

**Jo Christner, Psy.D.**  
PSY#15532  
16858 Clark Street, Encino, CA 91436  
11850 Wilshire Blvd., Suite #2001, Los Angeles, CA 90025  
(818)879-7777

## **Introduction to Group Therapy**

### **What is group therapy?**

There are different types of group therapy just as there are different ways of practicing group therapy. This will serve as an introduction to group therapy in my private practice. It will answer many of your questions and raise others. Feel free to discuss these with me.

The group meets for 90 minutes at the agreed upon time. The group consists of a minimum of 4 and a maximum of 9 individuals in addition to myself. All members of the group have had, or are currently in, individual psychotherapy either with me or with another psychotherapist.

The group is an on-going, open group. This means that new members may be added to the group as openings occur and as new members are deemed appropriate for the group. Some individuals may have belonged for a short time while others may have been members for years.

### **Group therapy is different from individual psychotherapy.**

Individual therapy focuses on your inner psychic life. It deals with unconscious conflicts, depression, anxiety, self-doubt, peculiarities of thought, phobias, and other emotional concerns. It focuses on internal individual processes assisting individuals to become more aware of their inner life, their beliefs and emotional reactions. Past traumas, current struggles, thoughts and behaviors are explored and processed in order to gain resolution and mastery.

The primary focus of group therapy is interpersonal and interactional rather than intrapersonal and intrapsychic. We focus on the nature of interactions and the hows and whys of each person's reactions. The focus is on the group and between members, not between members and the therapist. It is not individual psychotherapy in a group. The group, rather than the individual, is the primary focus. Every attempt will be made to preserve the integrity of the group. Often individuals will want to be the primary focus, even at the expense of the group. The therapist will focus on the group rather than on the individual (except in those cases when a group member is in crisis). The group is the healing agent.

Group therapy focuses on interpersonal interactions. It becomes a safe place for recognizing and practicing new behaviors. You can become aware of many struggles through your interactions with others. People stimulate each other in various ways. There are different personalities in the group so you have the opportunity to examine your reactions to other people. Frequently the people you meet in the group will represent others in your past or current life with whom you have difficulty. In group therapy you have the opportunity to work through these situations.

In group therapy you will find that you are not alone in your reactions to events and people. You will find support from others who will share their concerns and how they are approaching problems of living. The combined effort of the group becomes healing for each person.

In the group, I have the opportunity to observe how you behave in relation to other people. Individual therapy is limited to your perceptions of events and transactions. In group therapy you eventually behave similarly to the way you behave with people everywhere. This is particularly helpful for those of you who are in individual treatment with me. The group stirs things up for you to work on in individual treatment. Likewise, the group offers the opportunity for you to practice new behaviors.

The group is a microcosm of the world in which you live. The group often presents the very types of situations that you may find difficult. You have the opportunity to learn different ways of dealing with these situations. Furthermore, you bring to the group behaviors that adversely affect your interpersonal transactions. The group can offer valuable feedback and help you discover alternative ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving.

### **How is group therapy different than social interactions?**

The group is different than most social interactions you might have in your daily life. Social amenities, cocktail conversation, and other forms of social distancing are best left in the waiting room to be picked up on the way out. For ninety minutes each week you will be encouraged and challenged to suspend these forms of communication. We will struggle to relate to each other without our familiar styles. Questions, for example, are minimized. You will be asked to reveal the thought process behind your questions. What were the thoughts and feelings that emerged to create the question. You are encouraged to speak in first person, "I". Gathering each other's history as means of getting to know one another will be avoided except as it occurs spontaneously during the course of the group process. Emphasis will be placed on the process of interacting rather than on the content of the interactions. We will stay in the present, dealing with the past only as it is relevant for the present.

### **Individual music lessons versus Orchestra metaphor:**

It is possible to compare individual and group therapy to taking individual music lessons versus playing in an orchestra. During individual music lessons, you are the focus. You practice scales, explore alternative ways of playing, work through individual blocks in technique or style, and spend considerable time trying to interpret musical pieces. Often you are able to play well with your teacher once you feel comfortable. And then one day, you agree to play in the orchestra—in a group—so that you have experience playing with others. By observing you in the orchestra, your teacher has the opportunity to see you interact and then in your individual session you can work on different aspects of your performance.

### ***Your Contribution***

Each member of the group is a valuable contributor to the emotional well being of every other member. The groups are not formed on a chance basis. Each member of the group is selected for his/her contribution to the group as a whole. A group is orchestrated in much the same way as one might put together a orchestra. Each member plays a unique instrument and it becomes important for the group as a whole that you contribute to the "music" that is being played. The group therapist is like the conductor of the orchestra trying to bring out the best in each player for the benefit of the entire orchestra.

You are not expected to play very well, but you are expected to be physically present each time the "orchestra" is meeting to practice. Even though you may not think you are important to the group, the rest of the group needs you to be present.

### *Attendance*

You are a significant part of healing and growth for other members, just as they are an important aspect of yours. The “orchestra” is not the same when one of the instruments is missing. Your absence leaves a big hole and deprives someone else of your participation in their work. Each person stimulates the other to bring out an aspect of his/her personality. It’s important to be responsible and regular in attendance.

### *Combined individual and group*

Individual and group therapy are coordinated in such a way as to produce maximum results. When you are individual and group therapy with me, I consider your individual work when I see you in group and vice versa.. It is important for your growth that you attend both individual and group sessions regularly so that they can effectively be used together in your treatment. If you are in individual therapy with another therapist, a release will need to be signed so that we can coordinate care.

### *The Beginning Stage*

In the beginning stage of your participation in group therapy you will slowly reveal yourself to others. You will learn how others react and respond to your behavior. You come to modify or give up certain behavior or ways of dealing with other people as you come to recognize that those behaviors are ineffective. As you learn new ways of relating you may try them out in other places in your life.

