**Group Counseling for Children of Divorce and Separation: A Comprehensive Program**



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**H340: Preventative and Developmental Group Counseling**

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**ABSTACT**

The following is a complete program for group counseling for children of divorce and separation. It includes a target population, recruitment strategies, screening process, rationale, literature review, references, umbrella purpose, measurable goals, evaluation methods, and outline of six sessions that include objectives, materials and strategies. Population will be early high school students who are carefully and thoroughly screened so at to result in a group that is well matched and balanced so as to gain the greatest possible value for the six sessions together. Literature review and references look at divorce groups from multiple perspectives so as to include as many diverse issues as possible. A rationale explains why group structure is the ideal form for counseling for children of divorce. Group counseling helps students understand the wide variety of different issues that arise in the context of groups, helps with universality, and brings support and healing to the very essence of their life challenges: a fractures family *group*. The overall purpose, to empower students to make healthy adjustments in their lives given the immense life changes, is well served by group counseling. Measurable goals and evaluation methods insure a high degree of rigor in the process. Finally, six sessions are spelled out in detail including clear objectives, necessary materials and specific strategies so as to insure success in realizing the purpose of the group. Topics such as improving awareness of feeling and emotions, increasing knowledge of psycho-educational facts and statistics about divorce, increasing universality, managing adjustment and transition, writing about feelings, and increasing effectiveness of parent-students communication are explored in depth. Group ends with a termination exercise and opportunity to write a letter to parents.

**PART I: Target Population, Recruitment and Screening Strategies**

1. **Target Population**

My target population is early high school students who experience challenging life difficulties as a result of divorce and/or separation of parents or legal guardians. Student range with respect to their stages of loss and level of disruption in their lives, but tends to average out to be somewhere in the middle stages. The grade level is 9th and 10th grade students along with one 12th grade student interested in being supportive of the group and perhaps interested in studying counseling in college. Counseling sessions take place in a clean, well lit room either in a classroom of their high school, a room devoted to counseling at the school, or a suitable counseling room approved by parents and school administrators. It’s important that students feel safe in their familiar environment.

1. **Recruitment/Enrollment**

I will recruit students from local high schools. I will have conversations with local high school counselors who wish to collaborate with me, letting them know that I’m a child of divorced parents and that I’m personally and highly motivated to make a difference. I’ll inform them that I have ten years of teaching experience (including Psychology and Peer Counseling), that I’ve been an informal school counselor and that I’m studying psychology, human development and counseling within the context of education at Harvard Graduate School of Education. I’ll listen carefully to them about their students, asking open-ended questions that hopefully will result in conversation that add value to all parties and help us gain insights about our particular population of children of divorce. I’ll show that I have a solid needs assessment for this population and make sure that the parents, teachers, and counselors know that I really care. I’ve have conversation with teachers, counselors about parents about ideal students candidates for children of divorce or separation.

1. **Screening Strategies**

I’ll meet with students who the counselors feel are good candidates and use some of the techniques discussed in Group Counseling course on how to screen for the optimal group of students for this particular student issue. I’ll give potential members questionnaires to fill out, and ask them to give me writing samples about their thoughts and feeling about being children of parent divorce and separation. I’ll meet with them, build relatedness and trust, let them know more about the course and let them know about the kinds of rules and agreements necessary forfor participation. More specifically, I will:

1. Give a needs assessment survey to make sure they fall in the category of needing this type of counseling
2. Receive referrals and meet to talk through referrals with teachers and other counselors who know them.
3. Think through how much room I have and whether I need to do more than one group.
4. Give respect to and listen to parents who may have issues and concerns related to the participation of their students.
5. Get a good sense for the magnitude of the particular family issue and get a stronger sense of where the family is at as a unit.
6. Get a variety of feedback about whether particular students are ready for the group.
7. Look closely as student’s academic and counseling-related records and personal histories.
8. Distinguish between those students whose parents already got divorced and those whose parents are on their way to divorce but have not gone through formal procedures.
9. Ascertain the degree of desireeach student has to examine and work through issues.
10. Follow the standard practice (cited in the Code of Ethics of the American Counseling Association) of interviewing each student.
11. Gain an accurate sense for student’sexpectations of the group coming in.
12. Make sure students who want to be in the group understand the general level of vulnerability and personal sharing that will occur in the group.
13. Make sure students understand the nature of confidentiality and agreements.
14. Make sure they have the necessary language skills needed for communication in the group.
15. Make sure students have a desire to be helpful to othersin the group.
16. Make sure students agree to attend all sessions of the group, with very few exceptions of emergencies.
17. Ask students the appropriate variation of questions suggested by Greenburg on page 38 of his text, *Group Counseling in K-12 Schools.*
18. Be clear about the number of sessions and how long they will be.
19. Ask students to check schedules for any unforeseen large dates of absence.
20. Ask for and collect permission slips/forms that relate to the topic of divorce.

