What is group therapy?

In group therapy, 5-10 students meet face-to-face with one or two group leaders for one hour to ninety minutes. Members are encouraged to discuss whatever concerns brought them to CAPS in the first place. You can ask for support, different perspectives, or feedback. You can also share your feelings and experiences and provide support and feedback to other group members. The group setting gives members an opportunity to interact with others and try out new behaviors in a safe environment. It also gives people the opportunity to see that they are not alone and that other people experience similar difficulties.

How effective is group therapy?

Research shows that group therapy is as effective as individual therapy in addressing a wide variety of concerns affecting young adults, ranging from mild adjustment issues to chronic mental health concerns. For certain issues, such as relationship or interpersonal concerns, group therapy can be more effective than individual therapy.

How can group therapy be as effective as individual therapy?

Group therapy is typically just as effective as individual therapy for a variety of reasons. First, most group members identify with issues that other members share and find that they are helping themselves just by being present and processing issues vicariously. Second, members practice new ways of interacting by listening, giving feedback, and engaging other group members about their concerns. Third, group therapy offers the opportunity to hear multiple perspectives and receive support from peers. Finally, the group environment offers a safe place to test out behaviors or new ways of being.

What kind of people join therapy groups?

UNC undergraduate and graduate students and post-docs are eligible to participate in CAPS groups. Most often people join group because they are experiencing difficulties in their relationships or have something in their lives that they find distressing or difficult to handle. Some examples is the types of personal issues that students bring to group include:
• discomfort in social situations
• lack of intimacy or connection in relationships
• anxiety
• depression
• family of origin problems
• dissatisfaction with friendships or romantic relationships
• poor self-esteem and lack of self-confidence

What does a typical group session look like?

Groups at CAPS have very different formats. Many groups are structured or semi-structured; these groups are somewhat similar in that most sessions focus on a particular topic. Each session usually consists of brief lectures by the group leaders, group discussions, and experiential activities.

CAPS also offers personal exploration groups that are typically much less structured. There isn't a specific topic for each session and members are welcome to bring up any issues that they feel are important. The primary focus of the group is on the ‘here and now,’ with the idea that through giving and receiving feedback, people will be able to practice new behaviors and gain new understandings of self and others.

What if a member of the group is my friend or classmate?

We recognize that it might be awkward or uncomfortable to be in a group with someone you already know. Please inform the group leaders immediately if you have an existing relationship with someone else in the group. If this situation occurs, the group leaders, in consultation with the group members, will decide how best to resolve it. It may work out to have both of you remain in the same group, or it may be best to have one of you join a different group. In the latter case, the group leaders will consult with you or your friend/classmate to find another appropriate group that fits your needs and schedule.

How long do most groups last?

Most groups last 8-10 weeks. Some groups continue from one semester to the next, perhaps taking a break over summer and winter vacations. You will be informed of your group’s duration before it starts.

Can I participate in group and individual therapy at the same time?

Group therapy is the most effective form of therapy for many people because of the opportunities
for members to learn from each other and provide support and perspective. As a result, group therapy alone can be a sufficient way to address one’s concerns. In some cases, students may benefit from both individual and group therapy simultaneously. The therapists at CAPS can help you determine what form(s) of therapy would best meet your needs.

Can I join a group if I'm seeing a therapist in the community?

Yes, you are still eligible for CAPS services even if you are engaged in therapy in the community. We encourage you to let the group leaders and your individual therapist know about your participation so they can help you get the most from therapy.

Can I join a group if I have previously participated in a group at CAPS?

Yes, groups are always available to full-time UNC students, post-docs, and partners who have paid the student health fee. Even if you have participated in a group in the past, you may find a similar or different group being offered that is of interest to you.

How long can I stay in group?

You can continue participating in group as long as you and the group leaders feel that it’s beneficial for you. Some students remain in group for one semester and some continue for a year or longer.

What are group rules for participation?

If group is to be effective, your commitment to the following is essential:

- If you are going to miss a session, please let one of the leaders of the group know.
- The group meeting times have been set by the group leaders, and you are asked to adhere to those times.
- Having a feeling and acting on it are two different actions. Acting out your feelings is not acceptable whether you act them out upon yourself or another member of the group. The way we most respect ourselves and others is by experiencing feelings and then allowing ourselves to talk about them.
- It is your responsibility to talk about your reasons for being in the group.
- The group sessions are confidential. You, other members, and the group leaders are bound ethically and legally not to disclose the contents of the group sessions.
- If you decide that you have gained as much as possible from the group or that it isn’t the most appropriate treatment method for you, we ask that you come to the group and say good-bye.
- The work of the group needs to be done in the group during group time. Therefore, we ask
that you not socialize with other members of your group during the time when you are a member of that group.

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