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Military Deployment- A Counseling Group for Children

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Military Deployment- A Counseling Group for Children

A Plan B Project Presented to the Graduate Faculty of
Minnesota State University Moorhead

By

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Abstract

This group manual was created for children in military families who are currently experiencing a parent being gone due to military deployment. The creation of this counseling group is supported by the literature, Russo & Fallon (2015), found that military children face unique stressors compared to civilian children. Guzman (2014) shows that the numbers of children who live in a military family with at least one parent being a military member, is 1.7 million children in the United States. This proves that this is a large population that need its own unique services to meet their unique life stressors and life experiences. This author has found a gap in the literature as to the effects of multiple relocations and parent deployment on a child's externalized behavior, literature favors behavioral concerns and resiliency. It is this author's belief that even with this literary gap, early intervention is beneficial. This group manual was created to serve children aged five to six years-old to provide them with emotion identification, coping skills, a new support system, and to provide materials that are specific to their current experience in a developmentally appropriate manner. Child-Centered Group Play Therapy (CCGPT) is the theoretical base for this group manual. Wilson and Ray (2018) found that play therapy is easily modified to be developmentally appropriate and is also a multicultural model. This was created as a group model based on Guzman (2014), who reported that group sessions model family cohesion which is beneficial to this population.

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Introduction

Guzman (2014) notes that over 1.7 million children in the United States live in a family with at least one parent who serves in the US military. Trautmann, Alhusen, and Gross (2015) further break this down stating that there is more than 40% of children in military families that are below the age of 6 years old. This is a critical point in development for any child, where a child depends on their parent's physical and emotional availability to aid in their healthy development (Trautmann, Alhusen, & Gross, 2015). Russo and Fallon (2015) note this population face unique stressors such as frequent relocations, deployments, and multiple life changes. Lowe, Adams, Browne, and Hinkle (2012) found that military children have lower motivation and higher dropout rates than civilian peers due to constant moving and gaps in their education. Military life can have multiple long-term effects on military children.

Literature Review

The Impact of Military Deployment on the Family

Deployment can have a large, long-term effect on children of military families. It has been found that children who have an active duty parent move every two to three years, this can include an international relocation (Guzman, 2014). This means that during the typical schooling from kindergarten to 12th grade, 1.2 million children average on six to nine moves and live a nomadic lifestyle (Guzman, 2014). This can have negative consequences on a child's schoolwork, social networks, and activities as well as it requires the child to constantly adjust to a new school and culture (Guzman, 2014). When a child must readjust, it adds stress to their strained friendships and gaps in their education (Guzman, 2014).

Chawla and Solinas-Saunders (2011) state that research has found that a child's response to a parent's deployment varies by age. For example, children from the age of three to five show an increase in behavioral symptoms compared to those whose parent is not deployed (Chawla & Solinas-Saunders, 2011). Children who are continuously required to relocate commonly get labeled a "military brat" by their peers, this has been found to increase barriers to new social interactions and in turn increases a child being distant (Guzman, 2014). This can decrease opportunities for emotional exchange and limit emotional resources, which becomes highly problematic if the child is experiencing grief (Guzman, 2014). Not only does a parent's deployment affect their child's academic performance, but it can also change their physical health, behavior, mood, and anxiety (Guzman, 2014). This can especially affect the children whose parents have long deployments or serve in the National Guard and Reserves due to their constant involvement (Guzman, 2014).

Stress on Military Families

Russo and Fallon (2015) define stress as life events that require adaptation. Lowe, Adams, Browne, and Hinkle (2012) completed a study that focused on the impact of how being away from the family for long periods of time impacted the parent-child relationship for military families. One way that active duty members and their families differ from non-active duty families, is that they face a constant source of stress knowing that they will inevitably be deployed (Lowe et al., 2012). The spouse of the military member takes on the stress of becoming the sole caregiver for the family, finances, geographic separation, fear of their spouse dying, and child rearing (Lowe et al., 2012). If these stressors take place long-term, they can lead to loneliness and depression which can have its own impact on other family members (Lowe et al., 2012).

The 'three R's' are common stressors military families experience (Lowe et al., 2012). Redeployment is the first and takes place a month before the return of the military member, spouses prepare the home and children to please their military member (Lowe et al., 2012). This creates high-level demand situations for children by creating more responsibilities without increased attention from the parent, the family experiences uncertainty as they prepare for the homecoming (Lowe et al., 2012). Reunion is second and can take place for hours or days depending on the military base, here the military member can see for themselves the impact of their separation on their family (Lowe et al., 2012). Lastly, reintegration can negatively affect the long-term stability of the family if it is not properly communicated within the family, which is difficult to reestablish (Lowe et al., 2012). Reintegration also looks different depending on the age of the child, toddlers and preschoolers may feel and react to the military parent as a stranger whereas school aged children and adolescents may react with anger and fear (Lowe et al., 2012).

Lowe et al., (2012) utilized the Parenting stress Index (PSI) and the Parenting Relationship Questionnaire (PRQ) to measure how stress of deployment impacted their total stress, and if it increased relational frustration for the military dependent spouse and how this affected their relationship with their children. There were 30 spouses that participated from a base in Georgia who were all Caucasian and female, on average 35.4 years old with on average 2.4 children whose spouse had served for on average 14.2 years (Lowe et al., 2012). Results found that short-term duties and those with weaker parent-child communication had an increased level of parental distress compared to those who were accustomed to military culture for longer experienced less stress (Lowe et al., 2012). It is unsure if this is due to more experience with adjusting family communication and acquiring more coping skills over time, or if the spouse feels that if their family is labeled problematic it will affect their military spouse's career negatively and thus avoids full disclosure (Lowe et al., 2012).

Sumner, Boisvert, and Andersen (2016) utilized social support theory to look at the impact of parental stress and socially support had on military children's externalized behaviors. It was noted that literature results are conflicted about the impact on behavior, some support that multiple relocations and long-deployments have been found to foster resiliency in children of military families while others state that adverse effects in childhood can affect military and civilian children the same; if not more (Sumner et al., 2016). It is thought that there is a discrepancy due to the limitations of sampling methods and sample sizes (Sumner et al., 2016). Social support has also been known to be dependent on the availability of support from command leaders, their location, family support groups, and other military families (Sumner et al., 2016). Military culture has been described as service to country, loyalty, putting its own first,

and discipline that encourages rule following even if it means more pressure (Sumner et al., 2016).

Sumner et al. (2016) collected the data for their study from a survey that focused on professional individual characteristics about military spouse/partner, social support, stress, child behavior, and personal individual characteristics. Their population focused on dual parental homes with children age six and older who were still dependent on their parents (Sumner et al., 2016). Again, all participants were female, with the majority being 39 years old and primarily Caucasian, with on average having two children (Sumner et al., 2016). Externalized behaviors were assessed using parental reports based on the Behavior Problem Index (BPI) that were then scaled on a 3-point scale (Sumner et al., 2016). Stress was assessed based on eight questions utilizing a 4-point scale, and social support was based on personal satisfaction from people in their personal lives and their community over 12 questions utilizing a 7-point scale (Sumner et al., 2016). Use of military services (i.e. medical services, child care, etc.) was also examined with a list of 15 options and based on a 4-point scale (Sumner et al., 2016).

This study provided support that stress and social support experienced by the spouse are related to internalizing, externalizing, and attention behavior for children in military families (Sumner et al., 2016). Wang, Nyutu, Tran, and Spears (2015) found that for the spouses of military members, if they felt socially supported by friends, this increased their sense of community which helped with their psychological well-being. Furthermore, social support can act as a buffer to stress that increase the child's externalized behaviors and can help promote resiliency (Sumner et al., 2016). Limitations from this study included stress and social support can vary from child to child even within the same family and that multiple reporters were not utilized (Sumner et al., 2016).

Issues relating to Post Deployment

Many assume that a military homecoming is only a positive event for family members. However, children face the challenge of rebuilding their emotional connection while the family goes through restructuring its roles (Guzman, 2014). This emotional reconnection for children is made increasingly difficult if the parent or family member is returning with a physical injury or a psychological injury such as PTSD (Guzman, 2014). Britt (2007) stresses that there is still stigma surrounding mental health in general, and the military. Societal stigma, self-stigma, and organizational barriers are the biggest problems for military personnel getting mental health services (Britt, 2007). It is unknown how high the prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is in returning service members due to multiple sources of stigma. It was found by the RAND Corporation, Center for Military Healthy Policy Research that those who served in Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom, returning members had a prevalence of PTSD at 13.8% (Guzman, 2014).