One of the most important aspects of my screening is choosing a well-matched and balanced group that will work well together and provide value and fulfillment of purpose for all students. Some students might be reacting to their family divorces from such completely different perspectives that they would not be able to relate or empathize with other members in the group. If I lead more than one group it will be important to split the groups according to strategies like this. The more similar each other’s experiences, the more each student will get out of the group. Divorce is such a challenging issue and parents who are going through stress have complex and often dysfunctional ways of handling their problems. Some of them might put their children into very difficult situations and ask them to keep confidentiality. Given that some families might have overlapping issue or even intimacy within the community, I need to make sure boundaries are not crossed in this respect. Being aware of relevant legal issue such as whose parents are still married or not married is also important. Finally, although gender issues come up frequently in divorce groups (given that the very nature of divorce has to do with relationship conflict and breakdown), I need to be cognizant of how gender dynamics might play themselves out with students in the group. For example, any past histories of dating or of boundary crossing related to dating and sexuality must be carefully screened and considered so as to prevent an unsafe environment. That said, co-ed groups can be quite helpful for learning about cross-gender communication if created and screened carefully and mindfully.

**PART III: Rationale, Literature Review and References**

There was a time in our country when loss as a result death in the family represented a majority of the cases of extreme family disruption. Now the highest is divorce. Over half of all marriages in the United States end in divorce. Whether students split their time between two parents, don’t see one of their parents at all, or some other variation, divorce can be a very difficult and painful experience that brings with it great fluctuations in mood (Greenburg, 2003). The consequences and feelings associated with divorce are multiple and complex. Children of parental divorce, when compared with those from continuously intact two-parent families, struggle more with conduct problems, psychological adjustment, academic achievement, social difficulties, and sense of self (Amoto, 1994). Because the circumstances of divorce often involve other family members, it can be a complex issue. Students need a variety of viewpoints to compare and contrast. Because group counseling by definition involves many other students, it has the potential to provide reflection for these students from a variety of angles and perspectives. It is precisely because of the multi-dimensional aspect of group counseling that it is an ideally effective context within which students can learn about, and heal from, divorce.

Each student involved in a divorce or separation experience has different feelings and reactions (Greenberg, 2003). The primary reason group counseling is so ideal for divorce is that members become aware that others in the group who have similar feelings, and as such tend to become more accepting of their own circumstances. Group members get chances to verbalize their frustrations, anger, and sense of loss (Greenberg, 2003). Children of divorce struggle with questions related to what they can control; through effectively run group counseling, students listen to each other and gain a greater sense for what is within their control and what is not within their control (Greenburg, 2003). In the same sense that effective academic groups enhance problem solving skills, group counseling helps students learn and practice effective problem-solving strategies for dealing with their frustrations. For example, students learn to distinguish the difference between helpful and hurtful ways of expressing anger. Understanding a larger societal context is important, too; group counseling experiences that include statistics about divorce help add to the sense of universality that enables group members to feel they are not alone in dealing with their challenges (Greenburg, 2003). One of the issues students grapple with is a warped sense of their situation. Groups offer students an opportunity to measure self-perception against reality; they give students a chance to explore new behaviors by approximating real-life scenarios (Greenburg, 2003). Issues surrounding divorce can bring shame and embarrassment to students within the larger school community. Group counseling can effectively serve as a microcosm of students’ larger school and community environment; they provide students with the opportunity to try new behaviors in smaller, less-threatening settings. Feedback from other group members can help them integrate the realities of divorce with the realities of school (Greenburg, 2003).

