CENGAGE

Tenth Edition

Theory & Practice of Group Counseling

Gerald Corey

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Gerald Corey

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CENGAGE

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Gerald Corey

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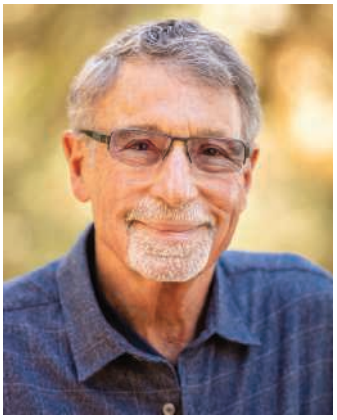
To Marianne Schneider Corey—my wife of 57 years, best friend, valued colleague, and coauthor—who has contributed immensely to the quality of my life and my work.

About the Author



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The following eight books, by Gerald Corey and colleagues, are published with Cengage Learning:

- *Theory and Practice of Group Counseling*, Tenth Edition (and *Student Manual*) (2023)
- *Theory and Practice of Counseling and Psychotherapy*, Enhanced Tenth Edition (and *Student Manual*) (2021)
- *Becoming a Helper*, Eighth Edition (2021, with Marianne Schneider Corey)
- *Issues and Ethics in the Helping Professions*, Tenth Edition (2019, with Marianne Schneider Corey and Cindy Corey)
- *Groups: Process and Practice*, Tenth Edition (2018, with Marianne Schneider Corey and Cindy Corey)
- *I Never Knew I Had a Choice*, Eleventh Edition (2018, with Marianne Schneider Corey and Michelle Muratori)

- *Group Techniques*, Fourth Edition (2015, with Marianne Schneider Corey, Patrick Callanan, and J. Michael Russell)
- *Case Approach to Counseling and Psychotherapy*, Eighth Edition (2013)

The following seven books are published by the American Counseling Association:

- *Clinical Supervision in the Helping Professions*: *A Practical Guide*, Third Edition (2021, with Robert Haynes, Patrice Moulton, and Michelle Muratori)
- *Personal Reflections on Counseling* (2020)
- *The Art of Integrative Counseling*, Fourth Edition (2019)
- *Counselor Self-Care* (2018, with Michelle Muratori, Jude T. Austin, and Julius A. Austin II)
- *ACA Ethical Standards Casebook,* Seventh Edition (2015, with Barbara Herlihy)
- *Boundary Issues in Counseling: Multiple Roles and Relationships,* Third Edition (2015, with Barbara Herlihy)
- *Creating Your Professional Path: Lessons from My Journey* (2010)

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Part Three

Integration and Application

Preface

Group counseling is an increasingly popular therapeutic intervention in a variety of settings. Although many textbooks deal with groups, very few present an overview of various theoretical models and describe how these models apply to group counseling. This book outlines the basic elements of group process, deals with ethical and professional issues special to group work, and presents an overview of the key concepts and techniques of 10 approaches to group counseling. The book also attempts an integration of these approaches and encourages students to develop a framework that leads to their own synthesis. The textbook addresses the key knowledge and skills areas for the group counseling competencies identified by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling Related Educational Programs (2016) in *CACREP Standards*.

Theory and Practice of Group Counseling is written in a clear and simple style, and you will have no difficulty understanding the theoretical concepts and their relationship to group practice. Many of you may have taken a course in counseling theories before your group counseling course, and that background will certainly be useful in understanding and applying the material in this book.

This book is for graduate or undergraduate students in any field involving human services. It is especially suitable for students enrolled in any of the courses under the general designation of "Theory and Practice of Group Counseling." The book is also for practitioners who are involved in group work or for students and trainees who are interested in leading various types of groups. This book is also useful for psychiatric nurses, ministers, social workers, psychologists, marriage and family therapists, addiction counselors, rehabilitation counselors, community agency counselors, school counselors, licensed professional clinical counselors, and mental health professionals who lead groups as a part of their work.

Overview of the Book

The tenth edition continues to emphasize the practical applications of the theoretical models to group work. The central purpose is to help you to develop your own synthesis of various aspects of these approaches. The book also includes two detailed chapters on the stages of a group's development, providing a guide for leaders in the practice of counseling.

Part One (Chapters 1 through 5) treats the basic elements of group process and practice that you'll need to know regardless of the types of groups you may lead or the theoretical orientation you may hold. Chapter 1, *Introduction to Group Work*, presents an overview of the various types of groups and discusses some general principles that can be applied in working with the reality of cultural diversity in groups. Chapter 2, *Group Leadership*, deals with basic concerns of group leadership, such as the personal characteristics of effective leaders, the problems they face, the different styles of leadership, the range of specific skills required for effective leading, and the components of an effective multicultural group counselor. An updated section on the role of research in group counseling addresses the issues of combining research with the practice of group work, evidence-based practice in group work, and the advantages of practice-based evidence as an alternative to evidence-based practice. Chapter 3, *Ethical and Professional Issues in Group Practice*, addresses important ethical issues that you will inevitably encounter as you lead groups, and it emphasizes the rights of group members and the responsibilities of group leaders. An updated and expanded section addresses spiritual and religious values in group counseling. Both the "Best Practice Guidelines," developed by the Association for Specialists in Group Work (2008), and the "Ethical Guidelines for Group Therapists," developed by the American Group Psychotherapy Association (2002), are presented in the *Student Manual* (available in the Online Student Resources). In Chapter 4, *Early Stages in the Development of a Group*, and Chapter 5, *Later Stages in the Development of a Group*, you are introduced to the major developmental tasks confronting a group as it goes through its various stages from the formation of a group to its termination, including evaluation and follow-up. The central characteristics of the stages that make up the life history of a group are examined,

with special attention paid to the major functions of the group leader at each stage. These chapters also focus on the functions of the members of a group and the possible problems that are associated with each stage in the group's evolution. There are many new references and suggested readings for Part One.

Part Two (Chapters 6 through 15) examines 10 theoretical approaches to group counseling. Most of the revisions for this edition are found in Part Two. Particular attention has been paid to providing the most current research available for each of the approaches discussed, and new examples illustrate key concepts. These chapters are designed to provide you with a good overview of a variety of theoretical models underlying group counseling, so that you can see the connection between theory and practice. Each of these theoretical orientations has something valid to offer you as a future group leader.

To provide a framework that will help you integrate the theoretical models, these 10 chapters have a common structure. Each chapter begins with a biographical sketch of a key figure (or figures) associated with the theory. All of the theory chapters describe the key concepts of the theory and their implications for group practice. This is followed by a discussion of the role and functions of the group leader according to the particular theory and, when applicable, the stages of development of that particular group process. Next are discussions of how each theory is applied to group practice; the major techniques employed within the framework of each theory; concepts and techniques that have applicability to group work in the school; and how the approach can be applied with diverse client populations. The necessity for flexibility and a willingness to adapt techniques to fit the cultural background of group members is emphasized in each chapter. New to the tenth edition is a section titled "Group Theories in Action," which is based on a recent video of my work with members of a group that shows how specific techniques of an approach can be woven into the group process. Each chapter also contains my evaluation of the major strengths and limitations of the theoretical approach presented. Five "Self-Reflection and Discussion Questions" designed to actively involve you in the material you have read are included at the end of each theory chapter. In addition, annotated resources are suggested to guide those who wish to pursue a more in-depth study of the approach.

Part Three (Chapter 16) focuses on the practical application of the theories and principles covered in Parts One and Two, making these applications more vivid and concrete. Chapter 16, *Comparisons, Contrasts, and Integration*, is designed to help you pull together the various methods and approaches, realizing commonalities and differences among them. The chapter concludes with a description of an "integrative model of group counseling" that combines concepts and techniques from all the approaches that have been examined; this discussion is focused on helping you attempt your own personal integration. The model I present integrates "thinking," "feeling," and "doing" perspectives, with varying emphases at each stage of a group's development. My rationale is to show which aspects of each theory I draw on at the various stages of the group, as well as to offer a basis for blending what may look like diverse approaches to the practice of group work. I strive to give you some guidance in thinking about ways to develop your own synthesis of the various group approaches.

New to the Tenth Edition

In this tenth edition, several chapters in Part Two have been significantly updated to reflect recent trends, and other chapters have received minor revisions. Relatively minor revisions were made in the chapters in Part One.

All the chapters in this tenth edition begin with a list of learning objectives, which is a new feature. Throughout this edition, careful attention has been given to updating sources to reflect the newest literature on each topic.

Revisions to Part One, *Basic Elements of Group Process: An Overview*, include updated research on the beneficial aspects of group work; an expanded treatment of confidentiality with minors; a new section on ethical issues related to online therapy groups; an expanded section on the role of religious and spiritual values in group work; additional discussion on having culturally sensitive conversations in a group; new material on the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP, 2016) standards pertaining to group work competencies; and an added section on teaching group counseling virtually. The chapters on both the early and later stages of a group's development have been revised.

The revisions found in Part Two, *Theoretical Approaches to Group Counseling*, are based on the recommendations of expert reviewers of each of the separate theories, who provided suggestions for updating the various approaches in line with current trends, new studies, and recent developments in the practice of the approach. Each of the theory chapters has been revised to reflect contemporary trends in practice and to include the most current literature available. New to this tenth edition is the video program *Group Theories in Action*, in which I lead a group, demonstrating some techniques associated with each of the theories and illustrating how selected techniques can be applied to a therapeutic group. Segments of the group session are discussed in the chapter text, so those who have not seen the video are able to see how each approach or theory can be applied to group counseling.

Specific changes made in the theory chapters for this tenth edition are detailed here:

Chapter 6, The Psychoanalytic Approach to Groups: increased emphasis on the role of the relationship in analytic group therapy; new research on the significant role of early experiences on adult functioning; current perspectives on the concepts of resistance, transference, and countertransference as applied to group work; an expanded discussion on the contemporary relational approach to psychodynamic therapy; and a revised discussion of brief psychodynamic therapy.

Chapter 7, Adlerian Group Counseling: revised material on how goals influence behavior; many additional examples to make key concepts clearer; and sample dialogues to illustrate interventions.

Chapter 8, Psychodrama in Groups: reframing of psychodrama as a form of experiential learning; addition of several examples of participants' experiences in psychodrama; revised section on applying psychodrama in school settings; and inclusion of recent studies supporting psychodrama.

Chapter 9, The Existential Approach to Groups: increased emphasis on the role of group members as active agents of change; and inclusion of meta-analytic studies identifying the factors related to therapeutic effectiveness.

Chapter 10, The Person-Centered Approach to Groups: new material on translating the core conditions in action; expanded discussion of the role of empathy, positive regard, and therapist congruence pertaining to effective group practice; more emphasis on diversity of styles in person-centered facilitation; and possible future developments of person-centered theory.

Chapter 11, Gestalt Therapy in Groups: increased emphasis on relational Gestalt therapy; updated discussion of how resistance is viewed in Gestalt therapy; revision of material on the evolution of various styles of practicing Gestalt therapy; and expanded discussion of working in the here-and-now.

Chapter 12, Cognitive Behavioral Approaches to Groups: identification of trends in contemporary cognitive behavioral theory; more emphasis on the role of the therapeutic relationship and collaboration; revised material on the role of homework in group practice; increased coverage on relapse prevention; updated and expanded information on mindfulness and acceptance approaches; discussion of future directions for this approach; and expanded treatment of culturally responsive aspects of current practice.

Chapter 13, Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy in Groups: revised discussion on the use of some techniques; a streamlined discussion of key concepts and techniques; and more emphasis on the diverse styles of rational emotive behavior therapy in practice.

Chapter 14, Choice Theory/Reality Therapy in Groups: new material on the application of reality therapy in school counseling; and additional discussion of how the past is addressed in reality therapy.

Chapter 15, Solution-Focused Brief Therapy and Motivational Interviewing in Groups: increased emphasis on clients being actively involved in the therapeutic process; a new discussion of the role of Milton Erickson in influencing the development of solution-focused therapy; more on how SFBT differs from traditional therapies; common factors between SFBT and motivational interviewing; an expanded explanation of how questions guide therapy and ways to use these techniques flexibly in an integrative approach; the current understanding of the stages of change model; and a revised discussion on applying these therapies with multicultural populations.

Instructor Resources

Additional instructor resources for this product are available online. Instructor assets include an Instructor's Manual, PowerPoint® slides, and a test bank powered by Cognero®. Sign up or sign in at www.cengage.com to search for and access this product and its online resources.

Alignment With CACREP Standards

CACREP Core Curriculum Standards* for group counseling courses are reflected throughout this tenth edition of *Theory and Practice of Group Counseling*. Chapter numbers relevant to the CACREP standards appear in parentheses following the standards listed.

After reading and studying *Theory and Practice of Group Counseling*, students will be able to demonstrate knowledge in these areas:

1. Understand, list, and discuss approaches used for various types of group work, including task groups, psychoeducational groups, focus groups, counseling groups, and therapy groups (Chapter 1)
2. Understand, list, and be able to recognize the therapeutic factors of group work (Chapters 1, 4, and 5)
3. Discuss principles of group dynamics, including group process components, developmental theories, group members' roles and behaviors, and therapeutic factors of group work (Chapters 4 and 5)
4. Understand and be able to demonstrate various types of group leadership styles and approaches (Chapter 2)
5. Understand the personal characteristics of group workers that have an impact on members: knowledge of personal strengths, weaknesses, biases, values, and their effect on others (Chapter 2)
6. Review the special skills for opening and closing group sessions (Chapter 2)
7. Review and discuss current research literature pertaining to group work (Chapter 2)
8. Understand and discuss ethical and legal considerations pertaining to group work (Chapter 3)
9. Understand the process components involved in the typical stages of a group's development (Chapters 4 and 5)
10. Understand the major facilitative and debilitative roles that group members may take (Chapters 4 and 5)
11. Understand and discuss group counseling methods, including group counselor orientations and behaviors, appropriate selection criteria and methods, and methods of evaluation of effectiveness (Chapters 3, 4, and 5)
12. Understand theories of group counseling and be able to compare and contrast the different theories studied (Chapters 6–16)
13. Understand group counseling methods and techniques (Chapters 6–16)
14. Review, understand, and discuss professional preparation standards for group leaders (Chapter 3)
15. Understand the value of participating in an experiential group (Chapter 3)
16. Understand and address issues of diversity and multiculturalism in group work (Chapters 1–3; Chapters 6–16)
17. Understand what is involved in becoming a diversity-competent group counselor (Chapter 2)

This textbook, along with a course in group counseling, will assist students in demonstrating competency in the following leadership skills:

1. Observing and identifying group process
2. Encouraging participation of group members
3. Attending to, acknowledging, confronting and responding empathically to group member behavior—actions/behaviors of the group members
4. Attending to, acknowledging, confronting and responding empathically to group member statements (paraphrase and reflection)

*Council for Accreditation of Counseling Related Educational Programs. (2016). *CACREP Standards.*

5. Attending to, acknowledging, confronting, and responding empathically to group themes (linking and summarizing)
6. Eliciting information from and imparting information to group members
7. Engaging in appropriate self-disclosure
8. Demonstrating awareness and understanding of one's own cultural values
9. Demonstrating sensitivity to diversity factors as they influence group process
10. Demonstrating understanding of multicultural factors as they influence group membership and group participation
11. Maintaining group focus; keeping a group on task
12. Giving and receiving feedback in a group
13. Using confrontation/blocking appropriately; working cooperatively with a coleader and group members
14. Engaging in ethical practice

Acknowledgments

Many of the revisions that have become a part of this textbook since its original edition in 1981 have come about in the context of discussions with students, colleagues, and professors who use the book. Those students and professionals whom I teach continue to teach me in return, and most of my ideas are stimulated by interactions with them. I especially want to recognize the influence on my life and my books of my wife and colleague, Marianne Schneider Corey, with whom I work professionally. Her critiques and feedback have been especially valuable in preparing these revisions, and many of the ideas in the book are the product of our many hours of discussions about group work. I would also like to thank the copy editor, Kay Mikel.