PTSD can evoke two different forms of loss within a family system known as ambiguous loss (Guzman, 2014). The first form is when the family member is gone physically but psychologically present within the family, this can take place during deployment, when they are missing in action, or were killed in the line of duty (Guzman, 2014). The second form of ambiguous loss occurs when a family member is physically present but not psychologically due to PTSD, which can affect their readjustment (Guzman, 2014). Ambiguous loss can be difficult because an important family member who should be able to help with coping, is the one causing the distress (Guzman, 2014).

Common Theories Utilized with Military Families & Children

Cognitive Behavioral Theory

A theory that has been effective with stress and coping is Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT) (Guzman, 2014). It has also shown to promote positive adjustments for children who are dealing with parental separation (Guzman, 2014). CBT has been effective in reducing depression, anxiety, and disruptive behaviors in children (Guzman, 2014). Wilson & Ray (2018) note that CBT has been a popular intervention for children with aggression since its interventions modify behavior and reduce symptomology.

Filial Therapy

Landreth and Bratton (1999) note that adults have a level of expectation for children to be able to communicate on the same level as them. However, children best communicate through play while their verbal and communication skills develop (Landreth & Bratton, 1999). Therefore, toys are how children show their thoughts, wishes, experiences, and relationship (Landreth & Bratton, 1999). Play therapy can be useful because it allows children to put their fears, fantasies, and guilt onto toys instead of people and still feel safe expressing those feelings because it is communicated symbolically (Landreth & Bratton, 1999). Play therapy provides insight by allowing the child to express feelings or past events and having the counselor experience it first hand in an interactive manner (Landreth & Bratton, 1999).

Therefore, a common theory utilized with children from military families is different types of play therapy. Chawla and Solinas-Saunders (2011) discuss the use of Filial Therapy and note that this therapy has shown to be effective with children from the ages of three to ten because it incorporates play, which can be a substitute for verbal communication which is still being developed during this age range (Chawla & Solinas-Saunders, 2011).

Filial therapy helps the parent and child create a stronger bond by helping minimize parental perceptions of problematic child behaviors and a reduction in the problematic behaviors themselves (Chawla & Solinas-Saunders, 2011). Filial therapy promotes parental involvement because it believes that parents are the most effective at developing changes within their children compared to trained professionals in the helping field (Chawla & Solinas-Saunders, 2011). The skills learned through filial therapy are structuring, emphatic listening, imaginary play, and limit-setting (Chawla & Solinas-Saunders, 2011). These four skills help military parents re-introduce stability, restore predictability and safety in the home, and show acceptance of their child's emotions (Chawla & Solinas-Saunders, 2011).

The first skill of structuring is utilized by the parent verbally deciding when and where play sessions will take place, this is important to military families who are constantly relocating, the play session can also be relocated (Chawla & Solinas-Saunders, 2011). The second skill of empathic listening help the parent to gain understanding of their child's internalized and externalized behaviors such as anxiety, depression, withdrawal, aggressive behaviors, attention seeking behaviors, and rule-breaking (Chawla & Solinas-Saunders, 2011). A parent who increases their empathic listening skills will open dialogue for the child to correct their emotions, help the child to identify and verbally express their emotions, and show the child parental acceptance and interest (Chawla & Solinas-Saunders, 2011). Child-centered Imaginary play is the third skill learned, play can only take place if the child feels that they are safe and relaxed (Chawla & Solinas-Saunders, 2011). Filial therapy encourages imagination that is self-directed by the child, parents aim to become more comfortable during imaginary play (Chawla & Solinas-Saunders, 2011). The final skill is limit setting, the parent verbally sets and reminds the child of appropriate boundaries to encourage appropriate behaviors (Chawla & Solinas-Saunders, 2011).

Filial therapy has been validated with other populations who are exposed to chronic stress due to their circumstances, this includes military families, families with chronically ill children, and families with an incarcerated parent (Chawla & Solinas-Saunders, 2011). These populations face change in their daily routines, changes in family structure and roles, financial strain, and long-term uncertainty (Chawla & Solinas-Saunders, 2011). Filial therapy has also been effective across different environments, age groups, ethnicities, and racial populations (Chawla & Solinas-Saunders, 2011). This is important regarding the military, because the military itself is diverse. Filial therapy has helped decrease parental symptoms as well as strengthen the at home parent-child bond which is critical as a protective factor for the child experiencing parental separations (Chawla & Solinas-Saunders, 2011).

Child-Centered Play Therapy

Child-centered Play Therapy (CCPT) is defined as a developmentally responsive intervention for children that values a child's drive for growth and healing, thus making it a popular theory utilized with children (Wilson & Ray, 2018). Unlike CBT, CCPT does not try to modify externalized behaviors, but to empathically understand their internalized origins (Wilson & Ray, 2018). Wilson and Ray (2018) conducted a randomized study of 71 children aged five to ten years old, 36 were in the treatment group and received 16 CCPT sessions in school to reduce aggressive symptomology and 35 were in the control group on a waitlist. Both parents and teachers completed the Children's Aggression Scale- Parent/Teacher (CAS-P/T) and the Social Emotional Assets and Resilience Scales (SEARS) pre-test and posttest (Wilson & Ray, 2018). Their results indicated that parents saw a statistically significant positive change, but teachers did not (Wilson & Ray, 2018). Bratton, Ray, Edwards, and Landreth, (2009) state an advantage of

CCPT is the training that parents can receive training to help them play and create a bond with their children who may be receiving services.

When it comes to group work and children, group formats emphasize family cohesiveness and provide support for children (Guzman, 2014). Group work also gives a child the opportunity to observe, learn, model, and share their skills and experiences with other children (Guzman, 2014). This can help decrease feelings of isolation, which is critical to military children because they can face bullying, rejection, and ridicule from peers who are against war (Guzman, 2014). Cheng and Ray (2016) looked at the success of Child-centered group play therapy (CCGPT) with kindergarteners and their social-emotional well-being. They also utilized the SEARS with 43 children, it was found that whether the group had two participants or three, both CCGPT groups found positive results in social competence, empathy, and over all social-emotional wellness (Cheng & Ray, 2016).

CCPT has large treatment affects that works for populations other than those who are Caucasian, middle-class, and western; that is encompasses a multicultural approach (Bratton et al., 2009). A point in applicability of CCPT was found by Blanco, Holliman, Muro, Toland, and Farnam (2017). After conducting a study on 23 normal functioning 1st graders who participated in a total of 26 sessions, it was found that CCPT had positive long-term effects on normal functioning students academically (Blanco et al., 2017). CCPT is an effective multicultural approach because it is based on play which is unique to each child's perspective.

Conclusion

Civilian children and military children experience common stressors, behaviors, and emotions however, there appears to be less literature on the latter. This author believes there is a gap in the literature between theoretical interventions and modalities of play therapy between military families and for their children individually. Although Filial therapy has been shown to be effective for military parents and their child, there is less literature on group work for military children as a population of its own. That is why it the goal of this author to create a counseling group for military children aged five to six years old utilizing CCGPT who are experiencing a military parent's deployment. The current author believes that a group focused on this specific population could be beneficial whether the group is running in the schools or within a community agency.

This group would serve as a social network for children going through the same experience which will foster peer relationships and stronger ties to the school or community in which they most likely just relocated to. Younger children can experience deployment at an increased difficulty due to possibly lacking strong attachment to the deployed parent, a lack of verbal communication skills, and they are more likely to act out their emotions externally developmentally (Chawla & Solinas-Saunders, 2011). Therefore, the sooner an intervention can be introduced, the better a child can understand and transition within their fluid family system.

Group Overview

Type of Group

This group is a counseling group that is based off Child-Centered Group Play Therapy and general Play Therapy techniques. The group members have been selected for this group based on externalized behaviors. Although within a group setting it is natural for peers to offer support, this is not a support group. A counseling group was chosen to provide opportunities for the group members to identify and process their emotions. By providing group members with a group to gain knowledge and skills, as well as learn from their peers, parents and teachers should see a decrease in externalized behaviors.

Purpose

The purpose of this group is to help young military children go through the experience of having a parent being deployed. Group members will experience a variety of emotions during the deployment and homecoming stages. Because of the military's unique culture and possible relocations, it is not uncommon for children to feel alone during this experience (Guzman, 2014). With constant change, it can decrease the opportunities for the child to feel emotionally supported during a high stress time (Guzman, 2014). It is the hope of this author that providing a tight group of peers experiencing the same situation, each group member will develop multiple opportunities to feel connected to those around them. The purpose of this group should be clear on any advertisement utilized to gain participants (Appendix A).

