

# Group Therapy



I would like you to consider group therapy. It is one of my favorite ways to work with clients. To you this suggestion may seem exciting and a bit frightening, but there are some reasons you have been asked to think about working in this way. Please talk openly with me about my rationale for suggesting this to you. I will tell you what I think you can gain from this kind of therapeutic experience. Group therapy can be very powerful and transformative but it isn't for everyone. Make sure you make a clear choice about involving yourself in group work. This handout will help you understand what group therapy is all about, what to expect when you come, and some suggestions on how to get the most out of your group experience.

## **What is Group Therapy?**

Group therapy is a gathering of people who are desiring to bring growth and change into their lives. Sometimes groups are formed around specific themes (e.g., depression management, relationship skill building, developing better boundaries, etc.). Other groups are less theme-based and gather for the sake of building general support for personal change and growth. Whether the group you are considering is theme-based or more general, I suggest you consider joining group if you want the support of others and want to offer others support in return.

Many therapy groups are ongoing and continuous; that is, some clients are just starting, while others, whose purposes for group have been met, are finishing. Other groups are closed, being constructed of a group of people meeting for a fixed period of time. Make sure to ask if the group you are considering is ongoing or time limited and closed. This handout will focus on what to expect in an open-ended ongoing group.

Groups will provide you with an opportunity to give feedback to and receive feedback from others. In groups you can gain a lot just by observing the work of others. Groups also offers the opportunity to try new behavior and hold yourself accountable for positive change.

The purposes for group involvement differ from person to person. Not everyone in your group will have the same concerns or interest. The value of group can be quite broad so the individuals in the group may be quite different from you. This is all part of what makes group powerful and enlightening. Come with an open mind and heart and you will gain the most from your experience.

## **When You Come to Group**

When you arrive for your first group session, you probably will feel a bit apprehensive, this is normal and quite common. You will find a half dozen strangers in a circle. I will do my best to help you feel at home and welcomed in the group. Others will also offer you reassurance and support right away so your anxiety

will be lessened by the time the first meeting ends. At your first group session I will explain the rules and structure of the group, have you sign a copy of the Group Contract form (attached), and ask the other group members to introduce themselves to you.

At the outset others will want to know who you are and perhaps why you have joined the group. At first you may be afraid to say very much. Share only what feels comfortable to you. Because you don't yet know if you can trust the group, take your time allowing the group to prove itself trust-worthy to you. In time trust will form and you can begin risking more by opening up about who you are and what you are wanting to add or change in your life. It won't take long for an authentic caring and trusted support to develop. In the first several sessions you are welcome to sit and observe without sharing much of yourself until you feel comfortable.

Group therapy aims at assisting you to know yourself and to know in which direction change will be most rewarding. Group helps you know, at an emotional level, that despite all else, you can have the experience of unconditional acceptance by others. It is in such a state of compassion that you will find the freedom and self-confidence to grow and fill out your full humanness. Group will help you learn to communicate with poise, confidence, and without fear.

A chief value of group therapy lies in the fact that you, as a participant, can come to perceive yourself through the reaction of others. You can get feedback on how you function as a member of a group. You may wish to use the group as a crucible in which to test out a new way of behaving, following which you may receive feedback on how others perceived the new you. A successful group therapy results in a close-knit, interdependent group whose members affirm one another and assist one another to achieve their growth goals.

In summary, group therapy functions as an assistance to help you achieve the following:

- An awareness of unconditional acceptance.
- An awareness of your inner feelings toward yourself and others.
- An awareness of how others react towards you.
- An awareness of helpful directions of behavioral change.
- An awareness of trustworthy environment in which change can successfully occur.
- An awareness of support from empathic and compassionate others.
- An opportunity to practice new and constructive behavior.

### **How To Get The Most Out Of Group**

The following guidelines are set forth to assist you in making group therapy a meaningful growth experience:

1. Know why you are in the group. Keep your focus on your personal goals.
2. Be a participant, not just an observer. Growth comes from risking, and the group will make a safe place where risks are encouraged and supported.
3. Communicate with the whole group. Any communication about a group member that occurs outside the group setting, as during a break, should be communicated back to the group.
4. Information gained in group is confidential. Group experiences are not for sharing with friends outside the group. On the other hand, you are encouraged to share with others how you are growing, as this tends to strengthen you. But group information is to be kept in trust.

5. Every member is responsible for the interaction and the success of the group.
6. As much as possible keep the experience in the here and now. Deal with conscious feelings, perceptions, and behaviors with a focus on what is alive in the room.
7. Speak directly from your honest feelings and thoughts, whether it be anger, affections, or indifference. The kindest thing you can do for fellow group members is to communicate to them your honest perceptions of them.
8. Be as spontaneous and authentic as possible. Do not filter yourself for the sake of pleasing others.
9. Avoid advice giving. It may seem as though you are trying to help another but allow others the freedom to ask for support or guidance if they desire it. Be aware of the tendency to rush in to fix others out of your own anxiety. Speak about your anxiety instead of advising others on how they can change.
10. Be aware of your changing feelings towards others and happenings within the group, both positive and negative.
11. Group is a place to watch yourself. A basic principle is, “as you are in the group so you are in the world.” Use the group as an agent for increased self-awareness and growth.

## **Conclusion**

Small groups in themselves are not new. Through the centuries they have been an integral part of spiritual traditions, learning processes, work-task forces, and general emotional support. Group therapy is designed as an instrument by which you can achieve your goals of self-realization. The group will provide for you an atmosphere in which you can gain self-understanding, and find motivation to become the person you want to be. Welcome to group.

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## **Group Contract**

Group therapy involves several important aspects, they are listed below. Please review these and discuss concerns with your therapist before beginning the group.

### **Boundaries**

Others may ask you to reveal things about yourself in the group. It is up to you to share as much as you feel safe to share. As your trust grows in the group you will likely feel more comfortable with disclosing. Likewise, respect the boundaries of others. Feel free to ask whatever you wish as long as you allow others to decline to reveal. Time boundaries are also important. Be conscious of the fact that you are sharing the group time with others.

### **Confidentiality**

The issues that come up in group stay in the group. Feel free to share as much as you feel comfortable revealing within the group. Conversations about any group member should only take place when that group member is present. Discussions outside of group, between group members, should also be considered confidential. Breaking confidentiality will lead to automatic dismissal from the group.

### **Commitment**

You are asked to give the group a **two session notice if you plan to discontinue**. This allows the group to finish any issues that may have come up with you and gives the group a chance to say good-bye.

### **Cost**

Group therapy costs \$80.00 per hour and a half session. You are charged for a complete month whether or not you attend each session. Since your insurance will not pay for missed sessions, payment of a missed group will be your responsibility. You are **allowed one holiday or absence every four months without charge**. Any additional absences will be charged.

I have read and can abide by these group standards.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date