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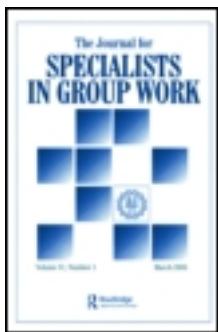
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PSYCHOEDUCATIONAL GROUP WORK

Structuring the Group Experience: A Format for Designing Psychoeducational Groups

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The design of an effective psychoeducational group begins with a strong theoretical foundation and evolves into a highly interactive experience that fosters growth and development in participants. This article presents a six-step model that enables the designer to move from a general statement of purpose to a session-by-session design that includes didactic content, experiential activities, and processing. By following this model, the group facilitator is able to develop a psychoeducational group that provides a logical sequence of learning activities that foster cognitive, affective, and behavioral change.

Structured groups as a therapeutic modality have experienced a rise in popularity as the use of short-term treatment models has increased (Rice, 1995). Morrill, Oetting, and Hurst (1974) set the stage for the use of psychoeducational groups in the creation of their model that placed emphasis on the roles of prevention and development as well as remediation in counseling. This movement was further supported by the work of Ivey (1976), who believed that the helping role should include education and skill development. In 1990, the standards for training group workers were revised and adopted by the Association for Specialists in Group Work (ASGW) (ASGW, 1991) and included four advanced group work types or specializations. These four types of group work were viewed as reflecting current and future work demands for counselors. Included in these specializations were guidance/psychoeducational groups that have the goal of preventing the development of debilitating dysfunction along with increasing coping skills. Conyne (1996) recommended that graduate programs develop new curricular approaches to

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teach the advanced group-work type competencies. Clearly, psychoeducational groups have become a vital part of group work.

Currently, psychoeducational groups cover a myriad of topics and may include affective and existential topics as well as cognitive-behavioral ones. Some of the developmental issues addressed include theme groups on loneliness (McWhirter, 1995), marital enhancement (Durana, 1996), athletes in transition (Constantine, 1996), stress reduction in the workplace (Kagan, Kagan, & Watson, 1995), and parenting (Sheeber & Johnson, 1994). In situations that require adjustment to a life-changing situation, groups have been developed for parents who have an adolescent with a mood disorder (Fristad, Gavazzi, Centolella, & Soldano, 1996), for persons diagnosed with HIV/AIDS (Pomeroy, Rubin, Van Lanningham, & Walker, 1997), children with parents in addiction recovery (Cwiakala & Mordock, 1996), foster parents of sexually abused children (Barth, Yeaton, & Winterfelt, 1994), cancer patients (Fawzy & Fawzy, 1994), children of cancer patients (Taylor-Brown, Acheson, & Farber, 1993), and divorce adjustment (Zimpfer, 1990).

A growing utilization of the structured group model is occurring in the area of educating persons with psychiatric disorders such as depression (Sherrill, Frank, Geary, & Stack, 1997), cognitive disturbances (Commissaris, Verhey, & Jolles, 1996), bipolar disorder (Bauer & McBride, 1996), bulimia (Kaminski & McNamara, 1996), panic disorder (Shear, 1995), schizophrenia (Gallagher & Nazarian, 1995), and substance abuse (la Salvia, 1993). This sampling of groups demonstrates the broad appeal and efficacy of using the psychoeducational group as both primary and supplemental treatment modalities.

Because the psychoeducational group is becoming an integral part of service delivery in the counseling field, developing the skills to design appropriate counseling experiences is essential for today's practitioners. The design of an effective structured group must be well crafted for the experience to be both meaningful and effective. Graduate education often overlooks the development of this skill as most textbooks focus on group process rather than group design (Conyne, 1996). The goal of this article is to explain the balance between content and process in the psychoeducational group. Although the group literature is more process oriented, the current climate demands more content focus. In this article, a step-by-step guide is provided for translating an innovative idea into a successful structured group. Although the content of each group will vary, the process of design remains consistent. By following the steps of this process, the group leader can create an effective vehicle for client change.