Gerald Corey

Part 1

Basic Elements of Group Process: An Overview

Chapter 1

Introduction to Group Work

Learning Objectives

1. Define these terms: group psychotherapy, psychoeducational groups, group counseling, task-facilitation groups.
2. Explain the rationale for asking group members to share their fears and concerns about being in a group at the first group meeting.
3. Understand how counselors design groups to meet the needs of specific populations over the life span.
4. Describe how psychoeducational groups can be designed to help people develop specific skills or progress through difficult life transitions.
5. Identify the key factors necessary to the success of brief group therapy.
6. Understand the rationale for orientation and preparation of members for a group.
7. Explain why it is necessary to view group counseling in a multicultural context.
8. Evaluate several basic ideas of multicultural perspectives on group work.
9. Analyze the process for becoming a culturally skilled group worker.
10. Identify some guidelines for serving multicultural populations in a group.

Today, more than ever, mental health practitioners are being challenged to develop new strategies to prevent and treat psychological problems. Although there is still a place in community agencies for individual counseling, limiting the delivery of services to this model is no longer practical. Group counseling offers real promise for meeting today's challenges. Group counseling enables practitioners to work with several clients at the same time, a decided advantage in these managed care times. In addition, the group process has unique learning advantages. Group counseling may well be the treatment of choice for many populations. If group work is to be effective, however, practitioners need a theoretical grounding along with the skill to use this knowledge creatively in practice.

Increased Interest in Group Work

In conducting workshops around the United States, and in other countries as well, my colleagues and I have found a surge of interest in group work. Professional counselors are creating an increasing variety of groups to fit the special needs of a diverse clientele in many different settings. In fact, the types of groups that can be designed are limited only by one's imagination. This expanded interest underscores the need for broad education and training in both the theory and the practice of group counseling. This book provides fundamental knowledge applicable to the many kinds of groups you will be leading.

Groups can be used for therapeutic or educational purposes or for a combination of the two. Some groups focus primarily on helping people make fundamental changes in their ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving. Groups with an educational focus help members learn specific coping skills. This chapter provides a brief overview of various types of groups and the differences among them.

All human services counselors will be expected to be able to use group approaches with diverse client populations and for a variety of purposes. In a psychiatric hospital, for example, you may be asked to design and lead groups for patients with specific problems, for patients who are about to leave the hospital and reenter the community, or for patients' families. Insight groups, remotivation groups, assertion training groups, bereavement groups, and recreational/vocational therapy groups are commonly found in these hospitals.

If you work in a community mental health center, a college counseling center, or a day-treatment clinic, you will be expected to provide therapeutic services in a wide range of group settings. Your client population will most likely be diverse with respect to age, ability/disability, presenting issues, socioeconomic status, level of education, race or ethnicity, sexual orientation, and cultural background. Community agencies are increasing their use of groups, and it is not uncommon to find groups for women's issues and for men's issues, consciousness-raising groups, groups for children of alcoholics, support groups, parent education groups, groups for cancer patients, groups for individuals with eating disorders, groups for people who have experienced trauma and crisis, groups for older adults, HIV/AIDS support groups, and groups aimed at reducing substance abuse.

Your theoretical approach may be based primarily on a single system. Increasingly, however, group practitioners are becoming more integrative as they draw on techniques from various theoretical approaches (Norcross & Goldfried, 2019). The numerous pathways toward integration are characterized by the practitioner's desire to increase therapeutic effectiveness and applicability by looking beyond the confines of single theories and the techniques associated with them (Norcross & Alexander, 2019; Norcross & Beutler, 2019).

Groups have particular advantages for school counseling. School-based groups are designed to deal with students' educational, vocational, social, and emotional problems. If you work in a school, you may be asked to form a career exploration group, a self-esteem group, a group for children of divorce, a behavior-modification group, an educational group teaching interpersonal skills, or a personal growth group. Elementary school counselors are now designing therapeutic groups as well as psychoeducational groups. On the high school level, groups are helping students who are in drug rehabilitation, who have been victims of crime, or who are going through a crisis or recovering from a trauma.

Counseling groups in K–12 school settings include a wide array of topics and formats. These groups are a mainstay of the psychological services offered by schools. Groups for children and adolescents occupy a major place in a comprehensive, developmental school counseling program because of their efficacy in delivering information and treatment. Steen, Henfield, and Booker (2014) state that integrating counseling with psychoeducational interventions has been successful in both personal-social and academic development groups in school settings. This combination of group counseling methods provides school counselors with the opportunity to facilitate self-awareness and to present skills information. Many school counseling groups are aimed at enhancing personal and social development and at the same time have a psychoeducational purpose (such as teaching study skills, how to interact with peers, or setting goals). Steen, Henfield, and Booker describe a group counseling model designed to help K–12 school counselors integrate students' academic and personal-social development into their group work. Riva and Haub (2004) maintain that "the real benefit of school-based treatment is that it can potentially reach many students before they need remedial counseling for more serious mental health problems" (p. 318).

There is considerable evidence for the effectiveness of group psychotherapy with a broad range of psychological problems and populations. The efficiency of group therapy has been enhanced by brief and time-limited frameworks for various settings (Brabender, 2020). Group work is a beneficial and cost-effective approach to treatment, and meta-analyses reveal that group therapy is as effective as individual therapy (Burlingame et al., 2004). Barlow (2008) contends that groups can be used effectively for both prevention and educational purposes: "Through ever-growing research and continuing improvements in clinical application, groups remain a powerful intervention tool across the life span, positively impacting childhood, adult, and geriatric disorders" (p. 244). Group approaches are flexible and can be designed to help people with almost any need.

The group approach has become popular in part because it is frequently more effective than individual counseling. Group members not only gain insight but also practice new skills both within the group and in their everyday interactions outside the group. In addition, members of the group benefit from the feedback and insights of other group members as well as those of the practitioner. Groups offer many opportunities for modeling, and members can learn how to cope with their problems by observing others with similar concerns. Group members also have the opportunity to rehearse their newly acquired skills within the group.

Even practitioners with advanced degrees in a helping profession often have had little exposure to the theory and techniques of group work. Many professionals find themselves thrust into the role of group leader without adequate preparation, training, or supervision. It is not surprising that some of them become anxious when faced with this challenge. Although this book is not intended to be an exclusive means of preparing competent group leaders, it provides practitioners with the fundamental knowledge and skills necessary to cope with the demands of effective group leadership.

Overview of the Counseling Group

A **counseling group** consists of a group facilitator and a limited number of members and has a specific focus, which may be educational, problem oriented, or revolve around personal growth. Group work emphasizes interpersonal communication of conscious thoughts, feelings, and behavior within a here-and-now time frame. Group work may have preventive as well as remedial aims; however, group members typically do not require extensive personality reconstruction, and their concerns generally relate to the developmental tasks of the life span. Group counseling tends to be growth oriented in that the emphasis is on discovering internal resources of strength. The participants may be facing situational crises and temporary conflicts, struggling with personal or interpersonal problems of living, experiencing difficulties with life transitions, or trying to change self-defeating behaviors. The group provides the empathy and support necessary to create the atmosphere of trust that leads to sharing and exploring these concerns. Counselors assist group members in developing their existing skills in dealing with interpersonal problems so members will be better able to handle future problems of a similar nature.

The group counselor uses verbal and nonverbal techniques as well as structured exercises. The role of the group counselor is to facilitate interaction among the members, help them learn from one another, assist them in establishing personal goals, and encourage them to translate their insights into concrete plans that involve taking action outside of the group. (Chapter 2, *Group Leadership*, describes the skills competent group leaders use to accomplish these tasks.) Group counselors perform their role largely by teaching members to focus on the here-and-now and to identify the concerns they want to explore in the group.

Goals

Ideally, the group members will decide the specific goals of the group experience for themselves. Here are some possible goals for members of counseling groups:

- Increase awareness and self-knowledge and develop a sense of one's unique identity
- Recognize the commonality of members' needs and problems and develop a sense of connectedness
- Learn how to establish meaningful and intimate relationships
- Discover resources within their extended family and community as ways of addressing their concerns

- Increase self-acceptance, self-confidence, self-respect, and achieve a new view of oneself and others
- Learn how to express one's emotions in a healthy way
- Develop concern and compassion for the needs and feelings of others
- Find alternative ways of dealing with normal developmental issues and of resolving certain conflicts
- Increase self-direction, interdependence, and responsibility toward oneself and others
- Become aware of one's choices and make choices wisely
- Make specific plans for changing certain behaviors
- Learn more effective social skills
- Learn how to challenge others with care, concern, honesty, and directness
- Clarify one's values and decide whether and how to modify them

Advantages

The group re-creates the participants' everyday world, especially if the membership is diverse with respect to age, interests, background, socioeconomic status, and type of problem. As a microcosm of society, the group provides a sample of reality—members' struggles and conflicts in the group are similar to those they experience outside of it—and the diversity that characterizes most groups also results in unusually rich feedback for and from the participants, who can see themselves through the eyes of a wide range of people.

The group offers understanding and support, which foster the members' willingness to explore problems they have brought with them to the group. The participants achieve a sense of belonging, and through the cohesion that develops, group members learn ways of being intimate, of caring, and of challenging. In this supportive atmosphere, members can experiment with new behaviors. As they practice these behaviors in the group, members receive encouragement and learn how to bring their new insights into their life outside the group experience.

Ultimately, it is up to the members themselves to decide what changes they want to make. They can compare the perceptions they have of themselves with the perceptions others have of them and then decide what to do with this information. Group members are able to get a picture of the kind of person they would like to become, and they come to understand what is preventing them from becoming that person.

Value for Specific Populations

Group counseling can be designed to meet the needs of specific populations such as children, adolescents, college students, or older adults. Examples of these counseling groups are described in *Groups: Process and Practice* (M. Corey et al., 2018), which offers suggestions on how to set up various groups and the techniques to use for dealing with the unique problems of each of them. A brief discussion follows that explains the value of counseling groups for some specific populations.

Counseling Groups for Children

In schools, group counseling is often suggested for children who display behaviors or attributes such as excessive fighting, inability to get along with peers, violent outbursts, poor social skills, or lack of supervision at home. Small groups can provide children with the opportunity to express their feelings about these and related problems. Identifying children who are developing serious emotional and behavioral problems is extremely important. If these children can receive psychological assistance at an early age, they stand a better chance of coping effectively with the developmental tasks they must face later in life.

Counseling Groups for Adolescents

Group counseling is especially suited for adolescents because it gives them a place to express conflicting feelings, to explore self-doubts, and to come to the realization that they share these concerns with their peers. Adolescents can openly question their values and modify those that need to be changed. In the group, adolescents learn to communicate with their peers, benefit from the modeling provided by the leader, and can safely experiment with reality and test their limits. Because of the opportunities for interaction available in the group situation, the participants can express their concerns and be heard, and they can help one another on the road toward self-understanding and self-acceptance.

Counseling Groups for College Students

Students encounter a range of developmental tasks during their undergraduate and graduate years. Counseling groups are a valuable vehicle for meeting

the developmental needs of both traditional and nontraditional students. Today's college students have had a variety of significant life experiences, including some who are returning from military deployments in foreign countries. Those who seek services at college counseling centers are increasingly older and more diverse in their life experiences, making group work more challenging (McCeneaney & Gross, 2009).

Many college counseling centers offer groups designed for relatively healthy students who are experiencing personal and interpersonal relationship problems. The main purpose of these groups is to provide participants with an opportunity for growth and a situation in which they can deal with career decisions, intimate relationships, identity problems, educational plans, and feelings of isolation on an impersonal campus. Theme or issue groups, which are time-limited and focus on a developmental issue or address a specific problem that the participants have in common, are popular in university counseling centers. These groups promote well-being by assisting people in dealing effectively with developmental tasks (Drum & Knott, 2009).

Counseling Groups for Older People

Counseling groups can be valuable for older adults in many of the same ways they are of value to adolescents. As people grow older, they often experience isolation. Like adolescents, older people often feel unproductive, unneeded, and unwanted. Many older people accept myths about aging that become self-fulfilling prophecies. An example is the misconception that older people cannot change or that once they retire they will most likely be depressed. Counseling groups can do a lot to help older people challenge these myths and deal with the developmental tasks that they face while retaining their integrity and self-respect. The group format can assist people in breaking out of their isolation and offer older people the encouragement necessary to find meaning in their life so that they can live fully and not merely exist.

Other Types of Groups

Although this book focuses on counseling groups, the practice of group work has broadened to encompass psychotherapy groups, psychoeducational groups, support groups, and task groups as well as counseling groups. Many of these groups share some of the procedures, techniques, and processes of counseling groups. They differ, however, with respect to specific aims, the role of the leader, the kind of people in the group, and the emphasis given to issues such as prevention, remediation, treatment, and development. Let's take a brief look at how psychotherapy groups, psychoeducational (structured) groups, and task groups differ from counseling groups.

Group Psychotherapy

A major difference between group *therapy* and group *counseling* lies in the group's goals. Counseling groups focus on growth, development, enhancement, prevention, self-awareness, and releasing blocks to growth, whereas therapy groups focus on issues such as remediation, treatment, and personality reconstruction. **Group psychotherapy** is a process of reeducation that includes both conscious and unconscious awareness and both the present and the past. Some therapy groups are primarily designed to correct emotional and behavioral disorders that impede one's functioning or to remediate in-depth psychological problems. The goal may be either a minor or a major transformation of personality structure, depending on the theoretical orientation of the group therapist. Because of this goal, therapy groups tend to be longer term than other kinds of groups. The people who make up the group may be suffering from severe emotional problems, deep personal conflicts, effects of trauma, or psychotic states. Many of these individuals are in need of remedial treatment rather than developmental or preventive work.

