

VIRTUAL PROGRAMMING FOR YOUTH

BEST PRACTICE GUIDELINES FOR FACILITATORS



By Jessica Irven, MS, LRT/CTRS, CCLS, CTP-C + Nicole Perry, BA, CCLS

PREPARING FOR YOUR GROUP

Set your group parameters and goals. These will shape your communication, activities, and the tone you set.

Parameters set the tone right away in a group. From communication beforehand such as group invites to screen sharing as participants enter to the first thing you review in starting the group, this helps to set the tone. Below is a sample from Phoenix Society programming.

A Safe Place for Feelings:

1. All feelings are okay
2. What is shared in the group stays in the group—no re-telling.
3. You can share by talking, raising your hand/arm/prosthetic, or messaging.
4. We ask that kids and teens talk for themselves. We want everyone to have a chance to talk!
5. You can say what worked for you, but let's not give advice or "should"s
6. We are patient and flexible with technology and glitches that may come with it
7. Respect continued privacy. Please do not give out personal information, or invite individual connections during group.

Sample goals for youth programming:

- To create a "safe" and accepting environment for participants.
- To provide an environment in which participants can feel comfortable sharing their burn and recovery related experiences.
- To use a mix of age-appropriate purposeful activities and discussion/sharing through which participants can develop coping skills and social skills
- To help children build bonds/relationships with group members for ongoing support and belonging
- To create a format and environment in which children/teens have repeated attendance/participation in group sessions.



GROUP FACILITATION

1. Facilitation matters.

Train facilitators for the virtual setting. Define facilitator roles: consider who will do tech details, who will watch for body language, who will manage chat messages, who are the activity leads, etc.

2. Communication before, during, and after will also help set the tone for participant experience.

- Be inclusive in your messaging- let participants and adults know that your group is accessible in multiple formats (ex. Can you use a phone to call in if technology or wi-fi are not available?)
- Provide details about what to expect, including adults' role and length of group
- Provide a follow up email after group
- Screen fatigue is real! Let youth and adults know that your group will be interactive, what to expect (exciting), and responsive to attendee's needs to address this.

3. Consider how you will incorporate trauma-informed programming principles.

- **Emotional and physical safety** – setting the tone, providing group parameters, ensuring one adult is present at all times during group time, having a plan for follow up resources/referrals in the event someone needs additional support outside of group.
- **Trustworthy and transparent** – taking time to build rapport/trust, open and honest before/during/after group, don't make promises you can't keep, consistency in structure of group as well as facilitators as much as possible
- Offering both **peer support opportunities** and **self-help skills** – self-advocacy, reflection, empowerment
- **Collaboration** – group led vs teacher-student style interactions/facilitation, making sure everyone has equal opportunity to share vs one person dominating conversation
- **Empowerment** – allowing participants the control make choices for themselves – if/when to share, if they want their camera on/off, if parent present is desired, etc.
- **Diversity** – inclusivity for all backgrounds/experiences, acknowledging each attendee will be at varying points in their healing

4. Plan comprehensive, but flexible/responsive activities.

First impressions matter! Small talk as you are waiting for participants to enter – silly joke sharing, counting to 10 one at a time trying not to talk over each other, informal introductions, basic conversation engagement, have a song playing, have a shared screen with a welcome message

- Invite self-introductions from youth. Give bullet points for this—consider using the chat or a screen share—to keep things brief. Example: where are you from, what brings you to group/connection to burn community if comfortable sharing.



- Have a welcome script, such as:
“Welcome everyone, thank you for joining in on our virtual support group, we are so glad to have you in group today!” Discuss basic outline for the day: activities, closing, how long to expect group to last.
- Praise for sharing, invite sharing, allowing space to think/collect thoughts

5. Have 3 activities ready: an icebreaker, an engagement activity or guest/role model, brief processing/takeaways.

- Keep activities: **short, engaging**, do and share, q&a, responsive, flexible, FUN
- Activities should:
 - Include an outcome-oriented goal and generally a therapeutic theme
 - Be age-appropriate for all attendees
 - Be multisensory and/or movement-based when possible
 - Be adaptable if need arises during group
 - Provide opportunities for small bits of safe self-disclosure
 - Include a closure that recaps activity theme. Processing/noting takeaways will help ground participants’ understanding, summarize, give closure, and provide expectations for next time. (Example: Inviting everyone to state one thing they will remember after today’s group as they say “see you later.”)

