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GROUP PSYCHOTHERAPY

While people seek psychotherapy for many reasons, all have some problems in establishing and maintaining close and gratifying relationships with others. Sometimes they have spent much of their life “faking it” (usually being bright and accomplished) but were never able to develop a sturdy, deeply authentic and resilient sense of self. Lacking such a sense of self, they may never have the occasion to learn to trust others, to reveal themselves with openness and vulnerability, and to confront others with genuine concern and honesty. The therapy group attempts to set up a social situation where group members can experience developing trust and being trusted; learn to experience authenticity and genuineness; overcome experiences of shame while learning to really like themselves; and where over time they can come to be seen, known, accepted, challenged, and stretched in their capacity to be self-aware, to love and to play. Inevitably, members will at some point experience others in the group similarly to the ways in which they experience intimate others outside the group, or similarly to the ways in which they experienced family members while they were growing up. The opportunity to explore these feelings in a safe setting is what makes the group experience so potentially healing and transformational.

In order to get the most out of their group experience, group members must share a common goal of becoming able to express their thoughts and feelings as they occur within the group. The way in which members can learn the most in a group is by being honest and direct with their feelings in the group at that moment, especially those feelings toward the other group members and the therapist. This often necessitates taking the “focus” off of another group member, a social faux pas in any other setting. Yet the deepest way to respond to another group member is to “share” one’s inner experience. “Politeness”, “taking turns”, “interviewing another group member” and “superficial chit chat” are the largest inhibitors of group process that exist in a therapy group. A group is best served by members spontaneity, even and especially when it entails interruption of others to bring to the group’s awareness such conflictual experiences as boredom, sexual attraction, envy, hurt, embarrassment, feeling left out, irritation, excitement, fantasies, and daydreams. To foster maximum learning from your group experience, there are some important agreements you will be asked to make.

AGREEMENTS:

1. As a group member you make a commitment to attend the group until you have reached your goals. You and the group will periodically evaluate your progress and eventually will make a collaborative decision as to whether you have successfully attained your goals. As you decide to leave the group, you will allow time for everyone to explore their feelings about your departure and say their goodbyes.
2. Regular attendance at all sessions is expected. Outside of vacations away from Austin, you make a commitment to prioritize attending the group session ON TIME every week. It is your responsibility to notify the group in advance when it is absolutely necessary for you to be away or to be late for a group. You will be asked to explore your unconscious motivations for habitual lateness, missing groups because of work conflicts, etc. **You will be charged \$60 for each ninety-minute session whether or not you attend.**
3. You are making a commitment to try and talk about what is going on in the group itself (whatever you are feeling at the moment) as a way of increasing your self-understanding. You agree to work towards taking your fair share of the time.

4. You are making a commitment to talk about important issues in your life that cause difficulty in relating to others or in living life fully and authentically. It is assumed that these difficulties will be reenacted within the group and will be available for analysis by the group. If you are in individual therapy, you agree to be reasonably open about what you are learning about yourself, to explore how these issues manifest in the group, and about fluctuations in your feelings towards your individual therapist.
5. Members will treat matters that occur in the group with utmost confidentiality. To that end, you are expected to keep the identity of all group members confidential.
6. While you must observe the utmost confidentiality relation to individuals that are not part of your “treatment team”, there are absolutely no secrets among members of your “treatment team.” Your “treatment team” consists of your group therapist, your individual and/or marital therapist and all the members of your psychotherapy group. Thus, what you share in the group or in individual or marital therapy will be shared with other members of your” treatment team” when anyone feels that it is important for your treatment to do so.
7. The group provides an opportunity for learning about one’s problems in social relationships; it is not a gathering in which people meet to make casual social friends, and if used in this manner the group loses its’ therapeutic effectiveness. However, if by chance or design members do meet outside the group, then it is their responsibility to discuss the salient aspects of the meeting inside the group, and to be open to the group’s feedback and reactions. In general, outside contact between ongoing group members drains the therapeutic energy from the group. Occasionally two people who have been friends or colleagues in the past opt to be in the same group; in such instances, the two individuals agree to put this friendship on hold for the duration of the group experience, and to explore fully within the group their thoughts and reactions to each other from past to present. Eventually lasting bonds may be formed between two group members that extend beyond the group experience (once group membership has ended), but this is not a goal of the group.
8. You are agreeing to work towards learning to put thoughts and feelings into words, not actions; to let other group members have an effect on you; to be willing to talk openly and honestly about what feelings subsequently come up about yourself and about them; and to work actively in the group on the problems that brought you to therapy in the first place.

INFORMED CONSENT FOR GROUP PSYCHOTHERAPY

 I understand that group therapy is a joint effort between psychologist, client, and the group. I understand that my group psychotherapy with Dr. Adams is not a “support group” but will consist of psychodynamic psychotherapy, e.g. that the uncovering of anxiety and other strong feelings in group psychotherapy is inevitable and even desirable. I understand that I may hear clinical material from other group members which may potentially be upsetting, and that such material will be treated as “grist for the mill” for my personal growth. I understand that I can request to schedule an individual session with Dr. Adams at any time to discuss feelings which arise in group. I understand that when Dr. Adams is out of town, a guest therapist will run the group.

I am committed to the therapeutic goals and to the group agreements for group psychotherapy. I have the above information pertaining to group psychotherapy and have had an opportunity to ask questions about anything I do not understand.

Signature _____ Date _____