

SESSION I

Grounding and Safety

Session Overview

Participant Goals

- To begin to get to know one another and develop trust
- To establish safety for participants and the group
- To learn that we are more than the impacts of our trauma
- To learn about triggers and some ways to cope when we feel triggered

Teaching Point

Building safety and trust is essential for growth and healing.

Topic Sequence and Recommended Timing (120 minutes)

12 minutes	Introductions
2 minutes	Read Selected Meditation
1 minute	Session Goals

Healing Women's Pain Curriculum, Facilitator's Guide, First Edition. Sophia Murphy, Dan Griffin, and Jonathan De Carlo.

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Introductions (12 minutes)

Welcome each of the women. Introduce yourself to the group members. Say your name, job title, and role within the agency. You may choose to share some limited personal information, such as why you became a counselor, but keep it brief. If you are a trauma survivor, you may choose to briefly share about your healing experience, being mindful of time and your self-disclosure. Ask the co-facilitator to introduce themselves in the same way.

Hi, I'm _____ and I'm a _____. Here at (insert agency name), I'm the _____.

Welcome to Healing Women's¹ Pain

The purpose of this group is to help you begin to navigate your own journey of healing from the effects of trauma in your life. We want to help you make sense of your past experiences and how they impact your life today. We want to help you see that you have everything you need to heal your pain. To begin, the term "Women" is used to include all persons who identify as female, feminine, femme, and other identities that do not align with masculinity. The goal is to use research around female socialization in Western Society to explore positive and negative consequences of being raised as a female or presenting as feminine. This title does not solely recognize gender as binary and is intended only as a means of context. The terms "woman," "women," "she/her," and "female" will be used throughout for the same purpose.

This is an experiential process, which means that we are going to ask you to be willing to take risks emotionally to help you to get everything you can out of the group. We will invite you to challenge yourself and your peers throughout this process and make an investment in your healing journey. There are guidelines that provide clear expectations and structure so that this is a safe group for everyone. That said, we want you to participate as is safest and most comfortable for you.

We, as the facilitators, are here to guide, provide resources, and help create a healing environment for everyone involved. At any time, please ask for what you need or want throughout our time together.

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Trauma! This word has lots of meaning and contexts, especially for women. We'll dive more deeply into defining trauma, specifically redefining trauma, as we continue, but for now, let's keep it simple. Trauma = wound. Is it safe to say that all of us, as human beings, are wounded to various degrees? All wounds are experienced differently, and we hope to provide a safe place for you to define together what a healing journey looks like.

Now let's go around the group and have each of you introduce yourself. You can just tell us your name and a little bit about yourself. Tell us one fact about you that people would not know by looking at you. Also, share any of your initial thoughts or questions based upon my description of this group.

Ask for a volunteer to begin, then let the women respond. Give clarification or redirection as needed.

Thank you all for sharing. We'll be getting to know one another better as we go along.

Read Selected Meditation (2 minutes)

Explain the Selected Meditation.

Part of the opening of each session will be reading a Selected Meditation from this book. A fundamental part of this program is going to be learning how to take care of yourselves – emotionally and spiritually as well as physically and intellectually. Reading this meditation will help you get used to experiencing ideas and concepts that remind you to take care of yourself emotionally and spiritually. This may feel uncomfortable for some of you, and that is a good thing. If I am doing my job well, you will feel uncomfortable at times as you experiment with new ideas and behaviors. I invite you to be open and listen to what is being read.

I will read the meditation today. Next week and in each session thereafter, I will ask for a volunteer to read it aloud to the group.

Tell the women what book you are going to use for the rest of the group. Read the first meditation aloud.

Session Goals (1 minute)

Read aloud the goals of the session.

The goals of this session are:

- To begin to get to know one another and develop trust
- To establish safety for participants and the group
- To learn that we are more than the impacts of our trauma, or again, any of the wounds we carry that have not healed
- To begin to identify trauma in our own lives using a new definition of trauma and to begin expanding our emotional vocabulary to be able to name our feelings

Are there any questions about the session goals?