Jacobs, Masson, Harvill (2008), in their book *Group Counseling: Strategies and Skills*, add three other reasons that group work is effective. First, students tend to feel more comfortable sharing with people their age. Second, in groups there are more available “data points” of information about the topic available for students; just knowing more information about the complex dynamics of divorce will benefit students. Third, in groups there is usually a sense of shared commitment that is reinforced by the accountability one feels to the group itself; for example, having a challenging conversation with one of their parents about how they feel.

The rationale for group counseling with children of divorce is not just supported in group counseling textbooks; it can be deduced from a number of perspective from literature on children of divorce. According to Amato (1994), student’s adjustment to divorce depends on several factors, including amount of time with parents, the level of inter-parental conflict, degree of economic hardship, and number of stressful life events that accompany and follow divorce. When students have the benefit of a group process, they can reflect for each other various ways to improve their coping strategies. For example, a student might encourage another suffering student by appealing to a sense of different perspective-taking: “Don’t worry, you will now get to spend more time with the parent you wish to spend time with and get to know them. This made my life *easier*!” Similarly, with the opportunity to hear each other, students have more access to understanding issues of causation; they might learn from a group the degree to which economic stress played a role in the divorce, which might alleviate some anxiety associated with student self-blame.

Omizo and Omizo (1994) assigned 60 children of divorce to experimental or control conditions, with experimental subjects participating in group counseling intervention. Comparison of the two groups revealed that participation in group counseling was beneficial for enhancing self-concept. Children benefitted from an increased sense of *internal locus of control*; they had an increased sense of what they could and could not control*.*  Given the high complexity of divorce and thus high confusion, the increased ability to make distinctions and gain deeper understanding of divorce makes group counseling particularly attractive.

Crosby-Burnett and Newcomer (1989) explored yet another aspect of the benefit of group counseling for divorce. They presented a two-tiered developmental guidance classroom unit on parental divorce which acquainted children with the idea of divorce as a part of family change. Their discussion paralleled many aspects of the classroom experience. By approaching divorce within the context of dynamic family change, students gained increased perspective. Their ability to universalize their experience and see it within the context of a much larger societal phenomenon, in a way they might explore the topic in their Social Studies courses, helped them see and understand the larger context of their particular family conflict. Family change is a subset of societal and historical change.

Riggio (2004) concluded in her study that divorcewas associated with significant positive outcomes for quality of mother-child relationships, social support, and independence facilitated by both parents. Her results were valid independent of participant gender, parental remarriage, and parental socioeconomic status. In her study, students in group counseling were much more likely to hear stories from other students that helped them see these possible benefits; support for the universality referred to by Greenburg (2003) was increased*.* Perhaps the most obvious benefit of group counseling is the chance to make new friends by bonding *through the group counseling class itself.*

In cases where divorce occurred in highly dysfunctional families, many students in group counseling experienced a decrease in the antisocial behavior associated with such a destructive marriage(Strohschein, 2005)*.*  It is in and through the enhanced group sharing that occurs in group counseling that such positive impacts can be recognized; students have the opportunity to compare and contrast each other’s experiences (Greenberg, 2003).

Farndale, Burton-Smith and Montgomery (2003) explore the topic of anxiety in children of divorce—specifically anxiety connected to peer attachment. They found that low peer acceptance was the strongest predictor of general anxiety in children. They also found that peer attachment was not influenced as much by parental divorce/separation status as it is by gender; girls had a better quality of attachment to peers than did boys. Meanwhile, a group of Norwegian academics found that long-term effects of divorce on symptoms of anxiety and depression, in general, were stronger among girls than among boys (Storksen, Roysamb, Holmen & Tambs, 2006). So, since peer attachment is directly related to group counseling (giving them greater facility with developing peer attachment skills), coed groups for children of divorce have high potential for effectiveness. Group counseling meets the needs of both boys and girls from slightly different, but equally important, perspectives. In most circumstance divorce occurs between a man and woman; coed groups that address gender-related issues have the potential to offer high levels of experiential learning about their parent’s socialized gender roles and the complex dynamics between genders in our society.

Finally, some reasons groups work well are a bit more straightforward. Youth tend to enjoy themselves in groups more than they do by themselves and groups are found to provide youth with a sense of belonging and fun (Greenberg, 2003). For many students, the sense of universality in groups is the main reason they show up at school; within the context of groups they are less inclined to believe that no one else shares their problems (Greenburg, 2003). The need to belong is so fundamental to human beings, especially young people possibly feeling a *lack* of belonging following a divorce; groups provide some of this sense of belonging. Groups represent the possibility of reminding youth of something that even adults tend to forget; that we are all part of an intricate web of commonality on this earth, inquiring together about what it means to be connected, to be human, to be alive and to love.

