slide 37

Effective Strategies Used to Implement Groups (from survey)



Slide 38

- ◆ Starter Kit: Letter to teaching staff; article in newsletter; teacher notification
- ◆ Bereavement Manual: example of teacher notification with rotating schedule

Slide 39

● STOP AND REFLECT

Personal Reflection

- What is the biggest obstacle standing in your way of running a group right now?
- What could you do to overcome it?
- How may this project/starter kit help you overcome it?
- What other support would you need to overcome it?

Slide 40

Assessment of Group Interventions

- ◆ Effective assessment enhances effectiveness of the group
- ◆ Assessment of individual sessions: Provides important feedback to both leader and members; allows for self-monitoring; and, increases leaders' awareness
- ◆ Assessment of total group experience: Used to improve and revise group programs

Slide 41

- ◆ Starter Kit: Assessment of group experience (ongoing) and assessment of group experience (final evaluation)
- ◆ Bereavement Manual: Pre-post assessment instrument and assessment of group process.

Slide 42

Thank you!

Remember:

We are our greatest resource.

References

Bowman, R. P. (1987). Small-group guidance and counseling in schools: A national survey of school counselors. *The School Counselor*, 34, 256-262.

Dansby, V. S. (1996). Group work within the school system: Survey of implementation and leadership role issues. *The Journal for Specialists in Group Work*, 21, 232-242.