

E-THERAPY

Lecture 10

GROUP, COUPLE AND FAMILY WORK ONLINE

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Lecture Ten Outline

10.1 Introduction

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10.5 Online family therapy

10.6 Summary

10.1 Introduction

In this lecture, we shall have focus on online group modalities. This includes; having a brief overview of online group counselling, online couple therapy and online family therapy.

10.2 Expected Learning Outcomes

By the end of this lecture, you should be able to:

- a) Online group counselling
- b) Online couple therapy
- c) Online family therapy

10.3 What is Group Therapy?

Group therapy involves a small group of members, who come together forming their own specific goals, share their problems, provide empathy and support to the others and also in turn try and change their self-defeating behaviors.

Group therapy is a type of psychotherapy that involves one or more therapists working with several people at the same time. This type of therapy is widely available at a variety of locations, including private therapeutic practices, hospitals, mental health clinics, and community centers (Corey, 2007).

Goals of group therapy

- To learn to trust oneself and others.
- To increase awareness and self- knowledge; to develop a sense of one's unique identity.
- To recognize the commonality of members needs and problems and to develop a sense of universality.
- To increase self-acceptance, self-confidence, self-respect, and to achieve a new view one's self and others.
- To make specific plans for changing certain behaviors and to commit oneself to follow through with these plans.

Principles of group therapy

Yalom (2005) described the principles of group therapy. He indicated that these principles are curative factors and the “primary agents of change” in group therapy this includes;

1. Installation of hope: People come to a group to improve their lives. Each person in the group is at a different place in their emotional growth and can offer hope and inspiration to others by showing what they have learned and overcome.
2. Universality: Many who begin group therapy may feel isolated and alone. Being part of a group can help people feel understood and have a sense of belonging.
3. Information Giving: A big part of many therapy groups is increasing knowledge of a common problem. This helps members help themselves and others with the same or similar problems.
4. Altruism: The ability to help others in the group is a source of self-esteem and increases self-worth, especially in those that do not think they have anything to offer others.

5. **Corrective recapitulation of the primary family:** Some people in group therapy may have stress or conflict in their family. The group can become a form of a family that can offer support and acceptance.
6. **Improved Social Skills:** Social learning, or the development of social skills, is something that occurs in therapy groups. Members offer feedback to each other about their behavior in ways that can improve relationships both in and outside of group.
7. **Imitative Behavior:** The therapist models appropriate prosocial behaviors such as active listening, non-judgmental feedback, and support. Over the course of the group, the members can notice these behaviors and integrate them into their own behaviors. This can lead to improved social skills and self- esteem.
8. **Interpersonal Learning:** Being a group can be an opportunity for members to work on their ability to relate to others and improve relationships.
9. **Group cohesiveness:** Wanting to belong is a human need. Group therapy can help people feel accepted and valued. This is an important healing factor if members have felt isolated.
10. **Catharsis:** The release of conscious or unconscious feelings gives members a great sense of relief. Yalom states that it is a type of emotional learning, as opposed to intellectual understanding, that can lead to immediate and long lasting change.
11. **Existential Factors:** Groups can explore and process issues such as death, isolation, and meaninglessness and help them accept difficult realities.

What is online group therapy?

Online group therapy takes place when a mental health professional, such as a psychologist, or counsellor, meets with a number of clients together over the internet and provides psychotherapy or counselling support.

In online group therapy, a person not only receives help from the counsellor or a therapist but gains support from people who have similar conditions or experiences. Hence, this can help improve their perspective on a problem and realize they are not alone in dealing with it.

The sessions in online group therapy, can take place in a synchronous form or asynchronous method. In contracting stage, the counsellor should state the time allocated for the group sessions (for synchronous session), issues of confidentiality should be discussed, the counsellor should give alternative contact address just in case of technological failure, group members should be provided for online materials for further information or knowledge on group counselling, and online group counselling sessions.

The counsellor should share a common consent form to the group members, which electronically signed by each and sent back to the counsellor for filing. Group members should avail general practitioners contacts for referral purposes, agenda and expectations should be shared beforehand.

Synchronous method: This can be through video chat, voice calls/conference and chat room discussions. In selection of the group members, online group therapy involves clients dealing with the same issues and the sessions should be led by the counsellor.

