



Group Therapy Handbook



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Welcome to Group Therapy

Group therapy is a valuable adjunct to psychotherapy and differs from 12-step meetings because dialogue and cross-talk are encouraged in group. This allows for a broader more inclusive foundation and intimacy among members. Even though group is open and ongoing, new members are asked to make a 10 week commitment to group which affords a specific chunk of concentrated energy towards intra-psychic change and solution focused life shifts. Being seen and heard as your authentic self by contemporaries with similar struggles can be a very powerful intervention. So often loneliness and psychological change go hand and hand; the old patterns have fallen away or no longer work and new ways of being, new connections have yet to manifest. Group will be held at the same time each week with an opening and closing format. Each member is of vital importance to the group and you are a member of group whether you are absent or present. Being accountable for your actions, keeping commitments, and prioritizing recovery is absolutely crucial to the health of the group and conversely for individual healing.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality is an important aspect of your therapy group. It is necessary to establish trust and cohesion in the group, and all must assume this responsibility for the group to be functional and healthy. Please do not share identifiable information about other group members with family, partners or friends. If you do share about group to those closest to you, discussions about group need to be limited to what you have shared with the group. Group needs to be a safe place. Violations of confidentiality will hurt the process.

Time Commitment

A personal commitment to a group is made for a minimum period of 10 weeks. However, if in that time you consider leaving the group, it is strongly advised that you discuss this with the group leader and members of the group before making a decision. This is important for both you and the group as a whole.

Fees, Billing and Insurance

Fees: Please call my office to find out about fees. At least 30 days notice will be given for any fee changes.

Billing/Payment:

You may pay by cash, check or credit card. You are expected to remain current with payment; therefore, credit card information will be kept on file in order for billing to remain current.

Statements:

Statements can be provided if requested and may be used to submit to your insurance carrier. Statements reflect all session charges, treatment service and code, all payments made and license number.

Absences

Absences are an important issue since the absence of one group member affects the group far more deeply than that group member may realize. Therefore, your presence is important for each weekly session. This commitment is made in order to foster and promote group bonding and support, which are crucial in order to benefit from this type of therapy.

Advanced notice given to the group facilitator and/or discussion with the group (while in group) about a future absence would be considered an excused absence. However, repeated excused absences over a period of time may become a matter of concern to your therapist and/or other group members and may be addressed with you in your group.

Cancellations

If a group is scheduled to meet during a commonly recognized holiday, it is strongly recommended that the group move to an alternate, convenient time for that week. Maximum effort must be made to find a time, convenient to all, so the process of the group will not be interrupted. If the group meeting is moved and a member has previous obligations, you will not be charged for that group. In the event that group is cancelled by the group leader, then the fee for that group will be waived.

Outside Relationships With Group Members

Support among members is encouraged. However, fragmentation of the group can undermine the work of the group as a whole. Examples of fragmentation are engaging in a sponsor-sponsee relationship within the group, the discussion of group issues outside of group. All of these divisions are referred to as “sub-groups” and can be destructive because they can lead to secrets or withholding of information from other group members. Secrets affect everyone. Recovery requires rigorous honesty and without it, the integrity of the group can be affected. Such occurrences must be discussed in group and resolved in favor of the integrity of the group.

Respect the Process

Any concerns should be communicated directly with your group leader. Please refrain from devaluing or gossiping about your group facilitator or other group members. This is to help protect the safety of the group.

Treatment Concerns

For the benefit of the individual and the group, the following conditions will be treated seriously:

1. Unusual or dangerous behaviour
2. Repeated breaches of commitments and group boundaries
3. Other marked psychiatric symptoms, including suicidal ideation
4. Aggression towards others

Outside Evaluations & Referrals

When warranted, group members may be asked to consult with a psychologist, psychiatrist, or obtain a physical evaluation. If a group member is found to be unable to maintain the goals of the recovery group, appropriate referrals will be made to a more intensive program.

Group Therapy Agreement

Please read the above information closely. You will be asked to sign an agreement to the above guidelines before your first group meeting.

Frequently Asked Questions

How many people will be in the group?

A group meeting will have between 6 - 10 participants as well as the group leader. From time to time there may be a psychotherapy student in attendance to observe and gain educational experience.

What does a typical group session look like?

Each session is 90 minutes long. This includes a 10 minute break about halfway through. Any materials will be provided in session. At the beginning each session clients are asked to provide an account of successes and failures that occurred over the past week. There is a follow up on ideas / topics / questions from previous session.

Therapist will introduce a new idea / exercise for discussion.

Large group may divide into break out groups.

Summary of discussion points will be provided by group leader.

Homework / reading may be assigned for next session.

Is the space used accessible?

