

Myths/Common Concerns About Group Therapy



- **“In group I am expected to disclose my deepest secrets.”**

You will be encouraged to share at a level that feels comfortable to you. It is common to feel uncomfortable at times when sharing, though most find their level of safety and willingness to talk increases as the group progresses. You may be invited by the group leader or other members to discuss your reactions or personal concerns, but you will never be forced to do or share something you do not want to. While many group members have reported feeling relief or an increased sense of understanding and acceptance after their disclosures, it is accomplished within their personal time frame.

- **“Hearing other member’s problems will make me feel or get worse.”**

Group members report gaining satisfaction, meaning and a sense of connection by hearing other’s struggles and successes. If hearing other’s problems makes you feel worse, this may indicate difficulty tolerating difficult emotions and poor emotional boundaries, which can be address in group therapy. Group can help you learn to sit with others who are suffering, as well as increasing tolerance of your own suffering, in a way that is compassionate and helpful. Hearing other’s experience can also be uplifting, provide hope and inspiration, and provide relief as you recognize that you are not alone.

- **“What about Confidentiality?”**

Confidentiality is mandatory for all group participants. You commit to upholding confidentiality by not discussing any group members and their experiences outside of the group. The golden rule for group: Everything that happens in group, stays in group.

- **“The group will look like the ‘Alcoholics Anonymous’ groups I have seen on TV.”**

Students report that groups and workshops look very different when compared to how they are portrayed on TV. The group and workshop facilitators strive to be dynamic, creative and respectful and do not require students to have a diagnosis or label to participate, or feel pressured to disclose any personal information. The counseling center encourages students to view themselves as unique, multifaceted individuals, and are thus not asked to define or view themselves in any particular way.

- **“Group therapy will take longer and I will not get enough attention or may not get my needs met.”**

Actually, group therapy can be more effective than individual therapy for two reasons. First, you can benefit from the group even during sessions when you say little, and merely listen carefully to others. You will find that you have a lot in common with other group members and as they work on a concern you can learn about yourself and your own situation. Group members may bring up issues that strike a chord with you but that you might not have been aware of or brought up yourself. Second, group therapy has been recommended to you because your counselor determined it is the best way to address your particular concerns, concerns that individual therapy may not be able to address in the same way. If you find that that feeling like you are not getting your needs met is a pattern for you, experiment with ways you can get your needs met in group. This may include asking the group for what you want or sharing your concerns regarding this topic aloud.

- **“Group therapy will be just like telling my problems to my friends.”**

Research shows that group therapy has been found to be an effective form of treatment and is as equivalent and sometimes more effective than individual therapy for certain concerns. Group therapy helps people talk about things in a more genuine way which helps them address the heart of their struggles and find improvements in their symptoms or concerns. In each group there are trained counselors in attendance who will help deepen the discussions and aid you in creating a more meaningful and healing experience.

- **“My problems are not as bad as others or are worse than others – so I won’t fit in or benefit.”**

Elie Wiesel, a concentration camp survivor, stated “We all lose when we compare suffering.” Group may provide a place for you to experience compassion for yourself and others, without having to decide who went through the worst experience. Relief can come when we recognize that we are not alone in our concerns. Group can provide you the opportunity to connect with others and learn how to give and receive support.

- **“Will this be another place for me to be judged?”**

People who have found a social group or organization to be painful or harmful in the past may find this is to be a great opportunity to heal from these experiences. Many have used the group as a way to create more positive experiences and have benefited from the opportunity to feel valued, accepted, and validated by others. Group members frequently report an increased sense of understanding and acceptance, and find that other group members can often relate to them about concerns they felt were uniquely their own.

- **“If I decide I do not like the group, can I just stop coming?”**

We ask that you commit to attending at least four sessions to give the group experience chance and time to work for you. If you recognize that things are not working in the way that you want, please verbalize it to the group and the facilitator(s). We encourage discussion about the group process, namely things that are or are not working. Having these discussions can often be a turning point in the group where you can more effectively work to improve your experience. If you continue to find your needs are not being met, we can work with you to explore other options.