Nurture Groups
Resource Handbook
2017
NURTURE GROUP GUIDELINES

SOME THOUGHTS FROM ONE NURTURE GROUP LEADER TO ANOTHER
-BY CAROLINE BURNS

Nurture groups can be a fantastic way to playfully teach children from abusive or neglectful backgrounds skills and the kind of life-values that they would have learned if they had lived with us all along. Sadly, many of our kids come to us from very difficult backgrounds and they lack many skills necessary for life. If we are intentional through play, our kids can learn all sorts of critical life skills. We cannot expect kids from hard places to behave appropriately if we haven’t taught them how first. As caregivers, we have the opportunity to proactively teach our children how to do things the right way before disaster (bad behavior) strikes.

These lesson plans were created and written to assist you in leading nurture groups for children ages 5 to 12 years old.

All nurture group activities are designed to give children opportunities to practice the 4 skills necessary for healthy relationships according to the 2001 Jude Cassidy study that are:

1. Receive/seek out nurturing care
2. Give nurturing care (physical and emotional)
3. Negotiate your needs (develop voice)
4. Be autonomous

These lesson plans are also designed to give children opportunities to learn to identify and express emotions and to learn healthy skills to self-regulate emotions and behavior.

TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL GROUP:

1. Offer children a full glass of water before group starts. This will help children focus and stay regulated. Dehydration causes us to be irritable and disrupts our brain functioning and focus.

2. Offer children a healthy snack before group starts to help regulate their blood sugar if you know they haven’t eaten a meal in over 2 hours. This will empower children to participate and learn. Ideas could be something simple like fruit, popcorn, nuts, etc. Prepare individual servings ahead of time so that as children arrive, their snack is ready and already on a table waiting for them.

3. If possible and permitted, offer children bubble gum or a piece of hard candy to eat as group gets started. The action of chewing and the action of sucking on something is calming and promotes optimal brain functioning and focus for learning. Teach children why you are offering these. It’s appropriate to tell them exactly why they can be helpful. Having a bowl with these allows the leader an opportunity to get children to ask using good eye contact, respectful words, a full sentence to ask for a piece of gum or candy. This also gives the leader an opportunity to validate the child using their words and say, “YES.” Children who didn’t get a lot of “Yes” responses in their first several months of life from neglectful or abusive parents need to hear, “Yes” from adults to help them build their trust.
4. Know your lesson ahead of time. Prepare as best you can in advance with all necessary materials for the game, activity, Band-Aids and feeding. Try not to just read off a lesson plan but very simply and with as few words as possible teach and engage the children.

COMPONENTS TO EACH NURTURE GROUP LESSON

Goal
A clearly stated goal each child will work towards achieving during the nurture group time. For example: Child will understand and demonstrate using their words to get needs met.

Core Scriptural Verse
Our desire is that children not only become emotionally healthy through self-awareness, but also grow in God awareness as well. Within each life value lesson is woven a scriptural truth that relates to the core lesson. This section ends with asking God for help in mastering that lesson or skill.

As Christians, we all want our children to grow up with a solid Biblical foundation based on respect for others, kindness, thankfulness, self-control and reverence for their Creator. The key though as adults is learning how to teach our children these values in a way that children from hard places can understand. Many of what our children will learn from us will be “caught” rather than “taught.” They watch everything we do and say. They are listening for how we speak about others when they are not around. They are learning from what we model in our own speech and behavior. We must teach with our lives first and foremost and with our words second.

Materials Needed
This is a list of materials you will need to gather and prepare before you conduct the lesson with the children.

The Lesson Plan

1. Rules
*Stick Together, No Hurts, and Have Fun* can be rules for group, families, friends and life. As the leader for these group sessions, it is your job to remind children each week as to what these rules mean and how we can practice doing them the right way each week in group. After a couple of weeks of meeting, ask the children to tell you what each rule means in their own words. But always start group but reminding children of the rules, very simply what these mean and how we will practice using them in that hour. Be practical. Introducing the rules and doing your hand motions should take no more than 2 to 4 minutes.

