

HUNTER COLLEGE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK
City University of New York

Working With Groups: What's So Great About Mutual Aid?
See For Yourself: Norms & Dynamics Compared

MUTUAL-AID GROUPS

Membership basis: common needs, desires, goals, and/or concerns and issues leading to tangible common ground

Problem solving: primarily self reflection, self reference ~ story sharing toward empathy

Climate: community ~ collectivity ~ sympathy ~ empathy ~ mutuality ~ collaboration ~ consensus

Context for expectations: work toward group purpose using group stage theory as decision-making context

Problem solving: collective brainstorming and insight ~ self reflection ~ self reference ~ story telling ~ collective insight

Participation/interaction: free-flowing with some exceptions ~ based on spontaneous contributions of stories, strengths, and ideas

Conflict: seen as result of interpersonal differences ~ differences valued ~ interventions geared to collective understanding and insight ~100% tolerance of right to express contrary/offensive values, ideas, attitudes

Authority: shared leadership over process and content toward collective ownership, primarily used to teach norms of mutual aid; professional authority attempts to "work itself out of a job"

Primary vehicle for helping: cumulative life wisdom of all participants as "experts"

Primary process: member-member aka "multilogue" with more active direction when group encounters a new "first" time

MANY OTHER GROUPS

Membership basis: availability or desire to participate ~ little/no reference to group purpose ~ individual goals provide primary framework

Problem solving: primarily advice ~ highly intellectual emphasizing individual change

Climate: search for individual insight, change, growth ~ performance ~ judgment ~ compliance

Context for expectations: work on individual goals using personality or behavior theories as decision-making context

Problem solving: serial attention on members (aka "casework in a group" or "aggregational therapy of individuals")

Participation/interaction: determined by practitioner ~ hierarchy of needs determines serial rights of members to "have the floor"

Conflict: seen as result of individual fault or defect often with judgments of integrity ~ interventions geared to change ~ conformity/compliance valued ~ low tolerance of unpopular values, ideas, attitudes

Authority: central leadership over process and content ~ used primarily to advance individual problem solving with professional help ~ professional authority remains primary helper

Primary vehicle for helping: professional expertise ~ the practitioner is the "real" expert

Primary process: leader-member aka "center spoke" approach ~ member-member interaction secondary, incidental, or absent