Rationale

In September the school counselors administered a general needs assessment to the entire school. Students were asked to identify issues in the three domains (academic, personal/social, and career) that they felt they needed help with. Twenty-six students checked the “Grief over the loss of a loved one” option.

Death and grief are sensitive subjects that make many people uncomfortable. Middle school students, like anyone else, react in a wide variety of ways to the death of someone significant in their lives. Some of these reactions are outside a school counselor’s realm of expertise; in these cases we need to refer students to appropriate resources (Cohen & Mannarino, 2011; Granello, Ober, & Wheaton, 2012). That said, grief has been successfully addressed in schools, and school counselors are positioned to lead bereavement support groups (Glass, 1991). Granados described an effective intervention in middle and high schools that focused on “re-membering” practices (Granados, Winslade, DeWitt, & Hedke, 2009). Based in narrative therapy, the approach encourages students to continue their relationship with their loved one by sharing memories rather than asking students to let go of the deceased and move on (Granados et al., 2009; Hedke, 2012). Research on this kind of grief counseling is limited, and the success is largely anecdotal rather than based in numbers. However, both adolescent and adult participants reported increased positive feelings, and decreased negative feelings as a result of bereavement support groups (Granados et al., 2009; Hedke, 2012).

Culture
Though culture is not the focus of this group, culture will be addressed indirectly in multiple sessions, and directly in the second session. Death is handled differently in different religions, different regions, and in different families (Lopez, 2011). In the second session, the questions and discussion will focus on the cultural messages students received surround their loss.

**Screening Process**

The 26 students identified through the general needs assessment were briefly interviewed by me or another school counselor. Students were asked who they had lost, how close they were to the deceased person, how they were handling loss thus far, and whether or not they would be interested in participating in a grief group. In addition to these 26, five other students who had lost a family member since the needs assessment were interviewed. Fifteen students said they were interested in group.

A week after the initial interview, the fifteen students were asked to complete a “Pre-Group Thoughts” survey. Students were given a personalized permission form, and I called parents to tell them about group and that the form would be coming. Fifteen students have completed this final screening step, and students are gradually returning their permission forms. Two separate groups will be conducted. The ASCA Action Plan and lesson plans provide details of this group.
Lesson Plans
Adapted from Granados et al., 2009, & Hedke, 2012

Session 1
Time: 50 minutes
Topic: Introduce the dead

Materials
- journals
- pens
- chart paper
- marker(s)
- journal questions written/printed out

Activities
1. Make group rules/guidelines (including confidentiality and “you should…” statements)

2. Group members introduce themselves and introduce the person who has died (Briefly.)

3. More detailed introduction of people who have died in dyads. Then each pair shares with the group. Facilitators might ask...
   a. Can you introduce me to your loved one?
   b. Tell me about the person who died.
   c. What things did they enjoy in life?
   d. What were their professions?
   e. What were their hobbies and interests?
   f. What kind of things did you enjoy about them?
   g. What did it mean to have them in your life?

4. Introduce the concept of journaling exercises, and get started if there is time.
   *Besides in group this week, when are the times that you notice a connection with your loved one who has died?*
   i. Are there some times more than others that you notice this connection?
   ii. Do you notice this connection more when you are alone or when you are with other people?
   iii. Are there stories, songs, rituals or sayings in particular that remind you of this person and your connection with him/her?

Meet with students briefly during sessions 1 and 2. Remind them to do the journal entry if they haven’t. *(Have extra copies of the prompt on hand)*
Session 2  
Time: 50 minutes  
Topic: Unpacking the language of grief  

Materials  
- Journals  
- Pens  
- Additional blank paper and something to write on (table, book, whatever)  
- White board or chart paper  
- Markers  
- Journal question written out/printed  

Activities  
1. Facilitator asks about the experience of the first session and journal writing  

2. Students work in dyads to answer:  
   What kinds of things did people say to you before your loved one died or since his or her death about how you were supposed to feel, think, or act?  

   Students write down their answers, not judging or discounting, just recalling.  

3. When time is up, the group comes back together and shares what they talked about in pairs. The facilitator writes down answers on the whiteboard.  

4. The facilitator asks about cultural messages that came from things like sympathy cards, TV, religious leaders, friends, etc., and adds to the white board.  

