

Importance of Group Meetings

MCC Patient Education Module

Groups provide positive peer support and pressure to abstain from substances of abuse. Unlike AA, and, to some degree, substance abuse treatment program participation, group therapy, from the very beginning, elicits a commitment by all the group members to attend and to recognize that failure to attend, to be on time, and to treat group time as special disappoints the group and reduces its effectiveness. Therefore, both peer support and pressure for abstinence are strong.

Groups reduce the sense of isolation that most people who have substance abuse disorders experience. At the same time, groups can enable participants to identify with others who are struggling with the same issues. Although AA and treatment groups of all types provide these opportunities for sharing, for some people the more formal and deliberate nature of participation in process group therapy increases their feelings of security and enhances their ability to share openly.

Groups enable people who abuse substances to witness the recovery of others. From this inspiration, people who are addicted to substances gain hope that they, too, can maintain abstinence. Furthermore, an interpersonal process group, which is of long duration, allows a magnified witnessing of both the changes related to recovery as well as group members' intra- and interpersonal changes.

Groups help members learn to cope with their substance abuse and other problems by allowing them to see how others deal with similar problems. Groups can accentuate this process and extend it to include changes in how group members relate to bosses, parents, spouses, siblings, children, and people in general.

Groups can provide useful information to clients who are new to recovery. For example, clients can learn how to avoid certain triggers for use, the importance of abstinence as a priority, and how to self-identify as a person recovering from substance abuse. Group experiences can help deepen these insights. For example, self-identifying as a person recovering from substance abuse can be a complex process that changes significantly during different stages of treatment and recovery and often reveals the set of traits that makes the system of a person's self as altogether unique.

Groups provide feedback concerning the values and abilities of other group members. This information helps members improve their conceptions of self or modify faulty, distorted conceptions. In terms of process groups in particular, as specific themes emerge in a client's group experience, repetitive feedback from multiple group members and the therapist can chip away at those faulty or distorted conceptions in slightly different ways until they not only are correctable, but also the very process of correction and change is revealed through the examination of the group processes.

Groups offer family-like experiences. Groups can provide the support and nurturance that may have been lacking in group members' families of origin. The group also gives members the opportunity to practice healthy ways of interacting with their families.

Groups encourage, coach, support, and reinforce as members undertake difficult or anxiety-provoking tasks.

Groups offer members the opportunity to learn or relearn the social skills they need to cope with everyday life instead of resorting to substance abuse. Group members can learn by observing others, being coached by others, and practicing skills in a safe and supportive environment.

Groups can effectively confront individual members about substance abuse and other harmful behaviors. Such encounters are possible because groups speak with the combined authority of people who have shared common experiences and common problems. Confrontation often plays a part of substance abuse treatment groups because group members tend to deny their problems. Participating in the confrontation of one group member can help others recognize and defeat their own denial.

Groups allow a single treatment professional to help a number of clients at the same time. In addition, as a group develops, each group member eventually becomes acculturated to group norms and can act as a quasi-therapist himself, thereby ratifying and extending the treatment influence of the group leader.

Groups can add needed structure and discipline to the lives of people with substance use disorders, who often enter treatment with their lives in chaos. Therapy groups can establish limitations and consequences, which can help members learn to clarify what is their responsibility and what is not.

Groups instill hope, a sense that "if he can make it, so can I." Process groups can expand this hope to dealing with the full range of what people encounter in life, overcome, or cope with.

Groups often support and provide encouragement to one another outside the group setting. For interpersonal process groups, though, outside contacts may or may not be disallowed, depending on the particular group contract or agreements.