Group therapists are typically clinical or counseling psychologists, licensed professional counselors, licensed marriage and family therapists, or clinical social workers. They use a wide range of verbal modalities (which group counselors also use), and some employ techniques to induce regression to earlier experiences, to tap unconscious dynamics, and to help members reexperience traumatic situations so that catharsis can occur. As these experiences are relived in the group, members become aware of and gain insight into past decisions that interfere with current functioning. The group therapist assists members in developing a corrective emotional experience and in making new decisions about the world, others, and themselves.

Psychoeducational Groups

Psychoeducational groups, or groups structured by some central theme, are gaining in popularity. **Psychoeducational groups** feature the presentation and discussion of factual information and skill building through the use of planned skill-building exercises. Psychoeducational groups serve a number of purposes: imparting information, sharing common experiences, teaching people how to solve problems, teaching social skills, offering support, and helping people learn how to create their own support systems outside of the group setting. These groups can be thought of as educational and therapeutic groups in that they are structured along the lines of specific content themes. Psychoeducational groups are finding a place in many settings, and they appear to be increasingly used in community agencies and in schools.

Psychoeducational groups are designed to help people develop specific skills, understand certain themes, or progress through difficult life transitions. Although the topics do vary according to the interests of the group leader and the participants, these groups have a common denominator of providing members with increased awareness of some life problems and tools to better cope with them. The intervention strategies used in psychoeducational groups are largely based on the transmission of information basic to making changes and teaching a process for bringing about these changes. The goal is to prevent an array of educational deficits and psychological disturbances.

Many psychoeducational groups are based on a learning theory model and use behavioral procedures. Chapter 12, *Cognitive Behavioral Approaches to Groups*, provides detailed descriptions of these groups, including social skills training groups, stress management groups, and cognitive therapy groups. Psychoeducational groups are well suited to populations of all ages, and they are described in detail in *Groups: Process and Practice* (M. Corey et al., 2018). Here are a few examples of psychoeducational groups for various developmental levels:

- A group for elementary school children of divorce
- An anger management group for children
- A substance abuse group
- A women's group and a men's group
- A domestic violence group
- A women's support group for survivors of incest
- A successful aging group
- A bereavement group for older adults

All of these groups contain certain content themes that provide structure for the sessions, encourage sharing and feedback among the members, are designed to increase self-awareness, and are aimed at facilitating change in members' daily lives. These groups can be designed for just about every client group and can be tailored to the specific needs of the individuals represented.

Task-Facilitation Groups

Task-facilitation groups assist task forces, committees, planning groups, community organizations, discussion groups, study circles, learning groups, team building, program development consultation, and other similar groups to correct or develop their functioning. These groups address the application of principles and processes of group dynamics that can foster accomplishment of identified work goals. Increasingly, human services workers are being asked to help improve program planning and evaluation within organizations.

Oftentimes those involved in task groups want to get down to business quickly, yet focusing exclusively on the task at hand (content) can create problems for the group. A leader's failure to attend to here-and-now factors is likely to result in a group that becomes overly focused on content concerns, with process issues relegated to a minor role. If interpersonal issues within the group are ignored, cooperation and collaboration will not develop, and it is likely that group goals will not be met. It is essential that group leaders recognize that process and relationships are central to achieving the goals of a task group.

It is the leader's role to assist task group participants in understanding how attention to this interpersonal climate directly relates to achieving the purpose and goals of the group (Hulse-Killacky et al., 2001). The balance between content and process in task groups is best achieved by attending to the guiding principles of warm-up, action, and closure. When this is done effectively, task groups are likely to be more successful and productive.

Task groups are commonly used by school counselors who assemble a group of school personnel to develop a plan to assist students. The team works together to determine how services can best be implemented. Rather than focusing on individual

growth, task groups in school settings are concerned with accomplishing common goals to assist a range of students (Falls & Furr, 2009).

Task groups have many uses in community intervention. Many of the problems people face are the result of being disenfranchised as individuals or as members of the community. One of the tasks of professionals engaged in community work is to assist individuals and the community in acquiring access to valued resources in moving toward a greater degree of empowerment. Group workers need to understand how sociopolitical influences impinge on the experiences of individuals from diverse racial and ethnic groups.

Working with the community usually means working with a specific group or in a situation in which competing or collaborating groups are dealing with an issue or set of issues in a community. Most of the work in community change is done in a small group context, and skills in organizing task groups are essential.

Brief Group Work

Strictly speaking, brief groups are not a type of group. Many of the groups already described are characterized by a time-limited format. Brief groups tend to have a preset time for termination and a process orientation. In the era of managed care, brief interventions and short-term groups have become a necessity. Economic pressures and a shortage of resources have resulted in major changes in the way mental health services are delivered. Managed care also has influenced the trend toward developing all forms of briefer treatment, including group treatment. Brief group therapy is well suited to the needs of both clients and managed care, and these treatments can be effective as well as economical (Hoyt, 2011). In **brief group work**, the group therapist sets clear and realistic treatment goals with members, establishes a clear focus within the group structure, maintains an active therapist role, and works within a limited time frame. Brief group work is popular in both community agencies and school settings because of the realistic time constraints and the ability of a brief format to be incorporated in educational or therapeutic programs.

Most of the empirical evidence on the effectiveness of group counseling has been based on studies of time-limited, closed groups; evidence from meta-analytic studies strongly supports the value of these groups. In general, the evidence for the efficacy of brief group therapy is quite positive (Shapiro, 2010). Brief interventions and time limitations are especially relevant for a variety of counseling groups, structured groups, and psychoeducational groups. The realistic time constraints in most settings demand that practitioners employ briefer approaches with demonstrated effectiveness. Because brief group work makes unique demands on group practitioners, it is essential that those who lead these groups have had training and supervision in brief group interventions. Shapiro believes the future of brief group treatment rests with the training group leaders receive: "We need to reestablish group training programs and more adequate supervision in brief groups and include personal group participation in our clinical and counseling training programs" (p. 506).

Group Counseling in a Multicultural Context

In a pluralistic society, the reality of cultural diversity is recognized, respected, and encouraged. Within groups, the worldviews of both the group leader and the members also vary, and this is a natural place to acknowledge and promote pluralism. Multicultural group work involves attitudes and strategies that cultivate understanding and appreciation of diversity in culture, ethnicity, race, gender, class, ability/disability, language, religion, sexual orientation, and age. We each have a unique multicultural identity, but as members of a group, we share a common goal—the success of the group. To that end, we want to learn more about ourselves as individuals and as members of diverse cultural groups.

DeLucia-Waack (1996) states that the multicultural context of group work requires attention to two tasks: (1) the application and modification of theories and techniques of group work to different cultures in ways that are congruent with cultural beliefs and behaviors, and (2) the development of the theory and practice of group work that makes full use of the diversity among members as a way to facilitate change and growth. Multiculturalism is inherent in all group work, and our uniqueness as individuals is a key factor in how groups operate.

In addition to understanding the range of clients' cultural similarities and differences, group counselors

must be willing and able to challenge the culturally encapsulated view of a group's structure, goals, techniques, and practices. A fundamental step for group counselors is reexamining the underlying culturally learned assumptions of all the major theories in light of their appropriateness in a multicultural context. Comas-Diaz (2019) believes that effective psychotherapy recognizes the crucial role of awareness, respect, acceptance, and appreciation of cultural diversity. However, most traditional therapy models are grounded in a monocultural framework wherein mainstream cultural values overshadow the multicultural worldviews that may be present among group members.

In their discussion of *multicultural intentionality* in group counseling, Ivey et al. (2008) state that it is no longer adequate to mainly look to internal dynamics within the individual as a source of problems. Instead, it is essential that we examine ourselves as contextual/cultural beings. We must expand our awareness of issues pertaining to gender, sexual orientation, degree of physical and emotional ability, spirituality, and socioeconomic status. It is not necessary to discard traditional theories and techniques of counseling, but we must conceptualize them in ways that recognize the environmental influences on individual distress.

Perspectives on Multicultural Group Counseling

The term *multicultural* refers to the complexity of culture as it pertains to delivery of services. From a broad perspective, **multicultural counseling** focuses on understanding not only racial and ethnic minority groups (African Americans, Asian Americans, Latinx, Native Americans, and White ethnics) but also people with physical disabilities; older people; gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender individuals; and a variety of special needs populations. The changing demographics of American society make it imperative that multicultural counseling address differences between counselor and client in areas such as gender, social class, language, sexual identity, ability/disability, and race and ethnicity (Lee, 2019).

Multicultural counseling challenges the notion that problems are found exclusively within the person. Going beyond this stance of "blaming the victim," the multicultural approach emphasizes the social and cultural context of human behavior and deals with the self-in-relation. It is essential that group workers recognize that many problems reside outside the individual. For example, prejudice and discrimination are realities in the social environment whose effects go far beyond working with individuals. If group workers hope to make culturally effective interventions, they will, at times, need to assume nontraditional roles that may include advocate, change agent, consultant, adviser, and facilitator of indigenous support or healing systems (Atkinson, 2004).

According to Pedersen (1991, 1997), the multicultural perspective provides a conceptual framework that both recognizes the complex diversity of a pluralistic society and suggests bridges of shared concern that link all people, regardless of their differences. This enables group counselors to look both at the unique dimensions of a person and at how this person shares themes with those who are different. Such a perspective respects the needs and strengths of diverse client populations, and it recognizes the experiences of these clients. Mere knowledge of certain cultural groups is not enough; it is important to understand the variability within groups. Individuals must be seen in the context of their cultural identities, the degree to which they have become acculturated, and their level of multicultural self-awareness.

Pedersen (1997, 2000) emphasizes the importance of understanding both group and individual differences in making accurate interpretations of behavior. Whether practitioners pay attention to cultural variables or ignore them, culture will continue to influence both group members' and group leaders' behavior as well as the group process. Group counselors who ignore culture will provide less effective services. For group counselors to successfully lead multicultural groups, it is essential that they be invested in becoming *culturally competent.* Group workers must become aware of their worldview, value diversity, learn about different worldviews, acquire and incorporate cultural knowledge as a part of their interventions, increase their multicultural skills, and adapt to diversity and to the cultural context of clients (Comas-Diaz, 2019). Leaders also need to have a good understanding of the diversity of cultural worldviews and the potential impact of differing worldviews on relationships, behaviors, and the willingness of members to actively participate in group work (DeLucia-Waack & Donigian, 2004).

Pedersen (2000) reminds us that culture is complicated, not simple; it is dynamic, not static. The tapestry of culture that is woven into the fabric of all

helping relationships need not be viewed as a barrier, however. In his workshops, Pedersen typically says that multiculturalism can make your job as a counselor easier and more fun; if you adopt a perspective that cultural differences are positive attributes that add richness to relationships, a multicultural perspective can also improve the quality of your life.

Some Guidelines for Serving Multicultural Populations

Adequate preparation is one of the best ways to increase the chances of a successful group experience for all members. Reflecting on these guidelines may increase your effectiveness in serving diverse client populations:

- Learn more about how your own cultural background influences your thinking and behaving. Become familiar with some of the ways in which you may be culturally encapsulated. Take specific steps to broaden your base of understanding both of your own culture and of other cultures.
- Identify your basic assumptions—especially as they apply to diversity in culture, ethnicity, race, gender, class, religion, and sexual identity—and think about how your assumptions are likely to affect your practice as a group counselor.
- Recognize that all encounters are multicultural.
- Move beyond the perspective of looking within individuals for the sources of their problems, and strive to adopt a self-in-relation perspective. Take into account the environmental and systemic factors that often contribute to an individual's struggles.
- Respect individual differences and recognize that diversity enhances a group.
- Learn to pay attention to the common ground that exists among people of diverse backgrounds. Acknowledge our share universal concerns.
- Realize that it is not necessary to learn everything about the cultural background of your clients before you begin working with them. Allow them to teach you how you can best serve them.
- Spend time preparing clients for a successful group experience, especially if some of their values differ from the values that form the foundation of group work. Teach clients how to adapt their group experience to meet the challenges they face in everyday life.
- Recognize the importance of being flexible in applying the methods you use with clients. Do not be wedded to a specific technique if it is not appropriate for a given group member.
- Remember that practicing from a multicultural perspective can make your job easier and can be rewarding for both you and your clients.

In your journey toward becoming a culturally skilled group counselor, you will probably need to think about ways of adapting your theoretical approach and techniques to better serve individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. Chapter 2, *Group Leadership*, deals with what it takes to become a diversity-competent group counselor. Chapter 3, *Ethical and Professional Issues in Group Practice*, introduces you to a range of issues that may arise in multicultural group counseling. The last two chapters in Part One describe the early and later stages in the development of a group.

Part Two addresses some of the major strengths and limitations of 10 major theories from a multicultural perspective. The general principles of effective multicultural group counseling discussed here provide some background for understanding the more detailed discussion later in the book. As you study the 10 theories explored in Part Two, carefully consider the underlying value issues that are likely to have a clear impact on your practice. The direct application of many contemporary models of therapy may be inappropriate for some clients. However, many concepts and techniques drawn from the various therapeutic schools do have cultural relevance. As a group practitioner, you will use a range of key concepts and techniques associated with the various theoretical systems. It is important to develop selection criteria that will enable you to systematically integrate those tools that best meet the needs of diverse client populations.

Video

Watch Gerald Corey's *Group Theories in Action*, video via the Cengage eBook. The group session discussed in this chapter is based on an integrative approach to group counseling.

Chapter 2

Group Leadership

Learning Objectives

1. Identify the characteristics and functions of effective group counselors.
2. Identify key issues and special problems faced by beginning group counselors.
3. Describe ways of creating safety and trust in a group.
4. Differentiate between facilitative and inappropriate self-disclosure by the group leader.
5. List and define the various group leadership skills.
6. List specific skills and tasks in opening group sessions.
7. List specific skills and tasks in closing group sessions.
8. Understand the role of diversity issues in the therapeutic relationship.
9. Explain what is involved in becoming a diversity-competent group counselor.
10. Explain the difference between evidence-based practice and practice-based evidence.

This chapter focuses on the influence of the group leader as a person and as a professional. After discussing the personal characteristics of effective leaders, I analyze the skills and techniques that are necessary for successful leadership and the specific functions and roles of group leaders. I provide enough information about these crucial topics to enable you to benefit fully from the discussion in the following three chapters, which deal with the ethics of group practice and the stages in a group's development. The topics covered here also represent an important prelude to the theory chapters in Part Two.

The Group Leader as a Person

Group leaders can acquire extensive theoretical and practical knowledge of group dynamics and be skilled in diagnostic and technical procedures yet still be ineffective in stimulating growth and change in the members of their groups. Leaders bring their personal qualities, values, and life experiences, as well as their assumptions and biases, to every group. To promote growth in the members' lives, leaders need to live growth-oriented lives

themselves. To inspire others to break away from deadening ways of being, leaders need to be willing to seek new experiences themselves. In short, group leaders are an influential force in a group when they model effective behavior rather than merely describe it.

Group leaders do not have to be problem-free. The issue is not whether leaders have personal problems but whether they are willing to make a serious attempt to live the way they encourage members to live. More important than being a finished product is the willingness to continually examine whether one's life reflects life-giving values. The key to success as a group leader is a commitment to the never-ending journey toward becoming a more effective human being.

Personality and Character

Group counseling techniques cannot be divorced from the leader's personal characteristics and behaviors. Some personal characteristics of group leaders facilitate the group process and are vital for effective group leadership whereas others may inhibit the group process. As you read about these characteristics, evaluate your own strengths and acknowledge areas that need improvement.

Presence Being emotionally present means being moved by the joy and pain that others experience. If leaders recognize and give expression to their own emotions, they can become more emotionally involved with others. Leaders who can draw on their own experiences are able to empathize with and be compassionate toward group members. Presence also has to do with "being there" for the members, which involves genuine caring and a willingness to enter their psychological world. Leaders who feel fragmented or preoccupied with other matters when they come to a group session cannot be present for group members.

Personal Power Personal power involves self-confidence and an awareness of one's influence on others. If group leaders do not feel a sense of power in their own lives (or if they do not feel in control of their destiny), it is difficult for them to facilitate members' movement toward empowerment. In short, it is not possible to give to others what you do not possess. Personal power does not mean domination and exploitation of others; these are abuses of power. Truly powerful leaders use the effect they have on group participants to encourage members to get in contact with their own unused power, not to foster their dependency. Group leaders promote a sense of empowerment by encouraging group members to become *client colleagues.* If members risk change, the bulk of the credit belongs to them.

Courage Effective group leaders show courage in their interactions with group members and do not hide behind their special role as counselors. They show courage by taking risks in the group and by admitting their mistakes. Courageous group leaders are vulnerable, challenge members in respectful ways, act on their intuitions and beliefs, discuss their thoughts and feelings about the group process with members, and willingly share their power with group members. Leaders can model important lessons to members by being themselves and not hiding behind pretense. When members push themselves to leave familiar and secure patterns, they often report being anxious and scared. Group leaders can demonstrate, through their own behavior, their willingness to move ahead in spite of sometimes being imperfect and fearful.

Willingness to Challenge Oneself One of the leader's central tasks is to promote members' self-exploration. Self-awareness entails the willingness to take an honest look at oneself, and group leaders must show that they are willing to question themselves. This essential characteristic includes awareness not only of one's needs and motivations but also of personal conflicts and problems, of defenses and vulnerabilities, of areas of unfinished business, and of the potential influence of all of these on the group process. Group practitioners who are self-aware are able to work therapeutically with the transferences that emerge within the group setting, both toward themselves and toward other members. Furthermore, group leaders are aware of their own potential countertransferences and take responsibility for their own reactions.

Sincerity and Authenticity One of the leader's most important qualities is a sincere interest in the well-being and growth of others. Because sincerity

involves being direct, it can also involve telling members what may be difficult for them to hear. For a group leader, caring means challenging the members to look at parts of their lives that they are denying and discouraging any form of dishonest behavior in the group. The client's best interest is paramount, and useful feedback requires sincerity and respect on the part of the leader.

Authenticity is a form of sincerity. Authentic group leaders do not live by pretenses and do not hide behind defenses or facades. Authenticity entails the willingness to appropriately disclose and share feelings and reactions to what is going on in the group, but indiscriminately sharing every fleeting thought, perception, feeling, fantasy, and reaction is inappropriate. For instance, even though a leader might initially be attracted to a member, it would not be wise to disclose this reality at the initial session. Such "holding back" does not imply inauthenticity; rather, it shows respect and consideration for members at this early stage of the group.

Sense of Identity If group leaders are to help others discover who they are, leaders need to have a clear sense of their own identity. This means knowing what you value and living by these standards, not by what others expect. It means being aware of your own strengths, limitations, needs, fears, motivations, and goals. It means knowing what you are capable of becoming, what you want from life, and how you are going to get what you want. Being aware of your cultural heritage is a vital component of this sense of identity.

Belief in the Group Process and Enthusiasm The leader's deep belief in the value of the group process is essential to the success of the group. Practitioners who lead groups simply because they are expected to do so, without being convinced that group interventions make a difference, are unlikely to inspire group members. A leader's lack of enthusiasm is generally reflected in members' lack of excitement about coming to group sessions and in members' inability to do significant work. The enthusiasm group leaders bring to their groups has an infectious quality. If leaders radiate life, the chances are slim that they will consistently be leading "stale groups." Leaders need to show that they enjoy their work and like being with their group members.

Inventiveness and Creativity Group counselors should avoid getting trapped in ritualized techniques and programmed presentations. It may not be easy to approach each group with new ideas, but inventive and creative leaders remain open to new experiences and to worldviews that differ from their own. One of the main advantages of group work is that it offers many opportunities for being inventive.

Stamina Leading a group can be demanding as well as energizing. Group leaders need stamina and the ability to withstand pressure to remain vitalized throughout the course of a group. Leaders of very challenging groups are bound to feel their energy being drained, and unrealistically high expectations can affect stamina. Leaders who expect immediate change are often disappointed in themselves and may be too quick to judge themselves. Faced with the discrepancy between their vision of what the group *should* be and what actually occurs, leaders may lose their enthusiasm and begin to blame not only themselves but also the group members for the lack of change within the group. It is crucial for group leaders to be aware of their own energy level and to have sources other than the group for psychological nourishment.

Commitment to Self-Care Staying alive both personally and professionally does not happen automatically; it is the result of your commitment to acquiring habits of thinking and action that promote wellness. Self-care is not a luxury but an ethical mandate, and you need to commit to developing effective self-care strategies. Self-care consists of the actions you take to improve your health and better meet the many challenges of being an effective counselor. Self-care protects you from burnout, empathy fatigue, impairment, and other conditions that can detract from your effectiveness. Self-care is best viewed as an ongoing preventive activity for all mental health practitioners. Engaging in self-care activities helps us successfully meet the demands of our professional work. It is essential that you become attuned to the warning signals that you are being depleted and take steps to nurture and sustain yourself. You cannot provide nourishment to group members if you don't nourish yourself. By taking care of yourself, you are modeling an important lesson in self-care for group members. If you have a pattern of putting others' needs before

your own, you increase the likelihood of burnout. By proactively engaging in taking care of yourself on all levels, you will sustain your energy and be able to continue to help others.

Portrait of Highly Effective Therapists In *Master Therapists*, Skovholt and Jennings (2004) describe their qualitative research project on the personality characteristics of 10 master therapists—those considered the "best of the best" among mental health professionals. Skovholt and Jennings's investigation yielded a portrait of highly effective therapists that includes the following dimensions:

- A drive to master, yet a sense of never arriving
- An ability to deeply enter the world of another without losing a sense of self
- The ability to provide an emotionally safe environment for clients while challenging them
- The ability to draw on their therapeutic power to help others while maintaining a sense of humility
- Integration of their personal and professional selves with clear boundaries between each dimension
- The ability to give to others while taking care of themselves
- The ability to accept feedback about themselves without becoming destabilized by this feedback

Other specific one-word characteristics associated with this portrait of the master therapist include being alive, congruent, committed, determined, intense, open, curious, tolerant, vital, reflective, self-aware, generous, mature, optimistic, analytic, fun, discerning, energetic, robust, inspiring, and passionate (pp. 133–134). Certainly, these 10 master therapists did not possess all of these traits all of the time, but this research sheds light on the personal characteristics of therapists who are considered outstanding by their professional colleagues. The researchers also described how these characteristics are manifested in a therapist's professional work.

A Concluding Comment

As you review the characteristics of effective group leaders, consider these personal qualities on a continuum. As you examine your own courage, self-awareness, and clear sense of identity, be aware that it will be easier for you to facilitate members' self-exploration as your self-awareness increases. The challenge is for you to take an honest look at your personal qualities and make an assessment of your ability as a person to inspire others. Your own commitment to living up to your potential is key; the most effective way to lead others is to model your own beliefs through your actions. Experiencing your own therapy (either individually or in groups) is one way to remain open to looking at the direction of your life. You will never be the perfectly integrated group leader who has "arrived." After all, once you have arrived, there is no place to go!

The personal dimensions described in the preceding pages are essential, but they are not sufficient for successful leadership. The specialized knowledge and skills identified by the Association for Specialists in Group Work (ASGW, 2000) in "Professional Standards for the Training of Group Workers" are central to effective group leadership. These leadership skills are examined in greater detail later in the chapter.

Special Problems and Issues for Beginning Group Leaders

Through my work in training and supervising group leaders and providing in-service workshops, I have come across a number of topics that have special relevance for beginning leaders. These issues must be faced by all group leaders regardless of their experience, but they are especially significant for those who are relatively inexperienced.

You may wonder whether you have what it takes to be an effective leader. My advice is to be patient with yourself and not to demand that you immediately become the "perfect group leader." Most practitioners (including me) questioned their competence when they began leading groups, and they may still have difficulty at times. Self-doubts are less of a problem if you are willing to continue to seek training and to work under supervision.

Initial Anxiety

Before you lead your first group, you will no doubt be anxious about getting the group started and about keeping it moving. You will probably be asking

yourself questions like these with a certain degree of trepidation:

- What do the participants really expect of me?
- Will I be able to get the group started? How?
- Will I run out of things to say or do before the end of the session?
- What if members of my group perceive my inexperience as incompetence?
- Should I take an active role, or should I wait for the group to start on its own?
- Should I have an agenda, or should I let the group members decide what they want to talk about?
- Do I possess the cultural competence to lead this group?
- What techniques are best during the early stages of the group?
- What if nobody wants to participate? Or what if too many people want to participate?
- Will I be able to help those who want to get involved?
- Will the group members want to come back?

It is essential for group counselors to identify and examine their internal dialogue. Even the most effective group leaders may find themselves slipping into distorted ways of thinking and engaging in negative thoughts when the group seems to have stalled. It is not easy to erase self-defeating thought patterns, yet it is possible to question the assumptions we make and the conclusions we form. As cognitive therapy teaches us, by being willing to continually challenge our core beliefs, we can avoid being controlled by negative internal dialogues.

Beginning leaders are encouraged to recognize that their doubts and concerns are normal. Moderate anxiety is beneficial and can lead to honest self-appraisal. Anxiety can be counterproductive, however, if it begins to feed on itself and is allowed to freeze us into inactivity. It is a good practice for beginning leaders to voice their questions and concerns and to explore them in the course of the training sessions. Their willingness to do this can allay some unnecessary anxiety, and they may discover that their peers share their concerns. Students frequently say that their peers appear to be so much more knowledgeable, skilled, talented, and self-confident than they themselves are. When they hear their peers express anxieties and feelings of inadequacy, these students realize that those who appear to be extremely self-confident are also struggling with self-doubts. Exploring their concerns with peers and a supervisor can help beginning leaders distinguish between realistic and unrealistic anxiety and thus defuse unwarranted and counterproductive anxiety.

Self-Disclosure

Regardless of their years of experience, group leaders may struggle with decisions about self-disclosure. For beginning leaders, the issue is of even greater concern. Although *what* to reveal and *when* are factors in determining the appropriateness of self-disclosure, the problem centers on *how much* to reveal. It is not uncommon to err at either extreme, disclosing too little or disclosing too much.

Too Little Self-Disclosure

If you maintain stereotyped role expectations and keep yourself mysterious by hiding behind your professional facade, you can lose your personal identity in the group and allow very little of yourself to be known. The reasons for functioning in a role (rather than as a person who has certain functions to perform) are many. One may be the fear of appearing unprofessional or of losing the respect of the members. Another may be the need to keep a distance or to maintain a "doctor-patient" relationship.

In addition to being unwilling to share your personal life, you may be hesitant to disclose how you feel in the group or how you are affected by certain members. To avoid sharing your own reactions to what is occurring within the group, you might limit your interventions to detached observations. Such "professional" aloofness may be expressed by too frequently making interpretations and suggestions, asking questions rather than making personal statements, acting as a mere coordinator, or providing one structured exercise after another to keep the group going.

The most productive form of sharing is disclosure that is related to what is going on in the group. For instance, if you have a persistent feeling that most members are not very motivated and are not investing themselves in the session, you are likely to feel burdened by the constant need to keep the meetings alive all by yourself, with little or no support from the participants. Disclosing how you are affected by this lack of motivation is generally very useful and appropriate.

Too Much Self-Disclosure At the other end of the continuum are the problems associated with excessive self-disclosure. Most beginning group leaders (and many experienced ones) have a strong need to be approved of and accepted by group members. It is easy to make the mistake of "paying membership dues" by sharing intimate details to prove that you are just as human as the members. There is a fine line between appropriate and inappropriate self-disclosure. It is a mistake to assume that "the more disclosure, the better." The readiness of the members, the impact sharing personal details is likely to have on them, and the degree to which your disclosures are relevant to the here-and-now process of the group should go hand in hand with self-disclosure.

You may be inclined to submit to group pressure to share more of yourself. Members often say to leaders: "We don't know much about you. Why don't you say more about yourself? We talked about ourselves, and now we'd like to see you open up too!" The members can exert more subtle, but no less strong, pressures for you to "become a member" of the group you are leading. In an attempt to avoid getting lost in a professionally aloof role, you may try too hard to be perceived as a friend and a fellow group member. If you decide to share personal concerns, it should be for the benefit of the group members. The place to explore your own concerns (and thus serve your own needs) is in a group in which you are a participant yourself. Group leading is demanding work, and you can make this work even more difficult by confusing your role and functions with those of the participants.

Appropriate and Facilitative Self-Disclosure Appropriate, facilitative self-disclosure is an essential aspect of the art of group leading. It is *not* necessary to disclose details of your past or of your personal life to make yourself known as a person or to empathize with the participants. A few words can convey a great deal, and nonverbal messages—a look or a gesture—can express feelings of identification and understanding. Appropriate disclosure does not take the focus away from the client and is never a contrived technique to get group members to open up. Your sensitivity to how people respond can teach you a lot about the timeliness and value of your disclosures. Timeliness is a critical factor; something that is inappropriate to disclose during the early stages of a group could be very useful when disclosed at a later stage. Beginning group leaders are advised to err on the side of caution rather than on the side of uninhibited and unexamined self-disclosure.

