**Introduction**

There is a natural tendency for people to gather in groups for mutually beneficial purposes. Through groups, individuals accomplish goals and relate to others in innovative and productive ways (McClure, 1990). People would not survive, let alone thrive, without involvement in groups. This reliance and interdependence is seen in all types of groups from those that are primarily task-oriented to those that are basically therapeutic. In order to be effective, group leaders must be aware of the power and potency of groups. They must plan ahead and they must be sensitive to the stage of development of the group. Equipped with this knowledge they can utilize appropriate skills to help their groups develop fully (Gladding, 1994). Proper preparation and strategic intervention increase the chance of running a counseling group smoothly and effectively.

**Types of Group Counseling**

1. Psychotherapy Groups

Group psychotherapy is based on the understanding that the relationships that are built between people are necessary to regulate all aspects of daily living. These groups focus on what members can do in the here and now and help members work together to form a cohesive group in which they can freely share their victories and setbacks in a safe and supportive environment.

Therapists that use psychotherapy in a group setting must practice empathy in order for individual group members to communicate freely with each other. These groups help those new in recovery build the interpersonal skills they need in order to effectively communicate with others in a healthy manner.

2. Cognitive Therapy Groups

Another popular type of group therapy in drug treatment is cognitive therapy groups. As its name suggests, these particular groups use cognitive behavioral therapy and other similar therapy styles that will help newly recovering addicts identify patterns of behavior that have kept them stuck in their substance abuse.

Therapists in cognitive therapy groups work with clients to control their thought processes and their addictive behaviors and help give them the tools to cope with the stressors and triggers they encounter in a more proactive fashion and without having to resort to the use of drugs and alcohol.

\*Bonus:

Wilderness Treatment

You also might be interested in finding out more about our Wilderness Treatment Program at First Steps Recovery in Clovis, California (Fresno County). Used in conjunction with individual therapy, group counseling, art therapy, music therapy, cognitive behavioral therapy and more, our Wilderness Treatment Program is a therapeutic intervention that uses nature as a backdrop and adventure and exploration as a tool for growth and self-discovery.

3. Dynamic Group Therapy

Dynamic group therapy is yet another popular therapy option that drug and alcohol rehab facilities use to help addicts address and overcome addictive behaviors. This form of addiction group therapy focuses on an addict’s deficits in both regulating their own behavior and any defects in character the addict may possess. Dynamic group therapy gives clients the supportive environment to examine the common issues that are shared within the group. This cohesiveness allows each member to overcome feelings of isolation and shame, as well as establish a safe environment with the goal of learning how to effectively control their emotions and feelings and achieve abstinence.

4. Relapse Prevention Groups

As a person successfully completes a drug treatment program, they may feel their recovery journey has come to an end. In reality, the real work in recovery truly begins once an individual transitions back into their normal daily routines. The first few months of recovery is when addicts are at their most vulnerable, and it is important for people new in sobriety to have the extra support needed to make this transition much easier.

Relapse prevention support groups are a major fixture of aftercare programs and are designed to help clients identify the triggers in their environment that have the potential to lead them to relapse. In these groups, clients work on refining coping skills and lean heavily on peer support, continued involvement in 12-step groups, and the utilization of educational programming that will help addicts better understand the chronic disease of addiction.

5. Mutual Self-Help Groups

Perhaps the most common, effective, and popular type of group therapy outside of an intensive treatment program are mutual self-help support groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous. Many drug and alcohol treatment facilities base their programs and services on 12-step philosophy, and active participation within these groups is paramount in helping the individual overcome their addiction.

These self-help groups are made up of people who share a common condition and a common goal. Outside of residential treatment, AA groups are self-run and offered in large groups, small groups, and other meeting types. These meetings are free of charge and focus on mutual support and the achievement of abstinence.

6. Network Therapy

A big indicator of success in sobriety is the presence of a substantial support network comprising of family and friends who are fully supportive of a person’s decision to lead a recovery-based lifestyle. Network therapy involves using the social network of the newly recovering addict in a group format to provide support for behavioral change and relapse prevention.

Cognitive-behavioral therapy provides the foundations for network therapy, and its ultimate goals are to help clients achieve and maintain their hard-earned sobriety. It is believed that participation of individuals who are part of the patient’s network of relationships can enhance the outcome of treatment.

**Types of Group Counseling**

Group TherapyThere are four main stages of group therapy. Once the group is formed there is generally a pre-group meeting. Each group member is screened to make sure they will be an asset to the group rather than a setback.

