Ethical Issues in Group Work
Chapter 12
Psychology 475
Professional Ethics in Addictions Counseling
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Ethical Issues in Group Membership

- Poor candidates for group:
  - Brain-damaged people
  - Acutely paranoid individuals
  - Antisocial personalities

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Counselors should meet with clients prior to attending group to:

- Respond to any questions or concerns
- Explain group process
- Clarify on how members are expected to behave

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Groups continued

- Explain expectations on what the group can accomplish
- Clarify goals and objectives
- Explore the risks and values of group participation

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Groups continued

- Values and limitations of groups
- Psychological risks – and ways of minimizing these risks
- Explore fears and resistance

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Involuntary Participation
When group attendance is mandatory, make sure clients understand their rights and responsibilities:

- Nature and goals of the group
- Right to decline certain activities
- Limits of confidentiality
- Participation in group will have an effect on them outside of group

Freedom to Leave Group

- Procedures for leaving a group should be explained during the initial session.
- Clients have a responsibility to the group to explain why they want to leave.

Psychological Risks

- Some potential risks:
  - Disruption of client’s lives
  - Privacy may be invaded
  - Group pressure

More potential risks:

- Scapegoating
- Misused confrontation
- No guarantee of confidentiality

More on Groups

- Group leaders have the ultimate responsibility of protecting the clients in group, and not allowing harm.

Confidentiality in Groups

- The legal concept of privileged communication generally does not apply in group settings.
Group leaders have the responsibility of telling clients:

- Limits of confidentiality
- Their responsibility to other group members
- The absence of legal privilege concerning what is shared in group

How to Encourage Confidentiality in Group

Exceptions to Confidentiality

- If members pose danger to themselves or others
- Other issues discussed in chapter 6 also apply to group work

Important to give members a written statement about:

- Nature, purposes, and limitations of confidentiality
- When it will be breached
- What will be documented

Confidentiality with Minors

- State laws pertaining to minors
- Can a minor seek help without parental consent
- An emancipated minor
- Rights of parents to access records

Values in Group Counseling
**Effective Group Leader Behaviors**

- Demonstrates acceptance of the client
- Avoids responding to sarcastic remarks with sarcasm

**Effective Group Leader Behaviors continued**

- Being honest with group
- Avoids judgments and labeling of members

**Effective Group Leader Behaviors continued**

- States observations in a tentative way rather than dogmatically
- Lets members who are difficult, know how they are affecting them in a non-blaming way

**Effective Group Leader Behaviors continued**

- Detects their countertransference
- Avoids misusing their power

**Effective Group Leader Behaviors continued**

- Provides both supportive and caring confrontation
- Avoids meeting their own needs at the expense of the members

**Diversity Issues in Group Work**

- Ethnicity and culture influence behavior.
- Consider social, environmental, and political factors in assessing problems and designing interventions.
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More Diversity Issues in Group Work

• Acquire knowledge/skills to work with the diversity of members in group.

• Self Awareness

More Diversity Issues in Group Work

• Sensitivity to issues of oppression, sexism, and racism.

• Respect the roles of family and community hierarchies within the culture.

More Diversity Issues in Group Work

• Respect members religious and spiritual beliefs.

• Assist members in determining when their difficulties stem from others racism or bias.

More Diversity Issues in Group Work

• Inform members about basic values in the group process.

Uses and Abuses of Group Techniques

Techniques that can be abused:

• Techniques client’s are unfamiliar with

• Techniques that serve the counselors hidden agendas
More techniques that can be abused:

- Techniques that create an intense atmosphere
- Techniques that pressure members

Guidelines for avoiding abuse:

- Techniques should have a therapeutic purpose and be grounded in therapeutic theory.
- Client’s self-exploration should be fostered.

Additional guidelines:

- Techniques should be unique to client and assist client in exploring new behaviors.
- Modify techniques to make them suitable to culture.
- Use techniques to enhance group therapy.
- Use techniques in a timely and sensitive manner.

Additional guidelines:

- Tone of leader is invitational.
- Counselors should only use interventions they have been trained in.

Remember:

- Always ask: “Whose needs are being met?”
Unfinished Business

The Consultation and Referral Process

- Don’t be afraid to seek the help of other professionals:
  - Traditional healers
  - Religious or spiritual leaders

Issues Concerning Termination