Facilitator Qualifications

The facilitator of this group will be a mental health professional who has obtained their master's from an accredited program. Professionals working towards their state licensure can facilitate this group so long as they are supervised under a licensed supervisor and meet with

them for one hour per week. The professional providing this group can be qualified with either a civilian background or a military background. Working with the population of children requires high energy and knowledge about developmental stages. Working with military children and their families can also be emotional. It is essential that the group facilitator receive supervision in order to maintain appropriate boundaries and to ensure no countertransference is occurring. The facilitator for this group should have experience with working with children. Facilitator should be familiar with children's mental health and common externalized behaviors. This group could utilize a co-facilitator if desired and deemed necessary depending on the group's presenting symptoms.

Group Format and Procedures

Each group session has been planned to first open with a discussion relating to each week's specific topic. This will be led by the group facilitator in order to provide consistency with the schedule and to remain in control of the group discussion. Since the age range for the group is from five to six-years-old, an increase in structured group sessions would be favorable and realistic. The facilitator should prepare ahead of time by familiarizing themselves with the weekly modules and materials, this will help provide smoother transitions during the group sessions.

Screening

The following assessments were discussed previously and will be utilized to screen for group membership; the BPI, CAS, SEARS, CBCL. These assessment tools will be utilized by parents and caregivers, teachers, and mental health professionals. A clinically significant score on externalized behaviors from these assessments will be necessary. The group facilitator should ensure that the assessment used was appropriate based on the population it was tested on. If there

is any question of how the assessment was provided or scoring, the group facilitator should consult with their supervisor and use their clinical judgment. These assessments will be utilized post intervention to check for the intervention's effectiveness of decreasing externalized behaviors.

Group Membership

Group membership will be founded on the client's family being a part of any military branch, one parent is currently deployed, and they were recommended for counseling services based on clinical assessments. Keeping groups to a smaller size when utilizing play therapy is essential as providing children focused attention allows a sense of connection to be developed between the child and facilitator (Mountain, 2016). Since the group age range is young, gender is not a concern for having a successful group (Cheng & Ray, 2016). Group membership will also not be obtained unless an informed consent form is signed by the parent and client (Appendix B).

Norms and Guidelines

Guidelines will be discussed and created as a group within the first session. With having a smaller group size, this portion of the first session should not take as long as it would with a larger group size. All norms and guidelines will be made developmentally appropriate to ensure understanding and participation from all the group members. Some common group norms for children's group include:

1. What happens in group stays in group! (confidentiality)
2. We listen with our ears to our friends and counselors
3. If I feel too shy or sad to share, it's okay to pass
4. Group time is where we can play and have fun, so we can feel better! (Providence Hospice of Seattle, n.d.).

Length of the Group

The length of this group follows an eight-week course plan with meetings running for 30 minutes at a time. These meetings are consecutive gathering each week, at the same time, and on the same day of the week. It has been found that a group for young children that is at least eight weeks long is enough time to see clinical change (Wilson & Ray, 2018). Should the facilitator be unable to attend one of the times, notice will be provided to clientele and their guardians in advanced time. If the group is being conducted with one facilitator, a different provider will not step in as they will not be a part of the group's cohesion and relationship. If two facilitators are providing the group, it will be up to their clinical judgement on how to proceed with one facilitator gone for the week. Group meetings will not be made up due to client absence.

Size of Group

This group shall be available to three to four members at a time. Keeping groups to a smaller size when utilizing play therapy is essential as providing children focused attention allows a sense of connection to be developed between the child and facilitator (Mountain, 2016). When groups are too large, children may not be provided the attention they need to foster this important relationship and cornerstone of play therapy.

Close-ended

To ensure greater confidentiality, participation, and cohesion this will be a closed group. Group members shall start and end together unless an absence of clients is apparent. Providing structure with young children is beneficial to their growth and learning. It is important that this specific population also experiences consistency which would include maintaining the same group members. This will also ensure that the group goals will remain the same for each group and better increase the odds of them being met.

Frequency and Duration of the Meetings

Each session will run for 30 minutes for a total of eight weeks. Since this group is for young children, 30 minutes is a developmentally appropriate and realistic time frame to foster the most participation (Wilson & Ray, 2018). Again, these meetings are consecutive, gathering each week, at the same time, and on the same day of the week.

Structure

Group sessions will follow a group discussion format for the first half of the session. This provides the facilitator a chance to provide information to the group, assess the group's growth on a weekly basis, to model appropriate ways to express emotions, and to normalize emotions experienced by the group during this transition period. The second half of the session will utilize art and play therapy techniques to promote creativeness in a way that is familiar to the child (i.e. play). Utilizing this therapy helps children understand muddled feelings and upsetting events that they may not have proper opportunities to sort out effectively (Mountain, 2016). Mediums of videos, books, and art materials are utilized throughout this group.

Group goals

During the first group session, the facilitator will help the group create group goals that they want to achieve. The facilitator should be mindful of what is developmentally appropriate and realistic within the eight-week time frame. Example of group goals could include identifying emotions, talking about emotions more, knowing body cues when emotions arise, how to self-regulate, and making friends.

Week 1 – Introduction to Group & Getting Ready to Say Goodbye

Objectives	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To help clients feel comfortable in a group setting and with new peers and counselor. 2. To help clients learn about deployment in a developmentally appropriate way.
Discussion	<p><u>Introduction to Group Counseling:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Welcome everyone in a calm and positive manner. - Explain that everyone is here because a parent has been deployed and its okay to have lots of feelings. - Allow time for children to introduce themselves to all group members. - Explain confidentiality in a developmentally appropriate manner (Appendix C). - Create group rules as a group. - Create group goals. <p><u>Getting Ready to Say Goodbye:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ask the group what they know about deployment. - Show clip from Sesame Street: Dear Elmo: Getting Ready (Appendix D). - Talk about common feelings because of deployment.
Activity & Materials Needed	<p><u>Puppet activity:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Instruct each client to choose a puppet - Have them interact as a group or put into pairs - Allow clients to play with one another - Pay close attention to the emotions being expressed - Use only tracking skills in beginning of play - Depending on client's acceptance, attach meaning to their play later - Allow clients to guide their play session <p><u>Materials:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Poster & markers for group rules - Handout on confidentiality - Access to internet to watch clip

Week 1 – Introduction to Group & Getting Ready to Say Goodbye

With it being the first session of group counseling, it makes sense that an introduction to what the children will experience is covered first. This may be the first time that the client is engaged in counseling services. By providing a small group format, hopefully this will provide familiarity and comfort to the group as they are the age where they are first starting school and a small group format is common. As with any group format, it is important to set rules and boundaries in the beginning. This author felt that it was important that this was done as a group to help the facilitator feel more a part of the group process rather than a teacher talking to their students. Since it is best practice, confidentiality should be discussed within the first group meeting in a developmentally appropriate way (Appendix C).

The second half of the first group session is to discuss military deployment. It is most likely that a parent or caregiver has already had this discussion with their child since the military parent is already deployed whether recently or for a while now. However, this period of transition can still be confusing to a young child. By assessing what each group member already knows about the topic, it provides two opportunities. One opportunity being that the group facilitator can gain a sense of each group member's willingness to be an active member in the group, their willingness to talk about a personal and difficult topic, and how much of a concrete understanding they have about a parent being gone for a long period of time. The second opportunity it provides is by having this conversation, each group member is given the chance to become in control of the conversation, feel a sense of mastery about the topic, and to see that they can relate to the other group members while having their voice be heard.

Understanding this, Military One Source partnered with Sesame Street to create a bilingual outreach program specifically for this population, Talk. Listen. Connect. The National

Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) (2010). The purpose behind the program is to utilize multimedia tools to help build resilience in military families and young children who are coping with the challenging transitions (NCTSN, 2010). The program covers deployment and homecomings while providing language to both the child and their parent that then develops skills from passive to skills to active skills (NCTSN, 2010).

This author felt that utilizing this program would be beneficial since it is age appropriate, a familiar medium to some cultures, and topic specific to this group. This outreach program is available on most military bases as well and in multiple cities, so if the child and family were to relocate in the future; the family would be familiar with the program and its resources. The specific tool used during the first group meeting would be a short video on deployment, *Dear Elmo: Getting Ready* (Appendix D). By being able to relate to a familiar character (again in most cultures), the group may feel that it is easier to talk about their parent's deployment. This would allow the group facilitator to build upon the first discussion of it and assess what emotions are present within the group.

The final part of the first group session is the use of puppets as a play tool to utilize child-centered group play therapy. Puppets are an age appropriate medium that is most likely familiar to the group (again, culture pending). This final part of the session provides the group with an opportunity to get to know one another through their preferred language of play. It is an opportunity for the group facilitator to assess the relationships, capabilities, and emotions within the group. It also ends the group on a lighter and fun note after talking about the difficult topic of deployment.