2. Check-in Questions
Ideally, the first couple of times you meet for group, you want to ask questions that are non-threatening and not too deep or personal for the kids so that they can get comfortable with sharing and comfortable with the group. As the sessions progress, the leader can choose to start asking more challenging check-in questions by asking about how the children might be feeling to help children develop better self-awareness and skills to identify their own feelings.
For many children from challenging upbringings, being able to identify and put appropriate descriptive words to how they are feeling can be a difficult task. Many children’s emotional intelligence is limited and they know no other feeling words than “sad, angry or happy.” Check-in questions are a great opportunity to give voice, practice autonomy, give children opportunities to practice sticking together by listening respectfully to one another as they take turns sharing, get to know children better, help children develop their own autonomy.

You can vary what item you pass around as your “Magic Feather” if you want week to week or you can choose to use the same item every week. That is totally your decision and what you think the kids will like and enjoy. At first, it is best to go around in a circle but after a few weeks, you could decide to switch it up by allowing the children to use their words and autonomy to decide who goes next by allowing children to toss the “Magic Feather” to whoever they want to go after them.

Often in nurture groups, children will struggle to “stick together” by respectfully listening to each person as they share. This is okay. Gently redirect children by reminding them to “stick together” by listening to their friends share. When we “stick together” we don’t make fun of other people or make comments during or after what each child shares as their answer to the question of the week. It is appropriate to remind children of this at the beginning before the kids start sharing their answers. We do not want to guilt or shame a child for not “sticking together” but rather, gently redirect their behavior.

3. Band-Aids
It is important that children are paired up with either another child or an adult who will take this activity seriously. Band-Aids shouldn’t last more than 3 minutes or so each time you meet. Pass the bowl/plate/basket around that hold your Band-Aids to everyone first before children start asking each other if they have a hurt so that every pair can do the activity simultaneously. This saves time and allows children to not be put on display as they do the activity.

Children should be reminded that they are not supposed to try to offer a counseling session after someone shares their hurt or try to solve their problem. Rather, children should say something simple to their partner like, “I’m so sorry you got hurt” or “I’m sorry you felt sick. I hope you feel better” as they put the Band-Aid on their partner. Also, instruct the children if they do not want to do the activity, they can use their words to say “pass” or “no, thank-you.”

Encourage children to actually put the Band-Aid on their partner when given permission. We are trying to practice giving care (by putting the Band-Aid on their partner) and receiving care (letting someone else take care of us which is represented by the child allowing their partner to actually put the Band-Aid on them).

4. Dysregulation Activity
Your goal with these games should be:
1. Kids should laugh and have fun.
2. Get the kids deregulated and overly excited.

If the kids aren’t enjoying the game or activity, then you’ll need to think of games for your next session that might interest the kids and allow them to laugh. After the game, that is when we teach kids and practice healthy ways to calm ourselves. The goal is to teach by actually allowing
kids to experience what it feels like to be dysregulated, identify that feeling, identify a healthy way to calm down and then do it.

They need to experience this process over and over because many of these children did not have attentive parents who helped them as infants learn how to calm down when they were upset. We can teach this process now only through actually going through the process. Don’t be afraid to let the kids get silly and play. We learn best through play. It is also important that kids associate group time with something positive and fun because that will keep children engaged and excited about meeting together each week.

5. Calming Technique
Ideally, we want children to learn as many healthy ways as possible to calm down throughout the months that you meet together for group. Don’t be afraid to ask the children to share healthy calming techniques that they’ve used and actually work for them when they are in the red in real life situations.