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**PART III: Purpose, Measurable Goals, Evaluation Criteria**

1. **Umbrella Purpose**

Assist children of divorcing or divorced families to understand and address the pressures on their relationships and the changes occurring in their lives. Through early intervention, help students adjust in order to minimize disruption to their normal development.

1. **Measurable Goals**

**Goal 1:** Increase knowledge of fact, myths and psycho-education distinctions and statistics related to divorce while connecting to student’s unique life context.

**Evaluation:**

1. (Objective qualitative): Pre and post questionnaire to parents to track progress in

their child’s knowledge of the statistics and typical dynamics at play with divorce.

1. (Subjective qualitative): Pre and post questionnaire to students to track progress of knowledge about statistics and dynamics of divorce, including open ended questions.

**Goal 2:** Increase ability to identify and share about emotions related divorce so as to increase sense of personal control and choice.

**Evaluation:**

1. (Subjective qualitative): Weekly journal entries in which students reflect on feelings of anxiety, stress, and anger and other emotions related to divorce. Surveys with open-ended questions.
2. (Subjective quantitative): Likert scale test each week to track quantitative changes in emotions related to divorce.

**Goal 3:** Develop student facility around adjustment, adaptation and transition related to divorce and separation.

**Evaluation:**

1. (Objective/subjective qualitative): Interviews with parents *and* student about student’s progress in coming to terms with adjustments with some open ended questions, including a few different areas of adjustment.
2. (Objective/subjective quantitative): Pre and post Likert tests for both parents *and* students designed to rate perceptions of difficulty and progress in making adjustments.

**Goal 4:** Increase ability to authentically communicate with parents about feelings related to divorce and separation.

**Evaluation:**

1. (Subjective qualitative): Weekly journals about how students are feeling about their own communications with parents.
2. (Objective qualitative): Interview parents in beginning and completion about authenticity, depth and effectiveness of their communication with their children.
3. (Subjective quantitative): Pre and post Likert test designed to rate authenticity and depth of communication with parents.

**PART IV: Six Sessions: Objectives, Materials & Specific Strategies**

**Session 1**

**Group Stage:** Allow members test the atmosphere, learn norms and expectations, gain a sense of direction trust levels. Risk taking relatively low as students define place. Set group norms.

**Objectives:**

1) Review purpose of the group and other important facts.

2) Give some broader context for students about what will happen over the six sessions.

3) Establish group rules, agreements and boundaries for the six sessions.

4) Have members introduce themselves and get to know each other.

 **Materials:**

1) Copies of sheet with purpose of the group, schedule and themes of sessions and some important facts.

2) Pens and white board.

3) Sheet with examples of rules and agreements from past groups.

4) Copies of sheet explaining process of student interviews, including sample questions.

 **Specific Strategies:**

1) Explain purpose of group. Explain schedule of sessions, theme of sessions. Explain some of the issues that many high school students struggle with as related to divorced. Talk briefly about some of the moods and emotions that are typical.

2) Outline importance of group rules and agreements, explaining how they help create a safe space for sharing. Explain how rules help shyer students and make sure more extroverted students don’t dominate the experience in sessions. Give examples of rules used in past such as taking turns speaking, no interrupting, saying “pass” if you don’t want to share, sticking to the topic, keeping track of the “thread” of conversation and no put-downs.

3) Allow students to propose rules and agreements that should be added.

4) Discuss as a group what rules and agreements to adopt for our group.

5) Explain confidentiality (“what we say in the group stays in the group”) and ask students why this is so important. Emphasize that no one should share what others have said in the group. Discuss teenagers’ frequent temptation to spread rumors and the break confidentiality so as to become what they perceive to be popular with friends. Discuss how this can be unhealthy behavior and can result in crossing boundaries and people feeling betrayed or injured.

6) Pair up students randomly and pass out interview sheets with sample questions. Have students choose questions they want to ask and then take turns interviewing each other. Challenge them to pay close attention and listen to each other. Questionnaire can include items such as name, grade, with whom the student currently lives, their favorite subject, some fun or meaningful hobby, something that makes them special and stand out, a person whom they respect, or anything else the student wishes to share.