Asynchronous method: Asynchronous is a time delayed communication which takes the form of emailing or text messaging. The facilitator needs to listen to the dynamics of the group with regard to: -

- How often responses are sent
- Apparently absent members
- Frequent contributors (these includes dominating members, tone of voice used in usual post to help in picking mood changes for individualized support or referrals). (Class manual) “Having an exact transcript of the group therapy can be invaluable both for process analysis and ensuring members’ safety.”

The process of setting up online group sessions is similar to setting up individual sessions, but there a few extra things a counsellor would need to think about beyond the additional complexity in scheduling. If a counsellor wants to start online group sessions with existing clients these initial steps are very key.

Benefits of Online Group Therapy

- Online group therapy has the ability to help a client to share their feelings, experiences and questions with other people and hear their responses in a therapeutic environment that facilitates perspective and accelerates healing.
- Online group therapy is convenient as it provides opportunities for people who are otherwise unable to devote the time attending face -to -face group therapy.
- Therapy sessions in online group therapy are conducted via the internet, there are a very few accessibility barriers, as well as need to commute to an appointment. The internet has the advantage of bringing people together, while also allowing them to remain in their homes.
- Online group therapy is accessible for people who are unable to leave the house for any reasons, such as depression, anxiety or any other mental health issues.
- Online group therapy could be useful for anyone exploring their therapy option, as it can help someone to feel more comfortable expressing themselves, building up to a face-to-face meeting at a later date.
- Cost effective: - Members in the group share the cost
- Provide a greater level of confidentiality: - Some people may be concerned about being identified. Online therapy can make members more comfortable by being able to do therapy from their own home.
- An online support group can help someone feel more comfortable expressing themselves, building up to a face-to-face meeting at a later date.

Advantages of online group therapy.

- Advantages of online support group
- Groups provide support. Hearing from others with similar issues helps you see that you are not alone in having challenges, whether you are grappling with panic attacks, depression, or another mental health issue.
- Groups provide a sounding board. If, for example, you talk about a fight you had with your partner, group members can see things in the way you present it that you do not. Hearing

from other people about how you come across can be very powerful. You get a wider range of perspectives on your situation, and that can help you deal with your problems better.

- Groups can propel you forward. Hearing how other members successfully overcame their fear of flying or how they confronted a family member over drug abuse can be very encouraging. Patients often push themselves harder when they see what others are doing.
- Groups promote social skills. Groups not only help to ease that sense of isolation, but also give the opportunity to practice re-engaging with people. By participating in a group, you see that you can get along with others.
- Group costs less than individual counselling. Some people believe that, because group therapy costs less, it is not as good, but "that's not the case at all. Group therapy can be incredibly powerful.
- Groups teach you about yourself. Every person in the group holds up a mirror and you get to see yourself through their eyes. It is a way of uncovering the blind spots that may be blocking your ability to overcome your issues.
- More accessible and flexible for someone who may be housebound.
- Group members view themselves as clients and as well as helpers.
- Multiple feedback is obtainable in online group counselling as opposed to individual counselling.
- Problem solving for a client can be enhanced by ideas generated by other group members.
- Clients learn to become sensitive to the needs and feelings of others by the help of a counsellor.
- More economical in terms of time, since several clients can be supported in one session.
- Provide opportunity for learning, self-direction with respect to educational, vocational and personal-social aspects of life.
- Provide the opportunity for the individual to realize the worth of human relationship while assisting him/ her in appraising his/her values.
- Help individual come to fuller realization and acceptance of self and others.
- Helps individual express and explore feelings that might otherwise be withheld.
- Help facilitate group problem solving as it is concerned with supporting individual and emotional problems

Disadvantages of online group therapy

- Group counselling may prove threatening to clients who are excessively withdrawn and who find it difficult to lower their defense.
- Group counselling may be too confrontational for clients with low self-esteem and with people with serious mental disorder.
- Vulnerable clients may feel under pressure to disclose personal problems before they are ready to do so.
- Clients who have special problems in relating to others may not do well in group.
- Although confidentiality is discussed and agreed upon among group members, it may be more difficult to safeguard and guarantee than it would be in individual counselling.
- Vulnerable clients may feel under pressure to disclose personal problems before they are ready to do so
- The client is not the focus of attention as people talk about their issues in a circle manner when one gets their turn.
- The level of confidentiality in groups is far less secure than it is in individual therapy. Although group members are generally instructed that the information and events that occur in the group are to be held confidential and only to be shared with group members during therapy, the potential for a breach of confidentiality is far greater in group therapy.
- Although the therapeutic alliance is broader, it is not as focused and strong in group therapy as it is in individual therapy.
- Groups typically meet at specific times. There is less opportunity to fit the therapy into the one's personal schedule.

