

SUPPORT GROUP FACILITATOR GUIDE

INITIAL STEPS

As an essential component of the TreeHouse program, it is critical that each Support Group session is conducted in a productive and smooth-flowing manner.

The following steps should occur in the order listed:

Step 1: If the group facilitator and attending teens have not previously met the entire group, everyone should introduce themselves.

Step 2: Explain that the purpose of Support Group is to give and receive support.

Step 3: Explain the three “needs” – you are loved without strings; not alone; and lovable, capable, and worthwhile (can be done at end of group instead).

Step 4: Explain the four rules of Support Group - confidentiality, honesty, respect, stay on track.

Step 5: If new teens are present, explain how and why teens “take time” and that they will have the opportunity to do so during the group.

Step 6: If new teens are present, review the feelings chart and the value of talking about feelings.

Step 7: Check in by having each teen state his/her name, provide 3-10 personal feelings, rate his/her week from 1-10, and state yes/no/maybe/leftovers for taking time to share. An optional task is for each individual to answer a “bonus” question.

Step 8: Be ready to interact with teens’ comments and/or introduce further interactive questions.

Step 9: Decide the order each teen will “take time” to share. Follow the Three Task format below for each teen who shares or for each issue shared by a teen, if more than one issue is presented.

THE THREE TASKS

The purpose of the Three Task format is to focus on the teens’ feelings, to solicit empathy and support from others, and to solicit peer input. The main goal is to help teens cope, not to “fix them” or their problem. Each teen must have a chance to vent and be heard. The role of the facilitator is to help them cope, even in the midst of a situation in which there are more powerful forces that they cannot change or control. We want to help ground them in God’s love and encourage them to decide who they want to be and how they want to respond in light of God’s opinion of them and in spite of negative messages and voices in their life.

TASK 1: FEELINGS

Minimize a recitation of the details of the event or situation, and help the participant identify and talk about their feelings. Exception: when there is abuse or neglect, encourage participants to talk enough about the situation to allow them to “break the silence” around the painful situation.

Possible statements to make to the group:

- Our primary concern at Support Group is not to focus on the details of anyone’s life, but on feelings related to significant life issues. We call it support group because it is a place where we listen, encourage, and to try to help each other cope with and even overcome our struggles.
- Each of us have three very important needs that can partially be met when support group works the way is supposed to: the need to experience unconditional love; the need to know that you are lovable, capable and worthwhile; and the need to know you are not alone.

Possible interactive questions:

- How do you feel about what happened/what’s happening/what’s going to happen?
- How does it feel to talk about the situation right now?

TASK 2: EMPATHY

Reframe issue to allow others to participate.

Possible approaches:

- Ask: “Has anyone else ever experienced what Jeremy is going through?” or, “I wonder if others can relate to what Jeremy just shared.”
- If some say yes...”How did you feel when that happened to you?”
- Ask Jeremy, “How does it feel to know that other people have gone through the same kind of thing you’re facing?”
- To focus on the feelings more than the situation, ask, “Can anyone relate to the feelings of _____ that Jeremy just expressed? Maybe your situation is/was quite different, but you have felt _____. If some say yes... “What was it like for you? What other feelings did you experience?”
- Or state, “Jeremy, the pain you feel is very real and very deep. Sometimes there are not easy solutions to our problems, and sometimes we feel completely powerless to change our circumstances. One thing we can hold on to, though, is knowing that we are not alone in our pain. As you’ve heard, others are going through similar situations/others can relate to your feelings.”

TASK 3: SUPPORT

Solicit further input or encouragement from peers according to the desires of the participant.

Possible approaches:

- Ask: “Jeremy, is there anything else you would like from the group tonight?”
- Or: “Jeremy, is there any way the group can support you tonight?”
- Or: “Jeremy, do you want any feedback from the group?” (You may wish to choose this response if you believe that the teen has lost perspective or is making poor choices that other teens could be helpful to address.)
- Invite the group to encourage or emotionally support the person sharing, to lift him or her up with affirmations, reminders of truth, or to give healthy perspective/ideas for moving forward.

ENDING SUPPORT GROUP: CLOSURE AND PREPARATION FOR DEPARTURE

A proper ending can leave the group feeling complete and connected.

The facilitator will do one or more of the following:

- Recap the learning/teaching from the evening's theme and/or items that arose in the course of sharing and supporting.
- Affirm the teen.
- Acknowledge the feelings/mood that exist at end of sharing time.
- Provide final input: encouragement, confrontation, reflection, etc.
- Prayer