

Group Counseling

Lecture 3

Leadership

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Introduction

Leadership in group counseling is very important to enhance group process and interactions. The person of the group leader is equally significant as they largely determine how the group will run and perform. In this lecture, you will be introduced to different types of leadership styles, qualities of a group leader and how they influence group performance.

Expected Learning Outcomes

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

- i. Define the term leadership.
- ii. Describe qualities and characteristics of a group leader.
- iii. Discuss different styles of leadership.
- iv. Evaluate the benefits of co – leadership.

Definition

This is a process of providing tools and directions to a specific group of people. It involves facilitating and guiding the actions of group members as well as accepting responsibility for the outcome of the group effort (Corey, 2009).

Qualities of a Group Leader

Some of the qualities of an effective group leader include but are not limited to the following.

- Active listening – listen to the verbal and non-verbal messages.

- Compassion – seek to alleviate suffering experienced by members.
- Justice - treat all fairly.
- Not judgmental – refrain from judgement that is subjective.
- Active – Be actively involved in all stages and offer the relevant guidance.
- Role modelling – be an example the leader wants to see in the members.
- Flexible – be open to change and diversity and group dynamics.
- Empathetic – try to understand the members’ view and observe inclusivity.
- Authenticity - Being a real person in a relationship, showing genuineness in action and speech, willing to disclose self appropriately, recognize the person they want to become.
- Multicultural competence – know your cultural values, attitudes, and behavior and how the same affects the group. The leader ought to respect group diversity (Leddick, G. R. 2010).

Characteristics of a Group Leader

Some of the key characteristics of a group leader include having an identity, know who they are and what they can become, what they want out of life and willingness to examine their values and goals, respect and appreciate themselves, are able to recognize and accept their own power and limitations, open to change and enhance their self-awareness with every experience. Applying emotional intelligence, self-care and be willing to learn in the process (Piggot-Irvine & Biggs Karene, 2020).

Skills and Techniques for Group Leaders

A group therapy session requires a skills leader to help the members benefit from the leader and the group members as well as help them deepen their own self-understanding. The leader ought to help the group become more competent in life skills like having a number of problem-solving strategies (Yalom , 2015) .

Active Listening

It entails listening to the content, voice and body language of the person speaking. It also involves communicating to the person(s) speaking that you are really listening. The leader may scan the room for nonverbal gestures, especially facial expressions, and body shifts and make sense of what could be happening (Corey, 2023).

Reflection

The purpose of reflection is to help the group leader look inward and see from an authentic perspective what is happening in the group and among the group members. The leader guides the members on how to reflect and if possible, depending on the group characteristics, the leader can ask them to write reflective journals.

Clarification and Questioning

Clarification may be done for the benefit of the entire group or for the leader to avoid confusion or misdirection from the group's purpose.

Summarizing

Because members are busy listening and sharing during the session, they often do not pick up on or remember some details that may be important for the process. A good summary will pull together the major points and can serve to deepen or sharpen their focus. It helps also to use this as a point of clarification in case they forgot something or did not understand a concept.

Encouraging and Supporting

This ability will be especially important in helping members deal with the anxiety of being in a new situation and sharing their ideas or personal feelings with others. Members are often concerned with how they will appear to others and sometimes fear they will say something wrong

and offend the group or the leader. The skilled leader must take the initiative in providing support and encouragement that will help put members at ease/unfreeze and grow through the process.

Tone Setting

This is the leader's ability to establish a mood (emotional tone) for the group. The leader sets the tone by reflective actions, words and what they allow to happen in the group. If the leader is very aggressive, he will create an atmosphere of resistance, anxiety, mistrust, and tension. A leader who allows members to attack and criticize others permits a negative tone to emerge within the group. If the leader encourages sharing and caring, a more positive atmosphere is established. The leader is responsible for setting the tone and should consider the following (Corey, 2009):

- Should the tone be very formal or informal?
- Should the group be task-oriented or more relaxed?
- Should the group be open to diversity?
- Should the group be inclusive and open to change?
- Should the group be serious or sociable?
- Should the tone be confrontative or supportive?

Modeling and Self-disclosure

This skill is useful in terms of the members sharing their feelings, thought process, responses, and feedback. Your style of effective communication, your ability to listen, and your encouragement of others will serve as a model for your members to emulate. Sharing, self-disclosure by the leader can be used to show that they are willing to risk and share about themselves. However, a leader should practice caution while sharing materials that are quite sensitive as there is no absolute confidentiality in group counseling.

Cutting off

The term is used to describe the leader's skill in stopping a member from talking too much or about a topic/opinion or idea. It is also referred to as blocking or intervening.

Reasons for cutting off include:

- When a member's comments conflict with the group's purpose and goals
- When a member is saying something inaccurate
- When members are arguing or rambling
- When members are rescuing another member

Cutting off strategies include avoiding eye contact with the speaker, which may be a signal to the speaker that they should stop talking. The leader can directly intervene and change focus or ask another member to speak instead or summarize and move on.

