MODULE III: Coping With Traumatic Loss and Grief
Introduction to Module III

Module III is designed to assist the adolescent with his or her responses to the traumatic death of a family member or close friend. The sessions of Module II were designed to progressively enable the traumatic experience to recede in its intrusiveness and impact on the adolescent, and to reduce the intensity and severity of posttrauma reactions, including PTSD and complicated bereavement. The sessions in Module III are designed primarily to facilitate grief and mourning in an individual, developmental and culturally appropriate manner. The initial sessions are intended to further reduce the consequences of traumatic bereavement, wherein preoccupation with the circumstances of the death interfere with normal grief responses, and to promote positive reminiscing and remembering. The latter sessions are intended to promote coping and adaptation to the loss. In contrast to Module II, this work may temporarily increase grief-related distress while providing a holding environment for ongoing grief reactions. At the end of the module, the adolescent will not be without grief reactions or mourning, indeed, these may continue long into the future. However, the adolescent will be better able to appreciate and integrate these responses into a constructive outlook and investment in their own future interpersonal life and activities.

Psychoeducation about the range of grief reactions provides an initial introduction to this module. It is important for the adolescent group members to understand that there are a wide range of grief responses and courses of bereavement, even among the group members. There is no one way to grieve. In addition, there are many developmental and cultural influences on the experience of loss and expression of grief. Grief and mourning have both private and public dimensions. Therefore, it is an interactive process that often involves different responses over time among family members and friends. By describing the wide range of responses, the adolescent is helped to appreciate his or her own reactions, those of the other group members, family and friends. The psychoeducation is especially important to adolescents. Silver and Wortman (1980) have described how bereaved individuals are distressed by the inappropriate expectations held by themselves or others about their course of bereavement. Peers and family members often do not appreciate how long children and adolescent grief reactions may endure. Of special importance, adolescents may consider something wrong with them because of unrealistic expectations about the persistence of their grief reactions. For example, one year after his best friend died, an adolescent boy feigned fainting, rather than be seen crying and missing his friend, because he assumed he should be over it by now and that none of his other friends were still experiencing grief. It is also important to underscore how differences in exposure to the death may influence the course of bereavement among family members and friends. Differentiating trauma and grief responses provides a framework to understand the interaction of these experiences, and how they may have influenced the course of bereavement for the adolescent, family members and peers. By increasing their awareness of how traumatic circumstances can make bereavement more difficult, the adolescent is assisted in being able to better focus on his or her grief responses.

The sessions in Module III are devoted to six grief processes, each of which has inherent specific adolescent developmental issues. The first challenge in traumatic bereavement is recognizing the loss. Grief over a death requires recognition of the physical reality of the death, even within a larger spiritual or religious context. Traumatic deaths complicate this process on two extremes. The manner of death may be so horrific that it is difficult to concretize the death, and to allow that image to assist in acceptance of the death.
Alternatively, a traumatic death may result in an absence of physical remains or confirming witnessing that leaves the reality of death inconclusive in the adolescent's mind. Because of the adolescent preoccupation with their own physical image and transformation, they can be both "grossed out" by and information seeking about the manner of death. The second focus is on the reactions to the loss. Among the many areas that are discussed, for adolescents it is of particular importance to address "suicidal thoughts" (without suicidal behavior) that accompany wishes for reunion as common grief reactions and the role of recklessness behavior to regulate "pangs" of grief. Remembering and reminiscing also present their own special challenges to adolescents. Traumatic deaths often introduce a sense of historical discontinuity in a person's life, introducing a sense of no longer being in contact with the person who you were before the traumatic death. This is especially challenging to adolescents who are directly dealing with issues of emerging personal identity and constructing a more elaborate framework of past, present and future by which to plan their lives. Helping the adolescent to bridge this sense of discontinuity through exercises that enhance active remembering and reminiscing are critical to restoring this important adolescent developmental task. In adolescents, the process of remembering the deceased may carry with it uncomfortable feelings associated with adolescent ambivalence that may also include difficult last interactions with family or friends. Paradoxically, adolescents may maintain behaviors and attitudes that evoked negative parental response as a way of "having the parent with them again" through a replaying of these negative interactions as a reunion fantasy. Adolescents also are engaging in ongoing reappraisals of parents, siblings and friends. This process can be brought to a halt by a sudden death. The intensity of the grieving process often engenders idealization, just at a time when an adolescent is "de-idealizing" parent or friend. In addition, adolescence involves continual re-negotiation of parent and adolescent relationship, as the adolescent makes the transition to young adulthood. The loss removes the physical opportunities for the adolescent to engage in the many difficult and positive interactions with parents that promote autonomy and a more integrated mature perspective of their parents. The sessions are designed to allow them to mentally continue this process even in the absence of their lost loved one. Adolescents are also faced with the developmental challenge that to move on in life can feel like they are actively letting go of the deceased in ways that feel unacceptable and distressing. They are also at a stage of abstract thinking that they can consider their own fears of sharing the same fate with that of the deceased or someone else close to them doing so in the future. Developmental achievements, for example, graduations, serve as loss reminders and as indications of going ahead without that person. The last session challenges adolescents to reexamine their loss-related avoidance and promotes reinvestment in interpersonal life and activities.
MODULE III: Coping With Traumatic Loss and Grief

Session 1: Learning About Grief
MODULE III, Session 1:

Learning About Grief

Note: These sessions are tailored specifically for adolescents who have experienced the death of a loved one. However, they include prompts that will allow them to be adapted for those who have suffered other significant losses, including:

- on-going forced separation from loved ones (due to financial reasons, ethnic persecution, etc.)
- loss of contact with extended family members and friends
- having a loved one who is still missing
- having a family member who was seriously wounded/disabled from the war (e.g., “I miss my father the way he used to be”)
- the loss of one’s home and former way of life

Content Objectives

1) Normalize and validate grief reactions.
2) Describe and explore grief signs and symptoms in terms that are relevant to members’ personal experiences.
3) Expand members’ vocabularies for labeling, understanding, and expressing grief symptoms.
4) Explain how the course of grief tends to fluctuate over time, often in response to loss reminders.
5) Explain why we grieve—what is the purpose of mourning our losses?
6) Review the two categories of loss reminders

Process Objectives

1) (Everyone) Work together to create a group atmosphere of support, validation, acceptance, and sympathetic understanding that:
   - is capable of tolerating, accepting, and bearing witness to such intense emotions as deep sorrow, longing, intense anger, and guilt
   - allows the group to serve as a "container" for the often intense and poignant thoughts and feelings that will be expressed
   - helps members feel comfortable experiencing and sharing their grief-related thoughts, emotions, and efforts to cope with/accommodate to the loss
2) (Group Leaders) increase members’ motivation and commitment to do grief work.
3) (Group Leaders) validate members’ grief symptoms by giving them meaning. Explain how these symptoms reflect how deeply they still feel the loss and what this loss personally means to them.
4) (Group Leaders) normalize members’ experiences by pointing out commonalities among members’ grief-related experiences, such as their losses, grief symptoms, and current adversities.
5) (Group Leaders) facilitate members’ re-connection with (living) members of their social networks. This process involves active investment in social relationships in the form of supportive exchanges (e.g., giving and receiving emotional support, feedback, reassurance of worth, etc.) among group members and with significant others outside the group (in their Practice Exercises).

Session Overview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section Number</th>
<th>Session Overview</th>
<th>Estimated Time</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1)</td>
<td>Check-In</td>
<td>:05</td>
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<td>2)</td>
<td>Review Practice Exercises</td>
<td>:10</td>
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<tr>
<td>3)</td>
<td>Transition to a Focus on Loss</td>
<td>:05</td>
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4) Grief Psychoeducation: What is Grief? :10
5) Grief Psychoeducation: Grief Reactions :15
6) Grief Psychoeducation: Review Loss Reminders :30
7) Summary and Practice Exercises :05
8) Transitional Activity & Check-Out :10

Total :90

### Supplies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Every Session</th>
<th>Special to This Session</th>
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<tr>
<td>Flipchart</td>
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<td>White Paper</td>
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<td>Markers</td>
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<td>Pencils/pens</td>
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<td>Kleenex</td>
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<td>Tape</td>
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### Handouts

- Common Grief Reactions
- Five Steps to Good Communication
- My Reactions to Loss Reminders
**Flipcharts**

**Session Highlights**

- Check-In
- Review Practice Exercises
- Focus on Loss
- What is Grief?
- Learn About Grief Reactions
- Learn About Loss Reminders
- Summary and Practice Exercises
- Check-Out

**Five Steps to Good Communication**

1. What Do I Want?
2. Who Should I Ask?
3. Find the Right Time
4. Request With an "I" Message:
   - Tell them what I am feeling.
   - Tell them what happened (outside and inside)
   - Tell them what I want them to do.

**What is Grief?**

Grief is a normal and understandable reaction to the loss of someone or something we care about.

1. Grief reactions may result from losses due to:
   - death, disappearance, physical separation, or estrangement from someone we care about
   - the destruction of, or separation from, cherished belongings
2. Grieving is healthy and beneficial.
3. Grief reactions fluctuate over time.
4. Grieving has both public and private components (parts)
5. Grief reactions are often evoked by loss reminders.
6. Grief often lasts a long time.
7. Healthy grieving does not require forgetting or no longer caring for the person or thing we love.
### Common Grief Reactions

1) **Emotional**
   - sad
   - angry
   - anxious
   - lonely
   - regretful

2) **Thinking**
   - uncertainty
   - distracted
   - preoccupied with thoughts of them

3) **Perceptions**
   - Sensing that I’m seeing or hearing them
   - Sensing their presence nearby

4) **Behavior**
   - Crying or weeping
   - Searching for them
   - Avoiding loss reminders
   - Acting absent-minded or distracted

5) **Social**
   - Decreased interest and motivation for relationships, boredom
   - Being critical, angry, or irritated
   - Withdrawing from others

6) **Physical**
   - Feeling fatigued, lethargic
   - Physical agitation, jumpiness, restlessness, hyperactivity
   - Get sick more easily

### Loss Reminders

1) **Times when we miss the lost person or object**
   - **Empty situations**: their bedroom, favorite chair, clothes, or place at the table.
   - **Shared activities**: playing games, going for walks, doing homework together, and eating meals together.
   - **Rituals**: graduations, birthdays, holidays, or other family celebrations, award ceremonies, and weddings.
   - **Favorite activities**: their hobbies, favorite food or music, or favorite sayings.

2) **Hardships or other changes created by the loss**
   - Moving to a new house or town
   - Separation from loved ones
   - Difficulty adjusting to a new environment
   - Difficulty making new friends
I. Check-In

L1 How are you feeling right now? (Use thermometer ratings.)
   • Is anything going on that may make it difficult for you to keep your mind in the group?
   • Briefly review "Today's Highlights" (Flipchart 1):

II. Review Practice Exercise

CONTENT:
   • Review the group session format.
   • Provide feedback and encouragement about how the program can help them with their goals.

PROCESS:
   • Increase motivation to use these skills in coping with real-life challenges.

L1 Present Flipchart 2.

L2 Last week we asked you, as a practice exercise, to use the Five Steps to Good Communication, using an "I"-message for advice or help in sorting out a problem. Today, we need your help. We’d like you to interview each other about how your personal goal of using an "I"-Message to ask for advice or help in sorting out a problem went. (Instruct the group members to use the Flipchart to interview each other about):
   1. What did you want?
   2. Who did you ask?
   3. What time did you pick to talk to them?
   4. What was your "I-Message"?
      • What did you tell them about how you were feeling?
      • What did you tell them about what happened OUTSIDE of you?
      • What did you tell them about what happened INSIDE of you?
      • What did you ask them to do?
   5. How did you express your appreciation?
      • Overall, how did it go?
      • If the discussion didn’t go as well as you wanted, what could you do next time to get better results? (Problem solve)

   Remember to be good listeners by listening carefully, asking questions when something is not clear, providing feedback, and sharing a similar experience that you've had (if you’ve had one!). This will help your conversation partner to feel understood.

BOTH Monitor and provide encouragement and feedback as needed.

L2 (Summarize): Thanks for your help. It’s wonderful to see you helping each other like this—these communication skills will serve you well, both now and in the weeks and months to come, as you give and receive support from your friends and loved ones. So keep working on them! Really use them to get the support you need for the work we are doing in our group, as well as for other important needs you have. Good work!

III. Transition to a Focus on Loss

CONTENT:
   • Switch the primary therapeutic focus from trauma to loss.
   • Work on developing a vocabulary for communicating about loss-related thoughts, emotions, and behaviors.
   • Practice self-disclosure skills.
Model sympathetic listening skills.

**PROCESS:**
- Members build group intimacy through disclosure and sympathetic listening.
- Group Leaders build group cohesion and normalize members' responses by pointing out “common denominators” among members’ loss-related experiences.
- Group Leaders validate members’ responses by reassuring them that their grief reactions make sense in light of the losses they have experienced.

**HINT:**
- Keep this exercise relatively light and brief—your goal is to transition from Module II “trauma-focused” work to the “loss-focused” work of Module III.

L1 For the past several months, we have been focusing on our traumatic experiences and how these experiences have influenced our lives. We have learned about:
- posttraumatic stress symptoms,
- trauma reminders, and how these reminders evoke posttraumatic stress symptoms—sometimes in ways we’re not fully aware of until we reflect on it;
- what trauma reminders tell us about how difficult our traumatic experiences were for us to go through—how frightened and helpless we felt.
- We also looked for hurtful thoughts connected to our traumatic experiences—thoughts that were making us feel guilty, ashamed, and so forth,
- when we found these hurtful thoughts, we challenged them and replaced them with helpful thoughts to help ourselves feel better.

We’re now going to shift our group’s focus away from these traumatic experiences themselves, to the ways in which the people and things we have lost continue to influence our lives. This means that we’re shifting away from the theme of trauma to the themes of loss and grief.

During the next month or so:
- We’ll be talking about grief symptoms—what they are, what they feel like, and the times and places in which we experience them.
- We’ll talk about loss reminders—what they are, and how they evoke grief symptoms, just like trauma reminders evoke posttraumatic stress symptoms.
- We’ll talk about how losing the person to a violent and tragic death can make grieving their loss more difficult.
- We’ll also focus on what it is like to live without the person or things we love—how much we miss them, and the adversities we now face as a result of their absence from our lives.
- Lastly, we’ll work on developing communication skills to help us share our grief in appropriate ways with others. These skills will help us to give and receive the support that we need as we move forward with our lives.

With this last goal in mind, we’d like to invite each of you to briefly share, in a minute or less, a loss that you feel is most heavily influencing your life right now. This loss can be of a person, a place, or a belonging—but it should be someone or something that is difficult for you to live without, and which you would like the group’s understanding and support in dealing with. The loss may be the same one you focused on before in our trauma-focused work, or it can be some other loss that you feel would be most beneficial to focus on now.

Please describe the loss you have chosen to focus on, including who or what you lost, and when the loss took place. In addition, please also share one hardship you are now facing as a result of their absence from your life. This may be a hardship that their loss has created (like financial hardship after losing a primary breadwinner), or something that you really miss now that they are no longer physically with you (such as their companionship or help with schoolwork).

**Note:**
- For traumatic bereavement groups, ask members to share the name of the deceased, their relationship to the deceased, how he/she died, and one hardship they are now facing as a result of their absence.
BOTH (Briefly) Sympathize, normalize, and validate. Ask clarifying questions as needed.

**After all group members have briefly described their experience(s):**

L1 (Monitor reactions): *How is everyone doing?*

BOTH (Process) Help members to emotionally recover as needed using the skills they have learned (deep breathing/relaxation, distraction, etc.).

L1 (Summarize and lead into the next section.) *Thank you all for sharing your experiences. We can all see how deeply you still feel the effects of these losses in your lives. We are confident that the work we will be doing in the coming weeks will help you to understand your reactions to these losses—these reactions are called “grief reactions”—and how to deal with your grief in ways that will help you.*
IV. Grief Psychoeducation: What is Grief?

CONTENT:
- Learn that grief reactions are a normal response to loss.
- Learn about why we grieve—why do we mourn our losses?

PROCESS:
- (Group Leaders) legitimize all forms of loss that have been experienced by group members, including loss through death, separation, missing status, physical separation, physical incapacitation, property loss, and lost developmental opportunities.
- Increase motivation for participating in grief work.

HINT:
- Adapt your comments to the types of losses experienced by the group members so that this work is relevant to their experiences.

L1 For many teenagers, the loss of someone or something they dearly love is the most painful and enduring experience they have ever lived through. They report that, even years after the loss occurred, there are still times when it feels as if the loss happened just yesterday, and they miss their loved one very deeply. Many teenagers report that they are reminded frequently of their losses, in many cases on an everyday basis, such as when... (cite relevant examples from the table below):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Examples of Loss Through Death, Separation, or Physical Incapacitation</th>
<th>Examples of the Loss of a Cherished Object</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>When:</strong></td>
<td><strong>When:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>your (mother) isn't there to wake you up in the morning, or to talk with you after school</td>
<td>you can’t return to the home of your childhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>you have to do additional chores because your (brother) isn’t there to do them</td>
<td>your home was so badly damaged that you can’t live in it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>you and your family are feeling very uncertain about the future because your (father) isn’t there to provide you with a sense of security and safety</td>
<td>you miss your home—your house, your community, your school, your friends, your way of life—all of the things that made up the world you once knew</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>you frequently feel lonely and bored because you miss the company of your friends</td>
<td>you don’t feel like you fit in with the people around you—it’s hard to make good friends and to fit in, hard to communicate what you’re feeling with others who haven’t lived through the same experiences</td>
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<tr>
<td>you can’t do the physical activities you used to love to do with your (dad) because his injuries won’t permit it</td>
<td>there is little joy in life—everything has to do with bare survival, and there’s not time or money or energy for doing enjoyable things</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>you and your loved ones are feeling very uncertain and anxious about someone who is still missing</td>
<td>you’re sometimes overwhelmed by thoughts of your past life and times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>your own physical injuries prevent you from participating in activities or achieving goals that are important to you</td>
<td>your (mother) isn’t there to wake you up in the morning, or to talk with you after school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the war has imposed such serious hardships upon you that you’ve had to grow up quickly and roughly, and haven’t had the opportunity to just be a teenager—now it’s harder to have fun, to relax, to not worry about other people or the future.</td>
<td>your (brother) isn’t there to do them</td>
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L1 With this introduction to HOW we can experience losses, we’d now like to spend some time talking about our reactions to these losses—something we call grief.

WHAT IS GRIEF?
Grief is what people go through after someone or something they care about very deeply dies or is lost. Although grief often involves very strong emotions and other reactions, many people don’t talk about it directly. As a result, people sometimes don’t know if what they’re feeling is normal. Let’s try an activity that helps us to think about which grief reactions are normal. I’m going to read some statements about grief and then ask you whether you agree with each statement or not.

As the statements are read and responded to, be sure to reinforce correct answers. When group members answer wrongly, normalize that perception (e.g. a lot of people think that, but really…). After each fact is read, call on one group member who got the correct answer and ask them to tell why they think it’s either true or false. Then fill in the rest of the facts as appropriate.

1. **Grief is a normal and healthy reaction to the loss of someone or something we care about.**
   **ANSWER: TRUE**

   Grief is a normal and understandable reaction to loss. The pangs of grief we feel are signs that we are missing and feeling the absence of the person or thing we have lost. Grieving is healthy and beneficial in the long run, because it helps us to adapt and adjust to the loss. The painful acknowledgement that a cherished person or object is permanently gone, and the discomfort of getting used to life without (them), are all part of adjusting to a loss. Indeed, until we properly grieve, we are stuck in the past. Grieving allows us to adjust, adapt, and re-orient ourselves to the changes that have taken place in our lives.

   In this way, grief reactions are very different from other problems, especially posttraumatic stress and depression symptoms. For instance, we refer to posttraumatic stress and depression symptoms, but we refer to grief reactions. That is because posttraumatic stress and depression symptoms are always distressing and almost always get in the way of what we want to do, so we’re working together to reduce them. In contrast, grief reactions are generally helpful, because they can help you to make the life changes needed to adjust to your loss. It is true that grief reactions CAN be distressing, but they can also be comforting, reassuring, and they can even bring a sense of relief, such as when we have a good cry or reminisce about a loved one. Thus, in our work together, we will not try to make your grief reactions go away. Rather, we’ll try to grieve together in ways that will help you.

2. **After someone close dies, almost all teenagers get over their painful feelings after about 6-12 months.**
   **ANSWER: FALSE**

   People grieve in very individual ways. There is no pre-set or “normal” time in which painful feelings are resolved. Many grieving teens describe a process in which initially very intense feelings of sadness and loss gradually lessen, and painful memories are replaced by more positive memories of the deceased. This process can take weeks, months, or years. A basic principle is that you will continue to grieve as long as you continue to feel the absence of someone or something special in your life. But because grief is not a bad thing, it’s something that we hope that you can each learn to live with.

