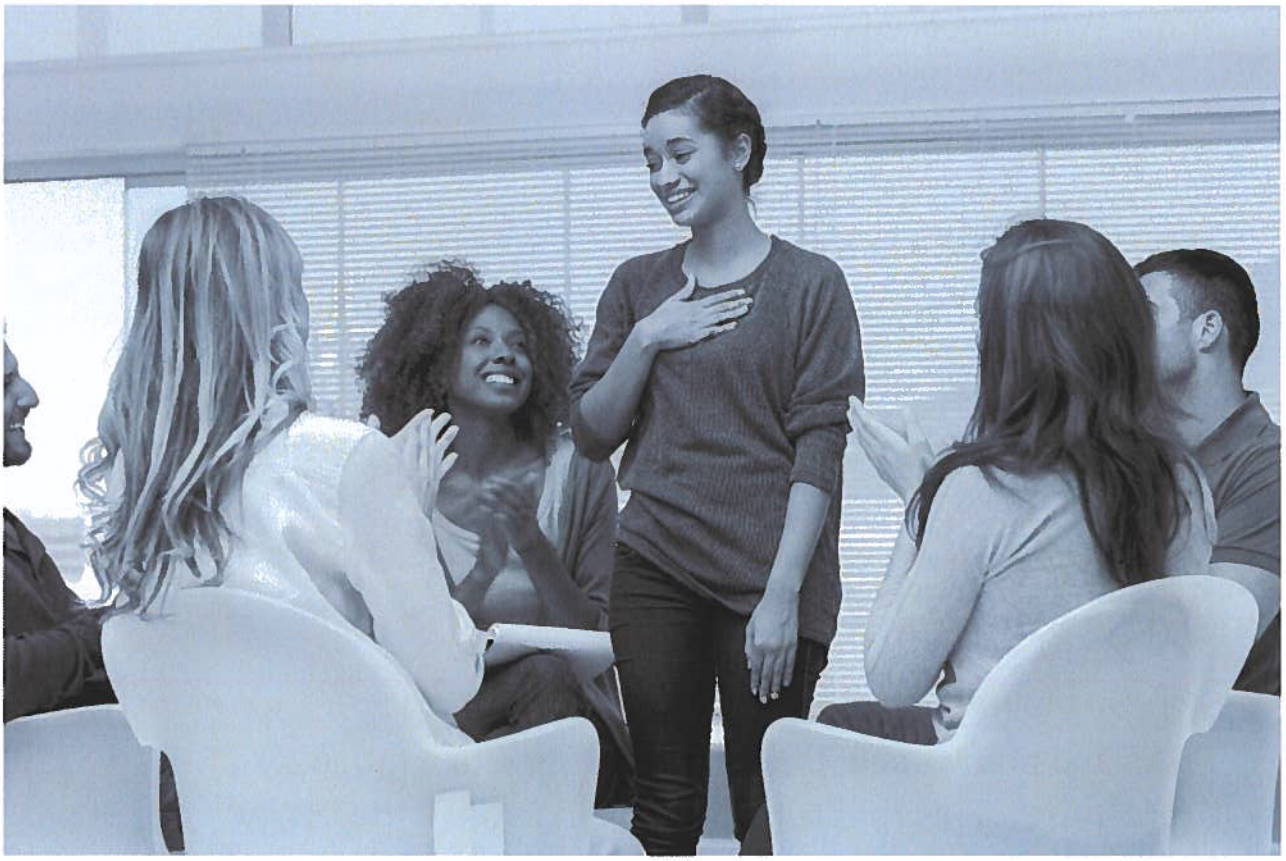
4 Forming a Group



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Knowing that most beginnings are awkward

we wait anxiously for words or actions

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to break the silence of this gathering

and give our group its genesis.

Strangers to each other,

and to ourselves at times,

we slowly move into awareness

of our own uniqueness

coupled with impressions

of the specialness of others.*

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Chapter Overview

From reading this chapter, you will learn about

- Steps in the forming stage of a group
- Tasks and problems at the beginning stage of a group
- Useful procedures for the beginning stage of a group

As you read, consider

- How you usually feel when you are beginning something new
- How you feel about following rules in a group setting and how you react to individuals who do not

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- What behaviors of someone else make you feel welcome or put you off

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Twyla Tharp, as a dance choreographer, is famous for interviewing many more dancers than she needs for any of her productions. However, her list of awards, including a MacArthur Fellowship, a Tony, and numerous honorary degrees, far surpasses her peers. She has the tenacity and ability to selectively choose individuals who will perform at extremely high levels individually and within a group to make her productions most memorable. It is Tharp's contention that effort spent in forming a dance assembly is crucial if the group is going to function at the highest level.

Tharp's ideas about the importance of being careful in forming a dance assemblage are applicable to the beginning and ultimate outcome of any group. The reason is that groups either develop in healthy ways or end up in disarray. Understanding how to begin and nurture a group significantly improves the chances that the goals of the group and its members will be achieved and chaos will be avoided.

Almost all functional groups go through developmental stages. More than 100 models of group development exist, but the generally agreed-on number of stages in their evolution is between four and five, with **Tuckman and Jensen's (1977)** five-stage model—*forming, storming, norming, performing,* and *adjourning*—being the most widely recognized (**Young, 2017**). Similar to the Tuckman and Jensen model are those by **Kormanski and Mozenter (1987)**, who state that groups develop out of **awareness** and then move on to *conflict, cooperation, productivity,* and finally *separation,* and **Trotzer (2007)**, who conceptualizes groups as moving through the stages of *security, acceptance, responsibility, work,* and *closing.* **Ward (1982)** characterizes group stages in a four-part sequence as *power, cohesiveness, working,* and *termination,* and **Gazda (1989)** does the same in including the stages of *exploration, transition, action*, and *termination*. I describe a four-stage process as well—*formation/orientation, transitioning*

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(storming and norming), *performing/working*, and *mourning/closing*. On the outskirts of this stage norm is Yalom (**Yalom & Leszcz, 2005**), with three stages—*orientation, conflict*, and *cohesiveness*—and **Corey (2016)**, with six stages—*formation, orientation, transition, working, consolidation,* and *follow-up/evaluation* (see **Table 4.1**).

Table 4.1 Stages/Transitions of Group Development According to Eight Group Experts.

Group Experts	Stage/Transitions
Tuckman & Jenson	1) Forming 2) Storming 3) Norming 4) Performing 5) Adjourning
Kormanski & Mozenter	1) Awareness 2) Conflict 3) Cooperation 4) Productivity 5) Separation
Trotzer	1) Security 2) Acceptance 3) Responsibility 4) Work 5) Closing
Ward	1) Power 2) Cohesiveness 3) Working 4) Termination
Gazda	1) Exploration 2) Transition 3) Action 4) Termination
Gladding	1) Formation 2) Transition 3) Performing 4) Closing
Yalom	1) Orientation 2) Conflict 3) Cohesiveness
Corey	1) Formation 2) Orientation 3) Transition 4) Working 5) Consolidation 6) Evaluation

Not all theorists agree that stages do or must exist in groups, at least in a progressive fashion (**Yalom & Leszcz, 2005**). However, developmental

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stages have been identified in learning groups (e.g., **Lacoursiere, 1974, 1980**), therapy groups (e.g., **Brabender, 1985**), and training groups (e.g., **Dunphy, 1968**). More recently, **Yoon and Johnson (2008)** have identified seven stages in virtual learning teams: orientation, scheduling, exploration, work and decision, progress check and evaluation, refinement and formatting, and termination.

Regardless of how many stages there are in group development, the beginning stage is an important and usually a multidimensional event. The most obvious beginning of a group is when group members and leaders assemble for the first session. However, before the initial meeting, many processes have already been completed—for example, formulating the idea for the group, screening members, and selecting preliminary individual and group goals. Even after the group meets initially, it continues to evolve and can be conceptualized as forever forming, with certain issues returning from time to time to be explored in greater depth—the so-called **cyclotherapy process** . Some of the issues with which groups continually struggle are anxiety, power, norms, inclusion, identity, interpersonal relationships, and personal growth (**Cohen & Smith, 1976**; **Ivers & Newsome, 2011**; **Kormanski, 1999**).

The focus of this chapter is on what is considered the **forming, or orientation, stage of the group** , which is a time of initial caution associated with any new experience. Personal relations are characterized by dependence, and group members attempt to be accepted and safe by trying to keep things simple and free of controversy so they can avoid being rejected by others, the leader, or even themselves. This feature of the group is particularly strong in counseling or psychotherapy groups in which individuals do not know each other well, but it can also be part of task/work and even psychoeducational groups where members have a common shared history. Regardless, discussions are usually superficial

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during forming, centering around historic or future events that do not have a direct impact on the group or its members.

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Reflection

What is your typical behavior when meeting someone new? Is the behavior different when you are with friends in a group or by yourself? Would you like your initial behaviors on meeting someone new to change? If so, how would they change? If not, why not?

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Steps in the Forming Stage

Forming is a process that involves several steps. Although some of these steps may be completed concurrently, none may be skipped if the group is going to form properly and prosper. Group workers are wise to consult such documents as the Association for Specialists in Group Work's (ASGW) *Best Practice Guidelines* (**Thomas & Pender, 2008**) if they want to have successful groups and work within appropriate ethical and professional standards.

Step 1: Developing a Rationale for the Group

A group begins conceptually with the generation of ideas. Behind every successful group is a *rationale* for its existence. The more carefully the reasons for conducting a group are considered, the more likely it is that there will be positive responses and outcomes. Therefore, a clear rationale and focus are of uppermost importance in planning. Group leaders who are unclear about their purpose will end up being nonproductive at best and possibly harmful.

For example, school counselors may wish to make sure that all members of a sixth-grade class learn appropriate ways of interacting with the opposite sex. One counselor decides to run a series of psychoeducational

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groups with the sixth-grade students based on the rationale that students first need knowledge before they can act properly. This counselor plans a sequential series of interactive presentations. Another counselor at the same school does not think through the process and impulsively decides to conduct counseling groups with the sixth graders to deal with this same topic. There is no rationale for such groups. They are ill suited for children who have not expressed a concern about this subject, and they take considerable time to conduct. The outcome of the two groups would vary greatly because of the initial thought processes in the planning of each.

Step 2: Deciding on a Theoretical Format

In addition to developing a rationale for which type of group to conduct, group workers must consider the theoretical format from which they will work. Some group leaders pretend not to work from a theoretical basis, claiming they will let their groups decide how to develop. Yet even this type of purported atheoretical stance is really a theoretical statement about how the leader thinks and conducts a group.

Ward (1982, 1985) notes that each major theory of group work has limitations and strengths. Leaders who are most aware of these areas before groups begin can choose a format appropriate for their group even if it is **eclectic** (a composite of theoretical approaches). All groups deal with individual, interpersonal, and group foci. Thus, a theoretical format should function on intrapersonal, interpersonal, and extrapersonal matters, but in varying degrees. The theoretical base of the group should match the needs of participants and the group as a whole.

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Waldo (1985) has conceptually described levels of functioning in a group as **I/We/It** . His thoughts parallel Hulse-Killacky's ideas concerning process and content. "I" is the individual, intrapersonal focus on beliefs, attitudes, and feelings; "We" is the interpersonal dimension, or the relationship among group members; and "It" is the extrapersonal emphasis on issues, tasks, or group concerns. Leaders who wish to facilitate interpersonal ("We") development of members might choose a theoretical format that promotes this process, such as a person-centered counseling group, whereas those emphasizing individual ("I") development might plan to employ an active psychoeducational group. Regardless of the approach chosen, planning for a group must consider that groups contain many variables, among them people, processes, and products. "Group work is challenging and complex because groups are complex" (**Ward, 1985**, p. 59).

