

Grief Services

Skills and Techniques for Group Facilitators

Most Important Skills:

- *Stay present and pay attention*
- *Stay connected to yourself*
- *Learn to trust your intuition*
- *Keep your communication clear, simple, and honest*

Other Useful Skills:

1. Create and maintain a safe container. Help establish rules/norms/guidelines.
2. Provide support, encouragement, and optimism. Hold the hope.
3. Encourage participation. Ask questions. Show interest. Listen.
4. Teach. Impart information.
5. Provide focus and direction. Balance individual and group needs.
6. Establish connections. Help members begin to support one another.
7. Use mirroring to:
 - a. comment on the group process
 - b. give individual feedback
8. Share your feelings and experience when appropriate.
9. Keep communicating with your co-leader.
10. Get help when you need it.

SKILLS

Leaders need group dynamics training to effectively promote interaction within the group and thus enable each person to speak comfortably. The art of facilitating a group effectively takes time to develop. Ideally, at least one of the leaders should have some past group experience.

Since there is a guidance component to a grief group, leaders need to transmit information that is relevant to the particular situation. Leaders need to have a good sense of timing, knowing when to teach and when to listen and support the expression of the struggle.

WHY HAVE CO-LEADERS?

The advisable procedure is to have *two* persons leading's group. Of particular value is to have one male and one female.

When group members are exploring their grief, often many things are happening simultaneously. At these times, as well as others, having two leaders can be very valuable. One or the other leader always can be monitoring the activity level of the group.

Additionally, two persons bring different styles that can serve the group members better. Some teens may connect with one leader, while others may relate better to another leader. It is imperative, however, that the leaders be collaborative. If misunderstandings arise, it is essential that both leaders be willing and able to work out their differences *outside* the group time.

Sometimes, a bereaved teen may express something that triggers some unexpected reaction within one leader. Sensing that, the other leader may need to take over the discussion, temporarily allowing the other leader to refocus.

Practically speaking, if one leader suddenly comes down with the flu or some other emergency arises, the meeting still can be held. Unnecessary cancellations can be disruptive to the participants. The teens depend upon this all-important continuity.

Highly recommended is that one of the two leaders be a mental health professional. If this is not possible, however, it is essential that there is a professional with whom the leaders can consult. This professional can assist the leaders with group process, can assist with particular issues needing expert opinion, and can help determine when individual psychiatric help might be warranted.