

# Myths about Group Counseling

## **I'll have to tell my deepest and darkest secrets to the group:**

No one in group is forced to disclose anything that they are not comfortable with, and in fact some thoughts, feelings or emotions are so personal that keeping them to oneself may be more beneficial than disclosing them to a group. Group members learn to identify their personal boundaries and respectfully communicate those boundaries to one another. They disclose personal information, over time and in a way that feels comfortable.

## **I won't be able to get enough of what I need out of the group if I have to share the time with others:**

Groups operate in such a way that many people are working on their own concerns at the same time. When two or three (or even more) people interact, they are all often learning about themselves and their life experiences from the interaction. One function of a group is to help create a space where all of the individuals are safe and attempt to learn how to meet their own needs.

## **If I don't speak, the group won't be helpful to me:**

Some people fear that they won't have anything to say, or won't know how to respond to others in a group. This is a valid concern because so often group participation in other settings (e.g. class, work, family life) is identified by verbal interaction or input. A therapy group, however, does not hold that same assumption, and allows an individual to observe and reflect, which are powerful learning tools in and of themselves.

## **I'll be forced to talk when I don't want to:**

Participants are often encouraged by one another to share their observations, internal reactions and experiences of the group, but in a way that feels comfortable and supportive. Group members discuss at the outset of therapy how they tend to share information, when they might need some space within the group, and how they can be best supported by others in the group. If a group member does not feel comfortable talking, they simply share this preference with the group, and ask that the group trust them to speak when they are ready.

## **It is so hard for me to talk to people I don't know; I'll never be able to share in a group:**

In reality most people are anxious about being in and sharing with a group. But even within a session or two, most people find that they want to talk in the group. Even the most private

or shy people find that the group is a place where they can trust others and share their concerns.

## **Group Counseling is not as good as individual counseling:**

Individual and group counseling have different benefits and help people in different ways, and research studies have shown that group participants are equally if not more satisfied than people who participate in individual therapy. While neither form is inherently better than the other, there are some struggles that are better suited for a group interaction, such as developing communication skills, getting interpersonal feedback, obtaining social support and understanding relationship patterns.

## **When so many people with so many problems get together in one room, it will all be too overwhelming:**

Coming into a group setting can understandably feel overwhelming, when one's own life circumstances may seem unmanageable. Many group participants, however, have described hearing about the experiences of other members as extremely helpful. Focusing on the life experiences of others helps them to feel less alone in their own struggles, as well as helps them to understand their own difficulties from a different perspective. Many find a sense of relief in knowing that others struggle with similar issues or emotions.

## **Other people will be confrontational and overly aggressive:**

Although there are plenty of stereotypes from movies and television of a group member throwing something or getting angry and storming out of a room, this type of behavior rarely happens. Group members are encouraged ahead of time to put their feelings into words instead of actions, so that they can help others to understand what they are going through, and to help themselves to learn effective ways of managing difficult or intense emotion.

## **The group leaders will be the only ones to help me resolve my problem:**

Although the group leaders will help to define the structure of a group, provide guidance, and help establish a sense of safety, the bulk of the work done in the group is by the participants. They support, challenge, and come to care for one another in a way that deepens over time, facilitating changes that come about for the participants in their personal lives as well as in the group.