Let the women respond and answer any questions as needed, giving clarification as needed. Thank the women if there were any questions. If there are no questions, proceed to the orientation activity.

Orientation to the Group, Distribution of Workbooks, and Group Agreements (25 minutes)

There will be nineteen meetings or “sessions,” each of which will take about 2 hours. During each of these, we’ll learn some information, talk about how it relates to our lives, and complete an activity that will help the information become more than just words.

You may wish to add some of your own words to briefly describe the purpose, structure, and content of the sessions. Distribute a handout that provides information about the days of the week and times of the regularly scheduled sessions.

If the women have not received copies of their workbooks prior to the session, distribute them now.

For the next activity, facilitators should decide how to review the foundational group agreements as listed below. Facilitators may choose to read the group agreements aloud,

as indicated. Alternatively, facilitators may choose to ask the participants to take turns reading the group agreements aloud. Being mindful that some participants may not be comfortable reading aloud, please consider how to invite participants to read aloud while respecting a participant's choice not to read aloud and be able to "pass."

Each of you will have a copy of *A Healing Workbook*. At the end of each meeting, I'll point out some exercises in the workbook that I'd like you to complete before the next session. You may be concerned that writing is something you're not good at, but nobody will criticize or judge what you say. Your workbook is for you only. No one else will read any of it without your permission. If you have a hard time expressing in words what you want to communicate, it's okay to draw pictures instead. It's also okay to work on these exercises with another group member and to help one another. Asking for help is sometimes challenging for women if you're used to managing things for others and on your own. Your journey will depend on your willingness to ask for and accept help, so starting now in this group is a prime opportunity for practice.

The purpose of the workbook is to help you to think through what we talk about in this group, and no one will grade you on what you write or draw. It is important that you bring your workbooks to each group session, so please try to remember that each time.

We would like this group experience to be as helpful as possible for everyone. To that end, there are group agreements that I would like us all to understand. Please turn to page 2 in your workbooks. As we are a new group, I will read these group agreements aloud today to help everyone feel comfortable and safe.

Read the group agreements aloud. You can also refer to page 2 in the workbook, and you may want to post the agreements on flipchart paper. When discussing agreement #9, be sure to remind the women that, if they are running late, they can always call to notify you or another staff member. When discussing agreement #10, about abstinence, be specific about the process of how circumstances will be addressed if anyone comes to a session under the influence. After you read all ten items, ask if there are any questions. Be sure that everyone understands the agreements and the reasons for them.

Group Agreements

1. **Safety:** It is critical that each of you feel safe in this group. It is often not easy for women to admit when they do not feel safe as they may (1) focus more on others than themselves and/or (2) struggle to admit they are infallible. We do

not often talk about safety. You may be thinking that safety is about defending yourself or protecting yourself from harm. But safety is also about feeling emotionally safe, feeling grounded, and feeling comfortable when sharing your thoughts and your problems with others. My commitment is to make sure this is a safe group, and I invite that same commitment from each of you. In order for this to happen, we all need to agree that there will be no emotional, verbal, or physical abuse here. We will all agree that this is an invitational process and will honor each participant's investment, no matter at what level they share in the moment. Our motto will be: Safety first, last, and always.

