AN INTRODUCTION TO GROUP THERAPY BASICS

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the assumptions and techniques we are using in conducting group therapy. While most groups will have within them the concepts we discuss here, it is important for each group leader to have a good understanding of WHO is in your group. Additionally adjust your group leadership style to the purpose of whom you are facilitating. To begin with, let's look at some of the similarities within our group. In addition to our alcoholism, drug addiction, overeating and co-dependency, we all have two things in common. First, before we came to the point of seeking outside help, we each tried our own Do-It-Yourself program in an effort to change ourselves. The second similarity is that we all failed. A basic assumption of group therapy is that a major reason for this failure is that our most determined efforts can't change what we can't see, and that there is a great deal that we are not seeing clearly.

A working Definition of group for our purposes is: Group Therapy is a forum whereby one can move from self-deception to a more healthy awareness of one's strengths and weaknesses. The effect of group process is to assist people to perceive themselves as others do. Within the boundaries of the group we find that a person will interact as one would in any other group situation. The group becomes what we call a social microcosm. The client will namely re-enact those roles, behaviors, and rules which were originally established in his/her family system. The observations and feedback provided by the group members which enhance the goal of interpersonal learning is:

1) To increase interpersonal learning of strengths and weaknesses.
2) To gain greater understanding of one's defenses and how they impede self-discovery.
3) To gain further access to the "feeling being" in one's self.
4) To explore acceptance of self, both the positive and the fallible aspects.
5) To provide a forum for one to undergo a corrective emotional experience and understand its implications.
6) To provide support and explore alternative forms of social relations.

For this reason, our goal in group therapy is:
TO DISCOVER OURSELVES AND OTHERS AS FEELING PERSONS AND TO IDENTIFY THE DEFENSES THAT PREVENT THIS DISCOVERY.

While change is the ultimate goal, our immediate purpose is to more accurately see what needs change. This requires seeing our self - discovering our self and at a feeling level. In examining our purpose, one of the things that stands out is our emphasis on feelings. We stress feelings for several reasons. First of all, our behavior in the past has been so opposed to our value system that considerable feelings of remorse and self-loathing have been built-up. It appears that we have accumulated a pool of negative feelings and walled them off with a variety of masks or defenses that prevent this discovery. This began with mild disapproval of ourself, then growing remorse, and, finally, a deep self-loathing. Statements such as "I am no damn good" or "The world would be better off without me" reflect these negative feelings and attitudes. It is important to be in touch with these in order to take the First Step of the Alcoholics Anonymous, Overeaters Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous, and Al-Anon programs where: "We admitted that we were powerless over such - that our lives had become unmanageable". Being in touch with the hostile feelings we have toward ourselves and the sense of helplessness and hopelessness that accompany them, make the First Step a moving description instead of simply an abstract theory. We feel the powerlessness and unmanageability. One of the important functions of the group is to help us identify the defenses that prevent this discovery. We will say more about the defense later on.
Another reason for stressing feelings is that many of the character defects that have disabled us for years are reflected in our feeling states or attitudes. As a result of the conflict between our value system and our repeated chemically-induced behaviors, we have formed rigid negative feeling states called attitudes toward ourselves and others. Most of us have become one or more of the following persons: Hostile, resentful, angry, self-pitying, fearful, defiant, phony, arrogant or superior. While these are represented as feelings, some have become so thoroughly a part of us as to be attitudinal in nature. They substantially color the way we see life and react to it. No longer are we persons who simply feel self-pity; but that we have become self-pitying persons. What was once a feeling has now hardened into an attitudinal posture - a character defect. If we are to change, we must first become ourselves at this feeling level.

Most of us are badly out of touch with our feelings, particularly the ones we have been describing, but as you will see, it is not just these negative feelings that are hidden and controlled. Our positive feelings of joy and love are also locked away by the defenses that seek to hide the negative feelings from view. It appears that our defenses are not selective. The man who has hidden away his anger is also crippled in any spontaneous display of affection or gratitude as well. While the majority of our focus in group therapy is on identifying our destructive negative feeling selves, the acceptance of these feelings frees the positive ones as well. "I never could tell anyone I really liked them before, unless I was drinking" is one example of this defect.

Most of us have ignored our feelings for years in an effort to see the facts. In group therapy, we explore Feelings and Facts. "How does that make you feel?", is a question asked frequently to help us focus on these Facts. Since our feelings are new to most of us, let's look at the ones used everyday: Mad, sad, glad, afraid, ashamed and/or hurt.