Cutting off strategies

- Timing: The leader should stop members quickly, before they ramble too long, -or argue - for an -extended period.
- Use of Voice: If the leader seems critical or angry, members are likely to react in a negative way. Clarifying: The leader should explain to the members why he is stopping what is happening.
- Explaining is a good practice because confusion and anxiety can result if someone is cut off for no apparent reason.
- Be sensitive, know when to cut off and how to do it

Mindfulness

This is the art of allowing members to pay moment to moment attention to what is happening within them and with other group members. This allows to pay attention to one's feelings, actions,

and thoughts. The leader is also able to deepen the understanding of the members through picking group energies (Germer, 2009).

Drawing out members

Drawing out members is the skill of eliciting group members' comments. Reasons for drawing members out include:

- To get greater involvement from the group members
- To help members who have a difficult time sharing in a group.
- To probe for greater depth
- Allow quiet and shy members to participate.

Drawing out strategies:

- Ask members if they would like to comment.
- Using dyads, rounds, and written exercises
- Eye contact: Giving a member who the leader would like to say something, eye contact, a nod or gesture which prepares the member to talk.

Use of Rounds

A round is an activity in which the leader asks each member to briefly respond to the same stimulus idea or activity. This is a way used to keep members focused, reflect, and respond. The leader uses rounds to do the following:

- Get members focused.
- Deepen the intensity.
- Gather information and locate group energy.
- Build comfort and trust.
- Draw out quiet members.

- Summarize important topics covered.
- Pick areas of clarification.
- Bring closure.

Using Dyads

A dyad is an activity in which members pair up to discuss some issue or concern. The leader uses dyads to:

- Develop comfort and reduce anxiety.
- Warm up members and building energy.
- Processing information and group activities.
- Winding up a topic.
- Getting certain members together.
- Providing leader/ member interaction.
- Elicit wide and deep information from members.

Exercises

The term is used among group leaders to refer to planned activities that the group does for a specific purpose. Sometimes groups generate ideas a leader never imagined of and the readiness to venture into the unknown is one area a leader should dare to give a chance ((Robert & David , 2021). The leader uses exercises to:

- Generate participation and discussion (brainstorming).
- Focus the group on a goal/activity or idea.
- Provide an opportunity for experiential learning.
- Increase the comfort level and build rapport.
- Provide fun and relaxation.

- Teach a skill.
- Get feedback.

Leadership Styles

Leadership style can vary from one leader to another. Some of the common leadership styles are discussed as follows:

Autocratic leadership: It involves the use of central processes for making decisions on policies and procedures. Group members carry the directives issued by the group leader without questioning.

Democratic leadership: It involves discussion of various options of solving problems with the group members. Leader acts as a facilitator and actively solicits thoughts and ideas from group members. Once a decision is made, all group members are expected to abide by the outcome, including the group leader.

Laizzez – faire: It is sometimes referred to a “hands – off” style of leadership. In this style, the leader provides the group with resources needed to accomplish the group tasks then spells the way to go and allows the group to complete the task with no direct involvement. The leader remains available to answer questions, to motivate and assist when it’s necessary (Corey, 2009).

Co – Leadership

Co – leading a group is very important. It provides a dual perspective and double energy in the available leadership where two leaders or more come together to lead a counseling group (Robert & David , 2021).

Models of Co – Leadership

- Alternative model
- Shared model

- Apprenticeship

Alternative model: This is a model where the leaders take turns in planning and there is a pattern in which the two leaders alternate in facilitation and intervening.

Shared model: Leaders jointly share every step of the group intervention. Leadership flows back and forth between the two leaders.

Apprenticeship: This is where one leader is clearly the experienced one while the other one is relatively a novice. The experienced leader takes the primary initiative and leadership within the group especially in the initial phase. In most cases, when an agency wishes to adopt a particular style of leadership for their groups they can attach an apprentice to a seasoned group leader so they can emulate them (Pickett & Reid, 2022)

Advantages of Co – Leadership

- Members benefit from live experiences and insights of the two leaders.
- Group members benefit from two models of leaders.
- It offers leaders an opportunity of someone with who the group planning.
- Leaders obtain feedback from each other thus gaining different perspectives and observations.
- Attention and care to the group is enhanced.
- Group leaders can complement each other and thus double strength.
- Each leader can grow from observing and working with other leaders (Proctor , 2008).

Disadvantages of Co – Leadership

- The planning process may take longer since there are two perspectives on every issue.
- Where approaches and perspectives of the core – leaders are different and not well coordinated this can result into confusion and inconsistency for members.

- Members of the group may align themselves with one leader causing conflicts.

Principles of Co – Leadership

- Mutual support
- Balancing each other
- Active communication
- Planning together
- Monitoring and evaluation

Conclusion

In this lecture, we have covered group leadership styles, qualities of a group leader, different strategies of good leadership and co – leadership in group counseling. In our follow up session, we shall learn how groups are formed.

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