We endeavour to meet in venues that are accessible to people of various physical abilities and limitations. That being said, not everyone's definition of accessible is the same. If you have any special needs please contact the group leader and they will do their best to accommodate. If it is not possible to meet those needs the group leader may give suggestions to other organizations that can better meet your therapeutic needs.

I am afraid of public speaking

Group therapy is not a performance. You will only be asked to share what you are comfortable in sharing. Remember that becoming vulnerable and stepping outside of your comfort zone can be an important part of creating meaningful change in your life. Group can be a good place to practice those skills in a safe environment.

What if something happens that makes me feel uncomfortable?

Therapy is about pushing boundaries and moving outside of your comfort zone. Often the discomfort you may feel is the desire to maintain the status quo and fall back on old coping mechanisms. A strong component of **group therapy** is learning how to deal with discomfort and trying new strategies in managing behaviours and thought processes.

If you feel distressed by something that happened in the group that you cannot seem to process, contact the group leader to discuss other techniques that may help.

Will I receive a certificate for completing this course?

A certificate will be given to all who request one and have attend a minimum of 7 meetings

I am taking this course as mandated by the court/my employer/my legal counsel and need additional paperwork.

If additional documentation and / or consultation with outside professionals is required please contact the group leader before starting to attend sessions. Any additional fees will be negotiated / set prior to joining the group.

Benefits of Group Therapy

Renowned psychotherapist Dr Irwin Yalom created this list of benefits that come from group therapy. (Yalom 2005)

Universality - When you are dealing with an issue it is easy to believe that you are the only one who has these experiences and feelings. When you are part of a group of people with similar challenges and reactions you realize that you are not alone and your struggles are valid. It combats a sense of isolation and can raise your self-esteem.

Altruism - In a group you are able to help each other. This allows each member to realize that while they may be having problems they still have something to give, not only to the members of the group, but society as a whole. In addition to boosting self esteem this helps develop adaptive coping styles and interpersonal skills.

Hope - In each group members are at different levels of recovery. Seeing someone further along in healing gives hope that change is possible. Members can be inspired by the successes of others to try new techniques. When success is recognized and celebrated members can use that boost to help others join them on the path that they have discovered.

Imparting information - In one on one therapy there are only two lived experiences in play. In group therapy there is a “hive mind” of information. While not always therapeutic in nature some information can help further healing in others. Knowing the name of a good mechanic or where to find a specific food item may not seem important, but relieving the stress of having car trouble or tasting a bit of positive childhood memories can lift the spirits and make it easier to endure other hardships.

Re-evaluating Childhood and Family Dynamics - Often members unconsciously begin to identify the group therapist and other group members with people from their background and family; this is a type of transference. Through interactions within the group, members are able to see how those relationships impact their life and actions. This can help stop the unhelpful cycles started in childhood and keep them from affecting present day relationships.

Development of socializing techniques - The group setting provides a safe and supportive environment for members to take risks by extending their repertoire of interpersonal behaviour and improving their social skills.

Imitative behaviour - Members of the group can see positive social, communication and conflict resolution skills in actions and imitate them as a way of developing their own. For example they may see how to share personal feelings, remain calm and respectful during conflict, engage in active listening, and how to be supportive of others while maintaining boundaries.

Cohesiveness - Humans are by nature social beings. It is a primal instinct to want to belong in a group, and it is this drive that leads to personal development. When cohesion happens all the members feel a sense of belonging, acceptance and validation. It is believed that this is the main therapeutic benefit that all others stem from.

Existential factors - Learning that one has to take responsibility for one's own life and the consequences of one's decisions.

Catharsis - Is the process of releasing, and providing relief from, strong or repressed emotions. Group can act as an emotional safety valve. When members are freely able to tell their story to a supportive audience without fear of judgement they are able to also release feelings of shame and guilt that they may be carrying.

Interpersonal learning - Interactions within a group therapy setting are just like any in the outside world, but without the emotional baggage or feelings of responsibility that are tied to social, familial or employment relationships. Within the group, a member's behaviour is given feedback and can cause a new level of self awareness about their impact on others.

Self-understanding - Is similar to Interpersonal learning. The self awareness gained triggers new levels of personal understanding. These new ideas can result in a chain reaction of revelation about unconscious motivations that lead to undesired behaviours. When they see "the light of day" they are easier to identify and change.

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We are members of one another. What binds us together is far greater than what separates us... because of our interconnectivity, what happens to the least of us happens to all of us. Whatever you do for the least of us, you do for all of us.

-Bennet Omalu

My humanity is bound up in yours, for we can only be human together.

-Desmond Tutu

*Alone we can do so little;
together we can do so much.*

-Helen Keller



Diversity is about all of us, and about us having to figure out how to walk through this world together.

-Jacqueline Woodson

Individually, we are one drop. Together, we are an ocean.

-Ryunosuke Satoro

There are no problems we cannot solve together, and very few that we can solve by ourselves.

-Lyndon B. Johnson