Brief Case

Joan and the Sound of Silence

Joan has seen a need in her school to address bullying. She wants to run an interpersonal group based on person-centered theory. She also wants to have the group focus on prevention and be developmental. Joan thinks it would be best to start her group with the younger children first. She assembles first graders, whom she screened to select those who are most passive and the least likely to complain about being picked on. However, during the first session of the group she is frustrated because no one talks about themselves or their feelings. Although Joan has good intentions, she has overlooked the fact that a homogeneous group of shy kids is not one that is likely to be verbal, especially using a person-centered approach.

Questions

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What would you suggest she do? When? How? Why?

Step 3: Weighing Practical Considerations

After a clear, convincing rationale and theoretical format have been determined, group proposals should stress specific, concrete, and practical objectives and procedures. Considerations such as meeting time, place, and frequency cannot be overlooked if the group is to be successful (**Jacobs, Schimmel, Masson, & Harvill, 2016**). Group leaders must be sensitive to political and practical realities as well. Some good group ideas never are implemented because colleagues fear, misunderstand, or disapprove of the group leader's plans. For example, a high school guidance group focusing on understanding human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS) might be prohibited or cancelled if the principal of the school thinks sexuality is the group's main agenda item. In a case like this, the group leader should first thoroughly brief the principal and then the parents of the teens on the emphasis of the group in order to prevent a negative reaction.

Brief Case

Careful Candace

At the beginning of the school year, Candace sent out a needs survey to her 10th-grade students. She found that one area a majority of them wanted more information on was on the impact of over-the-counter drugs on health. Rather than start a group on "Drugs 101," Candace talked to her principal about the survey results and then sent an e-mail to her students and their parents. She followed this communication by gaining permission from her

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administration to conduct a psychoeducational group on over-the-counter drugs and then explaining to the PTA what she had in mind. Before recruiting group members, she sent out another e-mail to the 10th-grade class and their parents informing them about what she planned to do and how and inviting their questions and comments. When she did recruit and conduct the group, no one seemed upset, and the group went well.

Questions

What did Candace do to make sure her group would not be controversial? What else do you think Candace could or should have done?

Overall, the setting in which the leader works will influence the formulation of a group proposal. For instance, an employee assistant professional might propose an adjustment group for recent retirees in a community center, whereas a college counselor might focus on offering a series of guidance presentations on careers in the student university center. Counselors and therapists in private practice will generally have more flexibility and fewer administrative procedures than those who work in the public domain. However, institutions do not protect private practitioners who conduct groups. Therefore, private practitioners must be as careful and meticulous as other group practitioners in their proposals. A partial secret of success in all cases is detailed preparation. A good model that reflects adequate preparation is a proposal that includes the broad range of information presented in **Figure 4.1** . This model can be adapted to meet the needs of group leaders interested in serving other populations.

Figure 4.1
Checklist of specific issues on content.
Proposal for a group

I. Type of Group

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This will be a (task/work, psychoeducational, counseling, psychotherapy) group for people between the ages of ___ and ___ or with the following interests or aspirations: _____. The group will specifically focus on _____. It will not concentrate on _____. The group will meet for a (limited, unlimited) time starting with a meeting on (fill in specific date, length of meeting, and place). During the initial session, the leader will give specific suggestions to participants in getting the most from their group experience. The fee (if any) for this group will be ____.

II. Rationale, Goals, and Objectives

The rationale for conducting this type of group is as follows:

1.
2.
3.

Goals and objectives for the group are as follows:

1.
2.
3.

III. Rights and Expectations of Group Members

Group members have rights as well as responsibilities. It is expected that group members will be active participants. However, members will decide at what level they participate, how much they reveal about themselves, and when they wish to share information. Ethical guidelines of _____ will be followed.

IV. Group Leader

Name(s) of the group leader(s), degrees, professional and personal backgrounds and experiences, qualifications for leading groups, and other pertinent information.

V. Basic Ground Rules

To obtain the most from the group, members will be asked to suggest ways of conducting it. However, these generic rules will be followed:

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1.
2.
3.

VI. Topics for the Group

Certain topics will be given emphasis, but group members will have the opportunity to discuss the aspects of those topics that are most meaningful to them. Following is a sample of some possible topics for the group to explore. Other topics of concern to group participants can be developed.

1.
2.
3.

Step 4: Publicizing the Group

How a group is announced influences both the ways it will be received by potential members and the kind of people who will join (**Corey, Corey, & Corey, 2014**). Some of the best ways of announcing the formation of a group are through word of mouth with professional colleagues, personal contact with potential members, and written announcements to a targeted audience. There are advantages and disadvantages to each of these ways of **publicizing a group** . For example, announcing the formation of a group through word of mouth to professional colleagues may personalize the information but fail to reach a large number of individuals who might wish to participate. The same is true if a group leader simply contacts individuals he or she thinks might benefit from the experience. Written announcements to selected audiences are likely to reach the most people, but they may not be clear enough to specify who should be a member of the group. Therefore, some individuals who are not suited for the group

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may apply, or too many individuals may apply, requiring the group leader to spend a large amount of time screening them.

The *Best Practice Guidelines* published by the ASGW (**Thomas & Pender, 2008**) is a definitive and comprehensive document that provides guidance on the proper conduct expected of individuals who lead groups, including preparation procedures. Professional group workers have also focused on specific issues regarding content that should be addressed. Among the best of these checklists is one by **Tollerud, Holling, and Dustin (1992)**. Another checklist on specific issues regarding content is found in **Figure 4.1** .

Step 5: Screening and Pretraining

The maturity, readiness, and composition of membership play a major role in determining the success of a group (**Riva, Lippert, & Tackett, 2000**). Therefore, potential group members should be **screened** (interviewed either individually or in a group before the group's first meeting concerning their suitability for the group) and carefully chosen whenever possible (**Riva & Lange, 2014**). Exceptions to selecting members are likely to occur in some psychoeducational and task/work groups. In the pregroup screening process, the leader must address potential group members' readiness to be in a group and their goals (**Chen & Rybak, 2018**; **MacNair-Semands, 1998**).

Most experts in the group field endorse either an **individually conducted pregroup screening procedure** or a **group-conducted pregroup screening process** (**Conyne & Diederich, 2014**; **Rapin & Crowell, 2014**). Both formats are essentially intake interviews—ways of determining who should join a particular group and who should not. In pregroup screening

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sessions, the group leader and potential members can interview one another about different aspects of the group process and themselves. The group leader may ask a number of questions of potential group members during the screening, but queries that are open ended and elicit personal responses and interpersonal styles seem to work best (**Gladding, 1994a**; **Riva et al., 2000**). For example, a prospective member of a group might be asked: (a) "What has been your past experience with groups?"; (b) "What has led you to want to be a part of this group?"; (c) "What can you contribute to this group?"; and (d) "How do you express your emotions, especially your negative ones?"

In the pregroup screening process, the group leader must determine the level of interpersonal behavior or comfort with others that potential group members have. Such a determination is "essential to groups that focus primarily on group interaction and group process" (**Riva et al., 2000**, p. 167). The goal is to determine whether a particular group is right for a particular individual at a specific time. Through screening members, premature termination is avoided, while goals and processes involved with the group are clarified, and members are empowered to take an active part in the group.

According to **Couch (1995)**, there are a number of interdependent steps necessary for conducting an effective pregroup screening interview:

1. **Identify needs, expectations, and commitment**—Of these factors, commitment is considered the most crucial. Thus, the group leader might ask, "Since there are a number of group experiences from which you could choose, why do you particularly want to be in this group? What do you want to get out of it?"
2. **Challenge myths and misconceptions**—It is crucial that potential members have accurate information and not misinformation like that sometimes given on television or in the movies (**Childers &**

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Couch, 1989). Some of the common misunderstandings about groups, especially counseling and psychotherapy groups, include "groups are for sick people," "groups are artificial," and "groups force people to lose their identity." The group leader might help in clarifying this matter by asking a potential member: "How do you perceive this group developing? What are your concerns in being a member of it?"

3. **Convey information**—The nature and limits of confidentiality are particularly helpful to communicate, but group stages, roles, and the importance of balancing content and process may be quite useful to explain as well. To address this matter, the group leader might simply talk about the length of the group, what might occur, and the importance of a member paying attention to nonverbal as well as verbal interactions.

The uniqueness of school environments may make the pregroup screening process distinct for school counselors who lead groups. These group workers may concentrate on developmental issues when interviewing potential members. They may also form groups based on program goals and student standards (Hines & Fields, 2002). Written parental consent for children under 18 to participate in a group is needed as well.

One way, other than screening, to ensure that members are ready for the group is through **pretraining** (orienting group members on what to expect of the group before it ever meets). "Such an investment should enhance the functioning of the group, speed its work, reduce dropouts, and increase the positive outcomes" (Zimpfer, 1991, p. 264). Pretraining has been positively associated with cohesion, member satisfaction, and comfort with the group (Burlingame, Fuhriman, & Johnson, 2004). Pretraining can be done on an individual or a group basis. When it is conducted individually, the possibility always exists that a leader will accidentally leave out some vital details about the group. The advantage of

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an individual process, however, is that the rapport between the member and the leader may increase. A group session, in contrast, is a more uniform, although less personalized, way of pretraining. Such a session focuses on topics that might be explored in the group and gives members an opportunity to assess whether they wish to invest themselves in this particular group. It also gives the leader an opportunity to see how potential members interact in a group setting. Group pretraining is not required; however, the more thoroughly prepared potential members and the leader are, the more likely it is that the dropout rate will be low, the communication clear, and the cohesion of the group as a whole great (**DeRoma, Root, & Battle, 2003**; **Yalom & Leszcz, 2005**).

An example of pretraining illustrates its essence. In a group that is voluntary and therapeutic, potential members should be informed of which techniques and procedures will be used, the qualifications of the leader, fees (if any), types of records kept, member responsibility, personal risks involved, and the types of services that can realistically be provided (**Association for Specialists in Group Work [ASGW], 2007**). They may be shown clips of selected group videos, such as those created by Irvin Yalom, Rex Stockton, Gerald Corey, or Peg Carroll. Their questions about the group should be answered as well.

When the group leader is unsure about how specific to be, it is better to err on the side of caution and give group members a thorough explanation of group and administrative procedures. In no case should the leader make promises or guarantees. Facts concerning the formation and procedure of a group are preferably put in writing.

Step 6: Selecting Group Members

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The selection of group members is usually a two-way process. Exceptions occur in some psycho-educational groups, in which material is presented to a captive audience, such as in schools or the armed forces, and in task/work groups, such as in businesses, where individuals are grouped with one another because they work in the same office. When potential group members and the leader are mutually involved in the selection process, both have input into deciding who will be included or excluded.

People invited to join the group should be individuals who are likely to benefit from the experience. Essentially, they should be those who have specific goals in mind, who have allayed their fears of what a group might do, and who feel comfortable in their roles and sensitive to their surroundings.

Individuals who do not appear likely to contribute to the growth of the group or who lack personal maturity are prime candidates for exclusion from it. Such individuals include those who are extremely hostile, self-centered, unmotivated, crisis oriented, or mentally unbalanced, as well as those who are unable or unwilling to self-disclose, express feelings, or tolerate anxiety (**Corey, 2016**; **Riva et al., 2000**). Other individuals who may be excluded from a particular group are those who are either too different or too similar to other potential group members. Many of these individuals may benefit from personal one-to-one counseling.