The four stages of a group, once established, are; the initial stage, the transition stage, the working stage and the final stage.

Each stage has a purpose and there are different expectations that must be addressed as the group progresses through each stage. The counselors and group members have roles that they fall into that also change as the group transforms.

Group Therapy – Initial Stage

The first stage of a group is the initial stage. The purpose of the initial stage of a group is to establish expectations of what the group is going to be like. These expectations include trust, roles, and goals. Confidentiality and conflict need to be addressed immediately. Also, any culture concerns must be dealt with. The counselors are there to explain the process and to support each member when dealing with confrontation. The group members must be participatory and involved. This can be tricky with court appointed group members but if the expectations of involvement are explained thoroughly they will learn that it is either participate in the group or face legal consequences.

Group Therapy – Transition Stage

The transition stage is a very difficult stage to get through. This stage comes after the initial stage and is when most of the group members feel anxious about sharing their feelings with strangers. Some members become defensive and resistant while others may be shy and fearful. It is the role of the counselor to keep the transition period on track and as pleasant as possible. This stage can be extremely uncomfortable for the counselor as they may be confronted, belittled, or attacked. If the counselor is good at leading groups the group will learn to trust and respect the counselor during this stage by leaving the negativity out. For the members to get the most out of the group they must participate cordially and this includes listening and giving advice.

Group Therapy – Working Stage

Once the transitional stage has settled, group members will start to feel comfortable enough to really get into the deeper issues that the group was designed for. This is called the working stage. This stage comes after all the kinks get worked out during the transition stage and is when each member is able to explore their thoughts and emotions which may be triggered by someone else’s words. The counselor in this stage will guide the group through this process using techniques and challenges that bring out emotions.

A good counselor will know how to guide by using minimal words themselves. Counselors should be able to read each group members verbal and non-verbal language. Group members in this stage need to be honest about their feelings and not be afraid to speak their mind. They should not feel as though they are being judged or criticized and if they are, it is the counselor’s job to address these issues.

Group Therapy – Final / Understanding Stage

Lastly, the final stage is when the group understands that they are no longer going to be together. This stage allows the group members to reflect on their experience and decide how they will use the knowledge that they acquired in their future occurrences. This stage often comes with feelings of sadness and separation. During this stage, feedback is very important. It is the role of the counselor to educate on what each member should expect from the experience which includes reminders of confidentiality and change that may not be noticeable immediately. Group members will be encouraged to give feedback to other group members as well and in the end it is up to each member to decide what to do with the experience that they received.

All groups are progressive and very unique. Some groups get a lot from their experience while others leave empty handed. The success of a group is a combination of how each group member performed and how well the group leader was able to lead and keep everyone on track. Either way, group work as proven to be quite successful. The stages of the groups vary in length and duration and also depend on the goals and purpose of each group. If a group leader leads a successful group they will know because the group members will be able to change successfully with the help of the group experience.

Is Your Group Therapy Leader Effective?

In a chemical dependency or addiction setting, being a group leader can be very difficult. All group leaders have it difficult but in chemical dependency, members of the group can still be adjusting to sobriety so their judgment may be a little clouded. One of the most important things a group facilitator can do is to properly screen members before the group starts. It can be detrimental to the entire group if a member is not ready or prepared for the experience. For example, in a chemical dependency setting if all of the group members have two weeks of sobriety under their belt and somehow someone who is not sober is allowed to participate then a catastrophe could possibly surface.

There is so much more to being an effective group leader once the process starts. For instance, knowing how to handle conflict, resistance, and how to guide the group in the right direction is very important for the leader to understand. Diversity seems to always have some sort of role in a group setting so an effective group leader will be able to understand different cultures and how to establish trust between all cultures.

**Typical Challenges of Counselling Process Groups**

Following on from my blog on ‘The Function of Process Groups,’ I wanted to discuss some of the typical challenges often encountered in process groups.

According to Marriage and Family Therapist, Shalini Mongia, in process groups trainee counsellors typically struggle with issues pertaining to the pressures and stresses of their courses, challenging clients, issues with supervisors or the supervision process, preparing for tests and exams, handing in assignments, dealing with countertransference issues, and facing the difficulties of undergoing the emotional changes inherent in counselling training (Mongia, 2014). They are consistently exposed to so many variables that leave them feeling vulnerable as they confront their own insecurities, meanwhile knowing that they have to come out in one piece at the end of it all. No matter how beneficial process groups are for trainees, it’s also a scary affair, observes Clinical Psychologist, Ryan Howes: it’s not easy sharing one’s struggles and uncertainties with fellow students who, though sharing similar experiences, are nevertheless by and large strangers (Howes, 2014).

