



~ *From the desk of Shelley L. Imholte, LCSW, MSW, M.Ed., PhD-c*

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*Owner & Operator of Sexual Life Improvement, PLLC*

### ***Overview of Group Therapy***

Group psychotherapy has been around for over 50 years. As a treatment modality group therapy has proven to be as effective as individual therapy and a powerful adjunct to individual therapy that promotes growth and learning about the self and the self in relationship with and to others. It actually makes sense if you think about it; each of us has been raised in group environments such as families, schools, churches, organized activity groups or athletic groups and the reality is that we will always be a group member of both large and small groups throughout life. These group environments influence and have influenced our growth and development as human beings as well as our experience in relationships with others. Group psychotherapy provides a place where you come together with others, with intention, to share with one another and learn from the group experience to gain a better understanding of who you are, what you want in life, what you need in life, and the patterns that are present in your life that limit you living as fully as possible. Together members learn about themselves and others which usually results in improvements in interpersonal relationships outside of group setting such as the workplace, marriage, life partners, family, and friends. Members can identify or expand on areas of desired change and make significant changes to enhance their quality of life by actively participating in group therapy.

### **Frequently asked Questions**

1. How does group work?



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Group members are selected for group participation when the therapist feels it is appropriate for the individual. This means the group theme is applicable to the reasons the individual sought therapy or reasons discovered in the individual therapy experience. For example, one would not join a pornography addiction group if one rarely views pornography. The *theme of the group* is instrumental in guiding the group and if the theme does not match with the individual's theme the group experience, although likely still beneficial because it promotes learning, is unlikely to adequately address the individual's concerns. *Appropriate* means that the individual is most likely to experience interpersonal growth by participating in the group experience and that he or she is strong enough psychologically to accept and give input from and with others as an effort to achieve personal growth. These are important factors in deciding if group psychotherapy is right for you. A discussion of group psychotherapy and setting group goals with individual members, prior to the group start date, is an essential task of the group therapist. As a potential group member prepare for a screening process dedicated to discussing apprehensions and fears of participating in group and if you choose to commit to group psychotherapy, together with the group therapist you will set individual goals for the group experience. In group psychotherapy group members become learning partners together while supporting and challenging one another through interactions within the group.

## 2. If someone is in group therapy, do they also need individual therapy?

This is decided mutually between the therapist and the individual group member. Each person is unique and so are his or her therapy needs. Group therapy has been used as a single treatment approach or as an adjunct to individual therapy. A discussion between



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potential group members and his or her therapist about what is needed for you to get the most out of this deeply personal work is encouraged.

### 3. How is group therapy different from support groups or self-help groups?

The focus in group therapy is on interpersonal relationships (self, other, and community) and assists individuals with learning how to express themselves honestly and authentically in relationships. Group therapy also offers a unique network of support for specific problems or challenges that are often sensitive in nature or viewed by society as flawed or pathological. Group therapy differs from support groups and self-help groups in that group therapy does more than offer members new ways to cope with what is happening in their lives, group therapy is designed to promote growth and change with the guidance of a licensed professional. Support groups, often led by trained professionals, help people cope with difficult situations and are usually geared toward alleviating symptoms. Self-help groups are more likely to focus on a particular shared symptom or situation and are not usually led by a professional.

### 4. Why is group therapy useful?

It is normal to be concerned about beginning group therapy and have questions about group therapy effectiveness. Group therapy is useful because group provides opportunities to learn with and from other people to better understand one's own thoughts, emotions, and patterns in life and identify areas for desired change. We live and interact with others daily and often there are things that other people are experiencing or grappling with that can be beneficial to share with others. In group therapy, you learn that perhaps you are



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not alone or as different from everyone else as you might think you are. The group as a whole learns through sharing and interaction, this is the most beneficial aspect of group. The more you involve yourself in the group therapy process the more you will gain from group membership.

#### 5. What kind of commitment do I need to make?

There are a number of group structures that can be used with group therapy. For example, an '*open*' group means that members are free to come and go; there is no commitment to attendance. A '*closed*' group means that once the group has its members it does not change, new people can neither just come in and join the group nor just up and leave the group without group discussion. The group is highly confidential with group rules defined and a group contract informing each member of their responsibility in group. The time commitment and length of group can vary ranging from a short term group to a long term group, meeting once a week to once a month. It is important that you understand what you are committing to and you are encouraged to ask questions about the time commitment and duration of group. The biggest and most important commitment you can make is to you!

#### 6. What if I am uncomfortable discussing my problems?

It is common to feel uneasy or embarrassed when you are first joining a group. Over time and with the assistance of the therapist most group members begin to develop interest and trust in the group process. Group therapy provides a great deal of relief because it allows members to discuss with others how they experience similar situations in life in a private



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and confidential setting and try out new ways of interacting within a safe setting that is supportive of personal growth.