

PREPARING FOR GROUP THERAPY

Before entering an interactive therapy group, new members often want to know how group works and what's expected of them as members in order to get the most out of the experience.

This brochure discusses these and other topics that are important for new members to know.

1) Members of the group expect one another to be forthcoming, to talk about what brings them, and to discuss what they're wanting to change in their lives. Equally important, however, is that every group member understands that people open up at their own pace. No one forces anyone else to talk or reveal difficult material before they're ready to.

2) During group, members try to focus their attention on what's happening in the moment (i.e. they try to focus their attention on "the here-and-now"). This is the main difference between interactions during group and "ordinary" social interactions.

This means that, during group time, members are expected to talk about their real & present feelings, as they occur right there in the room.:

A) Feelings one is having inside of oneself:

Example: "I feel really nervous right now"

Example: "I'm feeling very moved by what you just said"

B) Feelings one is having *towards* other members:

Example: "I really admire that you told us that, and I'm glad you did"

Example: "I feel frustrated with you right now"

Keep in mind that the *first* feeling you become aware of (for example anger) often hides a more vulnerable feeling underneath (for example, feeling left out or afraid or hurt or ashamed). Members try to explore what's underneath their feelings, and try to help others do the same.

3) Members try to listen to and respect *any feeling* that someone is having in the group. This includes feelings of appreciation, tenderness, attraction, warmth, liking, gratitude, and more. Similarly, members try to hear and understand one another's feelings of irritation, anxiety, anger, sadness, shame, disappointment, and more.

These feelings are inevitable parts of any enduring human relationship. During group, work hard to make space for them – to express them and listen to them and understand them.

4) When a member has something to say to another member, s/he tries to say it to the person directly. A group expectation is that instead of talking about people after group and/or behind one another's backs, people will speak to each other directly during the time and space of the group meeting.

5) The group process becomes interrupted when there is irregular attendance, or when people come late or leave early. Everyone is expected to be present for each meeting and to be on time.

When members become aware that they will be missing a group session, they are expected to let the group know as soon as possible, and/or to contact the group leader in advance of the absence.

6) Work with the things you keep hidden. All of us have things we hide and don't talk about. We're worried about how we'll be seen, how we'll be judged, and how we'll be treated if we disclose some secret. Many of the most dramatic improvements in group therapy, however, occur when a member risks talking about something she or he has kept secret for fear of others' judgment. Group is a place where members work on replacing judgment with understanding. What follows is a deep appreciation of our shared humanness.

7) The role of the group leader is to use his training to facilitate therapeutic experiences in the group setting. This includes providing support, feedback, developing a safe atmosphere, sharing observations, discussing group dynamics, and being responsive when members ask for help during group sessions. You are encouraged to share your reactions about the group leader, including his interventions in group, and to request his help during sessions when you want it.

8) The role of the group member is to actively participate in group, inform the group if something comes up for you that requires additional attention, remember and work on your group goals during each session, and honor the Group Agreement.

Above all, members work on communicating their real, present feelings. More than five decades of research on groups has shown that this is the single most important thing that group members can do in order to see significant positive changes in their lives outside group, as well as in it.

Understanding these group norms and knowing what's expected of you as a group member will maximize your benefit from being in group.