

**CREATIVE THERAPY III:  
52 MORE  
EXERCISES  
FOR GROUPS**

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# INTRODUCTION

## WHO SHOULD USE THIS BOOK?

Like its predecessors, *Creative Therapy: 52 Exercises for Groups* and *Creative Therapy II: 52 More Exercises for Groups*, this book has been designed as a practical guide to assist psychotherapists, group leaders, and specially trained teachers in mental health facilities, nursing homes, day programs, inpatient psychiatric units, special education programs, and support groups. It may be used as an adjunct to the psychotherapeutic treatment of such varied problems as Alzheimer's disease, schizophrenia, mental retardation, and depression.

The huge success of *Creative Therapy I* and *II* led to the development of this sequel, which contains 52 new therapeutic exercises complete with illustrations that may be photocopied for group members. The exercises serve as an avenue to therapeutic discussions of important issues that might not be shared through other techniques. Additionally, we have received feedback regarding the use of these exercises with the individual treatment of children. We have learned that children may enjoy the exercises and are consequently less inhibited about sharing fears, concerns, and fantasies.

As we did in the previous two works, this new book explains methods of energizing a group and takes both new and experienced group leaders through the stages for effective implementation of structured exercises. We have used these kinds of materials successfully in a major New York city long-term care hospital. We find that these exercises can help group members develop interactive skills, motivate less-verbal individuals to contribute to group discussions, and encourage group cohesiveness.

## WHAT IS IN THIS BOOK?

*Creative Therapy III: 52 More Exercises for Groups* is presented in an uncomplicated fashion so that the exercises will be nonthreatening to group members. The format allows the leader to refer to directions for each group meeting, and to photocopy the accompanying illustration, which becomes each member's worksheet. In each exercise, members complete a picture that focuses on a particular theme. A discussion follows in which the members discuss what their completed pictures reveal about themselves. Each member is able to look at his or her own illustration and express an initial response that might otherwise have been forgotten. The illustrations are intentionally simple to encourage participants to express themselves as freely as possible.

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## HOW DO YOU USE THIS BOOK?

*Creative Therapy III: 52 More Exercises for Groups* combines the structured expression of art groups with the therapeutic communication of verbal discussion groups. The worksheet provided with each exercise serves as a springboard to discussion for group members. Each exercise is accompanied by a step-by-step set of instructions for the group leader.

Group members sit at a table, preferably in a circle. The leader hands out photocopies of the chosen exercises to members at the beginning of the session. The leader should seek to involve members immediately by asking about the picture.

The group leader introduces the theme, describes the exercise according to the instructions that accompany each drawing, and asks for feedback and comments from the group members. This initial discussion should be used to prepare the members for the task that follows.

Next, group members are given a time frame and directed to "fill in" or complete the exercise with their responses. Additional supplies such as crayons, markers, pens, or pencils may be handed out at this time.

It is important to be certain that everyone has a clear understanding of the task. If questions arise, it is recommended that members be encouraged to ask each other to paraphrase the instructions. In this way members become actively involved and discover they can be helpful to one another.

Setting up a time frame is an important aspect of the structured exercise. These projects work best if the group members understand how much time is set aside for drawing, and how much time is for discussion. For example, in a 1-hour group, 20 minutes might be used for explanation and drawing, and 40 minutes for discussion.

These exercises should be nonthreatening. To reduce anxiety, group leaders should explain that content is more important than artistic talent, and that the drawings are used simply to promote discussion. Some members may be resistant to drawing because of self-consciousness or physical limitations. Encouragement is helpful, but too much encouragement may become stressful. An alternative is to avoid adding extra pressure by allowing anxious members to write rather than draw their interpretations.

Group discussion immediately follows the drawing period. The leader should state a few minutes ahead of time when this will take place. Once group discussion begins, all members' comments should then be directed to the group as a whole.

Members are asked to volunteer to discuss their interpretations. The leader becomes a catalyst to promote and encourage verbal interaction and help focus the discussion. As members see one another present and receive feedback, more may volunteer to discuss their work.

## WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS?

Projective art tasks introduce ideas that provide encouragement to groups searching for a common theme (Dalley, 1984). In addition, these structured exercises have a variety of other uses: to initiate members into a group process; as a warm-up technique; to help a group work through a particular stage in its development; to enhance group members' abilities to interact and share freely; to focus on a specific group need; and to help reduce group members' anxiety and uncertainty. For example, if used with children, the exercises allow the child to indirectly or directly express important ideas, fantasies, and feelings. Significant information about family members and dynamics are often shared as a result of this approach. It must be understood, however, that these techniques are intended as a tool - as one part of a total approach to meet the goals of a particular group.

Structured exercises are a way of accelerating group interaction. Getting in touch with suppressed emotions helps the group as a whole as well as the individual members. Specific exercises may be chosen to help the group work through a particular problem (Hansen, Warner, & Smith, 1980).

Yalom (1983) describes the use of structured exercises with lower-level, inpatient psychotherapy groups. These groups often consist of members with a limited attention span, fearfulness, and confusion. Structured exercises may help such members express themselves. The use of art or drawing exercises is especially helpful in fostering self-expression. These exercises may also stimulate group interest and provide variety. We believe the exercises in *Creative Therapy III: 52 More Exercises for Groups* are very effective with this type of group.

Structured exercises also help insure that no one dominates and that everyone has an opportunity to speak. A balance of verbal input is created. Monopolistic members must develop self-control to allow other members to have their turns. Shy or nonverbal members profit from the required participation, such as described by Levin and Kurtz (1974). These authors studied the effects of structured exercises in human relations groups and concluded that the inactive person benefits from a change in behavioral expectations. Greater opportunity for participation generates more ego-involvement, self-perceived personality changes, and increased group unity.

How does group therapy help group members? Feedback from one's peers, if properly channeled, can be a potent therapeutic force, promoting qualitative changes in self-expression, growth toward self-actualization, and changes in interpersonal behavior.

In his classic work on group psychotherapy, Yalom identifies key curative factors associated with the group process. We believe that many of the exercises included in *Creative Therapy III: 52 More Exercises for Groups* facilitate the curative process. Generally, the exercises encourage sharing and development of trust among group members. The drawings illustrate common fears and anxieties and allow group members to see how they share many of the same concerns. Through the use of the illustrations, members are encouraged to support each other in finding solutions to problems and learning to support each other's needs. Skilled therapists will use the exercises strategically to support the development of other curative factors within the group.

## WHAT ARE THE LIMITATIONS OF THESE EXERCISES?

Through experience, we have found these exercises and materials to be of great value. It is important, however, to realize the limitations of their use. As we have said, these exercises are to be used as a springboard to discussion and as an adjunct to other therapies.

Yalom (1985) describes possible negative effects structured exercises can have on groups. He suggests, for example, that they can create an atmosphere where critical stages of group interaction may be passed over. Structured exercises may also plunge the group members into sharing significant negative and positive feelings too quickly. In addition, the group leader may be too heavily relied upon by the members. This dissipates a group's potential effectiveness as a therapeutic agent.

The Lieberman, Yalom, and Miles encounter group project (1973) studied how structured exercises influence groups. The leaders who used relatively large numbers of structured exercises with their groups were often more popular with group members. However, group members were found to have a significantly lower outcome level than members participating in groups using fewer structured exercises.

There must be a balance to the use of structured exercises. The degree to which they should be used must be carefully weighed by the group leader; otherwise the leader runs the risk of reducing the group's potential and infantilizing the members. Some factors that determine the amount and type of structuring to be employed are the type of group, member characteristics, and the leaders' theoretical orientation (M. S. Corey & G. Corey, 1987).

Additionally, the group leader should keep in mind three of the considerations noted by Pfeiffer and Jones (1983). First, structured exercises should address the specific goals and purposes of the group. The leader should choose exercises directed at interests, concerns, or problems of individual members or of the group as a whole. Second, a more than casual understanding of the members is important, because revelation and exploration of fantasy can be threatening and anxiety provoking. Less-threatening exercises are recommended for groups with anxious or guarded members to promote openness rather than defensiveness. Third, different issues surface at various stages of group development. Groups will function best when the level of feedback expected corresponds to the developmental stage of the group. In early stages of group development, exercises that focus on openness and building trust are more appropriate. Exercises that focus on critical feedback and appraisal will be more successful in the later stages of group development.