Broken Boundaries

Different people come to process groups with different experiences and attitudes towards trust and confidentiality. Not everyone is, or could possibly be expected to be, on the same page regarding these issues. Furthermore, although participants tend to verbally commit to respect the confidential nature of the process, many problematic dynamics that emerge later in the group point to breaches of trust and confidentiality.

It could be argued that it is inevitable that issues occurring within group sessions will spill over to the outside, affecting relationships among a few or everyone in the group – negatively or positively. Also, problematic interactions between members outside the group often find their way into group sessions. It’s understandable that personal battlefields will shift depending on where trainees find themselves, and how this impacts the rest of the group’s functioning in and outside sessions cannot be predicted.

Fears and Vulnerabilities

Not everyone is comfortable revealing aspects of themselves that generate fear and anxiety; most people avoid acknowledging, let alone talking about, their own shadow selves. One upshot of this psychological reality is that initially, group participants tend to avoid talking about issues that are really troubling them about one another. Typically, they will talk about the stresses of getting through the course, often using these topics as veiled references to other group members they perceive as problematic. When this pattern goes on for too long – the group facilitator will likely notice and comment on it.

Frustrations inevitably arise, leading to awkwardness, and eliciting varied responses from individuals. This scenario is common to almost all process groups, and is one of the most difficult hurdles to negotiate for everyone. A typical, unspoken question that emerges in the beginning, and that remains constant throughout the life of the group might be: “How much of myself can I reveal without falling victim to overwhelming anxiety, shame, or ridicule?” It’s also not uncommon for participants to re-experience fears relating to childhood fantasies and experiences of loss and abandonment (Lenehan, 2004).

Unexpressed Feelings

It usually takes a while for some people to express themselves with honesty in a group setting where openness and feedback from others is encouraged. Revealing joyful emotions of personal triumphs can be easy, but this is often not the case where negative or uncomfortable emotions are the main focus. Although issues of trust, confidentiality, and the value of sharing thoughts and emotions are encouraged and talked about, it does not mean trainees will have an easy time expressing themselves.

Some people will find the courage to open up after a number of sessions, and this may frustrate others who make more of an effort in talking about their misgivings and shortcomings. In successful process groups, the actions of group members tend to have a knock-on effect; when reticent members observe that others are consistently taking the plunge to reveal themselves amid feelings of vulnerability, they feel encouraged to do the same. However, it takes a while for everyone to play ball, which can hamper the effectiveness of the group.]

Techniques of Group Counseling

1.Reflection – Allow student to understand fully each persons comments and how they can relate to what they just stated

2.Active Listening\*\* - Allow student to be very aware of their listening skills within a group and how important they are. This allows the group to be more open with each other when they know their group members are paying attention to their feedback.

3.Clarification – Allow student to be very concrete with others in the group of comments made

4.Summarizing – Allow students to see the bigger picture of what was said in the group by doing a recap of what was said. Provides comfort within group.

4.Linking – Allow students to see how their problems connect with others’ in the group and they have the same concerns

4.Encouraging – Allow students to be more open with group and makes sharing personal feelings more inviting.

5.Focus – Allow counselor and students to give attention to groups concerns

6.Cutting Off – Allow counselors to keep the group on topic and give everyone a chance to share.

7.Drawing Out – Allow counselor to bring forth quiet group members comments.

8.Rounds – Allows each student to share within the group.

9.Dyads – Allows students to pair up with a partner and learn more about another student.

10. Word or Phrase Round - Allow students to broaden their vocabulary when describing how they felt about something within the group session.

11.Comment Round - Allow students to share their personal comments about that specific session.

12,Icebreakers - Allow students to warm-up to group members when beginning group.

13.Modeling – Allow students to see counselor as a role model in group work and the behaviors that can be applied to them personally.

14.Use of Eyes – Allows counselor to have direct eye contact with group members that are sharing. It will allow the counselor to draw out quiet members to speak. Allow them to members that have lost interest in the topic.

15.Tone Setting – Allow students to establish a mood for their group. Rather it needs to be a tone that is serious, social, supportive, and formal.

16. Use of Leader’s Energy – Allow students to see the counselor excitement about their new group, topic, and activities.

