

WEEK 2

Death Brainstorm Web

OBJECTIVE Twofold: (a) For group members to use free association as they brainstorm thoughts, feelings, and images connected to the word *death* and (b) to begin the process of introducing their deceased loved ones to the rest of the bereavement group

RATIONALE By taking part in the Death Brainstorm Web segment of the activity, group members benefit from brainstorming all words that come to mind upon hearing the word death, and also seeing it printed on a sheet of drawing paper in bold capital letters. As group members brainstorm words, they watch you write them down, and they see these words literally emanate, or radiate, from **DEATH**, which is centered on the page. Along with helping adolescents verbalize their feelings, this activity helps them to generate and recognize the wide range of thoughts, feelings, fears, and hopes associated with death that they share with their fellow group members.

The Death Brainstorm Web activity is a wonderful way to help adolescents gain confidence in speaking up and sharing their thoughts, and it also allows for a smooth transition to the second objective for Week 2: introducing to the group the loved ones they have lost through death. In this segment of the activity, group members verbalize the experiences of their loss, including the experience of losing the “relationship” they had with the loved one, and begin the mutual aid process of giving and receiving support from each other.

The Death Brainstorm Web activity enables the grief process for individuals and the group as a whole. As individuals, group members are asked to voice their personal associations with death. Thus, without feeling threatened, group members verbalize any and all thoughts and feelings they have regarding death. As a group, everyone acts as one in considering the feelings that have been shared individually. Because there are no wrong answers, the range of thoughts and images created by indi-

viduals in the group are automatically validated as normal. This activity facilitates the grief process by helping to allay group members' anxieties about what topics lie ahead in the ensuing 10 group sessions. An important bonus is that, once completed, the Death Brainstorm Web becomes a hands-on visual tool that recognizes and displays the wide array of ideas, topics, thoughts, and images that group members feel and visualize about death.

In its own way, the second objective for Week 2 also enables the grief process. In effect, it gives permission to group members to tell their stories about the relationships in their lives that no longer exist, at least on an earthly basis. In taking risks by sharing with others, group members open up their hearts and souls to each other. During this activity, group members can plainly see that they are not isolated in their experience of loss, and the pain and sadness that often accompanies it. This fact alone bonds the group and helps the mutual aid process to continue.

MATERIALS

- ▷ 1 large sheet of drawing paper and 1 thick marker for the facilitator
- ▷ Example of a completed Death Brainstorm Web (p. 110)

PROCEDURE

1. Ask the group whether they know what it means to brainstorm. If some or all of the members do not know what it means, explain it to them as follows:

“To brainstorm means to say whatever comes to mind when, for example, you’re asked a question or asked to comment on something you see. Brainstorming means that you do not edit, censor, or change in any way what you just said. In other words, it means that everything you say is correct because there are no wrong answers.”

2. Introduce the first segment of the activity for this session and explain its purpose by telling adolescents the following:

“Today we are going to do a brainstorm activity which will, in essence, be a guide to our discussions over the course of the next 10 weeks. I will write a word on this sheet of paper, and when you see it, I’d like you to say what first comes to mind.”

3. On your large piece of drawing paper, use your thick marker and print **DEATH** in bold capital letters. Make sure everyone in the circle can see the boldfaced word, and then ask the group members to begin brainstorming.

Be sure to tell the group not to raise their hands before they call out a word, as this slows down the process of brainstorming.

To help make it easy for you to conduct this activity, try to sit on the floor in the middle of the circle and write down the words as fast as you can.

4. As each adolescent calls out a word, be sure to draw a line that extends from **DEATH** and then—at the end of the line—print the word you hear so that, visually, the word appears as an extension of **DEATH**. (This process usually takes around 10 minutes.)
5. When there is a lull in the brainstorming, feel free to end the activity. But tell the group that your marker will rest on the paper for the duration of the session in case anyone would like to add any other words that come to mind when they see or think about the word *death*.

Make sure that every member of the group calls out at least one word.

As a facilitator, you understand that there are certain feelings and thoughts that are associated with death yet are not called out by group members; make sure you add them either during or after the brainstorming session. Among these words are the following: *dreams, nightmares, the afterlife, funerals, guilt, violence, hospitals, cancer, AIDS, fear, relief, anger, pain, and suffering*. It is up to you to know which additional feelings and thoughts that weren't mentioned are important enough to record on the Death Brainstorm Web.

6. Ask for a volunteer or two to read aloud the words that have been written on the Death Brainstorm Web.

If no one volunteers, then read the words yourself.