It is important to not only teach ways to get out of the red and into green but to also discuss and teach healthy ways to get out of the blue and back into green. Our children will undoubtedly experience sadness, loss, sickness, disappointment, and exhaustion. They will need to develop healthy skills that are not harmful to themselves or others to get back into the green. If we do not teach healthy skills for getting out of the blue, many of these children as they grow older will start displaying unhealthy self-regulation skills like drug use, alcohol use, cutting, sleeping all day, emotional eating, eating disorders, excessive tattoos, excessive sexual partners or anything that they feel might numb their pain and “make it go away.” Teaching our kids healthy ways to self-regulate is critical.

6. Core Activity
The core activity should last around 20 minutes. This is a time to teach children through play a life or social skill. During this time is when you want to try to teach Life Value Terms which are short scripts that caregivers and parents should also be taught to use with children when they need to redirect bad behavior or disrespectful words. The best way to teach values to children who have attention problems and language deficits is by using simple and brief language – keep your message short and sweet. Children need a chance to practice these skills in a playful and calm way when not in a behavioral or emotional crisis. Parents need a chance to practice these skills in a calm moment so that when there is bad behavior and they need to react, they will have new parenting skills to help them redirect a child’s behavior instead of using shame, guilt, fear based threats, physical discipline, unrelated consequences that try to get children to comply only to earn a prize.

Scripts are a handy and playful way to redirect your child and stop violent outbursts before they begin. If you practice scripts with your child consistently during calm and good times, they’ll work when you need them most – during emotional crises.

Many of the role-play opportunities during these core activities help children learn to use their words, practice their autonomy and learn healthy and respectful ways to negotiate. Try to not lecture children during this time. We want to teach but we know that children learn best through play and through laughter. For optimal learning, nurture group leaders need to be playful and keep their words very simple and short so as to keep children engaged.

Children should not be forced to reenact their role-play in front of the whole group if they do not want to. It is important to give children voice and allow them to use their words and ask for a
compromise if they do not feel comfortable sharing in front of the whole group. It is completely acceptable for children to ask to show the adult leaders their role-play privately while the other children are still practicing if they ask with respect to not act in front of the group. Many children who come from abuse and neglect do not feel like they have a voice and that the adults in the world will listen to them and respect what they do or do not want. Allowing children to ask for a compromise gives children voice.

**Core Scriptural Verse**
Within each life value lesson is woven a scriptural truth that relates to the core lesson. This section ends with asking God for help in mastering that lesson or skill.

**7. Feeding**
This part of nurture group allows children to practice giving care to someone else, receiving nurturing care from someone else, negotiate their needs (use their voice), and practice their autonomy.

Just like with the Band-Aids try to allow your partner groups to do this activity simultaneously to not only save time but also to prevent children from performing this feeding activity with the entire group watching them as they do it. If you can pass around multiple plates at a time, this can help. Children can also choose to pass, like with the Band-Aid activity.

The food or candy that you provide for this activity is totally up to you as the leader. Some ideas for feeding foods are: candy, gummy candy, marshmallows, chocolates, pieces of fruit, cookies, crunchy chips (because that’s silly when this gets loud and messy- the crunchier the better), or any food treat that you think your kids would enjoy.

**8. Closing**
At the end of feeding, wrap up your time in a positive and fun way by giving the kids a smile and reminding them of the rules for group, families, friends and life. Thank them for coming and participating. Closing should take about 1 minute. This allows children to transition and lets everyone know that group is now over and that they did a good job today.

**9. Follow up for Caregivers and parents**
These sections are intended to be information that should be relayed/taught to the parents or caregivers of the participating children each week. Teaching these social skills and self-regulation techniques will be much more effective for the children if the parents or caregivers are using the same language at home and following up by encouraging children in a way that reinforces what has been taught in group each week.

