Group Therapy Facilitation Training Guide
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Introduction to Group Therapy

What is Group therapy?
- Group therapy is defined as "A form of psychotherapy that involves one or more therapists working with several people at the same time" (Cherry, 2017)
- Typically complements individual, couple, or family therapy, but can also be utilized as a standalone treatment or program.

Dr. Irvin Yalom's 11 Principles of group therapy:

1. **Universality**: Clients see they are not alone, and that suffering is universal
2. **Hope:** Newer clients can find encouragement from seeing the positive impact treatment has had on other participants and/or clients who are further along in treatment.
3. **Information:** Group members can learn from each other
4. **Group Cohesiveness:** Group members can experience a shared sense of belonging and acceptance of one another.
5. **Catharsis:** Healing occurs through sharing with others, talking through feelings and experiences to relieve pain, guilt, and stress.
6. **Socialization:** Group participation provides opportunities to socialize, as well as learn and practice new behaviors in safety.
7. **Altruism:** Group members have the opportunity to help one another, ultimately helping themselves in the process
8. **Interpersonal Learning:** Clients interact with the therapist and other group members and receive feedback to learn about themselves.
9. **Existential Factors:** Clients realize they are responsible for their own actions and the consequences that follow through group participation.
10. **Imitative Behavior:** Clients observe and imitate positive and helpful behaviors of other group members, including those of the facilitator.
11. **Corrective Recapitulation:** Clients explore their childhood experiences, personalities, behaviors, and feelings, and learn how to identify patterns within their family systems.

*Which of these principles of group therapy apply to the type of group you will be facilitating?

Categories of Groups

Generally, the tone and facilitation of the group depends on its type. Groups generally fall into two categories:

1. **Psychoeducational/Curriculum-based/Topic-oriented:** Provide members with information to cope or prepare for specific issues, structured by theory with topics, modules, curriculum, and activities.
2. **Process-oriented:** Focused on experience, sharing, making connections, discussion is the emphasis of the group rather than a set agenda (GoodTherapy, 2013).

Types of Therapy Groups

The following graphic from PositivePsychology.com depicts five types of groups:

Types of Therapy Groups

SELF-HELP GROUP
- Usually single issue
- Led by "survivor" who has overcome the problem

MEDICATION GROUP
- Focus on compliance with prescribed medication
- Decreases sense of isolation

INTERPERSONAL THERAPY GROUP
- Deep dive into group members' relationships
- Focuses on the present

ENCOUNTER GROUP
- Immersive and intense group situations
- Higher impact change than typical therapy group

PSYCHODRAMA GROUP
- Dramatic re-enactment of aspects of participant's lives
- Can provoke strong emotions
- Discussion of these emotions

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Group Structure

Session Length: Typically, once a week for 1-2 hours per session

Recommended number of sessions: ~6

Kinds of groups (Cherry, 2017):

1. **Open Groups**: New members can join at any time
2. **Closed Groups**: Sessions are closed to a core group of participants

Group Guidelines and Rules

PositivePsychology.com states that there are five rules that are essential for successful group therapy:

1. **Maintain Confidentiality:** Conversations are to be kept private by group members and facilitators.
2. **Commitment to Attendance:** Members should attend sessions, be on time, and stay for entire session to avoid disruption.
3. **No Socializing with Group Members:** Forming close friendships and bonds with other group members can hinder therapeutic success in the group and lead to fear of disclosure. After groups have disbanded, group members may pursue friendships among each other.
4. **Communicate with Words:** Expressing feelings through words rather than physical actions is important in the group environment.
5. **Participate:** Growth and healing comes from sharing, learning, and connection.

