

Nurture Group Outline

Nurture Groups (NG) are designed to immerse children and youth in a safe, playful environment where they learn and practice the 4 Skills of Meaningful Relationships. According to Jude Cassidy, those 4 skills are: ability to give care, the ability to seek/receive care, the ability to know the autonomous self (i.e. the ability to be emotionally close to someone while at the same time not losing the self) and the ability to negotiate needs. During NG, everyone has a voice that is listened to and respected. Participants are able to use this voice to negotiate their personal needs. Nurture Groups provide a place where children and youth are able to ask for nurturing care and are able to give nurturing care to others without feeling ashamed or embarrassed. Nurture Groups teach children and youth how to develop healthy relationships.

The 6 Parts of Nurture Group:

I. **Rules**

- a. Go over rules – (from Play with Them: Theraplay® Groups in the Classroom: A Technique for Professionals Who Work with Children, Rubin & Tregay, 1989)
- b. **3 Rules:**
 - i. Stick together – idea is that group members stay together *physically* (i.e. staying in the group, going where the group goes, participating in the activities our group is participating in) and *psychologically* (i.e. paying attention, raising your hand, being respectful, developing meaningful relationships with each other)
 - ii. No hurts – physical or emotional, with actions or words; “inside” hurts can be physical like headaches or stomachaches, or emotional hurts like sad or angry feelings; “outside” hurts can be scratches, bruises, or other marks
 - iii. Have fun – When group members stick together and don’t hurt each other, the group will be enjoyable for everyone
**These can be adapted for the specific ages and sophistication of your kids.
- c. Things to Remember for NG Rules:
 - i. Group members can make up hand motions for each phrase
 - ii. Group members put rules into their own words to encourage “buy-in”
 - iii. Adult/NG leader says first word of rule and children say second word (Adult says, “Stick” and the children say, “Together.” Adult: “No,” Children: “Hurts,” etc.)

- d. *How the Rules teach the 4 Skills of Meaningful Relationships*
 - i. *Give Care*—Establish rules that honor relationships
 - ii. *Seek/Receive Care*—Encourage group to rely on each other
 - iii. *Practice Autonomy*—Empower by allowing group to collaborate on the rules and by setting group expectations
 - iv. *Negotiate Needs*—Negotiate own needs & needs of others

- II. **Check-In**
 - a. Check-in is a simple question to connect and share power; “ice-breaker”
 - i. Use a “magic feather” such as light up wand, ball, special toy; anything that is fun and gets their attention/draws them in
 - ii. Sample questions include
 - 1. If you could be any animal, what animal would you be and why?
 - 2. What color jelly-bean would you like to be and why?
 - 3. Tell something fun that has happened to you in the last week.
 - 4. Tell something no one here knows about you.
 - 5. Tell one feeling that you have had today.
 - 6. What was your favorite childhood pet?
 - 7. Who is your favorite super-hero and why?
 - 8. You can tie this question directly into the activity for the day, for example if you are doing a sports related activity, your check-in question could be about a favorite sports team, etc.
 - iii. For initial groups it is best to ask simple, non-threatening questions, like many of those listed above. As the group progresses, questions can progress to deeper levels, such as “Tell me about a time when you felt embarrassed” or “What is your saddest memory?”
**Group members can “pass” on participation, but need to do so with respectful words. Having permission to pass on participation has potential to build trust and create a sense of autonomy. It also provides context for learning to negotiate needs respectfully.
 - b. *How the Check-In teaches the 4 Skills of Meaningful Relationships*
 - i. *Give Care*—Listen & respond to other’s stories
 - ii. *Seek/Receive Care*—Share personal hurts, seek care of someone safe
 - iii. *Practice Autonomy*—Request to pass with good words
 - iv. *Negotiate Needs*—Honor request to pass.

III. **Band-Aids®**

- a. *Band-Aids* are included as a connecting/nurturing activity.
 - i. Group leader shares a personal hurt (inside or outside) as a demonstration to the group. The group leader then demonstrates how to ask a partner for permission to put on a Band-Aid®
 1. Group members can say “no” as long as they use respectful words. If the child/ youth says “no,” offer them the option to put the Band-Aid on themselves or they can save it for later.
 - ii. Tell the group to find a partner
 1. Pass bowls with Band-Aids around to the group so that each participant can pick the one they want
 2. Each participant exchanges their Band-Aid with their partner
 3. Partners take turn applying the Band-Aid to their partner
 - a. First partner asks, “Do you have any hurts? Can I put this Band-Aid on you?”
 - i. Second partner either explains where they need a Band-Aid or declines the offer (passes)
 - b. Partners switch roles and the other Band-Aid is applied
 - iii. Purpose is to engage, support, and provide personal care for the child/teen (think in terms of nurturance needs of an infant) so this should allow gentle eye contact, safe physical touch, and caring voices
 - iv. Other alternatives for nurturing activities include:
 1. Application of lotion or powder to hands
 2. Simply noticing hurts, expressions, or personal changes
 3. Application of stickers or tattoos
 4. Painting each other’s fingernails
 - v. Older kids and teens will be drawn into the activities by the strength of the relationship with the caregiver
- b. *How Band-Aids® teach the 4 Skills of Meaningful Relationships*
 - i. *Give Care*—Safe touch to another person while listening to their hurts
 - ii. *Seek/Receive Care*—Share personal hurts; ask & receive a Band-Aid from a safe person
 - iii. *Practice Autonomy*—Request to pass with good words; honor request to pass
 - iv. *Negotiate Needs*—Choose own Band-Aid and ability to ask for a pass or a compromise

