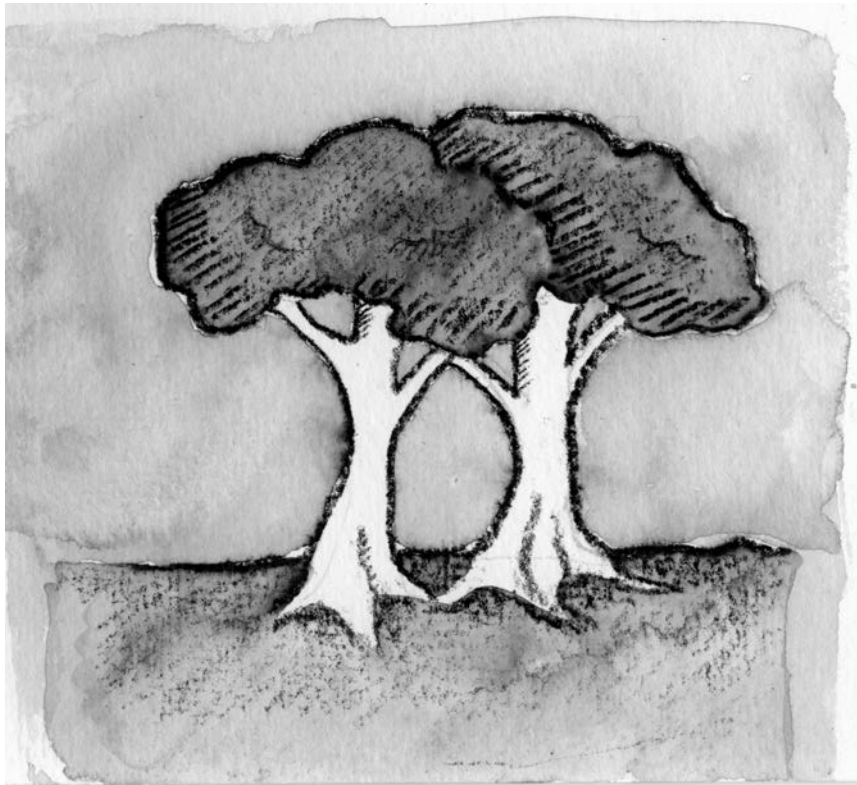


Two Trees

A Group Work Package for Children Living Away
From Birth Family



Designed and developed by Mary Jo McVeigh

A Rosie's Place Publication.
February 2005.



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Two Trees was created and developed by Mary Jo McVeigh.

Illustrated by Amanda Thomas.

Editing: Donna McGushin.

Formatting of manual and resources: Catherine Want.

Formatting of Children's storybook: Beth McNamara.

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Rosie's Place Publications

P.O. Box 40

Rooty Hill. NSW. 2766.

Ph: +61 02 9625 2599.

Fax: +61 02 9832 0376.

Email: rosiesplace@bigpond.com.au.

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Ph: +61 02 9726 9955

Facsimile: 02 9727 4580

Email: info@westerngraphics.com.au



With Love and Gratitude.

I would like to thank all the children and foster families I have worked with, who have taught me the best of what I know about children living away from their birth families.

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Orientation to the Package

This group work package is divided into three sections:

Section A: Workers Manual

Section B: Resources

Section C: Children's storybooks.

All three parts are integral to running the group work program and it is advisable for group facilitators to familiarise themselves with the entire package before running a group.

□ **Section A: The Group Workers Manual (Parts 1-5)**

The group workers manual is divided into five parts. These five parts are in the continuum of what needs to happen for the successful running of a group.

Part One: Theory and Practice outlines the theoretical and practice issues important in running a group.

Part Two: Pre-Group Phase describes the process to be followed in preparing for the group.

Part Three: The Group Programs give detailed instructions on how to run the children's and the carers' groups.

Part Four: Post-Group Phase describes the process for evaluating the group work program.

Part Five: Gardening Tools contains all the forms and questionnaires for the pre-group phase and evaluation forms for the group sessions.

□ **Section B: Resources (Parts 6-8)**

The resources section contains three sections including all the snapshot activity sheets, letters and templates needed for the group work sessions with the children. The snapshots come with group facilitator's guidelines on how to use them. However, it is envisaged that experienced worker will adapt the snapshots and utilise their own skills and imagination when using them and encourage children to experiment with their use.

The snapshots were not designed as a work-based activity, but as a facilitative resource for children to use to share their experiences with each other and tap into each other's wisdom. Therefore, children who are not comfortable reading or writing can still use them. They have been used in the following ways by children: as a spring board for discussion without filling them in; drawing pictures instead of writing words; asking the group work facilitators to write down what they say; using stickers or not using them at all, but drawing their own picture stories as a preferred alternative to the sheet provided.

Award sheets have been included in this package as an option for group facilitators to use. Award sheets for children are traditionally used as a means of controlling children's behaviour or by way of evaluating children's behaviour and work from a paternalistic standpoint. This package is written from a very different philosophical viewpoint and does not support either of these options. However, experience of children shows us that they love the archiving of their achievements in the form of awards. In recognition of this, the package has award sheets included to be used at the discretion of the group facilitators. If the choice is to use them it is suggested that they be used in a creative, supportive and non-punitive way, or not be used at all. For example, group facilitators can invite children to decide what they were proud of and write this into the award. When children struggle with this the facilitators can put forward a few suggestions from which the children can choose. Another alternative available in a cohesive group is to ask the members to nominate what to put on each other's awards. Bookmark outlines have been included to allow facilitators to make them as part of the ending ritual. The bookmarks can be used as gifts for either the children or the carers.

□ **Section C: The Story Books**

The story books, *The Little Seed Who Knew She Belonged* and *The Little Tree Who Whispered of Belonging*, were written for this group work program. Suggestions on how to use the books with a group of children are put forward. However it is important that the group work facilitators and the children bring their own creativity to how they use the books.

Consideration can be given to presenting children with a copy of their favourite Two Trees book as part of the ending ritual. Facilitators encourage each child to sign the inside cover of each other's books or the Two Trees bookmark (see Resources section).

□ **Using this Package.**

While the instructions given in running the sessions with carers and children seem detailed, it is envisaged that group facilitators will use their own skills and knowledge when running the group work program. The time allotted for each activity and instructions on how to run them are by way of guidelines only. Group facilitators are encouraged to move with the rhythm of each group they run and attempt to tailor the program to the group's needs, rather than make the group members adhere to a strict timetable.

This program is founded on the belief that children have wisdom and strengths and they have a right to learn from life's experience and each other.

Therefore, it is recommended that the group facilitators promote this philosophy in all interactions they have with children throughout the life of the group. The structure of the group is my means of providing guidance for children's discovery of their own and each other's strengths.

Therefore completion of snap shots should be sacrificed for furthering conversations that illuminate children's wisdom and strengths.

While conversation is vital in illuminating children's wisdom and strengths, they learn and function as visual and physical beings. To this end the snapshots, story books, letters and psychodrama were developed to acknowledge this and are a very important part of the group work program. In addition, many sessions invite the group facilitators to use butcher's paper to illustrate instructions they are giving to children. While using all these written resources it is important to reassure children that there are no right or wrong answers in completing them.

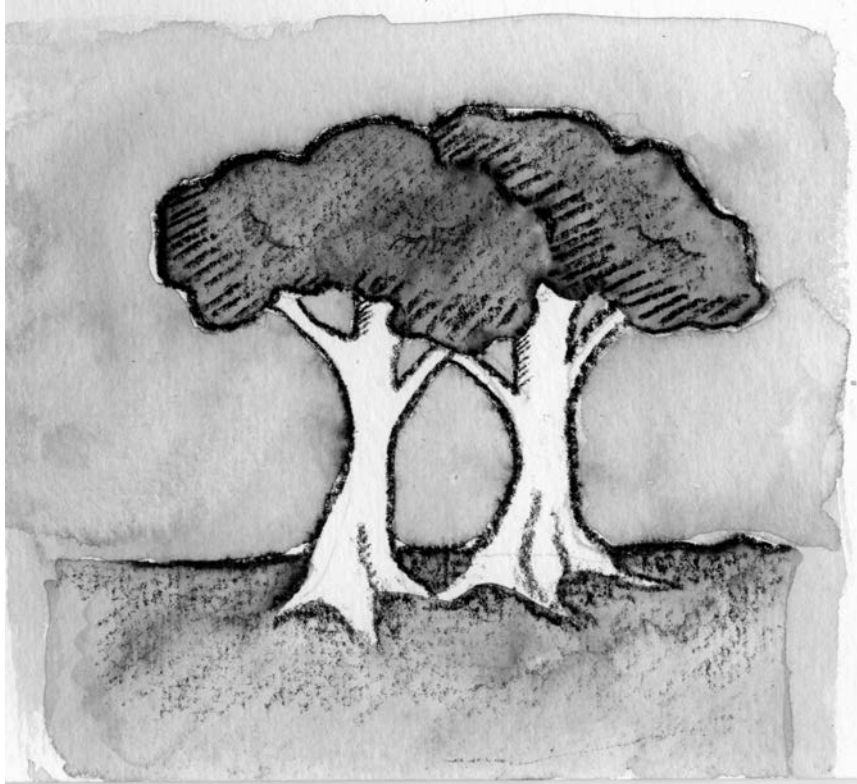
Many children easily understand the metaphor of the seed as the potential for growth in a child's life. However, it is not the aim of the group to get children to understand this metaphor. It is therefore essential that this metaphor is not hammered home and the children are allowed to take it up at whatever level they are comfortable with. All discussions that arise throughout the life of the group need to be at the depth the group can process. Some groups of older children may wish to discuss issues at length while younger children's groups may just need mention of the issues in passing.

From the pre-group assessments and early in the group process the energy level and functioning of the group will become apparent. For example, some groups may appear to need more physical activities than others do, some may want to do more or less snapshots and some may want to take sheets home in between sessions. It is therefore important that group facilitators adapt the program to suit this energy. For groups that are very physically active, it is important to include physical movement in the session. However, avoid games that over stimulate children who find it hard to self regulate. Group functioning and cohesion can often be adversely affected if this is allowed to happen.

□ **Conclusion**

When running groups with children the professional approach can be one that views group work as time consuming and daunting or exciting and enjoyable. This package was designed to maximise the enjoyment and ease of running a group and minimise the daunting elements. Therefore, it is important to use this package in a way that will enhance the group work process. Remember that the package is not the group; **the people in the group are the group**. The package is designed to give structure to a process that can allow a focus on children and their wisdom. ENJOY!