Our immediate purpose is to Discover and Identify in order to see clearly who we are and what needs change. Acceptance of “What Is” precedes change. Seeing and accepting “What Is” is very difficult, however, because we don't know that we don't know. We are in many ways blind and self-deluded, but we insist that: "I know who I am and where I'm going” or "I know 'what's best for me'.” We are deluded and we don't know it. In fact, most of us deny it. This is what allows us to fall back into the same destructive behaviors again, not having learned anything from the last one. How many times has a friend or relative said: “I saw you building up to it, but you insisted everything was O.K.” The assumption that self-delusion is a fact is basic to group therapy.

The way we illustrate this self-delusion is with the Johari Window:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1 OPEN</th>
<th>2 SECRET</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(PUBLIC?)</td>
<td>(PRIVATE? HIDDEN?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 BLIND</td>
<td>4 SUBCONSCIOUS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(UNKNOWN?)</td>
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The window's "4 panes" represent four aspects of our total self. As the diagram indicates, only the top 2 panes are visible to myself. Number 3 and 4 are hidden from my view. This is descriptive of the self-delusion that keeps me from seeing what I'm really like and allows my slow disintegration to continue with only a slight, if any, recognition on my part of how bad things have become. A more accurate picture of myself is essential to recovery.

Window 1 is Open. This is visible to Self and to Others and contains material I am willing to share with you - my interests, vocation, and virtues, to name a few. This is open information about myself.
Window 2 is Secret. I know things about me that I don't want you to know. I fear the loss of esteem if you see me as having such feelings as hostility, suspicion, inferiority, resentment, or self-pity. Revealing these feelings is called leveling. I level with you when I take the risk of letting you really know me by spontaneously reporting my feelings. Leveling is one of the two most important techniques in self-discovery.

We are Blind to Window #3, and yet it is seen by others. The tone of our voice, the tilt of our head, tells others things about us that we don't see. Many times a perfect stranger can see more in us in half an hour than we discovered in years of self-examination. When someone tells us how we appear to them, they are confronting us. Confrontation is the second vital technique in breaking through self-delusion to self-discovery.

The existence of the large blind area illustrated by Window #3 means that we are dependent on others taking the risk of confronting us with this material if we are to ever come to know it. "It takes at least two to know one".

Window 4 is Subconscious and not visible. While leveling and confronting often result in a glimpse into the unconscious, this is a bonus and not a goal in group therapy. The following is an example of how the windows change when we are open.

Group is an attempt to have someone perceive what is in need of change. To gain knowledge of what needs to be identified and how the group process aids in this discovery, we turn to the "Johari Window."

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Public (OPEN?)</th>
<th>Private (SECRET?)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blind</td>
<td>Subconscious (UNKNOWN?)</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
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The four panes are representative of the total self and can be used to clarify the function of feedback and self-disclosure.

In group sessions, change takes place via others sharing their perceptions (feedback) of information from Pane 3, and increased self-disclosure (revealing information from Pane 2). When one gains insights via the group process into Pane 4, Pane 1 increases in size and subsequently the others decrease as follows:
ON OPENING WINDOWS, the Johari Window concept was developed by Joseph Luft and Harry Ingham to demonstrate areas of awareness and interrelationships. The premise on which the window is based is that openness and trust are important to interpersonal relationships and to groups of people who are working together. There are four sections to the window, representing four areas of data about people.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Known to Self</th>
<th>Not Known to Self</th>
<th>Hidden - Different people have different windows</th>
<th>Unknown - Not known to self or others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public (OPEN?)</td>
<td>Blind</td>
<td>Subconscious (UNKNOWN?)</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

PUBLIC (OPEN?) Mutual awareness  
BLIND Others’ reaction to you  
HIDDEN (PRIVATE, SECRET?) Hidden from public knowledge; secrets  
UNKNOWN (SUBCONSCIOUS?) Not known to self or others; subconscious

Your Johari window is not a constant, and grows and changes over time.

This information is designed to help individuals open up to the PUBLIC (OPEN?) area of their
windows by diminishing the other areas. Start with a little goal-setting. Would you like to improve your relationships with a particular person or group you work with? How much of yourself have you disclosed in the relationship? How much feedback about yourself have you asked for or gotten? Now you can draw the window as you see yourself now. WHERE ARE YOU NOW? Your window should be proportionate to your responses to these questions. Then draw lines to show WHERE YOU WOULD LIKE TO BE, how much you'd like your PUBLIC (OPEN?) area to open up, and in which direction(s). (A further assumption is that decreasing the HIDDEN (PRIVATE?)(SECRET?) and BLIND areas tend also to expose some of the UNKNOWN (SUBCONSCIOUS?) area.)

