

Group Therapy



I would like to invite you to consider group therapy. It is one of my favorite ways to work with clients. This suggestion may seem exciting or a bit frightening, but there are some reasons you have been asked to think about working in this way. Let me explain my rationale for suggesting this to you. There are a variety of powerful things you can gain from this kind of therapeutic experience. Group therapy can be very 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 it will offer you 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 desire 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 people gather for the sake of building general support for personal change and growth. Both types of groups give you the opportunity to get the support of others and 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 and meet 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.

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. Groups will provide you with an opportunity to give feedback to and receive feedback from others. In groups you can gain a great deal just by observing the work of others. Groups also offer the opportunity to try new behavior and hold yourself accountable for positive change. These differing purposes and benefits are 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 a normal response. You will find a circle of a half dozen other individuals. I will do my best to help you feel at home and welcomed in the group. Group members 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 some things about you and perhaps why you have joined the group. You may feel timid to say much in the beginning. Share only what feels comfortable to you. Take your time in allowing the group members to prove themselves trust-worthy to you. In time confidence will form and you can begin risking more openly 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 trusting support to develop. You can allow yourself several sessions to observe, without sharing much, in order to build your comfort and trust.

Group therapy will assist you in knowing yourself and identifying the direction of change you may wish to make in your life. The group will give you the experience of unconditional acceptance. It is such a rewarding experience to be seen, supported and encouraged to become your fullest self. Group members will help hold you accountable to achieve the goals you set for yourself. In addition, group will help you learn to identify your needs and communicate these directly and confidently.

A chief value of group therapy lies in the fact that you, as a participant, can come to perceive yourself through the reactions of others. You will 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 news 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 where members affirm one another and assist each another to achieve their individual growth goals.

Here's a summary of the ways in which group can assist you. Group will offer you:

- an experience of unconditional acceptance
- heightened awareness of your inner feelings toward yourself and others
- feedback about how others see and react to you
- clarity about directions for behavioral change
- an experience of a trustworthy environment in which change can successfully occur
- an opportunity for support, empathy and compassion from others
- a safe place to practice new and constructive behavior
- accountability for taking steps toward your desired goals

How To Get The Most Out Of Group Therapy

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. Keep in mind that any communication about other group members 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 family and friends outside the group. 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, affection, 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." Group therapy is a perfect place to increase your self-awareness and growth.

Conclusion

Small group gatherings 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.

Please sign the attached Group Contract and bring it to your first group session.

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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 (print)

Date

Signature