5. Students evaluate the comments.  
   Of these messages, what has been helpful?  
   Of these messages, what has not been helpful?  

6. Journaling (There probably won’t be time, but have prompts just in case a student wants to journal for HW)  
   If you were to give advice to a person facing similar experience, knowing what you know now about what is helpful and what is not, what might you tell them?  

Meet with students in between sessions 2 and 3 to remind them to bring their object and/or picture. Meet with them on TUESDAY & WEDNESDAY before group on Thursday.
Session 3
Time: 50 minutes
Topic: Stories of strength

Materials
- Journals
- Pens
- Typed list of comments, words, phrases that the group came up with in session 2 (print one for every student)
- Students’ photos and items
- Journal question written out/printed

Activities
1. Revisit session 2, ask students if they have any lingering thoughts.

2. Sharing items and photos

Questions to ask (during sharing) to bring out stories of strength include:
   a. What do you admire about how (the deceased) faced challenges in life?
   b. What were his best moments?
   c. How did she live with adversities?
   d. In what ways did the deceased rise to the challenge of hardships surrounding his own death?
   e. What do you think she would appreciate about why you selected this picture or item?
   f. What does he know about you that would let him know you could manage the challenges in front of you?
   g. What might she see you succeeding at in the near or distant future?

3. Journaling (just in case we need an extra activity)
   - What were your loved one’s moments of greatness in life?
   - What strengths did your loved one have that you would like to keep close to you?
   - What would he or she say are your own moments of greatness?
   - What difference would you like this to make in your life as you remember the stories of strength?
**Session 4**  
Time: 50 minutes  
Topic: Finding the voice of the deceased

**Materials**
- Journals
- Pens
- Journal question written out/printed

**Activities**
1. Reflect on session 3. If applicable, ask students about a question from Session 3’s journal exercise: *What would your loved one say are your moments of greatness in life?*

2. Remembering conversation
   a. If your loved one were here, what would he say he valued about you?
   b. What would she say she appreciated about how you were during her **illness**? (if applicable)
   c. What would he say he appreciated about how you have handled things since he died?

3. Additional reflective questions
   a. If you were to remember your loved one’s words, how might it make today, tomorrow, or whenever easier to bear?
   b. When you imagine her words of advice living within you, how might you access these words when you need them?

4. Journaling exercise (start during session)
   *Please write a letter from your loved one to yourself. In it, please talk about the things you mentioned in the group. What does your loved one value and appreciate about you?*

**Students are asked to bring pictures between sessions 4 and 5 for the re-membering cards**
Session 5
Time: 50 minutes
Topic: Stories of Strength (2)

Materials
- Journals
- Pens
- Journal question written out/printed
- construction paper
- scissors
- glue sticks
- writing utensils

Activities
1. Review Session 4’s journal exercise - invite students to read the letters they wrote, and use the letters as a starting point for conversation.

2. Re-membership card activity – Students will make a collage like creation on construction paper. They will write words and phrases related to the person they’ve lost. Hopefully the discussions and journaling exercises in previous groups will lead students to have thoughts on hand. Facilitators will use a copier to shrink the collages down to the size of a typical membership card and laminate them.

**Students are asked to bring a picture and/or item of someone who helps keep alive memories of the person who died**

Remind students to bring the item between sessions 5 and 6.
**Session 6**
Time: 50 minutes
Topic: Expanding the club

**Materials**
- Journals
- Pens
- Journal question written out/printed
- Collage materials from session 5

**Activities**
1. Students share the pictures/items they brought with them. Facilitators say…
   a. Please introduce the group to people in the pictures
   b. How have they come to know your loved one?
   c. Who else shares your stories, love and memories of your loved one?
   d. What is it that they would say they value about your deceased loved one?

2. Give students time to finish up their collages from session 5

3. Reflecting on group
   a. What has touched you about meeting other people who have died?
   b. What stories of strength and love have you heard about from others in the past six weeks that have made a difference in your life?
   c. What would your loved one say that he values about what you have done in the past six weeks in this group?
   d. If there were one thing your loved one would want others to know about what it means to have her stories shared here, what would she say?

4. Post-group evaluations will be completed a different day, in the office, 1 on 1.
References