7. End this segment of the activity by congratulating the group for working together to create the web. Point out the wide range of responses to the word *death*, and remind members once again that the Death Brainstorm Web will serve as a visual tool that guides them through the next 10 weeks.
8. Begin the second segment of the activity for Week 2—the introduction of loved ones—by telling the group the following:

“Now we are going to take this opportunity to introduce our loved ones to each other. In order to support and better understand one another throughout the next 10 weeks, we need to know a number of things about everyone’s loss experience: (a) who died, (b) how this person died, (c) when this person died, (d) what your relationship with this person was like, and (e) something you will always remember about this person.”

Be sure to watch your wording when you ask members to introduce their loved one. Ask members to say something they will “always remember” about their loved one. Never qualify your request by asking for them to relate something good or something bad or even something special—just something they will always remember. It is up to the members to decide what they would like to share with the group.

Remind group members to be polite when others are talking and for everyone to look at one another when they are speaking.

Also remind members that it is OK to cry and to use the facial tissues when necessary. Be supportive and encouraging. If you feel it is necessary, walk over to a member and put your hand on the adolescent’s knee or shoulder, but do not stop the adolescent from sharing. It is of the utmost importance that members know that it is fine to show emotion and that they will not be laughed at by anyone; on the contrary, they will be supported and understood. This activity often sets the mood for the group’s future sessions because it helps to bond the members closely.

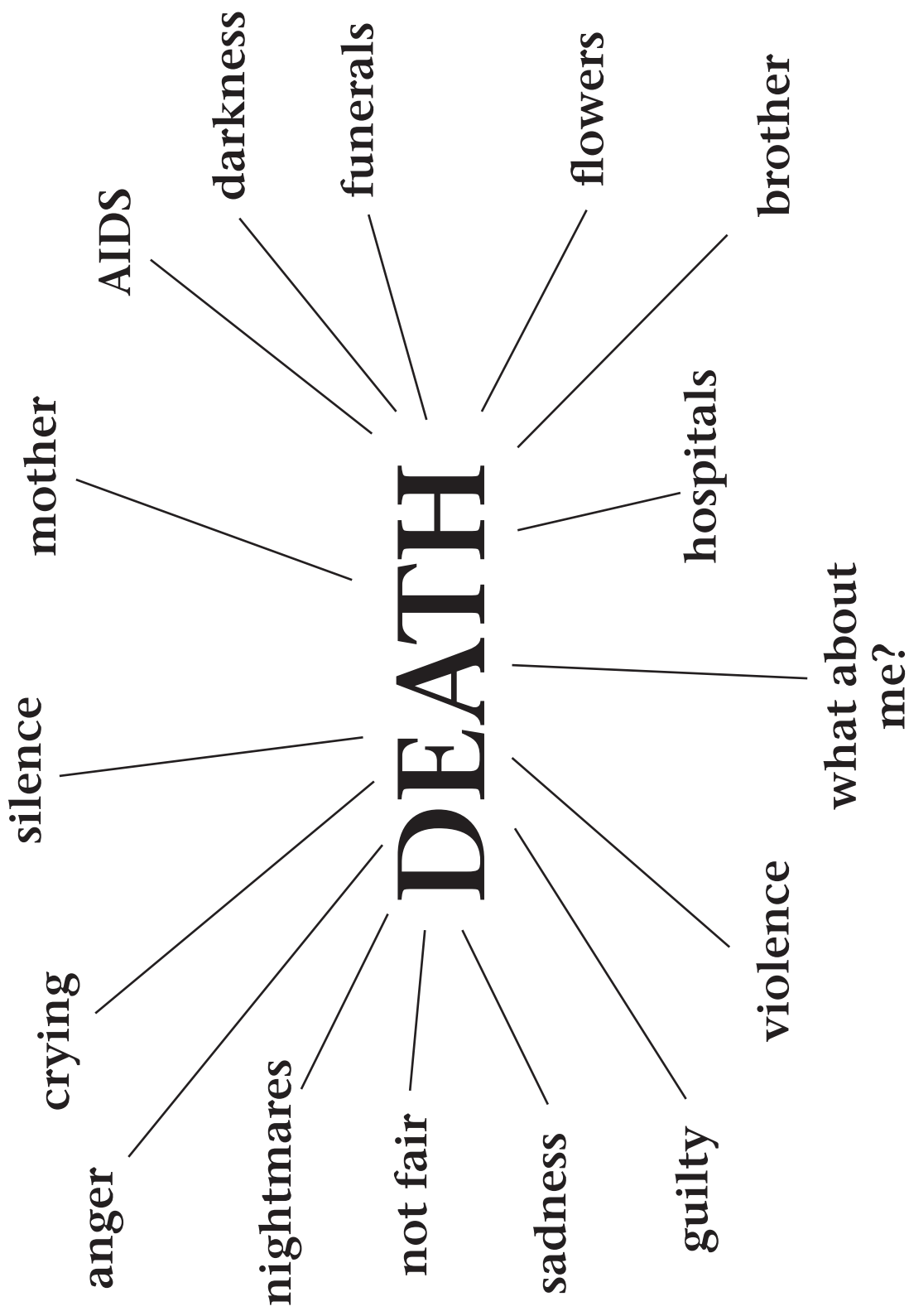
9. Model your own feelings about the loss of a loved one by answering questions (a) through (e). Remember that your modeling must be purposeful.
10. Ask who in the group would like to go first and share his or her story with the rest of the group, also answering questions (a) through (e). Group members will then take turns introducing their loved ones.