## CONCLUSION

*Creative Therapy III: 52 More Exercises for Groups* should offer rewarding experiences for both group leaders and group members. The structured exercises in this book make it easier for group members to focus ideas, feelings, and experiences related to the topic of discussion. Members further benefit from revealing themselves, exchanging feedback, and supporting one another emotionally.

The purpose of this book, however, is first and foremost to help group leaders, therapists, and teachers conduct their groups by providing a framework for successful group experiences. Through the use of specific suggestions, we describe the procedures necessary for group leaders to handle the widest variety of group therapy applications.

In addition, the use of these exercises may also help to alert group leaders to issues for further exploration in individual counseling or other group therapies. Although designed primarily for groups, with slight modification these exercises can be used in individual treatment. In particular, they may be most helpful for children.

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## *Exercise 1*

### **THE ICE BREAKER**

#### **Purpose:**

1. To promote an atmosphere for group interaction.
2. To promote group identity and cohesion.

#### **Materials:**

One photocopy of the illustration for each member; pencils, pens, markers, or crayons.

#### **Description:**

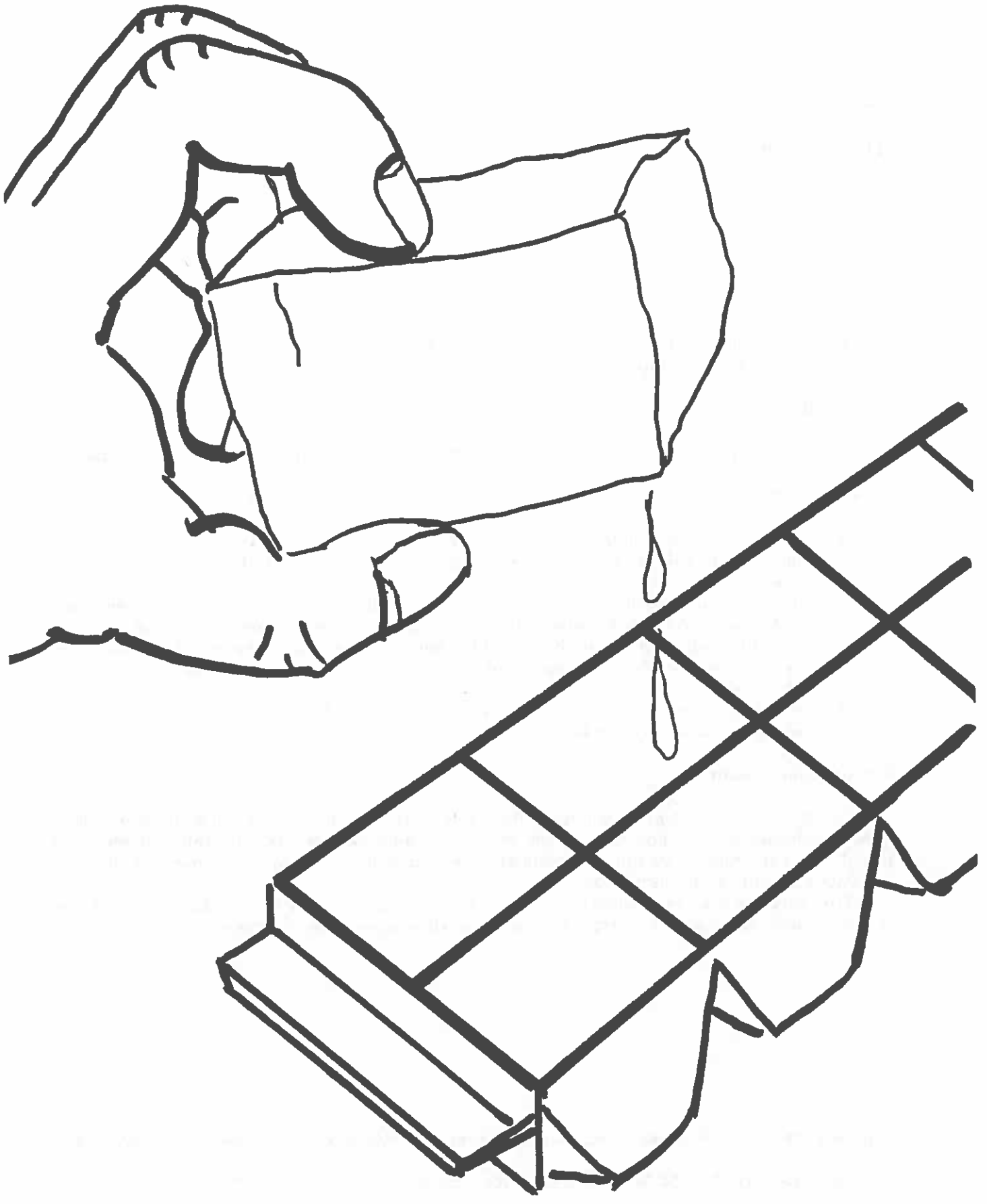
- A. The leader introduces the phrase, "Breaking the Ice." This is discussed by the group members and related to the experience of the members' initial participation in the group.
- B. As the materials are distributed, the leader describes this exercise as a way for members to ask each other questions in order to get to know one another better.
- C. On the illustrated "ice cube" being held, members are asked to write either a question they want to ask a fellow member, or something they wish to know about the future of the group.
- D. The group leader collects the illustrations and places them on a pile or in a container that serves as an "ice bucket."