Yalom and Leszcz (2020) stress that a leader's self-disclosure must be instrumental in helping the members attain their goals. They caution against indiscriminate leader disclosures and call for selective and timely disclosure that provides members with acceptance, support, and encouragement. Yalom and Leszcz believe that group leaders who disclose here-and-now reactions rather than detailed personal events from their past tend to facilitate the movement of the group. Group leaders' observations and personal reactions to members or to what is happening in the group at a given point in time can have a therapeutic impact. When done in a sensitive and caring manner, this is a powerful way to model giving interpersonal feedback in the group.

Hill and Knox (2002) reviewed the empirical evidence of the effectiveness of therapist self-disclosure and emphasize that it is critical for therapists to understand how their disclosures affect their clients and to use self-disclosures appropriately. Hill and Knox provide the following guidelines for using self-disclosure in practice:

- Therapists need to monitor the frequency and purpose of their disclosures.
- Therapists might consider disclosing for the purpose of normalizing experiences, modeling, strengthening the therapeutic alliance, validating reality, or offering alternative ways to think or act.
- Therapists should avoid self-disclosure that is used to meet their own needs, takes the focus off the client's experiencing, interferes with the flow of the session, burdens the client, blurs the boundaries in the relationship, or contaminates the transference.
- It is important for therapists to observe how clients react to the disclosures, to ask clients how they react to sharing personal material, and to decide how to intervene next.
- Clients react differently to therapist disclosure, so it is important to determine what clients need from the therapist.

Group Leadership Skills

It is a mistake to assume that anyone with certain personal qualities and a desire to help will be an effective group leader. Successful leadership requires specific group leadership skills and the appropriate performance of certain functions. Like most skills, leadership skills are learned and need to be practiced. Think about your own skill level as you read about these essential group leadership skills. (These skills are addressed in more detail in the theory chapters in Part Two.)

Active Listening Active listening involves paying total attention to the speaker and being sensitive to what is being communicated at both the verbal and nonverbal levels. Your ability to hear what is being communicated improves as your expertise improves. Many leaders make the mistake of focusing too intently on the content and, in doing so, don't pay enough attention to how group members express themselves. Being a skilled group leader entails picking up the subtle cues provided by members through their style of speech, body posture, gestures, voice quality, and mannerisms. Group leaders need to listen well to members, but it is just as important that leaders teach members how to listen actively to one another.

Restating In a sense, restating (or paraphrasing) is an extension of listening. It means recasting what someone said into different words so that the meaning is clearer to both the speaker and the group. Effective restating zeroes in on the core of a person's message, bringing it into sharper focus and eliminating ambiguity. By capturing the essence of a member's message and reflecting it back, the leader helps the person continue the self-exploration process at a deeper level.

Restating is not an easy skill to master. Some group leaders confine themselves to simply repeating what was said, which adds little new meaning and does not clarify the message. Others overuse the technique and sound mechanical and repetitive. The value of accurate and concise restating is twofold: It tells participants that they have been heard, and it helps members struggling with their own feelings and thoughts see these issues more clearly.

Clarifying Clarifying, too, is an extension of active listening. It involves responding to confusing and unclear aspects of a message by focusing on underlying issues and helping members sort out conflicting feelings. Members often say that they have ambivalent feelings or are feeling many things at once; clarification can help sort out these feelings so that members can focus more sharply on what they are experiencing. The same procedure applies to thinking. In clarifying, the group leader stays within the individual's frame of reference while at the same time helping the group member put things into perspective; this, in turn, may lead to a deeper level of self-exploration on the part of the member.

Summarizing The skill of pulling together the important elements of a group interaction or part of a session is known as summarizing. This ability is particularly useful when making a transition from one topic to another. Rather than merely proceeding from issue to issue, identifying common elements can increase learning and maintain continuity.

Summarizing is especially needed at the end of a session. It is a mistake for a group leader to end a session abruptly, with little attempt to pull the session together. One of the leader's functions is to help members reflect on and make sense of what has occurred in their group. Summarizing encourages participants to think about what they have learned and experienced in a session and about ways of applying it to their everyday lives. At the end of the session, group leaders may offer their own brief summary or ask each member in turn to summarize what has taken place, what the highlights of the session were, and how each member responded to the interaction.

Questioning Questioning is probably the technique that inexperienced group leaders tend to overuse most often. Asking members question after question can have a negative impact on group interaction. There are several problems with the ineffective use of questioning. Members feel as if they have been subjected to the "third degree," and the questioner probes for personal information while remaining safe and anonymous behind the interrogation.

Not all questioning is inappropriate, but closed questions—those that require a simple "yes" or "no" response—are generally not helpful. "Why" questions

usually lead to intellectual ruminating or put members on the defensive, neither of which is helpful. Instead, use open-ended questions that elicit alternatives and new areas of self-investigation. These questions can be of real value. For example, "What are you experiencing right now?" "What is happening with you at this moment?" and "How are you dealing with your fear in this group?" are questions that can help participants become more focused and feel their emotions more deeply. It is important for leaders to ask questions that explore issues in greater depth.

Group leaders need to develop skills in raising questions at the group level as well as questioning individual members. Examples of process questions that can be productively addressed to the group as a whole include the following: "How are others being affected by Simone's work right now?" "Where is the group with this topic now?" "I'm noticing that many of you are silent. I wonder what is not being said." "How much energy is in the group at this time?" Questions at the group level can assist members in expanding their focus and reflecting on what is happening in the group in the here-and-now.

Interpreting Leaders interpret when they offer possible explanations for a participant's thoughts, feelings, or behavior. By offering tentative hypotheses concerning certain patterns of behavior, interpreting helps the individual see new perspectives and alternatives. Interpreting requires a great deal of skill. Interpreting too soon, presenting an interpretation in a dogmatic way, or encouraging members to become dependent on the leader to provide meanings and answers are common mistakes. One way of interpreting is for leaders to share their hunches with members, asking them to reflect on how accurate these hunches are. The leader needs to have enough experience with members to base interpretations on knowledge gathered about the members. Timing is especially important. Interpretations not only have to be made at a time when the person is likely to be willing to consider them but also need to be expressed in a tentative way that gives the person a chance to assess their validity. Although an interpretation may be technically correct, it may be rejected if the leader is not sensitive to the client's willingness or unwillingness to accept it.

In addition to making interpretations for individuals, group leaders need to be skilled at making whole-group interpretations. An example of this is a leader pointing out how many members may be invested in attempting to draw a particular member out. At times, a group may be characterized by members who probe others for information. A leader could interpret such behavior as an avoidance pattern on the part of the group as a whole.

Confronting Confrontation can be a powerful way of challenging members to take an honest look at themselves. However, when handled poorly, confrontation also has the potential of being detrimental both to the person being confronted and to the group process. Many leaders shy away from confrontation because they fear its possible repercussions: blocking the group interaction, hurting someone, or becoming the target of retaliation. Confrontation can easily be seen as an uncaring attack. Skilled group counselors confront behavior inconsistencies in a way that gives the person ample opportunity to consider what is being said. Skillful confrontation specifies the behavior or the discrepancies between verbal and nonverbal messages that are being challenged so that no labeling can possibly occur.

As is true of most of these skills, confronting is a skill leaders need to learn in challenging individual members and the group as a whole. For example, if the group seems to be low in energy and characterized by superficial discussions, the leader might challenge the members to assess what they see going on in their group and determine whether they want to change what they notice about their functioning as a group.

Reflecting Feelings Reflecting feelings is the skill of responding to the essence of what a person has communicated. The purpose is to let members know that they are being heard and understood. Although reflection entails mirroring certain feelings that the person has expressed, it is not merely a bouncing-back process. Reflection is dependent on attention, interest, understanding, and respect for the person. When reflection is done well, it fosters further contact and involvement; feeling understood and achieving a clearer grasp of one's feelings are very reinforcing and stimulate the person to seek greater self-awareness.

Supporting Supporting means providing group members with encouragement and reinforcement,

especially when they are disclosing personal information, exploring painful feelings, or taking risks. A leader can provide support by being fully present at the appropriate time. This full presence requires a combination of skills: listening actively to what is being said and what is being conveyed nonverbally, being psychologically present with the individual, and responding in a way that encourages the member to continue working and to move forward.

The essence of this skill is in knowing when it will be facilitative and when it will be counterproductive. Some group leaders make the mistake of being overly supportive, or of supporting too soon. If leaders limit themselves to a style that is almost exclusively supportive, they deprive members of potentially valuable challenges. Leaders who offer support too quickly when someone is exploring painful material tend to defuse the intensity of the experience and pull group members away from their feelings.

Empathizing The core of the skill of empathy lies in leaders' ability to sensitively grasp the subjective world of the participant and yet retain their own separateness. To empathize effectively, leaders need to care for the group members. A background that includes a wide range of experiences can help leaders identify with others.

Facilitating Facilitation skills involve opening up clear and direct communication among the members and helping them assume increasing responsibility for the direction of the group. Facilitating is aimed at enhancing the group experience and enabling members to reach their goals.

Initiating Good initiating skills on the leader's part help the group work more effectively. These skills include using catalysts to get members to focus on meaningful work, knowing how to employ various techniques that promote deeper self-exploration, and providing links for various themes being explored in the group. Providing appropriate direction can give the group a focus and keep it moving, but too much direction can lead to passivity on the part of members. Initiating is a key skill in structuring a group session and in working with the group as a whole.

Setting Goals Productive goal setting is at the core of group counseling. Note that group leaders do not set goals for members; they help group members select and clarify their own specific goals. Although goal setting is especially important during the initial stages of a group, throughout the group's life leaders need to encourage participants to take another look at their goals, to modify them if necessary, and to determine how effectively they are accomplishing them. Leaders who don't develop the intervention skills of challenging members to formulate concrete goals often find that their groups are characterized by aimless and unproductive sessions.

Evaluating Evaluating is an ongoing process that continues for the duration of a group. After each session, the leader assesses what is happening in the group as a whole and within individual members. Leaders teach participants how to evaluate themselves and how to appraise the movement and direction of their group. For example, if at the end of a session most participants agree that the session was superficial, they can be challenged to find the reasons for the unsatisfactory outcome and to decide what they are willing to do to change the situation. Members also need to be taught how to evaluate what they have learned at the end of their group experience.

Giving Feedback The purpose of feedback is to provide a realistic assessment of how a person appears to others. Skilled group leaders provide specific and honest feedback based on their observation of and reaction to members' behaviors and encourage members to give feedback to one another. One of the great advantages of groups is that participants can tell each other their reactions to what they observe. Productive feedback is presented in a way that is acceptable to members and worthy of serious consideration. Feedback that is specific and descriptive rather than global and judgmental is the most helpful.

Suggesting Suggestion is a form of intervention designed to help participants develop an alternative course of thinking or action. It can take many forms, a few of which are giving information and advice, giving "homework assignments," asking members to think of experiments they might try inside and outside of the group, and encouraging members to look at a situation from a different perspective. Giving information and providing appropriate suggestions for alternative plans of action can hasten the progress

members make in a group. Suggestions need not always come from the leader; members can make suggestions for others to consider, especially during later stages of the group.

The overuse of persuasion, suggestions, and advice entails some dangers. One is that members can be led to believe that simple solutions exist for complex problems. Another is that members may remain dependent on other people to suggest what they should do in the face of future problems instead of learning how to solve their own problems. There is a fine line between suggesting and prescribing, and the skill consists in using suggestions to enhance an individual's movement toward independence.

Protecting Without assuming a parental attitude toward the group, leaders need to be able to safeguard members from unnecessary psychological or physical risks associated with being in a group. Although the very fact of participating in a group does entail certain risks, leaders can step in when they sense that psychological harm may result from a series of group interactions. For example, intervention is called for when a member is being treated unfairly or when an avalanche of feelings from the group is directed toward one person.

Disclosing Oneself When leaders reveal personal information, they usually have an impact on the group. The skill consists of knowing what, when, how, and how much to reveal. If the leader shares appropriately, the effects on the group are likely to be positive. If the leader shares too much too soon, the effects are likely to be adverse because members may not yet be able to handle such disclosure. The most productive disclosure is related to what is taking place within the group.

Modeling Group members learn by observing the leader's behavior. If leaders value honesty, respect, openness, risk-taking, and assertiveness, they can foster these qualities in the members by demonstrating them in the group. From a leader who shows respect by really listening and empathizing, members learn a direct and powerful lesson in how respect is shown behaviorally. In short, one of the best ways to teach more effective skills of interpersonal relating is by direct example. Leaders can also teach members how to model for one another.

Linking One way of promoting interaction among group members is to look for themes that emerge in a group and then to connect the work that members do to these themes. This is a most important skill to teach in a group and to foster involvement on the part of many members. Group leaders with an interactional bias—that is, those who develop the norm of member-to-member rather than leader-to-member communication—rely a great deal on linking. They encourage members to address others in the group directly rather than looking at the leader and talking about others who are present. Members often have shared concerns, and through effective linking they can be helped to work through their problems. By being alert for common concerns, the leader can promote interaction and increase the level of group cohesion. Through linking several members together, the leader is also teaching members how to take responsibility for involving themselves in the work of others. When members learn how to bring themselves into group interactions, they become more independent of the leader and are also likely to feel a greater sense of belongingness by being connected to others.

Blocking Sometimes a leader must intervene to stop counterproductive behaviors within the group. Blocking is a skill that requires sensitivity, directness, and the ability to stop the activity without attacking the person. The attention should be on the specific behavior and not on the character of the person, and labeling should be avoided. For example, if a member is invading another member's privacy by asking probing and highly personal questions, the leader will point to this behavior as being unhelpful, without referring to the person as a "peeping tom" or an "interrogator." When members judge or criticize others, pressure others to take a specific course of action or to express feelings in a group, or habitually ask questions of others, the group leader may need to block this behavior. Other behaviors that group leaders need to watch for and block when necessary include making excuses to justify failure to make changes, breaking confidences, invading a member's privacy, perpetually giving advice, storytelling, gossiping, offering support inappropriately, and making inaccurate or inappropriate interpretations. Whatever the behavior, blocking must be carried out firmly, but sensitively.

Terminating Group leaders need to learn when and how to terminate their work with individuals as well as with the group. The skills required in closing a group session or ending a group successfully include providing members with suggestions for applying what they've learned in the group to their daily lives, preparing the participants to deal with the problems they may encounter outside of the group, providing for some type of evaluation and follow-up, suggesting sources of further help, and being available for individual consultation should the need arise.

Don't Overwhelm Yourself!

