
GROUP PLANS II

In this chapter the reader will see group plans and group activities that have been developed and used by practicing school counselors who are graduates of the school counseling program at the University of Maryland at College Park. The format and presentation will vary somewhat. A group plan is a reflection of the knowledge, creativity, insights, and experience a group leader has in developing topics to accomplish the stated objective. Group plans should constantly be modified for improvement.

GROUP PLAN FOR STRESS REDUCTION

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TOPIC: REDUCING STRESS

Group level: Third through fifth grades
Number of sessions planned: Seven
Number of members: Six
Time for each session: 30 to 40 minutes
Location of sessions: Counselor's office

Prior to the beginning of Session 1, each group member would have had a screening interview. A parent letter should be sent home with each child and parental permission slips should have been returned (see Attachment 1).

SESSION 1

Purpose of Session 1

1. To review the purpose of the group.
2. To introduce group members to each other.
3. To establish group rules.

Materials Needed

Sheets of construction paper
Pencils/crayons

Specific Strategies

1. Explain the purpose of the group.
2. Members will introduce themselves to the group stating (1) name, (2) name of homeroom teacher, (3) what they like to do after school.
3. Establish group rules. The group leader should suggest the important ones and the group can add to the list. Confidentiality should be emphasized. Write down the group rules on chart paper and have them posted in the room. They should be reviewed at each session.
4. Ten minute icebreaker. The group leader would have drawn a circle and titled it "My Crest." Give each member a copy of "My Crest." Say to the group, "This circle will become your personal crest. In the circle, write the words that best describe the kind of person you think you are. I will come around and help you spell any words that are difficult for you. Then using the crayons that I will provide, you can decorate your crest in some way. After you have finished, you will be asked to share your crest with the group and say the words that best describe you." Provide students with crayons and walk around the group helping them spell words. If it is felt necessary to provide the members with more structure in order to make their crest, the group leader can demonstrate what is being asked by saying words that best describe the group leader.
5. Have the members share their personal crest with the group.
6. Summarize the session.

SESSION 2**Purpose of Session 2**

1. To review the last session.
2. To review the group rules.
3. To review the purpose of the group.
4. To define stress and how it affects our bodies.
5. To identify what the group members would like to know about stress.
6. To determine each member's stressors.

Materials Needed

Sheets of blank paper
Pencils
Stressor location chart

Specific Strategies

1. Review the last session, the group rules, and the purpose of the group.
2. Open up a discussion of what stress is and how it affects us, and point out that everybody feels stress at times.
3. Give each member a sheet of paper and a pencil. Ask them to fold the paper in two so that there are two columns. Place the letter *S* on top of the first column and the letter *W* at the top of the second column. *S* represents what each member feels are personal stressors. The *W* column is *where* they experience the stressors. After defining stress and explaining that a stressor is anything or anyone who creates stress for a person, members

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of the group would list those things that they feel cause their stress and write them under the *S* column. The group would then be asked to indicate where each of their stressors occur, such as at home, in school, on the school bus, and so on and write this in the *W* column. For example, if someone writes "taking tests" in the *S* column, the person would write "school" under the *W* column.

If the group does not do so on their own, the group leader should make the connection as to how stress affects our bodies (e.g., stress can result in difficulty in sleeping or sleeping too much, changes in eating habits, forgetfulness, stomachaches, headaches, etc.). The stressor/location chart is an evaluative tool and should be reviewed by the group leader prior to every session. The group leader should collect the stressor/locator charts because they will be used in the third session and will be discussed again at the seventh session.

4. Summarize the session.

SESSION 3**Purpose of Session 3**

1. To review the group rules.
2. To review what the members know about stress (see the stressor/location chart from previous session).
3. To identify specific stressors for the group members.

Materials Needed

Stress/location charts from Session 2
Sheets of construction paper
Sheets of paper
Pencils
Chalk and chalkboard

Specific Strategies

1. Review what was discussed in the previous session.
2. Ask one group member to review the group rules.
3. Ask members to tell what they know about stress. The group leader can ask members if they have anything else to add to their stressor/location chart.
4. Members will identify specific stressors. Prior to the group session, the group leader should have a poster board/chalkboard/overhead projector available so that the stressors identified by the group members can be written down. Ask the group members to tell the group what things make them feel stress (e.g., pressure, feeling overwhelmed). Create a list of potential stressors. Ask the group to indicate which of their stressors causes them to feel the most pressure and how they react when they are faced with that stressor.
On a sheet of paper, ask the members to write down the single stressor that causes them the most pressure. Collect the papers and hand them back to the members at the next group session.
5. Summarize the session.

SESSION 4**Purpose of Session 4**

1. To review the group rules.

2. To review the discussion from the last group and return the paper on which they stated the stressor that created the most pressure for them.
3. To expose the group to a relaxation technique. The group leader should obtain a quiet instrumental recording. Group members will listen to this quiet music for 10 minutes. They will then discuss how they feel after having listened to the music and offer their reactions to this relaxation technique.