So now where are you and where would you like to be?

I. Techniques for Understanding

A) Self-Disclosure: The revealing of one's private self to other group members. This aspect of group is greatly feared and valued by all group members. There is need to understand that self-disclosure involves risk. The degree of risk depends on several factors:
   1) Fear of rejection
   2) The nature of the material disclosed
   3) Whether the receiver will receive the information as it is intended and
   4) How the receiver reacts to the information disclosed.

Self-disclosure will increase as a member feels good about being accepted and understood after disclosing intimate material. Self-disclosure is necessary to form meaningful relationships and therefore necessary to the success of the group.

B) Confrontation: The revealing and providing feedback to others of how we see them. It is NOT ATTACKING SOMEONE! Confrontation is most useful and effective when combined with concern and specific behavior or data. There is also risk in honest confrontation, fear that the receiver will
   1) reject or distort the confronter's feedback
   2) reject and become angry with the confronter
   3) increase his intimacy with the confronter
   4) reciprocate with honest confrontation

II. Feelings and Defenses

A) Feelings: At the risk of sounding elementary, feelings are natural and okay to have. Simply stated "feelings are irrational states of being which in themselves are not good or bad.” However, the expression of these feelings can be appropriate or inappropriate. Basic states of feelings are anger, sadness, happiness, fear, shame and guilt.

B) Defenses: Defenses are basic methods used to protect against real or imagined threats to the self. It should be realized that defenses are both natural and adaptive. It is when these defenses block access to feelings which are important to interpersonal learning or when they begin to interfere with one's daily functioning that they need to be identified. Once identified and once a discovery about one's self is established then the option for genuine change exists.

AWARENESS —— ACCEPTANCE —— OPTION FOR CHANGE
1) Awareness of emotion and/or values leads to the ability to make decisions about behavior. When we can make choices about behavior, we can experience healing.

2) Without awareness, feelings/values are blocked and are acted on unconsciously. In this way our defenses victimize us. We have lost touch with our ability to choose our behaviors.

It takes courage to risk confronting. We have all traded our honesty for the approval of others in the past. However, if we care about our fellow group members, and if we want them to be honest with us in return, we will present them with our picture of them.

Confrontation is defined as: Presenting a person with themselves by describing how I see them.

Confrontation is most useful when spoken with concern and accompanied with examples of the confronted behavior or data.

"You seem self-centered to me because you only talk about yourself."
"You seem hostile because of the sarcastic answers you give."
"Your voice sounds so sad, I see you feeling sorry for yourself."
"Your face is so red, you seem very angry."
"John, each time Joe confronts you, you explain yourself instead of leveling with him. How do you feel about what Joe told you?" Or, "John, you go into a long silence after each confrontation instead of leveling. How are you feeling when you withdraw in silence?"

For the most part, defenses, including attitudinal postures, are unintentional and automatic shields against a real or imagined threat to our self-esteem. By pointing out the defenses we are using, we have a better chance of letting down this wall that is locking others out and keeping us prisoners. This blocks our getting close to others as well as our getting close to ourselves. Coming to recognize these blocks to self-discovery may enable us to look behind them to discover the feelings concealed from view. Long explanations may enable us to look behind them to discover the feelings concealed from view. Long explanations may hide feelings of inadequacy and guilt. Since defenses and attitudinal postures do hide us from ourselves, as well as others, it is important to identify them. A lot of this is new, so while you are getting used to it, just TRUST YOUR IMPULSES. Spontaneous expressions tend to be much more honest. It is more helpful to be Revealing than to be Right.

Most of us tend to think we already know ourselves and are afraid of looking badly, so it is hard for us to take the risk of being revealing and genuine. But what have we really got to lose? Remember how unsuccessful our previous attempts to change have been? Since we can't change something until we really see it and accept its existence, we should be ourselves: "Do I really accept something or keep it a secret?" Risking openness is the key. When you are tempted to withdraw into silence, remember that we are all in the same boat, and a common feeling of everyone when they are introduced to group is fear. Frequently, in place of confronting a person with some data that we have observed (what they said, how they looked, or sounded, etc.), we make the mistake of guessing, of asking questions and advice-giving.

"I bet you fight a lot with your wife."
"Did your parents raise you very strictly?"

A guess or a question is not confrontation. The other mistake is advice-giving in place of confrontation.
"Don't let people walk all over you so much."

