SUPPORT GROUP FACILITATION
Learning Collaborative
February 9, 2018
AGENDA

Session 1
• Opening
• Group Dynamics
• Support Group Model
• Facilitation
• Workshop 1

Session 2
• Workshop 2
• Workshop 3
• Workshop 4/Closing
WHAT TO EXPECT AT THIS TRAINING

• To learn by doing

• To make mistakes in the beginning; it’s part of the learning process

• To put into practice in a very practical way the strategies, structures, and group processes outlined for you in this presentation

• To have fun!
WHY DO PEOPLE GO TO SUPPORT GROUPS?

• To connect with other people experiencing similar experiences.
• To be able to speak openly about their feelings and experiences in a safe space.
• To leave feeling better than when they came.
• To learn new information and ways to cope.
• To feel that they were not only supported but that they contributed as well.
• To feel in a very real way that they have something in common with others.
WHAT DO THEY WANT FROM A SUPPORT GROUP?

• A safe place
• Not to be judged
• Boundaries that are enforced
• Competent facilitators
A WELL-FUNCTIONING SUPPORT GROUP:

- Has a skilled facilitator
- Does its own work
- Involves as many group members as possible
- Encourages self-enforced observation of behavior guidelines
- Allows group members to feel they have contributed
- Provides strategies
- Connects participants to resources and services
- Makes members feel they have benefited from attending
A WELL-FUNCTIONING SUPPORT GROUP:

• For group work to remain positive and cooperative, every individual needs to feel:
  • Valued
  • Important
  • Involved
  • Included
GROUP DYNAMICS
WHAT ARE GROUP DYNAMICS?

Group Dynamics are the processes that occur between group members

• These dynamics are affected by each member’s:
  • Internal thoughts and feelings
  • Expressed thoughts and feelings
  • Nonverbal communication
  • Relationships between group members

• Positive group dynamics play a central role in the success of your support group.
POSITIVE GROUP DYNAMICS REQUIRE:

- A skilled leader
- Clear boundaries
- Stating and enforcing rules of relationships
- Clear goals and purposes
- Identifying the “group subject” in a positive and optimistic manner
PROBLEMS IN GROUP DYNAMICS ARE RELATED TO:

• Leadership
• Group boundaries
• Observing group rules
• Group goals
• The group subject
LEADERSHIP

• Facilitator doesn’t have the skills to lead a group
• Facilitator doesn’t step in and say “let’s give someone else a chance”
• Facilitator pushes ideas onto the group
• Facilitator allows one person to monopolize the group
• Turnover in facilitators
BOUNDARIES

• Irregular attendance of group members
• New people are not made to feel comfortable
• The group is too large for safe sharing
• Cliques develop
• Facilitator develops inappropriate relationships with group members
GROUP RULES

• People make offensive remarks that result in hurt feelings
• Someone is consistently negative
• Personality clashes disrupt the meeting
• Meeting times are canceled or changed
GROUP GOALS

• Meetings have no structure
• Facilitator does not hold the group to the common purpose
• Meetings become a social activity and no work is done
• Group members or facilitator(s) are looking for romance with other group members
• Meetings devolve into gripe sessions. Participants hold back positive feelings due to a fear of sharing because everyone is complaining
GROUP SUBJECT

- People dwell on the past, rather than staying in the present
- Lack of visible progress is discouraging
- Crisis or traumatic events and intense emotions overwhelm the group
- People focus only on situations they can’t control
- People reject/disregard useful suggestions and remain stuck in old habits
SUPPORT GROUP MODEL
WHY DO WE NEED A MODEL?

• A support group can operate with a will of its own and take the group down an unproductive path, pulling even the most experienced facilitator off course.

• A model can help navigate around the predictable negative group dynamics which can torpedo a successful group process.

• Equips you with the structure and skills to handle the challenges of facilitating a support group.
SUPPORT GROUP MODEL INCLUDES:

- Agenda
- Group Guidelines
- Group Wisdom
- Communication Skills
AGENDA
AGENDA

The Agenda outlines the meetings and always includes:

1. Opening
   1. Read the group guidelines
   2. Check in: 1-2 minutes per person

2. Group work

3. Closing

Always start and stop on time!
GROUP GUIDELINES
WHAT ARE GROUP GUIDELINES?