MODEL OF STRUCTURED GROUP DESIGN

Drum and Knott (1977) described one of the first frameworks for designing structured groups and stated that such groups had a predetermined plan and goals. Topics for the group are predetermined and use discussion stimulus leads, structured activities, or a highly structured series of questions (Berg, Landreth, & Fall, 1998). Intentionally structured groups promote specific goals within a planned framework that is time specific (Winston, Bonney, Miller, & Dagley, 1988). Corey (1990) stated that structured groups serve the purposes of "imparting information, sharing common experiences, teaching people how to solve problems, offering support, and helping people learn how to create their own support systems outside of the group setting" (p. 11). Meichenbaum and Navaco (1985) evolved a model that included cognitive preparation and skill acquisition, rehearsal, application, and practice. These models have in common a preselected theme, specific goals, teaching of material, and activities to illustrate the material.

The model for design of a structured group presented in this article was originated by Furr and Fulkerson (1982) and entails two phases of development. The first phase is the conceptual phase that includes three steps: (a) statement of purpose, (b) establishing goals, and (c) setting objectives. The second phase is the operational phase that also includes three steps: (d) selection of content, (e) designing experiential activities, and (f) evaluation. The design process moves from a broad conceptual framework to implementation of specific content. A unique feature of this model is that the foundation of the conceptual phase is counseling theory. Whereas other design models have goal setting as a first step, this model emphasizes the need to build the group on sound theoretical principles. When goals evolve from a theoretical perspective of the topic, the group design will be more cohesive and sequenced in a logical progression. Each topic and activity will provide the foundation for the next topic.

Another feature of this model is its emphasis on processing the activities. Although process is implied by other models, this model is explicit in having the leader determine the direction of the processing prior to conducting an experiential activity. DeLucia-Waack (1997a) indicated the need for descriptions of group activities to include directions for processing. She stated that although group activities in the professional literature are often described in great detail, little attention is given to the processing of the activities. In this model, a balance is maintained among the didactic, experiential, and processing components of the group. The outcome of following this model is the development of a clearly articulated group that ensures the group content will remain

consistent across a variety of leaders and settings. To illustrate this process, an example of the six steps from a group on building self-esteem is provided in the appendix.

Step 1: Statement of Purpose

Ideas about structured groups usually evolve from clinical practice. Similarities among client problems may determine the group topic. Often, practitioners observe that certain types of clients could benefit from learning particular skills. Once that observation occurs, a structured group is the next logical step. At this point, the practitioner needs to establish a statement of purpose that is an explicit statement of the reason for the group's existence. This statement will answer the following questions: (a) What is the primary content focus of the group? (b) What population would benefit from participating in this group? (c) What is the purpose of intervention (remediation, prevention, or development)? (d) What is the expected outcome of participating in the group (change in cognitions, affect, behavior, or values)? Without a clear statement of purpose, the group will not have a clearly delineated direction. The statement of purpose provides a guide for the development of goals and objectives that in turn determine the content of the group.

Once the group focus is identified, the designer needs to consider his or her theoretical orientation to the topic. Theories guide beliefs about how change occurs in individuals that may occur in awareness, knowledge, insight, or behavior (Gladding, 1990). Each designer will make assumptions about the type of change that he or she expects based on a specific theory or the integration of several theories. Being aware of the theoretical assumptions helps the designer maintain a consistency among the different elements of the group. Without this awareness, the sessions may lack a thematic focus and leave the participant confused about the connections between the content and experiential activities.

To develop the theoretical perspective of the group topic, it is important to review current research related to the topic. The literature will help identify theoretical frameworks that have proven effective in addressing particular problems with specific populations. If a group leader has limited experience with a particular populations or problem, the leader should consult with more experienced professionals and get supervision.

Step 2: Establishing Goals

Goals indicate how an individual may change as a result of participating in the group experience and are derived from the theoretical

perspective indicated in the statement of purpose. Change can occur on cognitive, affective, behavioral, existential, and physical levels, and the designer needs to specify the type of change expected from group participants. The goals need to be consistent with the theoretical approach selected in the statement of purpose. For example, if an insight-oriented theory is chosen, then goals should not focus on behavior change.

Furthermore, a review of relevant literature is needed to provide a strong foundation for selecting goals and objectives. Once the group topic is selected, books and articles on that topic can help define the kind of change that can occur in the group. The example in the appendix describes goals that were derived from theoretical perspectives and research in the area of self-esteem. Ideas derived from Rogers (1961) contain the concept of unconditional self-acceptance, whereas research on cognitive behavior modification (Meichenbaum, 1977) provides the basis for changing self-talk. The professional literature in the field of counseling and group counseling addresses many psychoeducational topics. Using key words of the topic, a PsychLit search can be conducted to identify previous research and practice articles related to the topic of the group. Many articles may also contain specific activities that can be used in the group format.