It is not unusual for beginning group counselors to feel somewhat overwhelmed when they consider all these skills. My hope is that you will be patient with yourself and not expect mastery all at once. By systematically learning certain principles and practicing certain skills, you can expect to gradually refine your leadership style and gain the confidence you need to use these skills effectively. Participating in a group as a member is the optimal way for developing these skills; you can learn a lot by observing experienced people. Of course, you also need to practice these skills by leading groups under supervision. Feedback from group members, your coleader, and your supervisor is essential to the refinement of your leadership skills. Seeing yourself in action on videotape is a great source of feedback that enables you to identify specific areas you most need to strengthen.

Like all skills, group leadership skills exist in degrees, not on an all-or-nothing basis. They may be developed only minimally, or they may be highly refined and used appropriately. Through training and supervised experience, you can continue to improve your leadership skills. The *Student Manual for Theory and Practice of Group Counseling* (Corey, 2023) has a checklist and self-evaluation of the 22 skills discussed here. This inventory is useful for rating yourself on your leadership skills and can be used in rating your coleader. Of course, your coleader can rate you on each of the skills too. This instrument can provide topics for you and your coleader to discuss in your meetings.

Table 2.1 presents an overview of the group leadership skills discussed in the preceding pages.

Special Skills for Opening and Closing Group Sessions

Opening a group session effectively sets the tone for the rest of the session. Unfortunately, many leaders lack the skills necessary to effectively open or close a group session. For example, some leaders simply select one member and focus on that person while the other group members wait their turn. When a group session begins poorly, it may be difficult to accomplish any sustained work during the rest of the meeting.

The way each session is closed is as important as the way it is initiated. I have observed group leaders who simply allowed the time to elapse and then abruptly announced, "Our time is up; we'll see you all next week." Because of the leader's failure to summarize and offer some evaluation of the session, much of the potential value of the meeting was lost. Effectively opening and closing each session ensures continuity from meeting to meeting. Continuity makes it more likely that participants will think about what occurred in the group when they are outside of it, and they will be more likely to try to apply what they have learned to their everyday lives. Together with encouragement and direction from the leader, effective summarizing and evaluation facilitate the members' task of assessing their own level of participation at each session.

Procedures for Opening a Group Session

With groups that meet on a weekly or regular basis, group leaders have a variety of options for opening the session.

1. Participants can be asked to briefly state what they want to get from the session. My preference is for a quick "go-around" in which each group member identifies issues or concerns that could be explored during the session. Before focusing on one person, it is good to give all members a chance to at least say what they want to bring up during the meeting. In this way, a tentative agenda can be developed, and if a number of people are concerned with similar themes, the agenda can incorporate the involvement of several members.

Table 2.1 Overview of Group Leadership Skills

Skill	Description	Aims and Desired Outcomes
Active listening	Attending to verbal and nonverbal aspects of communication without judging or evaluating	To encourage trust and client self-disclosure and exploration
Restating	Paraphrasing what a participant has said to clarify its meaning	To determine that the leader has correctly understood the client's statement; to provide support and clarification
Clarifying	Grasping the essence of a message at both the feeling and thinking levels; simplifying client statements by focusing on the core of the message	To help clients sort out conflicting and confused feelings and thoughts; to arrive at a meaningful understanding of what is being communicated
Summarizing	Pulling together the important elements of an interaction or session	To avoid fragmentation and give direction to a session; to provide for continuity and meaning
Questioning	Asking open-ended questions that lead to self-exploration of the "what" and "how" of behavior	To elicit further discussion; to get information; to stimulate thinking; to increase clarity and focus; to provide for further self-exploration
Interpreting	Offering possible explanations for certain thoughts, feelings, and behaviors	To encourage deeper self-exploration; to promote full use of potentials; to bring about awareness of self-contradictions
Confronting	Challenging members to look at discrepancies between their words and actions or between their nonverbal and verbal messages; pointing to conflicting information or messages	To encourage honest self-investigation; to promote full use of potentials; to bring about awareness of self-contradictions
Reflecting feelings	Communicating understanding of the content of feelings	To let members know that they are being heard and understood beyond the level of words
Supporting	Providing encouragement and reinforcement	To create an atmosphere that encourages members to continue desired behaviors; to provide help when clients are facing difficult struggles; to create trust
Empathizing	Identifying with clients by assuming their frames of reference	To foster trust in the therapeutic relationship; to communicate understanding; to encourage deeper levels of self-exploration
Facilitating	Opening up clear and direct communication within the group; helping members assume increasing responsibility for the group's direction	To promote effective communication among members; to help members reach their own goals in the group
Initiating	Promoting participation and introducing new directions in the group	To help members work more effectively; to increase the pace of the group process
Setting goals	Planning specific goals for the group process and helping participants define concrete and meaningful goals	To give direction to the group's activities; to help members select and clarify their goals
Evaluating	Appraising the ongoing group process and the individual and group dynamics	To promote better self-awareness and understanding of group movement and direction
Giving feedback	Expression of concrete and honest reactions based on observation of members' behaviors	To offer an external view of how the person appears to others; to increase the client's self-awareness
Suggesting	Offering advice and information, direction, and ideas for new behavior	To help members develop alternative courses of thinking and action
Protecting	Safeguarding members from unnecessary psychological risks in the group	To warn members of possible risks in group participation; to reduce these risks

(continued)

Table 2.1 (*continued*)

Skill	Description	Aims and Desired Outcomes
Disclosing oneself	Revealing one's reactions to here-and-now events in the group	To facilitate deeper levels of group interaction; to create trust; to model ways of revealing oneself to others
Modeling	Demonstrating desired behavior through actions	To provide examples of desirable behavior; to inspire members to fully develop their potential
Linking	Connecting the work that members do to common themes in the group	To promote member-to-member interactions; to encourage the development of cohesion
Blocking	Intervening to stop counterproductive group behavior	To protect members; to enhance the flow of group process
Terminating	Preparing the group to close a session or end its existence	To help members assimilate, integrate, and apply in-group learning to everyday life

Source: The format of this chart is based on Edwin J. Nolan, 1978, "Leadership Interventions for Promoting Personal Mastery," *Journal for Specialists in Group Work*, 3(3), 132–138.

2. Members can be given a chance to express any thoughts they may have had about the previous session or to bring up for consideration any unresolved issues from an earlier meeting. Unresolved issues among members themselves or between members and the leader can make progressing with the current agenda most difficult. The hidden agenda will interfere with productive work until it has surfaced and been dealt with effectively.
3. Participants can be asked to report on the progress or difficulties they experienced during the week. Ideally, they have been experimenting with other ways of behaving outside of the group, they are getting involved in carrying out "homework assignments," and they are working on concrete, action-oriented plans. If these desirable activities have not yet taken place, time can be profitably used at the beginning of a session to share successes or to bring up specific problems.
4. In an open group (one where membership changes somewhat from week to week), it is a good idea to encourage those members who have been part of the group for a while to share with newcomers what the group has meant to them. Those who are just joining the group can say something about what they hope to get from the experience and perhaps share any of their anxieties pertaining to coming to the group.
5. In addition to facilitating member involvement in opening a session, group leaders may want to make some observations about the previous meeting or relate some thoughts that have occurred to them since the group last met.

One way to open a group session is through the use of a structured exercise that assists members in identifying the concerns they want to explore. Depending on how, when, and why they are used, structured exercises may either enhance interaction and provide a focus for work or promote member dependence on the leader for continuing to provide direction. In their eagerness to get a group moving and keep it moving, some leaders rely too much on exercises and structured activities. Exercises that relate to the overall plan of the group and are appropriately applied in a timely manner can be useful tools for promoting change. However, lacking proper application, exercises can be counterproductive to the group process and to an individual's growth.

Structured exercises can be very useful during the initial and the final stages of a group or as a way to open a meeting. At the beginning of a group, it may help to use certain exercises designed to assist members in clarifying their personal goals, in dealing with their expectations and fears, and in building trust. These exercises could consist of asking members to work in pairs on some selected topic, for example, what they hope to get from a group session.

Procedures for Closing a Group Session

Before closing a session, it is essential to allow time for integrating what has occurred, for reflecting on what has been experienced, for talking about what the participants may do between now and the next session, and for summarizing. The leader may also find it useful to check with the group around the midpoint of the session and say something like "I'm aware that we still have an hour left before we close today; I want to see if there are any matters you want to bring up before we close" or "I'd like each of you to give me an idea of how you feel about this session; so far, have you gotten what you wanted from it?" Assessments don't have to be made routinely in the middle of a session, but doing so from time to time can encourage members to evaluate their progress. If members are not satisfied with either their own participation or what is going on in the session, there is still time to change the course of the group before the session ends.

Generally, members do not automatically evaluate the degree of their investment in the group or the extent of the gains they have made. The leader can do a great deal to guide participants into reflecting on the time limitations of their group and on whether they are satisfied with their participation. Members also need guidance in appraising how fully their goals are being achieved and how effectively the group is operating. If this periodic appraisal is done well, members have a chance to formulate plans for changes in the group's direction before it is too late. Consequently, they are less likely to leave the group feeling that they didn't get what they had hoped for when they joined.

The leader's closing skills bring unity to the group experience and consolidate the learning that has occurred during a session. Here are some steps group leaders can take toward the end of each weekly session to help members evaluate their participation and bridge the gap between the group and their daily life.

1. Group leaders should strive to close the session without closing the issues raised during the session. It may not be therapeutic to wrap up a concern or solve a problem too quickly. Many leaders make the mistake of forcing resolution of problems prematurely. Being task-oriented, they feel uncomfortable allowing members the time they need to explore and struggle with personal problems. In such instances, the leader's intervention has the effect of resolving quite superficially what may be complex matters that need to be fully explored. It is good for members to leave a session with unanswered questions; this can motivate them to think more about their concerns and to come up with some tentative solutions on their own. Leaders need to learn the delicate balance between bringing temporary closure to a topic at the end of a session and closing the exploration of an area of personal concern completely.
2. Summarizing can be effective at the end of each session. It is helpful to ask members to summarize both the group process and their own progress toward their goals. Comments can be made about common themes and issues that have emerged. The group leader can add summary comments, especially as they pertain to group process, but it is even better to teach members how to integrate what they have learned for themselves.
3. Participants can be asked to tell the group how they perceived the session, to offer comments and feedback to other members, and to make a statement about their level of investment in the session. By doing this regularly, members share in the responsibility of deciding what they will do to change the group's direction if they are not satisfied with it.
4. It is helpful to focus on positive feedback too. Individuals who get involved should be recognized and supported for their efforts by both the leader and other participants.
5. Members can report on their homework assignments, in which they tried to put into practice some of their new insights, and they can make plans for applying what they have learned to problem situations outside the group.
6. Participants can be asked whether there are any topics or problems they would like to put on the agenda for the next session. Doing this can add to a sense of ownership and responsibility

for and to the group and to the members' own change process. Besides linking sessions, asking members to participate in setting an agenda prompts them to think about ways of exploring these concerns in the next meeting—that is, to work between sessions.

7. Group leaders may want to express their own reactions to the session and make some observations. These reactions and comments about the direction of the group can be very useful in stimulating thought and action on the part of the members.
8. In a group with changing membership, it is good to remind members a week before that certain members will be leaving the group. Those who are terminating need to talk about what they have gotten from the group and what it is like for them to be leaving. Other members will most likely want to give feedback to the terminating member.

In summary, the leader interventions I have described illustrate that careful attention to opening and closing group sessions facilitates learning. It has the effect of challenging members to recognize their role in determining the direction a group is moving as well as determining the outcomes of the group.

Becoming a Diversity-Competent Group Counselor

Special knowledge and skills are required for dealing with culturally diverse groups. If you are open to the values inherent in a diversity perspective, you will find ways to avoid getting trapped in provincialism, and you will be able to challenge the degree to which you may be culturally encapsulated. Take an inventory of your current level of awareness, knowledge, and skills that have a bearing on your ability to function effectively in multicultural situations by reflecting on these questions:

- Are you aware of how your own culture influences the way you think, feel, and act?
- What could you do to broaden your understanding of both your own culture and other cultures?
- Are you able to identify your basic assumptions, especially as they apply to diversity in culture, ethnicity, race, gender, class, ability, religion, language, and sexual identity?
- How are your assumptions likely to affect the manner in which you function as a group counselor?
- Can you be flexible in applying the techniques you use in your groups, depending on the specific makeup of the membership?
- How prepared are you to understand and work with individuals from different cultural backgrounds in a group?
- Is your academic program preparing you to work with diverse client populations in different kinds of groups?
- What life experiences have you had that will help you to understand and make contact with group members who have a different worldview from yours?
- Can you identify any areas of cultural bias or any of your assumptions that could inhibit your ability to work effectively with people who are different from you? If so, what steps might you take to critically evaluate your biases and assumptions?

Cultural competence embodies the knowledge and skills required to work effectively in any cross-cultural encounter (Comas-Diaz, 2019). However, knowledge and skills alone are not enough for effective group work. Becoming a diversity-competent group counselor demands self-awareness and an open stance on your part. You need to be willing to modify strategies to fit the needs and situations of the individuals within your group. It is clear that no one "right" technique can be utilized with all group members, irrespective of their cultural background. It is important to realize that it takes time, study, and experience to become an effective multicultural group counselor. Acquiring multicultural competence is an ongoing journey.

Developing cultural competence enables practitioners to appreciate and manage diverse worldviews (Comas-Diaz, 2019). It is your responsibility as a group counselor to have a general understanding of your members' cultural values. For example, an Afrocentric approach to group counseling involves understanding the worldview, set of social standards, and ethical values that reflect African American culture.

Understanding the values associated with the spiritual and communal nature of African American people is basic to effective group work with African Americans, and this perspective may be helpful with many other cultural groups as well. Effective multicultural practice in group work with diverse populations requires cultural awareness and sensitivity, a body of knowledge, and a specific set of skills.

D. W. Sue et al. (1992) and Arredondo et al. (1996) have developed a conceptual framework for multicultural counseling competencies in three areas: (1) awareness of beliefs and attitudes, (2) knowledge, and (3) skills. What follows is a brief summary of the multicultural competencies identified by D. W. Sue et al. (1992, 1998, 2019), Arredondo et al. (1996), and the ASGW's (2012) *Multicultural and Social Justice Competence Principles for Group Workers.*

Beliefs and Attitudes Diversity-competent group leaders recognize and understand their own values, biases, ethnocentric attitudes, and assumptions about human behavior. They do not allow their personal values or problems to interfere with their work with clients who are culturally different from them. They are aware of their negative and positive emotional reactions toward other racial and ethnic groups that could interfere with establishing collaborative relationships within the group and seek to understand the world from the vantage point of group members. Rather than assuming that their cultural heritage is superior, they are able to accept and value cultural diversity.