Two Trees



Section A Worker's Manual (Parts 1-5)



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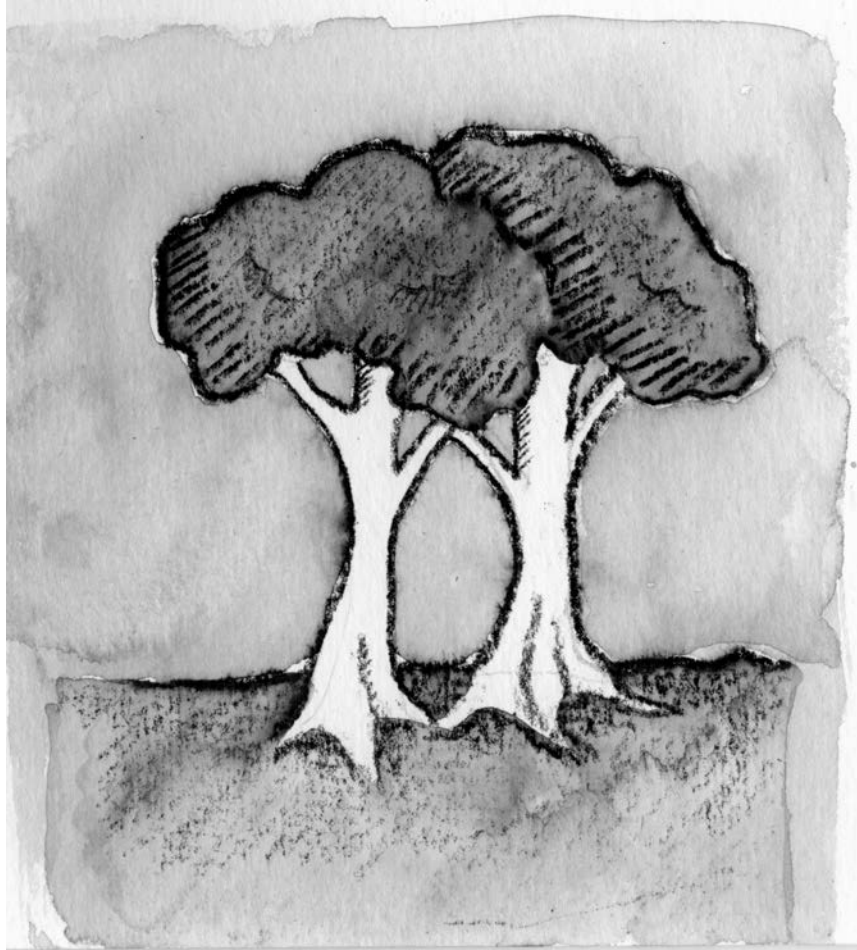
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PART ONE

THEORY AND PRACTICE ISSUES



Introduction

This group work package is the product of twenty-two years of listening to children who are in foster care and have found a home with people dedicated to their care. The ideas for the package gathered momentum in 2003. I found myself having more and more conversations with children about the struggles they were having with the status of being a foster child and the sense of isolation they sometimes felt.

These struggles can happen in different situations and at different times, such as the classroom on Mother's or Father's Day, when they are asked to make something for their mother or father or when discussions focus on families. The children spoke of feeling confused as to which parent to pick - their birth parent or the parent they are currently living with? Sometimes these struggles can happen in the playground or neighbourhood, when other children tease them because they do not live with their birth family or because they look so different to everyone else in their foster family.

They also showed me that the struggles could come from within - when they worry about losing the emotional contact with their birth parents, but feel unable to discuss it for fear of betraying their foster parents. Or the struggle as they try to work out what a "real" parent is, the one who is linked to you by biology or the one who cares for you day to day?

They also showed me the incredible resilience and wisdom that sit alongside such struggles. I therefore envisaged an environment that could tap into this and allow child to speak to child, and child to learn from child, under the gentle guidance of an adult. I envisaged this environment providing the springboard for discussion through planned activities using different media, allowing children to be creative, talkative, experimental and joyous. And so I set my imagination to work and my fingers to produce the written word and this group work program was born.

The metaphor I produced portrays my love of the natural world and honours the story of the growing seed. Seeds need many things to make them grow and develop into a seedling: protection, nurturing, the right ecosystem and the bounties that come with each season. With all this, hopefully one day the seedlings will grow into a majestic tree, a fragrant shrub or a flower of great colour.

All children are the seeds of the future generation and, like the seeds of the plant kingdom, need essential elements for growth. Children, who do not live with their birth families, are no different and it is the duty of we who know, care or teach them to be part of their growth.

It is my hope that the experience of being in a group utilising this package can be part of some child's story of hope, some little seed's story of growth.



Theoretical Underpinnings

The Two Trees package is influenced by many of the theoretical frameworks that the author has worked under over the past twenty years. Several of these theories will be obvious to the reader, while others lie dormant in the words but no less present. However, there are three main bodies of knowledge, trauma, resilience and group work that this chapter will focus on as the main influences in the development of this program.

□ **Trauma**

Traumatic events are those events that can, if they catch hold of a person's life, cause pain, distress and unwelcome experiences, the effects of which cause disruption to a person's preferred way of being in the world. Terr (1991) has described two types of trauma:

Type I trauma involves experiencing events that are single, unexpected and sudden.

Type II trauma involves the experiencing of re-occurring and patterned events, such as ongoing physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse and witnessing domestic violence.

Type II trauma is often the main form of trauma experienced by children and young people who live in out of home care. They also experience the added trauma of removal from their birth family and often multiple moves until a stable placement is found.

It has long been recognised that trauma affects children (Pynoos et al, 1996; Rothschild, 2000; Scheeringa & Zeanah, 2001; Vostanis, 2004). It is my belief that children's preferred ways of being in the world are to live in families free of abuse and violence. And their preferred way of being is not to exhibit behaviours that cause them and those around them distress. But trauma brings into children's lives a way of being that allows unwanted feelings and behaviours to show themselves. The effects of such unwanted feelings and behaviours often range in duration and intensity for different children, but can cause emotional, physical, psychological, cognitive, social and spiritual disruption to a child's life.

It is important to locate the past experiences of children, now living in out of home care, in the trauma field, because it locates the problem for the symptoms the child may suffer outside the child's individual pathology to the source of the trauma - the abuse and removal. In locating children's struggles within a trauma context, rather than individual mental functioning, the emphasis is put on adults to protect children, take steps to stop the flow of the source of the trauma and provide them with opportunities to heal and connect to a safer world.

Trauma counselling has an historic association with post traumatic stress disorder from war experiences. For children in out of home care, counselling them from the basis of Terr's Type II trauma (the experiencing of re-occurring and patterned events such as ongoing physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse and witnessing domestic violence) is more relevant. It is vital to acknowledge the difference between trauma from a war situation and the trauma of being abused by a family member or someone in a caring role. For a child who has been abused by a family member, the 'enemy' is not a stranger garrisoned over a distant hill. Total physical removal from the 'country' of the trauma cannot be guaranteed and children often see the person, who abused them, regularly. Furthermore, children often live with mixed feelings about this person. It is easier to demonise the faceless adversary whom society labels as your enemy than it is a person whom you love and whom society deems as having a protective role in your life. And when the trauma is over children are not heralded by ticker-tape parades as heroes and heroines and given recognition by society for the trauma they have endured. More often they are chastised for their disruptive behaviour, their aggressive behaviour, their antisocial behaviour. And their behaviour is medicalised and their problems professionalised.

It is therefore a challenge for all of us working with children, who live in out of home care, to avoid pathologising children, to hear the personal connection children often have to the person who abused them and provide them with a network to validate their stories of separation and pain. These principles are anchored in two of the four aims of this group work program:

- To give children, living permanently with a family who are not their birth family, the opportunity to meet with each other and have a shared experience.
- To afford children the opportunity to explore the experience of being born into one family and living in another.

In working with trauma it is important to know what harnesses recovery and what intervention is effective (Jones and Ramchandani, 1999). Robbie Gilligan (2001) reminds us that professionals often ignore the 'healing potential that may lie naturally within children' (Gilligan, 2001: 181). It is important in working with children to have the knowledge and skills to tap into that which lies naturally within. It is equally important to recognise that mobilising resources are vital for children's healing so that they are not the sole arbitrators of their recovery. Resilience based practice principles allow for both.

□ **Resilience**

Masten et al (1990) described resilience as: 'The process of, capacity for, or outcome of successful adaptation despite challenging or threatening circumstances.' (Masten et al, 1990: 426)

Children in out of home care may have faced the threatening circumstances of abuse before they entered care, and face the continuing challenging circumstances of living away from their birth families. These are not the optimal conditions for achieving full developmental capacity. Yet many children in out of home care transcend these conditions and continue to engage in the ordinary living of life, despite their extra than ordinary circumstances.

Children are adaptable and capable and react differently to all that life gives to them. They may be vulnerable in some situations and strong in others. They show skills in some aspects of their lives and not in others. There are personality traits in children that may make them more vulnerable to adversity than others. However, it is important to remember that resilience is not solely a fixed characteristic or personal trait, or the untapped ability to heal oneself. This view alone risks leaving children to hold the burden and responsibility for the life circumstances that brought them into care. Resources can be mobilised, family motivated and relationships engendered to provide an environment rich with resilience promoting factors. In Christopher Lalonde's words: "Self-continuity is not a private affair. When all else fails, family, friends and community can act as a safety net that holds us and carries us through dangerous times." (Lalonde, 2004)

This safety net holds resilience factors important for growth and development. The significant factors include the importance of relationships with supportive adults, peer networks, engagement in activities for promoting self esteem and efficacy, and positive school experience (Daniel, Wassell and Gilligan, 1999; Gilligan, 2001; Daniel and Wassell, 2002; Masten & Powell, 2003).

This group work program can be but one part of this safety net. It connects children to their peers, with supportive adult group facilitators in the background, and it engages children in activities that promote self esteem and self efficacy. These factors are embodied in the other two aims of this program:

- To provide children with the opportunity to look at their strengths and skills.
- To provide children with the opportunity to learn social and problem solving skills from each other.

□ **Group work**

From the moment we are born we become a member of a group (the family) and we continue to have relationships in groups (school, clubs, and friends) throughout our lives. Physical and psychological needs are satisfied in groups and survival becomes dependent upon the ability to live, work and play in groups.

A group is more than a collection of individuals - it is usually structured upon interaction among members who share a common identity or purpose.

Children are a distinct group in society by nature of their developmental stage, but within this childhood group there are vast differences of age, gender, class, culture and experience. Children within the large group of childhood therefore tend to gather together in subgroups around these issues.

Because children live a large part of their lives in groups, they are very skilled group members and seem to navigate this landscape of group membership with ease. Admittedly there are some children who are more skilled than others and for whom moving through school and social groups are done with ease, while others struggle and have mixed successes.

Group work provides a great opportunity for children to meet with each other, share their common experiences and pool their knowledge and resources to help each other. As Catherine Want wrote, 'As a tool for change, group work is a powerful entity. As a domain that fits a child's need for companionship and solidarity with others, it provides a space for work and discovery that is limitless.' (Want, 1999: 15)

In providing this space for 'work and discovery' it is important to be grounded in your theoretical framework as this provides the lens through which you can make sense of your work and guides your practice. However, no matter what your theoretical framework, it is important to remember the healing power of the relationship. Research highlights the importance of the therapeutic relationship for effective change (Asay & Lambert, 1999; Bachelor & Horvarth, 1999; Bordin, 1979).

In children's groups the relationships they have with each other hold the key to change more than the relationships with the adult facilitators. Children's companionship and solidarity will aid healing and change. As a facilitator you are vital in providing guidance, structure and form for the group and planning is all important in this role.

Planning Processes

□ Safety

Creating safety for members of a group needs to be given the same emphasis that is placed on using any therapeutic approach. This package promotes the use of this program when a child is in a stable environment and any safety or child protection issues have been addressed.

Safety issues external to the group process need to be resolved, as it is not possible for a child to benefit from a group work experience, talk freely about their foster care status or trauma if they are unsafe or in an uncertain placement. The mechanics of creating safety for children lay with the lead child protection agencies.

However, it is important that agencies referring children to a group work program are cognisant of safety issues, and do not place a child in a vulnerable position by referring them to a group when safety issues have not been addressed.

Safety internal to the group work process is the sole responsibility of the group facilitators. It is the group facilitator's role to ensure the group is a safe and nurturing experience for all the children attending.

Group facilitators establish safety by discussing with the children that the group is not the place for unsafe behaviour and, as facilitators, they will ensure this and take measures to stop any unsafe behaviour. The children are then encouraged to work with the group facilitators in discussing what this unsafe behaviour would look like, forming group agreements to abide by for the life of the group.

While this package encourages children to have a major input into establishing group agreements it is incumbent upon the group facilitators to ensure that the following agreements are included:

- No use of physical, sexual or verbal abuse.
- No destroying of materials used in sessions.
- No detailed descriptions of abuse experiences.
- Tell the group if experiencing difficulties and be allowed to remove self from the group or activity while accompanied by a group facilitator.

The facilitators need to encourage an agreed upon procedure for allowing group members, who cannot hold themselves to the group agreements, to have time away from group activities until they can find their way back to working within the group agreements. This needs to be facilitated in a way that is not disruptive to the group or punitive to the child. Encourage the children to think of a strategy to use, however, if they cannot, the group facilitators need to promote one. This package encourages children to think about group safety before they attend the first session by asking them a question in the pre-group questionnaire. This allows the children to have ownership of the group from the outset and creates an atmosphere of safety.