Members of extremely heterogeneous groups may not relate well to each other and may experience a good deal of interpersonal conflict (**Melnick & Wood, 1976**); members of extremely homogeneous groups, in contrast, may relate too well, may not work hard on individual or group tasks, and may stay on a superficial level. Over time, heterogeneous groups may be most effective for intensive group therapy procedures in which the emphasis is on personality change (**Kellerman, 1979**), whereas homogeneous groups may be most appropriate for individuals who need

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support or have more focused problems, such as solving a dilemma on a job-related task. Clearly, both advantages and disadvantages are inherent in heterogeneous and homogeneous groups.

A potential group member should never be coerced to join a group. Likewise, if a potential group member and the group leader determine that group work "does not show promise as a source of help," then the group leader should work with the interviewee in looking for other sources of assistance (**Ohlsen, Horne, & Lawe, 1988**, p. 37).

Brief Case

Savage Sue

Henry had one spot open in a counseling group he was forming at his agency for adults in midlife. The group was heterogeneous, and Henry thought that Sue, a mid-40s White woman, would be a good fit for the group. When he broached the subject of the group with her, Sue declined. Undeterred, Henry persisted and finally got Sue to join by telling her that if she did not, the group would fail and that the other group members really needed the experience.

The group turned out to be a bad experience for everyone involved. Sue did not show up half the time, and when she did come, she was passive-aggressive. Henry really got mad toward the end of the group and blasted Sue for her behavior. Her response was: "Well, I told you I did not want to be a part of the group in the first place."

Questions

Put yourself in Henry's shoes. What would you do now? What would you do the next time you start to form a group?

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Step 7: Selecting a Group Leader

Certain qualities distinguish an effective group leader. Some of these have been discussed previously and will not be reiterated here. The selection of a leader by a potential group member is emphasized because the selection process hinges partly on professional qualities and partly on personal qualities. It is easier to deal with professional issues because, in the pregroup screening procedure, the potential group member can and should ask about the group leader's qualifications. The group leader can voluntarily offer information about his or her educational preparation and experience in conducting groups. Such professional disclosure is considered a must at this point in group formation.

Personal information about the group leader's style in sessions is also important (**Trotzer, 2007**). The leader's style may incorporate humor, self-disclosure, confrontation, or other helping modalities. The leader's style and personality are important aspects of the group for the potential member to consider. If the potential group member does not think the group leader is one with whom he or she can comfortably work, then it is best to find another group to join.

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Tasks of the Beginning Group

Group leaders and members have varied tasks to accomplish during the first sessions of a group, including these: (a) dealing with apprehension; (b) reviewing members' goals and contracts; (c) specifying more clearly or reiterating group rules; (d) setting limits; and (e) promoting a positive interchange among members so they will want to continue (**Weiner, 1984**). Failure to accomplish any of these tasks may result in the group not functioning properly. Each of these tasks is examined individually.

Dealing with Apprehension

Apprehension is synonymous with anxiety. Too much or too little anxiety inhibits the performance of the group and its members (**Yalom & Leszcz, 2005**). Therefore, it is appropriate that group members and leaders have a moderate amount of apprehension when they begin a group. It helps them key in on what they are experiencing and what they want to do. Apprehension differs in psychotherapeutic and psychoeducational groups, in which there is an individual focus to the apprehension, and task/work groups, in which there is a group focus to the apprehension. For example, in a therapy group, Ellen may be anxious about whether others will see her as capable, whereas in a task group, she may be anxious about whether the group can perform its assignment.

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It is helpful, and sometimes necessary, after each group session for leaders to deal with any misunderstandings that may have arisen because of anxiety. For example, if James is berating himself in front of his counseling group for being defensive when asked a question about his attitudes toward race, the leader may say, "James, I hear you are concerned about two aspects related to the question Jan asked you about race. One is your verbal answer; the other, your failure to live up to your own expectations. I wonder what feelings got in the way of your handling of Jan's question." Such an observation and invitation give James a chance to deal with his emotions, especially his apprehension about saying the right words and being perfect. By clarifying what has happened, James and the group as a whole are able to move on.

Reviewing Goals and Contracts

Goals are specific objectives that an individual or the group wishes to accomplish. Group goals are announced at the time a group proposal is formulated and again during the pregroup interview. Members should keep these objectives in mind throughout the group process. Likewise, individual goals are worked out in the pregroup screening session and are consistent with the group's overall goals. In counseling, psychoeducational, and task/work groups, such goals may have a universal quality about them—for example, understanding careers. In psychotherapy groups, especially with individuals in severe distress, the goals and contracts may vary widely. For example, such groups may contain members who are trying to resolve grief as well as those who are attempting to overcome depression.

A thorough way of clarifying group and individual goals is to have the group leader restate the purpose of the group during the first session and have each member elaborate on his or her goals. In some cases and with some

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theories (e.g., Gestalt, transactional analysis), members are asked to formulate a **contract** (an agreement of what will be done and when) (**Corey, 2016**; **Donigian & Hulse-Killacky, 1999**). A written contract helps members specify what, how, when, and where they will work to make changes related to their goals (see **Figure 4.2**).

Figure 4.2

Sample contract on goals for an individual group member.

As a member of this group, I, John Smith, make this contract to achieve the following goals.			
What (i.e., goal)	*How*	*When*	*Where*
(1) share my thoughts	verbal	each session	in group
	verbal	each day	home
	verbal	each class	school
(2) eat healthy	choice	each meal	everywhere
(3) exercise	discipline	each day	home
(4) control anger	choice	each time	home
	choice	each time	in group
John Smith signature		January 31, 2019 date	

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However, as important as it is to formulate and verbalize goals, "simply asking members to write about their group or asking members to write specific goals prior to the beginning group are not sufficient to influence group process, perceptions of involvement, or ability to give feedback significantly" (**Bridbord, DeLucia-Waack, Jones, & Gerrity, 2004**, p. 301). It is in the verbalization and feedback interaction that goals tend to be clarified and strengthened.

Reflection

When have you had a goal that you did not openly discuss with someone? What happened to that goal? Was it clear? Did you achieve it? How important do you think it is to write down goals and keep them in a place where you can see them?

Specifying Group Rules

Rules are the guidelines by which groups are run. They are established both before and during the group process. In pregroup screening sessions, leaders take the initiative in setting up rules. For example, most groups have rules set by the leader, such as no physical violence, no drugs, and attendance at all meetings. Rules should be stated in a positive rather than a negative way; thus, "No physical violence" is better expressed as "Members will respect the physical and psychological space of others at all times."

During the first session of the group and afterward, members make contributions to rules by which the group will abide, for example, "Smoking will be permitted outside the group room but not during the group session." It is important to formulate a rationale behind every group rule rather than

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to set rules in an arbitrary and "thou shalt not" manner that invites violations and game playing (**Yalom & Leszcz, 2005**).

One rule that is usually agreed to but difficult to enforce is **confidentiality** —the explicit agreement that what is said in the group will stay in the group. It should be noted here that confidentiality is the "ethical cornerstone" of group counseling and psychotherapy (**Plotkin, 1978**). It is also a valued component of many task/work and psychoeducational groups, for it is "a prerequisite for the development of group trust, cohesion, and productive work" (**Gazda, 1989**, p. 303). However, confidentiality is sometimes violated, either intentionally or unintentionally. At the beginning of the group, members and leaders should review possible ways that confidentiality might be violated, including revealing identification information about group members or talking about group interactions outside of the group.

Leaders need to be sure of their responsibilities regarding confidentiality—for example, protecting group members' files or computer records and erasing or destroying audio and video recordings after they have been used to critique group progress. Leaders often take responsibility for keeping confidences by reviewing group codes of ethics and legal precedents. They usually do so outside the presence of the group. However, the extent to which leaders go to maintain confidence may be productively discussed in the group, especially if members raise issues pertaining to it.

When breaches of confidentiality occur, they disrupt the functioning of the group and promote distrust among members. Therefore, it is crucial that group rules or procedures be in place to deal with such possibilities. The group that can agree in the initial session on the nature of rules and the consequences for breaking them is ahead of the group that bypasses this procedure.

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Setting Limits

Limits are the outer boundaries of a group in regard to behaviors that will be accepted within the group. Limits are set both explicitly and implicitly in group settings. Explicitly, they take the form of rules regarding acceptable behaviors and procedures related to time (**Napier & Gershenfeld, 2004**). When members violate an explicit limit, the group corrects them. For example, if Kathy tells Connie what Louise said in confidence in a group counseling session, then Kathy may be dismissed from the group, asked to apologize to Louise, or taken to task by members about the seriousness of what she did.

Implicit limits are more subtle and involve such actions as the attention of the leader to a particular member or the verbal reinforcement or discouragement of certain content topics. For example, the leader may instruct group members who ramble on about their families: "Keep your comments about past family matters brief and to the point so the group can help you." The leader may also use eye contact to encourage or suppress dialogue. Skilled group leaders use their power of facilitating and setting limits in both direct and indirect ways.

Promoting a Positive Interchange Among Members

Promoting a positive interchange among members of a group is initially the task of the group leader. If positive interchanges among group members can be facilitated, then group members will begin to share openly with one another, and the group atmosphere will be enhanced.

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The leader can establish a positive tone by (a) being enthusiastic; (b) drawing out members; (c) holding the focus on interesting topics; (d) shifting the focus when the topics are irrelevant or interesting to only a couple of members; and (e) cutting off any hostile or negative interactions (Jacobs et al., 2016). The leader can also set a positive tone by emphasizing similarities among members so everyone feels included and a part of the group (**Ward & Ward, 2014**). If such a productive tone is not created, then group members may drop out, close up, or attack one another.

Another way to promote a positive interchange within the group is to use **interactive journal writing** . In this process, members keep logs of their thoughts, feelings, impressions, and behaviors within a group and exchange them in all directions—members to leader, members to members, and leader to members (**Parr, Haberstroh, & Kottler, 2000**). When conducted so that members are well prepared for it, this type of process may promote group cohesiveness, trust, altruism, catharsis, hope, and self-understanding. It can be used in all stages of a group.

Reflection

What is your reaction to someone responding to you positively as opposed to responding to you negatively? How similar or different do you think your reactions are to those of most people you know? How do you think a negative tone would influence the work of a group?

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Resolving Potential Group Problems in Forming

A number of problems can occur during the formation of a group and afterward. Some of these difficulties involve people; others are related to procedures. One of the best ways to handle potential group problems is to prevent them. Prevention involves following the steps for forming the group already mentioned in this chapter. When prevention is not possible, the leader and group can work to bring about resolution. Member interaction patterns that are particularly troublesome are addressed first in this section, then initial group procedures are addressed.

People Problems

Despite careful screening, some group members display difficult behaviors early in the group process. Those who cause the most concern, especially in counseling groups, are individuals in the group who monopolize, withdraw, intimidate, verbally ventilate, focus on others, seduce, or show intolerance (**Edelwich & Brodsky, 1992**). **Subgroups** (cliques of members who band together) may also be troublesome. Sometimes, group leaders will become too involved in the content of what is being expressed in the group and not notice interactional patterns. By concentrating on the styles of different group members, however, leaders are better able to plan

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and lead future sessions. Seven common membership roles often displayed during the first session are covered here, along with the problem of subgroups. In dealing with people problems, group leaders are advised to avoid labeling individuals. The tendency that goes with labels is to stereotype individuals and to perceive situations as falling within a certain behavioral range (**Kline, 1990**).