• They are the rules we agree to keep during group.
• They inform us about how we will act when we are together.
PURPOSE OF GROUP GUIDELINES

• Give boundaries for people to operate within.
• Help members feel comfortable sharing meaningful things.
• Help create a safe, confidential environment.
• Manage time keeping and procedures
• Help with the flow and pace of discussions
• Provide opportunity for everyone to be heard
GROUP GUIDELINES: DO’S AND DON’TS

• Always model respect for the member being disrespectful
• Remember, it’s normal for people to forget guidelines in support groups.
• Don’t scold; be directive
GROUP GUIDELINES
ACTIVITY
GROUP WISDOM
GROUP WISDOM

• Group wisdom is the process through which participants share resources and knowledge gained from past experience.

• Always ask members what they know that is constructive, practical, and helpful.

• Call on the experience and strength of the group members
GROUP WISDOM

The Group Wisdom process allows us to:

- Address matters of common concern
- Share the lived experiences of the group
- Address when a group member is “wallowing”. Wallowing is not just being negative, it is the expression of the many frustrations of trying to deal with mental illness.

Group wisdom expands group discussion, involves as many people as possible, helps a group do its own work, and lets people feel they have contributed something valuable to others in the group.
COMMUNICATION SKILLS
COMMUNICATION SKILLS

• Communication skills are techniques for shifting the group or a group member from less effective participation to a more effective group structure/process.

• Communication skills help us to stick to the agenda and group guidelines while also capitalizing on group wisdom.
COMMUNICATION SKILLS

• Affirm
• Inquire
• Direct
• Understand
• Support
This is saying “yes, you have a valid opinion, point, feeling…” before you shift the conversation.

Examples:
“You’re right. Sometimes the system doesn’t work. Let’s see what the whole group can tell us about this topic that is constructive and practical.”

“It’s a long, hard story you have. Tell us what’s happening currently.”
You ask the person (or group) direct questions to help shift the conversation, or to get more information to help you know where to shift the person or the group.

Examples:
“In the minute left, can you tell us what’s happening now?”

“The group guidelines remind us about mutual respect. [To the group] Why is that so important?”
You tell someone what to do, or what you are going to do, or what you want the group to do, in a respectful way.

Examples
“Our group guidelines include no cross talk. It’s hard to hear and speak when more than one person is talking.”

“Let’s use the whole group to help us. Does anyone have feedback that is practical and helpful in this situation?”
UNDERSTAND (FEEL)

Express respect for their feelings: frustration, confusion, resistance. Understanding statements often start with comments like, “It’s hard...” or “It can be really difficult...”, before shifting

Examples:

“It’s sometimes really difficult to understand another person’s reaction to mental illness.”

“This time limit thing can feel awkward, but we’ve got to do it. Tell us what’s happening now.”
You support the person’s position or help it along. “I, too…” or “Sometimes many of us...”

Examples
““I know how easy it is to get lost in our stories. Tell us what you’re dealing with now.”

“I get judgmental too, particularly with my own family. The group guidelines remind us to be respectful and we need to accept others for where they are.”
FACILITATION
FACILITATORS NEED TO KNOW:

• How to recognize problems in group dynamics
• How to use the support group model
• The skills to shift the group from where they are to where they need to go
• How to take charge when shifting the group and then step back to let the group do its own work
• That their role is different from a therapist
• How to provide a safe, nurturing environment
A SKILLED GROUP FACILITATOR:

• Asks group members to agree to share responsibility for maintaining the group guidelines.
• Sustains clear membership boundaries
• Clarifies goals
• Identifies the common concerns of the group in a positive and optimistic manner.
• Develops communication skills that encourage group participation.
REMEMBER, AS A GROUP FACILITATOR YOU ARE PRESENT TO HELP THE GROUP MEET ITS NEEDS, NOT TO HAVE THE GROUP HELP YOU MEET YOURS.
WORKSHOPS