

Group Counseling: Making it work on the small campus

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Rationale for groups

- Increased demand for services
- Time efficient
- Effective
- Homogeneous vs heterogeneous options

Questions of interest

- Is it students or counselors who are not interested/not comfortable with group counseling?
- Are time-limited workshops good precursors to group?
- What about effective marketing strategies?
- How do you deal with students' concerns that they may know somebody else in the group?

Research on groups

- Jennings and Anderson, 1997 JCSP, V12, 2.
- Random sample of 75 large (26 using groups) and 75 small (less than 6,000 FTE) schools (11 using groups). Commonly cited reasons for not having groups on the small campus
 - Negative staff attitudes about groups
 - Center policies inhibiting use of groups
 - Lack of trained group leaders
 - Shortage of group space

3 Common Group Types

1. Intentionally Structured Group
 - leader organizes the session
 - lays the ground work for the activities to be done that day
2. Psychoeducational group
 - both educational and therapeutic
 - more likely to be structured, closed and time limited.

3 Common Group Types

3. Therapy/process group
 - note membership changes if an open group
 - address concerns that have occurred since last meeting
 - review previous meeting, topics from the previous meeting
 - discuss any 'homework' assignments
 - may include a structured exercise to help members focus on issues at hand

Therapeutic factors

Group therapy is not individual counseling with 6 other people watching!

How does Group therapy help: mechanisms that effect change (Yalom, 1985)

1. Instillation of hope
 - Helping members to see that other members have made changes
2. Universality
 - Knowledge that you are not alone, others share your problems

Therapeutic factors

- 3. Imparting of information
Giving information that is useful and timely, mental health problems, family styles,
- 4. Altruism
Feeling that they are important to others is helpful
- 5. Corrective recapitulation of the family
Exploration of early family experiences that still influence the person

Therapeutic factors

- 6. Development of socializing techniques
Subtle and direct teaching of social skills
- 7. Imitative behavior
Modeling among group members, prosocial, or helpful behaviors
- 8. Interpersonal learning
Helping the individual to become a better observer of their own behavior, and how it affects others, then coming to terms with the process of changing behavior.

Therapeutic factors

- 9. Group Cohesiveness
The impact of belonging to the group is very powerful, ingroup vs. outgroup status
- 10. Catharsis
Acquiring the skills for self expression
- 11. Existential factors
Learning to take and accept responsibility for one's life, acceptance of non-being and the recognition of the importance of quality of life

Rensselaer Polytechnic Inst.

FTE 5500 UG, 1500 Grad
Primarily STEM majors
70% men
Frequent social difficulties

Social Anxiety Group

Has been running for 4 years

An open group with changing membership during the semester.

Averages 4-5 students, as many as 9

Students have often experienced bullying which led to social withdrawal

Social Anxiety

Students referred from 1-1 counseling

Participate in pre-group interview

Challenge – finding mutual time slots

- Schedule change on campus has made it easier
- Use of scheduling software helps
- Staff flexibility in finding common meeting time, sometimes after hours

Social Anxiety

Students now come in requesting admission to the group

Some word of mouth advertising

CC website includes videos of students who have been at the CC, including a former group member.



Marta Carlson, Ph.D.
Associate Director
Student Development and Counseling Center
Assumption College

About Assumption College...

- A small Catholic liberal arts college located in Central Massachusetts
- About 2000 undergraduates
- About 60% female and 40% male
- About 90% residential
- At the Student Development & Counseling Center, we have 3 full-time counselors and 2 half-time interns.
- 15% of undergrads utilized counseling services, .5% were involved with group treatment.

History of Group Counseling at Assumption College

- Late 1980s - 2002: The Eating Disorders Group ran every semester
- 2002: Decision made to convert the Eating Disorders Group to a Women's Group
- 2003 – 2013: The Women's Group has run almost every semester
- 2013: Decision made to convert the Women's Group to a mixed gender group
- Fall 2013: Launching the Young Adults Group

Why Assumption College Students Do Group Counseling...

Focus group question:

When there are so many other ways you could spend your time, how did you decide to commit to the Women's Group?

Why Assumption College Students Do Group Counseling (cont.)...

Answers:

- "Sounded like a good idea."
- "A way to meet people."
- "A good outlet."
- "A support group."
- "A good experience for being a counselor."
- "Individual [counseling] didn't work for me, so I wanted to try group."
- "I wanted to meet other people who had had a rough transition [to college]."
- "I liked knowing others in the same boat as me."

Marketing Groups on a Small Campus

How do you do it?

