

# **FEELINGS ARE REAL**

**Group Activities  
for Children**

## **LEADER MANUAL**



**Kristi Lane, Ph.D.**

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### **Leader Manual**

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## FOREWORD

Teachers interact with children during a major developmental task of childhood—that of going to school. Teachers are important mentors and guides for the children in their classes. In most elementary school classes subject matter, such as social studies, science, reading, spelling, and others, are taught. In this “class” children are taught to identify, label, and understand their feelings. Each session presents a new concept and the opportunity to lead one or two activities in which children can participate. Children will complete workbook activities that are geared to their age. These activities are completed by working both in small groups and individually.

The end of each activity is designed to help you evaluate that activity. In this way, you can mold the *Feelings Are Real* activities to best suit you and your classroom. Intermediate age children record their feelings at the end of each exercise. The leader’s role is to make comments to each student. In this way, the student gets personal encouragement.



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**Part I**

**RATIONALE**

**and**

**ORIENTATION**

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# **Feelings Are Real Group Activities for Children**

Group support is especially important for children and youth. This is evidenced in their natural affiliations with peers and with family. Both of these groups can either facilitate or reduce the youth's prosocial behavior. A positive impact can be made on children and adolescents if the power of the peer group can be utilized to assist children and adolescents while they develop their identity, self-esteem, emotional assertiveness, and coping skills. Intensive group work will be effective in helping school-age youth develop their ability to adapt to the world. Further, each child's competence will be strengthened by involving the major components of the child's world: the school, the home, and the community. Therefore, school-age children who experience emotional, social, and family difficulties will be the target population for this intervention project which will focus on group procedures as the primary method of developing healthy, adaptive behaviors.

## **RATIONALE**

Winning in the world can be equated with succeeding by adapting. The child who is winning will tend to show certain characteristics. The child will have social skills appropriate to the age level, such as relating to peers and feeling at ease. A sense of competence or ability to master stressful situations will be demonstrated by the child. Therefore, the child who sees a problem as a challenge instead of an insurmountable barrier is displaying competence and self-confidence. Additionally, the child's willingness to utilize adults

as resources or teachers is showing a sign of winning as well as developing a sense of independence, defined as being capable of making decisions based on internal reasons not on external influences. Finally, the winning child is achieving and receiving recognition from family, school, and friends which can include hobbies, school, and activities. The child needs to feel the sense of mastery while developing skills which are recognized by others. The winning child is meeting challenges, using skills, developing new skills, reaching out to adults and peers, and developing an inner sense of character.

### **Why Intervene?**

The decade of the 80s witnessed the change of and perhaps the undermining of the natural support systems of the child. Family roles and relations have changed and have resulted in increasing fragmentation in the lives of families. This is evident in the increasing number of single-parent homes, the shortage of adequate child care, the number of children who “mind the house” until one or both of their parents return home from work late in the evening. For the child, the result may be an increasing sense of impermanence in daily life: some call this ever-changing routine **stress**.

School adds to the demands of the child’s world. The education system is being criticized for falling short of goals of education. In turn, the school pushes the child to prove that a certain quantity of knowledge is attained. School, the major developmental task of childhood, becomes a source of frustration, demand, and stress. The media makes clear computer skills are a prerequisite for success at school. Thus, the child is in the center of two crucial systems both producing stress, turmoil, and demands without providing challenge or safety.

The peer group is subjected to a “pseudosophistication” from the media. For example, the speeding up of the child’s development is seen when a twelve-year-olds fashionable dress is to appear eighteen-years old. Many of the privileges formally reserved for the teen years have become boring for even the preteen. Perhaps, this is because the child’s knowledge about the world has increased due to the media and the pervasive

attitude that children can understand whatever an adult can: in reality *children are more similar to adults in their feelings than in their understanding*. This can make much of the child's knowledge about the world incomprehensible to the child at a level of deep understanding. This partition between actions and understanding is confusing and contributes to stress for the child.

Family, school, and friends—all natural support system—have been rendered less effective during this last decade. The child experiences a fast-paced, ever-changing world in which reactions are expected and given quickly. The child/adolescent appears grown-up because they have copied ways of dealing with the world from media, teachers, friends, and parents. The future of these natural supports can be in the lack of time and/or encouragement given to the child to construct actively an individual reality. Group support can provide a place to learn about feelings.

### **Why Group?**

Children have needs for belonging, security, recognition, and affection. Interactions with other children can help to meet these needs through support, shared feelings, and ideas. As children in a group form trusting relationships with the group leader and members, they begin to feel more accepted by others and less alone in coping with their problems. Group problem solving teaches decision-making skills and provides models of new behaviors. In addition, the support of the group can take away feelings of isolation. The skills learned in a group apply to all human interactions. These skills are among the basic skills which people most possess: communication, identification of feelings, empathy with others, social skills, definition of goals, and self-esteem.

Yalom (1975) believed that nine factors operate in a group and contribute to its effectiveness. He believed group cohesiveness, defined as feelings of belonging and acceptance, solidarity and loyalty, support, and caring, helps make a group cohesive. The more cohesive a group is, the more valuable the group becomes. In a group, persons act the way they do in real life. This dimension of a group is called interpersonal

learning and allows that the group can play a pivotal role in attempts to change. Another function of a group is advice/guidance/information. Initially, the group leader, or facilitator, is primarily responsible for this function. Later, the group members become altruistic in giving mutual help and support. In addition, a person can learn by identification/imitation/modeling. The group member can learn from the facilitator, the other group members, and norms or rules of the group. Yalom also believed that groups have universal qualities and offer hope to their members. The structure of a group can allow some members to re-enact family relationships. For example, if certain members viewed the leader as the authority then those members may react to that person like they reacted to their mother/father. Finally, group provides the catharsis, or a venting of one's emotions. In a group setting, catharsis can be safe and channeled into appropriate expression of feelings.

## **THEORETICAL ORIENTATION**

**The primary objective of this manual is to help group leaders teach children how to identify, label, understand, and cope with their feelings.** Essentially, the feelings level, or heart, interacts with the cognitive level, or mind, through the behavior, or actions. *So, heart talks to mind through our actions.* This means we can simultaneously possess different levels of understanding. That is, we can cognitively understand and be able to explain an event. If our understanding stops at the cognitive level some psychologists consider that the defense mechanism of intellectualization is being utilized. The problem with intellectualization is that we may not be able to truly understand our feelings or to cope with our feelings. At other times we may experience a feeling that is strong and heart-felt. Some people refer to this as a gut-level feeling. At the same time, we may have little or no understanding or explanation of our feelings. Some theoretical orientations refer to this as intuitive, meaning felt or sensed without the use of logical process or reasoning. The link between our mind and heart is our actions. In some ways, we watch our behaviors and feel their consequences. During this process our feelings and our thoughts begin to connect.