Building Facilitator Skills for Dynamic Support Groups
Objectives

Gain skills to recognize and deal with potential red flags during both the intake interview and during group sessions

Take away ideas to improve group retention
Groups We Are Addressing

- Closed - not ongoing
- Psychoeducational
Psycho-Educational Support Groups (definition)

The primary focus is to provide support, information and education to increase knowledge and coping skills.
Goals & Foundations of Effective Group Facilitation

- Information exchange
- Mutual support
- Group cohesion
- Coping and self-efficacy
- Reduction of social isolation
- Stress reduction
- Safety
A red flag doesn’t always mean that someone needs to be screened out of participating in a support group.

A red flag means there is something more to pay attention to, based on our past experience/training as group facilitators. We need to make sure we are screening people in to the best possible avenue for support.
What are some red flags that come up during the intake interview?

(please use the chat option)
Recent History of Suicide Attempt

Concerns
- Triggering for participant and other members
- One-on-one framework may be more appropriate

Suggestions:
- Be honest and validate their honesty and struggle
- Assess and offer support
- Discuss future participation in group

To Consider
- Policies
- Other programming
SA Occurred Very Recently

Concerns
• Group discussions may trigger raw feelings
• Curriculum may not be as useful

Suggestions:
• Be honest and validate their experience
• Rely on policy
• Assess and offer support
• Discuss future participation in group

To Consider
• Policies
• Other programming
Participant clearly needs significant space to talk/process her feelings

Concerns
• Participant may not be in a place to respond to redirection or listen to others

Suggestions:
• Be honest and validate their need to share/process
• Explain the group process
• Assess and offer support
• Discuss future participation in group

To Consider
• Other programming
What are some red flags that come up group sessions?
It’s week 3 and no one is sharing

- Silence is sometimes uncomfortable AND okay
- Try changing things up
- “Who would like to share first? rather than “Would anyone like to share?”
- “Who’s next?” rather than “Anyone else?”
- You can talk about the silence
One person is over-sharing – and not respecting other’s personal boundaries

- Don’t wait to address it
- Guidelines
- Gentle nudges and redirection
- If you need to be more direct, lead with genuine validation
Group members clash and others are uncomfortable/distracted by it

- Don’t wait to address it
- Try to identify common ground or help group members agree to disagree
- Do the guidelines address any of the behavior by either member
- Take a break if you think the group needs it
- This is the one time something may need to be dealt with outside of the larger group. You may need a supervisor’s support.
Group goes “off the rails” and the agenda is lost

• Make sure you at least do some “on-topic” work/discussion

• Honor the discussion that feels more urgent but offer choice to the group as a whole.
Group members just drop out

• Sometimes group members make healthy decisions that they are not ready for group

• There are a couple of things we have found increase retention
  
  o Encouraging notes to the next group
  o Weekly snail mail
  o Closing with “why I’ll be back”
  o Thoughtful reaching out
Encouraging Notes to the Next Group . . .

Dear survivor,

“Coming to group will change your world.”

“Don’t be afraid of your survivor journey.”

“You’re already doing it!”

“Be brave. It’ll be worth it.”
Weekly Snail Mail . . .
(not for domestic violence groups)

- Quotes
- Words of Encouragement
- Affirmations

Important: always ask at intake whether the participant is comfortable receiving mail at the listed address.
Closing with
A brag and “Why I’ll be back”

• Closes group on a positive note

• Encourages participants to return

• Reminds participants that what they are doing has value
Thoughtfully reaching out

• With permission
• No pressure
• Finding the best avenue for support
• Group will still be an option later on
Group is ending and members feel you are taking away their only support

- Plan a brainstorming or calendaring activity for the last or second to last meeting
- Are there other things happening at your agency where group members might connect?
- Are members able to repeat group in the future?
Facilitators clash

- Don’t wait to address it
- Bring in a supervisor if you need help sorting things out
- Changing facilitators mid group should be a last resort
Guidelines Help Frame Facilitation

Group created guidelines are a safety net for everyone. Don’t be afraid to revisit them together.

Group members are looking to you to keep the group safe, on topic and meaningful.
Questions!
Save the Date (we can’t wait)!

We will dive deeper into Group Facilitation Skills at an all-day training in Clark County (Vancouver) On Friday, August 18th

Watch for an announcement from WCSAP!
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