- You must be committed to group counseling as an effective modality. If you are uncertain, consider getting more training or supervision about group counseling.
- If you have at least 3 students with similar concerns, you potentially have a group.
- Announce the group at relevant professional meetings (e.g., Student Health Services, Residential Life, peer consultation groups), send out marketing to these groups...and then keep reminding them!!
- Make the referral process easy.

Marketing Groups on a Small Campus (cont)

- Seed your groups from your own (and your counseling colleagues') case loads. Why?
 - They know you and trust your judgment.
 - You can prepare them.
 - You can continue working with them in individual while they are in the group.

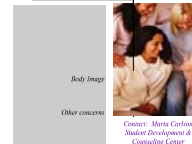
Marketing (cont.)...

- If possible, expand the population of students you draw from (e.g., local consortia groups, neighboring colleges and universities).
- Find out from your students what kind of announcements/advertisements/publicity they actually pay attention to, and focus your marketing efforts there (e.g., campus portals, tv, email, Facebook, Twitter).
- Design visual publicity (flyers, posters, pamphlets).



The Women's Group

Starting in February 2013



Body Image

Other concerns

Contact: Maria Galone
Student Development & Counseling Center
(508) 767-7272
mgalone@assumption.edu

Assumption College is an Equal Opportunity Institution. We are committed to providing a safe and supportive environment for all students. If you have any concerns or questions, please contact the Student Development & Counseling Center at (508) 767-7272.

Assumption College
Worcester, Massachusetts

Women's Group
Beginning again in October '07

Body Image

Other concerns

Contact: Marie Carlton
Student Development &
Counseling Center
(508) 765-2275

Assumption College is an Equal Opportunity Institution. All persons are encouraged to participate in the activities of the college. No person shall be discriminated against on the basis of race, color, sex, religion, national origin, or handicap. For more information, contact the Office of Student Development and Counseling Center, Assumption College, Worcester, MA 01602.

Confidentiality of Group Counseling

Focus group question:

What made the Women's Group feel comfortable in terms of confidentiality or in terms of general comfort about discussing personal issues?

Confidentiality (cont.)...

Answers:

"Saying [orally] in front of the other people [during the first group meeting] that I would maintain confidentiality."

"Everybody taking care of each other, showing kindness towards each other."

"I think of the people in the waiting room as trying to get help [like me]. A connection...other people also use this service."

Starting an Eating Disorders Group: Some things to think about...

- Consider members' stages of recovery and readiness for group.
- Consider the impact of greater versus less diversity in terms of diagnosis.
- Consider establishing group rules/guidelines around the use of triggering language and food during group meetings.

Group Counseling on a Small Campus: General Considerations...

- Groups do require more planning at the front end...but often less work in the middle and back end as members begin to take care of each other.
- For students new to group: Consider structuring the early sessions or having one or two orientation sessions (e.g., "Tips for Making the Most of Your Group Experience").
- For returning members: Consider handing out copies of "Group Rules and Guidelines" and "Tips for Making the Most of Your Group Experience" and reviewing these in the first session.

Group Rules and Guidelines



1. Please keep absolutely confidential both the membership of this group as well as any material shared in this group.
2. Be on time.
3. Please attempt to be present for all of the meetings. If for some reason, you are not able to attend one or more meetings, let me know as soon as you can.
4. Be honest with yourself and with other members of the group about what you are thinking and feeling during the group.
5. Please communicate your thoughts, feelings, reactions, etc. to each other in a way that is kind and also honest.
6. Please be willing to share aspects of yourself with the group and to listen and respond to others when they share. The power of a group comes from the commitment of members to explore issues (their own as well as others), to give and take from each other, and to support each other.
7. Please strive to be open and non-judgmental of other members' growth process. Remember, change takes time!
8. Please arrange to have access to your own personal counselor during the course of this group.
9. Please avoid socializing outside the group while the group is meeting weekly.



TIPS FOR MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR GROUP EXPERIENCE

Focus on the "here and now"
 You will experience a variety of thoughts and feelings about other group members and the group leader. It is important to share these reactions as you are experiencing them "here and now" during the group session. This will be scary at times and that is OK. Just remember, there are no good or bad feelings in the group. The group will function only if you are willing to share what you are thinking and feeling about being in the group.

The essential principles in group therapy are:

- Honestly share what you are experiencing
- Willingness to take risks

These principles are what can make group therapy a meaningful experience.

It is also important to learn how to set limits, so if you feel that you do not want to share your thoughts or feelings at a particular time, it is OK to say "no".

Experiment with new behaviors
 You can think of a group as a safe setting in which you can test out different ways of interacting with people and see how it feels to you and for them. For example, if you want to practice being more assertive, you can try doing that in the group and get other members' feedback on your new behaviors. Remember, group therapy is a unique experience because it will provide you with a safe environment in which you can take some interpersonal risks that you might not be willing to try outside of the group.