For a goal to be effective in guiding the group design, it needs to meet several criteria. First, the goal must be reasonable in that it is challenging for the participants but is also achievable. If participants have unrealistic expectations of what can be achieved through the group, they will become disillusioned with the group process and perhaps disappointed in their own abilities to change. The goals should be designed so that there is a high probability of success in making the desired changes. For example, the leader of a stress management group may state that a goal is to help participants reduce stress; however, this wording is too general. A more focused goal would be to help participants identify and modify self-statements that increase feelings of anxiety.

Goals also need to be written in terms that are measurable so that participants can self-evaluate their own level of achievement. Goals that are measurable assist the member in recognizing that the group has certain limitations in its scope. Rather than believe that a group will be a cure-all for a particular issue, the member will enter the group with an understanding of what can be accomplished within a time-limited model.

Clearly defined goals also allow the participant to evaluate whether the outcomes facilitated by the group are consistent with his or her personal value system. Participants need to believe in the value of making the changes advocated by the group if the group is to be effective. Often, a group is designed to target a specific population without considering

whether that population sees a need to make a change. The group may focus on teaching behavior-change skills without examining the values associated with the behavior. Unless the participants see the group goals as congruent with their own values, they will not commit to the change process. For example, a group on job-seeking skills may emphasize the importance of making eye contact that may be in direct conflict with the social values of a cultural group. Both the leader and the participants could experience frustration if pertinent cultural values were not recognized.

In determining goals, the designer needs to be realistic in what can be accomplished in a time-limited setting. It is tempting to focus on long-range change when in reality, short-term goals are the essence of what can occur during the group. The designer may find it helpful to visualize the group as a springboard for future change by providing the members with tools for future growth. If a group is designed effectively, the short-range goals will provide successive steps that will enable the participant to reach long-range goals.

Step 3: Setting Objectives

Whereas goals are the compass setting the direction for the group, objectives provide the road map on how to get there. Once the goals have been established, the designer determines the best way to reach the goals. Objectives establish the connection between theory and application and specify the steps necessary for reaching the group goals. In setting objectives, the designer makes assumptions about the way in which a psychological concept evolves. These assumptions are derived from the research and literature on the group topic and provide the steps to change.

In the appendix, one of the goals cited focuses on learning to modify negative self-talk. The objectives then have to delineate steps to reaching that goal. In this case, the participant must learn to define the different types of self-talk, identify when he or she engages in negative self-talk, become aware of how the negative self-talk affects his or her self-esteem, and learn to change the negative statements to positive or coping statements. The designer would then use these steps to determine how to reach the goal of reducing negative cognitions.

A crucial element in group design is the identification of the specific steps necessary for change. It is the role of the objectives to put these steps into practice. The session-by-session content comes directly from the objectives that need to be written in a specific manner. Objectives indicate what must happen if the goal is to be met, thus providing an outline for the content. Once the objectives are specified, the designer

can choose from many creative approaches to meet the objectives. If the objectives are successfully implemented, the goals will be met. Because change can occur on multiple levels (behavioral, cognitive, affective, existential, and physical), objectives need to reflect the level being targeted. Although many concepts involve change on multiple levels, an objective often will focus on only one component of change. For example, improving a person's self-esteem may be related to developing an unconditional positive regard for one's self as well as changing negative cognitions. Because both components need to be addressed, two separate objectives would be developed to ensure that change is facilitated on affective and cognitive levels.

Because change is a multidimensional process, the designer will have to make assumptions about the most appropriate sequencing of the objectives. Each objective needs to be sequenced so that it leads logically to the next objective. As mentioned previously, the literature and theory provide guidance on the sequencing of goals, objectives, and activities. In the example provided in the appendix, it may be important that attention be given to changing negative cognitions before a person is able to believe that he or she is deserving of unconditional positive regard. This example assumes a rational emotive therapy (RET) perspective (Ellis, 1979) that states changing thinking leads to changing emotions. If a designer chose a different perspective such as Gestalt, changing feelings may precede changing thoughts. Proper sequencing of objectives allows the group to follow a natural progression in which one level of learning provides support for the next level.