3. **It is best not to talk about the person who died—that way, it will be easier to move on with your life.**
   **ANSWER: FALSE**
Actually, talking about the loss and sharing your feelings with appropriate others is one of the best ways to work through painful feelings of grief. We have found that the people who have the most difficulty moving on with their lives are those who avoid thinking or talking about their loss. The very act of keeping strong feelings hidden and distancing themselves from others can cause additional stress and prolong their loneliness and anguish.

4. Grief reactions are completely unpredictable—you never know when they’ll come or go, or how strongly you will feel them. ANSWER: FALSE

As we explained in our second session together, things like posttraumatic stress symptoms and grief reactions typically do not drop in “out of the blue” by themselves. Rather, they are almost always evoked by things that remind us that our loved one is no longer with us. And just as posttraumatic stress symptoms are evoked by trauma reminders (such as loud noises or the sound of a siren), grief reactions are usually evoked by loss reminders. Typical loss reminders include anniversaries, social gatherings, big and little crises when we really wish we had our loved one’s support, and activities we used to share together, such as cooking, eating, doing homework, or playing ball.

5. Grief reactions will steadily decrease with each week that goes by. ANSWER: FALSE

Some people who do not understand grief believe that grief reactions should steadily decrease after a loss. However, this is not true. Rather, grief reactions tend to fluctuate over time in response to the presence or absence of loss reminders. That is, when in circumstances in which loss reminders are present—such as holidays, anniversaries, graduations, or while doing activities we used to do together—we tend to experience grief reactions, some of which may be very intense. However, in other circumstances where loss reminders are not present, we do not experience the same intensity of grief reactions. Thus, the intensity of our grief is not simply a matter of time—it is much more a matter of how important and central the loss has been to our lives, and how often we are reminded of the person’s absence in our lives.

6. Healthy grieving requires that we forget or stop thinking about our loved one who died. ANSWER: FALSE

Healthy and helpful grieving will never require that you try to replace, forget, or sever your emotional ties to the person or thing that is lost. This is simply not necessary in order to adapt to the loss and to move forward with our lives. Instead, our purpose is to re-form our relationship with the deceased—to make the relationship one of memory instead of physical presence—so that we have room in our hearts and minds for new relationships and life activities. In this way, we will both keep hold of the important parts of our past while making room for the present and future.

We each recognize that the loved one whom we have lost is irreplaceable—they were unique and special, and that’s why losing them hurts so much. So we will always keep a special and unique place for them in our memories and in our hearts. As we reminisce, we honor their memories by remembering what is unique and special about them. But as we grieve together, we will also work on making some more space in our lives for new relationships.
with living people. These new relationships will never take the place of our loved one, and they don’t need to. But they can enrich our lives and help us move forward in other ways.

7. Everyone in the family will grieve the same way, and will “finish” grieving at about the same time. **ANSWER: FALSE**

   Different people in the same family can have very different reactions to the death, and often differ in when and how strongly they experience grief reactions. This may be in part due to the different levels of exposure to the death that different family members may have experienced. For example, some may have directly witnessed the death or been closer to the events surrounding the death. Some members may have been directly informed, and then broke the news to others. Family members also have very different personalities and styles of coping that can strongly influence how they grieve. These differences can be a source of stress, frustration, and sometimes anger within a family, because some members think that others are refusing to “let go of the past”, or doing something that is unhelpful or insensitive. Family members often need to talk to each other more after a loss so that they can understand each other’s grief reactions and sympathetically support each other when they are having a difficult time.

8. After someone close dies, life will not be the same as it was before. **ANSWER: TRUE**

   People who don’t know very much about loss and grieving sometimes expect that life will “get back to normal” a few weeks or months after the death of someone close. However, for most survivors of these losses, the months and years following a death will require that they find a “new normal”—a new way of doing things, a revised or different set of family rituals, and a different set of plans and expectations for the future. But this isn’t a bad thing—it’s a way of adjusting to life without someone who continues to be an important part of their lives, but who is now physically absent. You and the people who support
you can be assured that you won’t forget your lost loved one as you return to your daily duties and activities, and as you form new relationships. Some things will be the same, and other things will be different, and both are OK.

V. Grief Psychoeducation: Grief Reactions

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<th>CONTENT:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Reinforce the concept that grief reactions are both reactions to, and efforts to adapt to, the loss of an important relationship or possession.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Learn that grief reactions span a wide range of emotional, cognitive, behavioral, social, perceptual, and physical reactions.</td>
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<td>• Adapt your comments to the types of losses experienced by the group members, so that this work is relevant to their experiences.</td>
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A. Exploring Grief Reactions

Group Activity: Card Game

L1 Give each member four cards that have the words yes, no, sometimes, and a question mark written on them (make these cards by cutting paper the size of a standard playing card and writing the words on them).

_I am going to read various reactions that people may have following a traumatic death of someone close. For each reaction put one of your four cards down on the table to indicate whether or not you experience the reaction and if you have a question about the reaction._

After each statement or cluster of statements, the group leader may comment on the reaction or answer a question that is put forward.

L2 Put a checkmark next to each grief reaction on the flipchart for each group member who endorses that reaction. At the end, summary comments are made regarding the range, uniqueness, and universality of grief reactions reported by group members.

L1 1) Emotional Reactions (sad, angry, anxious, lonely, regretful)

_A very important way in which we experience grief is through our emotions. Grief-related emotions cover a very wide range of feelings. Some, like deep sadness, anguish, longing for their return, and anger, are very powerful, painful, and difficult to tolerate. Others, like gratitude, or the sweet sadness that comes as we reminisce about pleasant times together, comfort us and bring relief. Over time, as we engage in our grief work, more of these pleasant emotions may surface. Let’s talk about some of the most common grief-related emotions:_
Many teenagers who have lost someone close to them report that they often feel sad. This is especially true in circumstances in which they are reminded of the absence, such as while having meals together or in social gatherings.

Most of these teenagers describe feeling angry about their loss. This is especially true when the loved one died in an unexpected or violent way. Because this is so important, we’ll spend time talking about anger during our next session.

Many teenagers also report feeling anxious and worried about different things. For example, many report worrying that something bad might happen to others they care about, or to themselves; many also feel anxious and uncertain about the adversities they now face as a consequence of the loss.

Many teens report feeling lonely after a loss. They feel like there is a big piece that is missing out of their hearts and their lives, and really miss the special things they received from that relationship.

A lot of teens describe feeling guilty or having regrets over things that adversely affected the relationship, such as being unkind to them, not telling them how much they loved them, or not being able to say goodbye.

Cognitive Reactions (preoccupied with thoughts of them, uncertain, distracted)

Teenagers also experience grief over a loss through their thinking—that is, cognitively.

- They find that they are often uncertain about things, such as what the future holds, or how they can cope with the adversities generated by the loss.
- Many report that they are more easily distracted, and that it’s harder for them to pay attention.
- (And very important for us) teenagers who have experienced loss through violent death or destruction of their property report being preoccupied by disturbing thoughts or images of the person and how they died. These thoughts are often very distressing and distracting, and make it hard to retrieve good, pleasant memories of the person or belonging. Sometimes these thoughts are so unpleasant that the person avoids reminiscing or talking about the loved one they have lost, and this can interrupt the grieving process. We’ll focus on this in greater detail in future sessions.

Perceptual Reactions (sensing their presence nearby, “seeing” or “hearing” them)

Some grieving teens also report having what they call “weird” or “abnormal” perceptual experiences, such as when:

- you sense the presence of a deceased loved one nearby
- you seem to “see” or “hear” them, such as catching a glimpse of their face in a crowd
- feeling like things aren’t real, like their death wasn’t real, or that you or the world around you isn’t real

Actually, these seemingly peculiar experiences are very normal, especially shortly after the loss, when our minds are struggling to accept the reality of the loss. These experiences demonstrate how our minds are wishing that the loss really happened and that our loved ones would come back to us, even if only in our imagination.

Behavioral Responses (crying or weeping, searching for them, avoiding loss reminders, acting absent-minded or distracted)

Grieving teenagers also react to their losses through their behavior. It is very common for them to:

- cry or to weep
- to find themselves searching for the deceased or being “on the lookout” for them to show up, such as imagining that it’s them whenever they hear the front door open
- avoid people, places, or things that make them feel the absence (loss
• acting absent-minded or distracted, like they have other things on their mind
• grieving teenagers may also try to cope in destructive ways, such as by abusing substances to try to numb their pain and calm their nerves

5) **Social Responses** (decreased interest and motivation for relationships, boredom, being critical, angry, or irritated, withdrawing from others)

*Grieving teenagers also may experience a change in how they relate to other people. They may experience:*
  • a decrease in their interest and motivation to form relationships
  • they may feel bored with life
  • they may get easily irritated by others, or become angry and critical
  • they may withdraw from others, even though they feel lonely and bored

6) **Physical Responses** (feeling fatigued, lethargic, physical agitation, jumpiness, restlessness, hyperactivity, get sick more easily)

*Grieving teenagers also react to their losses through their physical bodies. They may show signs of:*
  • feeling fatigued, lethargic, or out of energy
  • feeling agitated, jumpy, restless, or hyperactive
  • getting sick more easily
  • muscle weakness

L1 Make summary comments

**B. Monitoring Grief Reactions: Today’s “Grief Weather Report”**

Now that group members have a working knowledge of the range of grief symptoms, the following activity may be used to provide a vocabulary for group members to describe the severity of grief reactions they are experiencing at the present moment. This activity will be used as an initial Check-In exercise as well.


Explain that grief is like weather, in that it can change at any time. There can be stormy days in which you experience very strong grief reactions; there can be cloudy days when you have some grief reactions; partly sunny days when you have few grief reactions; or sunny clear days when you have no grief reactions.

L1 (Process) Invite each group member to report what kind of a day they are having today. As appropriate, inquire what kinds of thoughts and feelings go with their current weather condition. For those experiencing “stormy” weather, inquire whether they remember encountering anything that may have triggered this reaction.

**VI. Grief Psychoeducation: Review Loss Reminders**
CONTENT:

- Review the two categories of loss reminders as needed
- Emphasize that meaning loss reminders differ greatly in variety and the personal meaning of the reminder to the individual
- Review how loss reminders elicit grief symptoms, often in “pangs” or intense waves

PROCESS:

- Increase motivation for participating in grief work by emphasizing how grief symptoms and loss reminders intrude into daily life.

As we discussed in our second session, posttraumatic stress symptoms and grief reactions do not usually appear out of nowhere. Instead, they are typically triggered by different types of reminders:

- Posttraumatic stress symptoms are evoked by trauma reminders (like loud noises, seeing damaged buildings, or seeing planes flying overhead). They are linked mainly to the past—to the terrible thing that happened.
- Grief reactions are evoked by loss reminders (like holidays or other family gatherings where their absence is strongly felt). A loss reminder is anything (inside of you or outside of you) that evokes thoughts and feelings related to the loss of someone or something you love.
- (Summarize) Thus, trauma reminders call your attention to the traumatic circumstances in which the original loss occurred (i.e., HOW they died). Loss reminders call our attention to what it is like for us to live without them in the here-and-now, and to what it will be like to be without them in the future.

L1 Display Flipchart (“Loss Reminders”)

L2 (Review concepts as needed):

Loss Reminders generally fall into two major categories:

1. **Adversities Generated by the Loss**

   The loss of a loved one or cherished possession is stressful not only because of the loss itself, but also because of the many additional adversities it generates. When you suffer a major loss, your life changes in many ways. Changes may come in the form of additional hardships, such as a loss in family income, taking on new responsibilities, or the introduction of additional tensions among family members. Changes may also come in the form of moving to a new location and adjusting to a very different lifestyle. Contending with these adversities can often bring the loss to mind, as we think about how things would be different if they were still with us. Teens who have lost a family member often say things like these (cite as appropriate):

   **Loss of a person (through death, disappearance, or physical separation)**
   - “Since (my brother) died, I’ve had to take over his chores and responsibilities, as well as keep my old ones”
   - “Our family’s daily routines have changed ever since (Dad’s) death. Now we do lots of things differently, and it doesn’t feel the same.”
   - “When I worry about having enough money or I’m afraid at night, I think about my (father) and how different it would be if he were here...he always made us feel safe and secure.”
   - “Whenever I have to make dinner I think about my (mother) because she always did that.”
   - “There are many things that I used to do with my (brother) that I have to do by myself now, or with someone else.”
   - “It is so hard to make new friends. Whenever I feel like I don’t fit in or feel lonely, it reminds me of my old friends and I miss them a lot.”

   **Loss of one’s home (through destruction or refugee status)**
• “My living circumstances are overcrowded and inferior to what we used to have in our old home. Every day they make me think about what we have lost and I long for my old way of life.”
• “Life is much more uncertain and difficult than before. Nowadays, we don’t eat as well, or go on nice vacations and do things that cost a lot of money. It makes me miss the way things were before we lost our home.”
• “Every time I see my parents worrying about money, I re-experience our loss. I keep thinking about how much better things were before the war.”

L1 PROCESS (continue until group members understand the concepts and grasp their personal relevance). Facilitating questions:
• Have you had to take on additional chores and responsibilities because _____ is not around?
• Have your day-to-day routines changed since you lost ____________________?
• Are there hardships that you and your loved ones now face that keep reminding you of what you have lost? What?
• What goes through your mind at those times? How do you feel when those thoughts go through your mind?
• (Emphasize, as appropriate, the chain reaction):
  stressful situation (loss reminder) ➔ hurtful thought ➔ emotional distress

2. Empty Situations

The second category of loss reminders consists of empty situations. An empty situation is a setting in which we keenly feel the absence of the person or thing we have lost. These include times when we want to share our achievements with them, or stressful times when we miss their advice and support. Other very common empty situations are social gatherings, such as holidays and other special events, which aren’t at all the same when they are not there. Grieving teens describe empty situations in ways like these (cite as appropriate):
• “I miss my (father) at night when our favorite TV show comes on.”
• “I really miss my (father) when I see my friends talking to their dads.”
• “I miss my (brother) whenever I see people playing basketball—we used to play together and I loved watching him play”
• “I am reminded of my (uncle) whenever we have his favorite dish.”
• “I'm doing better in school now and I wish my Dad were here to see my grade reports.”
• “Whenever I do something that I used to do with my (brother), I get lonely and sad.”
• “I use to love Christmastime, because it was a time for our entire family to gather together. Now, Christmas is one of the saddest times of the year, because we all feel my (uncle)’s absence.”
• “I feel like I don’t have a man in my life to help me out when I need it, so I feel kind of deserted. I especially miss my father when a stressful situation comes up, because I want his advice and moral support.”

L1 PROCESS CURRENT EMPTY SITUATIONS
• Do “empty situations” such as these remind you of your losses?
• What types of “empty situations” evoke the strongest grief reactions—which are hardest to cope with?
• What grief reactions do you have in response to being reminded in this way?
• (Emphasize, as appropriate, the chain reaction):
  stressful situation (loss reminder) ➔ hurtful thought ➔ emotional distress

Anticipating future empty situations
Knowing how empty situations act as loss reminders helps us to anticipate future reminders and to prepare for them. For example, teens may say:
• “I know I’ll miss my father deeply when I graduate from high school, because I’ll want him to be there and to be proud of me.”
• “I can tell that my wedding day will be bittersweet. Even though we’ll be celebrating, I’ll also be thinking about my father and how he won’t be around to see his grandchildren.”
L1 PROCESS FUTURE EMPTY SITUATIONS

- When you think about the future, when are the times in your life that you think you will miss them the most?
- What do you think that it will be like to be without them at that time?

BOTH PROCESS MAJOR CONCEPTS OF THE SESSION

In the time remaining, lead a discussion of grief symptoms and loss reminders that helps members to process these concepts on an experiential level. Facilitating questions:

- “How do you experience grief over your losses?” (which symptoms do you experience?)
- “Do you grieve in the same way now as you did in the first months/year after the loss?” (if not, “how has your grieving changed?”)
- Which loss reminders are the most difficult for you to deal with?
- “Do your family members and friends who have suffered losses tend to grieve in the same way?” (If not, “Do these different ways of grieving make it hard to support and understand each other?”)
- “Do your family members and friends who have suffered losses react to the same loss reminders, or do you respond to different reminders?”

VII. Summary and Practice Exercises

| CONTENT: Summarize and bring closure to the session. |
| PROCESS: Motivate group members to use these two skills. |

L1 Summarize the session: Today we talked about grief.
- We learned that grief is a normal reaction to the loss of someone or something that we are attached to.
- We also learned that grieving is ultimately a healthy process, because it helps us accept and adapt to the loss.
- We learned about grief reactions, and that they may be expressed through a wide range of emotional, psychological, behavioral, social, and physical symptoms.
- We learned that grieving lasts a long time—for as long as we feel the loss.
- We also learned that grief symptoms tend to fluctuate in their intensity. In some circumstances we don’t grieve over a loss, whereas in other circumstances we may experience sharp pangs of grief. These “pangs” of grief are often evoked by loss reminders.
- Lastly, we reviewed two types of loss reminders—adversities generated by the loss, and empty situations.

L2 Pass out the practice exercise worksheet from the Posters & Handouts Manual.

L2 Assign Practice Exercise: We would like you to apply these concepts to your lives this week. Your practice exercise consists of two parts:
- The first part is to identify a situation this week in which you encounter a loss reminder. It may be an adversity generated by the loss, or it may be an empty situation. Your task here is to describe the loss reminder and the grief reactions that it evokes from you.
- (If time permits, have members anticipate difficult loss reminders, identify the type of support they will need, and whom they will turn to.)
NOTE: Also ask group members to bring in a photo of the deceased that they wouldn’t mind leaving here for the duration of the group. Explain that you want to pin all of the group members’ pictures to a board that will only be brought out during the group to help us keep in mind why we are here.

VIII. Transitional Activity & Check-Out

L1 You may lead the group in a chosen transitional activity and then engage the group in the following questions:

- How are you feeling now? (Use thermometer ratings.)
- What did you learn about yourself today?
MODULE III: Coping With

Traumatic Loss and Grief

Session 2
Understanding Grief Reactions: Focus on Anger
MODULE III, Session 2
Understanding Grief Reactions: Focus on Anger

Conceptual Underpinnings

Survivors may accept, retain, and dwell on disturbing thoughts, images, and feelings associated with the death of a loved one (or loss of a cherished possession) because of their personal symbolic meaning. More specifically, survivors may endure these distressing thoughts and feelings on the basis of the following (hurtful) beliefs and assumptions:

- “Because I lived and she died, I should punish myself by living with her death every day” (survivor guilt).
- “I should have been the one to die, instead of him/her. I should live my life in pain and suffering (and perhaps risk-taking) to make amends for his/her death.”
- “If I don’t always try to remember how she died, I may not be able to remember other important things about her.”
- “The tragic circumstances of her death eclipse all the good things that came from how she lived. It’s all I can think about when I remember her.”
- “If I let go of my outrage and desires for vengeance, it would mean that I find the circumstances under which he died to be acceptable—and that would be disloyal.”
- “If I let go of my outrage and desire for vengeance, it would mean that I condone the immoral actions of those responsible for his death.”
- “Because the cause of his death was unacceptable, I cannot allow myself to accept his/her death and move on.”

For these individuals, special therapeutic focus should be directed towards creating a safe, accepting, containing environment in which they can give voice to their anger, protest, outrage, resentment, guilt, shame, and/or deep hurt.

Content Objectives

7) Discuss ways in which traumatic death or loss can make the grieving process more difficult.
8) Provide a “big picture” overview of how Modules II and III are designed to help the group members carry out their grief work. In this overview, explain how Module II activities helped you carry out the first steps of grief work (acknowledging the reality of the loss, processing painful emotional reactions to the death and its circumstances) and how your group activities in this module will continue this grief work.
9) Provide an opportunity to express and explore feelings—particularly anger, shame, and guilt—related to the death of a loved one.

Process Objectives

6) (Everyone) Work together to create a group atmosphere of support, validation, acceptance, and sympathetic understanding that:
- Can contain, tolerate, accept, and bear witness to such intense emotions as deep sorrow, longing, intense anger, and guilt
• Helps members to feel comfortable experiencing and sharing their grief-related thoughts, emotions, and efforts to cope.

7) (Group Leaders) validate members’ grief symptoms by imbuing them with a sense of meaning. Explain how these symptoms reflect how deeply they still feel the loss, and the very personal meaning that the loss carries for them.

8) (Group Leaders) normalize members’ experiences by pointing out commonalities among members’ grief-related experiences, such as their losses, grief symptoms, and current adversities.

9) (Group Leaders) facilitate members’ connection and re-connection with living members of their social networks. This process involves active investment in social relationships in the form of supportive exchanges (e.g., giving and receiving emotional support, feedback, etc.) among group members and with significant others outside the group (in their Practice Exercises).