The group facilitators also create safety by managing the environment of the group. It is important, therefore, that the room used for the group is not overcrowded or cluttered. The room needs to be warm and inviting, but not full of toys or books or office equipment that will distract children and give cause for disruption.

The facilitators need to be well prepared and have all their resources ready and avoid leaving the room to photocopy or get more equipment. It is useful to have more copies of resources than is required to avoid the need to leave the room. If these resources are not used they can be kept for another group program.

Before the beginning of the group, program facilitators will need to negotiate with other people using the building not to interrupt the group unless it is a matter of physical safety. Therefore, for the duration of the sessions, the group facilitators may need to turn off their mobile phones or pagers and arrange another worker to deal with any other work matters that may arise. It is important to show the children where the toilets are, the layout of the building and who else may be in the building while they are in the group room.

The children may need reassurance of the presence of their carers. If the carers are to remain in the building, show the children the room they are in. During the sessions the carers are having, a group work session agreement needs to be reached with the children that they do not disturb the carers' group. Encourage the children to think of strategies to use that will allow them to enjoy being in their group program instead of interrupting their carers. If a child gets too anxious and needs to see the carer, one of the group facilitators may need to bring the child to see the carer and then return to the children's group, allowing the child to rejoin when they feel ready. A follow up session may be required with the child and the carer to see if the child wants to return to the group the following session, and what would make it possible for them to do so.

□ Purpose

The purpose of any group is fundamental to how it is run and structured. While it may seem like common sense to state that a group designed for one purpose (for example, children with bedwetting difficulties) should not be used for another purpose (children with anger difficulties) it needs to be remembered when planning a group. All groups will have fundamental principles in common and exercises from one group work program can be transferable to another. However, when using a group program, it is important that the group content matches the needs of the group members. If this is not attended to, it raises the possibility that the desired outcomes for the group may not be achieved and both workers and group participants may be left feeling the frustration of failure.

The purpose of the group that this package was developed for is fourfold:

1. To give children, living permanently with a family who are not their birth family, the opportunity to meet with each other and have a shared experience. By the very nature of them coming together it can help overcome the stigma of being different because they live in a foster family.
2. To provide children with the opportunity to look at their strengths and skills. Strengths and skills shared in a group can be reinforced by the audience of the group and become part of children's resilience factors.

3. To provide children with the opportunity to learn social and problem solving skills from each other. A major purpose of this group is that the children learn from each other, and that they learn skills that are based in their everyday experience of being children in foster care, and not given truths from adult professionals. A secondary purpose is that the skills gained in this group can be transferable to other problem situations.
4. To afford children the opportunity to explore the experience of being born into one family and living in another. This experience in a group can show children they are not alone and promote the honouring of both realities for children - the realities of having a birth family and living with another family.

Seasoned group workers and foster care workers will be familiar with a lot of the content of this package. It is therefore encouraged that the program be adapted to suit the needs of the group of children, rather than forcing children to undergo a program that does not suit them. However, it needs to be recognised that this package was developed for the specific purposes outlined above and, therefore, group facilitators need to be cognisant of this if they wish to make any changes to the program.

The Two Trees package includes sessions for carers as part of the group work delivery to children. These sessions are by way of facilitating the children's progress through the group and encouraging the support of the carers for the program.

The purpose of the carers' sessions is fourfold:

1. To enhance the effectiveness of the children's group.
2. To inform the carers of the children's group work content.
3. To discuss any issues that may arise for the carers as a result of the children attending the group.
4. To provide the carers with a support network of other carers.

□ **Structure**

This group work program is structured as a ten-session program for children and parallel sessions for carers. This structure is adaptable to allow for reduction or inclusion of other sessions depending on the needs of the group.

The structure and instructions for running the carers' group is not written in the detail given to the children's group. This is due to the fact that the content of the carers' sessions will focus on what the children are doing and any issues or support the carers feel they need. Therefore, the facilitators running the carers' group will be working with the agenda set by the carers.

Each session runs for approximately two hours however the times written into the group work program are approximations only. The length of each group session will be dependent on the group process as it unfolds.

The group facilitators may find it useful to meet half an hour before each session to finalise any aspects of the group content or organise resources. The group facilitators may also wish to meet for half an hour after the group to evaluate the session. The group facilitators who are running the children's group and the carers' group will need to meet with each other at the end of sessions. However, these meetings need to happen in addition to each set of group facilitators having their own session debrief.

□ **Group membership**

This group work program is designed to cater for children of eight years of age and up, who are in a permanent foster placement. However, group membership can allow for some flexibility. Group facilitators are encouraged to plan a group of mixed ages, gender, culture, class and religion if they feel that this will strengthen the group.

When considering the group membership, the facilitators should pay attention to the strengths of each child and how they would benefit from the group and how the group would benefit from having them as a member. It may therefore require that the group facilitators adapt some of the resources to suit children of different ages and abilities while still staying on the central themes. Not all children will fit perfectly into every one of the activities suggested in this program. Group facilitators therefore need to carry with them into the group the spirit of nothing is too difficult and adapt the material to the child, not the child to the materials.

While promoting the flexibility of group membership it is also important to acknowledge that for some children a group can be too overwhelming, too noisy, too big, and too difficult! Therefore, pre-group interviews with children and carers are vital to ensure that while allowing for difference, children are rightly matched to the group. Both children's group facilitators should conduct the pre-group interviews but with different children to avoid duplicating workload. This sharing of the pre-group workload ensures that the children do not connect with only one of the facilitators; the same applies with conducting the carers' pre-group interviews.

The group membership of the foster carers' sessions is predetermined by the fact that they are the carers of the children coming to the group. However, again, the group facilitators need to show flexibility and encourage the children and the carers to think about whom is significant in currently caring for them and may benefit from attending the group.

□ **Group content**

The content of each group session has been developed for this package as a means of providing guidance to the group facilitators. However, group facilitators should plan the content of each session to adapt to the needs of the children as they get to know them and the culture that each group seems to manifest as they join and progress.

The **activities and snapshot sheets** developed for this group program are a means by which children can connect with each other to explore their experience of not living with their birth family. The group facilitators need to bear in mind that the children are the group, not the content.

The flow of conversation that may result from children taking part in some of the activities must never be halted. Therefore, group facilitators are encouraged to sacrifice the completion of some tasks for the promotion of allowing children's connection with each other to happen. Group facilitators may suggest that the children take home any snapshots that were not used in the session, or they may decide to hold them for another time when there seems to be less conversation. Group facilitators will need to use their discretion in deciding how to utilise unused snapshots. Sheets sent home should go with clear instructions for both child and carer and reinforced that they are not to be seen as homework, so completion of them is voluntary. Snapshots unused from other sessions should only be introduced in a subsequent session if it does not disrupt the theme of the session. Remember the spirit of the Two Trees program is growth and progression, so ensure the use of snapshots does not counteract this spirit.

If children have unfinished snapshots encourage children to leave them in their snapshot holder and they can be finished at another time, remind the children that the snapshots are to be enjoyable, not a race to finish!

Some children who struggle with literacy and handwriting skills may not connect with the snapshot as a method of issue exploration. With these children it is possible to use other media such as clay, sand tray or plastic figurines to explore the session issue.

Due to the variety of activities and snapshots it would be prudent for group facilitators to gather all their resources before the group program starts and keep them in a location that is easily accessible. For ease of planning group content, the package contains a 'shopping list' with all the resources needed for all the sessions (found in separate Resources section).

The content of the carers' group will be determined by what the carers say their needs are, as well as exploring the content of the children's group. Therefore, the group facilitators need to have a copy of the children's group program and snapshots so they can discuss the contents of it with the carers.

□ **Group process**

Group process is used to describe interactions among individuals in the group and the changing conditions in the group as a whole. Various studies in group work show how it goes through various stages and takes on an identity of its own, independent of the members. Within the process, group members take on different roles, have individual needs and contribute to the successful functioning of a group (Brown, 1979; Douglas, 1978; McVeigh, 1986).

It is important for group facilitators to be aware of the group process when children come together. Monitoring the group process can provide valuable information to assist children, if they are struggling with relationships or with the content or structure of the group, and can be useful for facilitators to alert any other therapeutic services involved with the children to issues that may be addressed with the children. Information from monitoring the group process can also assist facilitators to frame children's behaviour in terms of group dynamics rather than as some individual failing of a child.

The agreements arrived at by the group members should be viewed as a means to enhance group process rather than as a punitive technique to control children's behaviour. The success of the group depends on a co-operative process; this can be enhanced by group agreements. However, facilitators need to ensure that children do not experience these agreements as an oppressive process.

Feedback at the end of every group session is a vital form of outcome measure for the agency to monitor the success of the group. It is, however, also a very good tool to enhance the group process. It also gives children a tangible sign of ownership thus helping group process. The permission form completed by the children is also viewed in this light and is seen as having similar value.

□ **Group facilitators**

The group facilitators are also members of the group and thinking about their suitability to be part of the group is equally important. This program does not call for any specific academic or vocational training in group work. However, there are some prerequisites for group work facilitators that are important.

Group facilitators need to like working with children and bring hope and joy to the group process. They need to have a love of play, as fun is the basis of many activities designed in this program.

They need to be able to tolerate noise, mess and be adaptable, while at the same time hold the structure of the group together.

Group facilitators need to believe that children have knowledge about themselves and unique ways of dealing with life. They need to be able to

promote children's connection with each other and facilitate the release of children's strengths and skills.

The group facilitators running the carers' group need to have the same knowledge base as the children's group facilitators. In addition they need to have knowledge and experience in working with carers and appreciate carers' wisdom, strengths and skills in caring for children.

Group facilitators need to have knowledge of the issues that face children in foster care, so that they are prepared to facilitate the discussions that come from the sessions from an informed basis. Knowledge of strengths based work, resilience, child development, trauma, foster care, and group work are important.

At least one of the group facilitators needs to have run a group before, have some professional knowledge of group work or be trained in this package. While the author does not envisage that all group facilitators will be experts on every aspect of running all groups, it is imperative that children are not left floundering in the face of lack of professional skills. Professional skills and knowledge are imperative in making a group safe for children.

This package promotes the use of two facilitators in running the group sessions. Co-facilitating allows for the group to benefit from the creativity of two rather than one. It also allows for support and joint managing and processing of the group.

Evaluation of the group sessions is very important. A group facilitator's evaluation form is included in this package. It can be used at the end of each session as a focus point for discussing the group session and by way of contemporaneous recording to be used for the final group work report.

Although this package has been written in the form of structured sessions the structured nature to this group does not necessarily stifle the atmosphere of the group. Fun and creativity; celebrating children's wisdom and watching relationships grow; promoting strengths and finding support for problems: these are the important factors in the group. Co-facilitators can assist each other in making the group a time for fun and learning, a time for problem solving and solution celebration, a time to make a difference by using the structure, not becoming a slave to it

□ **Evaluation**

Evaluation is the corner stone of ensuring good practice and accountability. This package promotes evaluation through the use of written evaluation forms. These forms can then be used as a springboard to discuss the group's progress in supervision.

It is important that facilitators mutually agree on a supervisor for the life of the group and establish joint supervision needs before approaching this supervisor.

Written evaluations for each session need to address the following:

- Content
- Structure
- Process
- Child's progress
- Group facilitator's performance as an individual and co-worker

It is advisable to do this after each session instead of at the end of the ten-week process to ensure that important information is not lost. This package contains session evaluation forms for children, carers and workers (in Gardening Tools). These session evaluation forms can then be collated as part of writing up an interim group work report.

After a specified period of time from the end of the group, it is important to interview the children and carers to ascertain if their goals were met. A final group work report can then be written.

