

Tragedy & Trauma

Y²AM Ministry
Plan

Supplement
For Youth & Young Adults

Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America
Youth & Young Adult Ministries

NAVIGATING TRAGEDY & TRAUMA

Youth & Young Adults Resources Book

A **Y²AM** Project

Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America
Youth & Young Adult Ministries

Model Sessions and Activities

Goal:

Learn to navigate through grief
in the wake of a traumatic event.

Objective:

Reframe negative perceptions, when possible, and
focus on finding God and healing from the event.

Estimated Duration:

90 minutes

Materials:

pencils or pens for each
participant
paper for each participant

INTRODUCTORY NOTES

One of the biggest mistakes Youth Workers can make is thinking they need to know everything.

When a tragedy occurs, it may be senseless; no real explanation may ever come forth.

Trauma affects every person differently. The traumatic event could be something that has also affected you as the Youth Worker, and you may need to process the event. Take time to process the event and reach out for help if needed.

“The more you are comfortable with grief, the more the youth entrusted in your care will be more likely to talk to you about their own loss” (*Good Grief*, Williams).

All loss, big or small is a real loss and needs to be allowed time to grieve.

During tough times, grieving youth need support. We can show our support through loving the youth and young adults entrusted in our care.

What is the best way to support them and what does that support look like? One of the best ways is to be silent and listen to the story of the youth or young adult in front of you. Just as God is silent as we pray to Him, this should be our model to our youth.

Our care and time will be the best type of help we can offer in the midst of a tragedy.

THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND

As you prepare to lead this session, keep these important points in mind:

1. Where possible, find a trained mental health professional in the parish to lead a session like this. It is also best to have multiple adults in the room to offer a loving presence as the session progresses.
2. When dealing with tragedies and traumatic events, none of us are here to “fix” anything. God alone is the source of our healing. The best we can do is create a safe space and offer a listening ear.
3. When traumas are particularly intense or recent, or when the impacted people are younger, an intense emotional response is more likely. A session participant may experience this and feel the need to, for example, cry or shout. If a participant is overcome by emotion, step aside with that person. Offer comfort and a listening ear. Give them the time and space to experience their emotions.
4. Discussing traumatic events takes courage and vulnerability. It is important to assure participants that what happens during the session will remain in the session; no one will share or talk about their pain behind their backs. And, after a session like this, it is normal for people to experience a “shame hangover” and feel negative emotions after opening up. Assure participants that this feeling is normal after opening up in a vulnerable way. Yet the Church remains a safe space for us to lean on each other and trust in God’s mercy.

OPENING PRAYER

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Lord of the Powers, be with us. For in times of distress, we have no other help but You, Lord of the Powers, have mercy on us.

Amen.

SETTING EXPECTATIONS

5 minutes

As the session begins, assure participants that what is shared here is in confidence. We are gathered to be honest with each other, to trust each other and God.

Assure participants that it is perfectly normal to experience emotions, even intense emotions, after a tragic or traumatic event. Emotions are a natural part of life: they are like the indicator lights on a car dashboard, and point to the existence of wounds within us.

Let participants know that, if they are experiencing an intense emotion, a session leader can step aside with them and give them space to experience that emotion.

ICEBREAKER

10 minutes

Pass out paper and pencils. Ask for participants to write down one word that comes to mind at this moment. Go around the circle and ask them to share their answers. If there are new participants, ask them to share their name as well.

LISTEN AND ASK

10 minutes

Teaching: (reflect on this before utilizing this session)

One of the most precious things we can give another person is our time. Time is precious because it's limited, and we can never get that time back. One of the most loving actions we can do right now, in the midst of this trauma, is give our youth our time. We can do this by being actively present with them and listening to their pain. There is nothing we can do to undo the trauma, but we can be present now to listen. Remember to allow participants to do most of the talking. This is not a time for them to be educated, but an opportunity for them to speak and share whatever is on their heart.

Activity:

Gather the group together. Ask participants to write down the questions, thoughts, or feelings that they are experiencing in this moment. Allow a few minutes for participants to write. Be sure to tell participants that anything shared in the group is to stay in the group; this is a safe space. Help facilitate a group discussion among participants (use questions from the debrief below).

DEBRIEF

20 minutes

Ask participants the following questions and help facilitate a discussion:

- ❖ What do you know about...?
- ❖ What do you mean.....?
- ❖ Tell me more about...?
- ❖ I wonder how... you might feel/we can help/this is impacting you?