Session Overview

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Supplies

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Handouts

• Five Steps to Getting Support
• My Reactions to Loss Reminders
**Session Highlights**

- Check-In
- Review Practice Exercises
- How Do We Grieve, and How Does Violent Loss Complicate Grieving?
- Loss-related Emotional Reactions: Focus on Anger
- Summary and

**Flipcharts**

**Five Steps to Getting Support**

1. What Do I Want?
2. Who Should I Ask?
3. Find the Right Time
4. Request With an "I" Message:
   - Tell them what I am feeling.
   - Tell them what happened (outside and inside)
   - Tell them what I want them to do

**Grief Processes**

1. Recognize the Loss
2. Understand and Experience Grief Reactions
3. Recall and Preserve Memories of the Loved One
4. Adjust to A New World in Which the Loved One is Absent
5. Re-engage in
Feeling Angry About a Death

1. About the Way They Died
   - It’s not right
   - He/she deserved better

2. At The People Responsible
   - They should be punished

3. At the World
   - I need him/her
   - It’s not fair
   - He/she was too young
   - We didn’t deserve this
   - All my hopes, plans, and wishes involving him/her must be altered or abandoned

4. At God
   - For letting it happen
   - For not protecting us

5. At The People Around Me
   - For the way people treat me since the death
   - Because others go unscathed while we struggle and suffer

6. At the Person Who Died
   - For leaving us when we really need you
   - For the hardships your death has created for us

Facts About Angry Feelings

1. Everyone who loses someone close feels angry at times.

2. It's OK to feel angry.

3. Being angry doesn't mean you need to hurt yourself or others. How you respond is your choice.

4. “Hard” feelings of anger, irritability, and frustration often cover more “vulnerable” feelings of sadness, pain, and longing.

5. If you give up being angry about your loved one’s death, it doesn't mean you have forgotten him or her.

6. There are different ways to cope with...
I. Check-In

L1 How is your “grief weather report” today? (use weather graphics)
- Is anything going on that may make it difficult for you to keep your mind in the group?
- Briefly review "Today's Highlights" (Flipchart 1):

L2 Display board with photos of deceased brought last week. Ask if any additional pictures were brought. Encourage those who have not yet brought a photo to do so.

Leave board in prominent sight for duration of group.

II. Review Practice Exercise

CONTENT:
- Review the group session format.

PROCESS:
- Provide feedback and encouragement about how the program can help them with their goals.

L1 Last week we reviewed what we know about grief:
- we learned that grief is a normal reaction to loss
- that it is ultimately a beneficial process, because it helps us to adapt to life without having our loved one or cherished possession physically present in our lives
- we learned about the many different ways in which we may experience grief symptoms—emotionally, mentally, physically, behaviorally, socially, and so forth
- we learned that grief reactions tend to fluctuate in their intensity—in some situations they are strong, and in other situations, we may experience them hardly at all
- we learned how these fluctuations can be explained by loss reminders, which evoke grief reactions, and we talked about two major types of loss reminders—adversities generated by the loss, and empty situations, which make us painfully aware of our loved one’s absence

L1 Present Flipchart 2.

L2 To help us gain more familiarity with these concepts, we asked you, as a practice exercise, to do three things during this past week:
- The first part was to identify a situation during this past week in which you encountered a loss reminder. Your task here was to describe the loss reminder and the grief reactions that it evoked from you.
- The second part was based on an understanding that an important part of grief work is connecting with living people. Thus, we asked you to use the Five Steps to Getting Support to draw on the support of another person to cope with your loss reminder.
- Bring a photo of your lost loved one.
Let’s find out how the practice exercise went. Today, we need your help. We’d like you to interview each other about your loss reminders and your reactions to it—how you thought and felt. Then, we’d like you to talk about how your request for support from another person went. (Instruct the group members to use the Flipchart to interview each other about):

1. What did you want?
2. Who did you ask?
3. What time did you pick to talk to them?
4. What was your "I-Message"?
   - What did you tell them about how you were feeling?
   - What did you tell them about what happened OUTSIDE of you?
   - What did you tell them about what happened INSIDE of you?
   - What did you ask them to do?
5. How did you express your appreciation?
   - Overall, how did it go—how satisfied were you with the result?
   - If the discussion didn’t go as well as you wanted, what could you do next time to get better results? (Problem solve as needed.)

Remember to be good listeners by listening carefully, asking questions when something is not clear, providing feedback, and sharing a similar experience that you’ve had (if you’ve had one!). This will help your conversation partner to feel understood and accepted.

BOTH Monitor and provide encouragement and feedback as needed.

L2 (Summarize): Thanks for your help. It’s wonderful to see you helping each other like this—these communication skills will serve you well, both now and in the years to come, as you give and receive support from your friends and loved ones. Supportive exchanges like these are particularly important to the grief work that we are doing right now, as we invest in our relationships with the people around us. So keep working on these skills! Use them to get the support you need for the work we are doing in our group, as well as for other important needs you have. Good work!

### III. Exploring Loss-Related Emotional Reactions: Focus on Anger

**CONTENT:** This two-part activity is designed to:
- increase awareness of the spectrum of grief-related emotional reactions
- help members to recognize how grief feelings may change over time
- identify grief-related emotional reactions that members are currently experiencing
- transition to a focus on processing anger- and guilt-related thoughts and emotions.

**PROCESS:**
- Normalize members’ emotional reactions by emphasizing commonalities among members’ experiences.
- Validate members’ emotional reactions by pointing out that they make sense in light of the nature of their losses.
- The group should function as a non-judgmental containing environment that can bear witness to these painful, and sometimes shameful or guilty, admissions with
understanding, compassion, and acceptance.

HINTS:

- Seek to broaden group members' understanding and experience of their anger. For instance, if revenge fantasies are disclosed ("I want to find those men who planted the mine that killed my father and plant mines all around their house"), you can (1) normalize and validate this reaction, and (2) gently interpret the fantasy as a reflection of how much they must have loved their father and how much it hurts to have him gone: ("The intensity of your anger and desire to get back at those responsible lets us understand how much losing your father has hurt you.

- It is easier for adolescents to externalize their anger by focusing on revenge rather than to feel the pain, sadness, and helplessness that lie at the core of their loss. Your task is to help them vent their anger and then to gently lead them back to the difficult and often conflicting feelings that underlie the anger.

- Anger directed towards (living) others may also mask members’ anger towards themselves or towards the deceased loved one. For example, members may feel guilty because they argued with their fathers the last time they saw them, or because the members never openly expressed their love for their fathers. Members may also feel guilty over their anger towards the deceased for abandoning them.

- Unresolved feelings of anger and/or guilt may be particularly likely in cases where the relationship with the deceased was highly conflictual or abusive.

A. Exploring Grief-Related Emotions

GROUP ACTIVITY: Emotional Timeline

L2 Draw this timeline on a board or large piece of paper:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Emotions During the First Few Weeks</th>
<th>Emotions During the Past Few Weeks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Death Occurs</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

L1 (Process) Facilitate a discussion about the emotions that group members experienced during the first few weeks following the death (you may want to insert additional lines demarking the period of time in which they may have not known the fate of their family member, and at the time when the death was confirmed).

L2 Write in the names of the emotions that members report in the appropriate columns. For the first interval (first few weeks), make sure group members explore/describe the feelings of numbness, shock, disbelief, and helplessness. More recent emotions will probably include anger and guilt.
GROUP ACTIVITY: Waves of Emotion

L2 Drawing on the above exercise, write in the most frequently endorsed emotions identified on the timeline underneath a drawing of a series of waves (see below):

Anger                  Guilt                  Sadness

L1 It may be helpful to think of grief-related emotional reactions like waves in the sea. Waves come and go, they can be strong, medium, or weak in their intensity, and they have peaks and valleys. One day you may be “riding” a wave of anger, and then after a while it begins to weaken, and you are next picked up by a wave of guilt-related feelings, or sadness, or perhaps a bittersweet emotion like being grateful that you had such a special person in your life (use the predominant emotions reported above, making sure to include anger, guilt, and numbness).

L2 Give group members different colored markers.

We’d like you to draw yourself in a boat (or surfboard, or ocean kayak) on an emotional wave that you are currently riding on.

(Both) (Process) Facilitate a discussion re:
• individual differences among group members in their experiences of emotion,
• commonalities among members’ experiences of emotion,
• the ways in which emotions change for individuals over time and across circumstances,
• transition to the next topic by calling attention to ways in which different emotional waves impact behavior and relationships. (“What do you do when you are angry/sad/feeling guilty?”)

B. Focus on Anger

L1: Lead a discussion on anger.

One of the most common emotional reactions to loss—especially a traumatic loss that is the result of human intent—is anger. Teenagers who have suffered these types of losses often report feeling anger, and even rage, at those responsible for the death, at God (for letting this happen), and sometimes at the person who died.

L2 Display Flipchart 4 and handout the Anger Worksheet showing different types of anger with rating scales by each type. Ask group members to fill out the worksheet indicating the degree to which they experience the different types of anger.
Facilitate a discussion about group members’ angry feelings. Read each type and ask for a show of hands of those who rated the item “Very Angry”. If few people are acknowledging these levels of anger, you may ask for those who endorsed “Somewhat Angry”. Use the process questions listed below to guide the discussion. Note that “Anger At Yourself” is a special type of anger that may be related to feelings of guilt. Guilt will be the focus of the next group of exercises.

**Feeling Angry About a Death**

1. **About the Way They Died**
   - It’s not right
   - He/she deserved better
2. **At The People Responsible**
   - They should be punished
3. **At the World**
   - I need him/her
   - It’s not fair
   - He/she was too young
   - We didn’t deserve this
   - All my hopes, plans, and wishes involving him/her must be altered or abandoned
4. **At God**
   - For letting it happen
   - For not protecting us
5. **At The People Around Me**
   - For the way people treat me since the death
   - Because others go unscathed while we struggle and suffer
6. **At the Person Who Died**
   - For leaving us when we really need you
   - For the hardships your death has created for us
   - For unkind things you did while you were alive
   - For not keeping your promises that we’ll have a future together
7. **At Yourself**
   - For not being there to help
   - For not preventing the death/injury
   - For things you have said or done (or not said and done)
   - For anger or estrangement toward the deceased

**Process Questions:**
- Do you relate to the angry feelings I have described?
- What sort of angry feelings do you experience?
- What part of the loss do you feel most angry about?
- When do you feel angry?
- What do you do when you feel this way? (Who do you turn to? How do you cope?)
- What helps you to feel better?
L1  You all did a great job talking about your angry feelings. I know that, for some of you, this is the first time you have shared some of these thoughts, and that takes courage. Before we finish for today, let's talk about "some facts about angry feelings".

L2  Display and review Flipchart 5.

**Facts About Angry Feelings**

1. Everyone who loses someone close feels angry at times.

2. It's OK to feel angry.

3. Being angry doesn't mean you need to hurt yourself or others. How you respond is your choice.

   *It is your decision how to respond to your feelings. This means that you do not have to displace your anger onto others, punish yourself even though you are feeling guilty, entertain suicidal thoughts, or take unnecessary risks.*

4. “Hard” feelings of anger, irritability, and frustration often cover “softer” feelings of sadness, pain, and longing

   *Angry feelings are often based on feelings of loss, helplessness, and sadness. It is sometimes easier to feel angry rather than to feel these other emotions.*

5. If you give up being angry about the death, it doesn't mean you have forgotten him or her.

   *Some teens feel that they must hold on to their anger or else they will be disloyal or forgetful of their loved ones. We want you to consider a different possibility: holding onto the anger helps to keep your painful feelings alive, and may make it more difficult to think fondly about, and remember, your loved one as they would want to be remembered.*

6. Explore and problem-solve ways in which teens can cope constructively with anger. Elicit ideas from the group. Ideas include:

   - talk about your feelings with others
   - replace hurtful thoughts with helpful thoughts
   - carry out a constructive activity (this may be related to the mode of death, such as participating in a drunk-driving awareness campaign, etc.)
   - exercise to “get it out of your system”

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**V. Summary and Practice Exercises**

**CONTENT:** Summarize and bring closure to the session.

**PROCESS:** Motivate group members to use these two skills.
Today we learned about grief work—that is, the specific processes that help us to adjust to a loss.

- We also learned how traumatic losses can interfere with and complicate the grieving process.
- We also spent some time sharing our emotional reactions to the losses we have experienced, focusing especially on anger—a very common and distressing emotion to contend with.
- The good news is that these feelings of deep pain, bitterness, and anger, which may be strong now, can lessen over time. Our hope is that, when you experience a loss reminder, such as an anniversary, you may still deeply miss your loved one, but yet be able to reminisce about him or her and enjoy sharing memories with others.

**Assign Practice Exercise:** Like last week, we would like you to practice the skills of identifying a time when you encounter a loss reminder and take note of your grief reactions. We’d like to add a step this week and have you think about what kind of a coping response would be helpful for you at that point. You may think of options from your Personal Coping Strategies Sheet, or think of the type of support that would feel best to you. It could be seeking out a good friend to talk to, sharing feelings, getting a hug, or finding someone to have fun with. Next week, come prepared to talk about one of your strongest “grief moments” for the week and describe your coping response.

Remind those who haven’t done so to bring a photo of their loved one for the group bulletin board.

**VI. Transitional Activity & Check-Out**

You may lead the group in a chosen transitional activity and then engage the group in the following questions:

- How are you feeling now? (Use thermometer ratings.)
- What did you learn about yourself today?

**End of Session**
MODULE III: Coping With

Traumatic Loss and Grief

Session 3:
Understanding Grief Reactions: Focus on Guilt
MODULE III, Session 3
Understanding Grief Reactions: Focus on Guilt

Content Objectives

10) To engage group members in exercises to help them identify feelings of guilt that they might have and provide tools with which they can challenge distorted notions of self-blame.
11) Provide psychoeducation on common guilt
12) Utilize the group to help challenge mistaken notions of foreseeability, preventability, and culpability.

Process Objectives

(1) Maintain a supportive environment with which to explore these very sensitive issues.
(2) (Group Leaders) normalize members' experiences by pointing out commonalities among members' grief-related experiences, such as their losses, grief symptoms, and current adversities.
(3) (Everyone) Work together to create a group atmosphere of support, validation, acceptance, and sympathetic understanding.

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Supplies

**Every Session**
- Flipchart
- White Paper
- Markers
- Pencils/pens
- Kleenex
- Tape
- Photo Board

**Special to This Session**

Handouts

- Five Steps to Getting Support
- My Reactions to Loss Reminders

Flipcharts

**Session Highlights**

- Check-In

**Five Steps to Getting Support**

1. What Do I Want?
2. What Should I Do?
Module III – Session 3
Understanding Grief Reactions: Focus on Guilt

I. Check-In

Grief Processes

6. Recognize the Loss

7. React to the Loss

8. Remember the Deceased and the Relationship

9. Give Up Our Old Ways of Relating to the Deceased

10. Move Into the New World Without...
L1 How is your “grief weather” today? (use weather graphics.)

- Is anything going on that may make it difficult for you to keep your mind in the group?
- Briefly review "Today's Highlights" (Flipchart 1):

L2 Display board with photos of deceased brought last week. Ask if any additional pictures were brought. Encourage those who have not yet brought a photo to do so. Leave the board in prominent sight for the duration of the group.

II. Review Practice Exercise

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<td>Review the group session format.</td>
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<tr>
<th>PROCESS:</th>
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<tr>
<td>Provide feedback and encouragement about how the program can help them with their goals.</td>
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L1 Last week we reviewed what we know about grief:

- we learned that grief is a normal reaction to loss
- that it is ultimately a beneficial process, because it helps us to adapt to life without having our loved one or cherished possession physically present in our lives
- we learned about the many different ways in which we may experience grief reactions—emotionally, behaviorally, socially, and so forth
- we learned that grief reactions tend to fluctuate in their intensity—in some situations they are strong, and in other situations, we may not experience them at all
- we learned how these fluctuations can be explained by loss reminders, which evoke grief reactions, and we talked about two major types of loss reminders—adversities generated by the loss, and empty situations, which remind us that they are no longer with us.

L1 Present Flipchart 2.

L2 To help us gain more familiarity with these concepts, we asked you, as a practice exercise, to do two things during this past week:

- The first part was to identify a situation during this past week in which you encountered a loss reminder. Your task here was to describe the loss reminder and the grief reactions that it evoked from you.
- The second part was to notice how you responded to the loss reminder, that is, what coping response you found most useful.

Let’s go around and see what you came up with. Remember to be good listeners by listening carefully, asking questions when something is not clear, providing feedback, and sharing a similar experience that you’ve had (if you’ve had one!). This will help your conversation partner to feel understood and accepted.

BOTH Monitor and provide encouragement and feedback as needed.

III. Exploring Loss-Related Emotional Reactions: Focus on Guilt
CONTENT:
• Build on last week’s exercise in which group members identified feelings of “anger towards myself”.
• Provide members with an opportunity to disclose and discuss their grief-related guilty feelings.
• (if appropriate) Point out how guilt-related feelings are more difficult to discuss than other grief-related emotions.

PROCESS:
• Allow members to ventilate their (often intense and poignant) feelings relating to remorse, regret, and guilt.
• Set the stage for a cognitive restructuring exercise in which members evaluate whether they really had control over the situation, or whether they are inappropriately assuming guilt for things they could not control.
• Normalize and validate as appropriate.

ACTIVITY: LEADER INTRODUCES TOPIC

Introduce this section with comments that cover the basic points presented below:

L1 When someone they love dies suddenly and violently, teens are often left with painful feelings of guilt. These guilty feelings can stem from being angry at the person while he or she was alive, or from disagreements they had with them that, now, cannot be resolved in person. If things had gone according to plan, then many of these conflicts would have been resolved in the course of time, just as they had many times before. But after an unexpected death, there is no time to say goodbye and make your peace. The “I love you” goes unsaid, the “I’m sorry” is left unspoken. The many, many things you would want to say and do for them, the wrinkles in your relationship that you would want to smooth out if you had to say goodbye, are left unfinished and broken off. A traumatic death leaves many teens feeling badly about how things ended. Heated or unkind words and acts, things they wish they would have said or done but assumed they had time to do in the future, even angry wishes for the other’s death or disappearance, now come back in the form of feelings of guilt, remorse, and regret.

Many teens also hold themselves responsible in some way for their loved one’s death, or at least the way they died. They may blame themselves for not being with their loved one at the end to provide protection and comfort. No matter how impossible it may have actually been to intervene, many teens are left with the haunting question, “what if”, in which they imagine how they could have prevented the death, or protected or rescued their loved one. These thoughts and feelings can plague grieving persons for months, even years, after the death.

Many people find it more difficult to understand and talk about their guilt than their anger. Even though it is difficult, we’d like to emphasize how important it is to work through these feelings, because feelings of guilt, remorse, and regret are often at the root of why people continue to feel badly for a long time after a tragic death. We hope that this group is a place where you feel comfortable making sense of these feelings and working on them. Does that sound OK?

This is a very personal and sensitive subject, and it is going to take a lot of trust and maturity from each of us. Please remember our agreement about confidentiality, which we made with each other the first time we met together. (Review as necessary.)

Last week, if you remember, we focused on anger (cite several types of anger identified by members). One of the types of anger we discussed was anger towards ourselves – for not being there, for things we said or didn’t say, for being angry or mean or distant sometimes, and (for some or
Perhaps many of us), for not doing something to prevent what happened. We talked about this several weeks ago when you shared how you wished that you could have stopped the death from happening.

**ACTIVITY:** GROUP COMPLETES WORKSHEET

L2 Distribute copies of the “Wishes and Regrets” worksheet and invite them to complete them, individually or in small groups. Assist them as necessary.

**ACTIVITY:** GROUP DISCUSSION

BOTH (Process) Invite members to share their thoughts and feelings of guilt, remorse, and regret. Sympathetically normalize and validate as appropriate. (HINT: If individuals choose to not share, encourage them to talk with a trusted adult or friend at another time.)

### IV. Identify and Revise Guilt-Related Cognitions

**CONTENT:**
- Distinguish guilt-related thoughts and emotions that are related to foreseeability and controllability from those that are related to unkind or inappropriate past actions that members now regret.
- Lead the group in identifying and challenging both types of hurtful thinking.

**PROCESS:**
- Allow members to ventilate their (often intense and poignant) feelings relating to remorse, regret, and guilt.
- Normalize and validate as appropriate.

**HINT:** Some issues (especially those involving ambivalent feelings in which the loved one has hurt the youth, such as physical or sexual abuse or neglect) may require individual attention and/or referral to a specialist. Obtain expert consultation as appropriate.

**ACTIVITY:** LEADER PRESENTS INFORMATION

L1 Thank you for sharing these very personal thoughts and feelings. We’d like to emphasize that many young people who experience a traumatic death tend to blame themselves for what happened, or for how they treated the person before they died, and consequently feel bad for a long time afterwards.

We’re calling your attention to this because we believe that many young people allow these thoughts and feelings to persecute and punish them in ways that are not helpful, or even deserved. This not only makes them feel bad about themselves, but it can get in the way of leading a good life of productive service, which is one of the best ways to make up for any (“all too human”) mistakes we really have made.

Before we proceed, let’s remember what we learned several sessions ago—that thoughts create feelings. Thus, if we want to find the source of a feeling—especially an unpleasant feeling, we need to search for the thought that produced it. Remember also that thoughts may be correct, or they may be incorrect and mistaken. Either way, correct or incorrect, thoughts produce feelings. We can’t tell, when we are experience a feeling, whether the thought that produced it was accurate or inaccurate. All we can tell is that we are believing the thought!