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2. Adapted from *Created to Connect – A Christian’s Guide to The Connected Child* by Dr. Karyn Purvis with Michael and Amy Monroe, pages 32-34
3. Adapted from *Play With Them: Theraplay Groups in the Classroom: A Technique for Professional Who Work With Children* by Phyllis B. Rubin and Jeanine Tregay
4. Adapted from *The Connection Where Hearts Meet* by Dr. Karyn Purvis with Elizabeth Styffe, page 70
5. Adapted from *The TCU Institute of Child Development*, child.tcu.edu
### Four Skills of Meaningful Relationships (Cassidy, 2001) and Nurture Group Components*

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<td>Request to pass with good words/honor request to pass</td>
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<td><strong>4. Activity</strong></td>
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<td><strong>5. Feeding</strong></td>
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<td>Give care through one or more closing activities</td>
<td>Seek care through closing activities; Remind group of rules that honor relationships</td>
<td>Provide transition to separate from Nurture Group</td>
<td>Negotiate own needs and needs of others</td>
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*Self-regulation is practiced throughout all of the Nurture Group components and is important for meaningful relationship.

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MAGIC FEATHER QUESTIONS

DUMBO
Remember the story of Dumbo? In the story, Dumbo the flying elephant held a feather with his trunk that encouraged him to believe he could fly, and it gave him courage. In Nurture Groups it has been found that holding an interesting object encourages the most timid to participate.

TYPES OF “FEATHERS”
• Flashing globe
• Lighted ball that flashes when bounced
• Ball of yarn
• Walkie talkie
• Play microphone
• Stuffed animal

QUESTIONS FOR CHECK-IN
• What kind of animal would you be and why?
• If you were a jellybean, what color would you be and why?
• What kind of pets do you have? Which one has been or is your favorite?
• If you were a color, what color would you be and why?
• Who is your favorite superhero and why?
• What was your favorite birthday and why?
• Where do you have the most fun?
• What was your favorite thing about today/summer/1st grade?
• Where is the place you feel the safest?
• What is something that no one knows about you?
• What are you feeling right now?
• Describe your birthday.
POTENTIAL LIST OF SUPPLIES

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- Atomic Fireballs®
- CD Player
- Baby Powder
- Ball of Twine
- Balloons (latex free, if required; clear and multiple colors)
- Balls (4-5 inches, beach balls)
- Band-Aids®
- Bandanas
- Bendables
- Bowls (plastic; various sizes)
- Brass brads
- Bubble gum
- Candy (individually wrapped – Life Savers, Gummie Bears, jelly beans)
- Chart paper/Chalk board/White board
- Chips (the crunchier the better)
- Colored Tape
- Constructions paper
- Cotton balls
- Craft sticks
- Fabric paint markers
- Feelings charts
- Fidgets
- Glitter glue
- Hula hoops (large and small)
- Index Cards (3x5 inches)
- Light-up ball
- Light-up spinning wand
- Markers (blue, green red & black)
- Masking tape
- Microphone
- Nerf® guns
- Paper plates (heavy duty)
- Parachute
- Party blowers
- Pencils
- Permanent markers (Sharpies)
- Ping-Pong® balls
- Plastic cones or cups
- Play Dough
- Puppets to include pet-type animals (dogs, cats, etc.)
- Rope (long enough for Tug of War game; two ropes 10-12 ft. in length for Ball on Two Ropes game)
- Self-Adhesive labels (2x3 inches)
- Shaving cream
- Silly String
- Squeeze balls
- Squeeze toys that squirt water or squirt guns
- Straws
- Strips of fabric (for 3-legged race)
- Stuffed animal
- Temporary tattoos
- Tote bags/Solid colored t-shirts/small wooden boxes
- Toys (attention grabbers in different colors; bubble wands, bubble guns, twists)
- Unscented lotion
- Video recorder
- Weighted items
- Wet wipes (moist towelettes)
NURTURE GROUP LESSON ONE
USE YOUR WORDS

Goal:
Child will understand and demonstrate using their words to get needs met.