Manipulators

Members who are **manipulators** are characterized by their subtle and not-so-subtle use of feelings and behaviors to get what they want. Often they are angry and bring into the group unresolved life problems centering on control. For example, Jose, in his manipulator role, may say to the group, "If you're not going to give me what I want, then I'm leaving this group."

Reframing, conceptualizing potentially destructive acts in a positive way, may help manipulative individuals. For example, the leader may say to Leonardo after he has falsely and vigorously accused the group of breaking confidentiality, "Sounds like what you want from this group is specific help in learning how to trust them." The group leader or members may also intervene by blocking manipulating actions, such as threatening or pleading. At the beginning of a group, manipulators will often struggle with group leaders for control. They should not be allowed to usurp the leader's function, or the group will fail.

Resisters

Resisters are often angry or frustrated and bring these feelings with them to the group. They do not participate in group exercises or tasks and act as barriers to helping the group form. For example, Brandy may say to the

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group, "I don't see any sense in telling you how I feel. That won't really help me."

Leaders can help resistant group members build trust in the group by inviting them to participate but not insisting that they do. This is an affirmation approach and allows resisters and leaders a chance to explore this behavior later (**Larrabee, 1982**). A second way of working with these individuals is to confront and interpret in a reflective manner what is happening with them (**Vriend & Dyer, 1973**). For instance, in the previous example, a group leader may say to Brandy, "I hear you have been disappointed with the groups in which you have previously participated. They have not been very productive for you." Often the feelings of resistant members are dealt with best in the working stage of the group.

Monopolizers

People who are **monopolizers** dominate the conversation in a group and do not allow other members a chance to verbally participate. Monopolizers initially offer group members relief because they focus attention on themselves and away from everyone else. These individuals are dealing with underlying anxiety but often become sources of irritation for other group members. One soliloquy does not a monopolizer make, so anxious members should not be characterized as exhibitors of this behavior too early. At the same time, members who display this pattern from the beginning need the help of the leader and other members to realize how certain behaviors hurt their interpersonal relationships and which other actions they could take to improve them. The sooner the nonproductive talk of the monopolist is addressed, the more productive an outcome can be reached. The technique of cutting off, highlighted later in this chapter, is an excellent way to deal with monopolists.

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Silent Members

Silent members may or may not become involved with the group. Sometimes, silence is used to cover hostility (**Ormont, 1984**) . . . and sometimes not. Members who are silent are often nonassertive, reflective, shy, or just slow in assessing their thoughts and feelings. The best way to determine the meaning of silence is to give an individual a chance to respond to a question and to notice what happens. A simple question such as "What do you think about what other group members have been saying?" is often enough to draw out a silent member.

Acceptance of silence by the group leader and the creation of opportunities by the leader for silent members to become more involved usually rectify any negative impact that may be associated with these individuals or this behavior. If a group member remains silent throughout the group experience, then he or she will probably not get as much from the process as more active members (**Conyne & Silver, 1980**).

Users of Sarcasm

Individuals who express themselves through **sarcasm** differ from those who are outwardly angry. **Users of sarcasm** mask their feelings through the use of clever language that has a biting humor. For instance, the sarcastic member may say, "Oh, joy, now I get to tell you about how I feel. Isn't that just thrilling!"

The group leader can help the sarcastic member work on expressing anger directly. This skill is accomplished by identifying what is happening in the group member's life and by having the group member explore what the behavior means for him or her both now and where it was learned. The leader may also invite other group members to give the sarcastic member feedback on how they respond to sarcastic ways of relating.

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Brief Case

Irksome Erika

Erika entered the psychotherapy group because she was unhappy with her life. She thought it would be easy to change, but after 4 weeks she became skeptical. She expressed her feelings through belittling others. For example, she would say, "Oh, my god, has Cora gotten cold feet?" or "Oscar, aren't you filled with confidence today! I can just see it oozing out of your skin."

When Erika did not stop these kinds of remarks, the group jumped in to confront her. For instance, Blanche told Erika: "I don't think your comments are helpful to you, the group, or the individual you are addressing them to. They just have a bitter flavor about them."

Although Erika did not change quickly, she did begin to soften her tone.

Questions

What might you have said to help Erika? What else might have been helpful to her besides words?

Diagnostic Analyzers

Individuals who have a passing knowledge of psychology or mental illness may attempt to diagnose or explain other group members' problems in clinical terms. These people are caught up in thinking everyone in the group has a deep-seated problem that can and should be explained by using the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* (DSM). Their belief is that once an explanation of a behavior is given, group members will act differently. Thus, diagnostic analyzers are quick to provide cures and an abundance of answers and explanations to others. They focus on solving other people's problems.

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The group leader can help counter this tendency and assist the diagnostic analyzer by pointing out that everyone has difficulties and that only those with extreme troubles are diagnosed by DSM standards. More importantly, the leader can assist the analyzer by having this group member focus on what he or she would like to get out of or take away from the group. This type of personal gain and centering can aid the analyzer in realizing that he or she has more to get from the group than is possible by concentrating on others.

Focusers on Others

This final category of behavior involves **focusers on others** —those who become self-appointed group "assistant leaders" by questioning others, offering advice, and acting as if they did not have any problems. These individuals are often challenged by group members and can be helped to overcome this other-focused behavior by being taught that self-disclosure is more helpful to most people than a style devoid of personal involvement. They may also be given permission during this stage of the group to make wishes for themselves. For instance, the leader may ask, "Latoya, if you could have some new traits for yourself, what would they be?" In essence, other-focused group members must be helped to realize the value of becoming personally committed to the group.

Overall, it is important that group members be given time to express themselves and not be labelled or stereotyped early in the group process. Leaders must trust their feelings and reactions in regard to difficult group members. In some instances, a difficult group member may have to be removed from the group, but this measure is a last-resort strategy (**Kline, 1990**). Such a process creates anxiety in other members about whether they might also be removed. Before ever taking such a step, the leader needs to try to help the group help itself by working through thoughts and feelings about certain behaviors. Allowing group members to give and

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receive feedback enables them to obtain insight and change the troublesome and disruptive behavior. In short, "the presence of 'problem members' is a golden opportunity to facilitate group development and move the group to greater levels of intimacy and heightened functioning" (**Kline, 1997**, p. 95).

Subgroups

Group leaders may help prevent the formation of subgroups by focusing on the uniqueness of each individual and his or her connectedness with the group as a whole. Leaders may discourage the formation of subgroups by making their expectations known about such groups in the screening interview, pregroup training, and the initial group session. When subgroups do develop, however, they must be dealt with directly, or they may have a deleterious effect on group member interaction. **Trotzer (2007)** describes three ways of handling subgroup behavior (in addition to prevention):

1. "Bring all coalescing, colluding, and subgrouping behavior that occurs in the group to the group's attention." For example, point out that John, Jim, and Mary seem to be acting as a team on their own and not with the other members of the group.
2. "Establish a guideline and expectation that the group be informed about extra group activities among members." In such a case, one of the group rules can be that all meetings of group members outside the regular schedule of the group be reported to the group at large before sessions begin.
3. "As a group leader, do not collude with subgroups overtly or covertly by not disclosing what you perceive and/or know about the subgroup." If a group leader remains silent on realizing a subgroup has formed, he or she is hurting the group as a whole. Speaking out

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may risk alienating members of the subgroup for a while, but not doing so poses an even greater risk of losing the group as a whole.

Group Procedural Problems

Both the group leader and members often feel anxiety, awkwardness, and anticipation at the beginning of an initial group session. Because every group is different, even veterans of group experiences may feel some apprehension. Most group members will try to put on their best behavior and be friendly and positive, but potential problems may arise at certain points. The best way to deal with these areas is to prevent them from developing. However, corrective measures may need to be taken.

Opening the Group

Beginning the first group session is often a difficult experience, especially for the novice leader. It is a **critical incident in the life of the group** . It is an event that has the power to shape or influence the group positively or negatively (**Donigian & Hulse-Killacky, 1999**). How it is handled can make a major difference in what happens later in the group. Some practitioners, such as **Coulson (1972, 1974)**, choose to begin a group in silence, but most group leaders are more structured. Sufficient structure at the beginning of a group helps members become less anxious and not be overwhelmed by the group process (**Marmarosh, Dunton, & Amendola, 2014**). Group leaders have general openings, or leads, at their command, such as "Let's get started" or "It is time to begin" (**Carroll, Bates, & Johnson, 2004**). These openings signal to the members that the group is beginning and focus attention on what is about to occur.

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Along with these general leads, several other options are available for beginning the first group session. **Jacobs et al. (2016)** suggest eight different ways. Each is dependent on the style of the leader and the purpose of the group.

1. "Start with an opening statement about the group; then conduct an introduction exercise." This type of procedure is usually employed with psychoeducational or task/work groups, although it may be used in therapeutic groups. It involves the leader taking about 5 minutes to describe the format and purpose of the group and introduce himself or herself, followed by a brief exercise, such as members introducing themselves.
2. "Start with a long opening statement; then get right into the content of the group." In this style, which is often used in educational and task groups, the leader begins by giving members an explanation of the group's content or purpose. He or she then quickly gets group members involved in the group without introducing them to one another because either the group is too large or members already know one another.
3. "Start with a long opening statement about the group and its purpose; then conduct an introduction exercise." This procedure is used when the group's focus is educational or task based. In the long opening statement, the leader reminds group members of their purpose and then helps the group get down to business by describing what the group is going to do. This option works best when the information given is interesting and informative. A mistake that may be made is for the leader to talk too long—for example, over 15 minutes.
4. "Start with a brief statement about the group; then get into the content." This opening is ideal for task/work groups in which members know one another, and the group's purpose is clear. In this

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opening, members freely exchange ideas and suggestions at the initial group meeting.

5. "Start with a brief statement about the group; then have the members form dyads." In this type of opening, the purpose of coming to the group is clear, and members have some comfort in being in the group. Breaking into dyads helps group members focus more on content or the purpose of the group experience.
6. "Start with a brief statement about the group; then have members complete a short sentence-completion form." The sentence-completion format is useful in helping members focus on the purpose of the group. It is employed in task/work, psychoeducational, and therapy/counseling groups when no introductions are needed.
7. "Start with an introduction exercise." This type of introduction is employed when group members have a strong idea of the group's purpose. This process helps members introduce themselves and immediately focus on the content of the group. A number of creative exercises can be used. For example, **Lessner (1974)** suggests that group leaders use nondidactic poetry, such as that written by Lawrence Ferlinghetti or A. R. Ammons, when they begin a new group. The selection is read aloud, and then all group members describe how they are like an image in the poem, such as a leaf, a rock, or a tree. Then they introduce themselves to the group by stating not only their name but also an image with which they identify. Texts such as **Gladding's (2016)** *The Creative Arts in Counseling* (5th ed.) or Jacobs's (1992) *Creative Counseling Techniques* are excellent resources for picking or modifying a procedure with which to begin. For example, Jacobs points out that props, such as cups and chairs, can often illustrate to group members what words alone cannot convey.
8. "Start with an unusual opening—one that grabs the members." The idea behind this type of beginning is to get group members'

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attention in ways that would otherwise not be possible. For example, a leader might stage a verbal argument with a co-leader on ways to effectively communicate. Group members would then be asked to offer feedback on what they saw. A discussion would ensue about communication and how to do it effectively.

No single type of introduction will work consistently for every group or group leader. The style of introduction is largely determined by the interpersonal skill of the leader and the nature of the group.