2. **Confidentiality:** No personal information revealed in this room is to be repeated outside the room. We need to know that we can trust one another, and there can be no trust if information about a group member is given to outsiders or if group members gossip about one another outside the group. There are two exceptions to this rule of confidentiality: (1) I have to communicate with other members of your treatment team as part of your ongoing care; and (2) I am required by law to break confidentiality when a member's personal safety or the safety of another person is at stake. You, as group members, will be responsible for maintaining confidentiality among yourselves.
3. **Participation:** Everyone will have a chance to join in the discussion *and* the opportunity to share at their own level of comfort, safety, and willingness without pressure or expectation. Since we are likely to ask challenging questions, talk about difficult topics, and explore painful issues, we will invite everyone to participate by minimally communicating their level of comfort, safety, and willingness as we go, supporting each participant to reach slightly beyond where they are comfortable, safe, and willing in order to learn to grow and expand their resilience. We will respect each participant's responses and support each participant to develop the necessary and sufficient skills to benefit from the group.
4. **Truthfulness:** We're here to tell the truth. Nobody will pressure you to tell anything about yourself that you don't want to talk about, but when you do talk, tell the truth about where you've been and how you feel. I may ask questions to better understand what you are saying or support you in telling your whole truth. We will strive to invite participants to share from their perspective, taking ownership of that perspective through the use of "I" statements rather than saying "You" or "We." Some people may be uncomfortable sharing their experiences from their own perspective, and we will seek to provide enough support without judgment to allow them to do so.

5. **Respect:** When you tell the truth about what you think, we invite you to do so in a way that respects others in the group. That means avoiding criticizing, judging, or talking down to anyone. If you think that someone is showing disrespect to someone else, please say so respectfully and invite them to explain their responses or behaviors. If someone is dominating the conversation, I'll referee so that everyone gets a chance to talk. If you think I am not doing my job as a referee, let me know. If you feel uncomfortable or angry at some point and do not want to participate, we invite you to share your current level of safety and pass on the current discussion until you are ready to invest further.
6. **Curiosity:** There are no dumb questions or wrong answers, as long as you speak about what is true for you. Ask whatever is on your mind. Please respect one another's honest questions and opinions. Safety is first, last, and always.
7. **Keeping Focused:** We're here to talk about healing trauma, which may lead us into a wide variety of related discussions. If we start to go off task, I'll direct us back to the topic at hand. If you think that we're getting off the topic and I'm not doing anything about it, or if you think that I'm headed off on a tangent, I invite you to alert me and help to refocus us.
8. **Attendance:** Since safety is at the foundation of the healing process for this group, we're all committing to showing up at all the sessions. Your commitment to attending regularly helps to stabilize the group and creates an environment of mutual support. Being present regularly also improves your opportunities for growth and the ability to maximize the experience. If you must miss a group meeting, please let the group facilitator know well in advance of that meeting and, if possible, share with the participants of the group as well. If you end up missing too many meetings, it may affect your ability to stay in the group.
9. **Timeliness:** The times of our group meetings are _____. We will begin and end on time to keep the structure of our group safe and predictable. If you are going to be late and can inform myself or others in the group ahead of time, we invite you to please do so as you are able. If you are late without informing us, I may also challenge you to explore your accountability and responsibility to yourself and the group. Being late is almost always a choice and an expression of how you are responding to your internal world. Starting and ending a group on time is essential for maintaining a safe space.
10. **Commitment to Recovery (If Applicable):** Using mood-altering chemicals is often a response to a trauma being triggered, even if someone is unaware of it. We will not assign any meaning to using mood-altering chemicals, but we will

want to ensure the safety of all of the participants and the group as a whole. We will always want to explore alternative coping skills and responses, supporting each woman in their journey. As such, we ask that you commit to showing up to group sober and free of any mind-altering chemicals and remaining so for the duration of each group. If you choose to use substances outside of the group, that is your choice. If it ever feels like it is a problem for you or something that you want to discuss further, we are here for you.

Please note that these guidelines are suggested. Make sure that the group agreements and the rules of your facility are consistent and mutually supportive.

I want to emphasize one point in particular: the issue of confidentiality.

1. What does confidentiality mean to you?

Let a few women respond briefly, asking for clarification as needed.

2. What happens when confidentiality is challenged or broken?

Let a few women respond briefly, asking for clarification as needed.

3. How does that feel?

Let a few women respond briefly, asking for clarification as needed.