10.4 Online Couple therapy

Online couple therapy is a form of psychotherapy that can help you and your partner improve the relationship over the internet or by using technology devices, when people are undergoing difficulties, they seek help to help in rebuilding the relationship.

Goals of Therapy

- Help partners negotiate behavior change
- Teach more effective communication skills (e.g., active listening, how to argue)
- Avoid the four horsemen and other forms of destructive fighting
- Focus on and encourage “positive sentiment override”
- Improving "communication skills"

Couple therapy online has its own attractive benefits. These are;

- Couple therapy online combines a safe space for two people to interact with each other and the therapist with the positive benefits of disinhibition, allowing them the freedom to talk freely where face to face communication is difficult.
- In couple therapy, the pace of therapy is much more considerate of the other person as one has to wait for the other to finish inputting text.
- Considering typing and then witnessing the communication also helps the couple to take responsibility for their words and actions.
- If facilitated well, the therapist cross talking and interruptions are reduced.
- Identify the relationship issues, it uncovers the issues that might be faced in relationships and at times tied to the personal past lives.
- Resolve conflicts, it helps in managing conflicts healthily and learning from the conflicts rather than taking the matter out of hand
- Improve communication skills, in a relationship there are disagreements but how one communicates is what matters most. The healthy ways of passing information.
- Strengthen friendship and attachment, this helps understand each other better which helps in building a stronger attachment.

When using chat rooms for therapy, each partner may be at different locations to take part or couples can take part on the same keyboard on one terminal. Taking turns on the same key board

can be quite frustrating, with waiting for one's turn creating tension and with the disinhibition being disrupted as the other party is seeing what the partner is writing.

If the couple therapy takes place face-to-face, it is recommended that couples communicate through email or chat between sessions if there is a block in the therapeutic process. The freedom of expression can help the flow of communication without the interruptions that can happen in a face to face session and minimizes the negative effect of physical facial reactions to what is being discussed. The couple can work through problems in a healthy, intimate communication via text, which can be brought into the face -to -face session to practice translating this into interactive personal communication.

When couple therapy takes place through email communication the partners take turns, each emailing the therapist. The therapist then responds openly in an email to both partners addressing all concerns. Email exchanges continue in this manner with the goal of consensus between the partners. All said, therapist should be aware of the additional complexities of working with couples in this way and ensure they are trained and prepared for online counselling.

Types of couple therapy

According to Muller, there are some approaches to couple therapy, which include;

- Emotionally focused therapy, it focuses on improving the bonding and attachment between the partners.
- Behavioral therapy, this therapy involves shaping behaviors by discouraging negative behaviors and motivating positive behaviors.
- Cognitive behavioral therapy, this involves knowing and changing thought patterns that have a negative influence on behavior.
- Ellen Wachtel's approach, this involves positive aspects of the relationship. Avoiding blame but striving for self-reflection.
- Gottman method, this involves dealing with the areas of conflict and equipping the parties in the relationship with problem solving skills. The main aim is to improve the friendship and intimacy between the partners.

- Psychodynamic couple therapy, investigating the underlying hopes and fears that motivate the partners to help understand each other in a better way.

10.5 Online family therapy

This is a therapy that helps family members by providing mental health services and support over the internet so as to improve communications and resolve conflicts. According to Dr. Bowen who came up with family therapy, he believed that when a client is experiencing difficulty whether personal or relates to the family, the family's involvement in the solution is beneficial to the client and it then yield more results.

Whether your family members are fighting every day, or nobody is speaking to each other, family therapy can help. The primary challenge of family therapy is arranging for everyone to be together at the same time. However, with family therapy counselling online, you can all be in different places and still communicate with each other and with a therapist at the same time. In fact, online family therapy has been shown to be more effective than in-person family therapy.

