

The Importance of Group Psychotherapy

We humans are social beings. Our brains are structured to grow from relationships and care from other human beings. When we experience trauma, neglect or general hurt in our lives, we use different relationships to try to understand, to make meaning, to grow and to heal. I would like to speak to the importance of fairly reimbursing therapists who offer group therapy, to have legislators understand the power of group therapy and its place in mental health modalities.

For some people, understanding, growth and healing can happen in an individual therapeutic relationship. For many children and adults alike corrective emotional and relational experiences can occur through group psychotherapy. With a trained clinician, this can be an important modality to augment individual work or in some cases, research shows, can be greater than individual work. Because of its effectiveness, a therapy group with 8 or 10 members and 2 co-therapists, can be a more financially efficient modality as well.

Here are a few therapeutic and corrective emotional factors the group therapy expert Irvin Yalom cites related to the power of working in a group in therapy:

1. Universality – realizing you are not the only one; decreasing social isolation of clients in a setting that also allows for “frank and candid consensual validation” of emotions from others, within the safety that a successful group is built upon;
2. Instillation of hope – hearing others stories, being able to reflect on other’s experiences in an environment that promotes honest communication with compassion;
3. Imparting of information – not just from a “professional” but from group peers, often the information can be assimilated in different ways;
4. Altruism – the sense of giving back that can happen in group therapy is a powerful healing agent to promote self-efficacy and agency in one’s life;
5. Corrective recapitulation of the primary family group – group therapy provides more opportunities for addressing family of origin conflicts, to relive them with the guidance of the therapist and group, to “correctly relive them,” with consciousness;
6. Imitative behavior- the opportunity to “try on” different ways of being, different habits, to be inspired through the group to further one’s own health goals.

Group therapy also promotes the 5 protective factors evidenced in the state’s Strengthening Families research and programs:

1. Parental resilience – whether through parenting groups or parent-child therapy groups, all the above corrective experiences enhance parental resilience;
2. Social connections – for any child or adult, being offered the opportunity to grow healthy relationships, is crucial for prevention, intervention for healing in relationships as well as general mental health healing;
3. Concrete support in times of need – through group interactions, sharing of resources and information from peers, clients can integrate information different from hearing from a “professional;”

4. Knowledge of parenting and child development – again, parenting therapy groups can widely disseminate information about parenting and child development, in a setting that also allows for therapeutic interventions to promote healing for parents who need additional supports, as well as in parent-child groups;
5. Social and emotional competence of children – group psychotherapy for children can promote these factors strongly.

Allan Schore's cutting edge neuroscience research speaks to the power of interpersonal regulation in healing aspects of psychotherapy. There could not be more powerful healing opportunities than a group psychotherapy setting. For these reasons, I urge the committee to increase compensation for group psychotherapy.

Submitted by

Jennifer Auletta, LCMHC and R-DMT (Registered Dance/Movement Therapist),
Clinical Services Director of the Family Center of Washington County
383 Sherwood Drive, Montpelier, VT 05602
jennifera@fcwcvt.org
802.262.3292 x135