Competent multicultural group leaders welcome the range of value orientations and diverse assumptions about human behavior and acknowledge the worldviews of group members. They respect clients' religious and spiritual beliefs and values and are comfortable with differences between themselves and others in gender, race, ethnicity, culture, sexual orientation, abilities, age, and beliefs. They value bilingualism and do not view another language as an impediment to counseling.

Effective multicultural group leaders monitor their functioning through consultation, supervision, and continuing education. They realize that group counseling may not be appropriate for all clients or for all problems. If it becomes evident that group counseling is not an appropriate venue for treatment for a member or a more homogeneous support group seems warranted, they refer the client to the appropriate form of treatment.

Knowledge Diversity-competent group practitioners understand their own racial and cultural heritage and know how it affects them personally and professionally. They understand that the institutional barriers of oppression, racism, discrimination, and stereotyping may prevent minorities from accessing the mental health services available in their community. They strive to understand the worldview of their clients and possess knowledge about the historical background, traditions, family structures, hierarchies, and values of the groups with whom they are working. They are knowledgeable about communication style differences and adjust their style to foster the group process for the members they serve. They understand that some of the values underlying the therapeutic process may differ from the cultural and family values of some cultural groups. Furthermore, these practitioners are knowledgeable about community characteristics and resources. They know how to help clients make use of indigenous support systems. They are willing to seek out educational, consultative, and training experiences to enhance their ability to work with diverse client populations. The greater their depth and breadth of knowledge of culturally diverse groups, the more likely they are to be effective group leaders.

Skills and Intervention Strategies Multicultural counseling is enhanced when practitioners use methods and strategies and define goals that are consistent with the life experiences and cultural values of their clients. Group leaders modify and adapt their interventions in a group to accommodate cultural differences and are able to exercise institutional intervention skills on behalf of their clients. They become actively involved outside of the group setting (community events, celebrations, and neighborhood groups) when it is appropriate for certain cultural populations. They recognize that some helping strategies may be culture-bound and do not force their clients to fit within one counseling approach. They are able to send and receive both verbal and nonverbal messages accurately and appropriately. They consult regularly with other professionals regarding matters of culture to determine whether or where referral may be necessary. Diversity-competent group counselors

take responsibility in educating the members of their groups about the way the group process works, including matters such as goals, expectations, legal rights, and alternative resources for continued growth.

Recognize Your Limitations Although it is unrealistic to expect that you will have an in-depth knowledge of all cultural backgrounds, it is important that you have a comprehensive grasp of the general principles for working successfully amid cultural diversity. Do not become overwhelmed by all that you do not know or feel guilty over your limitations or parochial views. You will not become more effective by expecting that you must be completely knowledgeable about the cultural backgrounds of all the members of your groups, by thinking that you should have a complete repertoire of skills, or by demanding perfection as a multicultural group worker. Instead, recognize and appreciate your efforts toward becoming a more effective person and professional. The first step is to become more comfortable in accepting diversity as a positive value and in taking actions to increase your ability to work with a range of clients.

Ivey et al. (2008) write about the notion of multicultural intentionality, or the ability of a group leader to work effectively with many types of individuals with diverse cultural backgrounds. To the key components of awareness, knowledge, and skills, they add the characteristics of humility, confidence, and recovery skills as critical to becoming a diversity-competent group counselor. These attributes imply that group counselors do not have to possess all the answers, that they can learn from their mistakes, and that they can develop confidence in their ability to become flexible with challenging situations. The ability to recover from mistakes gracefully is more important than not making any mistakes.

Expressing empathy on both cognitive and affective levels is an important skill for all counseling professionals, but to practice competently and effectively with diverse group members, it is also essential to strive for **cultural empathy**—the ability to place yourself in the other's culture (Comas-Diaz, 2019). You can develop cultural empathy by engaging in self-reflection, exploring your own worldview, challenging ethnocentrism, developing openness toward cultural differences, and recognizing power dynamics. If you truly respect the members in your group, you will patiently attempt to enter their world as much as possible. It is not necessary that you have the same experiences as your clients, but it is important that you attempt to be open to a similar set of feelings and struggles. Modeling cultural empathy will benefit all group members.

Group members can inform and teach you and other group members the relevant aspects of their culture that will help you all interact effectively with each other. It is helpful to assess a client's degree of acculturation and identity development, especially if individuals have lived in several cultures. Although they often have allegiance to their own home culture, they may also find certain characteristics of their new culture attractive and experience conflicts in integrating the two cultures. These core struggles can be productively explored in a group context if you and the other members respect this cultural conflict.

As you study the contemporary theories and apply them to group counseling, strive to think about the cultural implications of the techniques that grow out of them. Consider which techniques may be more appropriate with specific client populations and in specific contexts. Even more important, think about ways to adapt the techniques you will be learning to a group member's cultural background. Perhaps most important of all, consider how you might acquire the personal characteristics required to become a diversity-competent group counselor.

In the *Student Manual for Theory and Practice of Group Counseling* (Corey, 2023), you will find a checklist for becoming a diversity-competent group counselor. Use this checklist to assess your current level of skill development in the multicultural competencies. The ASGW's (2012) *Multicultural and Social Justice Competence Principles for Group Workers* is available online at www.asgw.org/. I recommend that you download this document and take some time to think about how these principles might apply to your group work.

Developing Your Group Leadership Style

There are as many styles of group counseling as there are leaders, and even leaders who subscribe to a primary therapeutic model, such as behavior therapy or solution-focused brief therapy, show considerable variation in the way they lead groups. As a group leader, you bring your background of experiences

and your personality, worldview, biases, and unique talents and skills to the groups you lead. You also bring your theoretical preferences to your work.

One determinant of your leadership style is whether you lead short- or long-term groups. As a group leader, your role in short-term groups is quite different from the leadership role in long-term therapy groups. Most likely you will be expected to set up and conduct a variety of short-term groups, which means you will need to be active, directive, conscious of time limitations, and concerned with assisting members in identifying specific problem areas dealing with their current life situation. Brief groups require a more structured style so that members can attain specific goals. For example, you will be more concerned with present issues than with exploring the members' past. In conducting short-term groups, the leader needs to pay particular attention to pregroup screening and preparation of potential members prior to the group, maintain a focus on a particular set of themes during the sessions, strive to develop group cohesion quickly, remind members of the time limits on the group's duration, and do follow-up work once the group ends. Leaders need to be more active in brief group work than in long-term groups, both in setting up the group and in conducting group sessions.

Whether you work mostly with short- or long-term groups, it is important to know yourself and to develop a style that fits your personality. The key is to develop a leadership style that expresses your uniqueness as a person. If you attempt to copy someone else's style, you can lose much of your potential effectiveness as a group leader. You will be influenced, of course, by supervisors, coleaders, and the leaders of groups and workshops you attend as a participant. But it is one thing to be influenced by others and another to deny your own uniqueness by copying others' therapeutic styles, which may work well for them but may not be suited to you.

The theoretical stance that you are challenged to develop must be closely related to your values, beliefs, and personal characteristics. You may advocate an approach that emphasizes thinking, or one that stresses experiencing and expressing feelings, or one that focuses on action-oriented methods. Or your approach may integrate the thinking, feeling, and acting dimensions. Regardless of the approach you favor, your theoretical preferences will no doubt influence your style, especially with regard to the aspects of the group interaction on which you choose to focus.

One way to build a foundation for a personal leadership style is to know the diverse range of theories of group counseling and their implications for styles of leading. Leading a group without an explicit theoretical rationale is somewhat like flying an airplane without a map and instruments. Theory can be viewed as a set of general guidelines that provide direction and guidance in examining your basic assumptions about human beings, in determining your goals for the group, in clarifying your role and functions as a leader, in explaining the group interactions, and in evaluating the outcomes of the group.

Developing a theoretical stance involves more than merely accepting the tenets of any one theory. It is an ongoing process in which group leaders keep questioning the "what," "how," and "why" of their practice. It is wise to take a critical look at the key concepts of the various theories and also to consider the theorists behind them because a theory is generally a personal expression of the person who developed it. It is important to remain open and to seriously consider the unique contributions as well as the limitations of different approaches. If you settle on one theory and do not recognize its limitations, you are likely to misuse it and to assume that it is an axiom and a set of proven facts rather than a tool for inquiry. If your theoretical perspective causes you to ignore all others, you may force your clients to fit its confines instead of using it to understand them. If you embrace a theory in its entirety, the theory may not serve the diverse needs of your group.

Many group workers align their practice with one particular theoretical orientation on the grounds that their theory of choice provides a good explanation of human behavior and provides them with a unified and consistent basis for intervening in their groups. I have no quarrel with practitioners who have carefully evaluated a theory and identify with a particular orientation. However, some adopt a theory without knowing why they prefer the approach, and these practitioners rarely have an open stance toward incorporating alternative perspectives. Most therapists today base their practice on some form of psychotherapeutic integration rather than identifying with a single theoretical orientation (Norcross & Alexander, 2019).

As you study the 10 theoretical models of group counseling presented in Part Two, the commonalities

and differences among these models and the ways in which the various perspectives can shape your style as a group leader will become clear. As you study each theory, reflect on the applications for developing short-term groups. Given the managed care emphasis on being both efficient and effective, today's group leaders need to learn as much as possible about short-term groups. Among all of the theories described, the psychoanalytic approach is most geared to long-term therapy groups, although short-term psychodynamic groups are being developed today. Most of the other theoretical approaches covered in Part Two lend themselves well to brief interventions and to time-limited groups.

The Role of Research in the Practice of Group Work

Effective group workers appreciate the role research can play in enhancing practice. Ideally, theory informs your practice, and practice refines your approach. Research can help you come to a better understanding of the specific factors that contribute to successful outcomes for groups. Applied research can help you identify factors that interfere with group effectiveness as well as confirm the efficacy of your interventions. Clinical work can be greatly aided by research findings and can inform research (Stockton & Morran, 2010). Even if practitioners do not have the time or the expertise required to conduct their own research, they can work with researchers to integrate research findings into their group practice.

Many group workers are either unwilling or unable to devote time to devising evaluative instruments as part of their clinical practice, and too often research findings are not integrated into clinical practice. Some practical considerations that can limit practitioners' active participation in research include the constant pressure to meet clinical demands, a lack of time, a lack of financial remuneration for doing research, and a lack of the skills and knowledge required to conduct research (Lau et al., 2010).

The Guiding Principles of Group Work (ASGW, 2021) addresses the importance of research on group work with the following standard:

> Specialists in group work seek to establish empirical support for group work and group interventions, intentionally attending to the intersections of equity, diversity, accessibility for individual members and the culture of the group as a whole. They attend to efficacy research as well as process research. They are active consumers of current research (e.g., journals, conferences, continuing education.) and strive to use evidence-based approaches to improve practice. (F.1)

Familiarity with research on group work is becoming an essential part of practice. You will likely be expected to gather evaluation data that will support the value of your group services. Accountability is now being stressed in all settings, and especially by managed health care companies. Many schools and agencies are requiring some form of evaluation of the effectiveness of a group. As a practitioner, it is essential that what you do in your groups be informed by research on the process and outcomes of groups. Part of your development as a group practitioner involves thinking of ways to make evaluation a basic part of your group practice.

Collaboration between practitioners and researchers can benefit both parties as well as the field of group work (Lau et al., 2010). To develop genuinely collaborative relationships, it is critical that researchers invite contributions from group practitioners regarding meaningful research questions and study design. The researcher's focus on evaluating treatment will benefit from complementary input by the clinician who has experience in actual group work. Lau et al. (2010) suggest replacing classical empirical research aimed at systematically evaluating treatments under controlled conditions with qualitative research methods and case studies. This "effectiveness research" would emphasize clinical aspects of group work done in real-world situations. Increasing cooperation between clinicians and researchers will likely result in more useful and relevant research results (Lau et al., 2010). In a similar vein, Castonguay et al. (2013) state that the key issue for practice-oriented research is what can be done to facilitate collaboration of clinicians and researchers in designing and conducting studies in which they are willing to invest their time and energy.

The History of Group Work Research

Both consumers and funding agencies have increasingly demanded that practitioners provide evidence for the value of their therapeutic strategies. In recent

years, the focus of group studies has shifted from an emphasis on process research to an examination of outcome studies. Although research on group counseling has improved, many research studies of group work suffer from serious methodological problems. Future group research needs to inform practice, and, at the same time, research needs to be guided by the expertise of clinicians who conduct groups. Castonguay et al. (2013) note that "clinicians are more likely to engage in designing, implementing, and disseminating studies if there is clear evidence that the merit and impact of these studies will be fairly considered and duly recognized by scholars, researchers, and policy makers" (p. 122). Lau et al. (2010) propose a community-based research paradigm that involves clinicians as full partners with researchers. In this context, clinicians define research priorities, determine the type of evidence that will have an impact on their practice, and develop strategies for translating and implementing research findings into group practice.

Researchers know little about how group processes mediate change in participants, how members influence group processes, and what dimensions of psychological functioning are most amenable to change in small groups. Quite simply, although researchers know that group treatments can be effective, they do not know much about why this is so. There are no simple explanations, and Lambert's (2011, 2013) review of psychotherapy research revealed that it is the similarities rather than the differences among models that account for the effectiveness of psychotherapy.

Group Practitioners' Perceptions of Research in Group Work

A Canadian survey of group psychotherapists was conducted by Ogrodniczuk et al. (2010) to evaluate practitioners' perceptions of the role of research in group therapy. Contrary to popular belief, this survey revealed that difficulties integrating research findings into the practice of group work are not due to a lack of interest or unfamiliarity with research. A substantial number of group therapists have a high level of appreciation for research, and a large proportion of respondents to this survey indicated past and current participation in research.

Survey respondents stated that without effective communication the results from even the best of studies will have only a slight impact on practice. They suggested that research findings be communicated in a brief manner and that findings emphasize the practical implications for those who conduct groups in the real world. Practitioners' dissatisfaction with reports of research findings seems to be a significant factor in the poor integration of research and clinical practice.

Respondents indicated that current research tends to ignore the complexities that are a part of group psychotherapy. They were critical of the lack of emphasis on qualitative research and the heightened emphasis of empirical studies evaluating the different brands of therapy used in a group. Clinicians in this survey wanted to see more qualitative research and case studies in the professional journals.

Stockton and Morran (2010) note that a key reason research findings often are not integrated into clinical practice is due to the constraints of experimental research that limit the applicability of findings to a real-world context. Although experimental studies may have internal validity, they may have little practical value to group workers. Ogrodniczuk et al. (2010) conclude, "by increasing dialogue with clinicians about research that has relevance to them, by engaging clinicians in the process of generating new knowledge, and by utilizing communication methods that would fit with the needs of clinicians, it would appear possible to achieve a meaningful synthesis of science and practice in the group therapy field" (p. 174).

