

## **Group Therapy Final: Script**

### **Getting Started**

Leader: Welcome everyone. It's good to see you all! Today, we're going to start off and reconnect by sharing something positive from this past week. Erica, can you start us off? (Helping members get reacquainted & Setting a positive tone)

Erica: Okay... Um, I wrote a poem about feeling lost. I wrote about feeling like I was kind of wandering through a dark forest, unsure of where I was or even where I should be going, and wondering why I was even in this forest with these questions swirling around my mind. It felt good to get those feelings out, kind of like a relief.

Karen: I get that. Sounds like it was a release.

Erica: It really was.

Alex: That's cool. Hey, I can go next. So, yeah, the clothing swap I told you guys that I would be going to was super fun! I got this awesome hat, and everyone was just swapping stories and clothes. It felt like a real community. You know, I really needed that. I needed to just relax with people that would accept me for who I was and have a little fun.

Lamar: Yeah, we all need a group. Our people. Glad you found yours.

Alex: You have no idea. It was so great.

Karen: I'm so happy for you, Alex. Well, guys, my mom and I actually made dinner together one night without arguing.

Alex: No way!

Erica: Are you kidding? That's great!

Lamar: Man, I know your mama was probably just as shocked as you, right?

Karen: Well...yes! You're right! Ha! That was an amazing feat for us. It was...nice. I found I really do love my mom and would love to spend more time with her and get to know her better. I think sometimes I just see her as a person who's out to get me, but maybe she really does treat me the way she does because she actually CARES for me... And boy can she whip up an apple pie in no time!

Lamar: I had something kind of similar happen this week. I helped my mom with groceries and stuff. Woah! If you would've seen how she reacted when I helped her out, you would've thought with her first response that she was mute. She just looked at me like I was some kind of alien from outer space, but no, it was just me! (Smile) She seemed kinda happy about it. And you know what? I kind of really liked seeing her smile. It really made me feel happy inside. The whole evening was, like, so different. No blow up! No short fuse!--from either of us. And the atmosphere was so amazing. I want that every DAY, man!

Erica: You know she's gonna expect that now. But I think she's also going to be really sweet to you, knowing that you actually care.

Lamar: Yeah, I get that. Now she knows she can really expect stuff from me, but it was good. And honestly, it didn't really take too much out of me to do a couple things to help out.

Alex: You are definitely going to be the mama's boy she has been dreaming of. I think your home life is about to get a whole lot better.

Karen: It sounds great, but I'd also be wary of how she's going to try to control you in the future. But, hey, if you feel peaceful and she is happy, sounds like your relationship is winning right now! You go!

Leader: (Nodding in appreciation toward each contributor) Thank you for sharing, everyone. And I love the affirmations! I know that some days can be tough, but finding something positive in your interactions with others can help put things in perspective. It's not just an ugly world out there that is out to get you. There's some good out there, and I hope we can help you to find that!

## **Purpose**

Leader: Our focus today for our 2nd session is on managing anger. This is a safe space to explore our feelings and learn from each other, and this skill will help you in a variety of settings and situations to remain in control despite what is going on around you. I'll guide the discussion and provide support. Last session, we went through our group norms and all of those still apply to this session. We'll discuss those in a moment. We would like you all to interact, but we want you to do that when you feel comfortable with the group. Remember, what's shared here stays here. Is everyone okay with that? (Clarified purpose for that day with group goal, communicated effectively, explained leader role, confidentiality, explained how group would be conducted)

Erica: Yeah, that's fine.

Alex: Totally agree. Safety first!

Karen: Sure, whatever.

Lamar: Yeah, got it.

Leader: Great, let's keep that in mind. I'd also like to review our group norms that we agreed to previously. Please share the norms that you remember that we established last week. (Explaining & Clarifying Group rules)

Alex: I remember that Erica was dead set on starting and ending on time, so I made sure to be here early!

Erica: (Chuckling) Yeah, I really did want to start and end on time, because I have a lot of homework to do in my Honors classes.

Karen: And don't forget, Lamar wanted to make sure nobody would cut him off!

Alex: Yeah! (Smile)

Erica: Uh-huh.

Lamar: You better believe it! I'm definitely going to be able to get my WHOLE piece in, in this group.

Karen: For sure! You can relax a little. Nobody wants to cut you off. You tell us your truth.

Erica: I seem to remember that we also didn't want to let anyone dominate the group.

Karen: Oh, yeah. That's good.

Alex: For sure

Lamar: Why is everyone looking at me? Listen, just let me say my piece, but I'm not going to be taking up all of your time. I'm not like that.

Lamar: Hey! I remember one. Girls...Ya'll need to put your phones down during this group.

Leader: Was it only for the girls?

Lamar: Well, no, but they have the most trouble putting their phones down! We had to ask them like 4 times last week to ignore texts and calls.

Leader: Remember, we don't want to stereotype in group. We are each individuals and should be treated as such. Everyone good with not using phones during group?

Karen: Sure.

Erica: Of course

Alex: Yeah. I get it.

Erica: And I think we need to remember that we agreed to not put others down. In this group, we treat each other as equals.

Lamar: Yeah, got it. Noted.

Karen: I don't intend to, but if I slip, let me know. I don't want to do that, but sometimes I think put-downs have been a defense mechanism.

Alex: I totally understand the struggle, Karen. But yeah, put-downs have really impacted my life in a major way. I won't be doing that, but I'll let any of you know if I feel put down in any way.

Karen: I'm so sorry, Alex. Like I said, if I slip and do that, let me know!

Alex: Will do!

Leader: Ok! I think we've covered all of our group norms. Does anyone have any additional norms they wish to add?

