

## SOME GUIDELINES FOR GROUP THERAPY

So, you're about to start group therapy. A little nervous? Everyone is. I've put together below some 'general psychologists' wisdom" about misconceptions and expectations that I hope you'll find useful

**1) CONFIDENTIALITY.** Almost the first question I'm asked is, *How much about myself do I reveal?* Just your first name (not your last). This is not a place where you'll be pressed to confess shameful transgressions or fantasies to an alien audience. No one will scorn, ridicule, criticize, or humiliate you. (I won't allow it.) I hope you will eventually experience the Group as a safe container.

People have different **rates** of revealing who they are, and of developing **trust**. It takes time. Lots of time. Think of the Group as a Forum for taking **risks**. When you trust the Group "enough", experiment with different types of behaving inside the Group setting.

You may wish to share pieces of your own experience with someone outside the group. But please! Keep in **strictest** confidence other Group members' experiences, and certainly their names.

**2) INDIVIDUAL VS. GROUP.** (Isn't this the Ying-Yang in so many contexts in all our lives?!) What if my own goals are different from others' goals? While each of us manifests our issues differently, all of us who seek some help from this process share the common challenge of establishing and maintaining close and gratifying relationships with others.

Most of us yearn for totally open communication. We want reciprocally honest feedback. It's (too) rare. So think of the Group as a social laboratory in which such honest interpersonal exploration vis-à-vis other Group members is not only permitted, but encouraged. This will not be easy. In fact, it may be very stressful. But it's essential: your **primary task** is to learn as much as you can about how you relate to yourself, and to each person in the Group. . . How you **self-disclose**, and how you become aware of your **impact** on others and theirs on you.

**3) EXPECT:** to feel puzzled and discouraged (especially in the beginning). You may feel misunderstood. Angry. Or disappointed. You may even devalue (something in) yourself, or others.

You'll feel at some point that you're not getting "enough 'air time'"-- and/or that "s/he's 'hogging the floor'."

And then! You'll be pleasantly surprised when another Group member provides some help.

You'll surely at some point feel frustrated or annoyed with **me**. You'll expect 'answers' from me that I cannot supply. Sometime, it may even feel hard to 'share' me with the others.

Because of the complexity of the above factors, Group experts urge you to stay with the group, and ignore your (surely expected) inclination to withdraw emotionally, to hide your feelings, or especially to leave the Group. One well-known researcher says, "It's almost impossible to predict the eventual effectiveness of the Group during the first dozen meetings. So I ask patients to suspend judgment, to make a 12-session commitment before even attempting to evaluate the ultimate usefulness of the Group."

### HELPFUL HINTS

- 1) Focus on the Here-and-Now. What are you feeling, thinking, experiencing right now?
- 2) Assume personal responsibility. Starting with "I" (instead of "you") statements can help.
- 3) Avoid blaming others (or yourself!). (Watch out for that 'policeman on your shoulder.')
- 4) Avoid giving advice or suggestions.
  - "Feedback" is not "you should/ could....": Instead offer "I feel..." "My reaction is ..."
  - i.e. tell how the other makes You feel.
  - Best not to deal with "why". Start with what you see, how you feel.
  - Feedback is specific. Be direct.
  - Give it as soon as possible.
  - Give both positive as well as negative feedback.
  - Acknowledge the feedback.
  - Seek clarification.
  - Beware of becoming defensive, or making excuses.
  - ("If the shoe fits, wear it. If not, throw it away.")
- 5) Try not to 'subgroup' i.e. to email or to meet outside the Group sessions.
  - Group provides an opportunity to learn about social relationships.
  - Group does not provide them. It is not the place to make social friends.
  - Pairing off, making extra-group relationships can interfere with yours and others' Group process when you may feel (out of loyalty) unable to speak openly or honestly to your "friend".
  - Should a meeting happen outside the group, please agree to bring back into the Group any salient aspect of that meeting.
- 6) Arrive on time. Try not to miss sessions. Resist your impulse to leave. Participate.
  - This will help enrich your experience, and help Group morale.
- 7) Call or email me if you've any concerns or questions. We will decide together if it would be helpful to bring them into the Group: joydryer@earthlink.net or 917-816-8882.
- 8) Play ):-

Joy A. Dryer, Ph.D.