Step 4: Selection of Content

Group content is organized into three components: didactic, experiential, and process. The didactic component focuses on the information to be taught directly to participants. One distinguishing factor of the structured group is the commitment to teaching psychological principles. Because structured groups are generally brief in duration, participants do not have time to discover all of the information for themselves. In fact, it is assumed that the leader has some knowledge that participants may not be able to discover through normal group interactions. The didactic approach allows the leader to take a directive role in teaching information appropriate to the group topic. Through the use of mini-lectures, the leader can provide the background knowledge needed for facilitating the change process.

A major feature of the didactic component is an interactive lecture in which the leader encourages comments and questions from the participants. Instead of just presenting the definition of a concept, the leader

would invite participants to share their ideas of the concept and then weave these comments into the definition the leader wanted to convey. Participants can be asked to provide personal examples of how the material applies to their own lives so that the information becomes more than an intellectual exercise.

These didactic mini-lectures typically range from 10 to 15 minutes but may be less depending on the age and attention span of the participants. The leader must be careful not to overload the participants with more information than they are able to process. Each lecture segment builds on previous segments until the concept being introduced is fully examined. The didactic segment begins with the simplest aspect of the concept and then expands to more complex ideas.

Although didactic information is a vital part of the structured group, change is dependent on the participant's ability to apply the concepts to life situations. Experiential learning allows the material to be encountered on a personal level. To learn by doing rather than just by listening results in a deeper and more complex educational experience. As the participant becomes more involved in the learning process, he or she takes more responsibility for applying the information to personal situations and consequently will be better able to use the knowledge outside of the group setting.

Experiential activities need to be grounded in theory just as the didactic component evolves from theory. The design of the activity will depend on what the theoretical assumptions say about which dimension (cognitive, behavioral, affective, physical, or existential) is critical to the concept being addressed. If time management is viewed from a behavioral viewpoint, activities may concentrate on examining how time is used daily and changing the order of activities. However, if time management is examined from a Gestalt perspective, then activities may center on examining how unfinished business interferes with engaging in the present.

Although the leader can maintain a degree of control over the presentation of didactic material, he or she can only determine the direction of the experience. Each participant may experience the activity in a different way because of his or her individual growth needs. The group leader must be prepared to address individual questions and outcomes of the exercise. The way in which the leader deals with these differences is through the third content component: process.

The goals of the process component are to help participants connect the experiential and didactic components. Once the experiential learning has occurred, participants may renew their interest in the informational component. They may need to clarify the conclusions they derived from the experience or examine questions that arose from the

experience. By linking the experience with the theory, the participant is better able to generalize the experience to a broader life context. Ultimately, the process component becomes the link between the group content and the participant's life outside of the group. Where the experiential component personalizes a concept for the participant, the process component integrates the new awareness with the individual's conceptual framework.

Including specific directions for processing the experiential activity is crucial to the success of the activity (DeLucia-Waack, 1997a). Many group leaders trust that appropriate processing questions will emerge from the group responses to an activity; however, it is beneficial for the leader to think through the purpose of the exercise and evolve questions that facilitate member understanding of the experience. Processing may include discussion about what happened in the activity; what were participants' reactions to the activity; what thoughts, feelings, or insights were generated; and how these insights can be applied to the participants' lives outside of the group. Kees and Jacobs (1990) suggested that processing questions begin with the concrete level and move to the abstract level. Initially, questions focus on processing what happened in the activity itself and then move to reflection on reactions to the exercise. Questions then can address how the activity has affected the group process. Later questions examine the impact of the exercise on members' feelings, thoughts, and insights as well as ways the experience can be applied to their lives outside of the group.

Another aspect of the processing component is the sharing of the leader's observations about the activity. While participants are engaged in the experiential component, the role of the leader is to observe the group interactions and to note issues and concerns that arise for participants. These issues and concerns then can be shared and examined during the process component. During this time, cognition and affect become integrated and assimilated into the participant's frame of reference. When the leader does not devote enough time to this component, the chance for transfer of learning to occur decreases.