Core Scriptural Verse:
Matthew 7:12, “In everything, treat people the same way you want them to treat you.” (NASB)

Materials needed:
1. Two bowls full of Band-Aids
2. Balloons
3. Engine plates
4. Gummy candies on a plate

The Lesson Plan
1. Rules
   • Stick together.
   • No hurts.
   • Have fun!

   Explain “Sticking Together” means everyone stays close together (going where the group goes, staying together by showing respect to others in group, and giving full attention when someone else is speaking.)

   Next, explain what “No Hurts” means. Explain there are two ways we could hurt someone - inside or outside hurts. Inside hurts are when we say mean things to someone else to try to hurt their feelings. Outside hurts are physical hurts like when we hit our friends or get a scratch from falling down.

   Finally, introduce “Have Fun.” Explain if we stick together and do not hurt each other, we can have a lot of fun in Nurture Group.

   After explaining what each rule means, have the kids come up with their own hand motions or sign for each rule. Group leader says the first word of each rule and the kids say the second word. Say, “Stick” and have children say, “Together” while doing their hand motion for that rule. Say “No” and have the children say, “hurts” while demonstrating their hand sign. Say, “Have” and have children say, “Fun.” Repeat this until children can fluently recite the rules along with the adult.

2. Check-in Question(s)
   1. This week’s “Magic Feather” – a stuffed animal.
   2. What is your name? If you could only eat the same food everyday for the rest of your life, what food would you choose?
3. Band-Aids

Pass two bowls full of different Band-Aids around the circle.

Remind children that sometimes we have inside wounds (emotional) or outside hurts (physical).

Instruct them to ask the person next to them “Do you have a hurt?”

If they say yes, ask them where and “Can I put Band-Aid on your hurt?” If they say yes, and you do put a Band-Aid on their hurt, then be sure to finish by saying “I’m sorry you have a hurt.”

Have the children practice with the person sitting next to them.

Remind children that putting Band Aids on each other allows us opportunities to practice helping another person take care of their hurts (giving care) and allowing another person to take care of our hurts (receiving care.)

4. Dysregulation Activity: Chair Basketball

(This can be done with or without chairs. Two large plastic bags for each group will be needed – one to hold the balloons at the beginning and one to place them in at the end.)

Split group into two teams. Make two vertical rows with chairs with a small distance in between chairs (each chair can be up to 6 feet apart depending on the size of the space you are conducting the group.) Have each child sit in a chair. The child at one end starts with the balloon and must pass it to the next child in line without the balloon touching the ground. Each child passes the balloon down the line until it reaches the second to last child. The child at the end of the line should make a circle with his/her arms. The last child holding the balloon should aim to throw the balloon in the “hoop” and then that child places it in the plastic bag. The first group to get all of the balloons through the “hoop” wins.

*If the balloon should touch the ground at any point, the balloon must start back at the beginning of the line.

**You can play the game with as many balloons as you like. It is recommended to start each group with 6 balloons per team. The first group to get all of the balloons through the hoop without touching the ground wins.

**The game could also be played to a final score. Simply adjust the rules as follows:
1. If the balloon touches the ground, it is considered a dead balloon. It cannot be reused.
2. The child at the front of the line should grab another balloon and the balloon should be passed down the line until a “hoop” is scored. 3. The team with the most points at the end of the game wins. Each team should start out with ten balloons each.

Another Version: Balloon Race

Split group into two teams. Make two vertical rows spacing each child about an arms length apart from each other. Each child should face forward. Each team should start with ten balloons (this amount may vary.) The first child in line should be holding a balloon. The children should pass the balloon down the line. The first child passes the balloon over his/her head to the second child
in line. The second child should then pass the balloon under his/her legs to the child next in line. The balloon should progress down the line in an over-under-over-under pattern until it reaches the last child in the line. He/she should place the balloon on the ground. The team to pass all of the balloons down the line the fastest wins.

After the game, show your engine (previously prepared) to the group. Review with children how our bodies are like engines and they can run way too high sometimes (too much energy = red), low (not enough energy = blue), or just right (green).