Erica: Not right now, but if I think of any, I'll let you know.

Lamar: Same

Karen: Same

Alex: Same

Leader: Ok. Now, as we begin, what do you all expect from today's session? (Members verbalized expectations)

Erica: I'm not sure. Maybe just to listen.

Alex: I want to learn to keep my cool, especially when things get tough.

Karen: I want to understand why I explode at my mom so easily.

Lamar: I just wanna get through this without getting angry.

Leader: OK! Thank you for your honesty! (Smile) And thank you for sharing. We'll try to address all those points in today's session or a future session together. Thank you all for feeling safe enough to share those honest feelings with us. You are each valuable members of our group. (Provided safe, inclusive environment for cohesion)

## **Focus**

Leader: Let's start by identifying what triggers our anger. Erica, can you share a recent moment when you felt angry? (Engaging the trauma triggers in the initial phase of the intervention: Guerra, et al., 2022). (Established and maintained group focus)

Erica: At school people laughed at my journal when they saw me writing. It made me feel so small and yet furious that I was being picked on. I felt so defenseless! I really wanted them to feel as bad as I was feeling. Maybe they wouldn't be so stupid about how they treated people, then. I mean, why pick on someone for just writing in a journal? Why can't they just mind their own business and leave me alone? I didn't ask them to write. I'm writing, because I want to write.

Alex: Erica, I get that feeling. This week, I got angry when a classmate said something really ignorant about gender. And there I was, just standing there, staring at them, shocked that they would say something like that. It's like they weren't even trying to understand. It just makes me feel so angry because they don't even care how it affects me. I was just so angry. Everybody knows that I identify as nonbinary, and to make a derogatory comment about people like me was just so insensitive. They knew I was in the room! Hello! I'm not invisible, and I do have feelings. Don't try to project your ideals onto me without talking to me and finding out why I identify as I do and how I came to this realization. Some people just seem so closed-minded.

Karen: My mom took my phone away because I came home late. I was so mad I screamed at her.

Leader: Ok, Karen, so you reacted by screaming, but can you describe for us how it was making you feel? What were you thinking and feeling after your mom took your phone away that caused you to react by being mad and screaming at her? (Drawing out members)

Karen: Well, I was thinking that it was so unfair that she took my phone away. Being late was such a small thing, but taking my phone away was huge! That phone is my life! It helps me stay connected with friends and is my lifeline to my social life. Without connection with my friends, my life is pointless! The magnitude of that consequence was waaayyyy too over the top for just being a little late. It was infuriating!

Erica: I feel that, Karen. I know what you're saying.

Leader: I see. Thank you for helping us understand that better, Karen.

Lamar: Some dude bumped into me on purpose and then turned to look at me, and laughed. I was so close to hitting him. It just felt like he was trying to make me react, and boy, it took all I had in me to hold back from doing what I totally felt like doing! I could have really gotten him good, but I decided that he wasn't worth it. It would just mess up too much for me in my life. Somehow, I don't know how, but I just let it go. "Let it go! Let IT go!"--isn't that what Adele sang? Well, somehow I did let it go that day. Now I just got to keep that up.

Alex: Hey! I think you were actually practicing what we learned last week. Didn't "Teach", here, tell us that even though something happens to us, reacting is not a "natural" result. We can actually "talk" to ourselves about the situation and acknowledge our feelings but instead choose a different response. Wasn't it sometime like CBT, or something?

Karen: Yeah, you're right!

Erica: Yes, it was CBT, Alex. That's awesome!

Alex: Thanks! (smiles) Hey, I may not be the sharpest knife in the drawer, but I'm not that dull!

Lamar: Let me guess, your mom's joke?

Alex: Might be...

Karen: Haha! But really, awesome recognition, Alex and awesome application, Lamar.

Lamar: Yeah, I don't like to brag, but I did do a thing last week, didn't I? (Said in mock humility!)

## **Rounds & Dyads**

Leader: Excellent, Lamar! And very astute of you to point out the skill we learned last week, Alex. A+! I appreciate everyone sharing. Yes, feeling hurt, provoked, or restricted can be tough feelings to manage. Now, let's each explore those incidents that made us angry, but this time focus a little deeper on the feelings we were experiencing. After sharing, we'll pair up and discuss further. Erica? Can you start us off? (Use of Guided Discovery aspect of CBT: [Sukhodolsky, et al., 2016]) (Demonstrated Rounds & Dyads)

Erica: I... I lost it when they laughed at me. I felt exposed, like everyone saw me as a joke. I think I just took it a lot farther. I felt like they weren't just joking around about me in that moment writing in my journal, but I felt like they were making an overall assessment of me as, kind of like, being "journal girl", like that was my identity, and it was stupid. And that's who I was. I don't want to feel stupid, I don't want to feel worthless or weird. I want to feel like a normal person that can be treated well and not looked down on. All my muscles tensed up during the encounter, and I wasn't able to enjoy writing anymore after that. Instead, I felt ashamed. Ashamed for liking something that others had decided it was stupid to like. What right do they have to make that decision for me. I've never made any decisions for them. I treat everyone with respect. If you like soccer, I don't make fun of the fact that you chase around a ball all day. If you like fixing cars, I don't say that you have no life, because all you do is hang out under the hood of a car all day. I leave them alone! If you like t...

Leader: Got it! Point well taken, Erica. You DO deserve to enjoy any activities that you like without being harassed by others. I think we all agree that that was really an awful way to be treated. (Looking around the circle for the next person to respond) (Gently interrupting someone talking too much)

Alex: Girl, I would've been mad, too.



Lamar: Oh yeah!

