

INTRODUCTION

Up to this point we have been concerned largely with individual counseling, or one-to-one counseling. Before a counselor can hope to imagine to tackle the complexities of group counseling, individual counseling must be mastered. Many of the concepts and techniques found useful in individual-counseling relationships are of value in group-counseling situations. However, the group represents a very different kind of social phenomenon that has some properties uniquely its own. Counselors will invariably find themselves working with groups of clients in addition to working with people on a one-to-one basis. Groups, an economical use of professional time, have significant features that inherently may make group procedures the treatment of choice at times.

DEFINITION

Group - In terms of counseling, a group is more than a collection of people. Group members share some common attitudes and values, accept each other, and relate to each other in many ways. The accepted membership in the group to deal with the problems they have in common as well as to satisfy some individual needs.

Group Counseling - is an interpersonal process involving a counselor and several members who explore themselves and their situations in an attempt to modify their attitudes and behaviors. Group Counseling may be preventive and/or remedial for the person. Preventative counseling permits an individual to resolve concerns before serious problems develop. For those individuals who have developed more serious problems, group counseling can be a process of intervention to change behavior.

The "group" can be a powerful modality where persons may pose significant aspects of their behavior. People can validate or invalidate many of their ideas, values, and beliefs through the feedback from others. Because of its powerful social reinforcing properties, a group can strongly influence individual behavior. Reinforcement in groups occurs not only through positive and negative social exchanges but vicariously through imitating or modeling the behavior of others. One major assumption underlying group counseling is that when the forces of the group process are mobilized in positive ways, people may be influenced in positive ways. Through the group process, individuals can gain in self-awareness through self-exploration and reality testing while at the same time receiving valuable feedback about their behavior. The group can be used as a practice setting sometimes. However, the group process

can also hurt clients if the members of the group lack acceptance, understanding, and respect for one another. The facilitative conditions so essential in one-to-one counseling are as essential in group counseling.

THE COUNSELOR IN THE GROUP COUNSELING PROCESS

The counselor's role in group counseling revolves four basic functions. The counselor may be a psychological educator, a facilitator of changes and personal growth, a monitor of the change or growth process, and a reinforcer of behavior change (Tosi, 1974). Depending on the nature and goals of the group, the counselor may elect to emphasize these functions to various degrees. For instance, a school counselor may serve as psychological educator and facilitator in a group-guidance class that emphasizes career development and personal adjustment. Over the course of several years, the counselor may want to monitor the effects of group guidance through a number of observational procedures, and whenever appropriate, reinforce or encourage healthy behavior and decision making. In a psychotherapy group, a counselor may spend more time helping the members explore areas of their personality that they may have previously avoided. In so doing, a counselor helps members reconstruct self-defeating attitudes and behaviors.

RATIONALE FOR GROUP COUNSELING

The rationale for group counseling seems deeply rooted in the nature of human beings and their societal relationships. Personality is largely the product of interaction with other significant human beings.

Given that the above perception hold a sense of truth, the rationale of group counseling are:

* Contributions of the group to Personal Development. The Group offers a great range of momentary and continuing experineces that enable its members to grow and develop.

* Personal Exploration and Feedback. Group counseling enables an individual to move toward meeting certain psychological needs to belong, to be accepted, to release negative feelings and to participate in a supportive atmosphere where self-exploration is encouraged.

* Reality Testing. Many of the areas with which an individual is concerned are social in nature. Perhaps one of the greatest contributions to personal development that a group affords an individual is an opportunity not only to talk about the problems but to engage in reality testing.

* Responsibilities To Others. Through reality testing, not only is each member able to generalize behaviors from the group setting to other situations outside the

group, but through this experience he or she can develop a sense of responsibility to self and also to others.

SOME GENERAL GOALS AND PURPOSES OF GROUPS.

Group members decided for themselves the specific goals that give meaning and direction to the group they are in.

However, the following are a few general goals shared by most groups.

- * To grow in self-acceptance and learn not to demand perfection.
- * To learn how to trust oneself and others.
- * To foster self-knowledge and the development of a unique self-identity.
- * To lessen one's fears of intimacy and to learn to reach out to those one would like to be closer to.
- * To move away from merely meeting others' expectations and decide for oneself the standards by which to live.
- * To increase self-awareness and thereby increase the possibilities for choice and action.
- * To become aware of one's choices and to make choices wisely.

- * To become more sensitive to the needs and feelings of others.
- * To clarify one's values and decide whether and how to modify them.
- * To find ways of understanding and resolving personal problems.

ADVANTAGES OF GROUP COUNSELING.

Group Counseling has advantages as:-

- * Vehicle for assisting people to make changes in their attitudes, beliefs about themselves and others, feelings, and behaviors.
- * Provide a re-creation of the members everyday world, especially if the group membership is diverse with respect of age, interest, background, socio economic status and range of problems.
- * Groups offer support and understanding, which foster the members' willingness to explore the problems they brought with them to the groups.