We’d like to apply this understanding to your feelings of guilt, remorse, and regret. As we do this, let’s keep in mind the important difference between helpful thoughts and unhelpful thoughts. Unhelpful thoughts may be accurate or inaccurate, but they are always pessimistic and self-defeating. They tie us up with feelings of helplessness, guilt, and unworthiness, to the point where we feel we can’t do anything to make things better, and that we don’t deserve to be happy and successful. Helpful thoughts, on the other hand, are accurate and constructive. They help us to remain hopeful and optimistic, so that we can persevere even when things aren’t going very well.

L2 Display Flipchart ? “Things I Blame Myself For”

L1 Let’s proceed. People’s guilt-producing thoughts often fall into two main categories:

**Category One:** I should have seen this coming and done something to protect my loved one.
This first category of thinking is based on the assumption that you should have been able to foresee what was about to happen, and to control what was about to happen. We can call these types of hurtful thoughts “crystal ball” hurtful thoughts and “superman” hurtful thoughts, because young people blame themselves because they didn’t see into the future (like fortune tellers do with a crystal ball) so that they could protect the people they love, and because they couldn’t intervene like superman and stop planes in mid-air, beat up the bad people and take away their weapons, or stop bullets in mid-air.

“Crystal ball” hurtful thoughts sound like this: (ideas for examples include):
• “I should have known this terrible thing was going to happen”...
• “I should have told him not to go to work today”...
• “I should have told her not to drive home that time of night”...
• “I should have known he was getting himself into trouble, running with the wrong crowd, and stopped him before it was too late”...

“Superman” hurtful thoughts involve blaming yourself for not having more control over what happened than any normal human being your age could be expected to have. They sound like this (ideas for examples include):
• “I should have been there to protect and comfort my sister when she really needed me—I’ll never forgive myself for not being at her side”...
• “All I needed to do was tell my Dad to go in late to work for once...then he’d be alive today.”
• “I should have known CPR or something to save my uncle’s life after he was badly hurt—I didn’t know what to do.”...
• “I should have been on that plane and stopped the hijackers before they took over”...
• “I should have stopped the plane from crashing into the building”...
• “I should have been there to take the bullet that ended my brother’s life”...

ACTIVITY: GROUP DISCUSSION

L1 Facilitate a group discussion focusing on whether members engage in this kind of hurtful thinking.
• Do you ever find yourself thinking like this—blaming yourself—for not being able to foresee or stop what was about to happen?
• Do any of your thoughts from the worksheet sound like this?

HINT: Rather than have you, the group leaders, decide whether a thought is accurate or a distortion, encourage group members to comment and dialogue about specific cases. Take advantage of the power of the peer group, and of their unique understanding of each other’s experiences, to maximize your therapeutic leverage.

ACTIVITY: GROUP LEADER COMMENTARY

[As appropriate, use any of the points in the commentary below:]

It is very important to keep in mind that these types of thoughts, although they are hurtful and make you feel guilty and unworthy, are commonly reported by young people who have suffered the traumatic loss of a loved one. They also help us to better understand about how you feel about your loss. These hurtful thoughts involve beating ourselves up, over and over again, with blaming thoughts about how we could have, and should have, done something or another that, in hindsight, may have prevented our loved one from being exposed to danger and death. And both help us to understand that it is easier to blame ourselves for not being able to see into the future and to step in like superman to stop what was about to happen, than to admit to ourselves that we had almost no control over what happened. It’s hard to admit to ourselves that many things—including dangerous and hurtful things—happen to our loved ones that are beyond our control. We cannot predict the future, we can’t control other people’s actions, and we can’t always be with our loved ones to keep them safe, no matter how much we love them. If love alone could protect our loved ones, then the world would be a much safer place to live in.

ACTIVITY: THOUGHT DISPUTATION EXERCISE (Category One Guilty Thoughts)
When you feel guilty about situations that were beyond your control, there are some things you can do to help yourself feel better. One of the best things you can do is to use positive self-talk to remind yourself that you really could not have known about or prevented what happened, and that you really did your best.

Invite group members to each identify one circumstance that was unforeseeable and out of their control that they, nevertheless, feel guilty about. Next, invite members to read or describe their guilty thought and the situation it is connected to. After each member presents his/her guilty thought, invite other group members to help him/her to challenge the truthfulness of the hurtful thought with a helpful thought or affirmation. Ideas include:

- “I cannot tell the future”
- “I did the best I could”
- “I couldn’t have known this would happen”
- “the best way I can make it up to him/her is to not be so hard on myself and to be kind to others”

Praise the group members for their good ideas and helpfulness, and invite the member presenting the guilty thought to write down the one or two affirmations that seem to him/her to be most believable and useful. Repeat this for as many group members as are willing to share their guilty thoughts relating to prediction and control.

**ACTIVITY: LEADER PRESENTS INFORMATION**

**Category Two**

- I did, said, or even just thought things about (the deceased) that I feel badly about.
- OR
- There are things I should have done or said that I didn’t, and now I can’t make it up to him/her.

The second category of hurtful thoughts involves being preoccupied with things that we did or didn’t do with our loved one while they were alive. Thoughts of these things may produce feelings of guilt, as well as regret and remorse—having strong wishes that we could take back our words or our actions and to make things right. We may have said or done unkind things during moments of anger that we didn’t really mean. Or we may recall times when they needed or would have appreciated our help and we were slow to give it.

Remorseful thoughts sound like this (ideas for examples include):

- “Three days before my Dad was killed we had a big argument and I yelled at him and called him a selfish jerk and told him to leave me alone. Now I wish that I could take back what I said. I feel so bad that the last words we spoke to each other were in anger.”
- “My Mom was sick for months and I was so mad at her for feeling sorry for herself and manipulating us that I stopped going up to her room and helping her, and I never really told her that I loved her…I never really thought she was so sick that she would actually die.”
- “I used to really tease my younger sister all the time. I was mean to her sometimes, and would call her names and make her cry. But since she died suddenly in a car accident, I keep on thinking of all the things I did and I feel sad, because now I can’t tell her that I’m sorry and show her how much I really love her.”
- “My Dad never kept his word with us …the last time he stood me up, I remember sitting on the front porch with my baseball glove and bat, thinking how much I hated him and wishing he would drop off the face of the earth, or just die so he wouldn’t hurt or disappoint us any more…Since he died, I feel angry and confused. Having him die didn’t erase my feelings of anger towards him, but I still feel sad and miss having a Dad. At least when he was alive, I had hope that things could get better.”

**ACTIVITY: GROUP DISCUSSION**

Facilitate a group discussion focusing on whether members engage in this kind of hurtful thinking.

- Do you ever find yourself thinking like this—blaming yourself for things that you did or didn’t do?
- Do you feel angry towards your loved one for things he/she did or didn’t do while they were alive?
Do any of your thoughts from the worksheet sound like these?

**ACTIVITY: LEADER COMMENTARY**

[As appropriate, use any of the points in the commentary below:]

These types of thoughts are also very common among people who have suffered a traumatic loss. And it's normal to behave and to feel this way. How many times each month in our close relationships do we do or say things for which we later say (or want to say), 'I'm sorry?' or 'I'll make it up to you?' Rarely do we keep a clean slate in our relationships—there are almost always things that need to be resolved over time. One of the things about sudden and tragic death that is so hard to deal with is that it takes that time away without warning.

Remember that, as we think about the past, we need to keep a balanced and realistic perspective. It may indeed be true that you did some unkind things that you now feel bad about, but it is almost certainly true that you did and said many kind things for your loved one for which you should feel very good about and thankful for. It is also not fair to harshly blame yourself when you had no idea that there would never be another opportunity to make it up to them, that this was not just another bit of give-and-take between the two of you that would work itself out in time. So, as we work together, let's think of ways in which you can think in a more balanced and compassionate way. For instance, are you willing to give both you and your loved one credit for the good things you did for each other? Are you willing to forgive one another for mistakes you have made?

(as appropriate) It is also important to keep in mind that your loved one may have done some things while he or she was alive that hurt you, and this may also make it hard to make your peace with him or her. You may have some very mixed feelings as you think about them, such as missing them AND feeling angry at the same time. You may feel hurt, or be mad at them, for not treating you the way they should have while they were alive. You may also be mad at them for abandoning you, or perhaps for doing something that contributed to their own death, like not being careful enough or drinking too much alcohol and then driving. These types of feelings are also frequently reported by young people who have suddenly lost a loved one. And they may be just as hard, or even harder, to work through, as their own feelings of guilt and regret. Please feel free to speak with us about this on a one-on-one basis after or outside of group if you wish.

(as appropriate) As you identify your feelings and sort them out, please know that we are not suggesting that you push out of your memories all of the less-than-ideal parts of your relationship with your loved one. As young people, it is especially important that you keep a balanced memory of your loved one—warts and all. Why? Because, as young people, you are moving away from the idealized image of your parents and other important life figures you held as a child, in which they are close to perfect and you just want to be like them, to seeing both their strengths AND their imperfections. You can't relate in a realistic, meaningful way as a teenager to an overidealized image. One of the most important tasks of this stage of your life is to decide who and what you want to become as a person. What are your values? Your sense of what is right and wrong? The personality characteristics you want to possess? As you think through these things, you'll need to reflect on which of the good parts of the important people in your lives you'll want to emulate (to keep with you and make your own). But you'll also decide how you want to be different, and hopefully, better men and women by improving on their weaknesses and mistakes. We do not dishonor our loved ones by remembering them as imperfect people—they wouldn't be perfect even if they were alive today! But let's use our memories of both their goodness and their weaknesses for a good and honorable purpose—that of making ourselves into better people as a result of having known them.

Another reason why we want to maintain a realistic image (the good parts and the bad parts) of our loved one is because if we hold only an idealized image—where our loved one was almost perfect and NO ONE can even come close to being as wonderful and superhuman as they were, then we become more likely to reject new relationships. What living person can possibly compare to a flawless, heroic, superhuman dead person? We'd always be thinking or saying, “My (loved one) wouldn't have done that!” or “My (loved one) would've done that differently!” without acknowledging that, when they were alive, our loved one often made mistakes and sometimes disappointed us. Comparing the people around us to a perfect standard can make them feel inadequate and unwanted, with the consequence that we alienate ourselves and feel lonely. If we take this idealization to an extreme, then we'd prefer to sit around and reminisce all day long and avoid contact with living people, because they constantly disappoint us by not measuring up to our perfect standards. Granted,
our loved one WAS special and had many wonderful qualities, and no one CAN take their place, nor do we want them to. But we do need to find room in our lives and hearts for new relationships with living (and imperfect!) people that will provide us with the support and opportunities for service that we need to be fully alive and happy.

**ACTIVITY: GROUP COPING EXERCISE (Category Two Guilty Thoughts)**

(In group or as a practice exercise) Invite group members to write a letter to the deceased in which they discuss their regrets from the “Wishes and Regrets” worksheet. In this letter they can:

- express their regrets (in the form of thoughts and feelings) about what they wish they hadn’t done, and about what they wish they had done.
- express their regrets about what they wish their loved one would and would not have done while they were alive. What still makes the group members feel hurt, sad, confused, or angry?
- In another letter, invite group members to write a letter on behalf of their loved one, who has read and is responding to their first letter. Prompts for this exercise include:
  - “What would they say at this point in time about what how you treated them?”
  - “What would they say at this point in time about what how they treated you?”
  - “What would they say to you about the things you continue to feel bad about?”
  - “How would they want you to be treating yourself and other people at this point in your life? If you did make mistakes, how would THEY want you to make it up to them (such as acts of service, or living a life of integrity that reflects the good principles they taught you?)”

Last, invite them to share one or both letters with the group, if they wish.

If group members are at a developmental and skills level appropriate for formal thought disputation, consider carrying out the next optional section, “cognitive restructuring guilt-related hurtful thoughts” as an alternative or supplementary exercise.

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<th>V. (Optional) Cognitive Restructuring Guilt-Related Hurtful Thoughts</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>CONTENT:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Identify, challenge, and replace guilt-related hurtful thoughts with more balanced, realistic, and constructive thoughts.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>PROCESS:</strong></td>
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<td>- Allow members to ventilate their (often intense and poignant) feelings relating to remorse, regret, and guilt.</td>
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<td>- Normalize and validate as appropriate.</td>
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**BOTH** (Activity) Engage the group members in an activity in which they challenge and replace their guilt-inducing hurtful thoughts.

1. **Look for signs of strong negative emotions (e.g., guilt, shame, helplessness, anger, worthlessness, and confusion).** As appropriate, acknowledge, normalize, and validate them. If hurtful thoughts are present, challenge them with helpful thoughts using the 3-Step Model.

1a. **Are there some things about your relationship with your loved one that make you feel bad about yourself?** (If appropriate, give examples: “feelings like guilt, regret, remorse, or shame?”).

1b. **(if yes) OK. We’re now going to try to understand these feelings using the same trusty 3-Step Model. “Three Steps to Taking Charge of Your Emotions” that we have been using all along. The first step is “What am I feeling?” Can you identify the bad feeling or feelings that you experience about what happened? Can you give (them/it) a name? (Identify the emotion or emotions.)**

1c. **Step Two is “Why am I feeling this way?”** Let’s use this step to understand the source of these painful feelings. Let’s first look at what was happening outside of you. Are there situations in which you did,
or did not do, things that you have the strongest bad feelings about? (Sensitively try to identify one or more objective events.)

1d. Next, let’s look inside of you—at the way you are thinking about what happened. Can you put your beliefs about what happened into words? (Try to phrase it as a hurtful thought, preferably in “assumption” form—that is, in “because...then” or “if...then” contingencies.) Examples include:

- My friend died because I wasn’t there to protect him (If I had been there, then I could and would have protected him)
- My father died because I was angry at him (Because I was angry at him, my father died)
- I should have stopped my brother from going to work that day (because I failed to foretell the future, I failed to protect him)
- I treated my (loved one) badly, and now I can’t make it up to them. I should punish myself by feeling guilty every day about what I did. (Because I treated her badly, I can’t make it up to her and should thus punish myself through guilt)
- Because I did something mean to my loved one while he was alive, I can’t be forgiven now, and shouldn’t be happy or have a good life.

1e. Make a connection between this belief and their distressing emotion. (Sympathize and reflect as appropriate): Now that we have looked at what happened outside of you and what happened inside of you, your emotional response makes sense. We can see why you are feeling badly about what happened, given that you are looking at things this way.

1f. Now our task is to work with you in thinking over whether your belief is the most sensible or constructive way of looking at things. Let’s look at your belief objectively by examining the evidence—reasons to maintain this belief, and reasons to look at it another way. Remember our situation-thought-feeling pyramid? We want to make sure that our thoughts match the situation—if they do, then our emotions are a realistic reaction to what has happened and it makes sense to keep them. On the other hand, if our thoughts exaggerate the situation, then our emotions are also likely to be exaggerated, and there are probably more constructive ways of looking at things that will take away this burden of hurtful thoughts and feelings that we are carrying. (If appropriate) Let’s remember that, not only do we love our loved one very dearly and feel compassionate towards him/her, but they feel the same way about us. They would want us to be happy and to lead good lives in which they are remembered and honored.

As we work together, we invite you to step back from your belief—to distance yourself from it, like an artist stepping back to look critically at her painting. She will praise the good parts, and point out the parts that need improvement. Remember that you and your belief are two different things, and that you have the freedom to keep your belief, to modify it, or to completely substitute it for another more constructive belief if you want to. It is very important that you understand that you have a choice over what you do and do not believe.

To begin, how strongly, on a scale from 1 to 10 where 1 represents “don’t believe it at all” and 10 represents “totally believe it”, do you hold your belief? (Obtain a baseline rating.)

1g. Step Three is “How can I feel better?” In this step we’ll consider whether your thoughts are a good match for the situation you describe. In particular, we’ll be looking for any parts that aren’t accurate, or that aren’t helpful ways of looking at the situation. We’ll also be looking for alternative ways of looking at the situation that make more sense to you, or that are more constructive ways of looking at the situation. Remember our basic guiding rule: In almost every situation, there is something you can believe that:

- Is true or factual
- Makes sense to you (is believable)
- Is a constructive way of viewing things—that is, it allows you to preserve a sense of hope, and to feel better about yourself and what happened.

(After the individual group member has worked on the problem, invite the remaining group members to make additional observations and suggestions.) Ideas for examining cognitive distortions include:

- Filtering Out and Discounting
- Are you remembering, and giving yourself credit for, the good things you did for him/her?
• It’s only fair, if you are going to criticize yourself for things you feel you didn’t do well, that
you give yourself credit for things that you DID do well.

Shoulds & Musts (I should have done better; I should have known what to do.)
• Is the thing that you are blaming yourself for something that a young person can be
realistically expected to do?
• Are you being hard on yourself for not being perfect?

All or None Thinking
• Are you thinking that you were either a completely good son/brother/daughter or a completely
bad son/brother/daughter, without any room for in between?

Blaming Myself Have you considered:
• That you might be overestimating what you realistically could have done under the
circumstances?
• Do you keep beating yourself up with blaming words without questioning whether they are
really justified, or whether your loved one would want you to do this as you remember
him/her?
• Are you telling yourself, “This wouldn’t have happened if I loved him more, as if to say that
love alone can protect those we love?”

Self Put-Downs
• Are you telling yourself that you’re a loser simply because you lost a loved one under tragic
circumstances? That now you’re “damaged goods” and therefore not as good as other kids?

Over-Generalization
• Are you telling yourself that, because you think that you didn’t handle some things well, that
therefore you handled everything badly?

If it FEELS True, it IS True
• Are you trying to convince yourself that you ARE guilty simply because you FEEL guilty—
because you wish you could have done more?

Foretelling the Future
• Could you have realistically have been expected to foresee what was about to happen?

Mind Reading
• Are you assuming that people blame you for what happened, or that they are disappointed in
how you handled yourself? Have you ever checked this belief out with them directly?
• Are you assuming that your loved one would be as hard on you, after what has happened, as
you are being on yourself?

1h. Evaluate the strength of the belief. How strongly do you believe the statement now, on a scale from 1
to 10?

1i. (As needed—if hurtful thoughts and emotions persist): Consider the evidence. Next, let’s weigh
the evidence for and against your belief. Let’s consider both the facts that support, and those that do
not support, your belief about what happened. (Involve the group as appropriate.)

L2 (If needed) Draw a 2-columned table on a posterboard or markerboard and
write down the “evidence for” and “evidence against”. Invite all group members
to comment in the role of caring and concerned friends.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evidence That</th>
<th>Evidence that Does Not Support the Belief</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Supports the</td>
<td>(possible questions/facts)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belief</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What evidence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>do you have</td>
<td>Did your circumstances permit you to do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>for believing</td>
<td>what you wanted (and tried) to do?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the hurtful</td>
<td>(they fooled the CIA, too!)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>thought?</td>
<td>Could you have known what was about to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>happen?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Could you have done anything to stop it?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>You were in a terrible predicament (Was</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>there any satisfactory choice available?)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


There was little time to prepare or to decide what to do
There was little information available
You were very young and inexperienced
You were terrified, horrified, confused, panicked, and felt helpless
You were doing the best you could under the circumstances
You didn’t start the war; you didn’t train the terrorists or make them want to hurt people
You didn’t choose to have your Dad work in the World Trade Center

1j. Evaluate the belief again. How strongly do you believe the statement now on that same 1-10 scale? (Continue working with them as appropriate. Note that it is not necessary, or perhaps even possible at this point, to make them completely abandon their belief. Your purpose is to challenge and weaken their belief, and thus initiate a gradual cognitive restructuring.)

1k. Work together to help them select a more helpful way of looking at what happened. Let’s complete the third step, which is to choose a more constructive and helpful way of looking at what happened. (Use the group as appropriate to make suggestions and to provide feedback. As appropriate, write down the new belief and give it to the member to work on.) Examples include:
- “I cannot foretell the future”
- “No one could have known that this was going to happen, including me”
- “I did the best I could under the circumstances”
- “I can’t control other people’s lives”
- “I’m only human, I’m still young, and I make mistakes. But I’ve also done a lot of good things, too”
- “There were times when I treated my loved one in ways that I now regret, but there were many times when I was kind and loving towards him/her. So when I begin to feel regretful, I can also remind myself of some of the nice things we did for each other.”
- “I did some things that I feel regretful about. But instead of torturing myself with guilt, which he/she wouldn’t want and which doesn’t do anyone any good, I’ll make it up to him/her by doing something kind for someone he/she cares about.”

1l. Evaluate the strength of belief in the new perspective. How much do you believe this new perspective on that same scale? Does it seem useful to you?

VI. Summary and Practice Exercises

CONTENT: Summarize and bring closure to the session.
PROCESS: Motivate group members to use these two skills.

L2 Today we explored our emotional reactions to grief, and focused especially on feelings of guilt, regret, and remorse.
- We learned that many young people who experience a traumatic loss share these feelings. Many of them come from the wish that they could have done more to stop the death from happening—that they could have foreseen it or had more than their natural ability to intervene.
- We also learned that feelings of guilt, shame, remorse, or regret are linked to hurtful thoughts about how we treated our loved one. We learned that these thoughts may or may not be accurate, and may or may not be helpful as we try to move on with our lives.
We then worked together to identify our hurtful thoughts that underlie these feelings, and to examine whether they are accurate and helpful. If they are not helpful, then we challenged them with helpful thoughts.

