

Sample Counseling Group Activities for Suicide Loss

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These are just a few suggestions to get you started, though there are many resources available to provide you with more.

Sample Ice-breakers

Introduce yourself and who you lost: This is a basic activity and is just as described.

M&M Activity: Bring in a large bag of M&M's. Do not tell students what they are for, but provide them a napkin or small plate. Tell them to take as many M&M's as they wish, but they must take some. Only when every student has had a chance to take some, explain that they now have to state one thing about themselves for every piece of candy. Teens love this and will laugh at having taken too many!

Beanbag Toss: Bring in a beanbag. Students gently toss the beanbag to one another, and must state one of their favorite things each time they throw the bag. Group members begin to learn about each other and things they may have in common.

Similarities Game: The group facilitator calls out certain items that students may have in common (i.e. if you have a pet, stand over here or if you have seen the Liberty Bell, stand here). The facilitator can make these up based upon geographic location and specifics to the school, etc. This again shows group members their commonalities.

BINGO: Another game to show what group members have in common is BINGO. The group facilitator would create a grid similar to a BINGO game, but each square would have likenesses. Similar to above, a square could read "I have a pet." Group members spend 15 minutes mingling with each other at the beginning of group in an attempt to find another group member who also has a pet. The activity is done when one member gets five likenesses in a row! Want to make this more challenging? Tell group members that they can only use another persons name one time.

Two Truths and a Lie: Each group member writes down two truths about themselves and one lie. The other group members have to guess which is the lie. A fun way to get to know one another.

Interview your Peer: Rather than telling the group about themselves, group members each interview the person sitting to their left. THEN, they have to tell the group everything that they were told!

Sample Activities

There are activities that are a part of nearly every suicide loss group. These may include:

Creating a memory mural- students all write down memories of their loved ones and they are put together in a collage.

Creating a memory quilt- Squares of fabric can be purchased cheaply and students can draw on or write on each square. Tie them together with ribbon to create a unique quilt. Here are some examples of ones that have been done in the past! Hang them up to remember loved ones!



Photo Credit: Terri Erbacher-Duff



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Sharing mementos- Students each bring in one important item that reminds them of their loved one. It could be their father's old tie, a poem or something more symbolic. They share with group members why it is an important memory.

Write a goodbye letter- With suicide, many students report that they never got a chance to say goodbye to their loved one, which can be very difficult. Writing a letter now can offer them needed closure. Perhaps give them the choice what to do with the letter; keep it, rip it up, or put it in a memory box.

Create a Memory book- Students often report feeling afraid that their memories of their loved one will fade with time. Creating a detailed memory book will help ease this fear. The book can include pictures, stories or anecdotes of favorite memories, quotes of their loved one, poems, as well as favorite foods, vacations, events, teams, or favorite holidays of the deceased so those living will never forget!

Create a memory box- Similar to the book, but reminder objects are placed in a box as a memento. This may be more helpful for younger children.

Circle of Grief- This is an exercise using color to express feelings. Provide each student with a circle drawn on paper. Tell group members that using as many colors as they wish, design their unique circle of grief. Tell them to let their mind think about how they are feeling now about the suicide loss they have experienced. See if they can identify and write their feelings beside the colors they used. Each group member has an opportunity to share their circle when finished. Suicide loss may create feelings such as confusion and shock – normalize all feelings and search for commonalities to help unite members.

Create a Memory Garden- Each student gets to create their own memory flower with each individual petal being a positive memory or something they most miss about their loved one. We post these right on the wall of our therapy room. The students are often proud of their positive memory garden as they walk into the room in the following weeks and see it. As their names are only written if they'd like, they remain confidential. In the sample below, a few of the boys in the group preferred to use the petals as thought bubbles and made bees/bugs to go with the thoughts. The options for creativity are endless!



Photo Credit: Terri Erbacher-Duff

Bibliotherapy- There are a multitude of books on grief and loss. Perhaps read one together and discuss it in group. This may be especially helpful for younger children. Older children who choose to read may ask for a few books to check out.

Enlisting support- It is important that group members can identify people they feel safe with and can go to when they are feeling down. There should be at least one trusted adult on their list. Have them write at least 3 names (you may list more than three) that can include family, friends, other group members, school staff and other helpful adults. Then, assign them the following homework:

- *This week, write the phone numbers of these people below their names.
- *Place this in a spot you can find easily when you need a supportive person.
- *Each day this week, be sure to talk to at least one supportive person a day.

The Ripples of Loss- Have group members write the suicide loss they have experienced in the center of a paper. Outside of that, have them write how this loss has had a ripple effect for them... There are often secondary effects of loss that may include changes in life, troubling emotions, altered relationships, having to move, etc.

Sample Remembrance Rituals

- *Light a candle to remember your loved one during the holidays or anniversaries
- *Look through photo albums and focus on these good memories.
- *Journal some favorite memories or funny anecdotes of your loved one.
- *Watch a funny movie you previously enjoyed with your loved one.
- *Wear a piece of jewelry that was a favorite of your loved one.
- *Visit the gravesite – bring a symbolic item to leave.
- *Volunteer for a suicide prevention organization in memory of your loved one.
- *Become an activist for suicide prevention.
- *Read cards or letters given to you by your loved one.
- *Take time to just remember your loved one and all they meant to you. Perhaps remember their smile or their laugh. Their memory will live on through you.

Source: Erbacher, T.A. (2008, November). *Teen groups for the suicide bereaved*. Presentation for the Delaware County Suicide Prevention and Awareness Task Force (DCSPATF) 5th Annual Symposium on Suicide: A community-wide health problem, Drexel Hill, PA.