The amount of time devoted to each of the three components is dependent on the dimension the leader is addressing (cognitive, behavioral, affective, physical, or existential). The dimension chosen as the primary focus depends on the theoretical perspective selected for the group. Some dimensions require more emphasis on the didactic, whereas others need to concentrate on the experiential and/or processing. In general, cognitive and behavioral dimensions focus more on the teaching aspect and are followed by practice activities. Affective and existential dimensions demand more experiential activities and extensive processing. The physical dimension needs to focus on the

experiential activities with less emphasis on processing. For example, teaching relaxation skills may focus the majority of attention on the experiential with some brief introduction and follow-up processing, whereas the topic of letting go of a past failure may need much time devoted to exploration of the affective dimension along with time to gain closure on the feelings through the processing component.

For the group design to have an impact, an appropriate balance of the three components of didactic, experiential, and processing is necessary or participants will not become fully involved with the group. Although the didactic content is what often attracts a participant to the group, it is the actual activities that make group stimulating and involving. Experiential activities or exercises are the driving force in effective structured groups. The content must be presented in such a manner that it impacts the participant in meaningful and lasting ways. Although exposure to information is important, the participant needs to take ownership of that information and translate it into his or her own frame of reference. To achieve the appropriate balance, the following timelines are suggested for each component: cognitive (60% didactic, 15% experiential, and 25% processing); behavioral (40% didactic, 40% experiential, and 20% processing); affective (30% didactic, 40% experiential, and 30% processing); existential (20% didactic, 40% experiential, and 40% processing); and physical (25% didactic, 50% experiential, and 25% processing).

Step 5: Designing Exercises

Many excellent exercises already exist and can be adapted to meet the needs of a particular group. Before choosing to incorporate an exercise created by someone else, the designer must first identify the theory and goals behind the exercise and determine if the exercise is congruent with the current group theory and goals. The exercise needs to be appropriate for the age and experience levels of participants to ensure that participants have sufficient developmental resources to benefit from the experience. Congruence between the dimensions addressed in the didactic component and the dimensions experienced in the exercise is essential.

Exercises can be grouped into several general categories from which the designer can create numerous variations. Each category will be discussed separately along with the goals of that category.

Self-assessment. One category of exercises is based on self-assessment instruments with the goal being to increase the participants' knowledge of their proficiency with regard to the topic of the group. Self-assessment allows each individual to specify areas of change he or she is willing to

undertake and thereby to set appropriate goals. A second benefit of using some type of self-assessment is that the same measure can serve as an indicator of progress at the end of the group experience. For some group topics, instruments with well-documented reliability and validity exist. However, it may be necessary to create some type of self-efficacy instrument that addresses the participant's beliefs about his or her confidence concerning aspects of the concept or an instrument that assesses the participant's knowledge about a topic. Other self-designed instruments may have the participant rate self-perceived behaviors in situations related to a concept being discussed in the group. For example, group participants in an assertion training group may rate their ability to act assertively in certain situations (i.e., expressing anger) with particular individuals such as family members or authority figures.

Cognitive restructuring. A major focus of many structured groups is on changing cognitions. Cognitive restructuring exercises concentrate on changing self-talk and disputing irrational beliefs. *Self-talk* is defined as subvocal speech that usually serves to direct one's actions and evaluate one's behavior (Meichenbaum, 1977). It is the ongoing conversation with one's self that can arouse emotions or instigate action. Once a person changes his or her thought pattern or challenges an irrational belief, both the affective reaction and the behavior are modified. To engage in cognitive restructuring, the sequence of change is (a) recognition of inappropriate self-talk, (b) restructuring the content of self-talk, and (c) repeated implementation of the readjusted self-statements. For example, in a group focused on managing stress, participants may be asked to identify self-statements that increase their anxiety and then modify these statements to become more calming.

Role-playing. Role-playing is a category of exercises that is related to the behavioral dimension. The goal of role-playing is to facilitate behavior change particularly in interpersonal situations. Role-playing allows participants to rehearse new behaviors in a supportive environment and to receive feedback in a constructive way. An integral part of role-playing is feedback that may come from observers or from a videotape that allows for self-observation. For feedback to be effective, the observer must be able to discriminate between appropriate and inappropriate behaviors. One method of teaching discrimination skills is through modeling in which the leader provides examples of the targeted behavior as well as examples of ineffective behaviors. Role-playing is frequently used when teaching any type of communication skills in groups such as marriage enrichment, job interviewing, or friendship building.