Acknowledge that those who are listening to the story might have questions they would like to ask of the member who is speaking, but ask that they hold off and ask their questions after every group member has completed (a) through (e). This way, you will be ensuring that there will be time for each member to take a turn introducing his or her loved one to the group.

Also acknowledge that, although members may have lost more than one significant person, because of time limitations, only one loved one may be introduced at this juncture. If time remains at the end of the group, you can ask members to introduce additional loved ones.

11. Once all the stories have been shared, ask the group if anyone has any questions to ask of each other’s stories.
12. Point out similarities and differences among the stories that were told and thank the group members for being so courageous for sharing with the group.
13. End the group session with the closing squeeze.

Sample Completed Death Brainstorm Web



WEEK 10

Looking Backward . . . Looking Forward

OBJECTIVE For group members to write a three-part poem that enables them to reflect on past events that have influenced them, to think about the present and where their life path has taken them thus far, and to look toward the future and what they hope to accomplish

RATIONALE This session facilitates the grief process by helping group members to view their losses in the larger context of their life paths. Up to this point, group members have focused on their loved ones and their accompanying loss experience. This activity, while still incorporating the loss experience, enables the group to go beyond their losses to explore other facets of their lives.

By taking part in this activity, group members are given the opportunity to stop and think more clearly about their lives and to see how their losses, their childhood, and the group experience have shaped the people they have become. In the process, they learn to share their dreams and hopes for the future, which in turn enables them to see that their losses are merely a part of a longer, more winding life path—one which encompasses a past, present, and future. In the end, this activity helps group members realize that they can retain their memories of and their connection with their loved ones, while simultaneously moving forward in their own unique lives.

MATERIALS

- ▷ 1 Looking Backward . . . Looking Forward worksheet for each group member (p. 158)
- ▷ A pen or a pencil for each group member
- ▷ The facilitator's copy of the Looking Backward . . . Looking Forward worksheet (completed prior to the session)

PROCEDURE

1. Introduce the activity and its purpose by telling the group the following:

“We are taking part in an activity today called Looking Backward . . . Looking Forward, which will allow us to think about our lives—in the present, in the past, and in the future. The purpose is to think about our life paths as well as some of the different people and events that have influenced who we are now and our hopes for the future. We will look backward and then forward, thinking about our childhood, our loved ones, our group experience, and our individual selves and personal goals.”

2. Take a few minutes to discuss with the group the metaphor, or analogy, represented by a life path. Show them that we are all on our own unique life path, each one shaped by different people and events, different strengths, and different struggles. Ask them the following:

What does our current life path look like (e.g., as it relates to school, friends, home, loss)?

Thinking back, what does our past life path look like (e.g., recalling elementary school, childhood)?

Can we envision our future life path (e.g., as it relates to experiences with high school, career, marriage, personal dreams, and goals)?

3. Holding up a blank Looking Backward . . . Looking Forward worksheet, explain that the three columns represent the three different elements of our life path—our past, present, and future—with the footprints used as a visual aid to symbolize our life path:

The “I remember . . .” column refers to our past.

The “I am . . .” column describes the person we are now.

The “I hope to . . .” column refers to our future hopes and dreams.

4. When thinking about the three columns on the worksheet, adolescents should reflect on four different aspects of their life experience: the loss of their loved one, their group experience, their childhood, and their future goals. Some typical statements follow:

The “I remember . . .” column can incorporate memories of their loved one (“I remember laughing with my grandma as we ate dinner”); memories of their childhood (“I remember the first time I went to Disney World”); and memories of the group experience (“I remember watching the whole group release the balloons”). Included in their memories can be people, events, things, places, special moments, and the like.

The “I am . . .” column describes the group members’ qualities, beliefs, interests, feelings, identities, and more. Again, they can incorporate their loss experience, group experience, and their sense of self (e.g., “I am lonely at times without my father”; “I am proud that I joined this group”; “I am Dominican”; “I am an artist”).