6. Facilitators should:

- Manage group dynamics
 - Minimize distractions – if late entry is allowed, how to handle to avoid disruptions but still make person feel welcomed, sound/mute
- Maximize the power of choice and control for each youth participant: Allow group chat if appropriate, webcam on or off (if safe), allow youth to choose their engagement level, invite them to type (in chat) or speak their answers or know it’s okay to take a pass
 - Facilitators may also consider using the chat box to provide activity prompts
- Be prepared to constantly read the room (and body language) during an activity and be flexible to adapt/end early, normalize participants’ emotions (privately in chat box or as a common experience of all)

Sample Activity Ideas:

- Show and share
- Scavenger hunt
- Book reading with facilitated questions
- Peer supporter/mentor/guest survivor sharing
- Include various opportunities for sharing at various levels that support varying comfort levels (from basic get to know you to more advanced)



DEVELOPMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

Developmental Considerations for Talking and Listening with Children

- **Self Efficacy:** a person's belief in his or her ability to succeed in a particular situation. If a child/teen believes s/he can be successful in a particular situation (such as dealing with a bully or facing classmates for the first time after burn injury), this belief helps determine how the child thinks, behaves, and feels. (Albert Bandura)
- **In support groups,** children can experience a carefully managed social setting which affords them the opportunity to succeed; transferring this experience into their school, home, etc. is an invaluable tool. If they can feel safe, happy, and successful in support group, this impacts their ability to go back to their home setting successfully. Facilitators can help shape these feelings of success and build skills for children to use at home/school.

Developmental Stages and Implications for Support Group Settings

Note: Chronological age might not match developmental stage. It is normal for children and teens to experience some (temporary) developmental regression during times of stress. Human beings go "backwards" in their reactions and ability to process their emotions and external information when stressed!

Knowing these facts can help in your use of language and in building on the strengths that accompany each stage. Note each child's functional level, recognize their struggles and celebrate their successes based on their milestones as well as valued and unique individuals.

From Erikson's Stages of Development:

Preschool Age (3 to 5 Years): initiative vs. Guilt

- **Developmental Tasks:** Independence at basic tasks, initiating tasks, and increasing confidence.
- **Considerations for Screens and Virtual Settings:** Attention span on screens is generally limited to 20 minutes. Participants will begin to use their own ideas for performance and tasks; they will display more ideas that deviate from others' opinions. They will be more aware of "right" and "wrong" (and learn whether adults will support their assessment of right and wrong, tattling on peers), facing guilt and blaming themselves for events (even when there is no causal link.)
- **What to do:** Keep activities brief, interactive, and concrete in your directions and expectations, allowing participants to clarify understanding. Praise participants for their capabilities (be concrete). Be concrete in clarifying situations which seem to cause guilt or feelings of inability, and validate the children's logic and thoughts.

School Age (6 to 12 Years): Industry vs. Inferiority

- **Developmental Tasks:** Increasing autonomy in tasks, initiating and maintaining social interactions, assigning personal value through abilities.
- **Considerations for Screens and Virtual Settings:** Ability to pay attention to virtual activities will vary greatly between individuals. Participants assign self-worth to ability successfully manage situations and complete tasks. Frustration with struggles and blaming oneself for



perceived failure can be an issue. Also, having to rely on a parent to complete basic tasks such as navigating screen interactions, and care after burn injury (such as assistance in eating or getting dressed) can cause great frustration linked to this developmental need.

- **What to do:** Provide opportunities for success and competence. Be aware of the level of difficulty of activities and have modifications/adjustments ready (physical alterations or otherwise). Utilize activities which allow participants to have a defined role in activities to reinforce their strengths and abilities.

Adolescence (12 to 18 Years): Identity vs. Role Confusion

- **Developmental Tasks:** Examining “ Who am I? What can I be?” Tries integrating many roles (child, sibling, student, athlete, worker) into a self-image under role model and peer pressure
- **Considerations for Screens and Virtual Settings:** Participants will associate their identity, self- esteem, and value with activities and roles. Limited in-person peer interactions can magnify feelings of isolation. Frustration can arise when these identities don’t match/when expectations for different roles don’t match, or when they do not have opportunity to explore roles at all.
- **What to do:** Be aware that burn injury can remove some roles, such as athlete, or a level of confidence in one’s own value. Use group time to reinforce the roles participants play. Emphasize opportunities for self expression and validation of social roles.

Consider the child/teen’s ecosystem at present:

- Child’s environment itself will impact their well-being
- Adult caregivers’ stress will impact the child/teen
- Misaligned types of attention (such as with parents working from home) impacts their adjustment, attention span, etc.
- Children may be missing basic needs, or be missing medical or therapy or other appointments
- With your group: not adding “one more thing” to the week’s task list
- Stress = regress. Kids may become more needy, have more outbursts, test limits, need more reassurance

For Service:

- Consistency in meeting days/times
- Continuity of facilitators to support consistency/trust building
- Finding creative ways to increase engagement – translating activities to virtual world
- Age ranges that virtual meetings best support
- Shorter attention span in younger ages, ways to engage in “play” vary by age, cognition variance by age
- Consider breaking groups by ages/developmental level – preschool/school age, teen, parent/caregiver



For Cautions:

- Screen time overload/over AAP recommendations
- Wifi availability/connection speed/screen availability and access
- Language barriers
- Time zones
- Does this type of group support hinder face to face socialization/enable "hiding behind the screen?" In your facilitation, empower comfort in external social interactions in addition to virtual group support
- Privacy based on platform selection
- Consents, insurance, legal issues
- Requiring prior sign in vs open link
- Plan for supporting participants that need more outside of group (sending resources, 911 support – exact location/contact info required)



SAMPLE PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

GOALS

1. To be trauma-informed (utilize best practices: multi-sensory, immersive, validating, skill-based)
2. To normalize response to trauma and stressors (increase awareness of normal reactions to trauma and stressors)
3. To build community/decrease perception of isolation
4. To model resiliency for an audience/participant group who will be the next generation of leaders/survivors in the burn community (program element: guest survivors)
5. To provide peer to peer support as a form of self advocacy and empowering others

GROUP STRUCTURE

Before Group

- Welcome email to include:
 - Guidelines/ground rules
 - Including ground rules for parents
 - Prompt for sharing during group: ex. "Be prepared to share something unique about you."
 - If applicable: suggested materials for activity (crayons, paper)

Group session: 30-60 minutes in length

Opening (10 minutes):

- Welcome, brief ground rules (on shared screen), icebreaker (sharing prompt)
- Ground rules for safety: A safe place for feelings:
 1. All feelings are okay
 2. What is shared in the group stays in the group—no re-telling.
 3. You can share by talking, raising your hand/arm/prosthetic, or messaging.
 4. We ask that kids and teens talk for themselves. We want everyone to have a chance to talk!
 5. You can say what worked for you, but let's not give advice or "should"s
 6. We are patient and flexible with technology and the glitches that may come along with it
 7. Respect continued privacy. Please do not give out personal information, or invite individual connections during group.
 8. Guidelines for adults/their role
 - Include in ground rules/technology glitches section: mention how we hold still and watch others
 - Optional/potential future element: Screen etiquette via activity (mirroring "warm-up stretches", count to 20 by taking turns without knowing who will say the next number, etc.)- especially applicable in duplicating this group
- Introductions: name, where you are, optional sharing (favorite chair stretch, local fun facts, etc.)



Optional stretching/breathing break

Activity (10-30 minutes)

- Always cue kids and give parents their role too
- Sample ideas
 - "Someone like me" (version of "All My Friends" but with waving instead of changing spots in a circle)
 - Show and Share (your talent or representative of it, something that helps you feel happy, get through the days, etc.)
 - Shout outs and good news
 - Local fun facts
 - Quiz bowl
 - Drawing activity: first drawing by getting verbal directions; second draw with verbal directions but you can't look at what you're drawing, third drawing with paper on top of your head (visible object to copy), fourth drawing by watching gestures on webcam only, etc. – talk about communication
 - Throwback (pic or object that shows how you've grown stronger)
 - Picture popcorn
 - Sara's STEPS Storytime
- End with mention of how to continue this activity/project at home (will also go in follow-up email)

Stretch/breathing break

Guest survivor or video (10-15 minutes)

- Provide guest with prompts/talking points – and if needed, q&a from facilitators; consider asking to demo a talent or show something meaningful to them
 - Talking points to include: what was hard, how did you get through (resources, in your mind/self-talk, in your family)
 - Model, validate, normalize
 - Show something that helped you cope, be who you are
 - Then q&a from participants (could be written/typed into comments section)

Closing (5 minutes):

- Round robin: One memory you'll keep (one takeaway) from today

After Group

- Follow up email with resources(support yourself and your child), thanks, brief survey



MORE RESOURCES

Phoenix Society for Burn Survivors

Phoenix Society for Burn Survivors is the leading national non-profit supporting and empowering anyone impacted by a burn injury. We offer support at each stage of the healing process to help survivors and their loved ones thrive.

Resource Center

Explore resources by the burn community, for the burn community. Find information and inspiration through this growing collection of articles, survivor stories, online courses, e-books, and more.

- [Resources for Virtual Youth Support](#) (resource list)
 - [Introduction to Phoenix Society Services](#) (course w/ nursing contact hours)
 - [Support Groups for Children and Teens](#) (fact sheet)
 - [Sarah's STEPS](#) (social skills picture book)
-

Peer Support

Nothing heals people like other people. Phoenix Society's national network of peer supporters offers hope and healing to survivors and their loved ones. Online peer support opportunities make that connection accessible to anyone, wherever they are, whenever they need support.

- [Phoenix SOAR \(Survivors Offering Assistance in Recovery\)](#)
 - [Peer Support Chat](#)
 - [Virtual Support Groups](#)
-

Connect with Phoenix Society

Phone: 1-800-888-BURN

Email: info@phoenix-society.org

Website: www.phoenix-society.org

Facebook: [@PhoenixSocietyforBurnSurvivors](https://www.facebook.com/PhoenixSocietyforBurnSurvivors)