#### **Group Discussion:**

Members take turns picking out a question from the "ice bucket." Each written question becomes the focus of a short discussion, with the leader encouraging as many members as possible to participate. As the questions are posed, members may have comments and other questions to add to the discussion.

This exercise may be a useful tool for members to get to know one another. It is therefore practical with any group type during the early stages of development.

Exercise 1



## *Exercise 2*

### **GETTING OFF THE GROUND**

#### **Purpose:**

1. To recognize universal concerns about the group experience.
2. To incorporate individual needs into the group process.
3. To develop insight into group dynamics.

#### **Materials:**

One photocopy of the illustration for each member; pencils, pens, markers, or crayons.

#### **Description:**

- A. The group leader begins a discussion about everyone's initial reaction to being a participant in a group. The members are reassured that it is common for people to have concerns when beginning a group.
- B. The group leader shows the members the illustration. The group members are encouraged to relate the picture of the balloon to their concerns about getting the group "off the ground."
- C. In the space provided on each separate balloon drawing, the group leader writes a few words that summarize the issues or concerns brought up by group members.
- D. The balloon drawings are then distributed at random to the group members. Each member is asked to write his or her response to the topic received. They do not have to sign their names.
- E. The completed illustrations are collected by the leader.

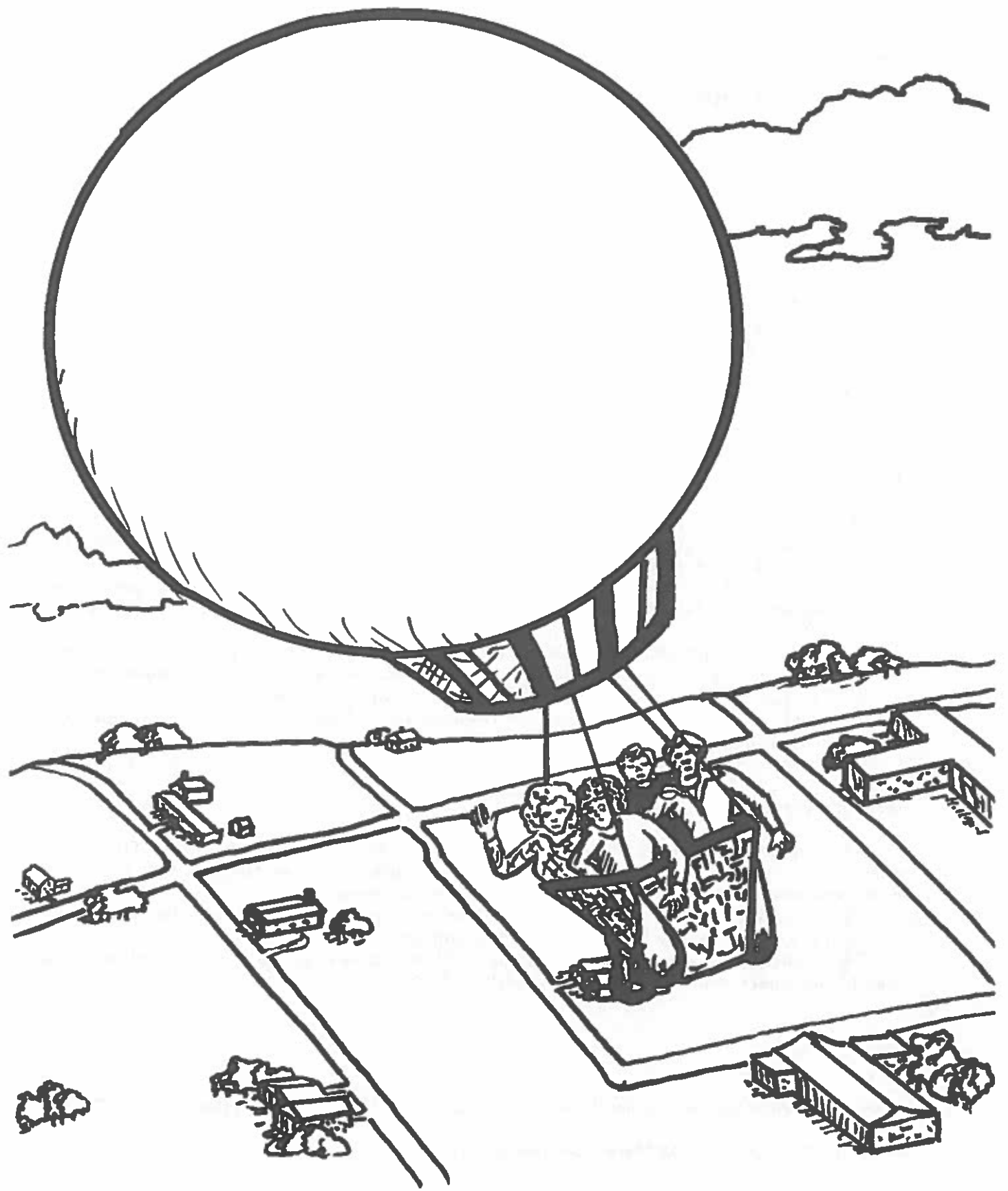
