

Group Counseling

The purpose of engaging in counseling is to become

- bathed in self-kindness,
- enabled by skills,
- powered by values, and
- directed towards priorities...

while serving as one's own

- comfort,
- friend,
- companion, and
- counselor.

One can increase the likelihood of achieving these desired outcomes through group counseling by:

- shining the sun of self-kindness upon oneself and one's process,
- staying aware of one's inner state, inner narrative, needs and wants,
- doing the work that is one's own to do,
- approaching reality,
- using skills,
- negotiating to attempt to get needs and wants met.

Group Policies

1. Current members, new members, and invited visitors are welcome at any time and may be present, both with and without notice. Sharing by group members and visitors is always encouraged but never required. When visitors are present, group members are invited to share or not share, to stay or not stay, their choice.
2. Substance use is criminalized in the United States and mental illness is stigmatized. If diagnoses are disclosed, people may lose their social standing, employment, scholarships, child custody, medications, even their very freedom. **To protect the safety of all, it is imperative that the identities of those who attend and the content of what is shared remain absolutely confidential.**

3. To protect the identity, confidentiality, privacy, and safety of all, take no screenshots and make no recordings of any kind, of anyone, or of anything during the session.
4. Please do not disclose anything that might compromise your safety. Please do not ask others to disclose anything that might compromise their safety.
5. Abstinence is not required to attend individual or group sessions. Substances affect individuals individually. If you have been using non-prescribed substances, please consider providing this information to the group if you anticipate it may affect the content of your sharing.

Group Protocol

1. Arrive on time.
2. Safety first.
3. Practice self-kindness and other-kindness.
4. Use "I-statements." Avoid "you-statements" (intrusion without permission) and "we-statements" (inclusion without permission).
5. Observe silence during each other's sharing.
6. If you find yourself wanting to react or respond to a group member's statements, become aware of what you are feeling and thinking first. Even if you choose not to follow up, practice being able to state your feelings and thoughts to yourself in reaction or response to others.
7. Ask for permission—and wait to receive it—before asking a clarifying question or making a suggestion. With your request, identify the type of follow-up you want to offer. Examples: "Are you open to a clarifying question?" "Are you open to a suggestion?" Reflect the content first, then ask your question.
8. Be cautious about giving advice. Advice-giving is often used to regulate an inner state of distress in response to another person's words or actions. Try to pinpoint the source of your distress rather than create a superior-subordinate relationship dynamic that may violate the personhood and autonomy of someone else.
9. Balance gaining and giving.
10. To foster open communication and discourage triangulation, disclose making contact outside of group. You are welcome to have contact with group members. If you have had contact, please share that with the group.

Group Procedures

1. Reading of group policies and group protocol.
2. Welcome and announcements.
3. Sharing of any contact outside of group.
4. Brief sharing of insights, observations, questions, and/or concerns from last session.
5. Check-in with a 2-minute timer.
6. Brief explanation of, and practice with, a skill.
7. *Check-out statements.* Please open an email, address it to your counselor, and use the subject line "I learned." Compose a two-sentence statement of observation, awareness, insight, and progress, beginning with "I learned..." Please state what you learned as a result of the session and how you think it will be of value to you. This statement will be recorded in your progress notes. When each person reads the check-out statement aloud, a "Buffet of Wisdom" is created.
8. *Statements of appreciation.* Group members take turns choosing and acknowledging the individual who helped them gain the most awareness during the session. They also share the insight the person helped them realize.

Last revised 7/5/20