The group work report can cover the following issues:

- Group membership: ages, gender, ethnicity of children. Professional background, gender, ethnicity of group facilitators.
- Group Structure: time, date, venue, number and length of sessions.
- Group Content: Issues addressed materials and exercises used. Benefits and pitfalls of each.
- Group Process: Issues raised in discussion by the children, group relationships and dynamics. Co-facilitators relationship with each other and the children.
- Carers Sessions: membership, structure, content, process and evaluation
- Evaluation: What each child and carer felt was helpful and not helpful, and whether their goals were met. What each group facilitator found was helpful and not helpful. Recommendations for changes in program.

□ **File management**

File management for the Two Trees program is to keep a record of the group process and by way of evaluating the group's success. It is not by way of keeping clinical information on individual children. Therefore, this program promotes the division of information storing and file management.

Information relating to the group process, contained in all the assessment and evaluation forms and group reports, should be kept in one file and clearly

identified as a Two Trees group project. This file can then be archived in accordance with the agency's usual protocol. When the final group report is finished, all personal details identifying the children need to be deleted.

The group facilitators can then record any pertinent information about the child, arising from the group sessions, plus keep a copy of the child's Two Trees book, on the child's individual file. If the child was referred to the group from outside the agency that is running the group, then the facilitators need to send an individual progress report plus a copy of the child's Two Trees book to the referring agency. The progress should be written in a manner highlighting the child's strengths and the gains they made as a result of attending the group. Ensure that the children and carers are aware of the file management process being used and have input into any individual reports that are written on children.

While all the group facilitators are responsible for completing evaluation forms and co-authoring the final report, it is advisable that one person has overall responsibility for file management.

□ **Practical considerations**

As with any great plan, the success of its execution is in the details, and group work is no different. The practical details of running a group need to be attended to thereby reducing the sources of disruptions for the group facilitators and allowing them to focus on the children and the group process.

The practicalities of planning each session in advance, and ensuring all the resources needed are at hand, have already been addressed. Group facilitators need to brainstorm any practical considerations they feel are pertinent to them and their agency and address them. Four areas that are important to consider are transport, facilities, food and sickness/non-attendance.

Transport

Getting children to and from sessions can cause problems for group facilitators if not negotiated before the start of the group. It is advisable to provide transport for the children attending the group or provide some shared arrangement with the carers. If possible it is advisable that the group facilitators are not the people involved in transporting the children. This allows them to focus on preparing for the group and debriefing after they have finished. As part of their commitment to supporting the group it would be reasonable to ask the referring agency or the child's foster care worker to provide transport. If they are fulfilling this function, it is important that they give feedback to the group facilitators on any conversation they have with the children that may be relevant to the group.

Ensure that they do not report back on every aspect of conversations they have with children, only those elements relevant to the functioning of the group.

Facilities

It is important in running this group work program that the carers and children's group are held in the same building. The rooms need to be close enough for ease of access, but not so close that noise from either group is disruptive.

It is advisable that toilets and hand washing facilities are close to the children's group. This allows children to use them with convenience and does not take either of the group facilitators out of the session for an extended period of time.

The group room needs to be comfortable and inviting, but not cluttered with furniture, toys or equipment that are distracting for the children. The room also needs to have tables to allow for art and craftwork and somewhere to safely store paintings or craftwork that require drying or are incomplete.

Food

The timing of this program allows for one-and-a-half hours to complete the group content. The group facilitators may allow twenty minutes to half an hour before the group program starts, to provide food for the children.

Providing food to children before the group session starts ensures that they are not hungry throughout the session and also facilitates group cohesion, as sharing food is a societal means of social connection.

Group facilitators need to ensure that they do not provide food that causes any child to have an allergic reaction or promotes over active behaviour. This issue will have been addressed during the pre-group interviews with carers and children. It is recommended that the group facilitators provide the food for the initial sessions and, as the group moves towards cohesion, the children may add their suggestions to the menu. Suggested items for the food may include fresh fruit, dried fruit, lunch box snacks or small sandwiches. It is advisable to provide juice as a drink, rather than carbonated drinks, as the latter often have a high sugar content.

It is advisable that the sharing of food happens in a different area to where the group activities take place. This ensures that no children's work gets damaged or resources ruined by accidental spills.

The carers should also be provided with a drink and light snack, but due to the length of the discussion often engendered with carers, it may be advisable to serve the drinks and snacks while their discussions are taking place rather than at the beginning of the session.

Sickness or non-attendance

Non-attendance at the group can happen, due to illness or unforeseen circumstances of either the group facilitators, or a child or carer, or, due to a child or carer wishing to withdraw from the group.

If a child or carer withdraws from the group process it is important for one of the group facilitators to follow this up with them. They need to process this decision in a way that frees the child up to attend another group when they feel they are ready.

Group facilitators need to have a replacement if they fall ill during the life of the group. The ideal situation would be if one of the carers' group facilitators stood in for a children's group facilitator. If this is not possible, then a colleague, who is familiar with the group program, could step in. Make sure the children are fully introduced to the new facilitator and give them time to ask questions of this facilitator or readjust to their presence. When the group facilitator returns from their sick leave, it is advisable to let the children have a quick catch up with them.

If a child cannot attend a group session due to illness, the group facilitator needs to tell the other children the reason for their absence and ask them if they want to add anything to a card the group facilitators will send to the ill child. Group facilitators can also send the child, who is absent, the snap shot from the session with instructions on how to complete it. The facilitators need to be clear with the child that they are not expected to complete the snap shots if they are too ill or inconvenienced. When the child returns it is advisable to let the children have a quick catch up with them.

If a child misses two sessions in a row, and is uncertain of return on the third, the group facilitators may need to take the decision to transfer the child's attendance to another group at a later date. If this is to happen, it must be discussed with the other children remaining in the group.



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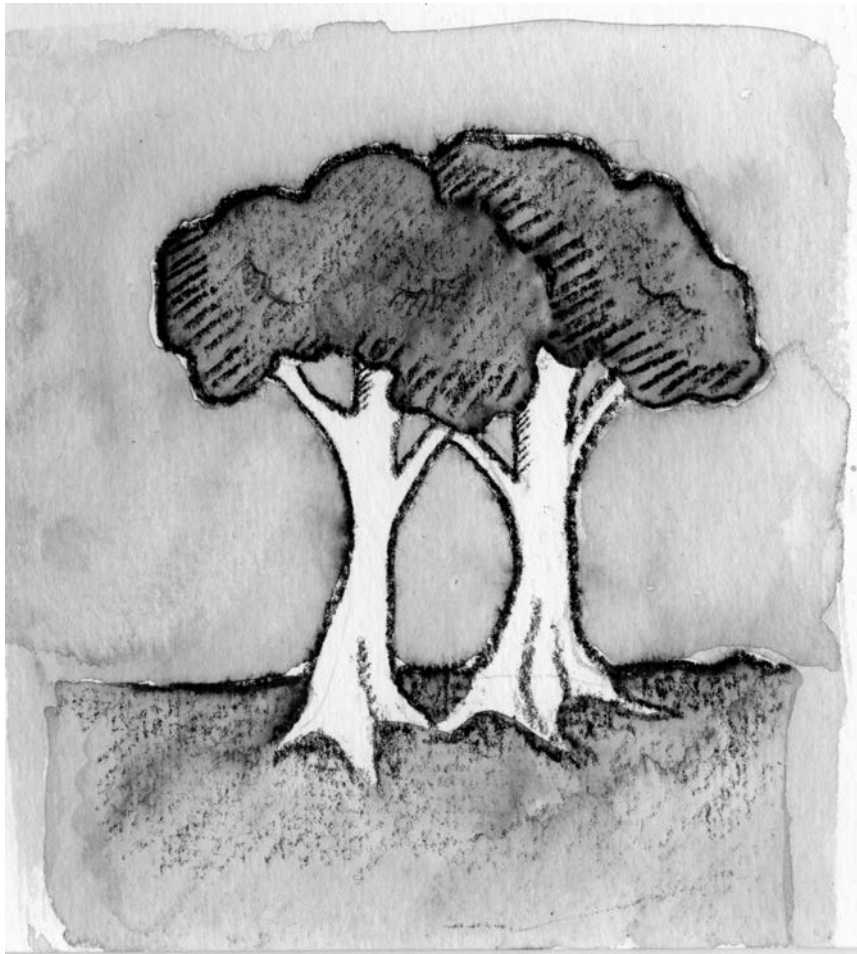
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PART TWO

PRE-GROUP PHASE



Preparing the Soil: The Seedlings

Aim: To gather information from the children and provide them with information about the group.

The operational success of a group often depends as much on the work that goes into preparation as it does on the running of the group itself. Therefore, group facilitators may want to gather information from various sources: the referring agency, the child and their carers.

In preparation for running the Two Trees group, it is recommended that the group facilitators undertake at least one session with the carers and one with the child. It may also be useful to have a pre-group meeting with all the carers of the children, who are going to attend the group, to give a more in-depth rundown of what is involved and prepare carers for the first children's group session.

The group facilitators need to be mindful that gathering this information is not designed to find the perfect match of child to group content. A 'perfect' functioning child is not what the pre-group information is seeking to find. The information is part of informing the facilitators' group delivery and whether this child will benefit from this particular group at this time in their life. It is important that group facilitators do not make the pre-group phase so stringent that no child is able to attend, or so loose that group membership does not match the group purpose. The facilitators should use the pre-group phase to help them:

- (1) Decide the group's suitability for each child.
- (2) Keep all children safe, interested and entertained throughout the life of the group.
- (3) Gather any information that may help with planning the content of the group.

○ Gathering Information from the Referring Agency

A Two Trees referral form has been designed for ease of information collection from referring agencies. Facilitators are encouraged to use and adapt this form to suit their style of working. Before any information is discussed, it is important that the referring agency provide written consent from the carers and the child to share this information. This written consent can be attached to the complete referral form and kept on the child's group work file.

The areas of information that may be important for the group facilitators to know are as follows:

- Any outstanding legal or care proceedings.
- Number of moves of placement and any difficulties arisen in any placement.
- Any physical or educational problems
- Any dietary or medication needs.
- Other agencies involved.

If a child has a counsellor, or is receiving any therapeutic intervention, it is important that the group facilitators send the counsellor information about the group sessions and offer feedback during or at the end of the group process. The information that the group facilitators feed back need only be that which may be important for ongoing work with the child. In cognisance of their developmental stage and understanding, the child can be informed of and be involved in this sharing of information.

In the course of gathering the information there will be occasions when a decision will be made as to whether the group is suitable for a particular child. This suitability needs to be judged on whether this group meets the child's needs at this particular time in their life, and does not equate to any individual failure on behalf of either a child or the referring agency.

Group facilitators may face pressure to increase group numbers to justify running a group. This can lead to children being included in a group work program, who either don't want to be there, don't like groups or who struggle with relationships in a group setting. This is not a healthy experience for all group members, especially the unwilling child member and runs contrary to the Two Trees self esteem aim. The Two Trees group work content does not depend on a certain number of children to be run. It can be adapted to suit small numbers of children if this is what

is deemed necessary. The issues can be discussed in dyads, triads or larger, sibling groups and kinship networks.

○ **Pre-Group Session for Children**

Before the group facilitators visit the child for the pre-group assessment session, it is recommended they send them a letter briefly outlining the group, introducing the facilitators and including the Two Trees Permission Form.

Every child being visited, as a prospective group member, should be sent a letter regardless of their age and reading abilities. This letter is by way of personal connection to the group and holds true to the philosophy of the group that every seed is special. The permission form for the children to complete is not by way of legal mandate but reflects the same honouring of children as displayed in the invitation letter. Both the letter and the permission form are as important in promoting the aims of the group as any of the contents of the group sessions.

Group facilitators will need to share the pre-group interviews to minimise the likelihood that the children will make connection with only one of the facilitators.

The purpose of the pre-group interview with the child is two fold: to give the child information about the group and to gather information relevant to the functioning of the group. As the

group is not designed to target specific behaviours there is no behaviour checklist to follow.

The group is designed to seek specific outcomes as outlined in the purpose of the group. Each child will set their own objectives for the group, in addition to the overarching aims of the group. These will form the basis for outcome measure at the end of the group work process. It is therefore important that the group work file shows a record of desired outcomes each child seeks from the group and how this was achieved throughout the life of the group.

