**About Process Groups  
 (Understanding Self & Others)**

**What is a Process Group?**

Group therapy is a powerful tool for growth and change. In process groups, 5-10 individuals meet face to face to share their struggles and concerns with 1-2 trained group therapists. The power of process groups lies in the unique opportunity to receive multiple perspectives, support, encouragement and feedback from other individuals in safe and confidential environment. ***These interpersonal interactions can provide group members an opportunity to deepen their level of self-awareness and to learn how they relate to others***.

Process groups are typically unstructured. There isn’t a specific topic for each group session, but some of the groups may be focused on a particular theme or the group may be target to specific group of individuals (e.g., women, men, or older students). Members are welcome to bring any issues to the group that they feel are important, and the primary focus of therapy in the group is on the interactions among group members. Members are encouraged to give support and feedback to others, and to work with the reactions and responses that other members’ contributions bring up for them.

**What can I expect from being in group therapy?**

The first few sessions of a process group usually focus on the establishment of trust. During this time, the group therapists and group members work towards establishing a level of trust that allows them to communicate openly and honestly. In a climate of trust, people feel free to care about and help each other. New members are often amazed at how much their contributions help other members. Group trust is enhanced when all members make a commitment to the group.

During the group meeting time, members are responsible for talking about what is troubling them. Discussion flows according to what members would like to talk about — the group leaders do not, for the most part, assign topics for the group to discuss. Members are encouraged to give support and feedback to others, and to work with the reactions and responses that other members’ contributions bring up for them. Group members and group therapists may serve as models for effective communication, offer problem-solving strategies, and promote self-acceptance and self-support.

As individuals begin interacting freely with other group members, they usually re-experience or recreate some of the interpersonal difficulties that brought them to the group in the first place. Many of the reasons people seek help with personal issues usually stem from difficulties in their relationships with others. Under the skilled direction of a group therapist, **the group is able to point out troublesome interpersonal patterns by providing feedback and support and offering alternatives**, and in such a way that the difficulty becomes resolved.

Unexpressed feelings are a major reason why people experience difficulties and distress. Sharing your thoughts and feelings in a safe and supportive environment is an important part of group therapy and strongly affects how much you will be helped. The climate of trust provided by the group promotes an environment where members feel safe to share their struggles and work collaboratively to understand one another. As individuals increase their self-awareness, develop new ways of relating to people, and learn new adaptive behaviors, they make progress towards their personal goals that brought them to the group.

**Interpersonal Process Group**

**How to Make the Most Out of Group**

* **Be yourself** – start from where you are, not where you think others want you to be.
* **Define goals** – what do you want to get out of group? However, be flexible about the potential for goals to change.
* **Recognize and respect yours and others’ pace for getting involved in the group** – some will always be ready to disclose their thoughts or feelings; others need more time to gain feelings of trust and security.
* **Take time for yourself** – you have the right to take group time to talk about yourself.
* **Focus on what is most important to you** – try to focus on the main ideas, thoughts, or feelings.
* **Recognize and express reactions and feelings** – if you have difficulty with this, ask the group to help you.
* **Be aware of censored thoughts and feelings** – try and take the risk to let yourself be emotionally available to and vulnerable with others.
* **Give and receive feedback** – both positive and negative, as soon as possible.
  + Specific and concrete
  + Representative of your own thoughts and feelings
  + Request it
* **Avoid giving advice** – sometimes giving advice prevents an individual from being heard.
* **Take risks** – experiment with different ways of behaving and expressing yourself to figure out what works and doesn’t work for you.
* **Ask questions** – seek clarification when needed to avoid making assumptions.
* **Become aware of distancing behaviors** – it is likely that your distancing behaviors have been adaptive in the past, but are they preventing you from getting what you want now?
* **Try to be as direct as possible and be open to the responses of others** – aim for dialogue that fosters an understanding of your experiences.
* **Remember that how people talk is as important as what they say** – pay attention to non-verbal behaviors and be willing to express your observations.
* **Focus on the relationships you have with the group** – focus on what is happening to make you feel closer to or more distance to the group.
* **Work outside the group** – work to build your awareness and try new things you are taking away from group in other areas of your life.
* **Be patient with yourself** – growth takes time and effort.
* **Give the group time to develop** – make a commitment to attend at least three group sessions before deciding if group is right for you or not.
* **Maintain confidentiality** – what is said in group stays in group.

**The Group as a Laboratory**

Group is a great space to take risks and “experiment” with new ways of interacting with others to see how that can result in a different outcome. In the column on the left you will find behaviors that may be contributing to difficulties in your relationships or functioning. The column on the right has suggestions of behaviors that you could challenge yourself to try out during the group.

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| If you relate to people by: | You might experiment with: |
| Complying, giving in, being self-effacing | Saying no |
| Resisting suggestions; holding back | Taking a risk; trying something new |
| Always talking; filling any silence with words because you feel uncomfortable | Being silent for a minute; getting in touch with uncomfortable feelings; talking about those feelings |
| Waiting for someone to say something, then reacting | Initiating something yourself, for someone else to react to |
| Always smiling, even when annoyed or angry | Talking without smiling |
| Explaining | Simply responding with what you feel (e.g., " I have an impulse to explain") |
| Trying to get people to stop feeling a certain way | Simply accepting the way they feel; at the same time exploring your impulses and feelings |
| Being polite; not showing anger or judgment | Connecting with your thoughts and emotions, and sharing them frankly and respectfully |
| Expressing anger easily | Checking to see what feelings are underneath the anger |
| Deflecting praise | Accepting praise and noticing your internal reactions and reflexes |
| Feeling bored but being too polite to say anything about it | Respectfully talking about your feelings of boredom |
| When attacked, defending yourself | Not saying anything in rebuttal-but exploring the feelings you have |
| Being afraid-and hiding your fear | Being openly afraid; letting everyone know it |
| Always complimenting others | Providing more complete and rounded feedback |
| Trying to get everybody to approve of you | Being what you are and not giving a damn what they think |
| Giving advice | Practice active listening; ask the other person how they would like to be supported |
| Always helping other people | Asking for help, letting yourself be helped |
| Always asking for help | Helping someone else |
| Controlling your feelings and suppressing them | Experiencing your feelings and exploring them |
| Keeping things secret | Disclosing something about yourself that is hard to say |
| Playing it safe | Taking a few risks |