Trust is essential to the group process, and there can be no trust if information about a group member is given to outsiders or if group members talk about one another outside the group. So, we need to make every attempt to ensure that what is said, revealed, or done in the group sessions remains confidential and safe.

4. What do you want to do, as a group, to maintain confidentiality? How do we want to ensure safety for the group?

Let the women respond briefly, asking for clarification as needed. Thank them for the input/responses.

Is there anything missing that you might want included? Are there any other questions or concerns about any of the group agreements?

Let the women respond with questions. Take time to clarify any of the group agreements you presented and any agreements anyone brings up, ensuring to ask

all participants if they can assent to the suggestion (requesting each woman verbally agree to follow the guidelines or express any concern about any and then confirm)

Thank you for taking the time with me to go through these group agreements. Know that at any time, anyone in this group can make a new request, ask for revision, or ask for clarification to these group agreements, and we'll take the time to give everyone the opportunity to understand a commitment to any changes in our group agreements.

Interactive Lecture: Redefining Trauma, Traumagenesis, and What Does Healing Look Like?

Now, let's take a few minutes to explore the concept of trauma.

Let's start by sharing your understanding/definition of trauma, and we will list all of the types of traumas we can think of...

On a piece of flipchart paper, divide the page into three columns lengthwise. Write down definitions of trauma provided by the women in the first column and list all of the types of trauma the women provide in the second. Leave the third blank. Ask for clarification where needed. Make sure you save this list for future sessions.

Okay. (Choose your own affirmation, e.g. "This is a great list!") Thank you, everyone.

Now introduce the term "trauma genesis" and the definition of trauma as follows:

"Trauma is anything that pushes a person past their ability to cope."

Using this new definition, ask for some additional examples of trauma from the women and write them in the third column. Ask for clarification and explore how the new definition shifted any initial thoughts for the women. Explore how the new definition changed the examples they provided for the list.

Next, ask the group the following:

So, for women, what does healing look like? What are the different ways that women can heal?

On a new piece of flipchart paper, list all the responses the women provide. Ask for clarification where needed.

Excellent. These are both great lists. Throughout our time together we'll continue to refine and explore both concepts. It is my hope that these sessions will help provide you all with a safe and nurturing place to explore and define these concepts and build a foundation to a healing journey.

The Safety Dance: Triggers and Being Triggered (5 minutes)

In the past week, how many of you felt afraid or uneasy? Just raise your hands. Okay, thank you. We may think that women only feel afraid or uneasy in explicitly violent experiences; however, that is not the only truth. Sometimes we feel uneasy and don't understand it. In the past week, how many of you felt overwhelmed or stressed by something that you experienced a desire to run away from, or found yourself blank, or struggled to be productive? Again, just raise your hands. Okay, thank you. For those who have experienced a traumatic event, feelings of unease, wanting to escape, being frozen, or numb are common responses that are programmed into our central nervous system so deeply, we may not even be aware that is how we are acting.

The process just described involves triggers and being triggered. A trigger is a stimulus that sets off a memory, sometimes explicitly and sometimes implicitly in your body, often of a traumatic event or experience. A single environmental sign related to a trauma such as a noise, a sound, a smell, a physical sensation, or another person's presence can trigger a full fight, flight, or freeze response. Sometimes we respond with fawning, which is another threat response categorized by deferring to others and hyperfocusing on others to the detriment of ourselves.

Our bodies have a system called "neuroception," which means that your nervous system often senses a threat (or perceives something as a threat) before you are consciously aware of it. A benign example is goosebumps. When the AC turns on and a cold breeze hits your skin, neuroception receives this information, and you experience goosebumps, often before you consciously think, "I'm cold." More severe examples relate to your body feeling threatened or unsafe. Triggers for safety set in motion deeply ingrained responses designed to alert us of a threat or danger that we

need to defend or protect ourselves from. Just as the sound of car horn alerts of a potential hazard, triggers let us know there is something to pay attention to. Unfortunately for those who have experienced trauma, the signs someone is currently experiencing set off a memory of the past experience in the present. This often produces a response as if to life-threatening danger, feelings of being intensely overwhelmed or stressed, and needing to protect themselves in the moment. Our protective automatic responses when threatened are simple: fight, flight, freeze, or fawn. These protective automatic responses become activated by something experienced in the moment. So, when we are triggered, we respond to the present with our past.