L2 Assign Practice Exercise: For your practice exercise for this coming week, we invite you to work on your letters to your loved one and their return letter, as we discussed. We’ll look forward to hearing whatever you would like to share!

VI. Transitional Activity & Check-Out

L1 You may lead the group in a chosen transitional activity and then engage the group in the following questions:

- How are you feeling now? (Use thermometer ratings.)
- What did you learn about yourself today?

**End of Session**
MODULE III: Coping With

Traumatic Loss and Grief

Session 4: Remembering and Reminiscing

The contents of this session draw, in part, from the suggestions of Nadezda Savjak, Ph.D.
Theoretical Overview

As was discussed in Session 2, a violent loss may complicate the normal grief process in many ways. One of the most powerful ways in which violent loss may disrupt grieving is by interrupting survivors’ efforts to reminisce—to remember, talk about, and re-experience their emotional ties to—their loved one or cherished possession. This interruption takes place as survivors’ efforts to reminisce are intruded upon by tragic, grotesque, or repulsive images associated with the violent circumstances of the loss, and by intense emotional reactions of terror, horror, helplessness, anger, or guilt. These distressing and intrusive thoughts and feelings may be so vivid, incessant, and overwhelming that survivors adopt the strategy of avoiding or suppressing most or all efforts to think, talk, or have feelings about the deceased. This may interrupt and compromise, in particular, the first three grief processes (Rando, 1993; see also Raphael, 1983) in the following ways:

1. **Recognize the Loss** (Rando, 1993)
   Survivors may be so distressed by recollections of the circumstances of the loss that they:
   - Deny the reality of the death (a relatively rare occurrence), and thus do not even initiate the grieving process. Instead, they simply endure a prolonged separation, and must construct elaborate fantasies concerning the reasons for the ongoing absence (he is alive somewhere but has amnesia; he is in hiding and hasn’t contacted us to protect us; I’m sure he is a prisoner of war).
   - Avoid participating in rituals—such as funerals—for fear of being exposed to additional disturbing information which, they fear, will evoke (or create additional) distressing thoughts and emotions. In so doing, mourners avoid exposing themselves to evidence that confirms the reality of the death—evidence that is vitally needed to oppose the powerful psychological needs to deny and avoid. Clinical evidence suggests that not viewing the body or participating in funeral/memorial rituals significantly increases the risk for complications in grieving.
   - Either avoid, or do not actively seek out, factual information concerning the death and its circumstances. This lack of information, however, often leaves mourners feeling anxious, confused, and preoccupied with speculation—sometimes obsessive in nature (rumination)—about what occurred to the loved one. In the absence of factual information, mourners may construct vivid fantasies of what “might” have occurred. These fantasies often take the form of “worst case scenarios” that may create more distress than learning the concrete facts of what actually took place.

2. **React to the Loss** (Rando, 1993)
   Mourners may be so overwhelmed by intrusive thoughts, images, or emotional reactions connected to the violent circumstances of the loss that they:
   - Suppress painful reactions to the loss because they fear being overwhelmed by their emotions and losing control.
   - Avoid opportunities to share and process their painful reactions to the loss with potential help-givers.
• Minimize, rationalize, or intellectualize their feelings (e.g., “We weren’t really that close”; “Everyone lost someone—it’s not a big deal”; “You couldn’t really grieve during the war, because you had to survive. And now it’s too late to start.” “It’s best that he died defending his country. I should be proud, not sad”.)
• Avoid grieving the many secondary losses generated by the loss of life: These include the many hopes and dreams that will never be fulfilled, one’s former belief system (which allowed one to trust and feel secure in the world), the loss of security and stability, the many hardships that must now be faced—and without the loved one’s support.

3. **Remember the Deceased and the Relationship** (Rando, 1993)
Mourners’ loss-related intrusive thoughts, images, or emotional reactions may motivate them to:
• Avoid remembering, reflecting on, or talking about the lost person and lost relationship—both the good and bad aspects of both. This avoidance interrupts the construction of a “composite image” that accurately reflects the nature and personal meaning of the relationship to the mourner. This composite image is essential to healthy grieving, as it will serve as the representation with which the mourner will interact in the new memory-based relationship with the deceased (Rando, 1993; Raphael, 1983).
• Avoid or suppress experiencing the feelings (positive, negative, or ambivalent) that bind them to the deceased. In the absence of processing these feelings—experiencing and expressing them—these feelings cannot be discharged and released, and thus diminished in their intensity. In turn, without the dissipation of these emotional connections, mourners continue to remain intensely emotionally attached to the deceased, relating to him or her as if he or she were still living and intimately involved in their day-to-day lives. This “as if” pattern of relating to the deceased is both unrealistic and ultimately maladaptive, because it absorbs great psychological resources without the possibility of reciprocation, prohibits adjustment to the loss, and precludes investment in rewarding (i.e., reciprocated and gratifying) pursuits such as positive life activities and interpersonal relationships.

In summary, although their use is understandable, coping strategies that rely on avoidance and suppression may thus seriously complicate, prolong, or even completely derail healthy grieving. The adoption of these strategies may thus increase survivors’ distress, maladjustment to present life circumstances, and risk for developmental disturbance.

In light of these observations, sessions 4 and 5 of Module III are devoted to facilitating the development of the capacity to reminisce constructively. More specifically, the fundamental goals are:
1. To call attention to the negative consequences of avoidance/emotional suppression.
2. To rehearse more adaptive ways of grieving—which include thinking, visualizing, communicating, and experiencing feelings (both positive and negative) about the deceased or lost object—without becoming overwhelmed by intrusive thoughts, images, and negative emotional reactions. The capacity we are seeking to facilitate is termed reminiscing.
3. To identify and challenge barriers to reminiscing (in the form of “hurtful thoughts” and “helpful thoughts”) to facilitate both “holding on” and “moving on”.
**Content Objectives**

1) Identify and challenge barriers to reminiscing.
2) Explain the importance of maintaining a positive connection to the deceased, and how this is accomplished through reminiscing.
3) Review how distressing thoughts, images, and negative emotions associated with the circumstances of the death/loss may interfere with reminiscing.
4) Explain the rationale for retrieving a non-traumatic image of the deceased (it facilitates healthy reminiscing).
5) Work together to access, in members’ imaginations, an intact, non-traumatic image of the deceased.
6) Plan for next week’s memento-sharing exercise.

**Process Objectives**

10) (Everyone) Work together to create a group atmosphere of support, validation, acceptance, and sympathetic understanding that:
   - is capable of tolerating, accepting, and bearing witness to such intense emotions as deep sorrow, longing, intense anger, and guilt
   - allows the group to serve as a "container" for the difficult thoughts and feelings that will be expressed
   - helps members feel comfortable experiencing and sharing their grief-related thoughts, emotions, and efforts to cope

11) (Group Leaders) validate members’ grief symptoms by giving them meaning. Explain how these symptoms reflect how deeply they still feel the loss, and the deep personal meaning of the loss.

12) (Group Leaders) normalize members’ experiences by pointing out commonalities among members’ grief-related experiences, such as their losses, grief symptoms, and current adversities.

13) (Group Leaders) facilitate members’ re-negotiation of their relationships with the deceased from one of physical presence (in which a living loved one reciprocated their affections) to one of memory. This process of re-negotiation is based on an acknowledgement that the deceased can no longer reciprocate the members’ emotional investment in the relationship.

14) (Group Leaders) facilitate members’ re-connection with (living) members of their social networks. This process involves active investment in social relationships in the form of supportive exchanges (e.g., giving and receiving emotional support, feedback, etc.) among group members and with significant others outside the group (in their Practice Exercises).

**Session Overview**

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<th>Session Overview</th>
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<td>Check-In</td>
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<td>22)</td>
<td>Review Practice Exercise</td>
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<td>23)</td>
<td>Why Stay Connected After a Loss?</td>
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<tr>
<td>24)</td>
<td>Identify and Challenge Barriers to Reminiscing (optional activity)</td>
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<td>25)</td>
<td>Recalling Positive Memories of the Deceased</td>
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<td>26)</td>
<td>Summary and Practice Exercises</td>
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### Supplies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Every Session</th>
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<tr>
<td>Flipchart</td>
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<td>White Paper</td>
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<td>Markers</td>
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<td>Pencils/pens</td>
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<td>Kleenex</td>
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<td>Tape</td>
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<tr>
<td>Photo Board of Deceased</td>
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### Handouts

- (The assignment this week is to practice visualizing and to bring a memento to next session)
Flipcharts

Session Highlights

• Check-In
• Review Practice Exercises
• Why Stay Connected After a Loss?
• Retrieving Positive Memories
• Summary and

Five Steps to Getting Support

1. What Do I Want?
2. Who Should I Ask?
3. Find the Right Time
4. Request With an "I" Message:
   • Tell them what I am feeling.
   • Tell them what happened (outside and inside)
   • Tell them what I want them to do.
5. Express Sincere
How We Try to Stay Connected After a Loss

1. Physical Connection
   - Searching for them

2. Symbolic Connection
   - Dreaming about them
   - Grief rituals (lighting candles)
   - Keeping mementos to remember them by
   - Reminiscing about them
     - Talking about them

Common Grief Symptoms: How Teens Stay Connected

- 8 of 10 felt their deceased loved one was nearby, "watching" them.
- 5 of 10 reported dreaming about this person
- 6 of 10 reported that they spoke out loud to this person.
- 8 of 10 reported thinking about

Barriers to Healthy Reminiscing

1. Cultural Barriers
2. Familial Barriers
3. Personal Barriers
   - attitudes
   - beliefs
   - assumptions

Intrusive Distressing Thoughts and...
I. Check-In

L1 Choose whether to use the “grief weather report” check-in and/or the thermometer check-in.

- How are you feeling right now? (Use thermometer ratings.)
- Is anything going on that may make it difficult for you to keep your mind in the group?
- Briefly review "Today's Highlights" (Flipchart 1):

Have board with pictures on display for this and all succeeding sessions.

Note: Last week was the last time you are to ask group members to bring a photo of the deceased. Those who did not bring one this week should be privately asked if they had feelings about bringing in a photo of their lost loved one.

II. Review Practice Exercise

CONTENT:
- Review homework from last week.

PROCESS:
- Provide continuity and reinforcement for practicing outside of the group.

L2 Last week we started writing letters to our lost loved one that included some of the things you might feel guilty or sad about. In this letter we thought it would be helpful if you focused on regrets or wishes you may have for things you did or didn’t do or say, or for painful feelings you secretly harbored toward them. We also thought it would be great if you wrote a response from your lost loved one in which those issues were answered. Some prompts we provided in drafting this imaginary letter were:

- “What would they say at this point in time about what happened between you?”
- “What would they say to you about the things you continue to feel bad about?”
- “How would they want you to be treating yourself and other people?”

For those who feel comfortable doing so, could you read your letter(s). If you didn’t actually complete the letter, perhaps you could share what it was like for you to attempt or think about this letter and, perhaps, what you would like to say in it, and what you would like to hear from your loved one in the way of a response.
III. Why Stay Connected After a Loss?

CONTENT:

- Normalize group members’ experiences with thinking, dreaming about, talking to, and even sensing the presence of, the deceased. This is accomplished by reframing these behaviors as natural—and perfectly normal—desires to maintain a psychological connection to the deceased.
- Explain the psychological importance of maintaining a positive connection to the deceased, and how this is accomplished through reminiscing.

PROCESS:

- Work together to create a group atmosphere of support, validation, acceptance, and sympathetic understanding.

TIP:

- Be supportive of all appropriate methods of remembering the deceased.
  Acknowledge that there may still be much sadness, pain, and anger associated with these memories—even pleasant memories are often bittersweet!
- Reassure members that, by continuing this work (confronting intense feelings, sharing those feelings, and cultivating positive memories of the deceased) some of these painful feelings will grow less intense over time, and positive feelings and memories will begin to come more naturally.

L1 During the past several weeks we have talked a great deal about grief reactions. Some of these reactions included:

- thinking about the person or lost object
- talking about the person or lost object
- participating in grief rituals to help us remember and pay our respects to the person who has died

Other grief reactions include rather unusual perceptual experiences, including:

- Sensing that you’re seeing or hearing the deceased, such as seeing their face in a crowd, or hearing them walk around upstairs
- Sensing their invisible presence nearby (this can be either spooky or comforting)
- Having dreams that feature the deceased. Some of these dreams can be very vivid and life-like, involving such things as meeting or conversing with the person, and these dreams can be either spooky or comforting.

We’d like to talk about the purpose of these grief reactions. That is, why do we think about, talk about, dream about, and sometimes sense the presence of, someone who we know is dead?

We do this because, after suffering the loss of someone or something we dearly love, our minds and hearts ache to be reunited with them. And our minds think of different ways to stay connected to them. Thus, these grief reactions all have in common the goal of maintaining a connection to our deceased loved one. There are two basic ways in which mourners may do this:
The first way in which mourners frequently try to stay connected to a deceased loved one is to fantasize about physically reuniting with them—that is, imagine that they return to us alive, as if they had never died.

This is especially common while mourners are still struggling with the reality of the death. For example, during the first weeks and months following a death, mourners often report feeling the urge to search for their loved ones, as if they were still physically alive and simply need to be located. Time and again, mourners may feel the urge to go to places familiar to the loved one, or to the place where they last saw him or her, to see if he or she is still there.

Does anyone remember feeling the urge to search for your loved one—to go to places they used to frequent, or the last place you saw them, to see if they were still there?

Does anyone remember actually catching yourself searching for your loved one?

(If yes) Do you remember how you felt when you saw for yourself that they weren’t there?

(If yes, help them understand that these personal confirmations of the person’s absence, although very painful, nevertheless gradually “teach” us that the person truly is gone and won’t come back. It is through experiences like these that we come to fully accept the reality of their death and begin to adjust to life without them.)

(If yes and if appropriate, call members’ attention to the point that being physically dislocated from their homes, etc., can make it harder to extinguish these urges to search, because they cannot go to these familiar old locations to confirm that their loved one is not there.)

The second way in which mourners frequently try to stay connected to a loved one usually occurs as they come to fully realize that a physical reunion will never take place. As this realization occurs, mourners often seek to connect with their loved ones in symbolic ways—that is, to reunite with them in their minds and hearts.

What do we mean by symbolic? Well, although death has ended the mortal life of the person we love—making it impossible to physically reunite with them—death hasn’t ended our mental and emotional relationship with them if we choose otherwise. This relationship can continue symbolically in our thoughts, imaginations, dreams, feelings, conversations, and other behaviors. We are relating to our loved ones in a symbolic way whenever we:

- Dream about them
- Participate in grief rituals (such as lighting candles)
- Keep mementos
- Reminisce about them by:
  - Talking about them
  - Thinking about them
  - Visualizing them (as they used to be)
Visualizing times we spent together
Learning more about them and their lives
Strive to follow their good teachings and example.

Those of us who have lost a loved one know that they don’t need to be alive and physically present in order to be an important part of our lives in these and other ways.

It’s very important to understand that these grief reactions are very normal and perfectly understandable, and that they serve the purpose of keeping a special place in our lives for a special person. Statistics from a large study of teenagers who lost someone close to them help to illustrate how common these experiences are:

8 out of 10 teenagers had the feeling at times that their deceased loved one was nearby, watching them.
5 out of 10 reported dreaming about this person—sometimes very vivid dreams in which they were reunited with their loved one.
(Some teenagers reported that these out-of-the ordinary experiences—feeling their presence nearby, or dreaming about them--were a little upsetting or scary. Other teenagers found these out-of-the ordinary experiences to be comforting and reassuring.)
6 out of 10 teenagers reported that they spoke out loud to this person.
Two years after the death, 8 out of 10 reported thinking about this person at least two times per week.

Thus far, we have discussed how striving to retain a psychological connection to our loved ones is normal and understandable. Retaining this connection is also a good idea from a mental health standpoint. Maintaining a special place in our minds, hearts, and lives for someone we love allows us to draw strength and comfort from our relationship with them. We can:

- feel their love and moral support,
- enjoy the companionship of their memories
- remember their example
- guide our lives by their values, counsel, and advice

One of the most important ways in which we maintain this connection with our deceased loved one is through reminiscing. As we discussed, we reminisce whenever we:
- Talk about our loved one
- Think about them
- Visualize them (as they used to be)
- Visualize times we spent together
- Learn more about them and their lives

*Each of these ways of reminiscing can help us to keep a special place in our lives for them.*

### IV. Identify and Challenge Barriers to Reminiscing

**optional activity**

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<tr>
<th>CONTENT:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Identify, discuss, and challenge two significant barriers to reminiscing:</td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Cultural, familial, and personal attitudes that discourage the maintenance of a connection with the deceased.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Distressing thoughts, images, and negative emotions associated with the circumstances of the death/loss may intrude into efforts to reminisce and may, in consequence, reinforce avoidance and emotional suppression.</td>
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<table>
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<th>PROCESS:</th>
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<tr>
<td>- Work together to create a group atmosphere of support, validation, acceptance, and sympathetic understanding.</td>
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<th>TIPS:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- This is an optional exercise, to be employed if members show reluctance to participate in the imaginal exercise. If this section is used, expanding this session to two sessions—the latter devoted to the imaginal exercise—may be necessary.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

L1  *As we pointed out last session, a number of things can make it hard for us to reminisce. We’d like to talk about two of these:*

L2  Display Flipchart 6.

**BOTH (Identify, discuss, and challenge barriers--familial, cultural (if relevant) and personal attitudes—to reminiscing):**
Familial Barriers

Different families react very differently to a loss, and even different people within a family can react in different ways. One way in which families differ is in how open or closed they are to talking and expressing emotions about the deceased.

Draw the following continuum up on the board.

Closed  Open

Let’s take turns going up to the board and writing our last name on the line where you think your family is in its “openness” or “closedness” about the death. Remember, we’re talking about the way your family tends to behave: Do they allow or encourage family members to express sad or angry feelings related to the death—do they mention the name of your loved one, and share memories about them? If your family does this, you should write in your last name on the left hand side of the line. On the other hand, does your family try not to talk about or share feelings about the loss? Do they try to “get along like things are normal”? If your family does this, you should write your name on the right side of the line.

(After writing in their names): Let’s discuss how our families grieve. Do people talk and share feelings, or do they keep it personal and private? In addition, how comfortable do you feel when you are at home or with family members, when you feel like talking about or sharing feelings about your loss? Many young people also comment that they choose not to discuss their grief with family members—especially their parent or parents—because they are concerned about burdening them with additional worries and concerns. Do you find yourself doing this?

(Process while conveying the following points as appropriate): Remember that family members tend to grieve in very different ways. They work on different grieving tasks—like feeling the pain of the loss, making adjustments to their lives, and so forth, at different times and in different ways. They often differ in which task they are working on at a particular time, the emotions they are feeling, the intensity of their emotions, and how they behave. These differences do not mean that one family member loved the deceased more or less than another, or that one family member is “weak” and another is “strong”. As we have discussed, grieving is hard work, no matter how you approach it. Understanding this will help us to become sensitive supporters to one another and to our family and friends as we all grieve our losses in our own personal way.
Cultural Barriers

One of the most difficult barriers to reminiscing is being told by others that maintaining a connection to a dead person (or cherished object) is unnatural, weird, unhealthy, weak, immature, or a sign that we cannot deal with reality.

(Process): Has anyone ever told you things like:
- “Hanging on to the past is unhealthy”
- “Talking about the past shows that you can’t deal with reality”
- “Feeling connected to a dead person is weird”
- “You have to give up the past in order to embrace the present and future”
- “If you were really OVER your father’s death, you wouldn’t be talking about him so much”
- “‘Recovering’ from a loss means that it doesn’t make you feel sad or upset to think about it.”

(Normalize, validate, and generate appropriate refuting “helpful thoughts”):

However, it’s perfectly understandable that we would continue to care about someone who was an important part of our lives while they were alive. A person doesn’t have to be alive in order for us to care about them and think about them. Don’t we hang pictures of famous dead people on our walls, build statues to honor them, sing songs about them, hear speeches about them, have holidays named after them, listen to songs about them, stamped their faces on our coins and dollar bills, and read books they have authored? And haven’t our deceased loved ones been at least as an important part of our lives as a dead philosopher, poet, or politician?

(as needed) Solicit member’s ideas for helpful “challenging” thoughts

Personal (Attitudinal) Barriers

A third potential barrier to healthy reminiscing is our own beliefs about thinking about, talking about, and having feelings about someone or something dear we have lost. These things can be fear over our own reactions, or reluctance to deal with unpleasant feelings.