The “I hope to . . .” column captures the group members’ dreams, aspirations, plans, and goals for the future. Again, this column may reflect on their loss experience (“I hope my uncle is at peace”); their group experience (“I hope to keep in touch with this group in the future”); and their private, personal goals (“I hope to live a healthy life” or “I hope to graduate high school”).

5. Model the activity to the group, using the following guidelines:

As you read your completed Looking Backward . . . Looking Forward worksheet, read the entire “I remember . . .” column before proceeding to the “I am . . .” column, and then read that column in its entirety before ending with the “I hope to . . .” column.

Make sure to repeat the column heading before reading each individual line. For example, “I remember my father tossing me up in the air” or “I remember my first day in this group”; “I am a Capricorn” or “I am sad without my friend.”

6. After you answer questions from the group, have the members complete their own Looking Backward . . . Looking Forward worksheets.

Encourage group members to think of several examples for each of the three columns on the worksheet.

The “I am . . .” column may be especially difficult for some adolescents. Some of them may feel compelled to sum up their entire personality, whereas others may limit the type of response they offer by focusing mainly on their physical traits (e.g., “I am tall” or “I have long hair”). You may have to help them by providing additional examples for this column.

You may also have to help group members in other areas, such as brainstorming or simply putting their ideas to paper.

Remind members that they are not required to complete this activity in order, but instead may skip around until they are finished.

If a group member exhibits severe difficulty with or an inability to complete the “I hope . . .” column, this problem may be a warning sign of depression.

As mentioned from time to time in this text, any demonstration of hopelessness or other sign of depression by an adoles-

cent should be assessed further, outside the group setting. If your appraisal leads you to believe that a member is very troubled and possibly suicidal, follow the steps described in the crisis intervention plan in Part I (see chapter 1, “When to Intervene: Characteristic Grieving Patterns and Warning Signs,” pages 18–20).

7. Once everyone has finished, go ahead and process the activity. A good idea is to have the group members reflect on the activity by asking them the following:

What was it like to do this activity?

What feelings did this activity bring up for you?

Did you find it challenging to think about your entire life path?

What was more difficult: thinking about the past, the present, or the future? How come?

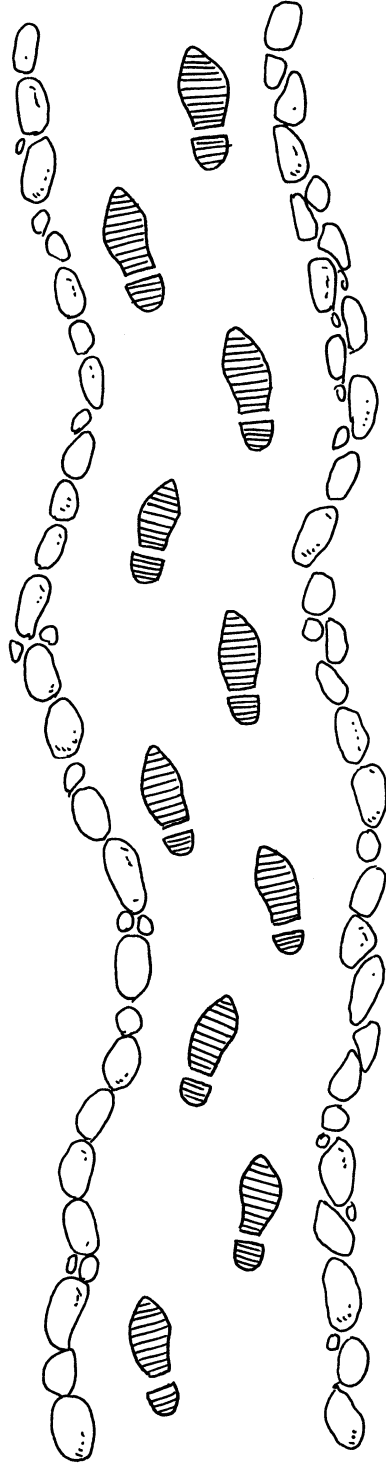
8. Have group members share aloud their Looking Backward . . . Looking Forward worksheets.

Just as the Balloon Release activity in Week 9 helped the group members to vent their deep-rooted (and often subliminal) feelings about their loved ones in a unique way and to ease their transition to the ending stage, so does this activity. At this point, adolescents are beginning to accept the realization that the group has an ending.

9. End the session with the closing squeeze.
10. Before leaving the meeting room, make a note to yourself to organize the group members' individual folders that you began creating before the Week 1 session got under way: You will need everything in chronological order for Week 11. Keep in mind that you will also need plenty of time to prepare for this activity, *so allow yourself sufficient time between now and Week 11* to organize the group members' folders and activities.

Looking Backward . . . Looking Forward

Name of group member: _____ Date: _____



I remember . . .	I am . . .	I hope to . . .