Other aspects of the group at its beginning that will be problematic if not addressed are structure, involvement, cohesion, hope and risk taking, and the termination of the session. These processes are examined more thoroughly here.

Reflection

Think of the groups you have been in during your lifetime. How did the groups that were most productive start? How did those you least enjoyed and profited from begin?

Structure

Group leaders in the initial stage of a group must make decisions on **structuring the group** (running the group according to a prescribed plan or agenda). Those conducting task/work and psychoeducational groups will be much more direct than leaders of counseling and psychotherapy groups. The advantages of structuring a group are that it promotes group cooperation, lessens anxiety, highlights individual performance, and facilitates the inclusion of everyone in the group (**Bach, 1954**). Structuring may also give leaders confidence and help them concentrate on group goals. The disadvantages of structuring are that it may discourage personal

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responsibility and restrict freedom of expression. Unstructured groups may also generate more initial anxiety and discontent (**Trotzer, 2007**).

Regardless of who promotes involvement, the structuring of a group is inevitable. As **Corey, Corey, and Corey (2014)** remind group workers, the proper question is not whether a group leader should provide structure but rather what degree of structure should be provided. A major guideline for the amount of structure will be the leader's theoretical stance. Overtly and covertly, members look to the leader for structure and answers as well as for approval and acceptance (**Yalom & Leszcz, 2005**). It is important that the leader not overstructure or understructure the group experience during the beginning sessions.

Dies (1983) has given some guidelines for proper structuring in the initial stage of group development. These ideas include awareness by leaders that directly structuring the group in its early stages facilitates the group's development and may promote the establishment of trust and the accomplishment of goals. However, structuring depends on the type of group. It can include indirect modeling of behaviors by the leader as well as confrontation of actions. Once the group begins to work well, leaders who use a lot of structure ease up on this process.

Involvement

Involvement of group members, in which they actively participate with one another and invest themselves in the group, is necessary for first sessions to work best. Structured exercises, such as those proposed by **Johnson and Johnson (2017)**, are excellent in bringing people together in a creative and enjoyable way. However, there is no instant intimacy or involvement of group members with one another.

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During the first sessions, group leaders must facilitate member interaction. The use of structured activities is one way to accomplish this goal. By discussing specific concerns related to the exercises, group members are able to stop concentrating on group acceptance issues and start focusing on individual goals. Therefore, there is a place in some groups for these activities on a limited basis. In deciding how to get members involved, leaders should focus on the primary purpose of the group before they decide on a strategy for achieving this goal. The most productive groups are composed of members who deal realistically with themselves, others, and issues.

Group Cohesion

"The effective development of any group requires that members share an image of the group" (**Hansen, Warner, & Smith, 1980**, p. 492). Unfortunately, in the initial stage of group work, "members bring individual images of the group" (p. 492). Not only is a common identity lacking, but also often group members are unsure of themselves, resist any directions from the group leader, or "play it safe" by showing a reluctance to join with others.

One way to break down this difficulty is to build **group cohesion** , that is, a sense of "We-ness" or belonging to the group (**Gray & Rubel, 2017**). Group cohesion allows individuals to voice their concerns freely and fully. By participating in this active way, members gain a sense of ownership in the group because they have invested in it. A way to enhance group cohesiveness is through the use of the arts (e.g., drawing, photography, literature) in helping group members express their feelings and thoughts more clearly (**Gladding, 2016**; **Shechtman & Perl-Dekel, 2000**). Simple art techniques in groups are usually fun and nonthreatening and involve self-disclosure. One such technique is known as "Lines of Feeling" where group members draw lines that represent how they feel in the moment (see

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Figure 4.3). Such lines can be drawn any time, especially if the group seems to be stuck. However, they are usually drawn at the beginning or ending of a group.

Figure 4.3
Lines of feeling.

The participatory process of members in simple art techniques, such as lines of feeling, is fun and promotes a sense of openness, trust, and security in the group as a whole as well as in its members. These perceptions lead to positive group member interactions like cooperation on tasks, resolution of differences, and agreement on group goals.

Although group cohesion usually does not manifest fully until the norming (or identity) stage of the group, the seeds for its development are planted early. They are rooted in attachment, as members learn to trust and interpersonally relate (**Pistole, 1997**).

Brief Case

Colleen's Cohesive Experience

Colleen was skeptical about being involved in a women's group. She was drawn to it because of her social isolation, but she was wary of it because she thought it would be too "touchy feely" and that all she would get from it

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would be an emotional purge. When she expressed her skepticism about the group during its initial session, she was surprised to hear other women voice the same concern. That made her feel closer to these strangers.

Colleen was drawn into the group even more when the leader asked members to draw a line with markers showing the emotions they were experiencing as they began the experience. Colleen used a bright orange marker. Her line was jagged up and down the page. When processing it, she was not sure if it represented anger, frustration, or nervousness. She laughed as she told the group, and in a good-natured way they laughed, too.

Questions

What do you think Colleen thought about the group after these two experiences? What else might you have done as the leader to have helped Colleen find her place in the group?

Hope and Risk Taking

Promoting hope is one of the basic "therapeutic" factors described by Yalom (**Yalom & Leszcz, 2005**). If members are hopeful that their situations can be different and better, then they are likely to work hard within the group. Leaders can instill hope during the initial sessions of the group in several ways. For instance, they can convey information to members about group process, validate commonalties among members, and accentuate the positive (**Couch & Childers, 1987**). They can also use humor or give general examples of how hope has been conveyed in other groups.

If members are able to experience a sense of **universality** (commonness with others) within the group, the group will feel more cohesive (**MacKenzie & Livesley, 1983**). They are then more likely to take risks that, when successfully completed, will add to their sense of accomplishment and attractiveness to the group. "The degree of risk

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should not be excessive at this point, or the disclosure too threatening to other members" (**MacDevitt, 1987**, p. 79). Therefore, leaders must strive for balance in the area of self-disclosure. Leaders who can facilitate the disclosure by members of limited and nonthreatening information in the early stages of the group are appropriate in what they are doing and on their way to conducting a successful group.

Closing (Terminating) of the Session

The closing or terminating of a group session is filled with many feelings—anxiety, relief, sadness, and joy. It is just as important to end a group session appropriately as it is to begin it correctly. Too often, not enough attention is focused on closing a session; a group leader may simply announce, "Time is up." **Corey et al. (2014)** recommend that at least 10 minutes be set aside at the end of a group for reflection and summarization. Otherwise, group members may become frustrated and fail to gain insight into themselves and others. The Coreys also suggest that, at the end of regular sessions, group members leave with some unanswered questions, some reflection about their involvement in the group, some self-report about what they are learning, some concentration on what they would like to explore during the next session, and some feedback from others about positive changes in their behaviors.

The initial sessions of a group are crucial in establishing such a pattern. Even if a group does not make it through more than a few sessions, many group members may experience "considerable relief " because they are able to release repressed feelings (catharsis), see themselves as possessing commonalties with others (universality), find themselves caring about the fate of -others (altruism), and experience hope about their personal futures (Zimpfer, personal communication, December 1989).

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Useful Procedures for the Beginning Stage of a Group

No one method or technique is appropriate for all aspects of a group as it begins. The reason is simple: Each group is unique. Yet there are some universal procedures that work well in most groups. The following are a few of these.

Joining

Joining is the process by which members connect with one another psychologically and physically. Joining requires that leaders and members exert some effort to meet and find out more about each other. Joining can occur in several ways. Probably the most common is for members to introduce themselves, stating their names and some brief background information. A more exciting way of joining is through an **icebreaker** — that is, an activity designed to promote communication between two or more people. Such an activity can take many forms, but its purpose is to energize, reduce anxiety, provide structure, facilitate members' introductions to each other, and promote universality among members by eliciting some personal information from each (**Brown, 2014**). An example of an icebreaker is for members simply take turns stating their name and a favorite food or activity. A more energizing but demanding icebreaker

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would be for each individual to have to introduce an individual seated nearby. Whether superficial or more complex, icebreakers are appropriate in most task/work and psychoeducational groups.

Counseling and psychotherapy groups, however, are better served when members go into more depth about themselves and explain their reasons for becoming a part of the group. They can do this in a straightforward verbal way. They can also do it more creatively by engaging in activities, such as playing a game called "numbers." In this game each individual writes down three numbers that are important to them. They show the numbers to other group members who then ask the stories behind the numbers. In this way, group members get insight into one another's lives.

Linking

Linking is the process of connecting individuals with one another by pointing out to them what they share in common. It strengthens the bonds between individuals and the group as a whole. For example, the leader may point out how two participants are dealing with issues involving loss or transition. The leader may also help the group realize through linking sentences that one of the issues during the session has been the establishment of trust. In such a case, the leader might say, "I have observed today that some of you are struggling with a common problem. Henry, Alice, Alicia, and Ernie, you all have talked about being unsure of whether you can say what you really feel in the group. The issue of trust seems important and one that is shared."

Linking is employed throughout the life of a group, but it is especially powerful at the beginning stage. Through linking, group cohesion is developed. Some group workers consider linking to be development

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because, as the group progresses, more themes, interpersonal relationships, and issues tie the group together and facilitate a sense of interrelatedness (**Trotzer, 2007**). This developmental quality of linking is more likely to occur if the process is used from the start of the group.

Reflection

Think of when someone helped you become aware of an interest or hobby that you shared with another individual. What was it like for you to gain this awareness? What did you want to do with this knowledge?

Cutting Off

Cutting off is defined in two ways. First, it is making sure that new material is not introduced into the group too late in the session for the group to deal with it adequately. For instance, if Janice, a group member, relates that she would like to share an important secret with the group, and only 5 minutes remain in the session, then the leader may cut her off. The cutoff will most likely focus on the limited amount of time left in the session. In such a procedure, the member is invited to bring up the secret information next time, and the group can begin the session with it.

The leader might phrase a cutoff statement this way: "Janice, I think the group is receptive to hearing from you but is unable to because of the time. I regret that what you wished to share has surfaced so late in the session. I need you to save this material until next session so we can deal with it properly and give it, and you, the consideration you are due."

Cutting off is also preventing group members from rambling. For instance, if Mark begins to relate his life history to the group, when all he has been

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asked to do is briefly introduce himself, then the group leader may cut him off by saying something such as, "Mark, we will go into more depth about our backgrounds as the group goes on. Now we need to move on to the next individual to make sure everyone has an opportunity to be introduced." By cutting off Mark, the leader keeps the group on task and teaches proper conduct to Mark and others in the group.

Drawing Out

The opposite of cutting off is **drawing out** , in which the leader purposefully asks more silent members to speak. For example, the leader might say, "Andy, we haven't heard from you about this matter." By using the drawing-out technique, the leader helps members feel more connected with one another. Drawing out helps members invest more in the group as well as recognize their thoughts. At the same time, other group members receive valuable information about the individual who is being drawn out. This technique is particularly appropriate for group members who tend to be introverted or reflective.

Clarifying the Purpose

Sometimes members unintentionally bring up material that is not appropriate for a beginning session or the overall purpose of the group. In these situations, the leader should **clarify the purpose** of the group with the individuals and the group as a whole, the stage the session has reached, or which behavioral interactions are appropriate. For example, the group leader may say, "Frank, your comments are quite interesting, but I am not sure where you are going with them in regard to the topic we have been

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dealing with. Remember, in this group we are focusing on improving our interpersonal communication skills."

