



Development and Implementation of an Engaging Group Therapy Curriculum

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agenda



General Introduction

Reasons to implement change

What's missing/could be improved

What to incorporate

Developing your own unique topics and materials

introduction

This information is meant to help improve both client's and counselor's experience in the group therapeutic setting. In both inpatient and outpatient settings, group therapy is often the core of treatment and where clients spend the most time and receive the most of their educational input as well as processing. It's also where the counselors have the most of their uninterrupted time to engage with the clients and make an impact. That being said, I believe strongly that it is vital to maximize that time with them and find ways to provide the relevant information in a way that is not only palatable, but relatable, interesting, impactful and memorable.



Why change things?

The Three R's

**Relevancy
Relatability
Reinvigoration**



RELEVANCY

“I have been to 8 treatments and no one has ever talked about this with me before.”

“I wish I would have heard/learned about this sooner.”

“That group really hit home.”

Statements like these showed up consistently, and it seemed to indicate to me not that my groups were anything groundbreaking or special, but that there was simply less attention given to some of major issues that this population struggles with, and that they themselves recognized they need help with.



RELATABILITY

In my experience, clients value authenticity, even if it means examining some uncomfortable topics or information. In active addiction, many people experience denial, avoidance, and resistance relating to their pain, their behaviors, and their own truth. This ultimately leads to an inability to grow past what it is they are resisting or in denial about. I found that oftentimes other curricula would hyperfocus on certain topics like relapse prevention, triggers, and goal setting (which are all crucial and useful and belong in any program) and would perhaps omit some of the more deep and painful but very real and very shared issues. Relatability also applies to the aspect of being real with the clients. Of relating on a personal basis, of not creating an authoritarian or you/them dynamic. While we want the clients to recognize us as professionals, being real and authentic with them about more of the things that matter and apply can be one of the biggest builders of therapeutic rapport-which has been shown many times to carry more weight in treatment success than any one specific therapeutic modality. This is done through not only topics but the counselor's presentation thereof.



REINVIGORATION

The purpose of offering this information to existing curricula is not to insinuate that the existing one is insufficient or of poor quality. It is not meant to erase and replace. It is meant to build on what exists, to breathe new life into some of the tried-and-true topics as well as to inject some other topics that may have been left out but can complement and improve what is already there, as well as to allow the clients and the counselors to reach deeper into the issues and draw out real change.

What might be missing or could be improved upon?

- Deeper delves into certain topics (many things, such as trauma and relationships, are brought up or mentioned but not given their own full dedicated slot)
- Some topics are entirely left out (basic neuroscience of addiction/brain chemistry, MAT, physical wellness and holistic health)
- Interesting and engaging tools or supports (using movies from 1989-aqua net and patterned shirts are a good giveaway)
- Presentation that makes the information not only engaging, but memorable and applicable
- Allowing the clients time to process what they learned and then revisiting it in a process group (not overloading with fluff just to fill time)

What to avoid

- Dry, flat information (packet-bombing, bland tools or presentation)
- Being rigid with the flow/topic of a group (sometimes things go off topic because someone needs it. The agenda is less important than the therapeutic process and benefit)
- Extreme aversion to any amount of self-disclosure (within limits, and where relevant)
- Dancing around or completely avoiding uncomfortable topics

What to incorporate

- Topic generating instruments that DON'T revolve around addiction (movies, readings). Clients, especially in an inpatient setting, can get burned out on the heavy stuff. There is so much great content out there that provide insight, life lessons, inspiration, motivation, etc. Interjecting some stories like that one way or another can be really refreshing.
- Topics that the counselor has chosen, feels strongly about or is invested in, so that they may pass on their passion and enthusiasm to the clients
- Time to process and then reflect (i.e. movie for a full group one day and process the next, possibly use a worksheet to encourage thought during and after)

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graph TD; A[DEVELOPING YOUR OWN UNIQUE TOPICS AND MATERIALS] --- B[USE YOURSELF AND YOUR EXPERIENCE AS A PLACE TO LOOK FOR INSPIRATION]; A --- C[FIND THE CONVERSATION POINTS AND MAKE THEM WORK FOR YOU]; A --- D[THE ART OF SELF-DISCLOSURE]; A --- E[MIX IT UP];
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THE ART OF SELF-DISCLOSURE

Don't be afraid to use yourself

- Most people enter the addictions field because of their own experiences. Whether it is their own addiction or trauma, or someone they loved experiencing it, or a loss, or a desire to help because they witnessed firsthand the pain it causes. There is nothing wrong with looking to your own personal experience for insight into what might help others. In fact, it can be one of the most valuable and relevant places to look- because these are human experiences. Some of the most impactful groups I have (per my clients) are borne from me coming into my own healing and recovery and reflecting on what I wish I would have known sooner, or what I missed, or what held me back, or what continued to cause me problems in my own life. This is not because I need to talk about myself- it is because the problems I have are not unique. They are HUMAN problems. And many of them are even more so exaggerated in the addiction population (i.e. codependency.) So if you don't know where to start, you can always start with you.
- Are there books you like? Movies? Something that spoke to you and motivated you or opened your eyes to something and helped you better yourself? Why not utilize that and share it with others? Read a passage from the book and ask the clients to then tell you what they thought of it. Show the movie and ask them if they related to it.

Mix it up

- You don't have to make EVERY second and every therapeutic tool about addiction or mental health. I have a group on habit that has minimal addiction content. The content is still extremely relevant, as people are very habitual beings. I also show movies that have nothing to do with addiction, but everything to do with resilience. Some of those have worksheets that draw parallels with addiction to the film, or ask the clients to relate it, but the content can become heavy at times, as is it's nature, so injecting positivity, humor, and hope into it regularly is very beneficial. The clients always respond well to true stories of people who have overcome extreme obstacles or challenges.

The art of self-disclosure

- Balance- oversharing versus complete avoidance
- Motivation/Intention
- Relevant and relatable
- Illustrates a point, animates a definition, creates a connection

Topics

Group Topics

1. Emotional Sobriety
2. Big 5 Personality
3. Recovery Support
4. Anxiety
5. PAWS
6. Ego
7. Codependency (1&2)
8. Self-honesty
9. Physical Wellness (1&2)
10. Defense Mechanisms
11. Habits
12. Character Defects
13. Willingness
14. MAT
15. Attitudes and Beliefs
16. Discipline
17. Mindfulness
18. Letting Go
19. Resentment vs Kindness
20. Least possible/Best possible



Videos/Activities

1. Addiction Neuroscience 101
2. In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts: Gabor Mate on Trauma and Addiction
3. David Goggins “How to Make Yourself Immune to Pain”
4. Brandon Novak “Tomorrow will be Better”
5. The Power of Habit TED talk
6. Sleep is Your Superpower TED talk
7. “Recovery Boys” documentary Netflix
8. “The Dawn Wall” documentary YouTube
9. The Other Side of Ego TED talk
10. The Superhuman World of Wim Hof
11. Taming Your Wandering Mind TED talk
12. Jocko Willink “Why Discipline Must Come from Within”
13. Good Qualities Exercise