Evidence-Based Practice in Group Work

In recent years a shift has occurred toward promoting the use of specific interventions for specific problems or diagnoses based on empirically supported treatments (APA Presidential Task Force on Evidence-Based Practice, 2006). Increasingly, clinicians who practice in a behavioral health care system are encountering the concept of evidence-based practice (Norcross et al., 2008). **Evidence-based practice (EBP)** is "the integration of the best available research with clinical expertise in the context of patient characteristics, culture, and preferences" (APA Presidential Task Force on Evidence-Based Practice, 2006, p. 273). This idea encompasses more than simply basing interventions on research. Group therapists are being asked to provide convincing evidence that the particular forms of group therapy they practice actually work with the particular types of members in their

groups (Klein, 2008). Norcross and Beutler (2019) note that EBP reflects a pragmatic commitment to "what works, not on what theory applies" (p. 535). Yalom and Leszcz (2020) believe that it is critical for group therapists to acquire an open, self-critical, inquiring attitude toward clinical and research evidence: "We can all be evidence-based group therapists regardless of our theoretical models. Ultimately, it is the therapist more than the model that produces benefits" (pp. 665–666).

The APA Presidential Task Force on Evidence-Based Practice (2006) has broadened the concept of EBP to consider the best research evidence in light of therapist and client factors. Psychotherapy is a collaborative venture in which clients and clinicians can develop ways of working together that are likely to result in positive outcomes. The involvement of an active, informed client is crucial to the success of therapy services. Based on their clinical expertise, therapists make the ultimate judgment regarding particular interventions, and they make these decisions in the context of considering the client's values, needs, and preferences. For group leaders to base their practices exclusively on interventions that have been empirically validated may seem to be the ethical and competent path to take, yet some view this as being overly restrictive.

Critique of the Evidence-Based Practice Model Many group practitioners believe that relying on EBP is mechanistic and does not take into full consideration the relational dimensions of the therapeutic process. These clinicians do not think matching techniques that have been empirically tested with specific problems is a meaningful way of working. Practitioners with a relationship-oriented approach (such as person-centered therapy and existential therapy) emphasize understanding the world of the client and healing through the therapeutic relationship. Norcross et al. (2006) remind us that many aspects of treatment—the therapy relationship, the therapist's personality and therapeutic style, the client, and environmental factors—contribute to the success of psychotherapy and must be taken into account in the treatment process. Evidence-based practices tend to emphasize only one of these aspects—interventions based on the best available research.

The therapist's clinical expertise is a critical element in forming a collaborative relationship with clients. In addition, client characteristics, culture, personal values, and preferences are critical aspects in the therapeutic relationship. There is substantial research to support the position that the *client* actually accounts for more of the treatment outcome than either the relationship or the method employed by the therapist (Duncan et al., 2010). Bohart and Wade (2013) argue that clients are at the center of the healing process and make the single strongest contribution to outcomes. From Bohart and Wade's perspective, "if clients really do play a central role in therapy outcome, then more research needs to focus on how clients do this" (p. 246).

Delivering brief, standardized services that can be operationalized by reliance on a treatment manual are preferred by health care insurance providers. However, relying exclusively on standardized treatments for specific problems raises a host of practical and theoretical issues. One of these issues is the reliability and validity of these empirically based techniques. Human change is complex and difficult to measure unless researchers operationalize the notion of change at such a simplistic level that the change may be meaningless. Although the goal of EBP is to enhance the effectiveness of delivering services, Norcross et al. (2006) warn that the move toward evidence-based practices has the potential for misuse and abuse by third-party payers who could selectively use research findings as cost-containment measures rather than to improve the quality of services delivered. Norcross and his colleagues show that there is a great deal of controversy and discord when it comes to EBP. They stress the value of informed dialogue and respectful debate as a way to gain clarity and to make progress.

Another Approach: Practice-Based Evidence (PBE) Many group practitioners do not think matching techniques that have been empirically tested with specific problems is a meaningful way of working with the problems presented by group members. Duncan et al. (2004) have suggested a different way to incorporate data to improve treatment decisions. They argue that the most useful strategy is to examine data generated during treatment to inform the process and outcome of treatment, an approach referred to as **practice-based evidence (PBE)**. Significant improvements in client retention and outcome have been shown where therapists regularly and purposefully collect data on the client's experience of the alliance and progress in treatment.

Miller et al. (2010) emphasize the importance of enlisting the client's active participation in the therapeutic venture. They argue that you do not need to know ahead of time what approach to use for a given diagnosis. What is most important is to systematically gather and use formal client feedback to inform, guide, and evaluate treatment. Monitoring the progress of each group member through systematic data collection on how each member is experiencing the group can help leaders make adjustments to their interventions and enhance the group process. Members could complete a brief form at the end of each group session, and their ratings on specific items could be tallied as a way to get a sense of the progress of the group as a whole.

Jensen et al. (2012) recommend that group clinicians integrate PBE into their therapy groups. They point to the benefits of taking the pulse of groups through the use of systematic measures to gather client-generated data to supplement clinical judgment. Collecting data directly from members about their group experience is a significant part of developing PBE. This approach can help therapists assess the value of a group for its members throughout the life of the group as well as provide a tool to aid evaluation of the group experience during the termination phase. Group practitioners have an ethical responsibility to determine how well a group is working and need to be willing to use the feedback they receive from group participants to refine their interventions.

Developing a Research Orientation

Yalom and Leszcz (2020) claim that group trainees need to know more than how to implement techniques in a group—they also need to know how to learn. Faculty should teach and model a basic research orientation characterized by an open, self-critical, inquiring attitude toward clinical and research evidence. Stockton and Morran (2010) believe that promoting students' positive attitudes toward research can motivate them to be good research consumers as well as clinician members of research teams. Stockton and Morran point out that most students enrolled in a master's program receive only basic research training and thus may not feel adequately prepared to understand the research literature, or to apply research findings to their clinical practice, or to become involved in research projects. Stockton and Morran recommend including more research coursework and research team participation as a part of master's degree programs.

Yalom and Leszcz (2020) believe that a research orientation enables group therapists, throughout their career, to remain flexible and responsive to new evidence. Practitioners who lack a research orientation will not have a basis to critically evaluate new developments in the field of group work. Without a consistent framework to evaluate evidence of the efficacy of innovations in the field, practitioners run the risk of being unreasonably unreceptive to new approaches. Whether you conduct research with your groups is less important than your willingness to keep informed about the practical applications of research on group work. At the very least, you need to be up-to-date with the research implications for practice.

In learning how to become a group practitioner, it is necessary to progress from a beginner to a skilled clinician in stages. Likewise, a developmental approach can be useful for teaching students about group research. Rex Stockton (Stockton & Toth, 1997) advocates an apprenticeship model in which students improve their clinical skills through practice, consultation, supervision, and discussion with mentors and peers. Likewise, they can learn about group research techniques through the same kind of exposure, practice, consultation, and collaboration with those who are doing research.

Group counselors are advised to make systematic observation and assessment a basic part of their group work practice. Instead of thinking exclusively in terms of rigorous empirical research, practitioners can begin to consider alternatives to traditional scientific methods. One such alternative is evaluative research. In group work, pure research should not be seen as the only type of inquiry that has value. Practitioners and researchers can choose to do good field research as well (Morran & Stockton, 1985).

Video

Watch Gerald Corey's *Group Theories in Action*, video via the Cengage eBook. The group session discussed in this chapter is based on an integrative approach to group counseling.

Chapter 3

Ethical and Professional Issues in Group Practice

Learning Objectives

1. Identify the major ethical issues pertaining to being a member of a group.
2. Define and describe the role of informed consent in a group.
3. Identify critical issues involved in working with involuntary groups.
4. Define and explore the role of confidentiality in a group.
5. Describe and clarify the impact of the leader's values on the group.
6. Understand the ethical issues pertaining to multicultural group counseling.
7. Explain some key uses and misuses of group techniques.
8. Explain what is involved in becoming a competent group counselor.
9. Explain the concepts of legal liability and malpractice in group work.
10. List several risk management strategies for practicing group work.

Professional group leaders must be willing to examine both their ethical standards and their level of competence. Among the ethical issues discussed in this chapter are the rights of group members, including informed consent and confidentiality; the psychological risks involved in groups; personal relationships with clients; socializing among members; the impact of the group leader's values; addressing spiritual and religious values of group members; working effectively and ethically with diverse clients; and the uses and misuses of group techniques. Competence of the group leader is also a central ethical issue in group work. Special attention is given to ways of determining competence, professional training standards, and adjuncts to academic preparation of group counselors. Also highlighted are ethical issues unique to training group workers using an online platform and my journey toward becoming a group work specialist. The final section outlines issues of legal liability and malpractice.

As a responsible group practitioner, you are challenged to clarify your thinking about the ethical and professional issues discussed in this chapter. Although you are obligated to be familiar with, and bound by, the ethics codes of your professional organization, these codes provide only a general framework from which to operate. You must learn how to apply these principles in practical situations. The Association for Specialists in Group Work's (2021) "Guiding Principles for Group Work" is reproduced in the *Student Manual* that accompanies this textbook. You may want to refer to these guidelines often, especially as you study Chapters 1 through 5.

Rights of Group Participants

My experience has taught me that those who enter groups are frequently unaware both of their basic rights as participants and of their responsibilities. As a group leader, you are responsible for helping prospective members understand their rights and responsibilities. This section provides a detailed discussion of these issues.

A Basic Right: Informed Consent

If basic information about the group is discussed at the initial session, the participants are likely to be far more cooperative and active. A leader who does this as a matter of policy demonstrates honesty and respect for group members and fosters the trust necessary for members to be open and active. **Informed consent** is an ongoing process that begins with presenting basic information about a group to potential group members to assist them in making decisions about whether or not to enter and how to participate in a group. Members have a right to receive basic information *before* joining a group, and they have a right to expect certain other information *during* the course of the group. Discussing informed consent is not a one-time event, and group leaders will revisit this topic as necessary throughout the stages of the group.

It is a good policy to provide a professional disclosure statement to group members that includes written information on a variety of topics pertaining to the nature of the group, including therapists' qualifications, techniques often used in the group, the rights and obligations of group members, and the risks and benefits of participating in the group. Potential members should also receive information about alternatives to group treatment; policies regarding appointments, fees, and insurance; and the nature and limitations of confidentiality in a group. However, group leaders should exercise care to avoid overwhelming members with too much information at one time. A lengthy informed consent process may unintentionally create a legalistic environment rather than provide a basis for trust and creative collaboration.

Pregroup Disclosures Group participants have a right to expect the following information before they make a decision to join the group:

- A clear statement regarding the purpose of the group
- A description of the group format, procedures, and ground rules
- An initial interview to determine whether this particular group with this particular leader is at this time appropriate to their needs
- An opportunity to seek information about the group, to pose questions, and to explore concerns
- A discussion of ways the group process may or may not be congruent with the cultural beliefs and values of group members
- A statement describing the education, training, and qualifications of the group leader
- Information concerning fees and expenses including fees for a follow-up session if that is offered and information about length of the group, frequency and duration of meetings, group goals, and techniques being employed
- Information about the psychological risks involved in participating in a group
- Knowledge of the circumstances in which confidentiality must be broken for legal, ethical, or professional reasons
- Clarification of what services can and cannot be provided within the group
- A clear understanding of the division of responsibility between leader and participants
- A discussion of the rights and responsibilities of group members

Clients' Rights During the Group Here is a list of what members have a right to expect during the course of the group:

- Guidance concerning what is expected of them
- Notice of any research involving the group and of any audio- or videotaping of group sessions
- Assistance from the group leader in translating group learning into action in everyday life

- Opportunities to discuss what one has learned in the group and to bring some closure to the group experience so participants are not left with unnecessary unfinished business
- A consultation with the group leader should a crisis arise as a direct result of participation in the group, or a referral to other sources if further help is not available from the group leader
- The exercise of reasonable safeguards on the leader's part to minimize the potential risks of the group; respect for member privacy with regard to what the person will reveal as well as to the degree of disclosure
- Observance of confidentiality on the part of the leader and other group members
- Freedom from having values imposed by the leader or other members
- The right to be treated as an individual and accorded dignity and respect

It is critical for group leaders to stress that participation in a group carries certain responsibilities as well as rights. These responsibilities include attending regularly, being prompt, taking risks, being willing to talk about oneself, giving others feedback, maintaining confidentiality, and defining one's personal goals for group participation. Some of these group norms may pose problems for certain members because of their cultural background. It is essential that the expectations for group members be clear from the outset and that members be in agreement with these expectations. Of course, part of the group process involves the participation of members in developing norms that will influence their behavior in group sessions.

Issues in Involuntary Groups

When participation is mandatory, informed consent is as important as it is when working with voluntary groups. Group leaders must fully informing involuntary members of the nature and goals of the group, the procedures to be used, their rights and responsibilities, the limits of confidentiality, and what effect their level of participation in the group will have on critical decisions about them outside of the group. When groups are involuntary, every attempt should be made to enlist the cooperation of the members and encourage them to continue attending voluntarily. One way of doing this is to spend some time with involuntary clients helping them reframe the notion "I have to come to this group." They do have some choice in whether to attend or face the consequences of not taking part in the group. Involuntary members who choose not to participate in the group need to be prepared to deal with consequences such as being expelled from school, doing jail time, or being in juvenile detention.

Another alternative would be for the group leader to accept involuntary group members only for an initial limited period. There is something to be said for giving reluctant members a chance to see for themselves what a group is about and then eventually (say, after three sessions) letting them decide whether they will return. Group leaders can inform members that they will choose how to use their time in the group. The members can be encouraged to explore their fears and reluctance to fully participate in the group, as well as the consequences of not participating in the group. Ethical practice requires that group leaders fully explore these issues with clients who are sent to them.

Freedom to Leave a Group

Leaders should clearly state their policies pertaining to attendance, commitment to remaining in a group for a predetermined number of sessions, and leaving a particular session if they do not like what is going on in the group. If members simply drop out of the group, it is extremely difficult to develop a working level of trust or to establish group cohesion. The topic of leaving the group should be discussed during the initial session, and the leader's attitudes and policies need to be clear from the outset.

Group members have a responsibility to the leaders and to the other members to explain why they want to leave. It can be deleterious for members to leave without having been able to discuss what they considered threatening or negative in the experience. Group members who leave abruptly are likely to be left with unfinished business, and dropping out may damage group cohesion and the trust other members may have in the group process. The remaining members may think that they in some way "caused" the departure. It is a good practice for leaders to ask members to bring the matter up for exploration in a session if they are even thinking about withdrawing.