Avoid giving advice to others
 At times you will be tempted to give members direct advice on their particular concerns. Rather than using time in the group to solve problems that exist outside of the group, you will be encouraged to focus on your reactions to what is happening "in the moment" during the group session. While there may be times when giving advice feels appropriate, you should remember that former group members rarely, if ever, felt receiving advice as one of the most helpful aspects of their group experience.



"Well, I feel some of you in this group are heavily into denial."



Jocelyn Novelle, MA, LPC, NCC
Assistant Director of Counseling
Sacred Heart University

Sacred Heart University

- A Catholic university established by the Diocese of Bridgeport, CT to be run by lay people.
- Wide range of bachelor and master programs, physical therapy doctoral program.
- 3,241 full-time undergraduates and 2,270 graduate students. Graduate students are limited to 5 individual counseling sessions/year but can come to unlimited group sessions. 12.7% of UG used counseling services.
- Counseling Center consists of 3 full-time counselors (one does substance abuse evals and referrals only), 3 part-time counselors, a part-time health educator, and a part-time psychiatrist.

Remember: Groups can be fun!



Training for Groups

- All staff members participate in the running of groups.
- All have had group process and facilitation training as part of graduate program.
- Group experts from surrounding universities have conducted in-services.
- Several staff have attended AGPA conferences which have excellent workshops on groups on college campuses.
- All staff are part of group listserv (groupsinscc@lists.fsu.edu) where invaluable information is shared across campuses on what works/what doesn't work with groups.

History of groups

- Each year, the number and type of groups that are offered varies significantly.
- 2012-2013 395 total clients—8 in group.
2011-2012 434 clients—20 in group.
2010-2011 402 clients—20 in group.
- Past groups: general psychotherapy, sexual assault survivor support, anxiety, grief, body image, eating disorders, first-year adjustment, alcohol recovery, and women's support.

Small Campus Challenges: Confidentiality

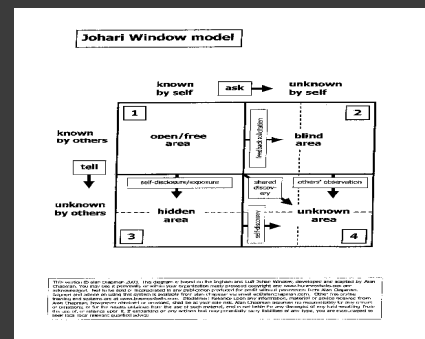
- On a small campus where news spreads like wildfire and everybody is in each other's business, students are very concerned about who will be in group.
- It is crucial to explain the importance of confidentiality *before* the student attends a group.
- Set a policy for how to handle two members of group knowing each other very well and discuss this with students *before* they attend group.
- There has never been an issue brought to group facilitators at Sacred Heart of members sharing information outside of group. Each member is equally vulnerable.

How to prepare students for group

Group Preparation Sheet (part of screening)

- Have you been in group before? If yes, how was that experience for you?
- What change do you want to make by joining a group?
- How do you feel group members can be helpful to you?
- What is your biggest fear about the group experience?

Preparation for group continued...



Most Effective Groups at Sacred Heart: Strategies for Success

- Strategy: Running more support groups.

Students often feel more comfortable sharing their stories and supporting each other than getting deeply into group process.

Also, the time constraints of the college setting make it more difficult to run long-term groups.



Strategies continued...

- Strategy: Referring students who have already attended individual counseling to group. They are more comfortable with the center and feel safe to go to a group.

Strategies continued...

- Strategy: Finding the students who want to participate and organizing the group time around their schedules. Use www.doodle.com to confidentially find a time that works best for everyone.

Strategies continued...

- Strategy: Conducting time-limited workshops on certain topics (i.e. “Tweak what you Eat”, etc.). At the conclusion of these workshops, students may be more open to joining a group on the topic.

Strategies continued...

- Strategy: Combining outgoing, socially comfortable students with introverted students. This improves the dynamic significantly.
- The most successful groups at Sacred Heart were the general psychotherapy group and the women’s group for this reason.

Helpful Resources

- Corey books.
- 101 Interventions in Group Therapy, Scott Simon Fehr, Editor.
- groupsinscc@lists.fsu.edu listserv.
- Theory and Practice of Group Psyc. (Yalom, 1985)
- American Group Psychotherapy Association (AGPA).
- Association for Specialists in Group Work & the Journal for Specialists in Group Work.
- Journal of College Student Psychotherapy, V12, 2, 1997.