“We are going to check in with our bodies after our game to see how we are feeling.” Start by asking the children the following:

“Who feels like they are on red? You may be feeling excited, angry, worried, energetic, frustrated. Raise your hand if you are on Red.”

“Who feels like they are on Green? You may be feeling peaceful, happy, or calm. Raise your hand if you are on green?”

“What about Blue? You may be feeling sad, tired, disappointed, hurt, bored. Okay, let’s try to get us all on green!”

5. Calming Technique: Magic Mustache

“Sometimes, when we are really scared, have you noticed people put their hands on their face like this? (Leader shows how we put our hands over our mouth or our eyes.) We have what are called “pressure points” on our face and when we push on them, sometimes this can help us relax. So we are all going to practice making a magic mustache by placing our index finger to the pressure points above our upper lip, and hold for ten seconds.”

Recheck engine plates and find out if anyone is still in the red. If so, do the magic mustache for another 10 seconds until everyone is in the green.

6. Core Activity: Use your Words

“If I were to run up to my friend and just grab his toy out of his hand without asking, how do you think he might react?”

(Kids might suggest that their friend might be mad or angry)

That’s right. My friend would probably be pretty bothered by me not asking and just grabbing his toy. I would do better if I said something like, “Hi, that looks fun. Would you mind if I played with your toy for a little while?” And then I should wait and see if my friend gives me permission to use their toy and if he says, “Yes you can.”

“What about if I wanted what my friend was eating at lunch, so I just grab his food out of his hand and take it as mine. How do you think he might react to me doing that?”

(Kids might suggest that he’d yell at me or get mad and want his food back)
"Yes that’s right. If we don’t use any words and we just take things without asking and waiting for permission, our friends might be upset with us. It is important that we use our words to communicate when we want something."

"If I wanted to try a bit of what my friend was eating at lunch, I should say something like, “Hey, that looks good. Would you mind if I try a bite?” And then I should wait and see if my friend gives me permission and says, “Yes.” If they say no, I need to respect that.

“Today we are going to use some puppets (or toys) and get into partners and practice asking for something the wrong way (and grabbing without asking.) Then we will practice asking for it by using our words and asking the correct way. In our role-plays, it is important to listen to what the other person says. If they don’t give us permission, we have to accept their “No.”

Have children practice their role-play in pairs for a few minutes. Once the group circles back up, ask for volunteers to demonstrate asking the wrong way first. Then have them ask for something by using their words. Give them applause for each attempt and talk about what they did correctly.

Introduce Core Scriptural Principle: Matthew 7:12 (NASB)

Matthew 7:12, “In everything, treat people the same way you want them to treat you."

“Why do you think it is important for us to show respect to others by using our words?” (let kids come up with ideas) Jesus told his disciples that one of the most important things for us to do as Christ followers is to love our neighbor as ourselves. Jesus said in Matthew 7:12, “In everything, treat people the same way you want them to treat you” (NASB). I would want other people to use their words and ask me first if they wanted something of mine.”

“Let’s pray. Dear God, thank you for showing us how to treat other people. Help us learn to use our words to ask permission first. Amen.”

7. Feeding:

Have gummy candy on a plate to pass around.

Partners take turns asking if they can feed each other a gummy. “Would you like a gummy?” If the partner says yes, then they are offered to pick the color gummy they’d like. Once a color is chosen, the partner asks, “May I feed it to you?” If they say yes, the partner feeds it to them. Then they switch roles.

Ask for a partner to demonstrate this exercise with.

