

Benefits of Exploring Group Member Connections in a Therapy Group by Ann E. Hale, M.A., TEP

During an interview with a prospective client for your therapy group you make this statement: "There will be group sessions when we will focus on group interactions. We find that exploring the interpersonal connections within our group setting provides good practice for building positive connections with friends and family at home." The person wants to know more precisely what this statement means in terms of what you do.

Your answer

The group leader speaks with the prospective client about a norm which has been established in the group, that of spending time focused on the group members connections to other group members. Likely the person has some anxiety about joining the group and needs assurance that being in the group is a good choice for him/her. Most people enter groups for personal development. A priority is that the time and money spent will directly relate to their life issues. Often people imagine that the time will be spent with each person having an equal portion of the group time.

The answer to this question needs to include examples of life situations and ways group issues mirror those of the prospective client. If you know, for example, that the person has many difficulties with monitoring and being a parent to a teenager who won't listen and has made a number of dangerous choices, you might want to say, "If I as a group leader begin to notice that group members are not really listening to one another, and this is causing people to feel ignored and hurt, I might spend time in the group having everyone make one statement to another group member and stay with it until it is reflected back and the person experiences really being heard.

Being successful in communicating is something we all need to practice and it is very useful in raising children."

I will also talk about groups and the importance of having a period of time to feel familiar, known and trusting. I share that I believe people really want to help one another, and that groups increase the number of resources a person has. In order for people to be known and to work well together I like to facilitate exercises that strengthen these connections. I stress that on first meeting we have many impressions. Over time those impressions get adjusted. I ask group members to think about one another during the interim between groups and to hold imaginary, one sided conversations. Then I like to provide some time in the group where people may have conversations that complete some of the information we have about one another.

I describe the connections between people in the group like a number of strings stretched between people forming a net. When those strings are strong, people can take risks, knowing if they fell off the high wire there was a safety net under them. If the net gets frayed or weak in places, then I like

to help those places become strong again. Everyone benefits from the safety and the examples of courageous people facing their lives directly and not hiding and being scared.

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