17.Therefore allowing them to be put off high energy levels. Non-Judgmental – Allow students to see that this is a positive experience and not to make anyone feel down.

18.Empathy – Allow students to convey to other group members that they understand and will not make fun of anyone Some Thoughts on Group Therapies

Several clients meet together Why? – usually cheaper interact with others gain social support (more information and life experiences, hope for future) Behavioral Group Therapies - Practice new behavior with other group members, Social Skills, Assertiveness Training Self help groups – usually not led by a therapist, just share common problem and meet to receive support Encounter Groups Open expression of intense emotions. - focus on self-awareness, promote personal growth Marriage and Family Therapy

Family Therapy - Family learn to express emotion and provide feedback to each other. Family unit is treated as a client Marriage Therapy communication - how to listen to one another and express feeling conflict management - how to handle problems how to handle feelings - depression, anger Combination of treatments for schizophrenia

Family training plus social skills training, better than just family treatment or social skills alone, better than control

**Advantages of Group Counseling:**

The members of the group must be dedicated to psychology then the counseling can be run more smoothly. It allows problem-solving that makes the employees more compatible for the goal’s primary focus.

It elaborates the members who are interested in concerning about a greater life. It has different responsibilities that are enhanced by the team lead.

The following mentioned are few group therapy advantages.

a. People interact freely with their team members:

This interaction is forwarded then people will have safe confinement to come across many troublesome techniques. It is on the difficulty of the group that their interaction and agreeing to certain things are more aggregative.

Many people satisfy themselves by encouraging themselves while listening to others in the group. This helps them to grow freely and to establish new ideas that are more confined.

b. Understanding the concern:

While this discussion is carried out then people will be more interactive as to understand what bothers them a lot. It is very important to understand the unexpressed difficulties. People express the self-disclosures that help them come up with concerns that are modified within the group.

It eliminates the commitment and changes towards the given area. Revealing the feelings are most important than analyzing the decisions. It ultimately defines the change in the area and also the commitment towards group analysis.

c. Participation of people in the group:

People in the group are very likely to participate that they become more involved in expressing things easily. It delivers when people share to tell something and are more competent in feeling the responsibility of others.

It might develop the growing and affirming ideas that help one practically. Here the people listening and thinking will vary according to the different sayings that can be applied to other people.

d. Pre-group planning:

As the counseling begins, people can opt for pre-grouping strategies that will involve everybody in the same path. It is more widely used in the homogenous methods that are widely compared with that of other basic techniques.

It can be the first step of the process. As it helps the other designers that there is some important considerations that are matched with the roles associated with membership and other opportunities.

e. Time and place:

The counseling groups will help in defining the consistent and specific data that has a different time to meet and place in 12 to 16 sessions that are modified within the emerging directions. Since it is held on behalf of the other meetings it can be managed within the actions that might affect. Thus the group will always be arranged in such a way that it will create a sense of equality for the people to communicate.

f. Magnified interaction:

During the counseling interaction within the team will become magnified as it will support the fact that includes the roles and responsibilities of each person. This helps the individuals to create awareness which involves the group dynamics.

It moderates the way that the groups will influence individuals on demanding jobs. It has equality in the presence of all the other groups.

g. Something bigger:

When people are portioned into a group they will feel that they are something bigger in the entire group that will make them motivated and encouraged.

It encourages them and boosts their confidence level and other values. This discussion will also help in handling all the defined resources.

It exhibits the value of other confidential and meaningful relationships. It emerges the specialty of all values that are involved in group discussions.

h. New perspectives:

While sharing feelings individuals can find many perspectives to tackle their problems. It matters when the defined goals are on the ultimate side and are insight into their own perspectives.

It can be managed while the new insights are discussed. It should be managed when the desired perspectives are announced and are left without care.

It gives the resource to share and define the insights that are involved in managing things. It evaluates how people manage it during tough situations.

i. Learning:

When a person faces a tough situation and when he/she shares others can collect the experience and learn from that person to handle such situations. It manages people to overcome the same situation which may likely to happen in the future to someone else. Whether the person will experience it or not people have to understand the tough situation and the methods to overcome them. It can be managed within the desired results in the future.

j. New contacts:

While gathering for the discussion people can collect many contacts that may help them in designing the future. It also helps in obtaining many long-lasting friends who involve in desired trends in the social rules of society. It manages the defined issues that are faced with strong bonds that are identified within the given sequence. It is identified with the help of many long-lasting identities.

k. Diversity in opinions:

Here people in the entire team will have different concerns for others that are modulated within the treatment of understandable feedbacks. It is modulated in such a way that it initiates the common myths in different regions.