IV. **Content/Activity**

a. Regulation Check

- i. Talk about how our bodies feel when we have high levels of energy, low levels of energy and when our energy is just right for learning.
 - ii. The group leader should proactively create identifies for each level of energy; examples include:
 1. Sloth, Turtle, Low temperature on a thermometer, thumbs down for low levels of energy
 2. Dog, medium temperature, thumbs to the side for just right for learning
 3. Cheetah, high temperature on a thermometer, thumbs up for high levels of energy

****These could also be co-created with the participants**
 - iii. Teach Self-Regulation Skills:
 1. Deep Breathing
 - a. Blow on “Soup”
 - b. Balloons
 - c. “Square” breathing
 - d. Group rhythm breathing
 2. Movement
 - a. Chair sit-ups and push-ups
 - b. Stretches
 - c. Pushing the wall
 3. Pressure points—magic mustache, temples
 4. Weighted items
 5. Sensory fidgets
 6. Chewing helps to organize; sucking helps to calm; crunching is alerting
 - iv. ****Have “regulation checks” periodically throughout the day, especially after highly dysregulating activities.**
- b. Proactive training in area of need—Scripts (routines), *Life Skills* (skills needed for functioning in society), or *Life Value Terms* (skills used in developing relationships)
- i. Verbal – word cues such as:
 1. Showing respect
 2. Gentle and kind
 3. Use your words
 4. Listen and obey
 5. Accepting no
 6. With permission and supervision
 7. Stick together
 8. Asking or Telling
 - ii. Behavioral – action cues such as:
 1. Choices

2. Compromises
3. “Re-do’s”
- iii. Take target area and have the child or youth work together with partner to produce – always give the child or youth the choice of taking on the role of the caregiver.
- iv. Role play, puppet play or skit
 1. Enables children to have body *motor memory* of the correct behavior
 2. Is an emotionally safe way for children to internalize messages (externalize through role-play 1st, then internalize it)
 3. Gives children and youth an opportunity to learn and practice new skills in a fun and non-threatening forum
**Do incorrectly (normal, default) first, then correctly (after instruction) second. Have fun with the “bad” way, then finish with the good way
- c. *How the activity teaches the 4 Skills of Meaningful Relationships*
 - i. This will depend on the activity you choose. You can intentionally focus on one of the four skills to highlight.

V. **Feeding**

- a. **Feeding** is included as a connecting/nurturing activity.
- b. For feeding
 - i. Form pairs
 - ii. Have each person select a food or candy
 - iii. Exchange as with the Band-Aids
 - iv. Have one partner initiate with the phrase, “Can I feed you this piece of candy (or whatever the food is)?”
 - v. The other partner can either accept or pass
 - vi. Partners then exchange roles and repeat
 - vii. As above, the purpose is to engage, nurture, and connect
- c. Possible food ideas
 - i. Individually wrapped candies
 - ii. Tootsie Roll Pops
 - iii. Chips (Pringles) – see who can make the loudest crunch
 - iv. Gummies/hard lifesavers, lifesaver mints, etc. with a hole in the middle, served with plastic straws
 - v. Pretzel sticks

- d. Something pleasurable, such as candy, is usually used so that the pleasurable experience is associated with nurture.
 - i. Always have an alternative option for children and youth with special dietary needs and for food taste aversions
 - ii. Children and youth seem to especially enjoy sour candies (sour flavors are alerting)
- e. *How feeding teaches the 4 Skills of Meaningful Relationships*
 - i. *Give Care*—Provide food for another person
 - ii. *Seek/Receive Care*—Accept food from another person
 - iii. *Practice Autonomy*—Request to pass with good words/honor request with respect
 - iv. *Negotiate Needs*—Ask for partner’s permission before giving care and then honoring decision

VI. **Closing**

- a. Optional -- Simple, group activity – like passed “hand hug”, group cheer or statement, group common motion, “secret handshake”
- b. Restatement of rules
- c. Optional -- Verbal release (blessing) or celebration of group together, e.g., “Let’s give us a hand!”
- d. The closing provides a transition to the rest of the day, reinforces learning and connection and reinforces the desire to participate in future groups/practice the new skills learned.