7) Have students introduce their partners to the group. As members introduce partners, call attention to similarities among members to start building a sense of universality.

8) End the group session by asking each member to complete the sentence “One thing I learned today in group was\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.”

**Session 2**

**Group Stage:**  Create trust, develop collectivism and universalism, increase “we-ness,” continue to establish common ground and help those who struggle to enter the group.

**Objectives:**

1) Gain greater understanding of facts, myths, falsehoods, confusions and misconceptions about divorce and separation. Gain greater understanding of what falls between different categories.

2) Identify specific truths in student’s lives about divorce and separation.

3) Gain greater understanding of the misconceptions of divorce called the “3 C’s.”

4) Increase student knowledge of psycho-educational distinctions (including statistics) around divorce and separation so as to increase feelings of universality around having divorced or separated parents.

**Materials:**

1) Sheet with list of facts, myths, falsehoods, typical misconceptions about what kids feel when parents divorce and/or separate.

2) 3 C’s sheet: Kids did not cause their parent’s divorce; Kids can’t change parent’s divorce; Kids can’t cure their parent’s divorce.

3) Sheet with psycho-educational distinctions about divorce including relevant statistics.

4) A sheet of paper that has 4-6 brief descriptions of common emotional states related to divorce and separation.

 **Specific Strategies:**

1) Review the purpose of the group, the previous session and the group rules and agreements. Remind group of the importance or rules and agreements. Answer any questions or concerns.

2) Ask students to privately write down what they think the facts, myths, falsehoods and misconceptions are about divorce and separation. Have them identify the ones that seem the most prominent and help them synthesize them by writing them down on classroom overhead boards.

3) Ask students to identify items that fall into a “grey area” between fact and myth, and to explain why they think that item falls in one category of the other. Draw and use a “Ven Diagram” for improved understanding. Discuss items that are true some of the time but not all of the time.

4) Ask students to write down in their journals a truth that is very relevant to their lives. Give them an opportunity to share that with the group, without pressuring them.

5) Share the 3 C’s sheet in class and explain to them by giving examples through vivid stories of students who thought those myths were true for them.

6) Have each student write down in their journals any times they felt these 3 C’s were relevant to them; specifically, when have they felt they were the cause, felt they could change their parent’s divorce, or felt they could cure their parents.

7) Briefly discuss psycho-educational facts and figures about divorce and separation. Field questions and discuss as a group. Student select a common emotional state that applies to their lives now.

8) Complete session with each student sharing one thing they realized from today’s session and saying anything else they want to say to feel complete for the day.

**Session 3**

**Group Stage:** Allow some testing of facilitator as trust built, honor their struggle with whether

to risk getting involved in group, provide space to allow wonder about others’ acceptance. Encourage moving into working stage.

**Objectives:**

1) Explore and share feelings about divorce and separation so as to gain greater sense of personal awareness and personal control.

2) Learn from watching video about divorce.

3) Continue to help cultivate student’s experiences of universality: the experience that they are not alone in their feelings and experiences related divorce and separation in their families.

4) Empower students to share what they need to feel safer in the group.

**Materials:**

1) Video about divorce and separation (either Children in the Middle, or Children of Divorce).

2) Journals for the purpose of writing about and sharing more deeply about their emotions.

3) Overhead white board with pens.

**Specific Strategies:**

1) Review previous sessions and the group agreements. Discuss concerns or questions.

2) Give background context for video and then view it together. Follow by giving more context and short talk about feelings and their impressions of video.

3) Ask students to think about video and then choose 3 questions they wish to ask each other about emotions related to divorce and separation. Assemble all questions and decide as a group which to ask the entire group. Post those questions up on the wall, listed from least vulnerable to most vulnerable.

4) Ask students to answer these questions to the entire class if they feel comfortable. Tell students that if they do not feel comfortable sharing with class, to write down answers in private journals. Point out common feelings and do linking between group members to increase sense of universality.

5) Ask “What is most uncomfortable about answering these questions?” Discuss. Ask “What would help you feel more trust in the group?” and “What do you specifically need so as to feel more trust in the group?” Tell students they can write down thoughts in journal or share with group.