Karen: I hate to say it, but I get it, too!

Alex: Nobody deserves to be treated like that! I don't think I would've kept it inside like you though. I would have TOLD them that they had no right to make fun of my writing. And maybe they were making fun of me, because they didn't know how to write—or else they might like to write, as well. Maybe they were illiterate! In my situation, my anger felt like a fire. That ignorance just erased my whole existence, made me feel invisible. I guess in my situation I wasn't able to stick up for myself, because there is so much shame associated with my gender identity. I feel like I have to hide. I feel like I can't be accepted in society and don't deserve to talk. I feel like I don't belong in the world as many people like to order it, so I should just keep to myself. I feel like I don't have a right to be me. Yeah, I think that is really what is at stake. I feel hurt, but I feel like my hurt is my own fault, because I'm not allowed to be the person that I am. I'm trapped.

Lamar: Man, don't let anyone make you feel trapped. That ain't right.

Erica: (Sighs) I have felt so trapped in the past, and I'm personally tired of feeling that way. I just need to see my value and learn to stick up for myself in those situations (Narrative therapy, in addition to prior narrative).

Karen: You must be telling MY story. Trapped is exactly what I was feeling when my mom came down hard. I felt betrayed by my mom. Like, how could she just control my life like that? My phone is the only thing that really belongs to me and allows me to maintain friendships that keep me sane in the midst of all kinds of stressors in life. And she would take THAT? You have GOT to be kidding me. If you take my phone, and see all my texts with friends or other boys, that's, that's, I just can't take it! I can't have someone take my phone! It just made me see red. I was SO angry I started to lose it.

Lamar: Ha! Talk about seeing red, that's exactly what I saw when that guy bumped into me. Like, say you're sorry or excuse me. But to just look at me and laugh, like I wasn't worth apologizing to and I was like some low-life worthless person... I felt disrespected. Like, he thought I was nothing. Absolutely nothing, next to him. Made my blood boil. Nobody is going to treat me like that and get away with that. I'll show them whether I deserve respect or not! I ain't letting anyone push me around like that. I ain't playin'. Either I get respect, or I'll show 'em how to give me respect. Personally.

Leader: Thank you all for sharing and going even deeper into the depths of what you were feeling. You're being honest, and when you are honest with yourself and others and discover the root of your pain, you can also learn whether those reactions that are so very natural to us can be changed in any way for the better. I know pain, invalidation, feeling controlled or disrespected has the potential to move into intense anger, for sure, but maybe there's a better way. Alex, I think you've been struggling with feeling acceptance. Can you talk to us about that, specifically?

Alex: Definitely: It kind of sucks being treated this way, but I really hate feeling like the odd duck out. Just because I am nonbinary doesn't mean I'm not a person. It doesn't mean that I don't deserve to be treated like everyone else wants to be treated. I'm just as human as anyone else in society.

Karen: You are definitely right. It makes me upset that you are treated that way. You don't deserve that at all!

Erica: It's so true! But you need to recognize who you are and not let them tear you down.

Lamar: Erica's right. Dude, you are just as much a person as any of the rest of us are. We don't treat you any differently, do we?

Alex: No

Lamar: And that's because you've got value. You are somebody, and don't ever let anyone take that away from you.

Erica: I agree so much. Alex, I accept you and want you to know that in group I never think less of you for being nonbinary.

Karen: Neither do I.

Lamar: And you know I don't!

Karen: People are just uninformed and ignorant sometimes and are just not willing to treat people right if they don't think or act like them. If you ask me, that's a sign of prejudice. It used to be

directed just toward African Americans, like Lamar, but now people are finding new things to pick on people for.

Erica: Yeah, Lamar, I just want you to know that we all accept you as you are.

Alex: Thanks, guys, so much. That means a lot. You're my people, too! But you know, I think that I also need to fully accept myself. I also need to listen to insults and accept the messages I'm hearing and then process that appropriately. When I hear things that really cause my blood pressure to rise, I need to take a step back mentally and just absorb the moment. I need to take inventory in my mind as to what is taking place. I need to accept the situation I'm in but commit to not lashing out in response (Acceptance and Commitment Therapy).

Leader: Wow, Alex! Are you familiar with Acceptance and Commitment Therapy?

Alex: No, what's that?

Leader: It's exactly what you just described! It's a form of mindfulness where you learn to accept a situation without judging yourself and your feelings, but it helps you to move on from those feelings to higher goals.

Alex: Wow, that's cool! Had no idea!

Karen: Look at the smarty pants in the group.

Alex: No way. Seriously. Not a smarty pants, but that just made sense.

Leader: A lot of these therapy modalities make sense, which is why we encourage you to use them and practice them. Some we may have to teach you, but some things may come more naturally for you.

Erica: You know, Karen talked a little bit ago about how different groups are marginalized. Like, Alex is picked on by some because he is nonbinary, but people are also pretty tough on African Americans. I'm just wondering what it's like for you, too, Lamar.

Lamar: Wow. You've really opened something up. You really want to know?

Erica: Yeah!

Karen: Yeah!

Alex: Yeah, man! We want to know what you go through.

Lamar: So, you've seen the news recently, right? All those shootings of unarmed black people?

Karen: I have.

Alex: For sure.

Erica: Yeah, I have.

Lamar: Well, that's the world I live in. Just walking around and being black is dangerous. People automatically assume you're guilty. Regular people in society and even the cops.

Alex: I have been so disgusted with how "Karens" are always reporting black people in certain areas, as though you have no right to be in an area that they are in.

Lamar: Yup. That's a biggy. Lots of "Karens" in this world.