QUESTION & ANSWER BOX

(Alternate Activity)

20 minutes

Teaching: (reflect on this before utilizing this session)

Sometimes participants are afraid to ask questions. They may have grown up in a place where they are criticized for asking questions. After giving participants time to write questions down (in the activity above), collect questions instead of asking for direct responses. Every person experiences trauma in a different way and needs to process and grieve in a different way. Allow participants to write whatever questions they need ask, and collect them, so participants do not feel put on the spot.

Activity: Again, allow time for participants to write their own questions on paper. Pass out extra paper if necessary. Do not have participants write their name on the paper. Collect papers and put them in a box or a hat. Read each question aloud to the group, making sure it is read anonymously. Answer the questions to the best of your ability, in truth.

If you do not know an answer, please share that you do not know the answer and that you will ask the priest.

WRITING REFLECTION

20 minutes

Teaching: (reflect on this before utilizing this session)

Writing for even five minutes a day has been shown to have positive effects on our minds and thoughts. Our thoughts play a major role in how we feel and that affects what we do and who we are. If we are preoccupied with negative thoughts, we can write them on paper. This may seem strange to participants, so telling them to write to their future selves may be a way to bridge the gap.

Activity:

Ask participants to write a letter to their future selves. Pass out paper, an envelope, and a pen to each participant. Have participants write letters to their future selves; this could be a letter about their goals, their feelings at the moment, where they see themselves, etc. Also, have participants write their full address on the envelope. When they are done writing, collect the letter sealed in an envelope. Put these letters in the mail a year from the day they were written.

Note: make sure younger participants properly write their correct address.

SCRIPTURE READING AND APPLICATION

15 minutes

Teaching: (reflect on this before utilizing this session)

The goal of this part of the session is to relay to participants the following truths: you are not alone, you are safe/ supported, and you are loved. Please feel free to share these truths in your own words, but make sure participants come out of the session knowing these truths. The passages below from the Old and New Testament show us that in our worst moments we can and should turn to God. We do this through prayer. Christ knows tragedy and trauma because He too experienced it. He was betrayed by a friend, unjustly arrested, beaten, and died in a brutal way. Christ stands by us everyday of our life. When we face tragedy He is still with us and He weeps with us. We are never alone when we know we have Christ walking alongside us. We are loved by God and that love is endless.

SESSION ON TRAGEDY & TRAUMA

Have participants read the following verses aloud:

Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress. He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death, and burst their bonds apart. Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love, for his wondrous works to the children of man!

(Psalm 107: 13-15)

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

(Philippians 4:6-7)

SESSION ON TRAGEDY & TRAUMA

Ask students the following questions and help facilitate a discussion:

- ❖ What do each of the passages have in common?
- ❖ What are we called to do when we are in trouble or distress?
- ❖ Who can we always turn to and why can we turn to them?
- ❖ What happened when we put our trust in God during times of distress?

CONCLUSION

15 minutes

Teaching: (reflect on this before utilizing this session)

Prayer is powerful. We pray because we have faith in God. God has made us many promises and has kept them all. Praying for ourselves and our lives is very important because that is how we cultivate a relationship with God. It is also important to pray for each other. Each of us has many people praying for us. We can fall into despair when we forget about the loving people in our life and their prayers for us. This activity reminds each of us that we have people who love us and we have people who are praying for us. Through the prayers of our family and friends, we ask God to help us and have mercy on us.

Activity:

Go around the circle and ask each participant to pray for the person sitting to their right. This prayer could be: *Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on (insert name)*. Youth Workers should sit in the circle with participants, beginning the activity by praying for the person to their right. Allow this to continue until everyone around the circle has prayed. If you want you can repeat this activity, praying for everyone to the left.

CLOSING PRAYER

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Lord, of the Powers, be with us. For in times of distress, we have no other help but You, Lord of the Powers, have mercy on us.

Amen.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Trauma and Grief

https://childmind.org/topics/concerns/trauma-and-grief/?utm_source=E-Journal+%2F+Parent+Update&utm_campaign=859958a0ba-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2017_10_02&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_e88a54a953-859958a0ba-313199161&mc_cid=859958a0ba&mc_eid=ff858aef03

Good Grief

https://fulleryouthinstitute.org/articles/good-grief?utm_source=E-Journal+%2F+Parent+Update&utm_campaign=859958a0ba-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2017_10_02&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_e88a54a953-859958a0ba-313199161&mc_cid=859958a0ba&mc_eid=ff858aef03

I Doubt It

https://fulleryouthinstitute.org/articles/i-doubt-it?utm_source=E-Journal+%2F+Parent+Update&utm_campaign=859958a0ba-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2017_10_02&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_e88a54a953-859958a0ba-313199161&mc_cid=859958a0ba&mc_eid=ff858aef03