Imagery. The use of imagery exercises allows the designer to move beyond the constraints of the immediate setting (Heppner, O'Brien, Hinkelman, & Humphrey, 1994; Myrick & Myrick, 1993). By encouraging the participant to use his or her imagination, an exercise can take the participant to a setting specific to his or her own issue. Imagery exercises can focus on either behavior or affect. Visualizing how one is supposed to act can actually improve performance. The use of imagery in systematic desensitization also is well documented (Renneberg, Goldstein, Phillips, & Chambliss, 1990).

Imagery increases intrapersonal awareness on both the affective and existential dimensions. Suppressed emotions may be brought to the surface through reliving experiences, and life meaning may become clearer as one projects his or her life into the future.

Creative arts. The use of art (Gladding, 1998), music (Gallant, Holosko, & Siegel, 1997), and drama (Winder, 1996) can be beneficial to adults as well as children. Use of these creative media allows the participant to express ideas or feelings that may be difficult to convey in words. Because of the hands-on nature of these activities, participants are engaged on multiple dimensions—physical, cognitive, and affective. Often, the goal of creative activities is to encourage expression of difficult emotions, and the subsequent processing of the creative activity facilitates the development of a new cognitive framework about the feelings.

Although the use of drama may initially sound similar to role-playing, there are some important distinctions. Role-playing is directed toward learning a new behavior, whereas drama allows for exploration of interpersonal dynamics. An example of this type of drama is the use of family sculpting (Lawson, 1989) where a participant can fully examine his or her position within the family. Other group participants are placed in the roles of family members, creating a living portrait that shows the individual participant's relation to the other family members. This process allows the participant to examine feelings related to his or her position in the family.

Body awareness. A final category of exercises involves the physical body and the way in which the participant interprets physical sensations. Body awareness exercises facilitate knowledge of physical signs connected to affect and behavior. Relaxation exercises are the most popular example of a body awareness experience. Many Gestalt exercises are related to sensory awareness and are based on the view that the body is inseparable from thoughts and feelings (Passons, 1975). Increasing this awareness can lead to increased recognition of denied emotions and the way in which cognitions lead to blocking affect.

Homework. In addition to in-group activities, the leader may want to add an out-of-group assignment to reinforce the skills and concepts introduced during the group. Homework allows participants to practice outside of the group what was learned in the group (Gazda, 1989). Usually, homework is assigned at the end of the session and can serve as a way of closing the session as well as providing continuity to the next session. It can focus on thinking, feeling, and/or behavior experiences and can take many forms such as observing self or others, recording reactions, practicing skills, and self-exploration through journaling. If participants are asked to complete a homework assignment, time needs to be allotted at the beginning of the next session for processing reactions. Otherwise, participants will not gain the full value of the activity, and the opportunity to provide corrective feedback is lost.

Exercises are not limited to the categories previously described. The designer is limited only by his or her imagination. The importance of well-designed (and well-processed) activities cannot be overemphasized. It is the exercises that personalize the information for the participant and facilitate the integration of the concepts into the participant's cognitive framework. Without exercises, the psychoeducational group would become a vehicle that only conveys information rather than changes perceptions and behavior. As discussed previously, the experiential activities must be thoroughly processed to realize the maximum benefit.

Step 6: Evaluation

An essential part of any structured group is evaluation. If a group is to be effective, the designer must test the ideas and determine which components facilitate change. *Process evaluation* refers to the effectiveness of the session-to-session activities, whereas *outcome evaluation* looks at the degree of individual change. Process evaluation is an ongoing activity and is important because members' perceptions of their connectedness to the group often predict who will drop out and who will find the group effective (DeLucia-Waack, 1997b). Throughout the group, the leader needs to consult with members about their perceptions of the group and its activities. This type of evaluation may occur informally as the leader asks whether the information presented has been helpful or if an activity was meaningful. The leader may decide to have a brief evaluation midway through the group to see if group needs are being met. Although a group design may not be able to be adapted to every suggestion, the leader often can make minor adaptations to respond to a member request. A number of process measures have been developed to evaluate group leadership behavior, group climate, therapeutic factors,

and in-session behavior. Many of these instruments are discussed in a comprehensive review of process and outcome measures by DeLucia-Waack (1997b). For example, the Group Sessions Rating Scale (Cooney, Kaddes, Litt, & Getter, 1991) can be used in psychoeducational groups to evaluate the perceived effectiveness of specific group interventions.