8. Closing:

Review the rules and remind kids that these are also rules for families, home, school, and life. We can stick together, no hurts, and have fun. Celebrate, “Yay we did Nurture Group! Good job using your words!”
9. Follow-up (for caregivers and parents)

At-risk kids often rely on tantrums, running away, or aggression to express their sadness, fears or frustration. They use behavior to communicate what they can’t express verbally. Although you seek to understand their behavior, you still need to wean them off acting out by constantly encouraging them to use their words. With practice and encouragement, your child will be able to use language to communicate appropriately. Prompt him or her regularly with the phrase “use your words.” Instead of saying, “Don’t do that!” if a child is taking something without asking, adults could say, “Use your words.” Framing commands in a positive way (what you want the child to do) often times results in greater cooperation. Instruction and correction works best for kids from trauma backgrounds if you can use 12 words or less.

1 Adapted from Play With Them: Theraplay Groups in the Classroom : A Technique for Professional Who Work With Children by Phyllis B. Rubin and Jeanine Tregay, pages 28-53
2 Adapted from The Connected Child by Dr. Karyn Purvis and Dr. David Cross, pages 75-76
3 Adapted from The Connection Where Hearts Meet by Dr. Karyn Purvis and Elizabeth Styffe, page 69
NURTURE GROUP LESSON TWO
STICK TOGETHER

Goal
Child will understand and demonstrate what it means to “stick together” in relationships.

Core Scriptural Verse
John 15:12 (CEV), “Love each other, as I have loved you.”

Materials needed
1. Two bowls full of Band-Aids
2. Engine plates
3. Cut up fruit on a plate
4. “Magic Feather” – a big pillow

The Lesson Plan
1. Rules
   • Stick together.
   • No hurts.
   • Have fun!

   Explain that “Sticking Together” means everyone staying close together (going where the group goes, staying together by showing respect to others in group, and giving full attention when someone else is speaking).

   Next, explain what “No Hurts” means. Explain that there are two ways we could hurt someone, inside or outside hurts. Inside hurts are when we say mean things to someone else to try to hurt their feelings. Outside hurts are physical hurts like when we hit our friends or get a scratch from falling down.

   Finally, introduce “Have Fun.” Explain that if we stick together and do not hurt each other, we can have a lot of fun doing Nurture Group.

   Next, have the kids come up with their own hand motions or sign for each of the three rules. Group leader says the first word of each rule and the kids say the second word. Say, “Stick” and have children say, “Together” while doing their hand motion for that rule. Say “No” and have the children say, “hurts” while demonstrating their hand sign. Say, “Have” and have children say, “Fun.” Repeat this until children can fluently recite the rules along with the adult.

2. Check-in Question(s)
   1. This week’s “Magic Feather” – a big pillow that each person can hug.
   2. What is your name? What is your favorite time of day and tell us why that is your favorite time of the day?
3. Band-Aids

Pass two bowls full of different Band-Aids around the circle.

Remind children that sometimes we have inside wounds (emotional) or outside hurts (physical).

Instruct them to ask the person next to them “Do you have a hurt?” If they say yes, ask them where and ask “Can I put Band-Aid on your hurt?” If they say yes, and you do put a Band-Aid on their hurt, then be sure to finish by saying “I’m sorry you have a hurt.”

Have the children practice with the person sitting next to them.

Remind children that putting Band Aids on each other allows us opportunities to practice helping another person take care of their hurts (giving care) and allowing another person to take care of our hurts (receiving care).

4. Dysregulation Activity: Group Knot

Have the children stand in a tight circle, with their hands in the center. Then have them grab other hands at random. The puzzle is for the whole group to work together to get themselves untangled.

Sometimes you’ll find that the group has actually formed several smaller circles. Repeat if the kids thought the process of untangling was fun and if time permits.

Show your engine (previously prepared) to the group. Review with children how our bodies are like engines and they can run way too high sometimes (too much energy = red), low (not enough energy = blue), or just right (green).

“We are going to check in with our bodies after our game to see how we are feeling.” Start by asking the children the following:

“Who feels like they are on red? You may be feeling excited, angry, worried, energetic, frustrated. Raise your hand if you are on Red.”

