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How Group Therapy Works

1. Group therapy is based on the idea that a great many of the difficulties that people have in their lives can be understood as patterns of relating with others. As children, we learn ways of getting close, talking to others, and solving issues with others. We also learn ways of keeping our distance, communicating ineffectively and re-enacting difficulties with others. Often these early patterns are applied in our adult relationships. Despite good intentions, we are not able to apply the best patterns all the time, especially in our most desired relationships. Often, symptoms such as anxiety or unhappiness, lowered self-esteem, or a general sense of dissatisfaction with life, reflect the unsatisfactory state of important relationships. Group therapy offers an opportunity to notice, learn about and improve these interpersonal patterns.
2. The more you can involve yourself in the group the more you will get out of it. With the input of the therapists and other group members, you will be able to pinpoint the sorts of things you find upsetting or bothersome. Being open and honest in what you say, putting even strong feelings into words (rather than actions) and sharing the emotionally significant events of your life will facilitate your discovery process. As group time is precious and invites work on serious issues, listen closely to what people are saying, think through what they mean and try to make sense of it. You can help other group members by letting them know what part of their message you understand and how it affects you. At the same time, listen deeply to what others say to you about your part in the group process. You may have questions you want to ask, but often it is the thoughts and feelings behind your question that are more important to explore. This process of learning from others is an important way to profit from the group experience.

3. One way of thinking about group is to view it as a “living laboratory” of relationships. It is a place where you can experiment with new ways of relating to people and take interpersonal risks. Do your best to translate your inner reactions into words. Group is a place to explore the meaning of what goes on and the reactions inside that get stirred up. Because the group is a place to learn from the experience itself, it is important to focus upon what is happening inside the group between the members and between each member and the therapist. Often understanding these in-the-room relationships sheds new light on your outside relationships.
4. It is normal to feel some anxiety as you talk about your personal feelings, thoughts, and experiences with others. Share these difficulties or concerns at a pace that is comfortable for you rather than forcing yourself to disclose too quickly in the group. You will feel more comfortable as you let the group get to know you.
5. You will develop personal goals with your therapist about what you want to work on in the group, which may be revised over time. If the group is not moving in the direction that is useful to you, please let people know how you would like it to change.

**The group meets Tuesdays from 4:30 pm to 6 pm at
6014 28th Street North; Arlington, VA 22207**

Group Expectations

1. **Confidentiality:** Confidentiality is mandatory. It is extremely important to help you and others feel safe discussing personal issues in the group. With non-group members (including significant others), you may talk about your own feelings and growth experiences, but you may not discuss members’ issues or reveal the identity of any group members.
2. **Stella and Teddy:** Stella and Teddy. Stella and Teddy are 10-pound Shih-Tzus. Each has earned the title of AKC’s “Canine Good Citizen” and “Professional Therapy Dog”. Stella was born in 2011 and has retired! However, Teddy, born in 2016, comes into all group sessions. He is very friendly and enjoys being with people. Sometimes he will sense a mood or

feeling and walk over to you to be available to be petted during the group. Sometimes he will indicate he will sit near you or hop up onto your lap, but most often he will sit/lie quietly throughout the group. He may greet you in the waiting room and show you to the door at the end of a session.

3. **Attendance, Punctuality and Fees:** We request that you attend all sessions, arrive on time, and remain for the entire meeting. Once a group gets going, it functions as a group, and even if just one member is absent, the experience is not the same. If it is impossible for you to make a session, please call or email Lorraine and Siddharth. If there is a planned absence, please inform the group at least a week in advance.
4. **Participation:** It is our stated group goal to put feelings and thoughts into words and share these with other group members, especially as they relate to what arises in you at those moments. These feelings might bring something forward about you (in your life or in the group) or it might bring something forward about the other person that you would want to offer as feedback. Please take your fair share of the talking time and assist others in taking their fair share of time as well.
5. **Socializing with Other Group Members:** It is possible to think of groups as an orchestrated therapeutic setting. Because we will be making use of therapeutic elements between and among members, it is advised that you avoid outside contact with one another. If you should have unexpected contact with another group member, please share this with the group at the next session, as it helps to maintain openness and to keep group relationships therapeutic.
6. **Termination:** You are making a commitment to yourself and to other group members to participate in a significant therapeutic experience. Please remain in the group until major relational issues are resolved. When you feel it is the right time to leave the group, please discuss this first with your therapist. For unforeseen reasons you might need to leave the group prematurely. Even then, because a thoughtful termination is relevant to all meaningful relationships, please give a minimum of one month's notice. During this time, you will be able to say goodbye to the other group members and to allow each of you to finish up important interpersonal issues.

I agree to these responsibilities as a group member.

Group Member Signature: _____

Date: _____

Group Therapist Signature: _____

Date: _____

Revised 09/2023