

Group Therapy

What is group therapy?

Group therapy is a form of treatment for emotional and psychological problems. It takes place in a group, usually of 6 to 10 people, under the guidance of 1 or 2 therapists. The interaction and discussion among group members may work to create understanding and beneficial changes in their behavior.

The group setting may help people with a variety of problems, such as trouble with relationships, eating or anxiety disorders, drug or alcohol dependence, and depressive illnesses.

Do all groups have a "subject?"

Some groups start with members having something in common. There are, for example, married couples' groups, women's groups, men's groups, children's groups, and groups for people who have lost someone through death. Most groups consist of adults who have problems in the way they interact with others.

How long does group therapy last?

Groups may be ongoing, with people staying in the group as long as they need to and new people arriving from time to time. Or they may be closed groups, with the same people in the group for the entire time the group meets. There may be a limited amount of time the closed group will meet, for example, 12 weeks or 6 months. However, closed groups may also be long-term, going on indefinitely. Some groups may meet for only one day or for a weekend.

Trust eventually develops among group members as people learn to be accepting of each other. The group can develop a powerful bond and may even want to continue with group meetings, perhaps in a social context, after therapy is over.

What is the difference between group therapy and a support group?

Support groups are usually ongoing, open, and leaderless. Various 12-step groups, like Alcoholics Anonymous, fall into this category. The purpose of support groups is to help people feel that they are not alone. They do not necessarily promote change.

What happens in group therapy?

Styles of group therapy differ. In some groups the therapist is active, directing the discussion. In others, the therapist may let the group direct itself. In some groups, each person takes a turn talking about his problems, with the members of the group giving that person feedback. In other groups, two or three people talk each time in more detail about themselves. Different people talk the next time.

What does the therapist do?

The therapist observes the group, making sure the interaction is going well and is helpful to members.

- If someone is taking over the discussion, the therapist might stop the discussion to ask members how they feel about one person dominating.
- If there are unspoken norms (for example, that it's okay to be late or to interrupt others), the therapist may ask the group to discuss them.

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- If there is something not being talked about, the therapist might ask members how they feel about that subject not being addressed.
- The therapist may summarize themes or issues (by saying, for example, "We talked about anger in relationships tonight and better ways to deal with it").
- If one person in the group is having difficulty with other group members, the therapist may help that person identify the behaviors that create problems in the group and elsewhere. It is assumed that people usually behave in the group in the same ways that give them problems in their life outside the group.

What helps a person to get better in group therapy?

The following factors in group therapy can help you feel better:

- You may come to understand that everyone struggles with similar issues.
- You may come to understand your patterns in key relationships with people outside the group therapy setting.
- You may get helpful information (feedback from the therapist or from other group members about your problems).
- You can model yourself after the therapist or other group members you respect.
- You can learn and practice healthier way of dealing with others.
- The group process helps give members hope that their problems can be solved.
- You may learn that you can be helpful to other people, which can increase self-esteem and benefit your relationships outside the group.
- You may receive powerful emotional support through the group process.
- A group can provide a new "family" experience that, in some cases, is better than the one members experienced in childhood.
- You can be helped simply by talking about your feelings and experiences in a nonjudgmental setting
- You may feel less lonely and less isolated.

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