This package promotes the use of the group facilitators' communication skills as a means of gathering information during the pre-group phase. However, there are certain issues that are important to include in this session and a pre-group questionnaire is included. It is not intended that this questionnaire be given to children to do on their own, but to be used by the group facilitators in guiding their pre-group conversations with children.

In giving the child information about the group, it is important to explain to the child that you are gathering the information to see if this group is right for them and to help plan the group. Explain to the child, who will have access to the information you are gathering and where and how it is recorded and stored. As you explain each aspect of the group, encourage the child to ask questions or make comments and check that the conversation is happening in an

age and ability appropriate manner.

The amount of information giving and gathering may appear overwhelming to some children. Group facilitators can make individual judgements on how to impart all the information to each child without flooding them. Making the pre-group phase as child focussed as possible is important, but may depend on the agency and time constraints of the group facilitators. However, consideration can be given to some of the following methods of information exchange: letters, breaking pre-group conversations into parts, several shorter pre-group visits and asking carers or referring agencies to discuss some of the information.

In gathering the information it is important to discuss the following issues:

Information known to group facilitators

It is important to tell the child who referred them to the group and the information that the group facilitators know about them. This can help allay children's fears about being sent to a group for negative reasons. In reassuring the child that the group is not seeking to change behaviours or seek specific results the group facilitators need to explain the aim of the Two Trees group which will also incorporate the child's own aims.

Group membership

Explain to the child both the group facilitators' experience and skills.

Assure them that all the children in the group will be living in permanent foster care and, if known at this stage, tell them the ages and gender of the other children.

Group content and structure

Discuss the time, place, date and length of each session with the child. Explain that each session will have the same format, but the content will vary to include snapshots, stories, board games and psychodrama. Tell the child about the awards and evaluation sheets and the purpose for each.

Sessions with carers

Introduce the idea of the carers group. Explain to the child that the carers' session will parallel their own, the aim being to give the carers support and help them support the child throughout the group process and beyond.

Safety issues

Explain to the child who will have access to the information about the group, the purpose for gathering the information and how this information will be recorded and stored. Include in this discussion the role of the group facilitators' supervisor. It is important to emphasise that the safety and protection of the child is paramount and, therefore, if the child discloses any previously undisclosed information that may concern the group facilitators as to their welfare or safety, then they will discuss this with the appropriate agency. Invite the child to sign the permission form sent in the letter if they have not already done so.

It is also important to emphasise to the child the importance of safety for each child during the group process. Explain to the child the need to keep everyone in the group safe by having group agreements. Ask the child to think of some now and record these on the Two Trees Group questionnaire form.

In gathering information from the children it is important to be mindful of any information the group facilitators feel is relevant to the smooth running of the group. If the child expresses a desire to attend the group, it is important to discuss some of the following:

- Child's previous experience of groups.
- Child's experience of any counselling or support services.
- Likes and dislikes about being in a group.
- Skills, strengths, hobbies.
- Hopes and expectations of the group.
- Fears and worries about the group.
- Dietary or physical needs.
- Behavioural or emotional problems.
- Information about birth and foster family



Preparing the Soil: The Trees

Aim: To gather information from the carer and provide them with information about the group

○ **Pre-Group Session for Carers**

The format and content for the carers' sessions are exactly the same as for the children, with the exception that the questions are related to the carers' knowledge of the child and what they feel is helpful for the group facilitators to know.

Before the children receive their letter it is important that the carers have been informed of this letter, the plan to run the group and the need for a further conversation with them.

It is very important for the group facilitators not to portray the groups as a cure for all evils. Group facilitators must also resist the invitation, from carers, if it arises, to make the group a behaviourally focussed group to tackle any behavioural problems they may experience. It is important for the group facilitators to be clear with the carers the purpose of the group and the role of the group facilitators. It will be important to discuss with the carers who they can get help from with behavioural or any other issues that arise. However, reassure them that meeting other carers will be a source of support for them and give them some guidance with any behavioural concerns they have.

The carers should be given a contact name for the group that can be used by them if they feel

there is something important for the group facilitators to know. However, carers must be aware that while this knowledge may be important for the smooth running of the group it does not mean that the group facilitators will be addressing it directly in the group.

The carers are the most important part of the wider team needed by the group facilitators to make the group a success. The group facilitators need to emphasise the importance of the carers' commitment to the group. Carers need to know that it is this partnership relationship that will allow the children to benefit most from the group.

In gathering the information it is important to discuss the following issues:

Information known to group facilitators

Tell the carers, who referred the child to the group, the information the group facilitators know about them and any child protection reporting procedures the group facilitators work by. Explore the purpose of the Two Trees permission form further and discuss the child's reaction to the letter and any questions they had as a result of reading it.

The purpose of the group

Emphasise to the carers that the group is not seeking to change the

child's behaviours or seek specific results. Explain to the carers that each child will set their own objectives for the group in relation to the group content. At this point also elicit the carers' goals for the group.

Group membership

Explain to the carers both the group facilitators' experience and skills. Assure them that all the children in the group will be living in permanent foster care and, if known at this stage, tell them the ages and gender of the children.

Group content and structure

Tell the carer the time, place, date and length of each group session (if it is being run, include the pre-group session for the carers before the first children's session).

Explain that each session will have the same format but the content will vary to include snapshots, stories, board games and psychodrama.

Tell the carers they will be expected to attend the carers' group. Depending on carers' availability, the carers' sessions can parallel the children's group sessions and they can meet each time the children meet. Alternatively, the carers can meet three times, at the beginning of the children's group, at a mid-way point in the group and during the final group work session with the children.

Explain to the carers the content and structure of each of these

sessions. Encourage the carers to ask questions of this process or discuss any difficulties they have with it.

Safety issues

Emphasise that the safety and protection of the child is paramount and, therefore, if they disclose any previously undisclosed information that may concern the group facilitators as to their welfare or safety then they will discuss this with the appropriate agency.

If the child has a counsellor, the group facilitators may also pass on information to this counsellor. Explain to the carers the process for doing so.

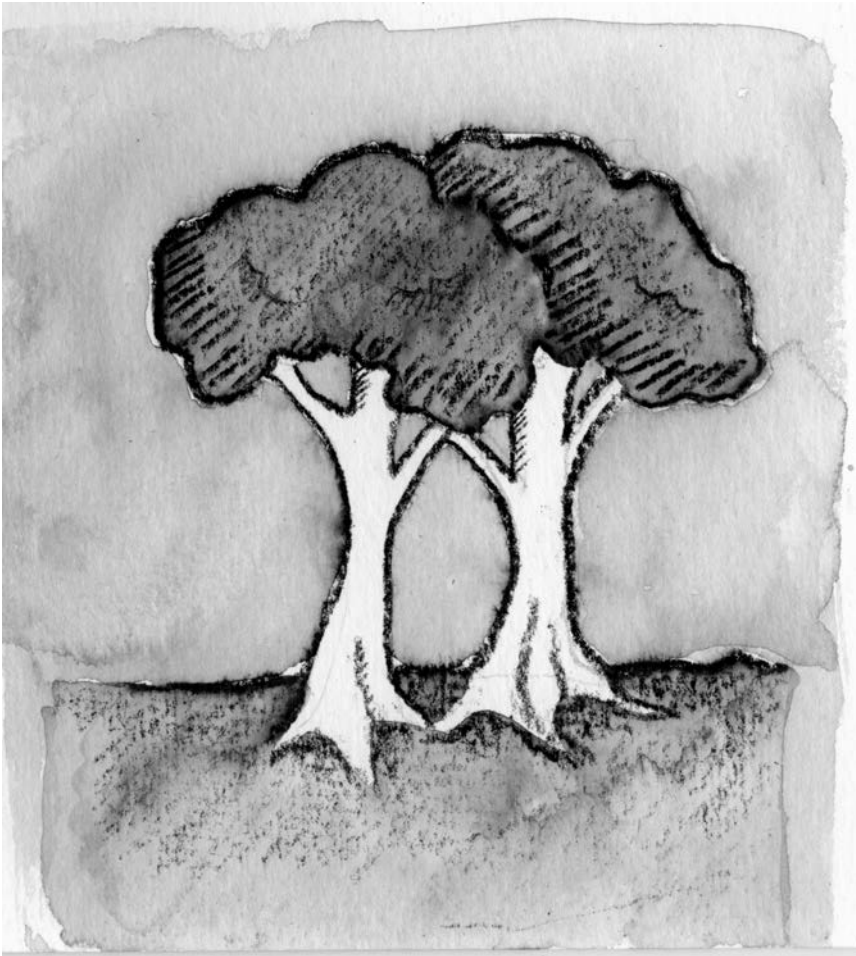
Additional Information

In gathering information from the carers, it is important to be mindful of any information the group facilitators feel is relevant to the smooth running of the group. The following information is relevant:

- Child's previous experience of groups.
- Child's experience of any counselling or support services.
- Likes and dislikes about being in a group.
- Skills, strengths, hobbies.
- Hopes and expectations of the group.
- Fears and worries about the group.
- Dietary or physical needs.
- Behavioural or emotional problems.

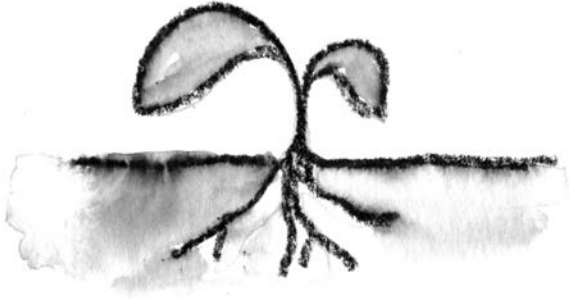
- Information about birth and foster family

The group facilitators' interview and engagement skills will be the primary means of collecting information from the carers. The group facilitators may want to utilise the pre-group questionnaire for carers developed for this package.



PART THREE

GROUP PROGRAMS



CHILDREN'S GROUP PROGRAM

Session 7 The Tree
I Live in Today

Session 8 The
Passing of the Seasons

Session 9 The
Sapling has Grown

Session 10 The Tree
has Blossomed

Session 1 Planting
the Seed

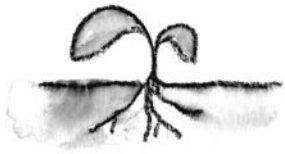
Session 2 Every
Seed is Special

Session 3 See Me
Grow

Session 4 In the
Forest

Session 5 The Tree
of Birth

Session 6
Replanting



Session 1: Planting the Seed

Aim: Introduce children to each other and group process

Introductions (30 minutes)

Children gather and share the food provided. While doing so, the group facilitators introduce themselves. Invite the children to say their names and engage in welcoming conversations.

Discussion About Group in Detail (30 minutes)

Explain to the children the lay out of the building, where the toilets are, the room the carers are in and all other people in the building.

Discuss with the children the purpose of the group. Explain that they will come together for ten weeks and that the group is about thinking about them growing from a baby into a child. Explain how their birth family, their foster family, their friends, neighbours and other people will be part of this growing. Explain that the group will look at how they are all unique but how they also belong to this group as they have some things in common.

To complement this discussion ask each child to choose one of the different coloured streamers provided. Place a two trees emblem badge on them the same colour as their streamer. Invite the children to stand in a circle and hold one end of the streamer and

throw the other end to someone else in the circle. As they do so, highlight the different coloured streamers connecting to make one coloured pattern and equate this to the story of the group also being formed today.

Outline that the group format will be the same each week and consist of a welcoming, a main activity, a finishing activity and evaluation. Display the group outline, pre-written on butcher's paper. Invite the children to discuss the outline to see if they wish to make any changes. For example, it is common for children to ask to have a game each week. Explain that they can negotiate, as a group, changes to the group outline throughout the entirety of the program

In discussing the welcoming game, tell the children that they will be encouraged to come up with their own welcoming games¹ as they become more and more comfortable with the group. Discuss menu for each week and negotiate food agreeable to everyone.

