

Information on *Starting Over* Group

What is group counseling?

Group counseling involves 6-10 members with 1 therapist, typically once a week for 1.25 hrs. Members talk about a variety of issues including exploring relationships, improving self-esteem, and enhancing coping skills. Group members share information about themselves and provide feedback to others while group leaders facilitate productive communication in the group.

How do I know if group counseling is right for me?

You will be referred to the group leader for a group screening. This screening will allow you to get to know the group leader, hear about the group, and decide whether the group will be a good match for you.

What issues are groups effective in treating?

Groups can be especially helpful for people who have concerns about their relationships. Some common concerns of group members include loneliness or isolation, shyness, dependence in relationships, superficial relationships and/or a lack of intimacy, frequent disagreements with others, discomfort in social situations, difficulty trusting others, being easily hurt or offended, needing a lot of reassurance from others, and fear of being left or abandoned. Group therapy is the treatment of choice for several other concerns as well.

What skills can I gain from group?

- Learning to communicate more comfortably and effectively.
- Identifying and exploring inner feelings.
- Getting feedback from others.
- Learning to express your own wishes and to act on your own behalf.
- Being honest with self and others.
- Becoming more sensitive to the ways people communicate.
- Learning about closeness and intimacy.
- Experimenting with new ways of relating to others.

How does group work?

One of the major ways that group can be helpful to you is that it can replicate the ways you interact in your everyday life. The other group members and leaders can also give feedback about how they perceive you and offer alternative ways of behaving in order to help you interact more productively. Groups are able to provide support, offer alternatives, or gently confront group members in such a way that difficulties can be resolved and new behaviors learned. Often people in a group begin to feel less alone in dealing with their problems. It can be very encouraging to hear that others have worked through similar problems.

What would I actually do in group?

Letting the group know why you initially came and sharing what you hope to gain from the group is a good place to start. If you need support, let the group know. If you think that you need to be challenged, let the group know that too. It is sometimes helpful to think of the group as a laboratory in which you can experiment with new ways of thinking, feeling, or relating to others. You will probably be most helped if you talk about your feelings. Unexpressed feelings are a major reason that people experience difficulties.

The Group Leader and other group members can help you to be more honest with yourself and others as you explore your feelings. How much you choose to talk about yourself is up to you. However, we have found that people who benefit most from group take responsibility for making the group work by sharing their concerns and speaking up when they have reactions to issues or to other individuals in the group.

How can I make the most of my group experience?

- Participate actively.
- Be honest and genuine.
- Express your goals and ask for help working on them.
- Monitor how much you can disclose to challenge yourself yet still feel safe.
- Express your thoughts, feelings, and reactions to the group.
- Experiment with new behaviors.
- Give and receive feedback.
- Be patient with the group, express frustrations, and stick with it.
- Find ways to work on your issues in between group sessions.

Will I have enough time to work on my issues in a group?

Each group usually finds its own way of negotiating how group time is used. Typically a group will begin with a “check-in” so that group members have an opportunity to summarize how they’re doing and/or request speaking time during that session. I have found that group members who are able to request time as needed are most likely to benefit from group. Group members can also benefit from hearing other people work through and discuss their issues.

Aren’t people too afraid to really talk in group?

When you meet people for the first time, it is hard to know what to say and how much to trust them. Trust is a process that develops over time as group members take risks and share about themselves. It helps to know that they have the same concerns as you. Letting the group know you are uncomfortable can be a first step. What is asked is that you make a commitment to being in the group and that you be willing to open up as you feel comfortable.

How can I trust that what I say will be kept confidential?

Group members are asked to make a commitment to protect each other’s confidentiality by agreeing not to divulge information that would identify other members outside of group. My experience shows that group members respect each other’s privacy just as they respect their own. To help ensure the safety of clients and others, some issues do not remain confidential. If a group member appears to be planning harm to oneself (suicide), harm to others (homicide), or reports abusing children or dependent adults, the group leader is legally bound to break confidentiality in order to provide the individuals with the assistance they need.

What will be expected of me?

Each group may establish its own ground rules, but there are some general guidelines that I have found to be important:

- Please let the group leader know if you are going to miss a session.
- If you decide that group is not appropriate for you, please discuss your concerns with the group rather than simply not attending sessions.
- It is your responsibility to talk about your reasons for being in the group and to let the group members know what you expect from them.
- You are expected to respect the confidentiality of the group.

What is the role of the group leader?

The Group leader has expertise in group counseling and in the specific focus of the group (e.g., social anxiety). The role of the group leader is to facilitate productive, respectful communication within the group. To do this, he will encourage group members to interact with one another. The Group leader may point out common themes, give feedback to individuals or the group as a whole, or offer support or challenge as needed. He also tries to provide enough structure so that the group doesn’t get stuck, but enough freedom so the group accepts responsibility for itself. The leader respects the confidentiality of the group and makes every effort to create a safe environment.

Will other group members be like me?

Within any group, there are bound to be similarities and differences among people, both of which can be helpful in making progress on your goals. Our group has a particular theme (Starting Over) members will have similar concerns.