

# **Group Counseling**

## **Lecture 2**

### **Concepts of Group Dynamics**

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#### **Introduction**

Group dynamics refers to the socialization process a group undergoes and how members of that group interact with each other. The group process has its own unique pathway, and the members also interact in unique ways. The way group members interact is different from one group setting, type, leadership, and form. In this lecture, you will be introduced to the concepts of group dynamics and how a group leader, facilitator, therapist, or supervisor can facilitate effective group therapy work within the different group dynamics.

#### **Expected Learning Outcomes,**

At the end of this lecture, you will be able to:

- i. Define group dynamics.
- ii. Explain the concepts of group dynamics.
- iii. Discuss healthy ways navigating group dynamics.

#### **Defining Group Dynamics**

The term group dynamic refers to the way people in a group interact and how these interactions affect the group as a unit and the members as well. It is a process by which people interact with each other. Sometimes the rationale behind forming a group may determine the group operation and interactions. For example, if in a group setting, members were forced to join and deal with discipline issues, there is likely to be more strife and low motivation to interact unlike a group

where members joined voluntarily. These conflicts or hot issues arise because of many factors like personality differences, style and nature of leadership, group goals and other factors that will be discussed in this lecture (Proctor , 2008).

## **Factors Influencing Group Dynamics**

### *Reason for Group Formation*

Groups can be formal or informal and they can be initiated for a variety of reasons and for different members. Some groups in counseling can be defined by age (children, teenagers, young adults, and the senior members), others may be to deal with a certain behavior problem, build personal confidence among others. Some groups are formed to foster clinical supervision and or for self-care. This foundational reason, determine by and large the direction of the group process (Paleg & Jongsma Jr., 2015). Sometimes the members deviate from the core business of the group, and this can lead to conflicts of interest and loss of direction.

### *Members Needs and Concerns*

In counseling practice, members can request to form their own group to deal with unique situation situations in their lives and or/ their work engagements. I have seen students and counselors in training form their own academic, coaching and mentorship groups, behavior change groups, self-care groups and professional development groups. The request may depend on the needs of the potential applicants and if these needs are not met once they join the group, conflicts may arise and affect the group process and interactions.

### *Personality Differences*

Personality is increasingly recognized as a key factor in the psychology of work behavior. Group behavior is equally important to consider as work behavior. Different temperaments play out differently in a group process and this translates to group dynamism. Traditional perspectives on

personality in the workplace emphasize its stable, dispositional quality in differentiating reliably among workers, predicting valued behavior, and accounting for the continuity of self-identity like it happens in a group counseling context. As group facilitator or therapist, understanding these personality dynamics is key to evaluating the effectiveness of the group work and processes (Robert & David , 2021).

### *Stress Coping Skills*

When people are under stress, the motivations, personalities, survival responses, cognitions, and coping skills of those who manage the uncertainty of an adventure willingly and repeatedly differ from one member to another. The group leader needs to explore the psychological processes and skills needed to navigate the unknown (what is likely to happen to the group cohesion, achievement of set goals of and members interactions). The group leaders need to promote positive emotions and states that enable members to achieve optimum psychological performance, thus enabling effective group processing and termination (Pickett & Reid, 2022).

### *Past Experiences*

This can come from the two ends (leader's perspective and members' perspective). The leader can have a preset mind set about the members based on his or her past experiences. This can blur the interactions within the group. If the members can also come in with past experiences; they can always bring the same into the group. Either side can influence the interactions within the group and block chances of flexible open experiences within the group. Having an open and flexible position helps to dissolve any preset biases in the group process. Every group is unique its own ways. My own experiences with groupwork have taught me to give a free open mind to each group that I lead or become a member.

## **Managing Group Dynamics**

### *Clear Goals and Responsibilities*

Having a clear list of group counseling goals and members assigned roles and responsibilities according to their abilities helps reduce confusion, conflicts, and misunderstandings in a group. Each member is clear of what is expected of them thus motivating them to active participation.

### *Effective Communication*

Encouraging effective communication skills in a group helps members develop common understanding and empathy for one another. At times teaching communication skills in group work helps to unite the group because some of the members may have a challenge communicating effectively in a social setting. Sharing relevant information is also crucial to the whole group to avoid conflicts and unnecessary misunderstandings.

### *Life Skills Training*

Members may join a group with a burden of socializing, creative thinking, problem solving, decision making and self-awareness limitations among others. A group leader can notice these challenges during pre-entry assessment and during the process of group interactions. It is advisable to train and coach the members through life skills competencies to enhance group cohesion and performance.

### *Ethical Considerations*

This refers to the application of counseling ethical principles in group work. The main ones include confidentiality, the duty to protect, safety and privacy of the group affairs and avoidance of harm. Ask members to volunteer to share but do not force them. Always encourage active participation with group safety. Give a warning to members that group confidentiality is not absolute.

### *Inclusivity and Diversity*

Members are packed in uniqueness in terms of gender, family of origin experiences, past life experiences, social status, education levels among others. As a group leader, avoid discriminating against any of them and do your best to make everyone feel inclusive. This creates group cohesion and sense of purpose (Corey, 2023).

### *Mindfulness and Self Compassion*

Members are human beings and are bound to hurt one another in a group process. Encourage day to day paying of attention to communication within and with each other during group work. For situations that hurt, encourage self-compassion acknowledging that it is human to hurt self and others too. Encourage self-forgiveness as well as other forgiveness sharing moments of empathy and compassion together (Corey, 2009).

### **Benefits of Group Dynamics**

Group dynamism brings positive outcomes as well. Such may include but not limited to:

- Team - work
- Enhanced self-awareness
- Cohesion
- Goals are achieved.
- Purpose
- Enhanced performance
- Leadership skills
- Social skills
- Sense of confidence
- Sense of belonging

## Conclusion

A group without issues of dynamism is not a real situation, group dynamisms is a good ground to learn from each other and from the group process itself. In this lecture we have looked at group dynamics in group counseling, factors influencing group dynamism and ways to navigate group dynamism and reap maximum benefits from a group. In our follow up session, we shall learn more about group leadership.

## References

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