(Fear of my reactions) (Process as appropriate): Do you tell yourself things like:

- “I can’t do it—it hurts too much”
- “The pain would overwhelm me and I would lose control”
- “I’ll start to cry and never stop”
- “The pain would overwhelm me and I wouldn’t be able to function”

(Normalize, validate, and generate appropriate refuting “helpful thoughts”):
One of the most important reasons why we worked so hard in telling our stories about what happened was to develop tolerance for the pain connected to our losses. Having confronted the pain over how the loss occurred, we can now, with courage, confront the pain of living with the loss—a process we all know as grieving.

L1  **Reluctance to confront unpleasant feelings.** (Process as appropriate): Do you tell yourself things like:

- “I’m angry at him for dying, and I don’t want to deal with those feelings”
- “I’m upset about things he did while he was alive, and I don’t want to deal with it”
- “I feel guilty about how we parted, and I don’t want to deal with those feelings”

L1  (Normalize, validate, and generate appropriate refuting “helpful thoughts”):

One of the most important things to know about reminiscing is that it doesn’t—and shouldn’t—involve only pleasant things. Typically, we try to recall only the pleasant things at first, but over time, we should try to remember everything—both the pleasant and the unpleasant, the ups and the downs, great times and disappointments. Why? Because we need to have a realistic picture of them to remember them by. In the absence of this, we’ll relate to our memories of them in a manner that doesn’t feel real or honest, and we won’t be able to resolve many of our important feelings. In many cases, it **IS** possible to make peace with our loved ones—even after they are dead—but only if we allow ourselves to remember them realistically and honestly as we reminisce about them.

- (as needed) Solicit member’s ideas for helpful “challenging” thoughts

**BOTH** (Identify and discuss how distressing thoughts, images, and negative emotions associated with the circumstances of the death/loss may intrude into efforts to reminisce).

L1  A second type of barrier to reminiscing is the distressing thoughts, images, and negative emotions connected to the way they died. As we learned about last session, being exposed to upsetting images or details of death and loss often creates distressing mental images and accompanying negative emotions. These distressing thoughts and feelings intrude into our efforts to think and talk about the person, and may be so upsetting that we try not to think about, have feelings about, or talk about our loved one at all.

L1  (Process as appropriate):

- Can you relate to this?
- Do upsetting thoughts, images, or feelings connected to the death intrude into your mind when you try to think or talk about the person?
- Are you reluctant to think about your loved ones for fear that something unpleasant connected to their deaths will pop into your mind?
- Do you avoid talking about your loved one because upsetting thoughts or feelings come?
• (Property loss) Is it hard to think of your home and town without thinking also of the day you were forced to leave it?
• (Property loss) Is it hard to think of your home and town without thinking also of what it looked like as it was being damaged or destroyed?

L1 (Normalize, validate, and generate appropriate refuting “helpful thoughts”):

L1 As we discussed last time, avoiding all thoughts, feelings, or conversations about the loss can greatly interfere with grieving. It prevents us from reminiscing, from sharing our thoughts and feelings about the loss with others, and from making our loved one a part of our current life.

Our work in telling our stories about what happened has also helped us develop tolerance for the distressing thoughts and emotions connected to our losses. Although it is possible that some distressing thoughts and feelings may come as we reminisce, we can also assure you that you are now much better prepared to cope with them. We can also assure you that young people who have participated in these exercises report that pleasant memories begin to return to them spontaneously, and that reminiscing can feel good.

V. Recalling Positive Memories of the Deceased

NOTE:
• This exercise is in two parts: The first part is a visualization exercise for traumatic death; the second part is a visualization exercise for traumatic loss of a cherished possession. Either or both exercises may be conducted, depending on the members’ needs.

CONTENT:
• Explain the rationale for retrieving a non-traumatic image of the deceased (it facilitates healthy reminiscing).
• Work together to retrieve, in members’ imaginations, an intact, non-traumatic image of the deceased.

PROCESS:
• Build tolerance for grief-related thoughts, images, and feelings.

HINTS:
• Keep the exercise moving. Remember that your voice is an important source of direction, reassurance, containment, and connection to the present. Be aware that long interludes of silence can provoke anxiety or allow members to become “lost in their thoughts” without an anchor to the present.
• Speak in a calming, reassuring, gentle voice. Be sensitive to the fact that this exercise may be a poignant experience for everyone involved.
• Don’t rush—be patient, relaxed, and deliberate. Remember that it takes time to generate mental representations, to interact with the deceased person, and to say goodbye. This may be the first time some group members “make contact” imaginally with a loved one since his/her death.
• Whenever possible, use suggestions rather than “commands.”
• Be aware of time limits—this exercise will require debriefing!
• Some members may fear letting go of traumatic memories (those associated with the violent, tragic circumstances of their death), for fear that they will lose all memories of their loved one. If this concern arises, state something like this:
  ➢ We can understand why this might be of concern to you. If most of the memories we have of our loved ones are painful ones, then it makes sense to be worried that making these memories recede will also make our ability to remember them at all recede as well.
  
  However, the purpose of this exercise is not to help you FORGET your loved ones. Rather, we want to make it easier to remember your loved ones during happier times—to reminisce—without being interrupted by distressing images, thoughts, and emotions, which make it hard to enjoy thinking about them and feeling close to them. Young people who have participated in this exercise report that this exercise actually helps them to retrieve their positive memories of the person, which they then enjoy reminiscing with. This actually HELPS them to remember their loved ones because they don’t feel compelled to avoid being reminded of them.

  ➢ It may also help to gently ask them how their loved one would have liked to be remembered:

    How do you think he/she would want you to remember him/her?

• For members who believe in an afterlife, this exercise can be modified to be “present”-focused (i.e., they meet with their loved ones, who are now beyond pain and suffering, and in heaven). As written, this exercise focuses on a time before the death.

L2 Monitor group members for signs of intense emotional reactions.

L1 During the last two sessions, we’ve been talking about ways in which losing someone or something very dear to us—which is already a very difficult experience to undergo—can be made much more difficult when the death or loss occurs in a violent or tragic manner. As we have seen from our personal experiences, upsetting images and strong emotions associated with how they died can interfere with our ability to recollect and reminisce about our loved ones. In fact, these images and emotions can be so painful and upsetting that we are reluctant to think or talk about our loved ones. This can prevent us from reminiscing, which is an essential part of grieving.

We would now like to work together in an activity designed to help us remember our deceased loved ones without interruption by distressing images and feelings. In this activity, we will recall, or if necessary recreate, a mental picture of what they were like while they were alive. We can then use this image to reminisce about what things were like when we were together. I think we can all agree that THAT is how they would want to be remembered. Shall we begin?
Part 1 (Optional): Visualization Exercise for Traumatic Death

- To do this, let’s get comfortable in our seats and relax...
- Lean back, put both feet in front of you on the floor, and breathe deeply and regularly...
- Feel free to close your eyes at any time, whenever you feel comfortable...
- For now, just concentrate on breathing deeply and slowly, drawing each breath in to the bottom of your lungs, holding it for just a moment, then releasing it—feeling all of your tensions being carried away with each exhalation...
- Breathing in relaxation, breathing out all of your tensions and worries, feeling them being carried out and away...
- Feeling your body relaxing, moving into a state of deep relaxation and calm...
- And even as your body is deeply relaxed and at ease, you’ll notice that your mind is feeling rested and fully alert...
- Your mind is rested, calm, and fully alert...
- You find that you can picture things clearly in your mind...
- In your mind’s eye, you can picture this entire room, from the (chairs, desks, windows), to each person, just as everything was when you closed your eyes...
- You find that you can clearly see each of our faces—(name each group member in turn, spaced 3-4 seconds apart)...
- You now find your mind’s eye moving to a different place, a place of your own choosing, a place where you and your loved one used to do something together, or where it would feel good to have him/her be there with you...
- It can be any place, just a place where it would feel good to have him/her there...
- Spend some time in this place, getting reacquainted with it...
- Look around you, seeing it clearly in your mind, seeing it in detail...
- Now, imagine what it would be like to have your loved one there with you, physically present, in that special place which you have chosen...
- If there is something about their appearance that isn’t right—something connected with the way in which they died—then imagine repairing whatever is not right about their physical body...
- ...putting everything back to the way it was before, making it right, so that he/she is completely restored, whole, alive, and well, just like he/she used to be while he/she was alive....
- ...until you can see him/her clearly, whole, alive, and well—his/her face, hands, body... just as you always knew him/her...
- imagine what it would be to be together with him/her...
- to see his/her face...
- to feel his/her touch or hug...
- to feel his/her warmth and presence...
- to hear his/her voice again...
- imagine what you would want him/her to say or do that would feel familiar—something that reminds you of being with him/her...
• imagine something familiar you would want to say or do that helps you to remember what it was like to be together...
• remembering him/her in this way may bring up some strong feelings—both now and as you reminisce outside of the group...and that is OK...
• these strong feelings let us know how important our loved one is to us still, how connected we still feel to him/her...
• how much we miss him/her, and how good it can feel to reminisce about him/her...
• it is now time to part from each other, at least for now...
• and as you say goodbye for now, you do so with the reassurance that you can return here, to this place, to your loved one, or to other memories and other places, whenever you need or wish to...
• it may be difficult to leave this memory, because it feels good be with your loved one again, in your memories...
• But it’s comforting to know that you can return here, to this place or to other places, whenever you want to be with your loved one again...
• to let them be a part of your life, a part of who you are...
• to draw strength from this relationship, even as you go on with your life, forming new relationships, working on your life goals, growing up...
• And now, I want you, in your mind, without opening your eyes, to come back to this group, to the here-and-now...
• to visualize all of us sitting here together...
• seeing each of us clearly (name each group member in turn)
• and seeing that each of us, individually, has just experienced a private moment of reminiscing...
• and at the same time, together as a group, we have shared the comfort and support that comes from grieving together...with people who understand what this is like...
• when we open our eyes, let’s look for ways to comfort and support each other...
• (More firmly) Now, focus on your breathing...
• ...breathing deeply and slowly...
• ...drawing each breath in to the bottom of your lungs, holding it for just a moment, then releasing it...
• ...deeply and slowly...
• Now, slowly, open your eyes...

L1 (Process)
As you feel comfortable, please share details of your experience with us:

• How are you feeling right now?
• Can you describe the special place you visualized?
• What did your loved one look like? (were you able to picture him/her clearly?)
• What did you do or say to each other?
• What did it feel like to be with them?
• How did it feel to return here?
L2 (psychoeducation): This exercise may have stirred up some strong feelings in you, and that’s OK. For some of you, you may not have expressed these feelings for a long time—perhaps never. Many people find that having a good cry every now and then helps them to feel better. During these times, it is also a good idea to seek support from others—whether in the form of companionship, getting a hug, talking to someone about how you’re feeling, and so forth. We’ll make plans for this at the end of the session today.

HINT:
If members are not able to generate or retrieve a positive or non-traumatic image, say something like:
- It’s not surprising that this exercise was not 100% successful the first time. It’s a challenging skills, especially if you haven’t visualized your loved one for a long time. But it is a skill, and with practice, the intact and positive image of your loved one will become clearer and easier to think about. Just like the others skills we are learning, reminiscing takes practice.

Part 2 (Optional): Visualization Exercise for Traumatic Material Loss

- To do this, let’s get comfortable in our seats and relax...
- Lean back, put both feet in front of you on the floor, and breathe deeply and regularly...
- Feel free to close your eyes at any time, whenever you feel comfortable...
- For now, just concentrate on breathing deeply and slowly, drawing each breath in to the bottom of your lungs, holding it for just a moment, then releasing it—feeling all of your tensions being carried away with each exhalation...
- Breathing in relaxation, breathing out all of your tensions and worries, feeling them being carried out and away...
- Feeling your body relaxing, moving into a state of deep relaxation and calm...
- And even as your body is deeply relaxed and at ease, you’ll notice that your mind is feeling rested and fully alert...
- Your mind is rested, calm, and fully alert...
- You find that you can picture things clearly in your mind...
- In your mind’s eye, you can picture this entire room, from the (chairs, desks, windows), to each person, just as everything was when you closed your eyes...
- You find that you can clearly see each of our faces—(name each group member in turn, spaced 3-4 seconds apart)...
- You now find your mind’s eye moving to a place from your past, a pleasant, familiar place, a time and place before the war...
...a time and place where you (and your loved ones) passed pleasant and peaceful time together...
It can be any time and place from your past, wherever it would feel good to revisit...
As you reflect, a picture of this time and place begin to emerge, more and more clearly, in your mind...
The sights...the sounds...the smells...
Perhaps there are people about, perhaps animals...
Cherished objects...
Spend some time in this place, getting reacquainted with it...
Look around you, taking it all in, seeing it clearly...
Seeing things as they used to be...
Doing pleasant things you used to do...
(if appropriate) Perhaps there are some old friends you would like to meet and say hello to...
...it is now almost time to say goodbye to this place, at least for now...
it may be difficult to leave this memory, because it feels good be here, in your special place, here in your memories...
But it's comforting to know that you can return here, to this place or to other special places, whenever you choose to...
And now, I want you, in your mind, without opening your eyes, to come back to this group, to the here-and-now...
to visualize all of us sitting here together...
seeing each of us clearly (name each group member in turn)
and seeing that each of us, individually, has just experienced a private moment of grieving...
and at the same time, together as a group, we have shared the comfort and support that comes from grieving together...with people who understand what this is like...
when we open our eyes, let's look for ways to comfort and support each other...
(More firmly) Now, focus on your breathing...
...breathing deeply and slowly...
...drawing each breath in to the bottom of your lungs, holding it for just a moment, then releasing it...
...deeply and slowly...
Now, slowly, open your eyes...

L1 PROCESS

As you feel comfortable, please share details about your encounter with your special friend or loved one.
• How are you feeling right now about your visit?
• Describe the place you visited (did you see it clearly?)
• What did you do there?
• What did it feel like to say goodbye?
• How do you feel about reminiscing like this again?
## VI. Summary and Practice Exercises

**CONTENT:**
- Summarize and bring closure to the session.
- To commit the members to practice the visualization exercise.
- Remind members to bring their mementos.

**PROCESS:**
- Motivate group members to use their skills.

### L1 (Summarize):
- *We’d like to compliment you on the courage you have just shown. It was very moving to hear your descriptions of your experiences and the feelings you still have for the very special people in your life.*
- *Remember that the images of your loved one/cherished place you visualized today are always there inside of you. You can use these images to reminisce—to think about them, talk about them, have feelings about them, and in this way remain connected to them and involve them in your lives.*
- *(if appropriate) Keep in mind that reminiscing does not only involve reflecting on pleasant things. Sometimes reminiscing can bring up old unresolved feelings and memories. This is good, because it lets us know what tasks we need to carry out as we do our “grief housework”. Things that bother us are things we need to think about and talk about.*
- *Remember also that visualizing someone—whether they are alive or dead—is a skill. And as such, it takes practice to master. The more you practice, the clearer your images will be and the easier it will be to reminisce.*

### L2 (Assign Practice Exercise):

*Today we demonstrated how to use our personal memories to reminisce about a deceased loved one (or cherished possession we have lost). There are other things we can do as well. Another very useful tool for reminiscing is having a special memento that reminds us of them:*

- *A memento is anything that helps you feel connected to your friend or family member.*
- *It can be something that belonged to your loved one, like a shirt, hat, pen, or tool.*
- *It can also be something that reminds you of things you did together, like a football, deck of cards, a book you shared, or something you bought while on a trip together.*
- *A memento can also simply be a gift he/she gave you, a special photo, or a lock of hair.*

*For your practice exercise this week, we would like you to do two things:*
• First, please practice picturing your deceased loved one. A good time for doing this might be each night just before you go to sleep. We’ll be interested to hear how this goes for you.
• Second, please think of a memento to bring next week to share with the group. This memento should be something that helps you to remember and feel close to your loved one. Please think of a memory connected to your memento that you would like to share with the group.

VII. Check-Out

L1 You may lead the group in a chosen transitional activity and then engage the group in the following questions:

• How are you feeling now? (Use thermometer ratings.)
• What did you learn about yourself today?

**End of Session**
MODULE III: Coping With

Traumatic Loss and Grief

Session 5: Reminiscing Together
MODULE III, Session 5
Reminiscing Together

Content Objectives

1. Expand members’ vocabularies for labeling, understanding, and expressing grief symptoms.
2. Practice skills for giving and receiving grief-related social support.

Process Objectives

1. (Everyone) Work together to create a group atmosphere of support, validation, acceptance, and sympathetic understanding that:
   • is capable of tolerating, accepting, and bearing witness to such intense emotions as deep sorrow, longing, intense anger, and guilt
   • allows the group to serve as a "container" for the difficult thoughts and feelings that will be expressed
   • helps members feel comfortable experiencing and sharing their grief-related thoughts, emotions, and efforts to cope
2. (Group Leaders) validate members’ grief symptoms by giving them meaning. Explain how these symptoms reflect how deeply they still feel the loss, and the deep personal meaning of the loss.
3. (Group Leaders) normalize members' experiences by pointing out commonalities among members’ grief-related experiences, such as their losses, grief symptoms, and current adversities.
4. (Group Leaders) facilitate members’ re-negotiation of their relationships with the deceased from one of physical presence (in which a living loved one reciprocated their affections) to one of memory. This process of re-negotiation is based on an acknowledgement that the deceased can no longer reciprocate the members’ emotional investment in the relationship.
5. (Everyone) Reconnect with others through carrying out grief-focused supportive exchanges within the group.

Session Overview

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<td>Sharing Our Mementos and Memories</td>
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<td>Summary and Practice Exercises</td>
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<td>32)</td>
<td>Transitional Activity and Check-Out</td>
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**Preparation**

- Check with members to remind them to bring their memento.

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<th>Supplies</th>
<th>Every Session</th>
<th>Special to This Session</th>
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<td></td>
<td>Flipchart</td>
<td>Have art materials available for group members who did not bring a memento; their drawing will function as a memento.</td>
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<td>White Paper</td>
<td>If possible, provide refreshments for the group.</td>
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| Handouts          | “How my traumatic experience changed me.” |


Session Highlights

- Check-In
- Review Practice Exercises
- Sharing our Mementos and Memories
- Summary and Practice Exercises
- Check-Out

How We Try to Stay Connected After a Loss

3. Physical Connection
   - Searching for them

4. Symbolic Connection
   - Dreaming about them
   - Grief rituals (lighting candles)
   - Keeping mementos
   - Reminiscing about them
     - Talking about them
     - Thinking about them

Six Grief Processes

12. Recognize the Loss

13. React to the Loss

14. Remember the Deceased and the Relationship

15. Give Up Our Old Ways of Relating to the Deceased

16. Move Into the New World Without...
Flipcharts

Five Steps to Getting Support

1. What Do I Want?

2. Who Should I Ask?

3. Find the Right Time

4. Request With an "I" Message:
   - Tell them what I am feeling.
   - Tell them what happened (outside and inside)
   - Tell them what I want them to do.

5. Express Sincere
### I. Check-In

**L1** Choose whether to use the “grief weather report” check-in and/or the thermometer check-in

- *How are you feeling right now?* (Use thermometer ratings.)
- *Is anything going on that may make it difficult for you to keep your mind in the group?*
- Briefly review "Today's Highlights" (Flipchart 1):

### II. Review Practice Exercise

**CONTENT:**
- Review the group session format.

**PROCESS:**
- Provide feedback and encouragement about how the program can help them with their goals.

**L1** Display Flipchart 2.

**L2** (Transition from the preceding week): *Last week we:*

- *Learned about reminiscing*
- *Learned how losing a loved one or cherished possession in a violent way can make grieving more difficult by generating intrusive thoughts, images, and feelings that interfere with our efforts to reminisce.*
- *Learned that these intrusive thoughts and feelings can be so unpleasant that we begin to avoid thinking about, having feelings about, or talking about our deceased loved one (cherished possession).*
- *Practiced visualizing our loved one (cherished possession), and afterwards shared our experiences.*
- *Learned that visualizing is a skill, just like learning to replace hurtful thoughts with helpful thoughts.*
- *Learned about mementos. Remember that a memento is anything that makes you think of, and feel closer to, your loved one.*

*In light of these things, we asked you to do two things this past week as part of your practice exercises:*

#### 1. Visualizing

- *The first practice exercise was to practice visualizing your loved one:*
- *Did you practice visualizing them in your mind?*
- *Was it easy or hard to do? Were you able to get a clear picture, or was it hazy?*
- *Did it get easier as you practiced over the week?*
- *What types of feelings did you feel as you visualized them?*
• Did you notice any change in your memories or feelings about your special person throughout the week?

2. Bringing a memento
• The first was to bring a memento for today’s session so that we can reminisce together by sharing a memory connected to it.
• Did everyone bring a memento?

L1 If there are group members who need to draw their memento, state something like:

(To the student): If you didn't bring a memento, we have some materials here to draw a picture of a memento you’d like to talk about. (Give him/her the drawing materials.)

(To the rest of the group): While ________ is working on his/her memento, let's talk a few minutes about how you’re feeling about doing this exercise—are you apprehensive? excited? Curious? Ho-Hum?

(Take a couple of minutes to let the group member(s) draw his or her memento, and lead the discussion. Reassure them that this exercise is informal, that they don’t have to have a speech prepared. They simply can talk about their memories that are connected to the memento.)