*Would you add any guidelines or rules to this list for your own group? Outline them below:

_____

Being a Group Facilitator

Functions:

Group facilitators are meant to help the group meet its goals while maintaining structures, norms, and culture in the group environment (MHA National). Facilitators stimulate discussion and foster communication among the group by modeling effective interactions. Facilitators serve the following functions in the group setting:

1. **Maintaining a safe environment:** Both physical and emotional. Facility where meetings are held needs to meet basic needs for the group, taking into account physical abilities of group members, comfort, and accessible restrooms. Emotional safety is also necessary and maintained via structure, confidentiality, and boundaries.
2. **Ensuring a supportive environment:** Create a mixed composition of group members to encourage varying insights, and utilize mediation and communication skills as the facilitator to cultivate respectful, inclusive communication.
3. **Bolstering Affect Exploration:** Facilitator should scan the room and look at different group members throughout the session, verbalizing different observations about group participation: i.e. pointing out when members are nodding at things other members say.
4. **Providing Leadership:** Facilitator models appropriate group behavior, acts as a resource for the group.

Tips:

The following are identified "tips" for being an effective group facilitator adapted from KSL Training:

1. **Mentally and physically prepare to facilitate:** Be well-rested, focus on having a positive state of mind. Have your facilitator toolkit ready.
2. **Create the right environment for the group:** Provide a setting with plenty of space, comfortable seating, natural daylight if possible.

3. **Ensure outcomes/objectives are clear:** Review objectives at the beginning of the group, establish any additional objectives/ hopeful outcomes with participants.

4. **Establish expectations:** Create a "code of conduct" for how group will operate.

5. **Energize the group:** Maintain a positive, energized presence, switch up activities and topics to maintain focus.

6. **Manage participation:** Take note of different communication styles within the group, ask "safe" questions at first to encourage participation.

7. **Adjust facilitation style:** As the group moves on, adjust towards being less directive and more consultative as members become more comfortable with each other.

8. **Provide a variety of techniques and working methods:** Utilize different activities and methods for brainstorming, goal setting, etc within the group to maintain interest and encourage participation.

Skills

Facilitators should possess the following skills to help ensure successful group outcomes:

1. **Self-Care**: Facilitators must have their basic needs met as well as their emotional needs to be adequate supports for group members. Group facilitation is an emotionally involved process that can be potentially triggering.
   a. *Emotion regulation* is necessary for self-care as a facilitator and includes having a recognition and understanding of your emotional response to certain group topics and employing strategies to regulate emotions when needed.

*What are some facets of self-care that can help promote overall wellness and emotion regulation? (Think physical, intellectual, social, spiritual):

2. **Effective Listening:** Showing concern for group members and truly listening to people in the group leads to enhanced understanding among the facilitator and members. This can be accomplished by showing interest and providing feedback. The following skills can be useful in enhancing effective listening:
   a. **Reflecting back words, thoughts, feelings**
   b. **Responding with affirmations**
   c. **Clarifying points**
   d. **Summarizing points**
   e. **Making eye contact**
   f. **Utilizing positive facial expressions**
   g. **Giving slight gestures (i.e. nodding head)**
   h. **Maintaining interested body posture (Leaning towards speaker)**

*Which of these effective listening tools do you utilize in your own therapeutic practice? Why do you use them?

3. **Communication:** Imparting knowledge, exchanging opinions, feelings, ideas through speech. Includes listening and speaking in language that is appropriate and easy to understand for group members.

4. **Problem Solving:** Facilitators use skills to discuss and explore problems brought up in the group. Specific strategies are to:
   a. **Identify/ recognize the problem**
   b. **Specify the problem/ seek to understand details**
   c. **Pinpoint the cause of the problem**
   d. **Explore feasible approaches to the problem**
   e. **Select a specific approach**
   f. **Mediate/maintain neutral presence in solving of the problem**
   g. **Implementing the solution**
   h. **Assessing outcomes of the approach**

*What "problems" or issues might come up in the group you are facilitating? Give an example of how you would use this approach to solve these problems:

5. **Boundaries:** Maintaining and modeling appropriate boundaries is very important. This comes from maintaining confidentiality, limiting friendships, and establishing clear roles within the group to provide structure, clarity, and predictability for all members. By establishing boundaries, a strong alliance can form among the facilitator and group members who know what the expect from the relationship.

