

AUSTRALIAN ASSOCIATION OF GROUP PSYCHOTHERAPISTS

Who benefits from groups?

Groups are helpful for people who would benefit from looking at the issues listed below with others in a group setting

- people who find themselves repeating the same patterns again and again
- people who are depressed, anxious, stressed and not living as well as they would like
- people who have a psychiatric diagnosis and require help to deal with an illness
- people who want to know more about the functioning of their minds
- people who want to have a richer and more creative life

How are groups run? What are the structures of groups?

A small group has between 5 and 8 members, who come together at the same time each week, usually, but not only, on one or two days a week, with the same psychotherapists. Some groups are run with a single therapist, some therapists work in couples.

Some groups are run as a *slow open group*. This allows for participants to leave the group when they feel ready to go, and for new members who wish to join to do so at a time which is appropriate for them.

Some groups are run as *closed groups*, generally for one to two years. Members start together on the same date, no new members join during the course of the group, and there is an set date on which the group finishes.

What are the different kinds of groups?

Groups, sometimes known as "*the private practice model*" may be run using the model of psychoanalytic group psychotherapy. However many different kinds of groups can be run using this model as a way of conceptualising and thinking about groups, where the group itself is run very differently. Practitioners may offer groups for adolescents, for people with a chronic medical condition, for people in psychiatric day hospitals, for mothers and babies, as well as a variety of other groups, where the look of the group is in each case different, but the thinking and framework of the group is nonetheless similar.

How are groups helpful?

Groups, like individual psychotherapy, offer a space for thought and reflection in a confidential structured setting. Just as the relationship in individual therapy between therapist and patient becomes something more than the two people involved, so within the group the relationships become something more than the number of members in the room.

The group itself and the space that has been created by the therapists and members together become important as an entity within which relationships occur. The forces in a group are unique to that group.

A group offers different ways of relating for members. Those who are quiet and more withdrawn are able to be part of something without having to speak, and can be part of something by watching and listening. Members can learn from one another, both directly through feedback and comments from other members, but also by watching and identifying with others. All of us have similar wishes about being loved and being able to love, and for meaningful relationships and lives, so when one member in a group is struggling with something it is more than likely that those listening will be able to identify with at least some, if not many aspects of what they are talking about.

A group offers a possibility to experience a space where one can belong, and to understand the forces that may prevent the feeling of being able to belong. A group offers the experience of learning that what one member feels is similar to what other members feel, to experience a commonality and sharing of experience, which for some people may be the first time this has occurred. A group can offer hope that change is possible, and comfort that the problems of one are experienced by others, and are not different, unusual and impossible to understand or deal with.

A group offers the space to see in a real experience one's own impact on the world, and to reflect on what this might mean, and whether it is the way one actually wants to impact on the world. There are others who can comment on behaviour in a way that a therapist cannot, within a space where discussion can be held or repercussions dealt with in a safe manner.

Being part of something larger than the 2 person relationship which individual therapy provides offers the opportunity for patients to explore certain feelings towards others which would not arise in the consulting room in individual practice in so clear a manner, if at all. How to relate to other group members, how to recognise and acknowledge love and hate, how to think about feelings towards the group therapist(s), all these are challenging and difficult areas which can be addressed within a group setting.

How do I to find a group?

The Australian Association of Group Psychotherapy (the AAGP) has a website, <http://www.groupanalysis.net.au>

where a list of members may be found, with contact details. Any enquiries will be welcome, and individual practitioners can help with finding a suitable group.