

# Advantages and uses of group work

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**groupwork**  
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There are many sound reasons for using groups to deal with individual and social problems. All groups (including work/task and psychoeducational groups) have the advantage of being:

**Efficient** – A community welfare/health professional may work more effectively through using groups than by working individually with clients. Some target groups, like adolescents and men, can resist the perspective of a counsellor, but they might consider and adopt the same viewpoint, if a peer in a group expressed this point of view.

**Greater variety of resources and viewpoints** – Group participants often value the perspective of other participants as the most helpful thing they gained from the group. Groups can quickly generate a variety of different ideas and responses to particular problems.

Counselling and therapy groups have other advantages (Jacobs, Harvil, Masson, 1988):

**Experience of commonality** - When participants share their own similar experiences in a group, the process of normalization occurs. This is where a person no longer views their problem in isolation and challenges the belief that they alone experience this problem. They start to see that other people have similar problems or concerns and this reduces their sense of isolation (Jacobs, Harvil, Masson, 1988).

**Sense of belonging** – A common problem can be the sense of aloneness that people experience in society or even within their family. Groups allow people to experience a sense of belonging with the other participants.

**Skills practice** – Participants can practice skills they wish to master or they can learn through watching others use these skills. The group experience can be a microcosm of life that provides a stage for a variety of issues to be explored and practiced.

**Feedback** – Groups provide participants an opportunity to receive initial and ongoing feedback from other people. Everyone makes assumptions about how other people perceive and react towards them. The group environment allows people to test out these assumptions and receive accurate feedback about how others respond towards them.

**Continuous learning** – Groups provide an opportunity for people to learn continuously. Some people prefer to learn by watching other people interact. Groups allow this to occur with everyone playing different roles that permit different ways of learning.

**Real-life approximation** – Groups often replicate real life experiences as they generate a full range of feelings and human reactions. Groups are microcosms, reflections of society or mini-societies. “While interacting with others, people experience fear, anger, doubt, worry and jealousy” (Jacobs, Harvil, and Masson, 1988, p.5). The group experience allows them to find new responses to old/familiar life experiences.

**Contracts and commitments** – A group is made up of a number of individuals who have their own goals and interests. They each develop by recognising what they want to gain from the group and by supporting others in pursuing their own achievements. Often incidental learning occurs where they gain something that they never initially recognised as important from the other participants.

## Uses of Groups

Many types of groups have been developed during the past century. The Specialists in Group Work Association (2000) has classified groups into four categories:

- Work/Task Group
- Psychoeducational
- Group Counselling
- Group Therapy

| Type of group            | Target group that benefit from the group  | Resources used within the group  | Participants who are excluded from the group | Group focus  |
|--------------------------|---|--|--|--|
| <b>Work/Task Group</b>   | Organisational teams<br>Management  | Educational  | Anti-social behaviours                       | Task<br>Organisational issues  |
| <b>Psychoeducational</b> | General population<br>Adolescents and children<br>Carers of people with disabilities                        | Educational<br>Pre-written programs<br>Pre-post measures to evaluate change          | Anti-social behaviours<br>Active psychosis   | Education<br>Support<br>Discussion<br>Self-help                              |
| <b>Group Counselling</b> | General population experiencing crisis or life transition   | Discussion of life experiences<br>Some educational focus.<br>Use of immediacy        | Active psychosis                             | Growth and experiential<br>Counselling<br>Discussion<br>Support              |
| <b>Group Therapy</b>     | General population experiencing crisis or life transition<br>Participants who had negative life experiences | Experiences<br>Use of immediacy<br>Interventions to modify negative life experiences | Active psychosis                             | Therapy<br>Discussion of life experiences<br>Discussion of early family life |

## Group Work Specialisations

The Association for Specialists in Group Work (2000) developed a categorisation system to improve basic training standards. These specialisations are:

### Task/Work Groups

Involves organisational and task focused settings for group and teamwork.

### Psychoeducational Groups

Structured educational group programs that help participants develop knowledge and skills for coping with immediate or potential problems, developmental transitions, or life crises.

### Counselling Groups

Less structured group work/counselling focused on dealing with normal human issues experienced by most people at some stage in life. It is focused on immediate personal issues and can be personal growth group orientated.

### Psychotherapy Groups

Less structured group work/counselling that focuses on individual experiences where participants have not had their emotional needs met during childhood and have developed some psychopathology.

### Basic Requirements for practicing within Group Work Specialisations

| Group Work Specialisation            | Basic Knowledge Base   | Minimum (Clinical) Experience |
|--------------------------------------|--|-------------------------------|
| <b>Task/ Work Group Facilitation</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Core group work skills training course</li> <li>• Knowledge of organisation context and theory</li> </ul>   | 30 hours supervised practice  |
| <b>Psychoeducational Groups</b>      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Core group work skills training course</li> <li>• Knowledge of subject theory</li> </ul>  | 30 hours supervised practice  |
| <b>Group Counselling</b>             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Core group work skills training course</li> <li>• Advanced group work skills training course</li> <li>• Participant in a counselling group</li> </ul>   | 45 hours supervised practice  |
| <b>Group Psychotherapy</b>           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Core group work skills training course</li> <li>• Advanced group work skills training course</li> <li>• Recognised training in a psychotherapeutic model</li> <li>• Participant in a therapy group</li> </ul> | 45 hours supervised practice  |

## **Misuse of Groups**

Groups can be misused when facilitators or practitioners change the type of group that they are running without the informed consent of their organisation and everyone within the group.

It is a misuse of group work to change a group advertised as a psychoeducational group into a group focusing on inner child and early life experiences without the informed consent of the participants and the wider organisation. Facilitators need to establish clear and transparent expectations that are based on:

- their level of skill and training
- participants' purposes for attending the group and their expectations
- advertised purpose of group
- sponsoring organisation's expectation
- type of supervision received.

Other misuses in group work can occur when:

- facilitators have too high expectations of the group or the participants
- people participate in the group when they have an active psychosis, anti-social behaviour or have a different purpose to that of the group
- facilitators introduce group exercises at an inappropriate time or too early within a group or are not safe for the group.

**[Click here to return to the Groupwork Induction Guide](#)**