

# GROUP THERAPY: OFTEN THE IDEAL ASSISTANCE

## HERE'S WHY ...

### “Why Does Group Therapy Work?”

When people come into a group and interact freely with other group members, they usually recreate those difficulties that brought them to group therapy in the first place. Under the skilled direction of a group therapist, the members are able to receive support, consider alternatives, or gently confront themselves and others. In this way the difficulty becomes resolved, alternative behaviors are learned, and the person develops new social techniques or ways of relating to people. During group therapy, people begin to see that they are not alone. Many times people feel they are unique in their problems, and it is encouraging to hear that other people have similar difficulties. In the climate of trust, people feel free to care about and help each other.

### “Just What is Group Therapy Anyway”

In group therapy, approximately eight individuals meet face-to-face with one or more group therapists and talk about what is troubling them. Members also give feedback to each other by expressing their own feelings about what someone says or does. This interaction gives group members an opportunity to try out new ways of behaving and to learn more about the way they interact with others. This situation is unique because it is a closed and safe system. The content of the group sessions is confidential; what people talk about or disclose is not discussed outside the group.

The first few sessions of a group usually focus on the establishment of trust. During this time, members usually work to establish a level of trust that allows them to talk personally and honestly. Group trust is enhanced when all members make a commitment to the group.

### “What Do I Talk About When I Am In Group Therapy?”

Talk about what brought you to the Counseling Center in the first place. Tell the group members what is bothering you. If you need support, let the group know. If you think you need confrontation, let them know this also. It is important to tell people what you expect of them.

Unexpressed feelings are a major reason why people experience difficulties. Revealing your feeling - self-disclosure - is an important part of group and affects how much you will be helped. The appropriate disclosures will be those that relate directly to your present difficulty. How much you talk about yourself depends upon what you are comfortable with. If you have any questions about what might or might not be helpful, you can always ask the group.

### GROUND RULES

#### “Are there any rules for my participation in the group?”

Here are four:

- 1) Group members are expected to be on time and to attend all sessions.
- 2) It is the responsibility of each person to talk about his/her reasons for being in the group. Talking about present or “here and now” feelings is usually the most helpful way to solve problems.
- 3) One thing that helps people is the knowledge that having a feeling and acting on it are not the same. Any feeling may be verbally expressed in a group; however, acting on a feeling should be a deliberate decision.
- 4) The group sessions are **CONFIDENTIAL**. By accepting membership in the group, participants are bound not to disclose the contents of sessions.

# COMMON MISPERCEPTIONS ABOUT GROUP THERAPY

## **1. "I will be forced to tell all of my deepest thoughts, feelings, and secrets to the group."**

You control what, how much, and when you share with the group. Most people find that when they feel safe enough to share what is troubling them, a group can be very helpful and affirming. We encourage you not to share what you are not ready to disclose. However, you can also be helped by listening to others and thinking about how their comments apply to you.

## **2. "Group therapy will take longer than individual therapy because I will have to share the time with others."**

Actually, group therapy is often more efficient than individual therapy for two reasons. First, you can benefit from the group even during sessions when you say little but listen carefully to others. You will find that you have much in common with other group members, and as they work on their concerns, you can learn more about yourself. Second, group members will often bring up issues that strike a chord with you, but that you might not have been aware of or brought up yourself.

## **3. "I will be verbally attacked by the leaders and by other group members."**

It is very important that group members feel safe. Group leaders are there to help develop a safe environment. Feedback is often difficult to hear. As group members come to trust and accept one another, they generally experience feedback and even confrontation as positive, as if it were coming from their best friend. One of the benefits of group therapy is the opportunity to receive feedback from others in a supportive environment. It is rare to find friends who will gently point out how your behaviors may be hurting you or others. This is precisely what group can offer, and it will be done in a respectful way, so that you can hear it and make use of it.

## **4. "Group therapy is second-best to individual therapy."**

Group therapy is being recommended to you because your counselor believes it is the best way to address your concerns. Individuals are not placed into group therapy because there is not space in individual therapy, or to save time. Group is recommended when it is the most effective method to help you. Your counselor can discuss this recommendation with you.

## **5. "I have so much trouble talking to people; I'll never be able to share in a group."**

Most people are anxious about being able to talk in group. Almost without exception, within a few sessions, people find that they begin to talk in the group. Group members remember what it was like to be new to the group and you will most likely get a lot of support for beginning to talk in the group.