To state this as confrontation would be: "You seem like a doormat the way you let people walk over you."

This way we are not playing God by advising, but we are letting the person see themselves from another point of view and trusting them to seek advice if they want it.

Confrontation is descriptive of what we have observed in the person we are confronting. Guesses, advice, or discussions about something we have not witnessed is not confrontation. In a sense, when we confront, we hold up a mirror to let another person know how they appear to us.

We are most useful as confronters when we are not so much trying to change another person as we are trying to help them see themselves more accurately. Change, if it comes, comes later when the person chooses it and enlists the spiritual help that the 6th and 7th Steps of the AA program and Al-Anon describes.

Picture a gardener preparing a proper environment within the soil so that the seeds the gardener plants may receive the gift of growth from a Power greater than the gardener’s. Imagine a physician cleaning a wound to provide an environment to receive the gift of healing. The change we are all seeking might be more correctly labeled healing or growth and, while it is largely a gift of a Power greater than ourselves, the necessary environment for the gift is an honest picture of who and what we are like now. Because of our egocentric blindness and self-delusion, we are all dependent on others for that completed picture. Confrontation provides it.

LEVELING
To respond openly to being confronted is to “level”. We level when we take the risk of being known by spontaneously reporting our feelings. For example, we level when we let someone know we are hurt - or afraid - or that we are angry.

Using these feelings as an example of leveling is probably useful for two reasons. Anger, bottled up, or fear that is kept hidden, seem to lead to more relapses than we can properly report. Frequently, people make the mistake of assuming that the purpose of group therapy is to make someone angry. Anger is an important feeling, but it is only one feeling among many that we want to discover and level with. If, instead of leveling, we respond without naming a feeling, we are hiding. The ways we hide our feelings are many, and we call them defenses. Each defense serves to avoid naming the feelings we are now experiencing. This prevents us from being known. One of the most helpful things that the group can do is to help a member identify their defenses. Defenses which we all use to some extent are:

Quibbling, equivocating
Verbalizing, talking
Shouting, intimidating
Blaming, accusing
Judging, moralizing
Debating, arguing
Evading, dodging
Attacking, aggression

Rationalizing
Justifying
Projecting
Analyzing
Explaining
Theorizing
Generalizing
Minimizing

Silence
threatening
Frowning
Glaring
Starting
Sparring
Switching
Denying
Try leveling with that feeling of fear for a starter and discover how that makes you feel. You will probably find, as others have, that when you report a feeling, you modify it. Keeping it a secret seems to increase its power. If we don't begin now to risk being genuine and self-revealing, when will we ever really do it?

"WALKING IN THE LIGHT"

This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. (John 1:5-9)

GOALS:

1) INCREASE THE OPEN (PUBLIC) AREA
2) DECREASE THE SECRET (HIDDEN, PRIVATE) AREA BY SHARING SECRETS WITH OTHERS
3) DECREASE THE BLIND AREA BY ASKING FOR AND RECEIVING FEEDBACK

JAMES 5:16a "Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.”
PROVERBS 28:13 “He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy.”


FEELINGS

If we want to be loved, we must reveal ourselves. If we want to love someone, they must allow us to know them.

As obvious as this may be, many of us go through life avoiding such disclosure. In fact, most of us practice concealment by playing roles. We claim to have certain feelings which we actually do not have; we profess to be loving when we're full of hostility; calm, when in reality anxiety is nearly overwhelming us; and to believe in things when in truth we do not.

Even with those persons we care most about, we share little of our true feelings, beliefs, or needs. Perhaps, because we want to be loved, we fear the truth that may come with openness and consequently we present ourselves as the sort of person we believe would be accepted and loved — and we attempt to hide the thing we think would damage that image.
Another reason we try to conceal ourselves is the fear of change. For most people, change is frightening and we want to think of ourselves as "constant". We've molded our image and seem to believe we are all that we ever could be when in reality our needs, desires, goals, values, behavior, and feelings change with experience and age. Still another reason we fail to expose our real self is that we don't really know how. We've never been taught how. In fact, we learned more about how to conceal our true identity, the result being that we continue to accept and play our roles. Our society encourages, in fact pressures us, to suppress all of the emotions and characteristics that it considers "unacceptable". Of course, there are times when honest leveling isn't possible and role-playing is appropriate in the social system we must be a part of, and which requires certain discipline. The key is "appropriateness" — to be private when we wish, but also able to be honest and open, without fear. We are human beings, alive, always growing and full of feelings — feelings that may be labeled "comfortable" or "uncomfortable," "pleasant," but not "good" or "bad." Feelings are perhaps our most personal possessions, and when they are not managed appropriately, they can be devastating.