Outcome evaluation is increasingly important in demonstrating the effectiveness of psychoeducational groups and can take several forms. The most rigorous form is closely aligned with research design in which participants are pretested on objective criteria prior to entering the group and posttested on completion of the group. Although a number of instruments exist to measure specific constructs, caution should be used in selecting these instruments because the construct addressed by the group may not change dramatically in the short span of a structured group (Baldwin, Collins, Kostenbauer, & Murphy, 1988). Although skills may be learned and cognitive frameworks influenced, the global construct may take longer to change.

Speer (1998) classified outcome measures into different categories and provided examples of instruments in each category. These categories include (a) client's self-reports of distress, (b) client's self-reports of symptoms, (c) client's self-reports of functioning and role appraisal, (d) significant other reports of consumer functioning and role performance, (e) public gatekeepers as sources of data, (f) functioning and role appraisal by independent observers, and (g) functioning and role appraisal by providers. He emphasized that information does not have to be limited to data collected from the participant but can include reports from others in the environment who directly observe the participant's level of functioning. For example, teachers can observe improvement in conflict resolution skills, and school records can indicate a decrease in office referrals, better academic performance, and increased attendance.

Another form of assessing outcome is centered on goal attainment. Participants are measured on how well they obtain the goals outlined by the group leader or how well they reach the goals they write for themselves at the beginning of the group. Items in the evaluation are specifically linked to the group content. An example of this type of item used in the Building Self-Esteem Group is "I can identify when I make negative self-statements" with the rating ranging from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree*. One benefit of this process is that it allows the participants to review the process they have just completed and teaches them to self-evaluate.

Member satisfaction is another common form of outcome evaluation. In this form of evaluation, participants report their subjective reaction to the group rather than an objective outcome. They may evaluate the leader's style, the content of the group, and the group activities. Member

satisfaction reflects the degree of attractiveness the member has to the group and can focus on how satisfied the member is with his or her individual progress and the level of satisfaction with the group interaction. Satisfaction in itself is not sufficient to create change but is a facilitative condition for nurturing change.

RECOMMENDATIONS

A pitfall for many new designers is having a focus for the group that is too broad. Initially, a topic such as building self-esteem appears to be an exciting prospect for a structured group. Once the designer begins writing goals and objectives, it will become evident that only a limited number of the main concepts can be incorporated into the group. One way of dealing with containing the scope of a group is to consider designing sequential groups on the same topic. The first group could establish the foundation concepts with subsequent groups building more complex skills. Another approach is to design parallel groups that complement one another. For example, a group that concentrates on assertion training could follow a group with a self-esteem focus because assertiveness is a skill helpful for maintaining a healthy self-esteem.

Another challenge for designers is making the time commitment necessary for documentation of the group design. Designers usually get excited about creating the ideas but lose some interest when the design process becomes tedious. If the documentation is to be complete enough for repetitive use, the designer must be willing to include substantial detail. It is very easy for the designer to assume that he or she will remember what was intended by a brief phrase or abbreviation only to realize much later that he or she cannot recall the meaning of an activity. Ideally, instructions should be written in enough detail so that another professional with similar training can lead the group without confusion.

At times, the designer must let go of an exercise that he or she views as extremely powerful but that does not fit the goals and objectives of a particular session. Too often, a leader begins with the exercise and tries to build the session around it. This approach forces the designer to evolve the goals from the exercise rather than from the theory, resulting in inconsistency among the sessions. Deducing the content from the theory allows the content to flow easily from one session to another and supports a logical sequencing of material.

The designer needs to recognize that a natural evolution of the group exists and that the nature of sessions will change as the group progresses. Early sessions need to provide members with a sense of safety

so they need to be high on the support factor. It is important to limit the amount of risk-taking activities members are asked to complete until group cohesion forms. Initially, self-disclosure activities should be limited to surface topics while gradually moving to a deeper intrapersonal level. As the need for support decreases, the leader needs to shift to information and activities that are more of a challenge to the participants. Unless the participants feel that more is being demanded of them, the group will lose its appeal and involvement will decrease. Each session needs to maintain an appropriate balance of the support and challenge factors.

A delicate relationship exists between using group process skills to respond to group dynamics and maintaining the structure of the group. Because the leader cannot fully anticipate how individual members will respond to the material, the leader must be able to react spontaneously. However, there will be a tremendous temptation to allow process to overshadow content. When process becomes dominant, the group is no longer psychoeducational and evolves into a therapy group. At times, a leader must demonstrate great restraint and not pursue an individual's personal issues at a deeper level. For many leaders, staying with the group plan and allowing for only minor deviations is the greatest challenge of structured group leadership.