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Summary and Conclusion

Beginning a group is a major undertaking filled with complex tasks. Group leaders who are not prepared properly can be overwhelmed by all the demands associated with this responsibility. Therefore, carefully prepared proposals and selection of group members are necessary if the group is to be successful. These processes take time and effort but are likely to pay off for the leader in such ways as receiving approval from colleagues, obtaining appropriate group members, gaining clarity on group and individual goals, and ensuring as much as possible confidentiality and proper procedure. Groups that begin well are more likely ultimately to do well.

Group leaders need to be prepared for developmental and unexpected events within the group, such as members who play certain roles and processes that contribute positively or negatively to group and individual growth. Structuring the group and confronting problems when they occur are important for an overall successful outcome. There is no way to know exactly what will happen when, but group leaders who have knowledge about how to open and close first group sessions, as well as how to help group members get what they both want and need, are valuable resources whose importance cannot be underestimated.

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Classroom Exercises

1. Draw up a proposal for a group you would like to lead following the model presented in this chapter. Present it to three other people in a small group of four, and elicit their feedback about ways to improve your ideas. Take turns listening to others in the group and making positive suggestions to them on ways to refine what they are proposing.
2. Using seven volunteer class members, assign one to play the role of the group leader who will screen the others as potential group members for a personal growth group. Have the leader interview members individually and in subgroups of two or three. Notice which questions are asked and how the interview process differs on an individual and a small-group basis. Then have the leader screen members for a task-oriented group. How do the questions differ? Discuss as a class what you observed.
3. Invite a group leader to speak to your class about how he or she conducts the initial sessions of groups and gets them off to good beginnings. Specifically focus on how the leader deals with the matter of confidentiality and troublesome group procedures such as those discussed in this chapter.
4. What ground rules do you consider essential for conducting an initial group session? How would these rules differ if the group were therapy oriented as opposed to task oriented?

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MyLab Counseling: Group Work

In the Topic 8 Assignments: Early Stages of Group Formation, try:

Application Exercise 8.1: Structuring an Inpatient Group and Licensure Quiz 8.1: Early Group Preparation

Application Exercise 8.2: Finding Similarities and Licensure Quiz 8.2: Screening and Pretraining

Application Exercise 8.4: The Beginning Stages of Different Types of Groups and Licensure Quiz 8.3: Tasks of the Beginning Group

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6 The Working Stage in a Group: Performing

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In the calmness of reflection

we examine the depths of our lives

and the purposes for which we have come together.

I am amazed that out of silence

and through sharing

a whole new group has evolved.

In the process of working

we have welded an identity

from where we shall stand

and likewise be moved.*

**From "In Reflection" © 1993 by Samuel T. Gladding. Reprinted by permission from Samuel T. Gladding.*

Chapter Overview

From reading this chapter, you will learn about

- Peer relationships, task processes, and team building during the working stage of a group
- Problems that may arise in the working stage of the group
- Strategies for assisting groups in the working stage and achieving positive outcomes

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As you read, consider

- What part(s) you have played in being a part of a team
- Difficulties you may have had as a member of a team or a group
- Ways you have helped others in a group or the group itself reach a goal

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Henry Ford is credited with converting the automobile from an expensive curiosity into a practical and affordable reality. He did so by making use of specialized groups. He changed the ways automobiles were made from one at a time to a moving assembly line where workers would add a crucial part to the car at every station. In a 20-year period (starting in 1908), more than 15 million Model T cars were sold. Ford had proven that small groups of skilled workers could cooperate to make a finished product one step at a time. The adjustment and innovation Ford implemented paid off, and its modern equivalent is found today in total quality groups where camaraderie and expertise are blended together.

Although their groups are broader and more complex than the groups Ford set up, members of successful, ongoing groups in all walks of life usually experience a number of adjustments and changes before they begin to work. However, after a group makes the transition from forming to resolving conflicts and norming, the **working stage** begins. This stage focuses on the achievement of individual and group goals and the movement of the group itself into a more unified and productive system.

The working stage is described as the group's "performing stage" (**Tuckman & Jensen, 1977**) and its "action stage" (**George & Dustin, 1988**). It is a time of problem solving that usually lasts longer than any of the other group stages. In groups of all types, somewhere between 40% and 60% of the total group time will be spent in this stage. Task/work groups will generally spend a higher percentage of their time here than will counseling, psychotherapy, or psychoeducational groups because of their purposes and the ways they are run. The working stage is often regarded as the most productive stage in group development and is characterized by its constructive nature and the achievement of results.

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During the working stage—as compared to the other stages—group leaders and members feel more freedom and comfort in trying out new behaviors and strategies because the group is settled and issues, such as power and control, have been worked through enough for members to trust one another. At this stage in the group's development, "therapeutic forces," such as openness to self, others, and new ideas, "are well-established" (**Ohlsen, Horne, & Lawe, 1988**, p. 88). A healthy group, regardless of its purpose, displays a great amount of intimacy, self-disclosure, feedback, teamwork, confrontation, and humor. These positive behaviors are expressed in interpersonal relationships among members (in peer relations). Other behaviors of the group during this stage are primarily focused on task-related endeavors, such as achieving specific goals. Both peer- and task-related dimensions of a group in the working stage are considered in this chapter, along with generic core skills.

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Peer Relationships

In the working stage of most groups, members appear to show genuine concern for one another on a deep, personal level. Participants are more *intimate* after control problems have been resolved. Feelings of empathy, compassion, and care abound, and groups gradually grow closer emotionally. This interpersonal bonding, or **cohesiveness** , usually increases, even in task/work groups, as group members interact and understand one another better. This process has positive repercussions in terms of member satisfaction and individuals' feelings about themselves and the group as a whole (**Perrone & Sedlacek, 2000**).

Emotional closeness is especially likely to grow if group members can identify socially with one another and if they have been successful in working through their struggles together. An appreciation of cultural differences is helpful in this process. Whereas the previous stages of the group were characterized by concerns of being *"in and out"* (becoming a member of the group, as opposed to being an outsider) and *"top to bottom"* (establishing a place in the group structure), the working stage of the group focuses on *"near and far"* (**Schutz, 1966**). Participants establish how physically and psychologically close they wish to be to others and behave accordingly.

Along with positive feelings about the group and the constructive behaviors of its members comes a greater willingness to self-disclose (reveal information about yourself to the group). Society generally discourages

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self-disclosure (**Jourard, 1971**), and in some groups, such as task/work groups or psychoeducational groups, it may be inappropriate for members to be too open. For example, if members talk extensively about family secrets in psychoeducational groups, they most likely have overstepped appropriate limits. However, self-disclosure has a place in most groups.

Self-disclosure involves more than simply talking about yourself. It is a multidimensional activity. It involves listening and receiving feedback as well as speaking. It is related to many other factors, such as the type of group you are in, the level of others' disclosures, group norms, and timing (**Morran, 1982**; **Stockton & Morran, 1980**; **Wilson & Hanna, 1986**).

Brief Case

Self-Disclosing Sally

The group Sally has been in for the past 5 weeks is a counseling group composed of women who have all been abused. Sally has had little to say, although she has been very involved mentally. However, in the middle of the session after Tameka has shared, Sally speaks up. She discloses to the group not only the abuse of the past but also the reasons why she did not leave her situation earlier. It is something that is hard for her to do and yet something she feels "comfortable" in doing. At the end of her self-disclosure, Sally admits she was scared to bring up her situation. Yet she says that the disclosures of others and the fact that she is feeling comfortable with others made her want to let them know about her situation.

Questions

What do you think is healthy about Sally's actions? What are some potential dangers or drawbacks?

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The **Johari Awareness Model** , sometimes called the *Johari Window,* is a good representation of what happens in the arena of self-disclosure when a group is in the working stage (**Luft, 1984**). This model also illustrates how appropriate disclosure develops during the life of the group (see **Figure 6.1**).

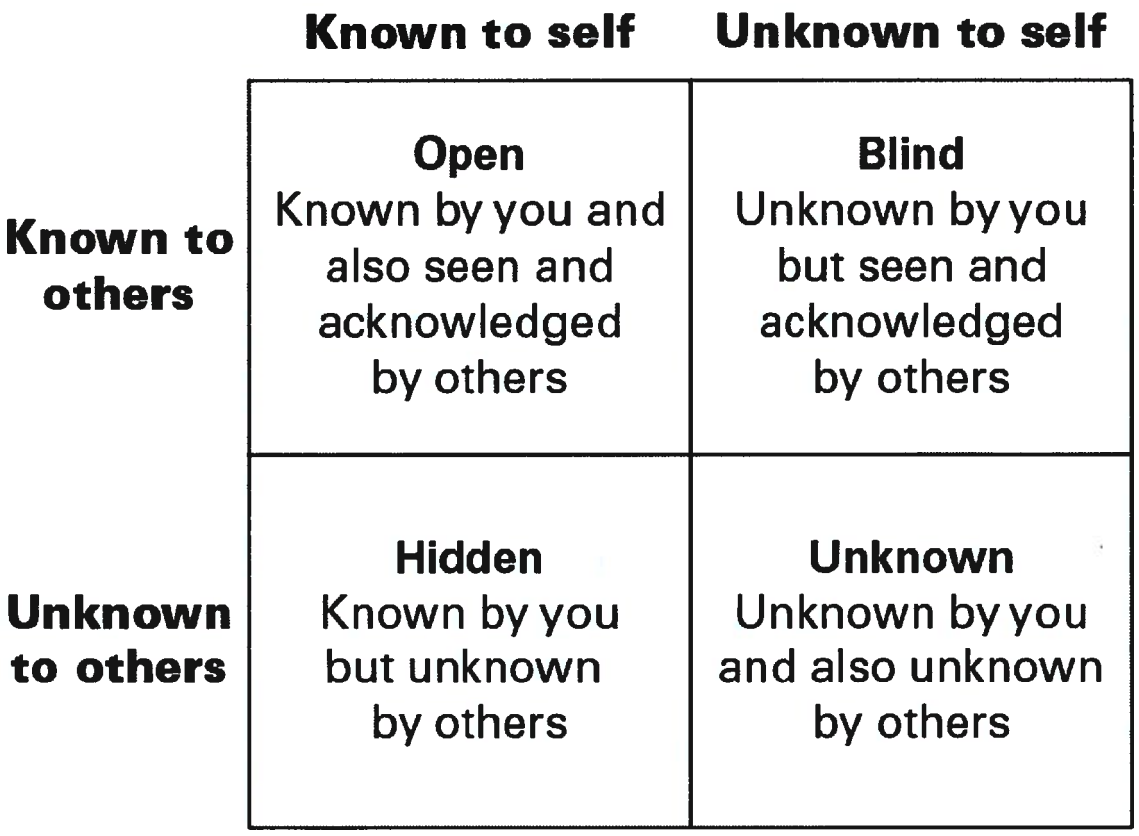

Figure 6.1
Johari Window.

Source: Based on J. Luft (1963). Group Processes: An Introduction to Group Dynamics. Copyright © 1963 by The McGraw-Hill Companies.

The first quadrant (the **open quadrant**) contains information that is generally known to self and others. For example, Flo knows the group is aware she chews her nails. In the working stage, this quadrant expands. Members learn one another's names, stories, and likes and dislikes. With an expansion of knowledge, participants are able to interact more fully and freely. Exchanges of thoughts and feelings move to a deeper and more

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personal level. What was previously hidden from others and even from yourself is now exposed and dealt with openly.