WE MUST BE ABLE TO IDENTIFY OUR FEELINGS, ACCEPT THEM AS AN INTEGRAL PART OF US AND MANAGE EACH ONE AS IT COMES, AVOIDING SUPPRESSION WHEN POSSIBLE, AND THEN GO ON TO THE NEXT FEELING – FOR WITH CERTAINTY, IT WILL COME.

THESE ARE FEELINGS: ANGRY - SAD - GLAD - AFRAID - ASHAMED - HURT
In the following list are ATTITUDES which signal that FEELINGS are NOT being expressed:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ATTACKING</th>
<th>PROJECTING</th>
<th>SWITCHING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GENERALIZING</td>
<td>WITHDRAWING</td>
<td>SILENCE/HUMOR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGREEING</td>
<td>BLAMING</td>
<td>COMPLYING</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THREATENING</td>
<td>JUDGING</td>
<td>MINIMIZING</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RATIONALIZING</td>
<td>DENYING</td>
<td>INTELLECTUALIZING</td>
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TIPS ON HOW TO SHARE FEELINGS:

1) Say the FEELING - "I feel angry"

2) Give the SCENARIO - "My spouse told me that s/he'd clean the garage, and it's been three days and is still not done. It was promised to have been done the next day."

3) Express the NEED - "I need you to do the things that you have agreed to do, when you agree to do them."

It is important to note, I feel, that the word that often indicates something other than the FEELING word is going to be spoken. So as a facilitator of group and counselor, you must be attuned to listening for individuals who say, “I feel that ….”. When individuals say “I feel that,” what needs to occur is that the facilitator needs to get the individual and team to repeat the statement “I feel” and then for them to choose from a list of feelings from the FEELING chart or FEELING word list to help the individual recognize what feelings are all about. After this behavior and/or communicative dialogue is repeated several times, the group members and individuals will quickly learn that expressing feelings is a normal part of dialogue and useful for creating a healthy communication.
Example of NON-FEELING WORDS:

FINE  O.K.
GOOD  FAIR
GREAT  BAD

A LIST OF FEELING WORDS:

BLISS  DISGUST
LOVE  BOREDOM
CLARITY  ENVY
ECSTACY  MOODINESS
VIBRANCY  DISCOMFORT
SEXINESS  SHAME
EXUBERANCE  SHOCK
SENSUALITY  ANNOYANCE
ENTHUSIASM  IRRITATION
PASSION  HURT
AFFECTION  FRUSTRATION
EXCITEMENT  NERVOUSNESS
JOY  DISAPPOINTMENT
ALERTNESS  HATRED
OPTIMISM  HOSTILITY
SUPPORTIVENESS  DEPRESSION
ACCEPTANCE  IMPATIENCE
GRATITUDE  JEALOUSY
SATISFACTION  GUILT
CONFIDENCE  LONELINESS
HAPPINESS  WORRY
CHEERFULNESS  EMBARRASSMENT
SYMPATHY  ANXIETY
SECURITY  GRIEF
FORGIVENESS  SADNESS
PATIENCE  RESENTMENT
COMPASSION  FEAR
PEACE  HORROR
COMFORT  DESPAIR
CALM  ANGER
WARMTH  TERROR
FRIENDLINESS  CONFUSION
This drawing represents a pictorial view of how our defenses, the two outer circles, often prevent a sharing of our emotions or mood state. When individuals are in treatment, it is important for therapist, as well as other group members, to be able to recognize their defensiveness. The simple recognition of one using defense and behavior and not speaking to the feelings or emotions that are within oneself is sufficient to begin the change process within the psychic of the individual. Now it is important to recognize that defenses in themselves are not wrong or inappropriate. Defenses are useful for helping us manage behavior and respond to the outside world in an appropriate way.

The old school method of psychology of removing all the defenses and then rebuilding a person is no longer considered an adequate nor clinically responsible process in helping someone recover. Therefore, when you encounter someone who is extensively using a multitude of defenses to guard themselves from speaking of their feelings and thoughts and emotions, it should be a clue to the therapist that there is a strong likelihood of an underlying issue in this area. It is then important for the therapist to address the use of defensiveness and allow the individual to use the defenses until they soften and they are willing to address the underlying issues. Just as a side note, this does not always occur within a short-term small group setting.