“Who feels like they are on Green? You may be feeling peaceful, happy, or calm. Raise your hand if you are on green?”

“What about Blue? You may be feeling sad, tired, disappointed, hurt, bored. Okay, let’s try to get us all on green!”

5. Calming Technique: Magic Mustache

“Sometimes, when we are really scared, have you have noticed that people put their hands on their face like this? (Leader shows how we put our hands over our mouth or our eyes). We have what are called “pressure points” on our face and when we push on them, sometimes this can
help us relax. So we are all going to practice making a magic mustache by placing our index finger to the pressure points above our upper lip, and hold for ten seconds.”

Recheck engine plates and find out if anyone is still in the red. If so, show the kids other pressure points on their face like in between their eyebrows on their forehead and press for another 10 seconds until everyone is in the green.

6. Core Activity: Stick Together

“One of our rules for group, life, and families is we “Stick Together.” Sticking together means everyone stays close together. If the group goes somewhere, we “stick together” by going where the group goes. We “stick together” when we respect other people and say only kind things to them. We can also stick together by listening when someone else is speaking. Sticking together also means that if we are out in public and walking by strangers, we might “stick together” by staying close to our caregiver or holding their hand.”

So let’s practice. Let’s pretend that my buddy and I are talking when we should probably listen to whomever is sharing in the group. The leader might say, “Hey there, let’s stick together.” And what might we do?

(Kids might say that Sticking Together means that they should be quiet and listen.)

“That’s right. Sticking Together in group sometimes means we should listen to others when they talk.”

“Or what about if I say something not nice to my friend and my caregiver says to me, “You need to Stick Together.” What would that mean?”

(Kids might say that Sticking Together in this example means that you should only say nice things about others.)

That’s right. Sticking Together means that we say nice things and not hurtful or mean things to our friends.”

“Today we are going to use some puppets and get into partners and practice not sticking together and then practice the same situation but the second time we want to practice sticking together.

Have children practice their role play in pairs for a few minutes and then ask the group to circle back up and ask for volunteers who would like to demonstrate doing it the wrong way first by not sticking together and then by sticking together the second time around. Give them applause for each attempt and talk about what they did correctly.

Introduce Core Scriptural Principle: John 15:12 (CEV)

“Love each other, as I have loved you.”

“Jesus said, “Love each other as I have loved you.” (John 15:12.) One way that we can show love to other people is by sticking together. And you know what? God always sticks together with each one of us because God always has kind things to say to us.”
“Let’s pray. Dear God, thank you for loving us. Thank you for sticking together with us and for giving us the Bible so we can read your words whenever we want to. Help us stick together this week. Amen.”

7. Feeding

Have cut up fruit on a plate to pass around.

Partners take turns asking if they can feed each other a piece of fruit. “Would you like some fruit?” If the partner says yes, then they are offered to pick the piece of fruit they’d like. Once a color is chosen, the partner asks, “May I feed it to you?” If they say yes, the partner feeds it to them. Then they switch roles.

Ask for a partner to demonstrate this exercise with.

8. Closing

Review the rules and remind kids that these are also rules for families, home, school and life. We can stick together, no hurts and have fun. Celebrate, “Yay we did Nurture Group! Good sticking together!”

9. Follow-up (for caregivers and parents)

Following group, adults can reinforce skills by using this familiar language with the children and particularly focus on reminding children to “Stick Together” instead of bullying others, being mean to others, or when you need a child to stay with the group. Instead of saying, “Don’t do that!” or “That’s not nice!” if a child is saying hurtful things to others, adults could say, “Stick Together.” Framing commands in a positive way (what you want the child to do) often times results in greater cooperation. Parents could also ask a child to “Stick Together” when you need the child to rejoin the group for an activity as a way to redirect.

1 Adapted from Play With Them: Theraplay Groups in the Classroom : A Technique for Professional Who Work With Children by Phyllis B. Rubin and Jeanine Tregay, pages 28-53