USING GROUP COUNSELING IN DRUG ABUSE

The use of group methods are popular in rehabilitation programs for the drug abuser. This usually involve supportive and/or encounter experiences.

THERAPUTIC GROUPS.

* Involve clients, or family members, and their purpose is to provide a structured opportunity for clients to alleviate guilt, to discuss problems and to express their feelings.

* Meet twice a week, with discussions focusing on past experiences which often involve wrong doings or feelings of guilt.

* Members of the group will verbally identify with each other experiences, and can provide advice as to how they themselves handled similar feelings or situations.

* Acceptance of the client, regardless of his/her behavior, is emphasized and laughter or ridicule is never allowed.

* Underlying goal of these groups is to gain insight into one's feelings and to have a sense of being in control.

ENCOUNTER GROUPS

Shertzer and Stone (1976) describe the encounter group as an experience based group designed to facilitate personal development and awareness. Yalom (1975) sees the encounter group as one that helps facilitate self-discovery, untapped resources, or the uncovering of an individual's full potential. In the encounter group,

persons can receive feedback from their peers and from the counselor or trainer that can help them better understand the impact of their behavior on others. Members may also deal with defense reactions that prevent them from communicating effectively in interpersonal relations. Encounter groups are not considered therapeutic because the emphasis is not on personality reconstruction or remediation but rather on effective communication. Encounter groups are for normal individuals rather than for individuals with diagnosed psychopathology.

The encounter group may be held in several successive sessions over a period of time or it can be held in one or two very long sessions called "marathons". Marathon groups are designed to increase understanding of one's defenses in order to be better able to interact in an open and honest manner within the group.

Each member is required to describe how each other's negative behavior is perceived, and then he/she is required to demand that changes be made regarding those aspects that are most unacceptable.

* The distinction made between one's behavior and a person who is a fallible human being is the essential ingredient in running a good encounter group.

- * Should only be led by counselors with strong directive abilities, since the leader needs to direct the group toward the real issues and must be able to maintain control.
- * Prohibit violent actions and permit no outside discussion, leader must be able to recognize and stop encounters that are non-productive or destructive in nature.

GROUP COUNSELING MEETS ADDICTS' NEEDS

Described below, are some ways in which group counseling can contribute to fulfillment of addicts' needs.

- * Search for identity is a central theme for addicts. He/She wants to know who he/she is. Most addicts know many things about themselves, but at the same time they have many doubts about themselves, often more than other individuals. Warm, accepting atmosphere of a group can provide an avenue for them to discover themselves. An addict will discover that other members in the group to have similar problems and thus he is not alone. Furthermore, the acceptance and commitment within the group will strengthen his ego - gives him the self-confidence and the courage to face up to his problems and to solve them.

- * **Increased self-understanding.** Addicts tends to face many questions about his/her interests, abilities, and

aptitudes that will require thorough self-appraisal with the assistance of a competent counselor. Possessing this kind of information addicts are better able to explore his/her real self with fellow clients, sharing his positive feelings about his/her strengths, explaining why he cannot accept and use certain strengths, and revealing his doubts - wondering to what extent his weaknesses will block certain plans. His fellow clients' ability to empathize and to accept him provides the support he needs to face up to his weaknesses - then to correct them if he can do so with reasonable effort or to accept them and to adapt his plans accordingly.

* Added confidence in his ability to face and solve his problems develops in group counseling. When an addict discovers that other addicts have problems, are willing to deal openly with their problems, and can solve them, he/she develops more confidence in himself/herself and the treatment process.

* Independent behavior can be studied, practiced, and reinforced in a counseling group. Addicts discover there that their ideas are respected, that they as well as others do foolish things in trying to achieve independence, and that their fellow clients can provide helpful feedback and suggestions for improving their behavior. They also learn, by role playing as well as talking, to convey to others what they want.

* Improving skills to learn and live new roles. Fulfilling this need also relates directly to the addict's search for identity and increased understanding of himself. To discover that others are struggling with similar problems makes his/her own more acceptable; seeing others learn to cope with their problems is encouraging; and helping them increases his/her respect for himself/herself.

Thus group counseling is especially appropriate for addicts. It enables them to satisfy some of their strongest needs, especially in providing real assistance to peers while obtaining assistance from them.

THERAPEUTIC FORCES WITHIN A COUNSELING GROUP.

A successful counselor must understand, recognize, and know how to use the therapeutic forces within a counseling group, and he must be able to teach his clients to recognize and use these forces. Likewise he must recognize and feel competent to deal with the antitherapeutic forces, and he must teach his clients to recognize, cope with, and accept responsibility for dealing with these forces.

* **Commitment.** Those who profit most from group counseling recognize and accept the need for assistance and are committed to talk about their problems, to solve them,

and to change their behavior when they are accepted for group counseling. They also seem to understand what will be expected from them, have some notion how they can be helped by group counseling, and expect to be helped.