Beginning to recognize when we are triggered can be more challenging and difficult than we may think at first. The main reason is that the memories of the trauma and our responses are deeply programmed into our nervous system so that we are almost unaware we've been triggered and are responding to a past memory. Learning to identify triggers and our responses to these triggers is a fundamental part of healing our wounds.

When we learn to identify triggers as they happen and stay in the moment, grounded and connected, we'll have a better chance to make different choices about how we want to respond rather than automatically feeling the need to defend, protect, and fight-flight-freeze-or-fawn. We'll be able to maintain our safety, experience all our feelings, and not bring our past into the present. We will spend more time on this topic in the coming weeks.

Debriefing (5 minutes)

Listening to what I've been saying, you might be thinking, "Not me. I don't feel insecure or triggered." Or "I just get overwhelmed sometimes, but my life hasn't been traumatic." You might even be thinking, "Other people have had it a lot worse than I have so this doesn't apply." That is a normal response. I am challenging one of the biggest – and most destructive – rules about being a woman which is to minimize your experience, especially in comparison to others. Or you may be thinking, "I have no idea what this person is talking about!" That is also very common because women have been trained from a very young age not to focus on themselves and just to push through any difficulty or discomfort.

This group will be intense at times. We are going to challenge you to grow and will support you throughout. We invite you to be responsible and ask for help or clarification at any time.

So, what are your reactions to what I just said? What do you think about all this talk about triggers and being triggered?

Let the women respond and ask for clarification as needed. Ask questions from a place of curiosity. Thank the women for their responses.

Grounding and Safety Exercises (10 minutes)

Take the women through the two different exercises slowly, thoughtfully, and respectfully. Keep your voice soft and speak slowly.

There are times when any of you may feel uncomfortable or anxious in the group. This happens to all of us at various times, especially in unfamiliar settings and with new experiences. For those who embrace help with healing trauma, feeling anxious, depressed, disconnected, or uncomfortable may be a frequent experience. A lot of the time, we keep these feelings to ourselves and do not know how to relieve our discomfort, so we may turn to unsustainable ways of coping.

We may also engage in thoughts and behaviors that, while seemingly mild, may prevent us from connecting with others or creating safety. We are also good at caring for others while neglecting ourselves, so when these uncomfortable feelings come up and we are on our own, we are not sure what to do. I am going to teach you two techniques that you can use to help you to relax or calm yourselves and feel more grounded. You can use these techniques any time. People do not even have to know you are practicing them!

Being grounded means being able to stay in the present, without constantly focusing on the past or the future. It also means not having your emotions or thoughts run the show, including emotional memories and fears. These exercises can help you to detach from your inner, emotional discomfort by becoming more aware of the physical world, to be present in the here and now. Up until now, many of you may have dealt with excitement, anxiety, stress, and feeling uncomfortable by using chemicals, acting “in,” or acting “out.” These exercises will help you deal with those feelings so that they do not control your behavior and stop you from growing.

The Safety Check (3 minutes)

An exercise that we are going to do in every session, potentially multiple times in each session, is called “the Safety Check.” This exercise involves considering your current level of emotional, physical, and psychological safety and sharing that information with others. Since our motto is: Safety first, last, and always, this exercise will serve several purposes. First, it will allow each woman an opportunity to consider how safe she feels in the moment. Second, it will help each woman establish a sense of competence and security by identifying experiences when and where her safety is challenged. Third, it will help each woman learn to express her safety (or lack thereof) to others in a secure and contained environment. Lastly, it will help others around you appreciate and understand your responses and behaviors as they learn more about you and your safety. The value of this exercise will become clearer with time and practice. The main point is that you get to learn how to check in with yourself.