Karen: And, but the way, I don't take offense! I know what you guys mean. White women and maybe white people have somehow been empowered to be advocates for themselves and for the threat they feel to the increasing rights of nonwhites. As a woman, though not a white woman, I'm offended that this is happening in society.

Lamar: Yeah, thanks for not taking offense at the phrase “Karens.” I guess we’ve just started using it in society, but I wouldn’t want you to feel offended. It’s just a tough society to live in, in which I feel like prejudice and discrimination has increased and been emboldened in our society.

Erica: I can only imagine. Lamar, when it comes to just everyday activities, what kind of pressures do you feel?

Lamar: I feel the constant strain of needing to make sure that I’m safe. If my mom gets stopped by a cop while we’re out, my heart rate increases. I don’t trust cops. I’m afraid of them. I’m afraid that whether I’m innocent or not I’ll get shot. Shoot first and ask questions later seems to be their mantra when it comes to black and brown people.

Erica; Wow. And when you think about having kids one day, how does that impact you?

Lamar: It makes me sad to think that no matter how much I try to protect my kids, it won’t be good enough. Plus, who knows if I’ll be around to protect my kids. If I get caught doing something simple, I will get crazy amounts of time in jail verses a white kid doing the same thing. Man, I think they just like to lock us up and throw away the key. It’s a tough world to live in. `

Alex: That’s deep. I hate being discriminated against, but I often don’t feel that level of discrimination until I begin sharing about myself. With you, it starts as soon as they see your skin color.

Karen: We can each be a part of the change we seek in society. I’m all for fairness. And I will work to advocate for it!

Erica: Me, too! It’s just not right! So shallow and ignorant.

Lamar: Thanks, guys. It’s a tough road to walk, but I kind of think that maybe I could benefit from Alex’s Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, too. It may not save my life, but it will help save my spirit from being crushed. And to me, that’s worth it. I need courage and strength.

Leader: You kids are amazing. I wish your teachers and parents could see the progress you’re making! I’m so proud. You know, these issues that you are facing, you are not alone in. As an African

American woman, I face discrimination, as well, and the insight that you are sharing shows a level of maturity that would, or should, cause grown adults to blush that they haven't figured out yet although you guys are figuring it out in your youth. Lamar and Alex, while my situation may be a little different, despite the fact that I am an educated woman with a PhD, I am still discriminated against. I'm only seen as a color, and not as a person and often not recognized for what I've accomplished in life. When I listen to you kids connecting, I'm so proud of you!

Now, let's form dyads and delve deeper into these situations to learn whether there is any possibility that we could have had a different reaction in your personal situations. When we come back together, I want to hear what each of you think regarding whether different reactions would have been possible.

### **After dyads**

Erica: After talking about it with Alex, I guess I was really feeling more sad than angry. They don't see the real me. They don't care about the real me. I can only be THEM in order to be accepted, and I just feel like that is incredibly unfair. If I could just recognize their ignorance in the moment and pity them instead of feeling like they had more worth than me, I would be less likely to get angry. I would know who I was and be confident in my value. But I guess sometimes I doubt how valuable I really am. Am I worth as much as they are?

Alex: You are, Erica. You are worth as much as they are, and their value is not greater than yours. You have to believe that and know that. Who are they? They are people just like you or me. They are just so full of themselves that they don't appreciate the great value that you have. They'll appreciate you later when you are an award-winning journalist! But, discussing my situation with you, Erica, made me realize maybe I'm angry because I care so much. I'm hurting, because the ignorant statements they make about gender aren't just knife pricks to my heart personally, but they are hurtful words to be sharing in society with the potential of hurting many more people than just me. There are so many people that are nonbinary, and if it is commonplace to make fun of our gender there will be no emotionally safe place for us. It's not just about me; it's about a culture of ignorance. And I'm scared for what it represents in the society in which we live.

Karen: When Lamar and I spoke, I began to understand a bit why my mom did what she did. I mean, I get that I broke the rule that she had laid down for me, and I should have had some consequence, but taking my phone just seemed like it was too much. Like, couldn't she have taken something else from me. Just not my phone. I need my phone. I can't live without my phone! It doesn't make it less annoying, but I get it. She's trying to do better as a mom. And, I guess I do want to be a better kid. But this is really tough. I just...Taking my phone is really hard for me, because I feel like it's mine.

Lamar: I dunno, talking about my situation with Karen, I guess I found that I was feeling scared underneath all that anger. I don't want to feel like someone can take advantage of me. I ain't victim material. I want to be in charge. I don't want anyone to think they can get the better of me and I will just take it. Uh-uh. (Shaking his head in the "no" direction side-to-side) Not me. I want to make sure people respect me, but I guess I can accomplish that while remaining calm by assertively standing up for myself and suggesting that he should have apologized for bumping into me. After I said my piece, I should've then just left, because if he's about to "start" something I need to get out of the way before I agree to the fight. I need to get myself out of those situations.

## Exercises

Leader: Thank you all for sharing. I can see some major breakthroughs happening right here tonight. You all have shared some profound insight into your situations and have bravely found some alternative reactions that would have a better effect on your minds and emotions. We need to change how we think about situations. We'll talk about that in a bit. Right now, let's do the "Anger Thermometer" exercise. Reflect on the levels of your anger from 1 to 10, where 1 is calm and 10 is extremely angry. Think about what each level feels like and what triggers each level. Erica, would you like to start?

Erica: Sure... Um, level 1 is like, when I'm writing and feeling at peace. But at level 5, my hands start shaking, and I want to be alone. At level 10, it's like an explosion, I can't control my words, and I just... break down.

Leader: That's a very insightful reflection, Erica. Identifying those signs is a big step. Alex, what about you?