Once you overcome the initial shyness common to all new members, the group meetings take on different meaning. You begin to see your fellow group participants as associates, fellow seekers of growth, instead of just a group of strangers. Sometimes, because you have shared powerful emotions and much healing together, nurturing relationships are formed which continue beyond your time spent together in the therapy session.

### *Extra-group interactions*

In order to create a safe place for all, intentional socializing outside of group is discouraged. If you decide to socialize, there are certain considerations and restrictions that govern extra-group socializing. These restrictions serve to keep the focus on the purpose of group therapy. Some behaviors can serve to undermine the effectiveness of the group.

1. The group members are discouraged from having sexual contact with one another. Although discussion of sexual feelings members may have toward one another during the group sessions is encouraged, sexual acting out between members will undermine the integrity of the group.
2. All interactions between members of the group occurring outside of the sessions are to be brought up in the group sessions. Conspiracies and private confidence between members are discouraged. All members are encouraged to discuss observations made of other members while in other settings.
3. Email communications are to be sent to the entire group so that they are part of the group process. Connection on social media is discouraged because it again creates a “private” relationship outside of group and changes the information known by all group members and the resultant interactions.
4. Members must keep in mind that the primary focus is the integrity of the group as a whole. Emphasis is on strengthening the group and hence its healing power.

The guidelines for the group were developed for the main purpose of safety and healing. They should be looked at as reminders that group therapy is a working process. We are here to work; friendships may develop as a function of the work we do—they are bonuses. We are not here to develop friendships as a primary objective. Just as in the workplace, the work is primary, the friendships, etc. are a by-product.

### **Group Outpatient Therapy Contract:**

#### **General Information**

1. **Attendance:** The group will either meet weekly or every other week and will be determined by myself and the group. Each group member is expected to be present each week. If an emergency arises and you are not able to attend, it is expected that you will let me know in advance.
2. **Entering Group:** You are expected to make **at least a four month commitment** to the group. This permits you to get a sense of how the group works and encourages you to work through discomforts within the group rather than prematurely leave.
3. **Exiting Group:** **A minimum of one month** advance notice of intent to terminate is expected. You are expected to attend **each session** during the termination period. This permits both you and the other group members an opportunity to finish interpersonal business and work through your termination from group.
4. I reserve the right to use information gleaned from individual sessions during the group sessions if, in my judgment, it is deemed in your best interest.

**Payment for Services:** The monthly fee for group therapy is payable in advance at the first meeting of the month. Since your membership in group involves the reservation of space specifically for you, missed sessions are not refundable. Your fee will be \$50.00 for a 90 minute group session. Periodically, my **fee may be reasonably increased**. Advance notice will be given and the fee discussed. Your signature on this document acknowledges agreement to these financial terms and gives authorization to Jo Christner, Psy.D. to provide me with educational, psychodiagnostic and psychotherapeutic services.

There is no fee adjustment for patient absences.

There is an adjustment for therapist absences.

There is a fee adjustment during those months when the office is close to a national holiday.

**Insurance Reimbursement:** Regarding clients who carry insurance, professional services are rendered and charged to the client and not to the insurance company. Your insurance company will only reimburse you according to the terms of your policy. Please note that your insurance may not cover this therapy expense, will not reimburse you until you have paid your annual deductible, and may not pay the entire cost of therapy. I will provide you with a monthly statement that you can submit to your insurance company for reimbursement. You are responsible for filling out your own insurance forms. If you choose to use your coverage, I will be required to formulate a diagnosis and include it on my billing sheet to the insurance company. The company claims to keep this information confidential; however, I have no control over the information once it leaves this office. If you have questions about this you may wish to check with the company providing the coverage. You may certainly choose to avoid the use of insurance altogether.

**Confidentiality:** All information disclosed within sessions is confidential. In the course of treatment, I might at times discuss your case with a colleague for consultation purposes only. Disclosure is allowed by law in the following circumstances (The first two items are **mandated** by law to be reported):

1. There is sufficient evidence/reason to believe that a client may do bodily

harm to self or others.

2. There is suspected occurrence of child abuse/neglect, elder or dependent adult abuse/neglect, by yourself or someone else, either current or past.
3. The client is gravely disabled
4. The disclosure is required by legal mandate
5. The disclosure is necessitated by a medical emergency

Every person in a psychotherapy group has the right to a confidential relationship with other members and has the ethical responsibility to protect them from any unauthorized disclosures of any information given in confidence in the group therapy setting. It is unethical to reveal any group member's name or any information about anyone who is or has been in group. Furthermore, inquiries as to whether another person is a group member or not should be answered by telling the inquirer that members identities are not disclosed. In fact, even the fact that a person is not in group therapy should be confidential by group members.

***Emergency Procedure:*** If you need to contact me between sessions, please leave a message and your call will be returned. If an emergency situation arises, leave a message stating that your call is an emergency and also call my cell phone at 818-674-2502. Please do this for true emergencies only. It is preferred that you reserve therapeutic questions and discussions for treatment sessions rather than via the telephone. Please keep in mind that if I am unavailable in a crisis situation, contact your primary physician, psychiatrist, individual psychotherapist or avail yourself or a nearby hospital with psychiatric services if you have insurance coverage. If the previously mentioned resources are inaccessible, dial 911 for help.

***Vacation Policy:*** A colleague's name and telephone number will be left on my answering machine for emergencies when I am unavailable. I will inform you in advance of these time periods.

***I agree to the terms and understand the principles involve in group therapy as explained in these pages.***

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Signature

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Date

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Printed Name

***Please return this signed page to me before your first group session.***