At the initial intake, the therapist will discuss with the family on their need for therapy and he will give each family member an opportunity to air out what they think and are the main problems the family is facing. In the next sessions, therapist will gather information from the family members on: family history, family roles, parenting and discipline approaches and the coping skills the family is using so as to build a picture of the family and how it works.

Online family therapy works well because of the familiarity of the younger members with the technology being used, as it often makes them feel more included and accepted in the dynamics of the process. Family therapy online also reduces the possibility of the participants being talked over or feeling discounted as the communication is there in black and white, permanently and can be referred back by the therapist if it seems to have been ignored by the other members of the group.

Using chat for family therapy online can be limiting due to the number of people taking part. It is therefore, recommended that there be the inclusion of video for the therapist to observe the voice patterns and non-verbal behavior. However, chat should not be excluded it can be used as an adjunct to face to face sessions or if the members of the family are geographically spread out.

Chat can also be extremely useful when the original nuclear family is broken and new relationships have been formed with step parents or siblings that affect relationships whether positively or negatively, with the biological members of the original family (or vice versa).

Using online asynchronous communication can also fit well into the different work or school patterns of the various family members, and the delayed response time allows the clients to fully digest and consider what has been said.

Goals of family therapy

It helps in exploring how family members interact with one another.

Helps identify and improve any unhealthy communication patterns in the family system.

It helps equip the family with better problem solving skills.

It helps the family understand and handle special family situation and to create a better functioning home environment.

What kind of issues family therapy handle?

Communication: Especially for families that have adolescent members or broad political differences, generational divides and divergent perspectives can be difficult to talk through constructively. Online therapy can give everyone an opportunity to feel heard, with an expert to moderate and direct the conversation.

Substance use: Alongside the physical and mental impacts that substance use can have on an individual, their family members and other loved ones can experience distress because of alcohol or substance use disorder. Online therapy can provide the space to unpack these issues, as well as offer opportunities for caring intervention.

Blended family issues: Bringing together two families through remarriage has the potential to enrich everyone's lives, but it also can stir up feelings of grief, resentment, or jealousy as stepsiblings and stepparents learn to combine their lives. Talking through these issues, either proactively or responsively, can help.

Abuse of any kind: Whether emotional, neglectful, financial, or physical, abuse must be brought into the light and fully addressed before any parties can begin to move on. A licensed mental health professional can make all the difference in directing these conversations within a safe space, and online therapy provides distance that might be necessary. A therapist can also provide individual support to the recipient/s of abuse and recommend courses of action for future safety and wellness.

Traumatic events like death or divorce: Any kind of loss to a family can be felt by all of its members in different ways. Online therapy can give each person the space to grieve in their own way, while also helping the family to move forward as a caring, compassionate team.

Behavioral issues: Some children and adolescents need additional support to move through behavioral issues—at home, at school, and/or in other environments—and the adults in the family might also benefit from professional support in navigating those difficulties.

Infidelity: If one partner is unfaithful to the other in any sense (sexual or emotional affairs, financial dishonesty, etc.), then trust needs to be repaired before the relationship can either move forward or come to an end. An online therapist can support each party through the necessary discussions, even if one or both partners are no longer comfortable being in the same location.

Benefits of family therapy

Family counselling has number of benefits which includes;

It is easier and convenient in having all family members present for the session and reduces scheduling costs.

Family goals can be achieved collectively.

Those who live in rural area and can access internet can be able to get professional services via internet.

Helps in developing healthy boundaries in a family and defines roles in the family.

It helps in addressing dysfunctional interactions.

Improves problem solving abilities.

Online therapy makes booking appointments easier and more flexible for everyone. There is no need for you to rearrange your schedule to make an appointment at a time that probably will not work for most of your family.

Video chats and conferencing allow you and your family members to participate more easily and equitably, and the conversation can expand to include even family members who are geographically distant. Also, one will be speaking from a place where you likely feel comfortable, especially if you're calling in from home.

Disadvantages

- It may be difficult for the children to express their feelings verbally for lack of comprehension of emotions, emotional conflict or emotional avoidance.
- Technological problems may interrupt the family session.

10.6 Summary

In this lecture, you have had an opportunity of see on online group modalities. That includes; discussing online group counselling, online couple therapy and online family therapy.

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