Alex: Okay, level 1 is when I'm creating art or dressing up, feeling really free. At level 5, my heart beats faster, and I start to snap at people. Level 10 is like a storm inside; I can't focus and just want to scream or throw something.

Leader: Thanks, Alex. It's important to recognize those physical signs. Karen, your turn.

Karen: At level 1, I'm usually just chilling, listening to music. When I hit level 5, I start arguing and stop listening. At level 10, I'm yelling, crying, and just can't handle being around anyone. I have to be alone, or I might do something that I'll later regret.

Leader: Thanks for sharing, Karen. Recognizing those feelings will help you manage them. Lamar?

Lamar: Level 1, I'm just playing basketball, relaxed. Level 5 is like, my jaw gets tight, and I stare down people. At level 10, I'm ready to fight, totally lose it. My muscles are tensed, I'm in position, and I'm ready to show someone that they ain't playin' with me! I'll show them I'm not someone to mess with.

Leader: Identifying these signs is crucial, Lamar. Thanks for sharing.

Leader: Now I have a question for each of you. Which level are you mostly at, and which level happens more than you wish it did?

Erica: I think for me, I'm mostly at level 1, but once I hit level 5, I pretty much am at a level 10 in like a few seconds. It happens pretty quickly.

Karen: I'd say I'm mostly on Level 1, but it lasts quite a while. I'm mostly by myself. But when I feel provoked by my mom, I don't even hit level 5, I just go straight to level 10. I get pretty hot and angry!

Alex: Well, I'd say that most of the time I'm at a Level 1 internally. After that, I stay at a Level 5 for quite a while. I already know people don't care about how I feel, so I don't want to prove to them that I'm weird by acting "crazy," but at some point I do get to Level 10, at times. It's just not that frequent. Mainly because I fear further taunting by trying to defend myself. Ultimately, it seems there's no way to defend myself.

Lamar: Mmmm. I think I'm not at level 1 very much. I'd say I'm mostly at Level 5, and then spend more time at Level 10 than I wish I did. Life is just stressful for me, and I'm always on edge. I don't really feel like I have much time to let my guard down and just relax. Even with friends! Those situations turn into fights, too. It's a mess.

Leader: Thank you all for your honesty. Now, let's move on to role-play. (CBT) We'll recreate situations that often cause you to feel angry but explore different reactions. Erica and Karen, could you demonstrate a scenario where you might typically get angry, but try handling it in a new way?



Erica: Okay, so, in this scene, I'll be writing, and Karen, you accidentally read over my shoulder, okay?

Karen: Got it.

Erica: (acting out the scene) Hey, I'd appreciate it if you didn't read my stuff without asking. It's private.

Karen: Oh, I'm sorry, I didn't realize. I won't do it again.

Leader: Excellent, Erica and Karen! You handled that with clear communication and respect. And Erica, I am proud of you for demonstrating some assertive skills in standing up for yourself!

Now let's switch it up. Karen't we're going to look at a trigger scenario for you.

Karen: Ok. So, in this scene, my mom is going to tell me I can't go out with my friends.

Erica: Ok. (Acting now) Karen, I need you to help me with some canning this afternoon, so you won't be able to go out with your friends.

Karen: (Taking a moment) Ok. How long do you think it will take?

Erica: It could take the whole afternoon and into the evening.

Karen: Alright. Do you think that if I help with the canning today I can spend tomorrow with my friends?

Erica: Yes! I think that would work out!

Leader: Excellent! You accepted what was to be and negotiated an alternative to free time that might be delayed from your prior goal, but could be realized in the relatively near future!

Now, Lamar and Alex, would you like to try a scenario?

Lamar: Sure, I'll be chilling and Alex, you bumped into me.

Alex: Alright.

Lamar: (acting out) Hey man, watch where you're going!

Alex: My bad, I didn't see you there. No harm meant.

Lamar: (pausing, then responding) Alright, just be careful next time.

Leader: That was a great example of taking a moment to respond rather than react, Lamar. Well done, Lamar and Alex. By recognizing our feelings before they escalate, we can choose how to respond more constructively.

Lamar: I can tell you that wasn't easy. Even to practice. But I know it's helping me to grow.

Leader: Exactly. Now, let's switch. Alex, your trigger will be focused on now.

Alex: Ok. Lamar, you're going to be one of the people in school that treats me like I am not worth anything.

Lamar: Ok. (Beginning to act) So, what are you doing here at the chess club? Don't you know that this is for normal people.

Alex: Normal people like you? (people nearby laugh) I didn't mean anything by that, just that we're all pretty different in our own ways. I really admire how you move to check mate so quickly. I'd like to learn how you do that.

Leader: Love it! You disarmed them with a little humor, stood up for your humanity, and then through humility killed them with kindness by offering them a compliment! That was pretty good! What do you say, guys!

Lamar: Impressive!

Karen: Pretty slick!

Erica: You really are a pretty smart person, Alex!

Alex: Thanks! (smiles broadly)

Leader: Now I'd like to give you an opportunity to "talk" directly with the source of your anger and let them know exactly how you feel. (Utilization of the Gestalt method in group: [Cheung and Nguyen, 2012]). We're going to put a chair in the middle of our group and you will have a chance to unload on the sources of your frustration. And then, you are going to pretend to be those sources of frustration and respond to yourself in a way that you think they would like to respond to you. I would like to have one person try this method this week. Who would like to try this?

Karen: I will! (Karen gets up and moves toward the chair in the center of the group that the leader has placed there. She looks down at the chair, then looks up, as if thinking, and then back down and begins talking.)