* **Expectations.** Clients profit most from a counseling group when they understand what is expected before they decide whether to join. They need an opportunity to learn what kinds of decisions they may make for themselves, what will be expected from them, what they can expect from the other clients and the counselor, and what benefits they may expect from the group counseling experience. When prospective clients realize what is expected of them in order to increase the chances for the success of the group, and what decisions they can make, they tend to take more responsibility for helping to create a therapeutic climate.

* **Responsibility.** Increased responsibility for themselves and the therapeutic process increases clients' chances for growth within a counseling group. Meaningful involvement and participation in making decisions that affect them encourage most persons to accept responsibility and discourage them from becoming reactive and hostile.

* **Acceptance.** Genuine acceptance by his/her fellow clients enhances self-esteem and encourages a client to change his behavior.

* **Belonging.** Both those who are to be changed and those who influence change must sense a strong feeling of belonging in the same group [Cartwright (1951)]. As the feeling of belonging increases, clients become more ego-involved in the interaction, participate more meaningfully, and increase their commitment for change.

* **Security.** When clients come to feel reasonably secure within their counseling group, they can be themselves, discuss the problems, that bother them, accept others frank reactions to them, and express their own genuine feelings towards others. The safer a client feels in the group, the easier it is for him to be open and transparent.

* **Tension.** Client's growth in counseling usually involves some tension. There must be enough tension and dissatisfaction to motivate change but not so much that it interferes with a person's use of his resources in achieving change.

GROUP COUNSELING DIFFERENTIATED FROM INDIVIDUAL

COUNSELING

To be effective in either individual or group counseling, a counselor must develop the therapeutic conditions and experience the feelings. For groups he must select good prospects who have a therapeutic influence on each other, assess their willingness to change, describe and reinforce their helping behaviors, and focus his attention on the speaker while noting and reacting to various clients' reactions to each other. He must detect and therapeutically use nonverbal as well as verbal interactions and teach his clients to do so too.

Frank (1952) reported that clients focused attentions on each other rather than on events within their individual pasts or outside their group. Durkin (1964) also found the patients treated in groups tended to focus on the here and now more than those treated individually. Joel and Shapiro (1950) reported that reality testing was an integral part of the treatment for their group patients, and that growth was often unaccompanied by insight. Lindt (1958) stressed treatment by the group more than treatment in the group. He noted the importance of clients' learning to listen to others, to invest in others, and to react to one another therapeu-

tically. He found that those who profited from his groups made an emotional investment in the group to the extent of making a genuine effort to help at least one or two other members.

Contrary to what those who have never participated in group counseling may think, some clients find it easier to discuss difficult topics in group counseling than in individual counseling. When clients observe and help others discuss their problems openly within a counseling group, and sense others' acceptance and compassion, they discover that they, too, can discuss their problems. Seeing other cope successfully with their problems by discussing them openly, at the same time gaining increased acceptance, decreases resistance and encourages therapeutic action.

What clients discuss is determined by their orientation to their group, their previous experiences in groups, and the way in which group members react to them and their problems. Ohlsen and Oelke's (1962) findings support these observations. Talland and Clark (1954) found that for their therapy groups the topics judged to be most disturbing matched closely those judged to be most helpful. Their patients valued most the topics that could be discussed only within a therapeutic relationship. Although their patients reported that no topic was entirely worthless, some seemed to find a

given topic more therapeutic than others. The writer believes that Talland and Clark's findings apply also to counseling groups. When, therefore, clients recognize that a topic is painful for the speaker, the counselor should reflect their feelings for wanting to avoid it as well as speaker's wish to deal with it even though it is painful. Such action enlists the group's assistance and conveys the counselor's confidence in the speaker's ability to cope with the painful material involved.

To harness the full potential of a counseling group, every client must learn to help others as well as to obtain help for himself. He must be sufficiently open to admit when others' problems expose his own, and to encourage others to try solutions that are most appropriate for them. As the therapeutic potency of the group increases, members' personal respect for each other grows so that they can tolerate individual differences and accept quite different solutions for similar problems. From the beginning they must learn to accept responsibility for helping the counselor develop and maintain a therapeutic climate.

CONCLUSION

Group counseling can serve as an adjunct to individual counseling. It is particularly useful as a reality testing base. Individuals can test out new ideas and

behavior and receive helpful feedback from the group. Also, the group allows for a sharing of many different perspectives on personal problem areas. Group counseling is usually (often) conducted as an adjunct to individual counseling.

Another important fact that should not go unrecognized is that group counseling is economical in terms of the counselor's time. And, if the client is paying a fee for counseling, group counseling can be very economical.

I do not believe that group counseling will replace one-to-one counseling. Group counseling may augment the effects of one-to-one counseling and for some counselors and clients be a preferred mode of treatment.

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