Tips for Getting the Most Out of Group Therapy

Focus on the here-and now, i.e., what’s happening in the group (or in your head) at this very moment. What is going on that makes you feel closer or more distant towards others? What is happening between the group members? Though it may be awkward, try to share these observations with the group, as it can provide the group members important information.

Get involved and try to be as open as possible. It’s okay to not understand. It is not expected that you will come up with a brilliant interpretation for others. Just be honest, even if it means admitting that you don’t know what is going on.

Learn to give feedback to others. Giving feedback is a skill few of us have learned to do well, yet it can be one of the most effective ways to deepen any relationship. Some tips for giving feedback:

- Be specific about what you’re responding to (particular remark, gesture)
- Be direct and honest, and provide concrete examples if possible
- Share both positive and negative feedback
- Give feedback as soon as possible

Learn to receive feedback from others. Think of feedback as a gift from other group members. Some tips for receiving feedback:

- Acknowledge feedback when given (e.g., “Thanks. I didn’t realize I was smiling just then?”)
- Seek clarification from the member or verify with other members if the feedback you’ve received matches their perceptions as well.
- Beware of becoming defensive, but if you feel yourself becoming defensive, it might be a good idea to share it.
- Ask for feedback. Find out from others in the group how they perceive you. What role do they see you taking on in the group? What are your “blind spots”?
Avoid giving advice. Sometimes we really want to offer advice to someone who is struggling, but often when we do, we fail to let that person feel heard. Make sure you have heard and fully understood the other person’s feelings before offering advice.

Share with others what is going on in your mind, even if it isn’t very pretty. If you don’t know what is going on in your mind, tell the group that. It is okay to be messy and let others know about the things that you normally keep hidden from others. We follow group rules, not social rules, and these rules allow for greater self-disclosure.

Express your feelings genuinely with the group. The expression of emotion will have far greater value than the expression of ideas or information. Try and take the risk to let yourself be emotionally available to and vulnerable with others.

Remember that how people talk is as important as what they say. Pay attention to the non-verbal behaviors in the group, yours and those of other members. Talk about what you notice.

Try to be as direct as possible and try to be open to the responses of others. Telling a story is sometimes a way of being known, but it can also be a way of avoiding dialogue and intimacy. Aim for dialogue that fosters an understanding of your experiences rather than monologue.

Focus on the relationships you have with the group, other group members and the leader. Put a priority on noticing what is happening inside the group. What is going on that makes you feel closer or more distant towards others? Try and explore with the group what you notice.

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