Karen: Mami, I don't like you trying to "lay down the law" with me and getting all tough all of a sudden. Everything was fine before that, and I don't like how you're treating me! You used to be nice! Everybody used to say, "Wow. Your mom is the best!" Now, you're trying to be like all the other mothers, and you're not as fun. I don't like it. I also don't like that Papi is always gone. I miss him during the week, and when the weekend comes, I miss the real him since he's so drunk. (Thinking, then continuing) Maybe you were so easy on me, because you were lonely, too, and didn't have the energy to tell me "No" sometimes. Maybe you miss Papi as much as I do. I know you mean well. (Thinking, then laughing) I definitely know I shouldn't get away with all the things I have gotten away with. If you only knew the half of it! Whooooeee!

(Now Karen sits in the chair pretending to be her mother and looks up, as if looking at invisible "Karen")

Karen: Karen, I love you so much. I have let you get away with so many things, because I don't like conflict. I am not a strong personality like you and your father, and when I feel strong resistance, I just give in. You're right, I do miss your Papi, and many times my loneliness doesn't give me enough strength to deal with your strong personality sometimes. However, your Tita has told me some of the things that you have been getting into, and I finally decided that I needed to get stronger and give you guidelines before I make a complete mess into how you are raised. I don't want you to be spoiled. I want you to respect rules and help me at home. Maybe stop thinking only about your needs and think about everything I have to do at home besides working. I need your help. Everything I'm trying to do is all out of love. I love you, Karen.

(Karen gets up and returns to her seat in the group)

Karen: Wow. I really feel like I understand what my mom may be going through. She is a really great mom, and I know I've needed some discipline. Maybe I should stop hating her for giving me some guidelines.

Leader: Karen, that is very insightful. I think you've just experienced a break-through that will really impact your goal of overcoming anger in your life. Seeing things from your mother's perspective has really seemed to have helped to diffuse some of your anger, because you are able to see the origin of your mom's decision in the background of all that is going on in her life right now. Does anybody else see the progress that Karen just made?

Alex: I do. She doesn't seem to be so mad at her mom anymore. Like, she doesn't see her just as out to get her, but instead kind of sees where she's coming from. And, lucky for her, her mom is coming from a very kind, respectful place. She's not trying to take her phone away so she can just give Karen a hard time. She's just trying to maintain some semblance of order and rules. I guess some rules are ok.

Lamar: I'd like to try this, too. Can I try it?

Leader: Sure! Go ahead. We still have time.

Lamar: Ok. (Walks over to the chair and looks down on it) Mom, I'm so sick and tired of you coming home and just right off the bat screaming at me. You don't say "Hi. How was your day?", nothing. You don't even seem to care what is going on with me, all you care about is the house. Man, if you only knew what I go through with those crazy kids in the neighborhood and trying to stand up for

myself since you're not around, you wouldn't be so critical of me. All you do is yell. And you make me feel like I have absolutely nothing good about me. You make me feel like I'm just a big disappointment in your life. I hate the loneliness, too.

(Lamar then gets up and moves to take the seat and portray his mother. After pausing for a bit, he begins.) "Son, I'm just trying my best. You know that in order for us to pay the rent, buy clothes, food, and everything else that you are hoping I'll get you if I have enough money I need to work. And since I'm the only one working to make ends meet, I have to work a lot. I feel so guilty that I don't have more time to spend with you, but this is all I have left after a long day. I just wish you could help me out a little and try to stay out of trouble. I really don't know how to manage all of that by myself. I just have too much on my plate right now. (Lamar returns to his place in the group)

Lamar: Wow, after doing that exercise I think that my mom really does have some legitimate reasons to be struggling with her own emotions right now. Yes, it really grinds at my soul when she yells at me, but she is really being pressed to the limit. I don't know. I guess she needs a little more understanding, and maybe I can step up to the plate a little better so that she can be the person she wants to be without the added stress that I put on her. I guess she does actually deserve that much.

Leader: I think another technique that might be really helpful for you all would be to focus on your breathing.

Alex: You're kidding, right? I know how to breathe!

Lamar: I'm telling you, they give us the strangest assignments!

Erica: No guys, I've tried this before, it really helps.

Karen: Ok, tell us what to do.

Leader: First of all, when you are anxious and getting angry, how would you describe your breathing.

Karen: I guess I hold my breath when I'm angry.

Erica: Yeah, I think I do, too.

Alex: Not me, I breathe heavily and forcefully!

Lamar: Uh, I think that my breathing is a lot more shallow and it kind of hurts. Everything in my body is tense.

Leader: Very good. Those are common reactions to brewing anger within our bodies. So, now to counteract that I'm going to suggest that you think of a positive image in your mind. It could be an image of a calm environment, your relationship with your faith, an animal, just anything that usually brings you joy and can calm you down. Has everyone thought of something calming?

Karen: I've got something.

Alex: I'm all set.

Erica: I think I almost have something to think about.

Lamar: Yeah, I'm good. Got it.

Leader: Great! Ok, so now I want you to close your eyes and think about that positive, calming image and breathe in for 3 seconds, and breathe out for 3 seconds, breathe in for 3 seconds, breathe out for 3 seconds, breathe in for 3 seconds, and breathe out for 3 seconds. How do you feel?

Erica: I feel so much less tense! Amazing! I have got to do this the next time something stresses me out!

Lamar: Yeah, I guess I feel more in control of myself. Hopefully I can use this to slow myself down when my adrenaline starts pumping and I'm getting hyped up for a fight.

Alex: I feel like my burden has been lifted off of my shoulders, and my annoyances are not worth as much as allowing peace and rest to enter my life.

