

## **Feminist Therapy Groups for Survivors Of Sexual Violence**

### **GUIDELINES FOR GROUP THERAPY SCREENING**

#### **Intake Interview:**

- The intake interview is to determine if the group is appropriate for the client's needs and to assess the client's readiness to be in a group
- The counselor gives the client information about the group
- The counselor gains information about the client's interest and hopes for the group

*Listen to the client's reasons for wanting to be in group. Are their expectations realistic? Do they show insight about the emotional work they will have to do? Are they coming because they feel ready, or because a therapist referred them? Are they court mandated or being pressured by a partner, parent, or friend? Does the person understand the give and take of group?*

#### **Guidelines:**

For survivors of child sexual abuse or adults molested as children (AMAC): It is advisable to **require** that participants in the a group have six months previous individual counseling specifically addressing the child sexual abuse. (Crisis counseling sessions with no previous therapy may not adequately address these issues before group) Exceptions may be made if the current therapist/counselor consults with the group leaders and feels the client is ready for group in less than six months.

For sexual assault survivors (SAS): It is suggested that anyone joining the SAS group have previous or concurrent individual counseling regarding the rape.

- The reason for these requirements is that expressing feelings and telling personal and painful things to a group of people can be very difficult. Having time to work on these issues individually first, makes this more comfortable and safe for the client.
- Group may trigger memories and feelings that are hard to deal with alone. It is good to have an individual therapist with whom the client can discuss anything that might have come up because of group.
- There is not time to address all the concerns of every member, time is limited in group so that everyone can have time to talk.

*Does the person have lots to tell you about (multiple issues/crises going on right now), have pressured speech, not slow down enough for you to ask all the questions? They may need more time in individual therapy or have other mental health issues that require attention before entering a group.*

## Explaining the group process and gaining commitment:

### EXAMPLE

“This is a 12 week therapy group, not an ongoing support group. It is run by one or more facilitators who are sexual assault counselors. We ask that you check your calendar and try to make all the sessions for the sake of continuity of the exercises and the building of group trust. We also ask that you check work/school schedules to arrive on time to group. Do you foresee any problems coming to the 12 sessions of group?”

“Because breaking the silence is a part of the healing process, there are no limits on disclosure. You will hear details of other members’ abuse/assault. The group process is a give and take- you will need to be in a place where you can listen and help others as well. Do you feel you are able to hear and give feedback regarding other members’ experiences of abuse/assault?”

“Confidentiality of the things disclosed in group is strictly kept by facilitators and staff of our agency, however, we can not ensure the confidence of other group members. The ground rules for the group are decided with the members’ input on the first night of group. The groups are composed of women only or men only, who are over 18, and usually have 4 to 10 people in them.”

### Obtain Client History:

- Has client sought counseling in the past?
- If client is in individual counseling or seeing a psychiatrist/doctor now, discuss the following questions:
  - How long have you been in counseling or on medication and what made you seek this resource?
  - Please tell me about how this counseling focuses on the sexual abuse/assault you have experienced? What progress have you made since disclosing the abuse/assault?
  - Have you spoken with your individual therapist about group therapy?
  - Is the therapist in support of you joining a group at this time? Do you agree?
  - Did s/he make the referral to the group?
  - We may ask for a release of information to contact this therapist/doctor, is that something you are willing to allow?

*We always want to make sure that we are not at cross-purposes with another counselor, therapist, or psychiatrist. Always remember, this is not their last chance in the world for group, it may not be the best timing (switching meds, going through a divorce, just disclosed to therapist, but hasn't talked about it yet, only recently recovered the memories of the abuse, very recently sober or recent relapse, actively using unhealthy/self-harming coping skills, etc.)*

- What made you decide to join a group now?
- What are some of your goals and expectations?
- Do you have any questions or comments?

**IF YOU BELIEVE THIS PERSON IS APPROPRIATE FOR GROUP:**

Invite them to become a member, make sure they know the time, day of the week and starting date for group. Review or clarify any concerns you may have about their participation. Ask about directions if they have not been to the meeting place.

**IF YOU DO NOT BELIEVE THAT GROUP IS APPROPRIATE FOR THE PERSON AT THIS TIME:**

Let them know why they will not be a part of the group at this time. Explain your reasoning and give the client alternatives for support and healing.

**EXAMPLES**

“Because you have never had any time to work on this with an individual counselor, it would be better to allow you time to do so before entering a group. Our next group begins in 3-4 months. Would you like referrals for individual counseling?”

“It sounds as though the (high anxiety/ eating distress/ use of alcohol to cope) you are describing would not allow you to hear and give feedback regarding other members’ experiences. It seems that group would not be the best step for you right now. You deserve more time to focus on yourself first. Do you have someone who is helping you deal with what you are going through?”

“You really reacted when I said you would hear details of other group members abuse. Since that is a major part of the process of group therapy, individual sessions might feel safer for you right now. I can make you an appointment with one of our crisis counselor if you would like...?”

Notes: