

Group Therapy

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Group therapy is a shared therapeutic experience that involves the presence of a trained professional and others who are working through similar issues. This collaborative form of healing can focus on interpersonal relationships or on particular concerns shared by group members. There are numerous psychological and emotional issues that are treated in group therapy, ranging from [addiction](#) and [abuse](#) to anxiety and [depression](#).

Group Therapy's Role in the Healing Journey

Group therapy is offered to help you address a variety of issues and reach a range of therapeutic goals. Some of the topics addressed include [substance abuse](#) and other addictions, [domestic violence](#), divorce, childhood abuse, depression, [anxiety](#), PTSD, and issues surrounding eating and [body image](#).

Some people choose to join group therapy to supplement primary therapy, to access additional support, or to serve as the sole component of healing work. Participants in group sessions find discussing their problems with those who can offer genuine [empathy](#) gives them a sense of belonging and encouragement.

Additionally, group therapy members provide support and direction for others struggling with the same issues they have faced in the past.



What actually happens in the group depends largely on who attends, what is being discussed, and any specific modalities the therapist uses in group. No matter the focus of the group, change occurs as you move through various stages of development. As you get to know yourself and the other members on a deeper level, perhaps working through conflicts as they come up, your experiences in the group become increasingly restorative.

Participating in Group Therapy

The criteria for joining a group depends on the intention of the group, what subject matter is to be addressed, and who would benefit the most from attending it. Who attends your group will depend upon these criteria as well as whether it is a “closed” or “open” group. If group members can pop in and out of the group and new members can join, it is called an “open” group. Once a group becomes established, they may become “closed” to new members for a period of time.

How often your group meets will depend on what you are working on in group therapy and what you and your therapist determine will best meet your needs. Some groups only meet once a week, whereas some are more intensive and meet three times a week initially, and then may decrease frequency over time. Group therapy sessions can be held in a variety of settings, such as community centers, therapy offices, hospitals, libraries, members’ houses, or churches.

Psychoeducational Group Therapy versus Process-Oriented Group Therapy

Group therapy offerings are usually divided into two larger types, either “psychoeducational” or “process oriented.”

Essentially, a psychoeducational group is focused on providing you with information about specific topics in order to give you additional resources or information. These groups are more structured; participants are provided with specific topics or modules to discuss and explore. The intention is to enhance your knowledge about the topic,

which is often identified in the name of the group.

On the other hand, a process-oriented group focuses on the experience of being in a group as the healing opportunity. For example, the process of expressing thoughts, feelings, and experiences in the group can be the very vehicle by which you discover change.

Activities in Group Therapy

Group therapy activities are designed to [encourage communication](#), insight, [trust](#), and personal growth. The activities may range from conversational, sit-down interactions, such as reading and sharing stories, to physically engaging, team-oriented exercises and games.

Ice breakers are common introductory group therapy activities that allow the members of the group to get to know one another in a non-threatening and playful way. In some groups, small objects may be used, such as balloons, bean bags, or balls; when members catch an item, they say something about themselves, and then toss the item on to the next person.

Physical activities such as dancing, knot-tying (with arms), or cooking require people to work in groups to achieve a desired outcome, and these exercises nurture collaboration, trust, and respect. Other activities such as painting, acting, and playing music may be used to facilitate [creative expression](#). Trust can be strengthened through role-playing, wilderness activities, and other trust-building games that help the members develop [confidence](#) in their peers and in themselves.



Ethics of Group Therapy

As a potential member of a group, you have a right to learn from the group therapist about the guidelines, goals, and [therapeutic methods](#) of the group from the very beginning. Guidelines regarding [confidentiality](#), for example, should be shared with you upfront. Typically, all members of the group agree to keep the session content confidential and protect the anonymity of the other members. Unless a member has authorized release of information, no member or therapist can discuss another member's personal history with any other member or any individual outside the group. The therapist is, however, obligated by law to inform the proper authorities if a member has expressed intent to [harm themselves](#) or others.

The group therapist is also responsible for maintaining a professional, respectful, and ethical environment free from discrimination, sexual inappropriateness, or other behaviors that could cause a member to feel uncomfortable or threatened. It is the therapist's role to ensure that the group therapy progresses in a nonjudgmental, collaborative, and productive fashion for all involved.

Advocates and Leaders in Group Therapy

There have been several strong advocates and leaders in the field of group therapy. The most prominent of these is [Irvin Yalom](#), who wrote *The Theory and Practice of Group Psychotherapy*. Yalom's research emphasizes the impact of group therapy on the individual, as well as the factors that contribute to healing in a group setting.

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