

## Guidelines for Being in Group Therapy

While a process therapy group has a supportive element, it primarily is insight-oriented. The group facilitates self-awareness and introspection, which results in deep change. The primary purpose of a process group is to explore your way of being in relationships. The following guidelines may help us become more “open” and able to give and receive clear communication with others.

1. **Speak with the first person “I”.** Instead of “people feel” or “you get to feeling...” say, “I feel” or “I think I feel...” This gives more of the flavor of you rather than broad generalities.
2. **Speak directly to individuals.** Look and speak directly into the group member(s) face. For example, if another person asks you, “How do you feel about Jamie right now?” turn to Jamie and say, “Jamie, I really appreciate your kindness a minute ago when you said ...” or “Jamie, I resent you right now,” rather than answering the one who questioned you originally.
3. **Speak from your honest feelings & thoughts.** Please consider the needs of others to feel safe and not be attacked harshly. Beyond that, there is no taboo on language, thought or expression in this group. Practicing to communicate exactly how you feel or think will increase your self-confidence.
4. **Be aware at all times of your thoughts & feelings of the moment.** Express them at the earliest appropriate time. Be aware even if you cannot express a perception of the moment. Focus on staying in the “here-and-now” not the past or the future.
5. **Read the messages from your own body.** Your body is a most basic, tangible aspect of yourself. It is continually giving you messages. The open or closed position of your limbs, sweaty palms, feeling “frigidity” or sleepy are examples of your body possibly telling you that you are afraid, angry, irritated, worried, embarrassed, anxious, etc. These messages can be noted and understood.
6. **Be aware of the role(s) you take & your characteristic behavior.** It has been observed that we tend to behave similarly in many situations. For instance, some of us tend to withdraw or run away from a confrontation, while others are “peacemakers” or compromisers. Or, another may behave differently in each situation, carefully “sampling” the popular opinion then conforming to the popular view. Sometimes we behave in a therapy group much as we do with our partner, friends, parents, family and associates.
7. **Be aware of how persons in this group remind you of other significant people in your past or present life.** For example, a certain woman may remind you of your mother, partner, an ex-girlfriend, friend or boss. Interacting with those persons can often work out old problems, affections, hurts, joys and sorrows even if the person is not actually or completely like the person of whom she reminds you.
8. **Listen actively.** There is a strong tendency to “read in” things we feel while missing what the person is trying to convey by what she is actually saying. We also tend to ignore or “read out” things a person is expressing because it bothers us for some reason. Techniques such as repeating back to a person what you thought she said before you answer may be helpful.
9. **Do not speak for others.** Such as “most women think...” or “I think Jamie is trying to say...” *Speak for yourself and/or check it out with the other person.* Speak for what YOU are experiencing at that moment rather than focusing excessively on the other person. Note, sometimes empathizing with another is a way of deflecting your own feelings.
10. **Expect periods of silence.** Although they may seem, at first, uncomfortable, creative things can occur in our awareness and consciousness. Use silence to be aware of what’s happening inside of you.
11. **Do NOT intentionally socialize outside of group meetings.** Confidentiality is paramount. Gossip outside of meetings destroys the integrity of the group. If between sessions you hold a side conversation with another member in which you comment on the group and/or a person in it, you should report the thoughts and feelings expressed back to the group or person(s) in it. The idea here is to speak face-to-face, maintain trust and to feel safe.