



**Information about
Group Psychotherapy from
the American Group Psychotherapy
Association**



“When I went into group therapy, I was suffering from low-level depression. Through the group therapy experience, I remember feeling joy again.”

About Group Psychotherapy

Group psychotherapy is a special form of therapy in which a small number of people meet together under the guidance of a professionally trained therapist to help themselves and one another. The therapy has been widely used and has been a standard treatment option for over 50 years.

If you stop and think about it, each of us has been raised in group environments, either through our families, schools, organized activities or work. These are the environments in which we grow and develop as human beings. Group psychotherapy is no different. It provides a place where you come together with others to share problems or concerns, to better understand your own situation, and to learn from and with each other.

Group therapy helps people learn about themselves and improve their interpersonal relationships. It addresses feelings of isolation, depression or anxiety. And, it helps people make significant changes so they feel better about the quality of their lives. Additionally, group therapists can apply the principles of group to other settings and situations such as businesses, schools and community organizations.

Group works! In studies comparing group psychotherapy to individual therapy, group therapy has been shown to be as effective and sometimes even more effective. In cases of medical illness, there is substantial evidence that this form of therapy helps people cope better with their illness, enhance the quality of their lives and, in some cases, such as breast cancer, has even been shown to help people live longer.



“My work prompted me to go into group therapy. Suddenly, as a manager, I was dealing with more people and needed to improve my interpersonal communication skills.”

If you are considering therapy, together you and your therapist can explore the nature of your problem. You will work to develop a better understanding of the problem and discuss what changes might make the situation better. In addition to group therapy, there are several other options available, including:

- Talking with an individual therapist
- Participating in therapy as a couple or family
- Receiving medication
- A combination of the above treatments

Your therapist can help you understand the benefits of each of these treatment options and determine what's right for you.

The Group Psychotherapist

Group psychotherapists are mental health professionals trained in one of several areas: psychiatry, psychology, social work, psychiatric nursing, marriage and family therapy, pastoral counseling, creative arts therapy or substance abuse counseling. In considering a therapist for group, make sure he or she is also qualified to lead group psychotherapy. The National Registry of Certified Group Psychotherapists certifies group therapists by the designation “CGP,” which means the therapist has received specialized training in group therapy. Clinical Members of the American Group Psychotherapy Association (AGPA) also have received specialized training.



*"Through group,
I identified what I needed
to work on as an individual
and learned how to deal
with other people
better."*

Who Can Benefit

Like individual therapy, group therapy can benefit almost anyone. Some of the issues typically addressed include:

- Difficulties with interpersonal relationships
- Problems in children and adolescents (such as impact from a divorce, peer issues, learning or behavioral problems)
- Aging
- Medical illness
- Depression and anxiety
- Loss
- Trauma
- Lifestyle issues within a traditional culture
- Personality disorders
- Addictive disorders

The Group Therapy Session

The group therapy session is a collaborative effort in which the therapist assumes clinical responsibility for the group and its members. In a typical session, which lasts about 75-90 minutes, members work to express their own problems, feelings, ideas and reactions as freely and honestly as possible. Such exploration gives the group the important information needed to understand and help one another. Members learn not only to understand themselves and their own issues but also become "therapeutic helpers" for other members.



1 How does group work?

A group therapist appropriately selects people (usually 5 to 10) who would be helped by the group experience and who can be learning partners for one another. In meetings, people are encouraged to talk with each other in a spontaneous and honest fashion. A professionally trained therapist, who provides productive examination of the issues or concerns affecting the individuals and the group, guides the discussion.

Not every group is alike. There are a variety of styles that different groups use. For instance, some focus more on interpersonal development, where much of the learning actually comes from the interaction between members. Others address thoughts and behaviors, where the emphasis is on learning how to control negative thoughts, address phobias or relieve anxiety-inducing situations.

2 If someone is in a group, do they also need individual therapy?

It depends on the individual. Sometimes group therapy is used as the main or only treatment approach. Sometimes it's used along with individual therapy. Often people find that working simultaneously in both group and individual therapy stimulates growth in mutually complementary ways. And clients may see two different therapists for individual and group therapies. In such cases, it's generally considered important for the two therapists to communicate with each other periodically for the client's benefit. Ask your therapist about the type of therapy that will best meet your needs.

3 How is group therapy different from support groups and self-help groups?

Group therapy focuses on interpersonal relationships and helps individuals learn how to get along better with other people under the guidance of a professional. Group psychotherapy also provides a support network for specific problems or challenges. The psychotherapy group is different from support and self-help and support groups in that it not only helps people cope with their problems, but also provides for change and growth. Support groups, which are generally led by professionals, help people cope with difficult situations at various times but are usually geared toward alleviating symptoms. Self-help groups usually focus on a particular shared symptom or situation and are usually not led by a trained therapist.

4 Why is group therapy useful?

When someone is thinking about joining a group, it is normal to have questions or concerns. What am I going to get out of this? Will there be enough time to deal with my own problems in a group setting? What if I don't like the people in my group?

Joining a group is useful because it provides opportunities to learn with and from other people, to understand one's own patterns of thought and behavior and those of others, and to perceive how group members react to one another. We live and interact with people every day and often there are things that other people are experiencing or grappling with that can be beneficial to share with others. In group therapy, you learn that perhaps you're not as different as you think or that you're not alone. You'll meet and interact with people, and the whole group learns to work on shared problems — one of the most beneficial aspects. The more you involve yourself in the group, the more you get out of it.