Explain that the group activities will be a combination of role plays, drawing and writing and craft activities. Explain to the children that the activity sheets (snapshots) are to be enjoyed and not a task to be hurried, therefore it is not important if they do not

¹ I would like to thank Cathy Want, whose skill and knowledge of working with children in groups always inspires me and who gave the idea of allowing children to engage in their own process of joining with each other without adult interference.

finish them. Any uncompleted snapshots can be kept in their snapshot holders and if they have time at another session they can complete them. Also explain that if the group facilitators run out of time they may give children the snapshots to take home. Again, point out that it is not compulsory to take the sheets home and children may not want to do so. Encourage the children to think of different ways to complete the snapshots, for example, writing, drawing, accepting help, etc.

Show the children the evaluation form and awards(see templates). Explain the process to complete awards and the evaluation forms and that the group facilitators use them to make the group more enjoyable and helpful for the children.²

Ask the children if they have any questions or concerns about any aspect of the group content and encourage group discussion of this.

Group Agreements (15 minutes)

Move on to encouraging a brainstorm on group agreements that can be written on butchers' paper and displayed at every session. Ensure that the agreements that the children spoke about during the pre-group conversations are already recorded on the butcher's paper. The group facilitators need to include the following:

- No use of physical, sexual or verbal abuse.
- No destroying of materials used in sessions.
- No detailed descriptions of abuse experiences.
- No interrupting carers' group, but suggesting ideas if children need to be with carers.

Ensure that the discussion covers what children can do to keep themselves safe in the group if any of the topics cause them distress. Ensure these safety techniques are not disruptive to group functioning. Encourage the children to come up with their own technique if they can't discuss the use of a calm or peaceful chair within the room, as a means of keeping safe or not disrupting the group.

Distribute the snapshot holders³ and explain to the children that each snapshot they complete will be kept in the snapshot holder. The snapshot holders will be collected at the end of each session.

Main Activity (30 minutes)

Distribute the snapshot called *Two Trees*. Ask the children to decorate their own sheet, as it will form the front page of their snapshot holder.

Distribute paper leaves. Ask children to write their names on the leaves. On another leaf ask the children to complete the

² I would like to thank Daphne Hewson, who gave me the idea of the children completing their own awards, by way of children giving themselves feedback, rather than imposed by an adult.

³ Snapshot holders can either be in the form of a photo album, scrapbook or anything that is attractive to children to record their work in.

sentence: “I like....” Invite each child to tell the group what is on their leaf and then stick it on a pre-made cardboard trunk. When complete, display the tree in the group room. Hang this tree up at every session and tell the children they can add leaves to the tree as the weeks go by.

Distribute the *My Tree is Me* snapshot and ask the children to complete as many leaves as they like.

Closing activity (15 minutes)

Ask the children to each say one thing they enjoyed about today’s group. Complete evaluation forms and awards. Put awards and snapshots into their snapshot holders.

Optional

Offer the children leaves to take home and bring back completed at the next session.

Facilitators’ Key Notes

While discussing the purpose of the group ensure that you connect the children to the metaphor of the seed. To add to this understanding you could use pictures of seeds transforming to plants and trees show or the stages of growth of a real seed from seed to seedling to plant.

Materials

- Cardboard tree trunk
- Leaves photocopied on green paper
- *Two Trees* snapshot

- *My Tree is Me* snapshot
- Butcher’s paper
- Coloured pens, crayons, glitter, glue
- Awards
- Children’s Evaluation forms
- Snapshot holders
- Timetable written on butcher’s paper
- Group agreements written on butcher’s paper

Task for group facilitators.

Facilitators need to prepare coloured blossoms(see template) and additional materials to decorate the group tree for the next week.



Session 2:

Every Seed is Special

Aim: To enhance self belief

Welcoming Activity (30 minutes)

Children arrive and join over refreshments provided. Check in with each child about how the week has gone and if they have any questions or would like to make any comments arising from last session. Allow the children to chat and connect with each other during their meal and discussion of the week. Invite them to stick their leaves on the group tree if they have completed any at home.

If time permits, a child suggests a joining game or group facilitators lead one.

Main Activities (1 hour)

Each child completes a leaf(see template)and adds it to the group tree. Group facilitators add blossom they prepared after the previous group session.

Distribute the box bought for each child. Explain that their snapshot holders and all other things they make will be put in their box each week. Explain that the group facilitators will look after the boxes until the end of the group. Allow children time to label their box with their name and perhaps choose a sticker to personalise their box.

Activity One: Decorate Seed

Group facilitators distribute a stone, large seed or piece of wood in the shape of a seed, with each child's name written or painted on it. Invite the children to decorate their seed with materials provided. As they distribute them, one of the group facilitators explains the theme of the group being growth from the seed through to seedling and into a tree.

Activity Two: *Every Seed is Special* snapshot

Group facilitators to distribute the ***Every Seed is Special*** snapshot. Explain to the group that they can draw or write inside the seed everything that is special about them. Encourage children to think about different aspects of their personality and skills. Group facilitators will need to circulate amongst the group to help children who seem to be struggling with putting things down about themselves. The knowledge of the

children's strengths that they gained during the pre-group interviews can be used. Ensure that the activity is not seen as a competition to find who has the most skills. Highlight to the children that it is not the quantity of skills or strengths that is important, but how they can cherish them.

When the group has finished the activity, encourage the children to share something they have written or drawn on their snapshot. Group facilitators are to emphasise the theme that everyone is good at something - they all have skills, strengths or talents that lie inside them, just like a seed, and can grow with them throughout their lives. Throughout the life of the group ensure that discussions like this are not laboured. It is usually enough for a facilitator to encourage small observations from the children, or say something brief.

Finishing Activity (15 minutes)

Complete evaluation forms and awards. Put awards and snapshots into their snapshot holders.

Optional

Offer the children leaves to take home to bring back completed at the next session.

Facilitators' Key Notes

While the children are decorating the seeds, connect them to the concept that they are like a seed growing and developing.

Materials

- Cardboard group tree
- Leaves photocopied on green paper
- Completed blossom
- *Every Seed Is Special* snapshot
- Butcher's paper
- Stone, seed or piece of wood
- Coloured pens, crayons, glitter, sequins, glue
- Awards
- Children's Evaluation forms
- Snapshot holders
- Timetable written on butcher's paper
- Any new group agreements written on butcher's paper

If time permits, a child suggests a joining game or group facilitators lead one.

Main Activities (1 hour)

Each child completes a leaf and adds it to the group tree. Group facilitators add further blossom prepared.

Activity One: See the Tree Grow

Encourage the children to think about things that trees need to have to make them grow and keep them healthy. For example, water, sun, freedom from damage. Write these up on butcher's paper, emphasising that there are no right or wrong answers.

Activity Two: Movement to Music

Play some relaxing music in the background. Instruct the children to curl up in a ball on the floor and tell them they are a seed. As they are curled up in a ball, explain to the children that you are going to place a circle of brown material over them to represent the earth that they, as the seed, lie under. Tell the children that the rain has fallen and the sun is up and it is time for them to start growing. Encourage the children to start moving and to eventually stand on their feet as a full-grown tree on top of the circle of material. As they are moving (growing) continually sprinkle them with blue paper, glitter or fabric (water). Speak to them of the heat of the sun and get them to imagine the heat of the sun on their trunks and branches and leaves. As you do so, go



Session 3: See Me Grow

Aim: To enhance self care

Welcoming Activity (30 minutes)

Children arrive and join over refreshments provided. Check in with each child about how the week has gone and if they have any questions or would like to make any comments arising from the last session. Allow the children to chat and connect with each other over their meal and discussion of the week. Invite them to stick their leaves on the group tree if they have completed one at home.

throughout the group and drape a piece of yellow scarf-like material on their shoulders to represent the sun. Then tell the children that as a tree they need to be protected, loved and cared for. As you are speaking, go throughout the group and drape coloured ribbon on their arms to represent the nurturance they are receiving.

An addition to this exercise can be to gently wrap green stretch material around the group, encouraging them to stretch out as forests do when they grow.

Turn off the music, unwrap the green material and ask the children to find their own comfortable space whilst staying in the circle. Discuss what it was like being a tree both standing alone and as part of a forest. Ensure the discussion includes what it was like to feel the nourishment of the rain, the warmth of the sun and the nurturance of protection, love and caring and being with other trees. Which part, if any, did they like or feels to be most important to them? Note: It is important after this activity that the coloured paper and ribbons is not discarded but a choice left with each child as to what they would like to do. Some children may choose to keep the fabric and paper with them whereas others may decide to place their fabric and paper in their box.

Activity Three: *See Me Grow* snapshot

Group facilitators to distribute the ***See Me Grow*** snapshot. Invite the children to draw themselves in the middle of the page. Ask them to

write or draw around their self-portrait all they need to help them grow. The group facilitators will need to circulate amongst the group, helping children who seem to be stuck. The group facilitator demonstrates this on a white board or butcher's paper as they describe the activity, pointing out that there are no right or wrong answers and that everything the children come up with is acceptable.

Closing Activity (15 minutes)

Invite the children to describe something from this session that they enjoyed. Explain to the children that their carers will be invited to the last group session and if they liked the music and movement activity it can be included in this last session.

Complete evaluation forms and awards. Put awards and snapshots into their snapshot holders.

Optional

Offer the children leaves to take home and bring back completed at the next session.

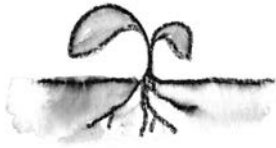
Facilitators' Key Notes

Have a special part of the room set up in which to do the movement to the music. It might be a good idea to have the floor prepared either with a green cloth or scattered leaves to represent the forest floor. Ensure you have the music turned on immediately you bring the group to this spot and turn it off as you move back to the other group area.

The children do not have to close their eyes during this activity or do anything that is physically uncomfortable. Ensure that there are plenty of resources for this activity, especially to drape around the children and allow them to continue wearing them for the rest of the session. The children may also be offered the choice to either take the resources home or keep them in their group boxes.

Materials

- Cardboard group tree
- Leaves photocopied on green paper
- Completed blossom
- **See Me Grow** snapshot
- Coloured pens, pencils
- CD and CD player
- Brown material cut into a circle
- Blue material, glitter or paper
- Yellow scarf or scarf-like material
- Strips of coloured ribbon
- Awards
- Children's Evaluation forms
- Snapshot holders
- Timetable written on butcher's paper
- Any new group agreements written on butcher's paper



Session 4: In the Forest

Aim: To discuss wider support system

Welcoming Activity (30 minutes)

Children arrive and join over refreshments provided. Check in with each child about how the week has gone and if they have any questions or would like to make any comments arising from the last session. Allow the children to chat and connect with each other over their meal and discussion of the week. Invite them to stick their leaves on the group tree if they have completed one at home.

If time permits, a child suggests a joining game or group facilitators lead one.

Main Activities (50 minutes)

Each child completes a leaf and adds it to the group tree. Group facilitators add a blossom they prepared from the last group session.

Activity One: *In My Forest* snapshot

Group facilitators to distribute the *In My Forest* snapshot. Invite the children to place their names in the middle tree. On the trees around them put the names of people, clubs, hobbies, and pets, cultural and spiritual supports.

Invite the children to discuss how it feels to have these supports in their lives. For children who appear to have few supports, emphasise the importance of the quality of these supports, not the quantity. In the discussion, highlight the importance of being an individual (every seed is special) and at the same time being part of a supportive system (in my forest).

Activity Two A (For Younger Children): *The Little Seed Who Didn't Belong*

Group facilitator reads the story *The Little Seed Who Didn't Belong* that was developed as part of this group work program. The story can be enlarged to make it easier for the children to visualise the story.

Please note: This story and a further story are included in the resources section to allow copies to be made so that each child has their own personal copy at the end of the program. It is encouraged that from the template the

book is presented in it's most appealing form using coloured quality paper or perhaps the cover to be laminated.