### III. Reminiscing With Mementos

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<th>CONTENT:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Expand members’ vocabularies for labeling, understanding, and expressing grief symptoms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Practice skills for giving and receiving grief-related social support.</td>
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<tr>
<th>PROCESS:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Build tolerance for grief-related thoughts, images, and feelings.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Normalize members’ emotional reactions by emphasizing commonalities among members’ experiences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Validate members’ emotional reactions by pointing out that they make sense in light of the nature of their losses.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Help members feel understood by summarizing and reflecting their words and feelings.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• The group should function as a non-judgmental containing environment that can receive these painful and poignant descriptions with understanding, compassion, and acceptance.</td>
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<tr>
<th>HINTS:</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Take your time with this exercise—you have an hour. Help members express their grief in genuine and appropriate ways, and to support each other with compassion and understanding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• In general, try to match your comments and mood so that they reflect the mood of the group members.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• If the member appears sad when talking about the memento, match your tone of voice to his/hers and acknowledge that it may still be difficult to think about their friend/family member, but feeling this pain also helps us to adapt to their absence.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
• If the group member appears filled with fond memories of his/her loved one when describing the memento, you also can reflect his/her pleasure and warm feelings.
• If a member becomes upset over this discussion, do not press him/her to speak. Present the use of a memento as something that many mourners find helpful for reminiscing, but it is up to them to choose.

L1 (Introduce the exercise): This week you each brought a personal memento of the person who died. In the next hour, each of you will have an opportunity to share your memento with the group and describe what it means to you. Don’t feel like you have to make a speech—it’s better if we keep things simple and genuine. You can simply talk about your memories and feelings that are connected to the memento.

Are there any questions before we begin?

L1 Invite group members to share their mementos:
• Why did you choose this memento?
• What memories and feelings do holding (or looking at) this memento bring up for you?
• What do you do with it to remember your loved one (cherished possession)?
• Does using this memento to reminisce help you to feel better?
• Have you ever shared your memento with someone else? (If yes): What was that experience like for you?

L1 (Process) Sympathetically validate by reflecting and summarizing.

If appropriate, listen for "hurtful" thoughts and help group members find "helpful" thoughts to counter them.

BOTH (Process) Normalize, validate, and build group cohesion.

I noticed that several members’ stories shared __________ in common. Did anybody else notice things in common among what was shared?

BOTH (Conclude): (as appropriate, refer to Flipcharts 3 and 4)

• Share your impressions and reactions to the exercise, emphasizing the courage and trust that members have shown.
• Invite members to comment and reflect on their experiences in participating in the exercise.
• Remember that learning to communicate about our grief experiences to others is a learned skill. We have to understand what emotions we are feeling, to put into words what we are thinking, and to build tolerance for the sadness and pain we feel.
• We hope this exercise today helps you to feel more comfortable sharing your feelings with others who understand. We feel like we now better understand what this loss means to you. Thanks for sharing these very personal things with us.
VI. Summary and Practice Exercises

CONTENT:
- Summarize and bring closure to the session.
- To commit the members to complete the practice exercise.

PROCESS:
- Motivate group members to engage in personal reflection about how their traumatic experiences have altered their development.

L1 Summarize today’s session, not only what occurred but your own reactions to the poignant stories that were shared today. Comment that healing from a loss does not mean forgetting your loved one. Encourage group members to find other opportunities and ways of reminiscing and bringing into your current life, active memories of the deceased.

L2 The homework assignment for this week is exactly this, another opportunity to build a bridge of memory to your loved one. This week group members should think about their loved one using the following questions:

What were his/her special traits?
What will I remember most?
How has he/she impacted my life and changed who I am?

These questions are meant to start you thinking about what your loved one’s “legacy” is to you, that is, what has your loved one bequeathed you? What part of who he/she was will continue to live in you?

Think of an image or symbol that signifies this legacy.

Draw, build, or somehow bring in that image or symbol to next week’s group.

VII. Check-Out

L1 You may lead the group in a chosen transitional activity and then engage the group in the following questions:

- How are you feeling now? (Use thermometer ratings.)
- What did you learn about yourself today?

**End of Session**
MODULE III: Coping With
Traumatic Loss and Grief

SESSION 6:
Adjusting to a World in which
the Deceased is Absent
MODULE III, Session 6

Adjusting to a World in which the Deceased is Absent

The death of a loved one, especially a nuclear family member, may precipitate many changes in the lives of young people. Relationships within and outside of the family may be altered in their size or composition, often with a net loss of important forms of social support. Additional changes may be found in youths’ living circumstances, roles, responsibilities, family rituals, and leisure activities. This session helps youth to identify changes in their relationships and in key domains since the death. Exercises then help group members recognize changes and deficits in their current relationships and opens the way towards remediating or broadening essential support.

Content Objectives

13) Identify changes and deficits in current relationships and social support
14) Identify changes in key life domains.
15) Visualize goals in changing life relationships and circumstances
16) Identify “first steps” toward making preferred changes to broaden essential support and re-engage in developmentally appropriate activities and responsibilities

Process Objectives

15) (Group Leaders) support a positive approach and facilitate individual confidence that group members can make desired changes in their life.
16) (Group Leaders) normalize members’ experiences by pointing out commonalities among members’ grief-related experiences, such as their losses, grief symptoms, and current adversities.
17) (Group Leaders) facilitate members’ re-connection with (living) members of their social networks. This process involves active investment in social relationships in the form of supportive exchanges (e.g., giving and receiving emotional support, feedback, reassurance of worth, etc)
18) (Everyone) Work together to create a group atmosphere of support, validation, acceptance, and sympathetic

Session Overview

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<tr>
<th>Section Number</th>
<th>Session Overview</th>
<th>Estimated Time</th>
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<tr>
<td>33)</td>
<td>Check-In</td>
<td>:05</td>
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<td>34)</td>
<td>Review Practice Exercises</td>
<td>:15</td>
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<tr>
<td>35)</td>
<td>Identifying Changes in My Life Since the Death</td>
<td>:50</td>
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<tr>
<td>36)</td>
<td>Summary and Practice Exercises</td>
<td>:05</td>
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<td>37)</td>
<td>Transition Activity &amp; Check-Out</td>
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Total :90

Supplies

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- Flipchart
- White Paper
- Markers
- Pencils/pens
- Kleenex
- Tape
- Photo Board

### Handouts

- My Relationships Before and After the Death
- Changes in My Daily Life Since My Death
- First Steps to Making Positive Life Changes
Flipcharts

Session Highlights

• Check-In
• Review Practice Exercises
• Identifying Changes In My Life Since The Death
• Focus on Relationships and My Daily Life
• Summary and Practice Exercises
• Check-Out

Five Steps to Getting Support

1. What Do I Want?
2. Who Should I Ask?
3. Find the Right Time
4. Request With an "I" Message:
   • Tell them what I am feeling.
   • Tell them what happened (outside and inside)
   • Tell them what I want them to do.
5. Express Sincere

I. Check-In

How are you feeling right now? (Use thermometer ratings.)
• Is anything going on that may make it difficult for you to keep your mind in the group?
• Use Weather Report Graphic to check-in on current grief reactions.
• Briefly review "Today’s Highlights" (Flipchart 1):

II. Review Practice Exercise
### III. Identifying Changes in My Life Since the Death

**CONTENT:**
- Lead an activity in which members (a) identify changes in their relationships, circumstances, and activities since the death; (b) discuss changes that have been difficult for them; (c) identify changes they wish to make that will help them to better accommodate and adapt to the ongoing absence of their loved ones; and (d) develop a realistic plan for effecting those changes, complete with specific “first steps” that they will implement with the group’s support.
- Draw emotional proximity maps to describe relationships before and after the death.
- Provide an opportunity for group members to talk about changes in their relationships and to acknowledge “losses and gains”.

**PROCESS:**
- Members build group intimacy through disclosure and sympathetic listening.
- Group Leaders build group cohesion and normalize members’ responses by pointing out “common denominators” among members’ loss-related experiences.
- Group Leaders validate members’ responses by reassuring them that their grief-related reactions and difficulties in adjusting to the death make sense in light of the losses they have experienced.

L1 As we have discussed in our past sessions, losses create many changes in our lives—in our moods, our relationships, our day-to-day activities, and in our physical surroundings. Adapting to these changes is an important part of grief work. Put simply, grieving is making the changes, both inside of ourselves and outside of ourselves, that help us to accommodate to the ongoing absence of our loved one from our lives. The more central our relationship was to our loved one, the more changes we need to make in our daily lives as we learn to live without their physical presence. Today we’ll be participating in an interesting activity, in which we will describe the types of changes in our personal relationships, and in our day to day activities, that the loss has created for us. After that, we’ll discuss ways in which we can support each other in making any additional needed changes to help us better adjust to our loved one’s absence.

#### A. Group Activity: My Relationships Before and After the Death.

L2 Hand out the Relationship Map Worksheets from the “Posters and Handouts Manual” to group members and give each member two different colored markers.

L1 Relationships with families and friends often change after someone close dies. Sometimes families draw closer, and sometimes they grow more distant, depending on member’s unique reactions to the loss. Family members can become more emotionally expressive and accessible to each other, or they
can become more argumentative and emotionally cut off. Likewise, friends can have a wide range of reactions: some feel uncomfortable and avoid you, some may act awkwardly because they don’t know what to say, and others may go out of their way to spend time with you. Overall, these changes can bring about losses or gains in the amounts and kinds of support that young people receive.

In this exercise, we would like you to use these maps to represent your relationships with family members and friends before and after your loss. By drawing out your relationships, you can get a clearer understanding of how your relationships have changed or remained the same, and gain some insights into things you can do to get the kinds and amounts of support that you need to deal with the challenges you currently face.

STEP ONE

L2 First, take the circular “before” map, and write in “me” in the very center, because you are the center of your social world. Then, take one of your colored markers and draw a small square on the map for each of your immediate family members. Based on how close or distant each family member was before the death, place their square closer or more distant from you. The first outer circle represents relationships that are close. The second outer circle represents relationships that are more distant. In each square, write in the name of each family member. (As directed by the Group Leaders, have members draw relationship lines between family members to indicate quality of relationship.)

Now, with the same colored marker, draw the squares for each immediate family member in the “after” map to show where they are now in terms of closeness-distance from you. (Put in family names and relationship lines as directed).

STEP TWO

L2 Now, take your second colored marker and draw a square for each of your important friends and extended family members on the before and after maps. By “important” we mean people who you count on for different kinds of support (emotional, fun, material, advice, etc.).

STEP THREE

BOTH Facilitate a discussion in which group members react to the changes in their relationships and their net gains or losses in social support.

1. Allow each member, in turn, to share his/her before and after map, and to comment on what remained the same, and what changed.
2. Point out commonalities among group members and ways in which members might be experiencing losses or gains in their support network.
3. Call attention to areas in which they have good support, and to areas in which they may need to work on recruiting more support.

Prompts include:
• How have your relationships changed since the death?
• Would you describe your family as closer or more distant since the loss?
• Do members of your family grieve in similar ways or in different ways?
• What can you say about the amount of support you have now, compared to what you need?
• Who have you gone to for emotional support, such as someone you can openly talk to and with whom you can share your feelings – before and after the death?.

B. Dyad Activity: Changes in My Daily Life Since the Death

L2 Hand out the “Changes in My Daily Life” Worksheet (from the “Posters and Handouts Manual”) and have the group break into pairs to mutually answer and discuss the listed items.

L1 We just finished exploring ways in which our relationships change after someone close dies. Now we are going to examine ways in which our day-to-day activities may have changed.

Example: (Provide your own example as appropriate. Sample comments are shown below)
When someone dies, the lives of all the people who had a relationship with that person also change in some way. For example, let’s say that a father dies suddenly. His family and friends must not only grieve the loss of his love, companionship, and support; they must also grieve the loss of security and stability that his life brought to theirs. For example, his surviving family must now continue on without his income, without his assistance with homework and practicing musical instruments, without his help in coaching his sons’ little league baseball team. Consequently, the family may now have to move to a different home, and can’t afford the same lifestyle as before. Mom must now work or do more things outside the home, and so meals are more irregular and involve more take-out dinners or pizza deliveries, and don’t involve the family sitting down as much as they used to. The children’s chores and responsibilities also change, with teenagers finding that they have more babysitting responsibilities, or more chores like housecleaning, cooking dinner, doing the laundry, and cleaning up after little brothers and sisters.

Other changes can be found in the way the family celebrates the holidays and other special days, like graduations, catechisms, and bar-mitzvahs. These times, once very joyous, can become stressful and sad reminders of the lost loved one, because their absence is deeply felt. For this reason, families sometimes stop doing their rituals, or they change them to allow them to remember and honor their loved one while also doing something new and enjoyable.

Other examples of changes are your hobbies and pastimes that you used to enjoy with your loved one. Some kids, for example, say that they don’t like to play the piano any more, or play sports, or make cookies, or hanging around with their old friends because it makes them feel lonely and sad about the loss. Sometimes grieving young people stop participating in clubs, boy or girl scouts, and withdraw socially, or they may become less motivated in school or have difficulty concentrating. This can result in lower grades or conflicts with teachers and parents about schoolwork.

But not all, or even most, of your loss-related changes are bad or undesirable. Some young people report that they have drawn closer to their family members or friends after the loss, and that their lives have changed in other good ways. Sometimes they spend more quality time with each other, and speak more openly about what is really important to them. Sometimes their priorities change, and they feel like they have matured and are better friends and kinder brothers or sisters. Much of the time, young people report that the changes brought about by a loss are a mixture of positive and negative things.

In this next exercise, we’d like you to talk about ways in which your life may have changed in different ways. For each area listed in your worksheet, please talk with your partner about the ways in which your life has or has not changed. Afterwards, we’ll share what we have learned. To help you remember your discussion, please write in some notes on your worksheet under each area.

### C. Group Discussion: Changes That I Like… Changes I Don’t Like.

**NOTE:** This is a summary/integrative group discussion in which members discuss the positive and negative changes in their relationships and daily lives. The goal is to help members to use a balanced perspective in acknowledging life changes of all kinds and in making plans for further adjustments and accommodations to the loss.

**BOTH** Lead a discussion in which members report back on their paired-up discussions. Normalize and validate, making summary comments regarding commonalities, negative or undesirable changes, and positive changes brought about by the loss. Lead in to the final activity by identifying the types of changes that members would like to make to accommodate to the loss.

### D. Group Activity: Making Positive Changes in My Life.

**L2** Hand out the “First Steps to Making Positive Life Changes” Worksheet from the Posters and Handouts Manual.

**STEP ONE**

**L2** Invite group members to draw their desired relationships map with family members and friends represented by named squares and (with your help) attaching lines describing the quality of the relationship. Prompt them to think about desired changes in their support networks by calling attention to current and desired levels of supportive provisions, such as:
• Emotional Closeness (having someone to share your thoughts and feelings with)
• Fun/socializing (having people to hang out with, go to parties with, and play sports with)
• Material Support (having someone who can help you out in practical ways, like loaning you lunch money or helping you go shopping for clothes or school supplies)
• Advice or Mentoring (having someone in your life whom you respect and who can give you good feedback, counsel, and advice)
• Reassurance of self-worth (someone who can help pick you up when you are feeling down about yourself)
• Feeling Needed (people in your life whom you can help and who will help you with acts of service)
• Advocacy (having people in your life whom you can make meaningful changes in your community or advocate for social or political changes that you believe in)

STEP TWO
L1 Facilitate a discussion in which group members describe their desired relationship networks, using their relationship maps. Have them focus on areas for potential change by contrasting their “desired” with their “actual” relationship maps. The task here is to help group members plan realistic, achievable steps that will help them to create effective support networks. If appropriate, use the Five Steps to Getting Support handouts as prompts or supplementary materials. Prompt them with such comments as:
• Great idea! What is a first step that you could make toward achieving that change or goal?
• What is something that you could realistically do in the next week or two that you could come back and tell us about?

Have group members write in their “first steps” on the lines provided on the worksheet.

STEP THREE
BOTH Work with the group members to identify and write in the life changes they wish to make on the bottom half of the worksheet. Prompt them with such comments as:
• What are some ways in which you can change your life to make living with the loss easier to deal with?
• Are there any negative changes in your life brought about by the loss that you can work on to improve the quality of your life?
• Is there a positive change brought about by the loss that you can enhance, or use to improve the lives of your family or friends?
• Let’s translate these general ideas into some specific first steps that you could accomplish in the next week or two.

Have group members write in their first steps on the lines provided.

IV. Summary and Practice Exercises

CONTENT:
• Summarize and bring closure to the session.

PROCESS:
• Motivate group members to initiate desired changes in their support network, circumstances, and activities.

L1 Summarize the session’s content and interactions. Highlight commonalities in group members’ responses, and reinforce supportive group behaviors. Sample summary comments include:

Today we explored ways in which our life has changed since the death: ways our important relationships have changed, ways our living situations, roles, activities, school and lives at home have changed. We gave some good thought to which changes we like, and which changes have made things harder for us. Finally, we developed some good ideas for specific things we can do during the next few weeks to make changes in our lives that will help us to adjust to the loss in a positive way. You all did a great job!
L2  **Assign Practice Exercise:** This week we would like you to choose two of the “first steps” you wrote down for changes you would like to see in your life. Let’s go around the circle now and have you pick the “first steps” you would like to try this week. The group can give you some ideas on skills you may want to use to accomplish your steps. We look forward to hearing about how things go when we meet next time!

### III. Transitional Activity & Check-Out

L1 You may have the group select a transitional activity and then engage them with the following questions:

- *How are you feeling now?* (Use thermometer ratings)
- *What did you learn about yourself today?*

*END OF SESSION*
MODULE III: Coping With

Traumatic Loss and Grief

SESSION 7
Planning For Difficult Days (Relapse Prevention)
MODULE III, Session 7
Planning For Difficult Days (Relapse Prevention)

Introduction and Overview

This session uses relapse prevention as a model for anticipating and developing a coping plan to anticipate predictable “setback” periods and settings. Because of the phasic nature of traumatic grief and the manner in which grief reactions may wax and wane depending upon the presence and intensity of trauma reminders, loss reminders, and life adversities, it is essential for group members to develop an effective coping plan to contend with difficult days. This session focuses on developing two sets of skills and expectations designed to inoculate young people against thoughts and feelings of helplessness, unpredictability, and hopelessness in the wake of a traumatic loss. The first is to instill the understanding that, although painful memories and feelings often persist for months, years, and decades after a traumatic loss, they are relatively predictable due to their links to trauma reminders, loss reminders, and secondary adversities or other stressors. The second is to enhance their perceptions of self-efficacy by engaging them in the creation of a coping plan that identifies and anticipates “high risk” situations and circumstances, and prescribes a set of coping responses with which to effectively contend with them.

The activities in this session provide a fun and interactive method of identifying and creating coping strategies for “difficult days” expected within the coming six months. This exercise focuses on two categories of difficult days. The first includes “special days” (i.e. birthdays, holidays, anniversaries, graduations, reunions, etc.) that may generate or contain painful trauma or loss reminders and stressful interactions. Rando (1993) characterizes these reminders as “cyclical” meaning that they are linked to cycles of days, weeks, months, seasons, and years, and are thus comparatively predictable.

The second category of difficult days consists of stressful daily occurrences and interactions with which the group members routinely contend. Rando (1993) characterizes these reminders as “linear”, indicating that they occur with comparative randomness along survivor’s personal timelines. A common complaint of grieving teens is that the people around them—including family members, neighbors, peers, acquaintances, teachers, and other community members—often do not know how to treat them or talk to them about the death of their loved one. Specifically, young people tend to complain that peers and adults who know about the death either ignore them or act differently (e.g., “they act nervous around me”, “people are stand-offish to me”). Feeling different or being treated differently is often aversive to teens, who are intensely preoccupied with the task of “fitting in” and gaining the acceptance of their peers.

Conversely, clinicians observe that group members often lack the necessary interpersonal and psychological skills to talk about their losses in ways that are appropriate for the setting, the manner in which they are approached, and the nature of the interpersonal relationship. Specifically, students often describe that they feel awkward in disclosing to, or that they simply do not know how to tell, friends and teachers that their parent/sibling is deceased. Examples include situations in which they are asked to obtain parental permission for an outing, efforts by the teacher to schedule a meeting with the parent for a parent-teacher conference or for disciplinary reasons, having one’s parent invited for “back to school night”, having friends’ parents ask if they can call your parent to see if you can eat/sleep over, and so forth. These situations are often characterized by feelings of awkwardness, and sometimes shame, in the teen, who also senses that others are uncomfortable and do not know quite what to say or do. An unfortunate outcome of these transactions is mutual discomfort with discussing the trauma or loss, avoidance, and distancing in relationships, with the net result that teens receive the wrong kind of, too much, or too little, attention (see Layne, Pynoos, & Cardenas, 2001).