#### **Group Discussion:**

The group leader reads the comments about the group process out loud. The group members are encouraged to explore whether or not any of the recommendations could become practical guidelines for running the group in the future.

This exercise may help group members explore their expectations about the group process, and is an opportunity for input into the group experience.

This exercise may be useful during the earliest stages of group development and is a way for members to become acquainted with each other.

Exercise 2



*Exercise 35*

**A SERIOUS MATTER**

**Purpose:**

1. To identify issues and feelings of concern.
2. To enhance group identity and cohesion.

**Materials:**

One photocopy of the illustration for each member; pencils, pens, markers, or crayons.

**Description:**

- A. The leader describes the exercise as one in which members will be relying on either their memories or their imagination.
- B. They are asked to imagine a serious conversation between an adult and a child.
- C. The materials are distributed.
- D. Members are asked to write or illustrate in the space provided at the top of the picture what they think the depicted man and child might be talking about.

**Group Discussion:**

Members describe the conversation. They are asked to comment on the significance of what has been remembered or imagined, and to describe the relationship this conversation could have to their own lives.

They explore not only what is being said, but what they think the feelings of the depicted figures are.

Members are encouraged to reveal whether this conversation actually took place.

Because of the self-revelation inherent in this exercise, it is effective with well-integrated groups whose members are able to think abstractly.

Exercise 35