1. I invite you to take a moment and consider your current level of safety (emotional, physical, *and* psychological).
2. On a scale of 1–10, rate your current level of safety in this moment (1 being completely unsafe, threatened, and in extreme danger; 10 being completely safe, secure, and able to respond from your wisest and highest self).
3. Once you’ve chosen your rating, we’ll all take a moment to share our ratings together. There is no need to justify or qualify your rating, unless you choose to. If someone chooses to qualify their rating, there is no expectation for others to do the same.
4. We’ll begin on my left and proceed around the group until everyone has shared.
5. Make a mental note of your own rating and the ratings others have shared with you.

Model the safety check by giving your own honest rating (it doesn’t have to be a 10), then proceed to the participants starting on your left. Before moving to the next exercise, always ask: “For those who shared a rating of three or less, is there anything we as a group can do to be of support for you as we continue?” Address each woman’s support request accordingly, acknowledging and honoring her for asking for and accepting help.

Box Breathing (3 minutes)

Another helpful exercise is learning to take paced breaths over a count, inhaling, holding, exhaling, and pausing before taking your next breath. This is called box breathing.

1. Take a couple of normal breaths. Inhale through your nose and exhale from your mouth.
2. Now, inhale deeply through your nose over a count of four.
3. Hold your breath in, over a count of four
4. Exhale from your mouth over a count of four.
5. Pause, over a count of four.
6. Let's do the entire cycle of breathing over a count of four, three more times.

Many people practice box breathing to counteract feelings of anger, stress, fear, panic, and so on. It also interrupts responses of “fight, flight, freeze, or fawn” and allows you to stay in the moment, clear and connected. The more you practice this way of breathing, the more natural it will become to you.

Who noticed any changes in herself because of this exercise?

Let a few women respond and thank them for their responses.

The goal of relaxation and grounding exercises is to get your mind off other concerns and help keep you focused on what you are trying to accomplish. Learning how to calm ourselves when emotions start to take over is a skill that we all can use. You can use these techniques outside of our group, too, when you are feeling stressed or uncomfortable. Remember, what's great about these exercises is that you can use them anywhere and anytime. Others do not even have to know that you are using these new tools, and you will feel better. I will be reminding you about them in future sessions and inviting you to use them outside of this group.

Resourcing (3 minutes)

In healing trauma, resourcing is a fundamental practice. Resourcing is like grounding, but slightly different. It is the ability to feel safe, to feel nurtured, and to feel connected within yourself. If trauma is an ocean full of storms and unpredictable weather, the ability to resource is an island that you can build any time where you can rest and gather your resilience.

The ability to resource comes naturally to some people, and for others it is difficult or nearly impossible. Usually, the more stress and trauma a person experiences, the more challenging it is for them to develop and maintain a calm and secure center to their lives. Resources come in many forms, both internal and external. An example of an internal resource could be remembering a time and place where you felt totally safe,

completely connected, and in your highest, wisest self. An example of an external resource could be an activity such as playing a musical instrument. Often people build diverse resources they engage in their everyday lives without realizing it. Intentionally developing both internal and external resources to manage feelings of stress, anxiety, or other intense emotions is critical to healing trauma.

What are some of the internal resources you all have in your life right now?

What are some of the external resources you all have in your life right now?

Let the women respond, asking for clarification if needed. Thank them for their responses.

Understanding Trauma in Your Life – (20 minutes)

Refer to the three columns created at the onset of the session with definitions of trauma (old and new today) as well as examples of trauma, and then provide each woman a feelings wheel.

Write “Understanding Trauma in Your Life” in large letters on a sheet of flipchart paper.

The next activity will help us get to know ourselves and begin to see our story with more honesty and compassion. We will break into small groups of three women each. I’d like us to count off by “threes.” Once we’ve all identified our number, each number will come together to form a small group.