Invite the group to discuss what was happening for the little seed, how the little seed felt and what comfort the little seed may have needed. Expand the discussion to include the children's own lives and invite them to speak about similarities and differences between them and the little seed. Link the discussion with the *In My Forest* snapshot and discussion.

Activity Two B (For Older Children): *A Letter to Treesa*

Group facilitator reads the letter, *A Letter to Treesa*, developed as part of this group work program. Invite the group to discuss what was happening in the letter; how the letter writer may have felt; and what comfort the letter writer may have needed. Expand the discussion to include the children's own lives and invite them to speak about similarities and differences between them and the letter writer. Invite them to write back to the letter writer.

Closing Activity (25 minutes)

Ask the children to bring in a photo of themselves to the next session.

Distribute snapshot *In the Heart of the Forest* with a heart drawn on it. Supply a selection of seeds, glitter and sequins. Invite the children to decorate their heart.

Complete evaluation forms and awards. Put awards and snapshots into their snapshot holders.

Optional

Offer the children leaves to take home and bring back completed at the next session.

Facilitators' Key Notes

When discussing the contents of the story or the letter with the children do not overemphasise the connection to their own lives. Approach this discussion from a curious stance, pondering if there are any similarities, rather than forcing children to look at their own lives in depth.

While the story and letter have been written to suit the older and younger age groups do not underestimate the power of story telling for older children and pick whichever activity you think suits the group.

Before the next session, telephone the carers and ask them to remind the children about bringing in the photograph of them.

Materials

- Cardboard group tree
- Leaves photocopied on green paper
- Completed blossom
- Story: *The Little Seed Who Didn't Belong*
- Letter: *A Letter to Treesa*
- *In My Forest* snapshot
- *In the Heart of the Forest* snapshot
- Coloured pens, pencils
- Seeds, sequins, glitter
- Glue
- Children's Evaluation forms
- Awards
- Snap shot holders
- Timetable written on butcher's paper
- Any new group agreements written on butcher's paper



Session 5: The Tree of Birth

Aim: To discuss family of origin

Welcoming Activity (30 minutes)

Children arrive and join over refreshments provided. Check in with each child about how the week has gone and if they have any questions or would like to make any comments arising from last session. Allow the children to chat and connect with each other over their meal and discussion of the week. Invite them to stick their leaves on the group tree if they have completed one at home.

If time permits, a child suggests a joining game or group facilitators lead one.

Main Activities (1 hour)

Each child completes a leaf and adds it to the group tree. Group facilitators add a blossom they prepared from the last group session.

Activity One: Birthstone

Before this session the facilitators are to find out the birthstone of each child. The facilitators let each child know what their birthstone is and what it means. The facilitators then distribute a large piece of card or wood on top of which is written or painted 'My birth card'. Invite each child to record as much information about themselves and their birth as they know. For example, date of birth, time or place of birth, colour of hair and eyes, etc, that they were born with and any other qualities they were born with.

The children then decorate their birthstone using craft materials supplied.

Activity Two: *The Tree of Birth* and *Fruit From The Tree of Birth* snapshot

Give children *The Tree of Birth* snapshot and invite them to write the names of as many people in their birth family as they remember. Distribute the *Fruit From The Tree Of Birth* snapshot and ask them to complete it. Discuss with the children that the fruits from their birth families can include such characteristics as hair colour, eye colour or height. For children who know nothing about their birth family tell them the same physical characteristics are possible and encourage them to write 'my family may have given me....' Discuss

with the children the conversations other children living away from their families have had about the not-so-good things that birth families have given them, such as neglect or abuse.

Tell the children that they can decide if they want to include these on their snapshot. They can do so in any way they want. The group facilitators can ask the children if they want them to demonstrate how to complete this snapshot.

Invite children to share this. Discuss how it felt to do this snapshot and process any issues that arose from this activity. Encourage the children to nominate a person they can talk to about any feelings arising from this session, remind them of all they put on their *In My Forest* snapshot.

Closing Activity (15 minutes)

Invite the children to show their completed craft work and say what they like about what they did or how they feel about their achievement.

Complete evaluation forms and awards. Put awards and snapshots into their snapshot holders.

Optional

Offer the children leaves to take home and bring back completed at the next session.

Facilitators' Key Notes

Encourage the group to help each other to think about characteristics they may have been born with. Gauge how they group is dealing with the discussion of birth families: if it becomes too difficult, do not introduce the *Fruit From The Tree Of Birth* snapshot, but continue with the craft activity and look for opportunities for discussing the birth family within the flow of the activity.

Materials

- Cardboard group tree
- Leaves photocopied on green paper
- Completed blossom
- Birth Stone template
- *Tree of Birth* snapshot
- *Fruit From The Tree Of Birth* snapshot
- Coloured pencils, pens
- Selection of craft activities that take no more than ten minutes to complete

- Awards
- Children's Evaluation forms
- Snapshot holders
- Timetable written on butcher's paper
- Any new group agreements written on butcher's paper



Session 6: Replanting

Aim: To discuss the experience of not living with birth family

Welcoming Activity (30 minutes)

Children arrive and join over refreshments provided. Check in with each child how the week has gone and if they have any questions or would like to make any comments arising from last session. Allow the children to chat and connect with each other over their meal and discussion of the week. Invite them to stick their leaves on the group tree if they have completed one at home.

If time permits, a child suggests a joining game or group facilitators lead one.

Main Activities (1 hour)

Each child completes a leaf and adds it to the group tree. Group facilitators add a blossom they prepared from last week's group.

Activity One: (For Younger Children) *The Little Tree Who Whispered of Belonging*

Group facilitators read the story, *The Little Tree Who Whispered of Belonging*, written as part of this group work program. Invite the group to discuss what was happening for each of the seeds that spoke to the tree. Expand the discussion to include the children's own lives and invite them to speak about similarities and differences between them and some of the seeds.

Invite the children to make their own tree.

Activity One: (For Older Children) *Treesa's Reply*

Group facilitators read the letter *Treesa's Reply*, written as part of this group work program. Invite the group to discuss what was happening for the people Treesa wrote about. Expand the discussion to include the children's own lives and invite them to speak about similarities and differences between them and some of these people.

Activity Two: *Treasure From The Forest Found* snapshot

Distribute *Treasure From The Forest Found* snapshot and ask the children to complete it.

Closing Activity (15 minutes)

Invite the children to show their completed *Treasure From The Forest Found* snapshot and say what they like about what they did, or how they feel about their achievement.

Complete evaluation forms and awards. Put awards and snapshots into their snapshot holders.

Optional

Offer the children leaves to take home and bring back completed at the next session.

Facilitators' Key Notes

As the children make their own trees, explain that all trees are different: some grow in forests, and some stand alone on hilltops; they come in all different shapes and sizes. Invite the children to think of themselves like this, and that the tree they make is unique like them.

Materials

- Cardboard group tree
- Leaves photocopied on green paper
- Completed blossom
- Story: *The Little Tree Who Whispered of Belonging*
- Letter: *Treesa's Reply*
- *Treasure From The Forest Found* snapshot
- Coloured pencils, pens
- Craft supplies to make a tree with, eg, coloured paper, toilet roll holders, pipe cleaners, etc
- Awards
- Children's Evaluation forms
- Snapshot holders
- Timetable written on butcher's paper
- Any new group agreements written on butcher's paper



Session 7: The Tree I Live in Today

Aim: To discuss foster family

Welcoming Activity (30 minutes)

Children arrive and join over refreshments provided. Check in with each child how the week has gone and if they have any questions or would like to make any comments arising from last session. Allow the children to chat and connect with each other over their meal and discussion of the week. Invite them to stick their leaves on the group tree if they have completed one at home.

If time permits, a child suggests a joining game or group facilitators lead one.

Main Activities (1 hour)

Each child completes a leaf and adds it to the group tree. Group facilitators add a blossom they prepared from last week's session.

Activity One: *The Tree I Live in Today* snapshot

Give children *The Tree I Live In Today* snapshot and ask them to complete it. Invite the children to share their tree. Discuss how it felt to do this snapshot and process any issues that arose from this activity.

Activity Two: *Fruit From The Tree I Live in Today* snapshot

Give children the *Fruit From the Tree I Live in Today* snapshot and ask them to complete it. Invite children to share this. Discuss how it felt to do this snapshot and process any issues that arose from this activity.

Activity Three: Game or Craft Activity

Give children a choice of craft activity or play a game.

Closing Activity (15 minutes)

Invite the children to show their completed craft work and say what they like about what they did or how they feel about their achievement.

Complete evaluation forms and awards. Put awards, and snap shots into their snapshot holders.

Optional

Offer the children leaves to take home and bring back completed at the next session.

Facilitators' Key Notes

If children want to talk about aspects of their foster family they do not like, allow them some time to speak about these issues. Ask the children if they want you to feed this back to their foster care worker. If discussion reveals any aspect of placements that concerns the group facilitators, they will need to remind the children of their duty to inform their case workers and ask them how they feel about this. While giving time to such discussion group, facilitators need to make sure that this discussion does not overwhelm the group, so they may need to protectively interrupt the flow of conversation to avoid this.

Materials

- Cardboard group tree
- Leaves photocopied on green paper
- Completed blossom
- *The Tree I Live in Today* snapshot
- *Fruit From Tree I Live in Today* snapshot
- Coloured pencils, pens
- Selection of craft activities that take no more than ten minutes to complete
- Board game
- Awards
- Children's Evaluation forms
- Snapshot holders

- Timetable written on butcher's paper
- Any new group agreements written on butcher's paper



Session 8: The Passing of the Seasons

Aim: To discuss problem solving techniques for the children to use when faced with issues of explaining their birth history

Welcoming Activity (30 minutes)

Children arrive and join over refreshments provided. Check in with each child how the week has gone and if they have any questions or would like to make any comments arising from last session. Allow the children to chat and connect with each other over their meal and discussion of the week. Invite them to stick their leaves on the group tree if they have completed one at home.

If time permits, a child suggests a joining game or group facilitators lead one.

Main Activity (40 minutes)

Each child completes a leaf and adds it to the group tree. Group facilitators add a blossom they prepared from last week's group.

Movement to Music

Facilitators play music in the background that represents stormy weather. If facilitators have a recording of wind and rain this can be used. Using the props from Session 3, tell the children to be a tree. As the music is playing, tell the children to move as if the wind is blowing and the rain is falling. Tell them thunder and lightning is occurring, the trees are being swept about by the weather. Start to calm the weather down and invite the children to slow their movements down. When the music has stopped, encourage the children to sit where they are and describe the experience. Discuss what it was like for the tree, what helped the tree in the storm, and what did not help. Discuss how damage can occur in the storm and how to protect trees from damage.

Liken the storms the trees experienced to the problems that children in foster care may face. Brainstorm these problems and record them on a large sheet of paper. Some of these problems may include:

- Being teased in school
- Not knowing what to do for Mother's or Father's Day
- Not knowing what to do about things parents might say about each other, the foster carers or foster care workers
- What to do if something makes them feel uncomfortable at access visits

- Wanting to talk about birth family with foster family but worried about offending them

If the group finds it hard to talk about all the problems show them the **Hard Questions** box. Tell them that they can put any hard questions about being in foster care into the box. Explain that the facilitators will pick them out one by one and invite the group to brainstorm solutions to these problems, or suggest people who can help with these problems. Write them up on butcher's paper. Invite the children to tell of times they have overcome some of these problems and encourage them to offer solutions to each other. If solutions cannot be readily found, encourage the children to think about the options discussed in the story *The Little Tree Who Whispered of Belonging* or *The Letter to Treasa*.

Closing Activity (35 minutes)

Invite the children to do a *Be Strong Be Proud* poster or card recording everything they are proud of about themselves.

Complete evaluation forms and awards. Put awards into their snapshot holders.

Optional

Offer the children leaves to take home and bring back completed at the next session.