This session will open with a discussion focused on identifying and discussing problems relating to difficult days and difficult day-to-day interactions relating to the loss. The discussion will then lead to a problem-solving activity focused on developing effective coping strategies with which to contend with difficult days. This will involve a review of members’ coping plans and a discussion of “tips” for getting through difficult days. A second activity will focus on building interpersonal skills that that will guide members in engaging others in trauma- and loss-focused interactions in an appropriate manner. The goal is to help group members to develop an authentic voice with which they can speak about their losses and difficulties in a genuine and minimally distressing manner, that will neither discomfit nor distance others because they have said too much or too little.
Content Objectives

17) Normalize and validate members’ difficulties in contending with difficult days and difficult interpersonal interactions.

18) Call attention to the fact that only some interpersonal interactions focused on the loss can be viewed as supportive interactions. On some occasions, people are (either appropriately or inappropriately—voyeurism is quite common) requesting information that may or may not be helpful for the bereaved and/or traumatized youth to disclose. In other interactions, people are genuinely interested in helping. However, even in the latter interactions, potential support-givers may need guidance from the youth (or others) regarding what types of support are needed, and at which times. Link this concept with the “Five Steps to Getting Support” skill members have learned.

19) Call attention to the need to develop effective support-seeking skills that will assist members in (a) gauging what types of disclosures are appropriate in which settings, and with which relationships, (b) eliciting specific forms of support at specific times, depending on the immediate need.

Process Objectives

19) (Everyone) Work together to create a group atmosphere of support, validation, acceptance, and sympathetic understanding that:
   • allows the group to serve as a “container” for members’ disclosures of the pain, frustration, and loneliness that often accompanies difficult days and difficult interpersonal interactions related to the loss
   • helps members feel comfortable experiencing and sharing their grief-related thoughts, emotions, and efforts to cope with/accommodate to the loss

20) (Group Leaders) increase members’ motivation and commitment to do grief work, with a special emphasis on developing skills with which to contend with adversities generated by the loss.

21) (Group Leaders) validate members’ grief symptoms by giving them meaning. Explain how these symptoms reflect how deeply they still feel the loss and what this loss personally means to them.

22) (Group Leaders) normalize members’ experiences by pointing out commonalities among members’ ‘special’ days and difficult interpersonal interactions.

23) (Group Leaders) facilitate members’ re-connection with (living) members of their social networks. This process involves active investment in social relationships in the form of supportive exchanges (e.g., giving and receiving emotional support, feedback, reassurance of worth, etc.) among group members and with significant others outside the group (in their Practice Exercises).

Session Overview

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<td>Check-In</td>
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<td>Summary and Practice Exercises</td>
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Supplies

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<tr>
<td>Flipchart</td>
<td>White Paper</td>
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This activity requires either a large chalk or drawing board or a large piece of butcher paper taped to the wall so that group members may write on it.

### Handouts

- Common Grief Reactions
- Five Steps to Good Communication
- My Reactions to Loss Reminders
Session Highlights

- Check-In
- Review Practice Exercises
- Focus on Loss
- What is Grief?
- Learn About Grief Reactions
- Learn About Loss Reminders
- Summary and Practice Exercises
- Check-Out

Flipcharts

Problematic Daily Occurrences

Who to tell about the death?

How to speak about the death?

How to get the support you want.

Dealing with rumors

Dealing with expectations that you should be “over it”.
Loss Reminders

1) Times when we miss the lost person or object
   - **Empty situations**: their bedroom, favorite chair, clothes, or place at the table.
   - **Shared activities**: playing games, going for walks, doing homework together, and eating meals together.
   - **Rituals**: graduations, birthdays, holidays, or other family celebrations, award ceremonies, and weddings.
   - **Favorite activities**: their hobbies, favorite food or music, or favorite sayings.

2) Hardships or other changes created by the loss
   - Moving to a new house or town
   - Separation from loved ones
   - Difficulty adjusting to a new environment
   - Difficulty making new friends
MODULE III, Session 7
Planning For Difficult Days (Relapse Prevention)

I. Check-In

are you feeling right now? (Use thermometer ratings.)
- Is anything going on that may make it difficult for you to keep your mind in the group?
- Briefly review "Today's Highlights" (Flipchart 1):

II. Review Practice Exercise

CONTENT:
- Review the group session format.
- Provide feedback and encouragement about how the program can help them with their goals.

PROCESS:
- Increase motivation to use these skills in coping with real-life challenges.

L1 Last week you had the worksheet “First Steps To Making Positive Life Changes”. This exercise was designed to have you first visualize where you would like to be at in terms of your relationships and level of support, and in terms of different parts of your life like school, participation in activities, chores, etc. The second goal was to help you find the first small step you might take toward realizing these goals, in this way making the process less intimidating. You were then asked to try and actually make some headway on some of these first “small steps”.

Invite group members to share their experiences working on this activity and then share their "small steps". Problem-solve with individuals who have not completed the assignment and help them, perhaps privately, to do this important exercise.

III. Planning for Difficult Days (Relapse Prevention)

CONTENT:
- Explain that “difficult days” involving trauma and/or loss reminders can often be anticipated.
- Assist members in identifying their own (often idiosyncratic) difficult days.

PROCESS:
- Facilitate group cohesion by pointing out commonalities among members’ responses.
- Enhance the perceived range of “permissible” responses by calling attention to and validating the differences among members’ responses.
- Validate members’ responses by sympathetically pointing out that it is clear why these are difficult days, given what they remind the members of.
- Increase members’ motivation to develop effective coping plans with which to contend with “difficult days”.

A. Group Activity: Anticipating Difficult Days
L2 Draw six equally placed vertical lines across the board/paper to create columns for the next six months. At the extreme left, write the name of the current month at the top of the column and continue writing consecutive months at the top of the columns to the right. Provide each group member with a different colored marker or piece of chalk.

L1 As appropriate, invite all group members to go up to the board at the same time and write, under the appropriate month, special dates that may serve as trauma or loss reminders during the next six months. Explain that these days should include specific times or settings in they may expect to be reminded either of the traumatic event that resulted in their loved one’s death or of his/her continuing absence. These “difficult days” may include birthdays, anniversaries, holidays, seasons of the year, or special events such as graduations, reunions, religious events like bar mitzvah’s and catechisms, athletic events, or musical/theatrical performances involving the group member.

PROCESS Once all members have written in their special dates, help each group member to identify one or two days that he/she expects to be the most difficult to handle, and to think of why. Then, invite members to describe their difficult days and the parts of them that they expect to be most difficult.

B. Group Discussion: Dealing With Difficult Days

L1 Now that we have each identified one or two difficult days, and the parts of them that are most difficult to handle, let’s work on developing a plan that will help us to cope with these days as best as we can.

BOTH Facilitate a discussion on ways to cope effectively with these anticipated “difficult days”. During this discussion/exercise, invite members to review their Personal Coping Plans to identify which coping strategies may be most effective for that day and place. These plans were created in Module I, Session 3.

For holidays and special occasions, consider directing the discussion to aspects of the upcoming event that may be most painful or difficult to negotiate. Prompts for engaging group members in this task include:

- This holiday I am most worried about……
- What I fear the most is……
- I will miss (deceased person) particularly when we….
- I start getting upset when….
- It’s hardest for me when….

During this exercise, review the worksheet “Ideas for Getting Through Special Days”

Prompts for engaging group members in developing strategies for coping with difficult days include:

- Remember that one of the important tasks for grieving is to remember the past while moving into the future. One way you can do this in your families is to set aside a special time during which your family remembers and pays tribute to your loved one. Perhaps you can each share a special memory of a time you shared with your loved one, or have a moment of silence, or pray together. Then, you can create some new family rituals that are all your own, so you can create new pleasant memories.
- I wish our family would change…
- One way I would like to honor the memory of (deceased person) during (the holiday or event) is…
- I’m going to try something new by…
- One things I’ve done in the past that has really helped is to……
- One thing I’ve done in the past that didn’t help (and that I’d like to avoid doing again) was to…
- I’d like the group’s help in figuring out a better way to…

C. Group Discussion: Dealing With Daily Occurrences

**HINTS:**

1. This discussion is designed to provide an opportunity for members to share daily interactions at school, with friends and family members that are difficult because of their loss.

2. Initiate this discussion from a “one-down position” in which the students are treated as the experts. Convey the message that you don’t really know what is difficult for them.
Besides special days, another source of stress for young people who have lost a loved one is daily situations and conversations that are difficult or awkward. We hear from young people that it’s hard to know who to tell and who not to tell about the death of your loved one, and exactly how to tell them. Young people tell us that, sometimes, people who do know about what happened can treat you differently, like avoiding you, or they act nervous about mentioning the word “death” or the name of your deceased family member. Some kids say that they feel uncomfortable when they are in situations where a parent is supposed to be involved, like back-to-school nights, or getting permission slips signed, or setting up teacher-parent meetings.

So let’s spend some time talking about whether this happens to you. You tell me…what kind of regular situations feel uncomfortable to you, or are difficult to deal with?

Facilitate a discussion focused on identifying stressful day-to-day interactions related to the traumatic death.

D. Group Discussion: Speaking Authentically About Your Loss and Asking for What You Want

Summarize the foregoing discussion, focusing on the range of common situations that the group members find uncomfortable and difficult. Common themes and questions may include the following:

- Not knowing who to tell or how to talk about the death.
- How to help friends and teachers provide the kind of support that you need at the time.
- How to deal with situations that usually involve your deceased family member (conferences, permission slips, etc.)
- Dealing with rumors about the death.
- Dealing with other’s expectations that you should be over the death by now.

There are no easy answers to these problems. Your role is not that of the “answer person”, but rather of a sympathetic listener who understands the pain and isolation that these circumstances may cause. You may find the following principles useful as you seek to help group members develop personal coping plans. Seek to use the group to generate these ideas on their own with appropriate “leading” questions as appropriate.

Present Flip Chart #2

Not knowing who to tell about the death.

You should give serious thought to the question of whom to tell about the death. The decision is easier for close friends and family members, less clear for teachers and acquaintances. The key factor is whether disclosing will make things easier for you in the long run. For instance, even though you would prefer not to tell a school counsellor or certain teachers, it may be in your best interest to do so in order to avoid awkward public situations in which you have to break the news with an audience present. For different acquaintances on campus, you may want to speak with them individually, or ask a close friend to spread the news, along with your preferences regarding how others can best support you.

Not knowing how to speak about the death.

This is another serious matter, because you might want different people to have different amounts of information about what happened. As you think about what to say, keep in mind that you want them to know enough so that they can support you in a sensitive and effective way without exposing them to upsetting details (such as graphic information that you or they can picture clearly) that don’t help them and that make you feel upset to talk about. For this reason, it may be a good idea to develop an honest yet brief “news release” that can inform people about what happened without over-exposing you. For example, you might say, “My Dad was killed in the World Trade Center attack…..yeah, it’s been difficult but we’re doing better now….thanks.” This is an authentic statement that gives the news
without inviting intrusive follow-up questions. If someone presses you for details about the event that you don’t wish to discuss, you can say, “I’d rather not go into details, but I can tell you that it was one of the hardest, longest days of my life”.

It may be appropriate to have a Group Exercise in which each group member develops their own “News Release”.

How to help friends and teachers provide the kind of support that feels good to you.

Remember, in our exercise on learning to get support, that different types of stressful situations require different types of support. In some situations, you may be confused over an important choice and not know what to do. In that case, information and advice can be most helpful. In other situations where you are bored or feeling lonely, being invited to socialize with friends can really pick up your spirits. At other times, a hug and an understanding ear, maybe a shoulder to cry on, are exactly what you need.

- Lead a discussion in which members explore the specific types of responses and supportive exchanges that have been most helpful, and least helpful and make them feel bad.
- Point out that, when friends or family offer support that we don’t want, we sometimes respond with irritation, or we ignore them. This can confuse them, and hurt our relationships.
- We can sometimes make things easier if we let our friends and family know what type of support they could offer that would be useful to us. A good way to do this is to use the Five Steps to Getting Support. This will also help put your friends at ease because they often mean well but simply don’t know what to do.

How to deal with situations that usually involve your deceased family member (conferences, permission slips, etc.)

You can avoid some of these situations by letting key people know about the death beforehand. If this is not possible, then consider taking people aside and speaking with the privately. For example, when a teacher asks that both parents sign a permission slip, the students may refrain from saying anything at the time and speak privately with him or her after class.

Dealing with rumors about the death.

This problem can be reduced somewhat by proactively speaking with key adults and peers. Once they hear the news from you—the news that you want them to know, the need for gossip may go down.

Dealing with other’s expectations that you should be over the death by now.

Dealing with other people’s expectations can be difficult, especially if they don’t understand very much about grief. Young people can feel pressured by open comments like “It’s been a month now...you better start concentrating on your grades.” Other comments can be subtler, such as when all discussion of the deceased is dropped and people only talk about getting on with your life.

The best antidote for this problem is knowledge about the grief process, both for you and for those around you. If you encounter this problem, think back to our discussions we had at the beginning of our focus on grief, and if needed, think about handing some of our materials to people who may benefit from reading them. Remember that grief is a very individual process, and that there is no set time for it to be resolved. In fact, for cases of traumatic bereavement, active grieving can continue for years. In truth, you will grieve, in some way or another, for as long as you feel the absence of your loved one in your life, and this is not a bad thing. It shows how important your relationship with him/her was to your life, and what they meant to you. While it is true that your feelings of sadness, anger, and loss may diminish over time, they may not go completely away for a long time. Instead, they may be changed into a sweet appreciation for your loved one.

- Consider discussing/problem solving practical approaches for dealing with friends, relatives, or associates who place these expectations. This may involve talking to the individual using the Five Steps to Getting support and, perhaps, providing some on-the-spot grief education.

IV. Summary and Practice Exercises
L1 We call this session our “relapse prevention” session because it is designed to give you a “heads up” for difficulties that are waiting for you. We want you to be very aware that the road to healing is bumpy with many ups and downs. There may be times, perhaps even tomorrow, when you will be plunged into sadness, anxiety, or deep longing for your lost family member and the world will seem closed and distant and uncaring. It is at those times that we want you to think back to your experience, training, and practice in our group, so that you can begin to put things in perspective and, hopefully, try one of your personal coping strategies. This group cannot take away the pain you have experienced or the pain and longing you will continue to experience, but it can help you from falling into a downward spiral in which you lose hope and confidence in your ability to persevere.

Next week is our final group session, so the only homework is to get ready to have some good food and to say goodbye. Let’s also take a group picture today so that I can have a copy developed for everybody next week.

Take a few group pictures. Before next group, have copies made for each group member. You will be making Goodbye Cards for each member for the last session. These cards consist of the photo mounted on colored card stock paper. Make a card for each group member. Identify them as such by putting the group member’s name at the top of their card. Plenty of room should be provided for group members to write special messages. You may do this as simple or fancy as you like, with computer typesetting or hand printing. Bring these for next week.

V. Transitional Activity & Check-Out

L1 Ask group members the following questions.

- How are you feeling now? (Use thermometer ratings)
- What did you learn about yourself today?

Have the group select a transitional activity.

**END OF SESSION**
MODULE III: COPING WITH
TRAUMATIC LOSS AND GRIEF

Session 8: Saying Goodbye in a Good Way
MODULE III, SESSION 8:
Saying Goodbye in a Good Way

Content Objectives
1. Review progress in treatment
2. Reinforce treatment gains
3. Help group members to plan and look forward to their life after the group.
4. Allow group members to genuinely express what participating in the group has meant to them—their reactions to termination of regular group meetings, their anticipation of missing the group leaders and each other.
5. Compare and contrast this “voluntary” separation with previous “traumatic” separations

Process Objectives
1. Part from each other in a therapeutic fashion
2. Identify and process “resurrected” thoughts and feelings connected to earlier separations.

Session Overview

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Flipcharts

• Check-In
• Review
• Practice Exercises
• Saying Goodbye in a Good Way
• Check-Out
I. Check-In

L1 How are you feeling right now? (Use thermometer ratings.)
- Is anything going on that may make it difficult for you to keep your mind in the group?
- Use Weather Report Graphic to check-in on current grief reactions.
- Briefly review "Today's Highlights" (Flipchart 1):

II. Review Practice Exercise

Content:
- Focus on developmental progression, calling attention to the importance of adopting a future orientation rather than a "survival" orientation.
- Emphasize the importance of setting positive goals and working towards them.
- Reflect on the progress members have made, both individually and collectively, while participating in the group.

Process:
- Facilitate expressions of confidence and reassurance from group members regarding each other’s goals and their abilities to achieve them.
- Increase motivation to form and pursue positive individual goals.

L1 Invite each member to share his/her plans for the future with the other group members. Lead the group in encouraging members in adopting helpful and optimistic beliefs and plans, and in reassuring them that they can truly accomplish them.

III. Address termination issues

Content:
- Focus on personal and collective accomplishments.
- Focus on termination-related issues.
- Increase members’ capacity to differentiate between “good” goodbyes and “traumatic” goodbyes.

Process:
- Facilitate pride and satisfaction in personal and collective accomplishments.
- Generate confidence that members have developed the skills to accomplish their (appropriate) personal goals.
- Process termination-related thoughts and feelings.
- Increase tolerance for separations.

Hints:
- Keep your “feedback” remarks brief but genuine. Be careful not to “heroize”, to patronize, or to overdramatize (this may place pressure on students to follow your example). Melodrama and grief don’t mix well.
- As appropriate, point out that they can use what they have learned about themselves and their achievements in the group in the future, when they encounter situations in which they doubt that they can do it. They will need to rely on this strengthened self-confidence as they face their own (unpredictable and uncertain—but life always is) futures with hope and courage.
- Emphasize the contrast (“what is different”?) between aspects of this separation and past traumatic separations to highlight the nontraumatic nature of this parting.
1. **Distinguish between how we're separating now and previous “traumatic” separations.** Compare and contrast between a “good” goodbye and a “traumatic” goodbye by noting what is the same, and what is different:

   As you know, today is our last official session together, so a lot of our work today is going to focus on saying a “good goodbye” to each other. But before we begin, it is very important that we point out the big difference between how we are parting and the way you have parted from other people in the past. We are separating voluntarily because we have done the work that we formed our group to do, and not as the result of sudden and traumatic circumstances. Nevertheless, saying goodbye today may still remind us of other times when we never had the chance to say goodbye—of relationships in which we never wanted to have to say goodbye.

   **L1 PROCESS:** Invite group members to respond:
   
   *We’d like to invite each of you to comment. Does today’s goodbye remind you of other goodbyes from the past? If so,
   *  
   • What is the **same** about saying goodbye today compared to my “traumatic” goodbyes in the past?
   *  
   • What is **different**?

2. **Invite members to reflect on their accomplishments in the group.**

   Let’s first reflect on what we’ve accomplished during this time we have been meeting together, both as individuals and as a group. Do you remember our first individual interviews together, before the group formed? During those interviews, we asked you to describe a chronology of your life—the important things that happened before the (trauma), during the (trauma), and after the (trauma)—the high points and the low points.

   Distribute the timelines to the individual members.

   We’d like you to take a minute and look over your timelines—how you viewed your life before joining the group. Try to remember what you were like back then—how you were thinking and feeling, and especially how you were thinking about your future. Reflect on your life history—who you were before, how the traumatic event changed you, and who you are striving to be now.

   (Give them a minute or so to reflect)

   We’d like to invite each of you to comment on what you’ve accomplished with the group’s help.

   • Share one or two positive changes that you have made in your life, or in your family’s life, while you have been a part of this group.
   • Before our first session, did you think that you would have been able to accomplish what you have accomplished with the group’s help?

3. **Invite members to share their reactions to participating in the group.**

   And now, after reflecting on what your life was like before joining the group, let’s talk about what being in the group has meant to you:

   • What has it been like for you to be in the group?
   • What was the group like compared to how you thought it was going to be like?

   Disclose what working with the group has been like for you. Keep your disclosures brief but sincere.
• Review your own perceptions of the positive changes that each group member has made.
• Convey your respect and admiration for their courage and hard work.
• Tell them how happy you are for them.

4. **Discuss what you will take with you as a “legacy” from the group.**

   *Now we invite each of you to share one or two of the most valuable things that you have learned or gained from the group. What will you take with you that you consider most helpful or valuable?*

5. **Give each member a chance to share his/her feelings about the group coming to an end, and to say goodbye.**

   *We’d like to give each of you some time to talk about how you think and feel about the group ending.*

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### IV. Exchange Best Wishes & Have a Goodbye Party

**CONTENT:**
- Teach the importance of actively creating positive memories and opportunities for positive interactions.

**PROCESS:**
- Provide comfort to group members by creating positive mementos with which to remember and reminisce about their group experience.
- Facilitate positive exchanges of comfort and other forms of support.

**BOTH** Before you dismiss the group to enjoy the food and drinks, invite them over to a separate table that you have set up along the side of the room. On this table, place copies of the “Group Wishes” Card for each member, along with an equal number of pens or markers. Group member’s names should be written boldly at the top of their Card. Ideally, the cards should be laid out so that group members can walk around the table and write on the cards set along the perimeter.

Invite group members to write a goodbye note or some positive message on each of the cards. When students have finished they may go over to the food table and have some fun!

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### V. Check-Out

• **How are you feeling now? (Use thermometer ratings.)**

Make sure group members are doing well. Keep over any members who are visibly distressed.

**end of group**