For the small group discussions here and in subsequent group sessions, have the participants form subgroups (preferably of three members each; one or two groups may have four members if the total number of participants requires it). Again, so that the participants are not just with “their friends,” remember to count off. You do this by taking the total number of participants and dividing by 3. The number that you get is the number that you then count off by. For instance, if you have 12 participants, then you would count off by 4s.

Let's take a moment to review the questions I'd like us to look at for this small group discussion.

Small Group Discussion Questions

1. Think back to when you were a young child. Using our new definition of trauma and the feelings wheel, what is something that pushed you past your ability to cope and how do you feel about it now?
2. Think back to when you were a teenager. Using our new definition of trauma and the feelings wheel, what is something that pushed you past your ability to cope, and how do you feel about it now?
3. Think about your life today. Using our new definition of trauma and the feelings wheel, what is something that is pushing you past your ability to cope, and how do you feel about it now?
4. Think about your life three years from today. Using the feelings wheel, how do you want to feel about your life at that time?

Is everyone clear on the questions? I suggest that each woman take a turn answering the first question, then move on to each question in order, letting each person answer the question before moving ahead. Is everyone ready? We'll have about 20 minutes or so for this discussion. I'll keep time and give groups a time update throughout. Alright, let's begin ...

Pay attention to the group and the participants without lurking or hovering. Give support, guidance, direction, or redirection as needed or requested. At least one facilitator should always remain in the room to be available for participants. As the 10-minute mark approaches, give a time update so each person can address the questions. As the 17-minute mark arrives, give a final 3-minute notice to finish their discussion. Once all participants have finished, ask the participants to rejoin as a large group.

Thank you all for your willingness to invest and support each other in exploring your stories. Let me begin by asking a simple question: what was that experience like?

Let a few women respond with their experience. Common responses may range from easy to hard, challenging to helpful. Without probing too much, support generating a brief discussion.

What Do You Want to Get out of This Group? (10 minutes)

As the women answer the questions, record summaries of their comments on flipchart paper. You may want to refer to this at various points throughout the curriculum. Make sure that all the women answer all three questions, even if their answers are “I don’t know.” When the women say what they want to get out of the group, be willing to question them – especially the first ones to answer – to make sure they are saying what they want to get out of the group, not what others want for them.

Considering our new definition of trauma, each of you is here because you’ve experienced some type of abuse or trauma. Our experiences with trauma have made us feel – and even act – in ways that have likely become unsustainable. We may see ourselves as victims, often feeling powerlessness, or we may be so focused on caring for others that we don’t understand ourselves or even notice ourselves. These would be examples of “freeze” or “fawn” from the threat responses we discussed at the onset of today’s session. For some of us, our trauma may lead us to cope in other ways that are problematic and even dangerous. When activated, some people experience a “fight” response, which can include acting out violently. Women are not immune to physical aggression even though this is more often talked about with men. We may find ourselves lashing out verbally or even physically mistreating people we care about when we feel powerless or threatened. A large part of healing trauma is about taking responsibility for how you feel, how you act, and how you relate with others, particularly with yourself. This program will help you realize that, although you can’t always control what happens to you, you do get to decide what kind of woman you become and how you want to heal from the wounds of your past. Will you own your story, or will your story own you? *That* is the question.

In general, people change only when they are experiencing some discomfort. You are here because something profoundly impactful has happened in your life. You all may be at different stages in the change process. Our job is to assist you in gaining as much information as possible so that you can make good decisions and get what you can out of the group experience.

Now I would like each of you to think about what you want to get out of this group. The most important consideration in answering this question is to think about what you really want, not what your counselor, a family member, your partner, your employer, or anyone else wants. I want you to say what *you* want. What is the work

that you are here to do to become the woman you always knew you could be?
“Better” is a great answer, but it will not be your only answer.

Who will volunteer to answer the question first?