Week 2 – Introduction to Feelings

Objectives	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To help clients be able to identify common emotions. 2. To help clients engage in their emotions with others. 3. To facilitate a safe environment for play.
Discussion	<p><u>Introduction to Feelings:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Welcome everyone back and recap previous session. - Let the group know what they'll be doing for the session. - Ask the group to list common emotions (sad, happy, etc.) - Read the book <i>The Color Monster</i> by Anna Llenas (Appendix E).
Activity & Materials Needed	<p><u>Book:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Facilitators will read <i>The Color Monster</i> by Anna Llenas - After reading, go back and discuss each color monster individually. - Ask each child what makes them feel the color of the monster. <p><u>Art activity:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide each group member with a piece of paper and drawing utensils. - Instruct the group to draw their family's 'colors' when they found out their parent was being deployed. - Allow the group time to draw details as they desire (i.e. their house and family members). - Next have the group draw their family's 'colors' that they are feeling today. - Facilitator should silently observe changes between the two drawings (i.e. the child was green or calm in the first one and in the second they are red, or angry). - Facilitator should also observe the group member's willingness to attach any verbal statements to their drawing. <p><u>Materials:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Two pieces of paper per group member - Markers or crayons

Week 2 – Introduction to Feelings

The second group session is to focus further on emotions, especially being able to identify the emotions being experienced by the group. Again, it felt to be necessary for the group facilitator to first assess the group's knowledge about common emotions (sad, happy, mad, etc.). At this age level, children will be able to identify common basic emotions, but they may have a harder time verbalize feelings such as fear, anxiety, or stress (Landreth & Bratton, 1999). In order to open a discussion on emotions, reading the book *The Color Monster* by Anna Llenas (Appendix E) first would be helpful to the facilitator. This author chose this book because it utilizes colors and pop-up designs which would be engaging to this age range. By labeling emotions by colors (i.e. sadness is blue), it can make the discussion appear more inviting and developmentally appropriate. Some group members may find it more comforting to label their emotions by colors that are familiar to them instead of labeling emotions by their names (sadness, anger, happy, etc.).

This author thought by utilizing a book that would be fun and visually stimulating, the group would be more likely to engage in the discussion following the reading of the book. This author specifically wanted to utilize a book that was not specific to just military children or military transitions such as deployments and homecomings. The focus of this week is to identify emotions which is common to any population, so a book that is military specific is not necessary for this week. Being able to identify emotions can already be a difficult process for children compared to adults, so a tool that could be inviting to help with this process was desired. This author also thought this could be a fun book that could be found in multiple environments such as schools, other therapy services, the home if the child were to ever relocate; seeing this book would remind them of this counseling group and the benefits of it.

This author thought it may be more comforting for the second week of the group to include a coloring activity. Coloring can be completed independently but within a group format, this would allow for group members to visually observe their peers partaking in the activity. Ziff, Ivers, and Shaw (2016) found that a child-centered atmosphere is conducive for the effectiveness of small group art activities used to support child social and emotional development. By creating two separate drawings, the facilitator can mentally assess the emotional process the group member is experiencing because of the deployment. The drawings can also provide insight to how the group member may perceive the environment within their home, which can help the facilitator and parent better understand externalized behaviors. The group facilitator will not push for the group to verbalize their emotions or provide an in-depth explanation of their drawings, but it will provide insight to the facilitator during week three.

Week 3- Let's Talk About My Feelings

Objectives	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To help clients verbalize the emotions they are experiencing. 2. To model appropriate ways to verbalize emotions. 3. To introduce ways to release emotions appropriately.
Discussion	<p><u>With the Group:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Welcome everyone back for the week. - Recap Sesame Street clip from week 1. - Open discussion for deployment questions. - Recap last week by rereading <i>The Color Monster</i> by Anna Llenas to the group (Appendix E). - Model ways on how the facilitator talks about their feelings. - Normalize that it can be hard or scary to share their feelings. - Introduce the activity 'Feeling Monsters' (Lowenstein, 2011).
Activity & Materials Needed	<p><u>Feeling Monsters Activity:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Instruct each client to draw a monster of the way they're feeling when they think of their parent's deployment. - Ask "how big is your monster?" Have them draw the monster the same size of their emotion (big monster = lots of fear) - Next say, "this monster is really big, He must have eaten an awful lot this week. What sort of things are feeding your monster?" - Write for the client what they answer on separate water balloons. - Ask which ones they can control. - Ask which ones they responded well to and how so. - Go outside and tell the group "we don't want our feeling monsters to get any bigger, so we must let go of all the things that are feeding it." - Have them pick up a balloon one by one and throw them at the monster. - Once done, ask each client what they learned about their monster. - Ask, how did it feel letting go of the anger, sadness, etc. <p><u>Materials:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Poster (for each member) for drawing their monster - Markers - Tape - Water balloons - Access to fill up the balloons (ahead of session)

Week 3- Let's Talk About My Feelings

The third group session is designed to build from week two. A child needs to first be able to identify emotions before being able to discuss them in depth, which is the purpose of week three. This will be achieved through helping the group verbalize the emotions they are experiencing because of their parent's deployment. This also serves as a way for the group facilitator to model appropriate ways to verbalize emotions, which should also be done in a developmentally appropriate way for this age range. This third group discussion will refocus on the topic of a parent's deployment. This will take place towards the beginning of the session by recapping what the group has learned thus far from watching the Dear Elmo: Getting Ready (Appendix D) clip and the book *The Color Monster* by Anna Llenas (Appendix E). Depending on the group facilitator's judgement, the book can be read again or flipped through to rejoin the group's memory of it. Now that the group is better able to identify emotions, the group facilitator should model how to verbalize them (i.e. 'I feel sad because my mom had to go away').

To introduce play and creativity into this week's module and with staying with the theme of monsters, the 'Feelings Monsters' (Lowenstein, 2011) activity will be completed for the second half of the group. The recommended age group for this activity is ages nine to fourteen and can be delivered individually, as a group, or within a family setting (Lowenstein, 2011). Although this age range is above the group's ages, this author felt that the activity can be adapted developmentally and still be beneficial to five and six-year-olds. The goals of this activity include identifying and describing emotions, understanding the difference between things that can be controlled and things that are out of our control (environmental factors), and to identify alternative coping skills (Lowenstein, 2011). This activity utilizes narrative, cognitive-behavioral, and rational emotive behavior theory to be effective (Lowenstein, 2011). It also

utilizes art and play therapy through drawing and releasing of emotions by throwing water balloons.

Now that the group has learned of emotions and their corresponding colors, (i.e. anger is often shown in red) the group facilitator will follow the activity by first instructing each member of the group to draw their own monster in relation to how they are feeling when they think of their parent's deployment. For example, if a group member was feeling very sad that their parent is deployed, their monster should be larger in size and darker colors used like blues. After all the monsters are drawn, the facilitator will ask each group member individually, "This monster is really big. He must have eaten an awful lot this week. What is feeding your monster?" (Lowenstein, 2011). The group facilitator will then write on each water balloon what is making the 'monster' feeling their negative emotion.

The next part is to help the client identify which water balloon they have control over, with this age range it may be helpful to break this down into which ones are their thoughts, behaviors, feelings, and which ones do adults control (deployment, relocation, etc.). If the child is having a difficult time with this, it may be more beneficial to move on and have them identify which events they responded to appropriately and which ones they wish they would have responded to differently to further assist them identify their externalized behaviors. Next, the facilitator will bring the group outside and tape each monster onto a wall (Lowenstein, 2011). The facilitator will explain that "we don't want the sad monster to get any bigger, so we must let go of the things that are feeding it" (Lowenstein, 2011). Each group member will pick up their own water balloons and throw them at the monster. Finally, the group facilitator will ask what they learned about their monsters and how it felt to let go of their negative emotions (Lowenstein, 2011).

This author picked this activity because the purpose behind is to help children verbalize their emotions as well as how to let go of their emotions in a healthy manner. This author also liked that it kept with the theme of monsters from week two, which would make it easier for this age range to connect the lessons from week two to week three. This activity also continues to utilize colors as a metaphor for emotions and continues to provide a visual representation that is developmentally appropriate. The activity can also be modified for a client who struggles with destructive anger or emotional flooding by putting the monster drawing in a larger bowl and having the facilitator puncture small holes into the water balloons to slowly release the water (Lowenstein, 2011). The activity utilizes art which allows each group member to be creative and to visually show their emotions in a way that is accurate to them and in a manner that they have control over. The use of water balloons is also a way to visualize letting go of negative emotions which would be beneficial to this age range since their thinking is more concrete than abstract. It could also serve as a fun and memorable group activity.