The second quadrant (the **hidden quadrant**) contains undisclosed information known only to yourself. This quadrant shrinks during the working stage, through self-disclosure. For example, group members become aware of the experiences others have had, such as the fact that Larry has traveled extensively or that Jackson studied abroad. This information would not be apparent unless it was willingly revealed. Members become increasingly comfortable with one another because of finding out more about one another. This comfort leads them to take further risks in revealing hidden secrets to the group as a whole, as Sally did in the example given earlier. When this process happens, members who have opened up, and the group as a whole, are freer to explore other personal and interpersonal dimensions of relationships that were previously limited to them.

The third quadrant (the **blind quadrant**) is originally unknown to yourself but known to others when the group began. For instance, Tom may be unaware that his face twitches slightly before he speaks in the group, but everyone else sees it. In the working stage, the personal unknown area diminishes. Feedback is a key ingredient in this process, as members share their impressions of one another. There is a risk in giving and receiving feedback of this nature, for not all comments may be positive. Therefore, group leaders need to monitor and, if necessary, intervene to be sure effective feedback takes place at this time and throughout the group. Through sharing on a number of levels, members come to know about how they are seen and are able to interact on a deeper and more authentic level in the group.

The fourth quadrant (the **unknown quadrant**) is full of potential. It contains material hidden from self and others because of a lack of

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opportunity. As the group progresses, this quadrant shrinks. It may be developed in the group because of crises or opportunities. The possibilities and potentials that individuals possess lie dormant until opportunities arise to express them. In the working stage of the group, some situations develop in which, unknown to the group or the person, an untapped talent emerges. For example, Brenda, a shy group member, may suddenly take the lead when the group is in the midst of a dilemma, such as searching for ways to deal with a rival group in a positive way. Although unexpected, this type of emergent behavior is usually welcomed by all within the group because it represents growth.

Overall, in the working stage of the group, members become increasingly aware of individual participants and the world of each person. More sharing of past and present experiences and perceptions ensues, and risk taking increases. The group and its members achieve growth and freedom. New discoveries open the group and its members to other insights and actions as well. A long-term, closed group membership is especially prone to display these behaviors.

Reflection

When have you seen someone and the group they were in surprised by that person's actions? What do you think happened to trigger such new behavior? How was it similar to or different from the process described in the fourth quadrant (IV) of the Johari Window?

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Task Processes During the Working Stage

The major emphasis in the working stage is productivity, whether the results are tangibly visible or not. Group members focus on improving themselves or achieving specific individual and group goals. One way productivity may be increased is by encouraging equal member airtime through making **rounds** (**Yalom & Leszcz, 2005**). This procedure has been elaborated on previously, but its importance as a process in a group that is working cannot be overestimated. Members who are given time during the group to discuss issues of concern to them will invest more deeply in the group with each session and will do the type of work that can benefit them and the group as a whole. For example, if in a counseling group Timothy realizes the group will help him in finding new ways to overcome his shyness with women, then he is likely to attend all group meetings faithfully and participate actively. The only problem with the technique of rounds is having enough time for all members to articulate and work on situations to the extent they wish.

A second way tasks are accomplished in the working stage is through **role-playing** . In role-plays, members are given a chance to assume an identity that differs widely from their present behavior. Role-playing is a tool for bringing patterns of behavior and their consequences into focus, "by allowing participants to experience the situations concretely . . . gain insight into their behavior, and practice the skills required to manage the

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situation constructively" (**Johnson & Johnson, 2017**, p. 55). This psychodramatic technique can be powerful in helping group members see and feel how certain actions will be experienced before they actually occur outside the group (**Shaffer, 1997**).

Trust and caring are vital in the role-playing process, and specific ideas about what the group member wants to accomplish are helpful. In a role-play, the participants set up an imaginary life situation and ask others in the group to play certain parts while they respond in a prescribed way, such as remaining calm. After the action is completed, the member and the group discuss benefits, consequences, and alternative ways of behaving in the given situation.

Brief Case

Name-Calling Nanette

Nanette is an overweight, unkempt, and lethargic sixth-grader. She is teased a lot in school. The counseling group she is in is working with her on controlling her temper. She is asked to play the role of being nonchalant when others poke fun at her. She pretends the words are like raindrops bouncing off a finely waxed car. She is in the driver's seat and can remain cool instead of revving up. Nanette finds her role refreshing, and she is surprised she can control her temper.

Questions

How do you think the car metaphor helps Nanette? What other roles might Nanette play that would help her? How might she transfer what she does in a role-play to real life?

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A group member can have a frustrating experience in a role-play and still benefit from it. For instance, Helen asked her psychoeducational group members to role-play a situation with her in which she confronted her boss about his rude and demeaning behavior to her. Although group members tried to assist Helen in their enactment of roles, Helen was not sure after the role-play ended whether she had found a way to address her boss. However, as she continued talking, Helen began to realize that, although she had not achieved all that she wished, she did feel some relief and confidence about the situation and had a base from which to continue.

Another task process that is prevalent in the working stage is **homework** , or working outside the group itself. Group members often find they need to carry behaviors they practice within the group to situations outside the group. Although the group or its leader may not give members a specific assignment, they will often try out new skills and bring their experiences back to the group to process. In this way, participants receive twice the benefits they would otherwise: they get to practice skills in a real-life situation, and they get to interact with the group about the experience.

An example of homework is a member practicing being calm when his colleagues in a work setting make demands on him. In returning to the group, he can not only relate how his homework went but also receive support and suggestions from other group members on future homework assignments. Homework generally varies in its intensity and importance. Sometimes, simple and less noticeable acts are vital homework tasks. These include calling friends, going to a meeting, or inviting someone over for refreshments.

Reflection

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Outside of an educational setting, when have you had homework or given yourself homework? How did that work for you? How have you seen homework benefit others?

A final dimension that must be considered in the working stage of the group is **incorporation** (a personal awareness and appreciation of what the group has accomplished on an individual and a collective level). When the working stage of a group ends, members should have a feeling and knowledge of what was achieved and how. Through incorporation, members realize the value of the group in their lives and remember critical times in the group regarding what they or other members said or did. Incorporation prepares members to move on to the termination stage. For example, in thinking about the group as it progressed, Eileen was able to realize she took risks in the group by disclosing information she had never revealed before. Instead of being devastating, this experience gave her a sense of relief and direction. She was able to take satisfaction in what she had done and began to see she could accomplish goals outside the group. Her gratitude for the group and for what she learned as a result of being in it increased.

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Teamwork and Team Building During the Working Stage

Teamwork and team building are vital in the working stage of groups (**Klein et al., 2009**; **Kline, 2001**; **Ward, 1997**). A **team** is "a number of persons associated together in work or activity" (***Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 2003**). The outcome of a team effort is seen most graphically in athletic or artistic competition. In these competitions members of a group act and perform in a coordinated way to achieve a goal in a unified and coordinated manner, such as scoring points in a basketball game or a dance contest (as in the television show *So You Think You Can Dance?*).

Groups sometimes function as teams, whether planned or not. However, selecting members of a group who have excellent emotional intelligence will function best in a team environment because they will add to the group's expressive astuteness and ensure the best possible results (**Peterson, 2012**). Two ways of selecting members are by using the **Team Player Inventory (TPI)** or the **Group Emotional Intelligence Individual Regulation (GEI-IR)** . The TPI is a 10-item assessment instrument that denotes the degree to which individuals are predisposed toward organizational team-working environments (**Kline, 1999**). It is practical in determining whether "there are team members who view team work environments as primarily negative" as well as identifying individuals who "are positively predisposed to working in a team environment" (p. 110). The GEI-IR is a three-pronged instrument with a group efficacy scale, a

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group trust scale, and a group cohesiveness scale. It has practical applications in that it can be used both during a group's life and at its conclusion.

After team members are selected, the next major step in team building is promoting a team spirit. Increasing team spirit increases the likelihood that a group will work together constructively. It is done by encouraging **teamwork** (all members of a group working together cooperatively) through team building. The process of **team building** takes time and may assume different patterns over time (**Klein et al., 2009**; **Kormanski, 1999**). For example, some teams may build through completing tasks together, whereas others may do so through extended group discussions. Groups that work to achieve consensus, promote interpersonal relationships, and minimize conflict perform best.

In psychoeducational groups, teamwork and learning are promoted by emphasizing how groups can achieve tasks that cannot be accomplished by an individual alone (**Gough, 1987**). For instance, if an academic class is given a long reading assignment that could not be covered by one class member in the time allotted, a study group team could come together and distribute the readings. Then each member could become an expert on an area he or she would later teach the group when they reassembled (**Light, 1994**).

Teamwork is considered so important to many organizations that teachers from graduate business schools to elementary schools often break their classes into teams at the beginning of a term to help them to master material and learn how to work cooperatively with others. A team can be a socializing as well as a productive experience. The founder of reality therapy, **William Glasser (1986a)**, considers teams to be an essential part of his theory, especially as it relates to control within self and others. Teamwork and the team building that goes with it can also be applied to

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counseling and psychotherapy groups in stressing the importance of the interpersonal dimension in your own growth and development.

Effective development of a team (team building) can take other forms as well. **Maples (1992)** has proposed one model of developing a group into a team. She premises her model on the assumption that group members trust one another and are motivated for success. Basic components of this model involve choice and ownership. Groups that make positive choices that lead to success do so from a stance of openness, honesty, compassion, enthusiasm, and integrity, and a commitment to communication. The ownership of the group is achieved in such cases through patience, objectivity, personal responsibility, and investing energy in the group. Keeping focused in the present, being sincere, and at times being introspective or humorous are other factors that help the group achieve a sense of unity as a team. Maples suggests that groups also need **ice-breaking exercises** (introductory activities that link people together). Such exercises increase the group members' awareness of one another or remind them of what they did in previous sessions.

Brief Case

Bulldozing Barney

Barney believes it is always best to get down to business as soon as possible. Therefore, when his task group comes into a room, he gives them an agenda and tells them what they are going to do. He then begins the meeting by going item by item through the handout. Barney's group appears to be unmotivated, and they are behind other groups at the same company who have had a similar assignment.

Questions

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What do you think is going on inside Barney's group? How do you think Barney is feeling? Thinking? What do you think the group members are feeling and thinking?

Ward (1997, pp. 115–116) has listed six other factors that either contribute to or distract from the development of teams:

1. **Leadership style**—A democratic style works best in building teams because of its cooperative emphasis.
2. **Member maturity and motivation**—The more of each, the better.
3. **Group task or purpose characteristics**—Some tasks lend themselves to cooperative work more than others.
4. **Membership stability and group size**—Irregular attendance is distracting, and having either too many or too few members prohibits the development of a team effort.
5. **Time availability**—It is crucial that group goals match time availability.
6. **Organizational, institutional, cultural, and societal expectations**—The setting in which a group is conducted will influence whether teamwork is valued, as will the backgrounds of those involved.

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Problems in the Working Stage of Groups

Despite good intentions, some groups are more productive than others for a variety of reasons, including pregroup preparation, the composition of group members, the group's focus, and group leadership/followership interactions. Among specific problems that arise during the working stage are fear and resistance, challenges to leaders, and a lack of focus on achieving individual and group goals. These problems are expressed in numerous ways, such as intense emotionality in members, projection or scapegoating of a member, and lack of constructive participation. Focusing on issues outside the group, such as gender or race, or turning inward as a group to be protective (collusion) are also problematic and are considered here.

Racial and Gender Issues

Matters pertaining to race and gender are manifest in some groups more than others, but they occur in most types of groups in both subtle and blatant ways. The thoughts and feelings surrounding these descriptors of individuals reflect societal attitudes in general. In regard to race, **Rokeach, Smith, and Evans (1960)** propose that racial prejudice is based on assumptions about the beliefs and attitudes of individuals of a given race.