1. What do you want to get out of this group?

Let the women respond, asking for clarification as noted above. Write their responses down on the flipchart paper. Thank them for their responses. When the women have answered the first question, ask the next question.

2. What can you do to help yourself get what you want?

Would anyone like to go first in answering the second question?

Let the women respond, asking for clarification as noted above. Write their responses down on the flipchart paper. Thank them for their responses. When the women have answered the first question, ask the last question.

3. What do you think you will need from the rest of us to get what you want?

Would anyone like to go first in answering the third question?

Let the women respond, asking for clarification as noted above. Write their responses down on the flipchart paper. Thank them for their responses.

Excellent! We'll keep this list up during our sessions and check in at times to see how we are following through with achieving this list. We can add to this list at any time, so feel free to speak up if you identify something new or different as our group continues.

Safety Check-out (5 minutes)

During today's session, we talked about some important issues for women. After every session, we will take a few minutes to talk about the issues we have explored and conduct one last safety check as we check-out of group.

Conduct the Safety Check.

1. I invite you to take a moment and consider your current level of safety (emotional, physical, *and* psychological).
2. On a scale of 1–10, rate your current level of safety in this moment (1 being completely unsafe, threatened, and in extreme danger; 10 being completely safe, secure, and able to respond from your wisest and highest self).
3. Once you've chosen your rating, we'll all take a moment to share our ratings together. There is no need to justify or qualify your rating, unless you choose to. If someone chooses to qualify their rating, there is no expectation for others to do the same.
4. We'll begin on my left and proceed around the group until everyone has shared.
5. Make a mental note of your own rating and the ratings others have shared with you.

As with the earlier exercise, you may want to model the safety check by giving your own rating, then proceed to the participants starting on your left. Before moving to the remainder of the closing, always ask: "For those who shared a rating of three or less, is there anything we as a group can do to be of support for you as we continue?" Address each woman's support request accordingly, acknowledging and honoring her for asking for and accepting help.

Follow Up and Close (5 minutes)

Explain how the workbook will be used throughout the program. Read the directions for the workbook assignment aloud. Make sure that everyone understands what is expected. Close with a few sentences of summary and encouragement, like the example shown.

You've done a great job today! At the end of each session, you will be invited to further explore the ideas we have talked about and to practice the new skills that you are learning outside of this group. There is a chapter in the workbook for each of our sessions. Each chapter has a summary of the main concepts discussed and exercises that we invite you to complete before the next session.

Please take out your workbooks and turn to page 11. We'll look at some of the ways in which the workbook will be an important tool throughout this program. First you will see a summary of the information we just discussed. After that is an exercise that you will be expected to complete before the next session. Often, this will involve writing, and there are spaces provided for that. Today's assignment is *[Read the first exercise from the workbook.]*

Does anyone have any questions?

Let the women respond and address any questions as needed.

Now, if you turn to page 7 you will see the “healing journey” exercise. Over the course of this program, we are going to talk about a lot of topics that may be new for you and may feel uncomfortable or confusing. Every one of these topics is connected to your healing journey. Your ability to practice things like grounding and resourcing outside of this group is the most important part of this process.

In this session, we have begun the process of looking at ourselves and looking at “What do I want from this group?” and “Understanding Trauma in Your Life.” This task will take us on a journey of exploring our inner feelings, thoughts, and beliefs, as well as looking at our relationships and the roles we play. We will create a safe place in which we can learn to trust and, with the help of other women, we will begin to get clearer pictures of ourselves and our healing journey. You may even get a glimpse of what your true purpose in this life is.

Today’s session is the beginning of an ongoing process. Healing is a lifelong process. There is no miracle cure for trauma. There is no quick fix for the impact trauma has had on your life. But this program will give you many tools and techniques that you can use even after you have completed it. I promise you that, no matter how bad things are for you or how hard they seem, they can get better.

Thank you for coming today. I look forward to seeing you on *[date and time of next meeting]*.