Karen: I agree with what everyone else has already said. It calms me down and helps me to refocus. And my muscles are so much more relaxed.

Erica: Right? Isn't that great?

Karen: It really is. I feel like this will really help my body to be in a much more healthy state of being, too.

Lamar: So, I come from a christian background, and there's this Bible verse that he who can control his spirit is greater than he that takes a city. You know, I often can't control my spirit. But guys, I think that, with God's help and the use of this strategy, I could be able to control my spirit and not let it spiral out of control. This is crazy!

Alex: I know what you mean. This is definitely a technique that I will be able to take with me and use on a regular basis.

### **Dealing With Problem Situations**

**(This is Annette. I think that maybe instead of just referencing how to solve problems we are supposed to show that in dialogue? I'll try to do that below, and you guys can tell me what you think.)**

Leader: Now, let's discuss strategies for when conversations become challenging. For instance, if someone dominates the conversation, we can gently remind them to share the space. If there's silence, we can invite quieter members to share, without pressure. Any thoughts?

Erica: It makes me more comfortable when everyone has a chance to speak. It feels safer.

Alex: And if someone's being negative, maybe we can redirect by asking how they'd prefer things to be.

Karen: Yeah, and if someone tries to rescue another, just remind them we're here to express, not fix each other.

Lamar: And if things get too heated, maybe just take a break or change the subject for a bit.

Leader: Those are all excellent suggestions. Thank you for contributing.

(Annette's suggestion for dealing with problems): Negative member and trying to "get the leader"

Alex: But, I want to go back to Karen and her situation with her mom. I don't know, Karen. I think you don't appreciate what you have. You had the best mom ever before she decided to change. I mean, you had the opportunity to freely express yourself and whatever you wanted to do! You could really be your own person! Now you're going to be restricted by these new "boundaries" that she is trying to create for you. I mean, my foster parents and I are so similar in our expressions that I feel totally free all the time! But you seem like the direct opposite of your mom. I just think you are going to feel so repressed and not feel that you have a voice if you feel you should just blindly do whatever you are told. You're going to change...

Lamar: I agree with Alex. Karen, man, I don't like adults getting in my way. You had it made! And your mama was home!--and she still let you do what you wanted! My mom works so much, so I do what I want when she's gone. But when she gets home, man, she lays down the law and I have no freedom anymore whatsoever. I hate when she gets home and makes me do stuff. If you had a mama that would let you do what you wanted, you would need to fight to get that back! You're crazy for accepting this "new mom." I would say I want a refund! I want my mom back, and I would throw a fit until I got her back.

Karen: I get what you're saying guys, but if you knew my mom like I do, you'd know that I really have taken things too far, I...

Alex: Girl, you are crazy! Get ready to lose your identity! You had a mother that was giving you exactly what you needed to be the person you wanted to be and able to come and go as you pleased, and you are saying "yes" to restrictions? Crazy!--if you ask me.



Erica: You guys are wrong! I totally agree with Karen. Man, I get so uptight with my aunt sometimes and I'm just so frustrated with my situation. Even though I appreciate all she's doing for me, I just wish I had my original family. It's not their fault, but I always feel so upset with all these crazy changes in my life right now! Karen gets to have her family, which already is amazing, and the fact that she wants to value and appreciate and honor her mom is amazing. If I had my mom close, I would do anything to make her proud of me. If you think about it, we're all so spoiled that many of us own our own phones. No mother HAS to let you have a phone, but when they do we should be open to restrictions. We're not adults, you know. We're still teens. We should listen.

Lamar: Have fun, girls! You won't convince me that losing your freedom is a good thing! You got a screw loose!

Leader: Lamar, remember that one of our group rules is to not make personal attacks. You'll want to apologize for that, but then tell me why you view Karen honoring her parents as losing her freedom? And after you share, Alex, share with us why you view honoring parents as losing your identity?

Lamar: Sorry for going personal, Karen.

Karen: (Nods her head in acceptance of his apology) No problem. Forgiven.

Lamar: Sorry to you, too, Erica. I didn't mean to go personal.

Erica: (Nods her head in acceptance of his apology) It's ok. I'll forget it.

Lamar: I think the reason that I view it as a loss of freedom is because when my mom comes home after working long hours and sees me "doing my thing" and she doesn't approve, she just starts shouting and telling me all the things I did wrong and getting all up into my business. Man, I hate when she gets like that! If you had a mama that let you enjoy life and you didn't have to deal with the screaming, why would you give in to a change? You should demand the old mom back, because with her things in your life were working out really well!

Karen: Well, she doesn't really scream. She's barely shown any backbone, but now she's trying to be firm with me and tell me what I need to do. I don't think I should be mad at her. You know? Maybe your mom yells because she is so exhausted and you aren't listening to her while she's away.

Lamar: Man, you just don't know. (shakes his head)

Karen: What don't I know?

Lamar: Like, it's just a hostile environment every night. It's hard to take.

Alex: I think you lose your identity when your parents aren't able to celebrate the uniqueness of you and begin to try to set limits on you and your self expression. I wouldn't want to be limited like that. I want to be free to be me and have people like me for myself. My phone belongs to me, and I shouldn't be inhibited in my communication as a form of punishment. In fact, we're almost adults, I'm not really big into thinking we should still be at the punishment phase at this point anymore. Maybe give me a few more chores, but don't take away any of my stuff! After all, we could run away if they don't want to give us freedom. There's nothing holding us back anymore. We could just start working.

Leader: I don't think you guys need to be on separate sides on this issue. I think you would all agree that self expression and individuality are very important to express. The question is whether any limits are acceptable. I think if you thought about it you would agree that we sometimes need limits to our self expression in order to show care for others.