5 What kinds of people should participate in group therapy?

Group therapy can benefit many different people, from those having difficulties with interpersonal relationships to those dealing with specific problems such as



Commonly Asked Questions

depression, anxiety, serious medical illness, loss, addictive disorders or behavioral problems. With adolescents, for example, group therapy teaches socialization skills needed to help function in environments outside the home.

6 Will there be people with similar problems in my group?

The therapist's role is to evaluate each member's problems prior to forming the group. Usually there is a mix of members who can learn from each other. While some members will have similar circumstances, it's not necessary for all to be dealing with exactly the same problem. In fact, people with different strengths and difficulties are often in the best position to help one another.

7 What kind of commitment do I need to make?

The time commitment depends on the type of group and the nature and extent of your problems. Short-term groups devoted to concrete issues can last anywhere from 6 to 20



weeks. Support therapy groups (for example, those dealing with a medical illness such as cancer) may be more long-term. There are also more open-ended groups in which members work at their own pace and leave when their particular needs or goals have been met. It's best to talk with your therapist to determine the length of time that's right for you.

8 What if I'm uncomfortable discussing my problems in front of others?

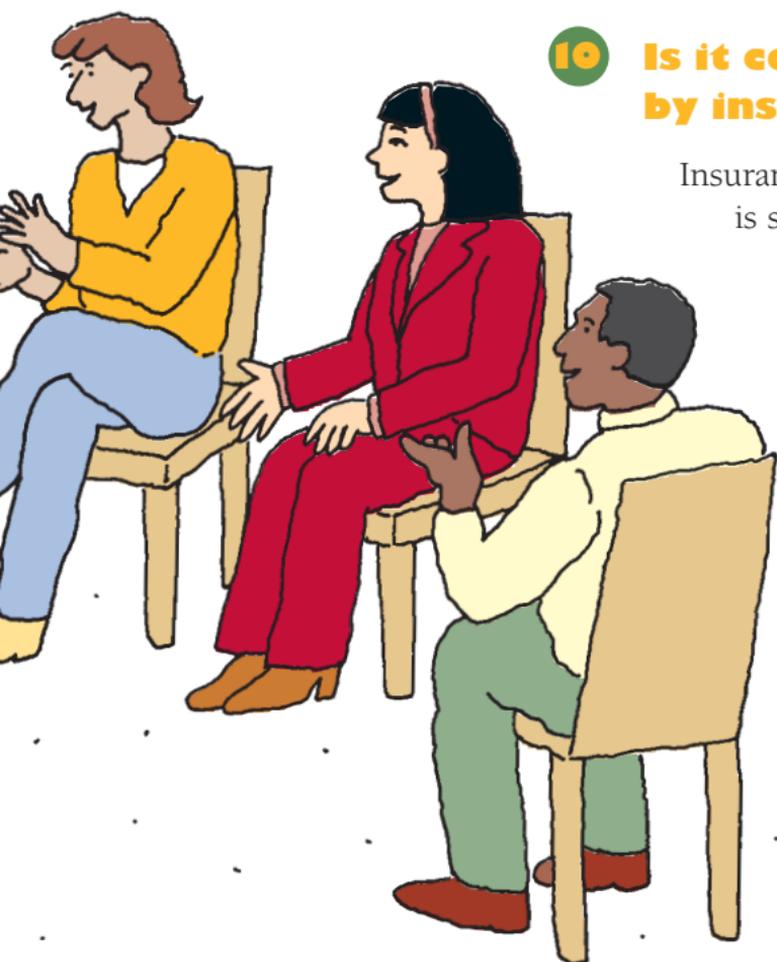
It's not unusual to feel uneasy or embarrassed when first joining a group, but soon you begin to develop feelings of interest and trust. Most clients find that group therapy provides a great deal of relief because it allows them a chance to talk with others who are experiencing similar problems — in a private, confidential setting. Many people who have experienced group therapy believe that working together with others is helpful and they feel better by participating in this form of therapy.

9 What does group cost?

The cost varies depending on the type of therapist and perhaps even the geographic area of the country. Typically, group therapy is about half the price of individual therapy.

10 Is it covered by insurance?

Insurance coverage is similar for both group and



individual therapy. In addition, most managed care companies cover group much the same as individual therapy.

11 How do I find a good group therapist?

It's important to consider the qualifications of a potential therapist. A professional group therapist has received special training in group therapy and meets certain professional standards and meets certain professional criteria. That's where the AGPA can help. Its Clinical Members of the association have received special training in group therapy. In addition, the National Registry of Certified Group Psychotherapists certifies professionals who have met specific training and educational criteria for group therapy as well as ongoing a Certified Group Psychotherapist will have met strict professional criteria as well as ongoing continuing education requirements.

12 What do I ask the group therapist?

When talking with therapists, here are four simple questions you may want to ask:

1. What is your background?
2. Given my specific situation, how do you think group would work for me?
3. What are your credentials as a group therapist?
4. Do you have special training that is relevant to my problem?

About the American Group Psychotherapy Association

The American Group Psychotherapy Association is the oldest and largest professional association dedicated to the field of group psychotherapy. The association has thousands of members and maintains the highest professional standards in the field. AGPA is a multidisciplinary association, representing all of the group psychotherapy disciplines.

Group works! For information on finding a group psychotherapist, please call 212-477-2677 or toll free at 1-877-668-AGPA (2472) or visit our website at www.agpa.org.