Week 4 – What to Do with My Feelings

Objectives	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To help clients understand what stress and anxiety might look like in their bodies. 2. To provide clients with coping skills.
Discussion	<p><u>With the Group:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Recap the previous sessions about emotions. - Show picture of stress and anxiety in the body (Appendix F). - Engage children in discussion if their bodies ever feel worried when they think of their parent’s deployment. - Explain that there are some cool ways to calm our bodies down when we feel anxious or upset. - Watch the Sesame Street Clip: ‘Belly Breathe’ (Appendix G).
Activity & Materials Needed	<p><u>Puppet activity:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - After watching the video, provide each client with a turtle puppet. - Explain that turtles sometimes feel scared or upset and hide in their shells to calm down. - Have each child practice belly breathing with their turtles. <p><u>Bubble activity:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Model taking deep slow belly breaths in order to blow bubbles. - Have the group practice first sitting in place. - Have the group pop the facilitator’s bubbles by clapping their hands together, explain that it also feels good to let go of our worries. Can tie back to ‘Feeling Monsters’ activity & water balloons (Lowenstein, 2011). - Let the group have fun playing with bubbles and interacting with one another! <p><u>Materials:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Access to internet to watch clip - Turtle puppets - Bubbles for each client and facilitator

Week 4 – What to Do with My Feelings

The fourth group session is to give the group coping skills for their emotions in a manner that is developmentally appropriate. This week's focus is to show group members how their feelings can affect them physically. It's not uncommon for children who undergo a major stressor in their life, such as a parent's deployment, to feel physical symptoms (NCTSN, 2018). The group facilitator will utilize an image of a person who has physical symptoms such as a stomach ache when experiencing anxiety (Appendix F). This would be followed by asking the group how their bodies feel anxious or worried when they think of their parent's deployment. This provides the group members with an opportunity to see a connection between emotions and their bodies based on their own experiences. This author believes that when you can relate a topic or activity directly to the client, it serves as a stronger learning opportunity because it makes it personal.

The next part of the group session the facilitator will have the group watch the Sesame Street video: Belly Breathe (Appendix G). This author chose this video to explain deep breathing because it is developmentally appropriate and utilizes Sesame Street which will increase the familiarity and comfort level with the medium. The video directly shows school-aged children practicing deep breathing, which provides a nice model that directly relates to the purpose of this week. The third part of the session includes providing each group member with a turtle puppet. This author wanted to utilize puppets because it provides a more fun hands on learning opportunity for the members. Some members may feel shy practicing in front of the other group members, so this takes the focus of trying to learn this coping skill off their own physical bodies.

The turtle also provides a nice metaphor by the facilitator explaining that even turtles feel the need to hide inside their own shells when they become sad or upset in order to calm down.

Students would then practice as a group and individually. To help master the skill further, the facilitator will model how they need to use deep breaths in order to blow bubbles. The facilitator will provide each group member with a small container of bubbles for them to practice deep breathing in a fun and age appropriate manner. The facilitator can even model that clapping the bubbles away can feel good too because it helps release their emotions in a safe way. This author chose deep breathing as the coping skill because it requires no materials that could pose as a barrier in the future.

Week 5 – Building Friendships

Objectives	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To help build a support system for the clients. 2. To help clients learn different ways to make friends. 3. To practice using conversational skills.
Discussion	<p><u>Building Friendships Discussion:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Inform the group that they will be discussing ways to make friends. - Compile a list created by the group of qualities that make a person a good friend. - Next have each group member identify which qualities they possess to build self-confidence in group members. - Now create a separate list of things they could ask a new friend when they first meet them (i.e. ‘what is your favorite animal?’). - Next split the group up and have them practice how to introduce themselves to their partner and practice asking the questions created by the group (the facilitator should model this first).
Activity & Materials Needed	<p><u>Beach Ball activity:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Before the session, the facilitator will write fun questions or ice breakers on a beach ball. - Explain to the group that they will take turns catching the beach ball, which ever question their right index finger lands on, they will answer to the group. - Facilitator should model first. - To end the activity, the group will take turns throwing it to a group member and listing one positive quality about them. - With remaining time, allow the group to play with the beach ball! <p><u>Materials:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Poster & markers for list of qualities and questions - Beach ball - Open space for the activity

Week 5 – Building Friendships

The fifth group session will focus on providing the group with skills to build friendships. This will provide group members with skills and self-confidence that they can utilize for the rest of their lives, especially if they face multiple relocations. It is not uncommon for military children with an active duty parent to move six to nine times throughout their primary education (Guzman, 2014). It is this author's belief, that to provide young children with these skills, they will serve as a protective factor throughout their social development. By creating a list of good qualities of a friend, the group can work together to accomplish this goal and allows the group to decide what they value in friendships (versus the facilitator's personal beliefs). The author wanted this week's module to be strength based which is why the facilitator should provide an opportunity for each member to realize what positive qualities they possess.

This group also allows for two hands-on learning opportunities. The first is by having group members practice using basic conversational skills such as introducing themselves. This is a realistic skill that they will need to utilize throughout their futures. By practicing asking peers questions, the group members will become more familiar with the process which should help reduce some anxiety surrounding the interaction in the future. The second hands-on opportunity is with a beach ball with questions and ice breakers on it. These could include general topics and military specific questions, such as 'what branch is your mom/dad a part of?' This activity allows for the group members to be mobile which is appropriate for their age range. The activity can be adapted to be more physically challenging which can turn the activity into more of a 'game' by creating a speed round, a hot potato round, or by creating distance to challenge the group's physical skills.

Week 6 – Getting Ready to Say Hello Again

Objectives	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To introduce the topic of a military homecoming in a developmentally appropriate way. 2. To let clients, know that it's okay to have mixed feelings about a homecoming reunion. 3. To utilize art to promote creativity.
Discussion	<p><u>Getting Ready to Say Hello Again:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ask the group what they know about homecomings. - Show clip from Sesame Street: Dear Elmo: Coming Home (Appendix H). - Ask about their general thoughts now that the group has seen Elmo say goodbye to his dad and now, he's learning about his dad coming home. - Read the book '<i>But... What If?</i>' by Sandra Miller Linhart (Appendix I).
Activity & Materials Needed	<p><u>Book:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Facilitator will read '<i>But... What If?</i>' by Sandra Miller Linhart. - Talk about common feelings because of a possible homecoming from the book. - Ask what ways the group can relate to the characters. - Ask what they're most excited for when their parent comes home. - Ask what they are nervous about with their parent coming back someday. <p><u>Art activity:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Explain that the group gets to do a fun art activity! - Show example jars and explain that the group gets to make their own jars for their parent to help them count down the days until they're home (Appendix J). <p><u>Materials:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Facilitator example jar (already completed) - 2 glass jars for each group member - Permanent markers or puff paint - stickers

Week 6 – Getting Ready to Say Hello Again

The sixth group session introduces the topic of a military homecoming. For some group members, this may be the first time discussing the topic in length, this could be for two reasons. The first is that the homecoming is not scheduled to happen anytime soon, and the second being that their parent or caregiver may be unsure how to explain this (NCTSN, 2010). A military homecoming is another transition in the child's life that is not stress free. A child will be transitioning from the new family roles they took on because their parent deployed (NCTSN, 2018). It is not uncommon for children to feel stress, anxiety, and resentment during this time period (NCTSN, 2018). It is also not uncommon for children to be unaware of the emotional roller coaster involved, most children envision the type of homecoming that is commonly shown throughout social media. Although it is a joyous occasion and one that does include hugs and tears, there are more emotions that come after that. It is also important to let children know that a homecoming could also take more than one day due to the parent needing to debrief, finish documentation, and follow military protocol (NCTSN, 2010).

To help introduce and explain this topic, this author chose to again utilize Military One Source and Sesame Street. They created a program specifically for homecomings. In the video *Dear Elmo: Coming Home*, the group will see Elmo now being able to prepare for his dad coming home and some of the feelings he has (Appendix H). Since this topic may be new to the group, the facilitator will ask for general thoughts about how they think Elmo may feel about his dad coming home. To assist in explaining the possible emotions, the facilitator will read the book *But... What If?* By Sandra Miller Linhart (Appendix I). This author chose this book because it is specific to explaining to children that it is okay to have multiple emotions about their parent coming home from a deployment. This book was created for this specific population and this

author thought it would be important to utilize a tool to explain such a specific topic that is for them.

The final part of the session is to utilize art and creativity as an outlet for the group. Children have a difficult time understanding the passing of time because it is a more abstract concept (NCTSN, 2010). It can be beneficial to provide children with a tool to visually and physically track time. Each group member will be provided with two glass jars that are theirs to decorate with a theme of a countdown until their parent is home again (Appendix J). The facilitator will provide the parent's with options to fill the jars; for example, colored marbles, beads, or candy. The objects used to fill the jars should be left to the parents' discretion because some may not want their child eating a large amount of candy or it may make more sense to use a small object such as beads if the parent's homecoming is not for many weeks to come.