Alex: You are taking the girls' side. You won't even consider how important self expression is in life! We are almost adults, we need to be free to be who we were meant to be.

Lamar: Yeah, what's up with taking the girls' side? Maybe you're just too old to remember how important it is for us to be free to be who we were meant to be.

Leader: Woah, guys. Let me ask you a question. In your self expression of yourself, have you ever expressed yourself in ways that you later regretted? (Corrective recapitulation; identifying allies)

Alex: No!...Well, I guess there was one time a friend invited me to a really nice event. They knew I was trying to fit in, and I had felt bad for not getting invited, so when they invited me I was ecstatic. The only problem was I decided to dress in my normal kind of frumpy, flamboyant style, and it totally didn't fit the event. I know the friend who invited me was a little embarrassed by how I showed up even though they didn't tell me. It was totally clear that I was not dressed to match the

venue, but that I was there inspite of the venue. I guess I wish I would've done something a little different so they wouldn't have been embarrassed by how I dressed as I attended their event—which they paid for.

Lamar: (sigh) Well, I guess if I would stop spending the whole afternoon on myself and instead decided to wash the dishes or pick up things around the house after school I would really bring a smile to my busy mama's face. Maybe she wouldn't yell at me then, with me yelling back at her. And maybe I wouldn't get in fights during that time...I guess I could be myself but still do something she would appreciate.

Leader: You got it! I think you all really do have the same goals, right? (All heads nod) What you are realizing is that respecting others and being helpful are good attributes to have in your character that don't diminish you, they make you a better version of yourself. And that version will help you to be able to control your anger better since you are choosing to care for others. We're about ready to finish for today, does anyone have any additional comments they'd like to share?

Alex: No, I think I'm good.

Lamar: Me, too.

Karen: I'm good.

Erica: No, I'm finished. And I see we have about 10 minutes left in our session!

Lamar: Ha! Of course you're looking at your watch, now that you don't have your phone! (Smile)

Karen: Hey, I love hanging with you all, but I've got stuff to do, too. But it's been good.

Alex: Same. It's been real, but when it's time to go, it's time to go. Right, Erica?

Erica: Ha! For sure!

## Closing

Leader: Ok! Well, then, as we close today's session, let's summarize our main points. We discussed recognizing the levels of our anger and learned new ways to respond rather than reacting according to our initial reactions. We also talked about our anger thermometers and how to rate where we were at a given time. Erica, what's one thing you'll take away from today? (Planned for closing, summarized highlights, reinforced commitments, allowed time for closing)

Erica: I'll try writing when I feel angry, to sort out my feelings before they get to be too much. I will also consider that maybe I need to be more assertive in standing up for myself to not be bullied, and reaching out to others that can help me when I feel like I can't stand up for myself.

Leader: That's a great strategy, Erica.

Leader: Alex would you like to go now?

Alex: I learned that stepping back and breathing can help me see things more clearly, not just getting lost in anger right off the bat. I also need to accept that some people just won't understand me and will keep their personal viewpoints no matter how it affects me and my community. Since I can't change people, I will just have to accept that they may be unable to be kind to me due to their background. Maybe there is hope that they will change in the future.

Leader: Breathing can indeed be powerful, Alex.

Leader: Karen what have you learned?

Alex: Just a second. Before you go to Karen, I just have to say that I have really been impacted by today. Thanks so much. Thanks to all of you. I have learned so much from everyone today. I'm really starting to love this group.

Leader: No problem. Glad it helped! Now, Karen?

Karen: Me, too, Alex. I'm feeling really bonded to all of you, as well. I realized talking things out and understanding where the other person is coming from can really cool down the situation. I can't wait to try to practice this at home. I'm not gonna lie, if my mom tries to take my phone away again it's gonna be mad hard, but I get it so I'll try to just take it.

Leader: Understanding is key, Karen.

Karen: For sure.

Erica: I just wanted to jump in and agree with Alex, too. You guys are all feeling like family. I really love this group and what I'm getting from it! I'm so glad we still have several sessions together and am already disappointed that this group will not last longer than it will. We'll have to exchange contact info at the end. Anyway, sorry! I interrupted.

Leader: No problem, Erica. We're so glad you shared. I'm really pleased that you are all feeling bonded with one another. This is occurring a little quicker than it normally would in group. You guys really work well together. Ok, Lamar, we saved the best for last! What have you got for us to tie this up?

Lamar: Maybe not everything needs to end in a fight. I can walk away or talk it out instead. AND my mom is one of the best mothers ever. I really need to treat her better. She deserves at least that much. She's the queen of the home, and I want her to feel like that. I'm gonna do better by her in the future.

Leader: That's an important realization, Lamar. Thank you for sharing that. Let's also commit to respecting others and showing in tangible ways that we care for our families, perhaps by being helpful! It's been a really great group today! Anyone have any other thoughts before we close?

Alex: No.

Lamar: No.

Karen: No.

Erica: Not me!

Lamar: Haha! Of course not you, Erica! How'd we do? Are we still on time?

Erica: As a matter of fact, we have exactly one minute left!

Lamar: What'd I tell ya?! (Laughing to himself)

Alex: That's funny!

Karen: Haha, you are waayyy too precise, girl. Love ya, anyway! (Smiles)

Erica: Sorry, guys. Can't help it!

Leader: I am really loving the group cohesion I see happening here. There is an acceptance of one another and a kind of family-type atmosphere that has developed, but we better finish quickly before Erica tells me times up! (Smile).Ok, then. We'll see you all next week, same time, same place. Be safe as you go home tonight. Great group! Looking forward to next week!