6. **Managing disruptive members:** Facilitators should create pre-established guidelines or a code of conduct for the group and then refer to expectations as

needed, for example, to address tardiness or members who monopolize the conversation.

7. **Handling crisis situations:** If a crisis should arise with a particular member in group, facilitators should be prepared to contact a co-facilitator, supervisor, or another counselor on call for assistance while still maintaining order within the group.

8. **Self-reflection:** Facilitators should be open to reviews from group members and suggestions for improvement.

Co-Facilitation

Co-Facilitation can be appropriate and beneficial in groups for both group members and facilitators. According to MHA National, benefits of co-facilitating include:

1. **Capitalizing on diversity**
2. **Accommodating larger groups**
3. **Modeling positive interactions among group members**
4. **Maintaining focus and interest in sessions**
5. **Reducing the intensity of impact of the group on one facilitator**
6. **Partnering in the process**
7. **Providing stability in case one facilitator can't attend**

Successful co-facilitation requires the following:

1. **Relationship building among facilitators**
2. **Balancing each other's styles of facilitation**
3. **Communicating details of the group to each other, planning ways of signaling to each other in session**
4. **Including input from each other during session**
5. **Debriefing following sessions**

*Will you be co-facilitating your group? If so, use the below space to brainstorm strategies for how you will plan to have a successful group experience with your co-facilitator:

Misc. Suggestions for Success

1. Create a list of supports and resources for the group to refer to when needed. Update the list as necessary.
2. Have a process in place for members who stop attending the group.
3. Create a space for group members to converse with each other, and not just in response to the facilitator.
4. Address group members by name. Utilize name tags if needed.
5. Encourage conversation but be careful not to press people too much. Attempt to engage all members by "meeting them where they're at."
6. As a facilitator, practice self-regulation. Know when to talk and to let others talk. Be comfortable with periods of silence when needed.
7. Encourage members to focus on their victories and successes, no matter how small they seem, to enhance confidence in the group.

Group Therapy Guidelines

Session Structure

1. **Setting up for the meeting**
   a. Arrive early enough to set up the room
   b. Arrange chairs in a shape wide enough to accommodate all members and allow latecomers to enter with minimal disruption
   c. Place any refreshments on a side table our of the way. Consider what is being offered and ensure it is not distracting or disruptive.
   d. Place any necessary literature on a table that can be picked up as members enter.
   e. Prepare yourself mentally and emotionally to create a supportive, productive atmosphere for members.

2. **Starting and ending meetings**

   Starting
   a. Start the meeting by welcoming members and introducing yourself and your role as the facilitator.
   b. Allow group members to introduce themselves.
   c. Explain the purpose/mission of the group.
   d. Review the meeting agenda.
   e. Orient group members to location of restrooms, vending machines, water fountains.
   f. Review guidelines at **every** meeting. Distribute written copies of guidelines at first meeting.

   Ending
   g. Provide 10-15 minute notification that meeting is coming to an end.
   h. Invite members to make final comments
   i. Have group members share what they found helpful about the meeting.
   j. Mention any literature or references that might be useful following today's discussion.
   k. Summarize what was spoken about at the meeting.

      l. Express appreciation to the group for their participation and presence.

3. **Guidelines for meetings**
   a. Consider demographic requirements (i.e. pre-marital with wedding date set), and screen participants for these.
   b. Establish parameters of confidentiality
   c. Establish parameters for group etiquette
   d. Create a comfort agreement that clarifies
      i. Role of the facilitator
      ii. Start and end time for meetings
      iii. Cell phone use
      iv. Taking breaks
      v. Attendance expectations
      vi. Taking notes during meetings
      vii. Parameters for giving and receiving advice/feedback.