This author chose this art activity because it provides the group member and their parent with a way to countdown time in a way that the group member will be able to understand. It provides a daily or nightly opportunity for the child and parent to engage in the activity and be able to converse about the homecoming, especially as it draws closer. The jars also act as a physical keepsake from the counseling group and their time spent with the group. The jars can also be reused if the parent should be deployed again in the future. Financially, jars can be purchased at a lower cost, in a package, and can be found at different types of stores (i.e. grocery stores, art stores, Target, etc.).

Week 7 – Introduction to Group Closure

Objectives	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To prepare the clients to say goodbye to the group that they have been a part of for the past six weeks. 2. To help familiarize a time of transition in their life.
Discussion	<p><u>Introduction to Group Closure:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Let the group know that after today, they only have one more group together. - Assess what the group understands about transitions in life. - Have the group share things that help them cope with transitions they have already experienced. - Discuss feelings that they may have about ending group. - Remind the group that they will not be alone and of lessons learned from week five’s friendship lesson. - Read the book ‘<i>The Invisible String</i>’ by Patrice Karst (Appendix K).
Activity & Materials Needed	<p><u>Book:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Facilitator will read the book ‘<i>The Invisible String</i>’ by Patrice Karst. - Ask the group what lessons they’ve learned from the book. - Ask each member who they share a string with (deployed parent, friends from this group, etc.). <p><u>Art activity:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Explain to the group that they’re going to make an invisible balloon string. - Follow the steps from ‘D.I.Y. Yarn Orbs’ (Appendix L) - Let them know they will finish it during their last group next week. - Complete putting all string on and let dry overnight (will pop the following group session). <p><u>Materials:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Balloons (any shape, ex. star, heart, etc.) - Scissors - Glue - Corn Starch (or you can substitute with Flour) - Water & a bowl - Spoon - String - Petroleum Jelly & paint brushes - Clothes pin - Something to hang balloons on while child works on it & too dry

Week 7 – Introduction to Group Closure

The seventh group session is to prepare the group members for group closure. This would be extremely important for this population since they already have no control over the transitions in their life because of their parent's military involvement. This serves as a time to model experiencing emotions because of something difficult but being able to cope with it. This also provides the group with a chance to utilize the knowledge and skills they have learned from being in the group. Although most children do not have control over the transitions that occur in their life, by asking the group to share things that have helped them in the past provides the group with a sense of control and to remind them they have gotten through transitions before. This session provides the group with time to share their emotions about ending the group and to gain support from their fellow group members. It also serves as a chance to discuss the emotions and process them but saving the final eighth session as a chance to end on a lighter note. Tying in the lessons from the fifth week, friendship skills, also reminds the group that they are not alone in this experience and is strengths based.

The facilitator will read the book *The Invisible String* by Patrice Karst (Appendix K). I chose this book because its message is that no matter where one is or what they are doing, they are still connected to their loved ones. I thought this to be fitting for this group since their parents are most likely in a different country and it promotes the idea that the group members will always be connected as well, building another support system for everyone. After the book is read, the facilitator can ask what the group learned from the book, if it made sense to them, and who they share a string with. By listing all the people that they share an invisible string with, this will help the group members feel less lonely and be able to identify who is a part of their support system.

To build off this, this author found an art project that further illustrate the idea of an invisible string which is to build a yarn orb (Appendix L). The project entails blowing up a balloon, which can serve as an opportunity to practice deep breathing again, covering the balloon in a glue mixture, and covering the balloon with different colored strings. The facilitator could incorporate past lessons such as having the group choose colored string that matches their feelings, using patriotic colors, or by having each member pick a color that represents them and is used on each balloon to show that the group is one. The facilitator can note that each member is their balloon, or it can be their parent, and that they are surrounded by many strings. The project will need to dry and be completed during the final group session.

This author chose this project because it shares the same message as the book while being hands on. Art again, allows the group members to utilize the project as an emotional and creative outlet that provides them with a visual. Art puts the child in the lead of the session as well. This project does require multiple materials however most of it can be purchased in packages, can be reused, and utilizes past art materials like the balloons used in week three's water balloon activity. These are also easy to find materials should the group member want to and be able to complete the project at home with their families.

Week 8 – Group Closure

Objectives	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To give the group a safe environment for closure. 2. To provide the group time to recap what they have learned and how they have grown. 3. To give the group time to say goodbye.
Discussion	<p><u>Group Closure:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reread the book <i>'The Invisible String'</i> by Patrice Karst (Appendix K). - Ask the group what feelings they have about it being the last group. - Ask the group what feelings they have about their parent being away. - Ask the group what they have learned about feelings. - Talk with the group about what was their favorite video & activity from group. - Ask each client what the biggest lesson was they learned from group. - Finish art activity. - With the remaining time allow the group to choose how they want to end the group!
Activity & Materials Needed	<p><u>Art activity:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Once the discussion is done, allow the group to complete the last step of their string activity - Carefully pop the balloon inside the string ball - Remove balloon and throw away <p><u>Materials:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Scissors - Any previously used materials in case children want to redo an activity: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Puppets o Bubbles o Art supplies o Water balloons

Week 8 – Group Closure

Week eight is the final week within this group manual. This week's purpose is to give the group a safe environment for closure, to recap all the lessons, to provide praise to each member for their personal growth, and to give the group time to say goodbye. This author felt that it would be beneficial that each member gets to say goodbye to one another. It is not uncommon for military families to have to relocate quickly and suddenly so they may not always be able to say goodbye to all the people in their lives. The facilitator will again read the book *The Invisible String* by Patrice Karst (Appendix K). Next a discussion will follow of their emotions about their parent being gone, how these may have changed since week one, and how they feel about the group they have been a part of. It would be important for the facilitator to remember the developmental level of the group and to not expect an in-depth processed verbalized closure. Young children are very resilient and may only want to focus on the positive emotions that group has hopefully provided them (Masten, 2013).

The facilitator can also take note of what the group's favorite activities were or what were the least favorite. To provide each member with their personal growth, the question of what has been the biggest lesson learned from group can be asked. This provides an excellent opportunity for the facilitator to comment on how far the group member has come emotionally and behaviorally. The last portion of the group will include finishing the art project from the previous week. The facilitator will gently pop each balloon and remove the balloon from the created yarn orb. Now the facilitator can talk about even though the balloon is gone, the yarn still stayed together even though the middle is now invisible, just like the string in the book is invisible. This activity also provides the group members with a tangible object from their time in the group. With the remaining time of the session, the group should be allowed to play with

desired materials or games to cement the bonds created and to end the counseling group on a positive and fun note.

Critical Analysis

Strengths

This author felt that the biggest strength of this group manual is the population that it is intended to serve for multiple reasons. The first being that this is a population that the author is very passionate about. This age range is also a strength because young children are more resilient than adults. This author believes that early intervention is always beneficial to any population and this group manual aims to take part in that belief. Although this is not the first ever group created for this population, it does aid an underserved population with its own unique cultural background. Another strength of this group manual is that it utilizes multiple resources and mediums to help drive creativity within each group member which is a principal of play therapies (Wilson & Ray, 2018).

Growth Areas

One growth area of this group manual is that it may lack sessions, Wilson and Ray (2018) created a group that showed success with providing two sessions a week for a total of eight weeks. This group was created on a smaller scale to avoid possible barriers. This could include agency barriers, transportation barriers, and funding costs. These families have recently become a temporary single parent home and the stressors that come with this were taken into consideration. A second growth area of the group manual is the lack of literature supporting it due to gaps in the research. This author felt that although this field has begun to research the military population more in recent years, it still lacks focus on the children of these families and how to best support them even though the facts are known (i.e. behaviors, adjustment concerns, educational concerns). Most of the literature on this specific population has focused on interventions involving just the child, or the child and the non-deployed parent together. This

author has concerns that this fails to address how a child might cope if the family is a dual military parent family. The child needs to be able to regulate their emotions and utilize coping skills on their own no matter which parent is in the home.

A third growth area is that the literature also fails to look at the effects of play therapy utilized in a group setting with this specific population. This ties into the fourth growth area, which is this author's lack of knowledge and experience with CCGPT. Without proper training, the activities chosen may not be as effective which could decrease the group's overall effectiveness to decrease externalized behaviors. A fifth growth area is that this group is intended for children whose parent is already deployed. This could vary as to how recent the deployment was for each group member however, this author felt best to leave it unspecified for the time being due to a lack of knowledge in the average time after a deployment occurs, externalized behaviors begin to show. Externalized behaviors scored through assessments was a membership screening tool.