When they are brought for social interactions then people will depend on the serialized way and express their viewpoints. The relationship will become insular. The thoughts and expressions can be imagined as to face the challenges.

l. Exploit the feelings of loneliness:

When the truth is given then people have to define the unique circumstance that will be more applicable as to modulate the struggles in loneliness.

It has many incompetent roles that are alienated from a person. This can also be defined or regularized from person to person.

People who discuss about the loneliness will always feel that they are isolated. So group counseling will help in bringing them out of their isolated world.

m. Sharing ideas:

Even though the group member is actually engaged with something then there may be some misconception that are more defined as therapy while others will observe and support the connection as feedback.

It is conducted for the people who are isolated and lonely and it can be overcome by managing and listening to people and the support that is provided. At the end of the session, people will be encouraged and suggested by others.

n. Finding voice:

Expressing feelings and needs will encourage an individual by making them much stronger as to modulate the session to talk about the anticipation. It arranges the notices and the development within them. It also defines the self-connected challenges that are defined within the group.

o. Relate to others:

The members of the team are strongly noticed that means it helps them throughout the feelings that they undergo and also it encourages the people around. This matters when the defined challenges of different people are interconnected. It can be handled that all the things are focused on relationships.

p. Safety net:

The safety net will be built among the team members if the hardships are shared. It has different authentication and selective friend safety nets within the group.

It manages the group counseling strategies and skills and practices that are inbuilt as the team develops.

q. Ever growing support:

Usually, the groups will be divided into subgroups that are identified within the people to comfort and to provide insight to them.

It serializes the ever-growing support of the group members and also making the people more insightful within the team. It builds positive energy and praises people for their behaviour.

r. Encouragement:

When the ideas are shared people will encourage the person as they will overcome that obstacle. It supports the group and the members in it. It has regularized happenings in and out of the group. It is polished within the dynamics of every individual. It eliminates social phobias due to anonymity and also encourages different viewpoints.

**Disadvantages of Group Counseling:**

There are certain disadvantages that affect the overall discussion of the group. Some of them are discussed below:

a. Personality clashes:

Personality clashes can happen due to the different nature of people. There will be some disagreements with the team when a problem is discussed. A dominating personality will try to rule the entire group that others cannot explain their opinion. This issue has to be fixed by the trainer before becoming huge clash and must ensure that the issue is fixed.

b. Comments:

While sharing the opinion some of the group members will pass comments that will again leave the person in frustration. It can be rectified in a hostile manner and also in an emotional way. The fear of receiving information and the comments given by the other participants will cause depression in the minds of a person.

c. Trust:

Sometimes people will feel uncomfortable to reveal their problems and to break their trusts as to share and forward personal ideas. This will cause some trouble to people as they are obligated to their feelings. Sometimes the person will be rejected. Group counseling also paves way for fear of rejection.

d. Intense personal discussions:

This group counseling activity will sometimes make people curious at certain things. In this case, people will feel uncomfortable to play a certain role when they will be extremely abused. It also coincides with the extreme graphic details about the past. It can emerge in a certain way to explore extreme information about an individual.

e. Inherent risks:

Few members in the group will exhibit their aggressive behavior that may cause clashes. Fragile people will not be able to understand what will be going on in the group.

It has to be analyzed that the group becomes more confidentially damaged as to endure the practices. They cannot manage the inherent risks that members will confidentially breakthrough at a certain level. It will be bounded by certain private sessions.

f. Social phobias:

Some people will be nervous while speaking before a crew. But this counseling requires the individual to come in front to address about themselves. It has to be addressed in front of the entire group. This sometimes causes detailed research about the phobias that are spoken infront of others.

g. Expensive:

Sometimes attending the discussion may become expensive as it accounts for intense scrutiny and intimacy of individuals. This adds to the expense that will make the therapist as to define the nonpartial observers. While some individuals seek professional help the counseling will become more reversed. It sometimes becomes worse in case of different viewpoints and experiences.

**Conclusion:**

Hence people inspite of their culture, ages and sexes can have the discretion to a certain extent. These participants are assigned on their own identification that makes more compatible. Certain people who suffer from social anxiety can be perceived by attractive people all around. It can be reconciled within the team and can be modulated during many crisis. It accounts to true multiplicity in the forms and also specializes in different groups.