6) Conclude group by asking “What was the most important lesson they received from the session?” Ask students to volunteer to thank and acknowledge one other student in front of the whole group for something they appreciate about that person.

**Session 4**

**Group Stage:** Acknowledge and recognize expressions of anxiety, assist members in identifying personal goal, foster climate in which resistance is openly dealt with, encourage students to enter the working stage, have open communication, take risks and express what feeling.

**Objectives:**

1) Deepen the vulnerability of sharing to include difficult issues, problems, adjustments and transitions that students deal with related to parental divorce and separation.

2) Have students write more effectively about their own problems in paragraph form.

3) Increase skill of asking open-ended questions that elicit depth from other students.

4) Explore specific remedies for solving problem related to adjustments

**Materials:**

1) A sheet listing of a variety of issues and problems students have related to divorce and separation, along with a short paragraph example to illustrate each problem. Sheet includes problems with adjustment, mild depression, anxiety, lack of concentration, different levels of anger, lying to please one or both parents, isolation, over drinking of alcohol, drugs, reckless dating, reckless driving, eating disorders and other forms of destructive behavior and escape of feeling pain and sadness.

2) Sheet with specific strategies students can use to alleviate the negative impact of problems listed above.

**Specific Strategies:**

1) Review purpose of group, previous sessions and group agreements. Discuss questions or concerns.

2) Give students the list of specific typical student problems (see objective above) along with short paragraph examples. Ask students about feeling and emotions, letting them know today we will have the opportunity to go deeper.

3) In pairs students write (on paper or in journals) 2 or 3 issues with which they can relate, and write a paragraph similar to the ones they received but with themselves as the subject.

4) Share paragraphs with their partner. Each in the pair take turns asking the other a more in depth question about that issue using questions like “How so?” “Will you please share more about that?” or “What else is there about that?”

5) Using sheet given to them as guide, students then discuss with each other how specifically they will best deal with each of the two or three issues. For example, for anger, take 30 seconds to close eyes, calm down, and ask oneself to consider a variety of choices available to them in that moment.

6) Give opportunity for students to share out to the entire group (optional) using the format of completing the sentence “One issue, experience, problem or adjustment I’ve struggled with is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and the way I plan to deal with it now is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.”

7) Remind students we only have two more session and take any questions or comments about termination.

**Session 5**

**Group Stage:** Continue working stage, encourage more self-disclosure of emotions, make connections with group goals, encourage processing to be “here and now,” and link to purpose from first session.

**Objective:**

1) Explore more subtle feelings and experiences that are difficult for students to name and conceptualize.

2) Increase understanding about process of reading and writing in more depth about one’s emotions.

**Materials:**

1) Copies of three short testimonial essays.

2) Copies of short reading about learning about yourself and emotions through reading literature and writing.

3) Form explaining how students will be combining with their Language Arts teacher.

**Specific Strategies:**

1) Review past session and group agreements. Discuss any questions or concerns.

2) Give each student 3 short essays on the topics listed above which help students get more access to experiences related to divorce that are more subtle and thus more difficult to name and conceptualize.

“I was left behind.” Discuss student’s feelings of neglect or feelings that parents separated from them or left them behind.

“I had to grow up too quick.” Discuss feelings that students must grow up too quick, or that their childhood was shortened by the divorce.

“I feel split in half.” Discuss feeling of being split or of no longer feeling like a “whole person.” Let students know about books with titles like “Two Houses.”

3) Have each student read each essay.

4) Explain to students that they will be doing an interdisciplinary lesson in their Language Arts class related to learning about self and emotions through literature and writing.

5) Read the short reading related to learning about self and emotions through literature.

6) Discuss with students the process of writing about yourself and set them up for a homework assignment of writing about one experience they have as children of divorce that is a bit more difficult to explain verbally and that is more easily expresses as a story about themselves.

7) Ask students to complete the following sentence: “The most important thing I learned about myself from this session about writing about emotions was\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.”

8) Remind students that next session is the last “termination” and to think about what they want to say in their last session. Address related comments or questions.

**Session 6**

**Group Stage:** Focus on termination, getting complete and saying goodbye gracefully. Review and reinforce individual change which has occurred in counseling. Guides departing members to a resolution of the relationships with the counselor and group members.