Perceived Difficulties

One perceived difficulty of this group manual is that it deals with possible strong negative emotions. A child may regress in their willingness to be open with the group because of the nature of the topic. This could negatively impact the group's growth in processing. It could also be highly detrimental to a child to remove them from this group, especially because they are already experiencing emotions of loneliness. A second perceived difficulty is the matter of including a week dedicated to the topic of a parent's homecoming. Unfortunately, not all children will get to experience a parent's homecoming. Building upon this, even if all the group member's parents deployed within a close time frame of one another, it does not mean that the homecomings would occur at the same time due to the parent's orders and their job within the

military. That is why the author left the topic board and focused on the possible emotions experienced during this time, rather than the moment itself. However, as noted, there are still possible setbacks for including this topic. The final perceived difficulty with this group manual is that the group facilitator would have to have experience with children, intense and negative emotions, and knowledge of play therapy. Children and groups can be unpredictable so the group facilitator must be fully aware of their limitations with working within this format with this population.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Advertisement



Counseling Clinic | 123 45th St. | Moorhead, MN 56560

Military Deployment A Counseling Group for Children

This is a group created for children who currently have a parent deployed with any U.S. military branch and to process this transition and explore common emotions surrounding this topic.

The first session will be held on April 9th, 5:30-6pm. Meetings will be held every Thursday for a total of 8 weeks.

This group is for children aged 5-6 years old who:

- Are confused about their recent family structure change.
- Are experiencing emotional difficulties.
- Need emotional and social support to decrease negative emotions and behaviors.

Appendix B: Informed Consent

Informed Consent

I, _____, have agreed to have my child, _____, participate in group therapy. I understand that the purpose of this form is to establish an agreement between my child, the client, and their counselor to begin a counseling relationship. I understand that I have the right to discontinue this relationship and services at any time and am aware of the consequences of doing so. I am guaranteed the highest professional and ethical services by the group facilitator.

Limits of Confidentiality Disclosure

This counselor desires to protect the privacy of your health care information. This shall include any written documentation and verbal communication given in session. There are five circumstances that confidentiality will be broken by the counselor due to ethical standards and the requirements of the law:

1. Abuse or neglect of a child
2. Abuse or neglect of a vulnerable adult
3. A client is a risk to their own well-being (potential suicide)
4. A client has made a threat of physical harm or made known of a homicide to an identified individual
5. The court of law has sent a court order

When the primary client is a minor, confidentiality shall be limited towards the parents. Minnesota state law and ethical codes allow minors the right to request their private data stay private from their parents. This counselor will honor these requests when it is believed that it is in the best interest of the child to protect them from any physical or psychological harm.

I understand that as mandated reporters, my counselor may break confidentiality due to the circumstances outlined above and there for the limits of confidentiality. I also understand that other group members may break confidentiality even after confidentiality has been explained to them.

Client's Signature _____

Date _____

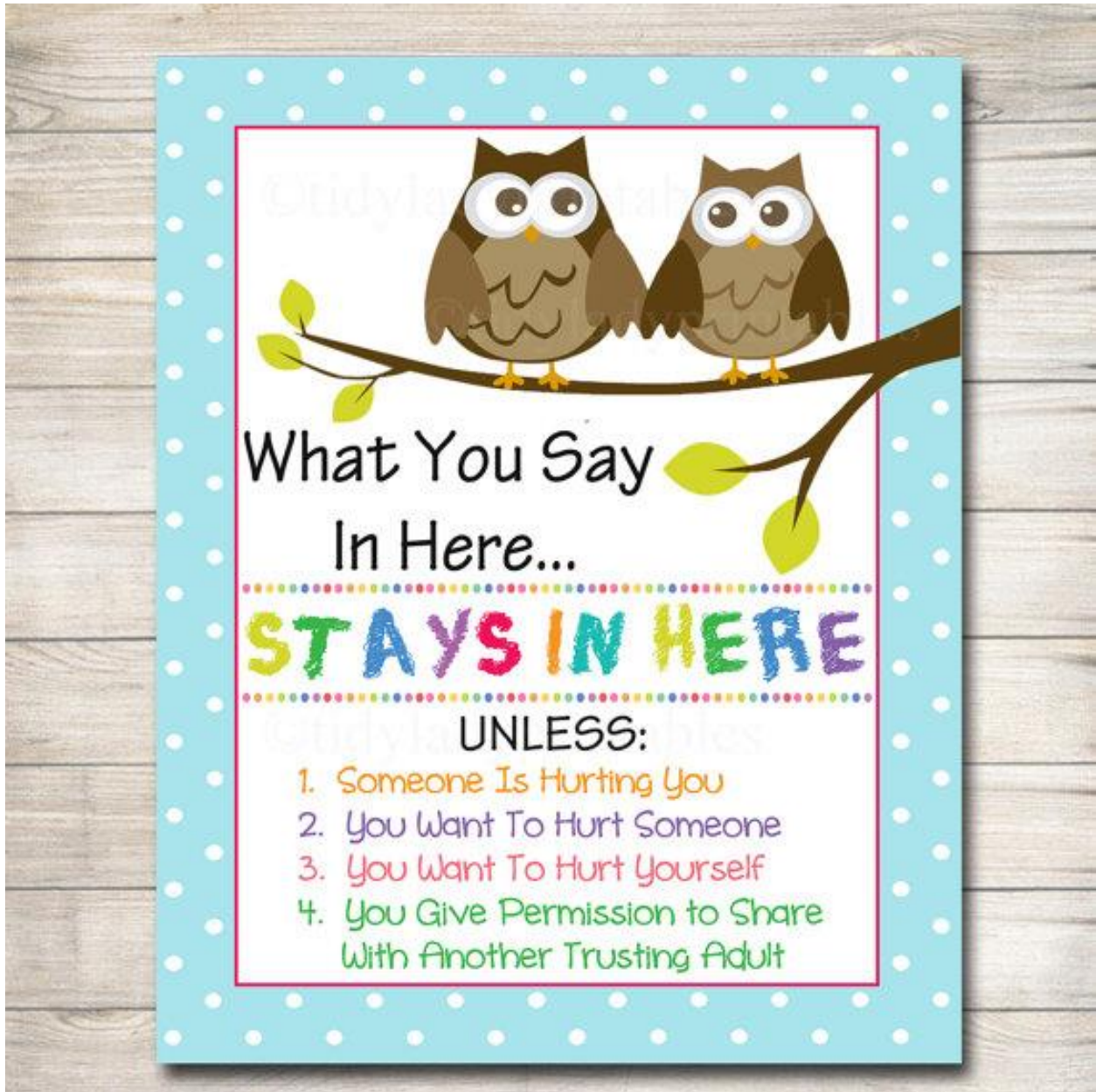
Parent/Guardian's Signature _____

Date _____

Handouts

Appendix C: Child Friendly Confidentiality

From: <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/325877723020748199/>



Appendix D: Sesame Street Video- Dear Elmo: Getting Ready

From: <https://sesamestreetformilitaryfamilies.org/topic/deployments/?ytid=a3KIVU-EUeE>

Video: Dear Elmo: Getting Ready



Appendix E: *The Color Monster* by Anna

From: https://www.google.com/search?q=the+color+monster+a+pop-up+book+of+feelings&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjNmpfUsaHhAhWLM4MKHaTqBMsQ_AUIDygC&biw=1280&bih=610#imgrc=gtiK4Lh88MhBjM:

ANNA LENAS

THE COLOR MONSTER

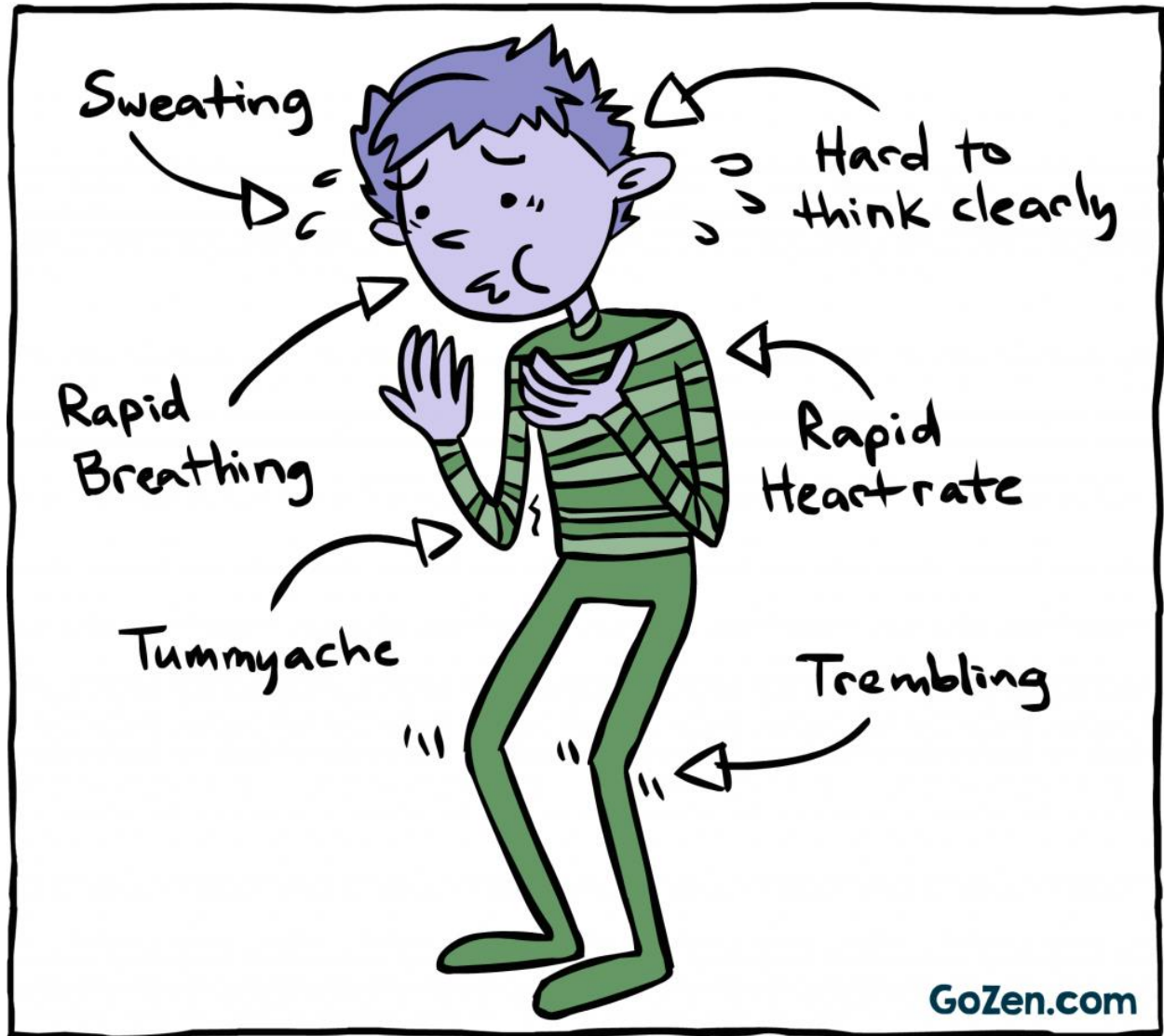
A POP-UP BOOK OF FEELINGS



Appendix F: Anxiety in the Body Picture

From:

https://www.google.com/search?biw=1280&bih=610&tbm=isch&sa=1&ei=zsyaxIq2MZCm_QbuwoG4Aw&q=how+anxiety+affects+the+body&oq=how+anxiety+a&gs_l=img.1.0.013j0i2417.92258.94263..96441...0.0..0.217.1390.8j4j1.....1....1..gws-wiz-img.....35i39j0i67.gxPAhwk4CVc#imgcr=im2T4lcArUziwM:



Appendix G: Sesame Street Video- Belly Breathe

From: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mZbzDOpylA>



Sesame Street: Common and Colbie Caillat - "Belly Breathe" with Elmo

Appendix H: Sesame Street Video- Dear Elmo: Coming Home

From: <https://sesamestreetformilitaryfamilies.org/topic/homecomings/?ytid=eInIHNS5YmA>

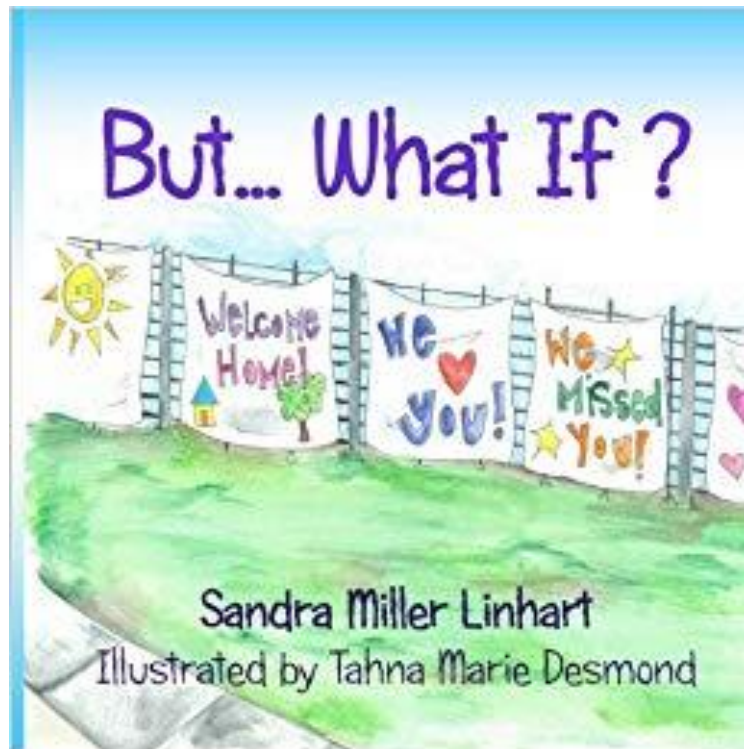
Video: Dear Elmo: Coming Home



Appendix I: *But... What If?* By Sandra Miller Linhart

From:

https://www.google.com/search?biw=1280&bih=610&tbm=isch&sa=1&ei=xfKaXLLkEcWGjwSavqGACw&q=but+what+if+by+sandra+miller&oq=but+what+if+by+sandra+miller&gs_l=img...3...7093.11459..12282...0.0..0.108.1479.15j2.....1....1..gws-wiz-img.....0i67j0j0i8i30j0i24.QNZmpYqhu7c#imgrc=I1u4uv5g4-yHbM:



Appendix J: Countdown Jar Example

From:

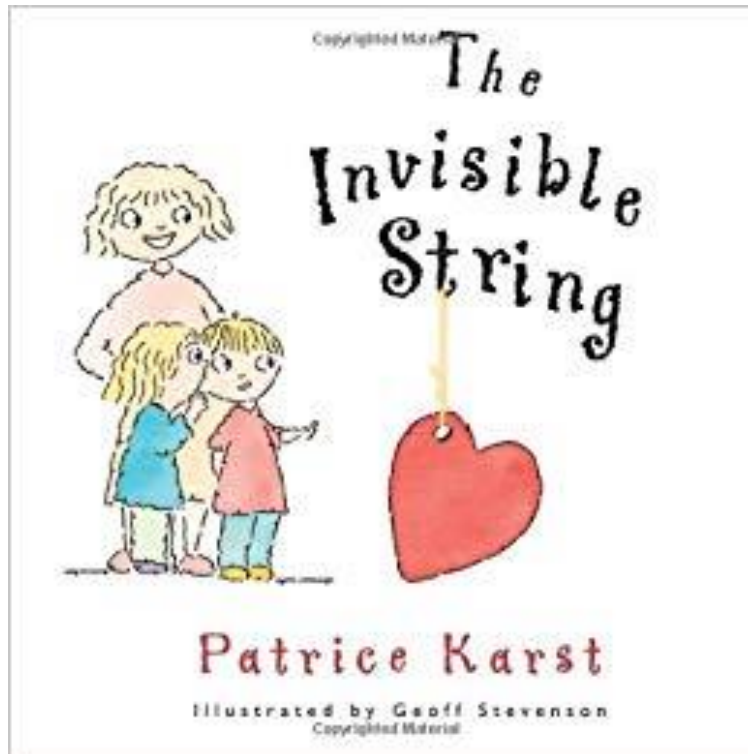
https://www.google.com/search?tbm=isch&q=military+homecoming+jar+activities+for+kids&chips=q:military+homecoming+jar+activities+for+kids,online_chips:countdown&usg=AI4_kTw0Vsgi6DuZbB6tU9D8zn-1WCPAg&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjIzs7RtqHhAhXn4IMKHXB9ABcQ4IYILCgD&biw=1280&bih=610&dpr=1.5#imgrc=jtH8f7nIG83RqM:



Appendix K: *The Invisible String* by Patrice Karst

From:

https://www.google.com/search?biw=1280&bih=561&tbm=isch&sa=1&ei=vfSaXLK_GMngiwT07quwCw&q=invisiable+string+book&oq=invisiable+string+book&gs_l=img.3...307175.310122..310361...0.0..1.127.1903.17j5.....1....1..gws-wiz-img.....0j0i67j0i30j0i10i30j0i10i24.3SwyDpOhPvc#imgrc=1red9JWQ1wUI1M:



Appendix L: D.I.Y. Yarn Orbs Instructions

From: <https://www.instructables.com/id/DIY-Yarn-Orbs/>

Step 1: Materials