Facilitators' Key Notes

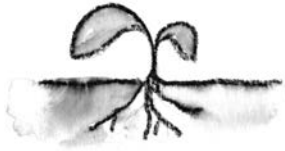
The facilitators can place some questions in the **Hard Questions** box ahead of the session, and if they are used, explain to the group that these are difficulties other children in care have told them about.

Tell the children that next session will be their penultimate session and part of the session will be set aside for planning the final session.

Materials

- Cardboard group tree
- Leaves photocopied on green paper
- Completed blossom
- Butcher's paper or whiteboard
- Craft activity
- Board Game
- Coloured pens, pencils
- CD and CD player
- Brown material cut into a circle

- Yellow scarf or scarf like material
- Strips of coloured ribbon
- Awards
- Children's Evaluation Forms
- Snapshot holders
- Timetable written on butcher's paper
- Any new group agreements written on butcher's paper



Session 9: The Sapling has Grown

Aim: *To strengthen the children's sense of self by exploring their future and preparing the children for the end of the group.*

Welcoming Activity (30 minutes)

Children arrive and join over refreshments provided. Check in with each child how the week has gone and if they have any questions or would like to make any comments arising from last session. Allow the children to chat and connect with each other over their meal and discussion of the week. Invite them to stick their leaves on the group tree if they have completed one at home.

If time permits, a child suggests a joining game or group facilitators lead one.

Main Activity (45 minutes)

Each child completes a leaf and adds it to the group tree. Group facilitators add a blossom they prepared from last week's group.

Activity One: *Two Trees Weekly News* snapshot

Group facilitators distribute the ***Two Trees Weekly News*** snapshot. When all the children have finished the snapshot, discuss the work. Encourage the children to think about the skills, strengths and wisdom they have as children and how to bring them into their future. Highlight that some

negative experiences of childhood will not disappear when they become adults, but that it need not colour their future.

Activity Two: *Two Trees Group Gifts To You* snapshot

Explain to the children that it is now time to finish the work of the group and start to prepare for the last session. Distribute the ***Two Trees Group Gifts To You*** snapshot. Invite children to put their name on the top. Instruct children to pass their sheet to the child on their left. Each child then writes a special message on the sheet that says something about the time they spent together in the group, or something they liked about the child or help they got. The group facilitators can give examples of things to write to start the group off. When each child has written on the sheet they then pass it to their left again, until everyone has written something on each child's sheet and the sheet returns to the owner. Allow time for the children to read their sheets and either say what it will be like for them when the group finishes or anything else they would like to say to the group.

Planning The Last Session (30 minutes)

The group facilitators invite each child to get their group work snapshot holders and see if there were any unfinished pieces of work they would like to do. As work is being finished, the group facilitators explain to the children

they will be making a book with all the work the children have completed. They will be presented with the book at the last session.

Discuss with the children what they would like to do with the group tree. Options may be to take their own leaves home, swap leaves with each other, give leaves to group facilitators to put into books, or any other ideas generated by the group.

Explain that their carers will be invited to the last session, they will be presented with their books, and there will be shared food. Invite the children to think about how they would like to summarise the group to the carers and help them to plan the last session.

Suggestions for the last session:

- Perform the two psychodramas and have each child say what it meant for them.
- Each child shows something from their books and says something about it.
- Each child says something they liked about the group.

Closing Activity (15 minutes)

Complete evaluation forms and awards.

Facilitators' Key Notes

Group facilitators explain to the children that while next week is the last week, they will be sending a group work evaluation form to the children some weeks after the group is finished. If the facilitators see the children in

another context this will also need to be highlighted.

Materials

- Cardboard group tree
- Leaves photocopied on green paper
- Completed blossom
- *Two Trees Weekly News* snapshot
- *Two Trees Group Gift for You* snapshot
- Coloured pens, pencils
- Awards
- Children's Evaluation forms
- Snapshot holders
- Timetable written on butcher's paper
- Any new group agreements written on butcher's paper



Session 10: The Tree has Blossomed

Aim: To celebrate with the carer the

group's achievements and close the group

Welcome

The group facilitators welcome the carers and the children to the last session and speak about the journey of the group, describing the activities and showing the group tree (if it has not been dismantled) or a photo of it (if it has).

The Children's Story

The children share the group contents with their carers in the way they planned in the last session.

Celebrations

The group facilitators present each child with their book, group certificate and native tree. Speak to the theme of the children blossoming like a tree, throughout the group process and the continuation of their growth after the group finishes.

A bookmark template is also provided which can be given to children, encouraging them to decorate the front with their name and craft materials and gain signatures from other children on the back of the bookmark. Ribbon representing the colours of the Movement to Music exercise-session 3) can be threaded through the top of the bookmark. To add

to the finished product it can also be laminated.

Celebration

Group facilitators invite the children and their carers to a celebration party with some special celebratory food.

Facilitators' Key Notes

There is no specific timing with each of the sections of this session. However at the end of the session it will be incumbent on the group facilitators to ensure they close the group after the shared meal with certainty but not haste. To rush the carers and the children may make them feel rejected. However, to be uncertain in finishing may leave the child with feelings of ambiguity.

Materials

- Cardboard group tree
- Children's books
- Children's group certificates
- Any other resources the children want to show the carers
- Native tree for each child



CARERS GROUP PROGRAM

Session 1
Preparing the
Seedbed

Sessions 2-10 Watch
the Seedling Grow



Session 1: Preparing the Seedbed

Aim: To orientate the carers to the

children's group work program and discuss their role

Introduction (15 minutes)

Group facilitators welcome the carers and introduce themselves. Ask the carers to introduce themselves to the group, say the name of the child they are caring for and one strength or skill the child has.

Explain to the carers that they will meet together each week and join with the children for the last children's group session. Lead them in a discussion of the group agreements that they would like the group to adopt.

Inform the carers that you will be finishing promptly to ensure the children are not kept waiting on them.

Discussion About The Children's Group (40 minutes)

Group facilitators show the carers the children's group program. This may be prepared beforehand, either on an overhead or written on butcher's paper. Explain the aim, content and structure of each session, and ask the carers if they have any questions.

Distribute two paper leaves to each carer. Ask them to write their name on one leaf. On the

other leaf ask them to write something they like doing, are good at, proud of, or have achieved. Stick the leaves on the tree. Explain that the tree will be used each week and it parallels the process the children will be undergoing. Ask them to talk about how they found doing this activity.

Forecasting problems and benefits (30 minutes)

Display two sheets of butcher's paper, one headed **Pitfalls** and the other headed **Benefits**. Invite the carers to brainstorm the problems they envisage arising as a result of the children being members of the group. Encourage carers to give each other support with finding solutions for these problems without deskilling each other. Group facilitators need to ensure they maintain the balance between promoting an environment of self help and keeping the group structured. Give the carers the name and number of the contact person for all group issues. Ask the carers to be prudent in using the group contact person only if something major arises. Encourage them to nominate other sources of support.

Invite the carers to brainstorm all the benefits that will arise for the children as a result of being members of the group.

Encourage them to highlight these benefits to the children when they see them arise and also feed them back at the next group session.

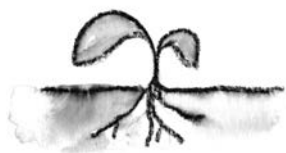
Closing Activity (10 minutes)

Complete evaluation forms.

Materials

- Outline of children's group timetable on butcher's paper
- Butcher's paper for group agreements
- Butcher's paper entitled ***Benefits***
- Butcher's paper entitled ***Pitfalls***
- Cardboard tree trunk
- Leaves photocopied on green paper
- Evaluation forms

Sessions 2 - 10: Watch the Seedling Grow



Aim: To monitor

progress of the children and value the carers' support of the group

Orientation to each Session (20 minutes)

Check in with each carer about how the week has gone and if they have any questions or would like to make any comments arising from the last session.

Add leaf to group tree.

Main Discussion (1 hour)

Invite the carers to put together an agenda for this session. The first agenda item for each week will be discussion of the content of the current children's group session.

If carers have no items for the agenda, then the group facilitators can invite the carers to complete the snap shot that the children are doing in their session and lead a discussion on it.

Finishing activity (10 minutes)

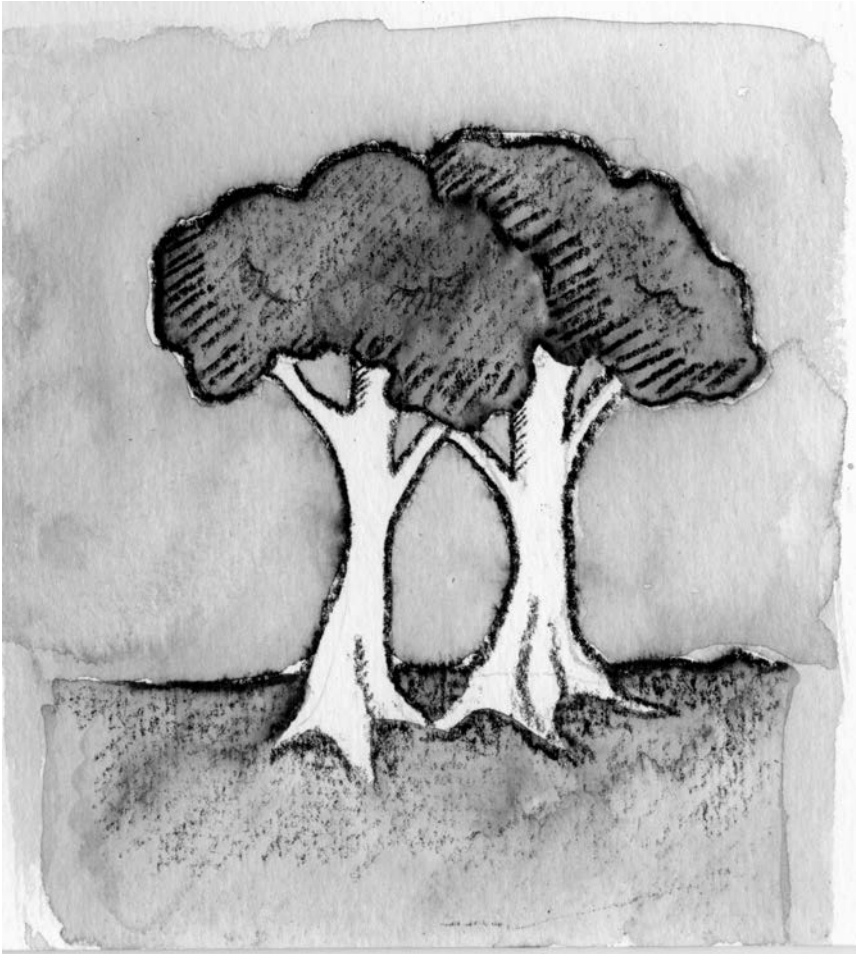
Complete evaluation forms.

Facilitators' Key Notes

The carers will join the children for a celebration of the group in session 10.

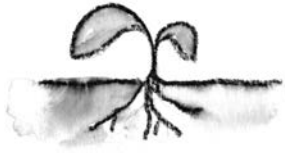
Materials

- Outline of children's group timetable on butcher's paper
- Group agreements on butcher's paper
- Butcher's paper to record agenda items
- Cardboard tree trunk
- Leaves photocopied on green paper
- Copies of children's session snapshots
- Evaluation forms



PART FOUR

**POST-GROUP
PHASE**



Watering the Garden: Post-Group Sessions

Aim: group facilitators to record, evaluate and consolidate experience of the group process

The group facilitators will need to meet once or twice to complete the administrative component of running the group. The following tasks need to be completed:

- Group workers debrief with each other and group work supervisor on the experience of running the group for them as professionals.
- A group work report written and kept by the foster care agency.
- Copies of all the evaluation forms (children's, carers and facilitators) to be attached to the group work report.
- A copy of each child's book to be kept on foster care agency file.
- A thank you letter and group work evaluation form sent to the children and carers, three to six months after the group has finished.
- Post group work evaluation forms to be discussed by facilitators and any necessary changes incorporated into running another group.
- Post group work evaluation forms to be filed with group work report.