Briefly outline your own "comfort agreement" for the group you are facilitating below:

Useful Techniques

The following chart is adapted from Authenticity Consulting, LLC and is useful to review when considering which techniques to utilize during group facilitation:

Common Techniques	Common Application in Groups
Brainstorming	Generate a broad range of new and creative ideas
Consensus	Make a group decision in a highly participative, egalitarian fashion, and that everyone can live with, even though not all members might readily agree with the decision
Discussion	Open exchange of comments among group members to explore or clarify a topic, often in preparation for a decision
Facilitator intervention	Techniques used by the facilitator to strengthen a constructive practice or discontinue a destructive practice (this section of information in this document is about how to do interventions; the other rows in this table are forms of interventions)
Ground rules	Guide and scope the group members to certain, desired behaviors in meetings; they establish the group s desired personality of the group
Meeting agendas	Ensure meetings are highly focused and results-oriented around certain topics, their order and their timing
Meeting management	Ensure all participation and group processes are highly effective and efficient in a meeting; can include most or all of the facilitation techniques, in addition to planning and following up the meeting
Nominal Group Technique	Collect, organize and summarize a wide range of ideas from among group members to generate group conclusions and recommendation
Parking Lots	List a topic or question to be addressed later on by the group
Round-Robin	Ensure complete collection of all ideas from all participants
Stories	Descriptions of experiences meant to convey important learnings
Voting	Make a selection from various alternatives

Virtual Group Facilitation

Certain groups may be facilitated virtually. In this case, facilitation requires a unique skillset. The Association for Specialists in Group Work provides the following 10 tips for virtual group facilitation, adapted for the purposes of this facilitation guide:

1. **Understand and choose the best technology for Group Work. For the purposes of our groups at the clinic, we use our secure OSU zoom access.**
2. **Set the stage for success by:**
   a. Testing technology prior
   b. Ensuring your face is visible
   c. Choosing a background with no distractions
   d. Limiting background noise
   e. Wearing plain clothing
   f. Establish a protocol for documentation of notes among facilitators
3. **Establish norms by**
   a. Discouraging multi-tasking
   b. Encouraging respect and confidentiality
   c. Determine if it is mandatory for cameras to be turned on ahead of time
   d. Determine how mute/unmute will be controlled within the group
   e. Determine how chat function will be used in session
4. **Attend to cultural and accessibility considerations**
   a. Determine each group member's capacity or ability to utilize technology platform
   b. Provide extra support and alternative communication methods when needed i.e. closed captioning
5. **Monitor group process during virtual groups**
   a. Ensure each member has an opportunity to speak if they choose
   b. Note nonverbal and verbal interactions
   c. Utilize feedback as a means of communicating necessary shifts in group dynamics (i.e. if one member is dominating conversation, utilize constructive feedback to change this)

6. **Incorporate ethical, privacy, security, and safety practices**
   a. Use HIPAA-compliant platforms
   b. Promote confidentiality
   c. Screen potential group members
   d. Ensure client safety by modeling and establishing positive group dynamics
   e. Verify members' identities

7. **Adapt meaningful group activities for virtual platform**
   a. Utilize ice breakers when needed to ease tension
   b. Share session agendas and outlines ahead of session
   c. Utilize homework and external assignments to help members strive toward reaching personal goals outside of sessions
   d. Create small and large group interactions through breakout rooms and chat functions when appropriate

8. **Be adaptable and flexible**
   a. Pay attention to energy levels, adapt expectations for group when necessary

9. **Consider pandemic-specific issues**
   a. Maintain personal self-care and self-compassion to avoid burnout
   b. Monitor group members for pandemic-related anxiety, depression, PTSD, stress, substance misuse
   c. Address pandemic fatigue
   d. Acknowledge additional situational and environmental stressors

10. **Honor the group journey**
    a. Be honest, vulnerable, and genuine

References

The following links provide access to the resources adapted for the purpose of this facilitation guide:

https://positivepsychology.com/group-therapy/

https://www.ksl-training.co.uk/free-resources/facilitation-techniques/tips-for-facilitating-groups/

https://www.mhanational.org/sites/default/files/MHA%20Support%20Group%20Facilitation%20Guide%202016.pdf

https://asgw.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/ASGW-Ten-Tips-for-the-Facilitation-of-Virtual-Groups.pdf

https://www.authenticityconsulting.com/misc/facilitation-techniques.pdf