**Objective:**

1. Increase quantity, quality, effectiveness and authenticity of communication with parents about feelings related to divorce and separation. Option to write a letter to parents.
2. MAJORITY OF SESSION: Termination of group: getting complete with each other and saying goodbye.

**Materials:**

1. A sheet with a few readings demonstrating parent-child dialogues that illustrate a variety of communications issues students often have with parents including unclear communication, conflict, lying/withholding, and being overly silent.
2. Sheet with warm up questions related to sharing with parents (see below).
3. Termination (MAJORITY OF SESSION) Sheet with important aspects of getting complete and saying goodbye to a group.

**Specific Strategies:**

1. Review previous sessions and group agreements.

**BRIEF (10 MINS) ON PARENT-CHILD DIALOGUE (SOME OF THIS MAY HAVE TO BE CUT IN FAVOR OF TERMINATION ACTIVITY)**

1. Hand out sheet described above and read a few examples of parent-child dialogues.
2. Give students a piece of paper with two columns (one for each parent) and ask them to identify the type of communication they have with that parent. Below name of parent and type of communication list specific examples they can think of where this is true and happens with that parent. Students can list more than one type of communication with each parent.
3. Discuss conversation starters. Tell students it is important to keep the lines of communication open with parents in most situations. Remind them that they may have many fears, worries and questions about the divorce, and that if they learn to talk with their parents about these issues, they will likely have an easier adjustment to the changes divorce brings. Take sharing.
4. Discuss how we do not always know how to express our feelings or put our questions or concerns about ourselves and parents into words.  Discuss with students the pros, cons and strategies of talking during dinner, in the car, at bedtime or on walks.

**TERMINATION: MAJORITY OF SESSION**

1. Termination Part I (This is a chance to get complete and say goodbye for now. This has been a very special time together and I thank you. Each of you has touched my life. Look at the sheet provided for you about termination and how to get to a point of feeling complete with a group. Write down in journals something you want to express to each member of the group. You will have an option to express this verbally to entire group if you wish. Think about what you want to acknowledge each other as we transition into the next part of our lives. Discuss option to stay connected with each other and remember that saying goodbye does not mean goodbye forever.
2. Termination Part II: Discuss gift giving, sharing of food, encourage physical expressions of positive regard through a hug, embrace or handshake. Talk about use of transitional objects that serve as a reminder of the group experience. Discuss confidentiality and how the nature of the relationships will change. How should an unexpected meeting in public be handled by members?
3. Termination Part III: “Cutting of Circular String.” Explain context and do activity.
4. Thank you and goodbye comments.

**OPTIONAL (Possible 7th or 8th session)**:

Writing a letter to parents (homework if there is not enough time). Tell students that writing letters is a constructive way to deal with confusing feelings and to blow off steam.  Ask them to write a letter to one or both parents, expressing your feelings about the divorce.

Students they do *not* have to send the letters if they do not want to, and that just the act of putting feelings and ideas in writing often helps to put the situation in perspective.

As a further warm up, have each student answer the following questions following by opportunities to share in the group:

* Why do you think people get married?
* Why do you think people get divorced?
* What do you think brought your parents together?
* What do you think they loved most about each other?
* What do you think your life will be like in five years?
* What good qualities does your dad have? Your mom?
* How has your life changed since the divorce?
* What do you worry about?
* What questions do you really want to ask your parent?
* What are examples of how you would bring up these topics to your parents?
* What fears do you have about talking with your parents?

**Tips for Communicating from a Distance**

When one parent moves a considerable distance away, coping with the divorce often becomes more difficult for children because, in addition to the effects of the divorce, they must also adjust to not seeing that parent very often.

The following tips can help parents and children maintain strong relationships from long distances.

* E-mail each other. E-mail is a fast, convenient way to keep in touch.
* Start a postcard club. Everyone likes to receive mail! It only takes a few minutes to fill out a postcard. Give some stamped cards to your child, and take turns sending a card each week.
* Have weekly or monthly phone dates. Set a specific time when you will talk on the phone (e.g. Wednesday evenings at 7 p.m. or the first Sunday of each month at noon). This will give both of you something to look forward to!
* Create a shared journal. Buy an inexpensive notebook and write your thoughts and feelings in it. Exchange the notebook when you see each other.
* Create a family Web site. This is a great way to post information and pictures to each other.