Finally, group leaders need to remain aware of members who may benefit from a referral for additional individual or group therapy. Even when appropriate screening has occurred, a group member may experience a crisis or become aware of deeper level issues. If this situation occurs while the group is in progress, the group leader will need to meet individually with the member and evaluate whether the member should continue with the group. Because of the structure provided by the group, the member may be able to manage the emotional situation without creating a distraction in the group. However, the leader and member may feel that the group would not be productive for the member and would need to make a referral. It is the responsibility of the leader to maintain a current list of referral sources and assist the member by coordinating the referral (Gladding, 1999).

IMPLICATIONS FOR GROUP COUNSELORS

The design of an effective psychoeducational group is a highly involved endeavor. The benefits of following this process is that the group retains a strong theoretical foundation while creating stimulating activities that enable the participant to actively engage the material. Once the design has been completed, implemented, and refined, the

group can be repeated easily by different facilitators without any loss of effectiveness. The time spent in the initial design may appear to be overwhelming at first, but if the designer truly wants an effective product that will stand the test of time, the investment is proven beneficial.

APPENDIX

Structured Group on Building Self-Esteem

Step 1: Statement of Purpose

The group, Building Self-Esteem, is designed for college students who desire to develop more positive feelings about themselves. The group design is based on the assumption that self-esteem is learned through interactions with others. Self-esteem is defined as the ability to know one's self, both strengths and limitations, and to accept and value one's self unconditionally. Individuals are not born with positive or negative esteem but with the capacity to develop in either direction.

Step 2: Goals

1. To develop an understanding of the relationship between self-talk and self-esteem and to learn to modify inappropriate self-talk.
2. To develop an awareness of how feelings relate to self-talk with special emphasis on the ways people use self-talk to cancel out positive feelings.
3. To help participants understand how beliefs, self-talk, and feelings influence behavior and to assist participants in identifying changes that can lead to behavior change.

Step 3: Objectives

Objectives for Goal 1:

- a. Participants will learn the definition of self-talk and be able to differentiate between positive, negative, and coping self-talk.
- b. Participants will be able to define the relationship between self-esteem and self-talk and will identify how their personal self-talk affects their self-esteem.
- c. Participants will learn to identify personal negative statements and ways to change these negative statements to positive or coping statements.

Step 4: Content

Self-talk and self-esteem. At this point, the concept of *self-talk* and its involvement in self-esteem is explained. What one says to one's self is one of the most accessible factors to an individual in changing his or her level of esteem. As a way

of illustrating this point, have the group think about getting back a test paper with a poor grade and then ask them what things they say to themselves that keep them from maintaining their self-esteem. Emphasize that being aware of what they say to themselves is what the group will be working on in the remaining sessions. Explain the principle: Changing self-talk changes feelings about one's self.

Step 5: Exercises

Changing self-talk:

- a. Distribute handout on self-talk that contains examples of negative self-talk in the left column. In the right column, an example is provided on how to change the negative self-talk to positive or coping self-talk. The leader asks members to read the first example and describe the differences between the types of self-talk. The leader also may ask for personal examples of negative self-talk and demonstrate ways to change these to positive or coping self-talk.
- b. Small group activity. The group is asked to break into triads and read the remaining examples on the handout. They are then to change the negative self-talk to positive or coping statements. Once this task is completed, they are to identify a personal statement they typically say to themselves that serves to reduce their self-esteem. Participants then help each other in restating self-talk in a way that does not decrease self-esteem.
- c. Regroup and discuss. The leader asks the triads to share examples of negative statements and the revised positive or coping statements. Processing questions may include: How does your negative self-talk affect your feelings about yourself? How did your feelings toward yourself change once you switched to a positive or coping statement? What are some of the ways in which you can apply these principles during the next week?

Step 6: Evaluation

- a. Process evaluation: At conclusion of second session, ask members to identify what they had learned from the activities and how they can use this information to meet their individual goals for change. In addition, ask members what activities and information had not been helpful to them.
- b. Outcome evaluation: Compare pretest evaluation on definitions of self-esteem and self-talk with posttest evaluation.
- c. Outcome evaluation: Give participants a list of negative statements and have them change the statements to positive or coping statements.

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