Materials Needed

Audio tape of recorded quiet music
Audio tape player

Specific Strategies

1. Review the discussion from the last session.
2. Ask one member to review the group rules.
3. Say: "Today we are going to practice something that will help us to relax our muscles when we are feeling tense and overwhelmed by something that is stressful to us." Ask the members to tighten their muscles in their shoulders and backs. After 30 seconds, ask them to take a deep breath and release the tension in their muscles. Repeat this exercise a second time. Say, "One way we can help ourselves when we are feeling overwhelmed is to listen to calming music and allow ourselves to do nothing. We are going to try this relaxation technique right now. Put yourselves in a comfortable sitting position somewhere in this room. You must separate from the other group members so that you are not distracted. You are not allowed to talk or get up while the music is playing. You are expected to close your eyes and just listen to the music. The music will play for 10 minutes. When the music stops I want you to join me back in the group. Are there any questions? (Answer any questions.) Now please find a place in the room away from the other group members." Give the members a minute or two to find a suitable place in the room. When all of the members are seated, play a recording of soft instrumental music. Stop the music after 10 minutes and ask the members to return to the group. When the members return to the group, ask "How do you feel?" Allow the members to respond. Other questions you may ask are:
 - Was it difficult or easy for you to listen to the music and not do anything else for 10 minutes? Why?
 - Is this something you could do at home to relax? Why?
 - Were you able to relax and only listen to the music or did you find yourself thinking about other things? Why?
 - Is this something you can do that will help you relax when you are faced with the stressor you wrote down on your paper?
4. Ask the members to identify other things that they can do to relax (e.g., go for a walk, ride a bike, read a book, write poetry, etc.).
5. Summarize the session.

SESSION 5

Purpose of Session 5

1. To review group rules.
2. To discuss the relaxation technique from the previous session.
3. To introduce and practice problem-solving strategies.

continued

Continued**Materials Needed**

Basket containing six slips of paper on which are written stressful situations
Poster board showing a problem-solving model

Specific Strategies

1. Review the discussion from the previous session.
2. Ask a member to review the group rules.
3. Say: "The technique that we used last week allowed us to relax. There are times when relaxing will not take away the stress that we feel. Can you think of a situation when you might need to do more than just listen to relaxing music?" Some answers might be: when you are feeling overwhelmed because you've got a lot of homework to do, when you've gotten angry with your best friend, when you feel you are in trouble, and so on.
4. Say: "Today we are going to practice using problem solving in order to reduce our stress. The problem-solving model we are going to use is (1) first, identify the problem, (2) next, think of all possible solutions to the problem, (3) examine every possible solution by looking at the consequence of each solution, (4) choose a solution that seems to have the best consequence, and finally (5) make a commitment to do what needs to be done to solve the problem." (This model should be written on poster board and placed in full view of the group.)
5. Prior to the session, create stressful situations for the members to practice the problem-solving model. Write the stressful situations on small sheets of paper for the members to pull from a basket. Examples of problem situations involving stress would include studying for a test, being late for the school bus, being rejected by a classmate, hitting a baseball through a neighbor's window, or showing parents a bad report card.
6. Each member chooses a stressful situation from the basket and is asked to resolve the stressful problem by using the problem-solving model.
7. Remind the group there are two more sessions.
8. Summarize the session.

SESSION 6**Purpose of Session 6**

1. To review the group rules.
2. To review the two stress reduction techniques, namely, listening to music and using the problem-solving model.
3. To practice using the problem-solving model.
4. To begin termination.

Materials Needed

Stressor/location lists used in the second session

Specific Strategies

1. Review the discussion from the previous session.
2. Ask a member to review the group rules if it is felt necessary.
3. Say: "During our last session we talked about and practiced two methods that can help us reduce our stress. One was relaxing by listening to soft music, the other was using a problem-solving model. You will recall that you once made a list of those things that you felt were stressors for you and where you have stress. Using this list of stressors, tell me

how you could use either soft music or the problem-solving technique to resolve the stressors on your list." Give members a copy of their stressor/location list.

4. Say: "Next week will be our last group session. I will be asking you to tell me what you have learned about stress and whether you have been able to reduce your stress. Think about what you have learned about stress."
5. Summarize the session.

SESSION 7

Purpose of Session 7

1. To review the previous sessions.
2. To evaluate the effectiveness of the group.
3. To ask members what they learned about stress and if they feel they have been able to reduce their stress.
4. To ask the members to think about having a short-term goal for themselves.
5. To discuss the possibility of having a follow-up in two or three weeks.

Materials Needed

Snacks or farewell souvenirs

Specific Strategies

1. Review the discussion from the previous session.
2. Ask the group to review the group rules, if necessary.
3. Ask each member to tell you what has been learned about stress. Write down their responses and distribute the list to them within a week.
4. Ask members to say what they will do in the near future to reduce the stress they feel when they are faced with pressure or a situation they find overwhelming.
5. Ask each member to name a short-term goal. Tell the group that you will be speaking with them individually in about two weeks to discuss what they are doing to reach their short-term goal. The group should be told that anyone who feels the need to meet sooner than two weeks should contact you.
6. Ask the group if they would like to have a follow-up meeting in a few weeks. If the group decides that it would like to meet again, arrange for this with letters to parents and contact with teachers.
7. Thank the group for their time and dedication. Provide a snack or farewell souvenir (e.g., pencil).

ATTACHMENT NUMBER 1

Initial Letter to Parents

Date _____

Dear Parents,

_____ has referred your child for membership in the stress reduction group that is being planned. The group will meet seven times, beginning _____, for a 40-minute group session that will take place in the counselor's office. We will be discussing the skills that are needed to manage stress. These skills include understanding stress, identifying the stressors in your child's life, using quiet time to reduce stress, and acquiring problem-solving skills. So that your child will not miss the same class seven times, we will meet one week on Tuesday and the

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