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Some groups may struggle or engage in high conflict because of racial prejudices among members. Other groups deal with racial issues through denial (**Lanier & Robertiello, 1977**). Individuals who hold stereotyped views and act accordingly are **culturally encapsulated** (**Wrenn, 1985**) and behave in a rigid and stereotyped manner (**Ivey, Pedersen, & Ivey, 2001**). Contact with others from different cultures in a group context often helps members become more aware of their racial feelings. It can have "the healthy effect" of making them realize their ethnocentric assumptions and limiting beliefs, "thus leading to a broader view of human nature" (**Walsh, 1989**, p. 547).

The same dysfunctional/functional and nonproductive/productive dynamic of prejudice and stereotypes may occur in regard to gender, too (**Sullivan, 1983b**). In such cases, the w

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Problems in the Working Stage of GroupsDespite good intentions, some groups are more productive than others for a variety of reasons, including pregroup preparation, the composition of group members, the group's focus, and group leadership/followership interactions. Among specific problems that arise during the working stage are fear and resistance, challenges to leaders, and a lack of focus on achieving individual and group goals. These problems are expressed in numerous ways, such as intense emotionality in members, projection or scapegoating of a member, and lack of constructive participation. Focusing on issues outside the group, such as gender or race, or turning inward as a group to be protective (collusion) are also problematic and are considered here.Racial and Gender IssuesMatters pertaining to race and gender are manifest in some groups more than others, but they occur in most types of groups in both subtle and blatant ways. The thoughts and feelings surrounding these descriptors of individuals reflect societal attitudes in general. In regard to race, Rokeach, Smith, and Evans (1960) propose that racial prejudice is based on assumptions about the beliefs and attitudes of individuals of a given race. Some groups may struggle or engage in high conflict because of racial prejudices among members. Other groups deal with racial issues through denial (Lanier & Robertiello, 1977). Individuals who hold stereotyped views and act accordingly are culturally encapsulated (Wrenn, 1985) and behave in a rigid and stereotyped manner (Ivey, Pedersen, & Ivey, 2001). Contact with others from different cultures in a group context often helps members become more aware of their racial feelings. It can have "the healthy effect" of making them realize their ethnocentric assumptions and limiting beliefs, "thus leading to a broader view of human nature" (Walsh, 1989, p. 547).The same dysfunctional/functional and nonproductive/productive dynamic of prejudice and stereotypes may occur in regard to gender, too (Sullivan, 1983b). In such cases, the words man and woman are highlighted at the expense of the concept individual. The result is that men and women must learn new roles within the group that give them greater freedom to be flexible and competent. Sometimes others hamper this new learning, but it has a good chance of success if it is begun early in the group's development. Leaders must work with the group to prevent or limit negative outcomes among members by increasing sensitivity and decreasing the escalation of conflict (Korda & Pancrazio, 1989). Generally, the issue of gender is highly visible and dealt with constructively by group leaders and members as part of larger issues in the working stage.Group CollusionGroup collusion involves cooperating with others unconsciously or consciously "to reinforce prevailing attitudes, values, behaviors, or norms" (Butler, 1987, p. 1). The purpose of such behavior is self-protection. Its effect is to maintain the status quo in the group. For example, in work groups, when subordinates agree with their boss to keep from being fired, they are engaging in a collusion process. The same is true in psychoeducational groups when students concur with their professors to receive a good grade.Most groups experience some degree of collusion, but in extremes, group collusion prevents open discussion, critical thinking, and problem solving. Such closedness, and the conformity promoted by it, may lead to a destructive process that is regressive in nature. Janis (1982) has called this phenomenon groupthink. In a groupthink situation, there is a, "deterioration of mental efficiency, reality testing, and moral judgment that results from in-group pressures" (Janis, 1972, p. 9). Forms of groupthink may become destructive and even deadly. Evidence of the lethal nature of groupthink can be found in the Bay of Pigs invasion of the Kennedy administration; the mass suicide that occurred in Jonestown, Guyana, under the leadership of the Reverend Jim Jones; and the Branch Davidian tragedy in Waco, Texas. In less severe cases, groupthink inhibits growth and represses individual and group development. For example, in some work groups, criticism of a new or existing product may be suppressed because of groupthink. Ignoring the groupthink attitude and expressing criticism may cause talented individuals to lose their jobs and influence in a company. The cartoon "Dilbert" regularly illustrates examples of groupthink in businesses.To prevent group collusion from occurring to any great extent, group membership should be diversified. In addition, open discussion should be

promoted, and goals and purposes should be continuously clarified. As a precautionary measure, some type of devil's advocate procedure should be actively implemented. This procedure entails asking one or more members in the group to question group decisions with a firm skepticism before the group reaches a conclusion. Such an approach is especially helpful, "when the decision scenario involves high uncertainty (little predictability) but plenty of available information" (Chen, Lawson, Gordon, & McIntosh, 1996, p. 589). Interpersonal relationship skills should be strengthened as well. "Groups who wish to structure themselves to avoid faulty decision making are well advised to have impartial leadership and methodical procedures where they avoid overestimation of the group, closed-mindedness, and pressures toward conformity" (Schafer & Crichlow, 1996, p. 429).Brief CaseDanielle as the Devil's AdvocateDanielle is not very popular in her work group. She is always questioning. She wants to know what the expected outcome of an action might be, and if she does not get a specific answer, she will not cooperate with the group. Everyone in the group is tired of her "attitude," and they are now signing a petition to get her transferred.QuestionsWhy do you think the group's action is a good or bad idea? What else might they do? What else might Danielle do to help make the group more productive?

The Working Stage of the Group and Groups that WorkJust as there is a difference in the dynamics underlying the working stage of a group's development, there is also a difference in working and nonworking groups. For instance, members of working groups have a sense of cohesion and trust with one another. They work in the present and are willing to take risks in self-disclosing or sharing ideas. When disagreement exists in the group, members acknowledge it and deal with it in an open manner. Communication is clear and direct, and members use one another as resources. In addition, working groups are aware of the group progress and process. They either accept responsibility for doing their part within the group in relation to their own or the group goals. They give honest feedback to one another without fear of reprisal. They are hopeful and secure within the group and are therefore able to maximize their thinking, feeling, and behaving capabilities. Corey, Corey, and Corey (2014) have identified about 20 characteristics that compare working and non-working groups. These characteristics include such factors as trust, clear goals, functional leadership, cohesion, acceptance, feedback, clear communication, diversity, and cooperation.Corey et al. believe leaders and members play vital, interactive parts in the success or failure of the group. Research confirms such a view. Leaders who have prepared themselves and their members adequately beforehand are more likely than not to be successful. However, despite preparation, incidents may happen within the working stage of a group that cause problems. For example, the death of a loved one may influence a group member to focus on his or her internal agendas rather than the group's task. Likewise, an unresolved conflict between group members may break down the harmony and constructive nature of the group.

Strategies for Assisting Groups in the Working StageWhen groups are not doing well in the working stage, several approaches can rectify the situation. They include modeling by the leader (Borgers & Koenig, 1983), exercises (Corey, Corey, Callanan, & Russell, 2014), group observing group (Cohen & Smith, 1976), brainstorming (Osborn, 1957), nominal-group technique (NGT) (Delbecq & Van de Ven, 1971), synectics (Gordon, 1961), written projections (Hoskins, 1984), group processing (J. Donigian, personal communication, July 8, 1994), and teaching of skills (Toth & Erwin, 1998).Modeling by the LeaderThe modeling method is used to teach group members complex behaviors in a relatively short time by copying or imitating. Modeling depends on timing, reinforcement, the amount of positive feedback received, the view of the group leader, the degree of trust, and the amount of motivation for imitation. Borgers and Koenig (1983) stress that group members borrow from leaders and other members what they need to

function better and become more their own individuals. Leaders can promote working in the group by displaying behaviors congruent with this stage, such as self-disclosure, or by having a core of group members with whom others can readily identify display such actions. The latter strategy of having peers help peers is especially effective if the members who are modeling behaviors are similar to those they are helping in regard to age, gender, and background (Cox, 1999).ExercisesExercises involve less direct showing and more experiential integration. "The term exercise is used among group leaders to refer to activities that the group does for a specific purpose" (Jacobs, Schimmel, Masson, & Harvill, 2016, p. 219). There are different views about whether preplanned exercises should be used in groups and when. On one end of the spectrum is a view represented by Rogers (1970), who advocates the avoidance of "any procedure that is planned" (p. 56). On the other end of this continuum are leaders who simply employ a series of exercises in their groups from group exercise books (e.g., Pfeiffer & Jones, 1972–1980).A more moderate approach is using exercises in groups at specific times for particular reasons (Carroll, Bates, & Johnson, 2004). As Jacobs et al. (2016) point out, a leader may employ group exercises for at least seven reasons:To increase the comfort levelTo provide the leader with useful informationTo generate discussion and focus the groupTo shift the focusTo deepen the focusTo provide the opportunity for experiential learningTo provide fun and relaxation (p. 205)All of these reasons make it likely that sometimes group leaders will employ a prestructured exercise during the working stage of the group. Preplanned exercise experiences should not be used indiscriminately or even frequently in the working stage of most groups. However, interventions such as these, when well planned and tailored to a particular situation, can increase member awareness and responsiveness to self and others. Whether exercises are used in group work depends on the need for these devices, the comfort of the group and its leader with them, and the potential benefits and liabilities of using such procedures (Wenz & McWhirter, 1990).As previously discussed, an icebreaker at the beginning of a group can be a potent stimulant, as can a well-timed intervention at a critical moment in the group's development. For instance, if a counseling group appears to be anxious and overly concerned about one of its members, Michelle, and is talking about her instead of with her, then the leader might simply ask the group to gather in a tight circle with arms interlocked. Michelle would then be invited to try to break through the circle, which, even if she is successful, would be frustrating and aggravating. From this brief exercise, the leader could help the group focus on its dynamics and the group processes that keep the group from discussing their anxiety about Michelle with her.Regardless of the types of exercises used, "it is the processing of those activities that translates what happens in group into interpersonal and intrapersonal learning for group members" (DeLucia-Waack, 1997b, p. 82). Through processing of an experiential exercise, group members may "develop a plan of action for transferring . . . learning to their lives outside of the group" (Kees & Jacobs, 1990, p. 23). This benefit may be especially powerful because it offers group members new possibilities for influencing the course of their lives positively.Despite benefits, group exercises have disadvantages, too (Gladding, 2016). If they are used too often, group members may become overly dependent on the leader. Exercises may make some group members angry or resentful because members may feel a lack of control over what will happen next. Finally, if employed too frequently, exercises can disrupt the natural development of a group. Therefore, prudence is called for when exercises are used in groups.ReflectionWhen have you been in a group where the leader used exercises? How did you like the experiential nature of what you did? What drawbacks or doubts did you have in following the leader's directions? If you were running a group, when might you use exercises? Why?Group Observing GroupGroup observing group requires that the group break up into two smaller groups in any way the leader directs and that each watch the other function (as outsiders). This process is sometimes called a fishbowl procedure (see Figure 6.2).Figure 6.2Group observing group.After the group observations are completed, the group reunites, and members give one another and

the group as a whole feedback on what was observed. The intent of this activity is to help members focus on common concerns that outweigh differences and to begin working harder on shared agendas.For example, Carolyn might notice that the group she is observing struggles with the problem of making sure everyone who wants to contribute is heard. This awareness helps her realize her own group is not unique in its quest to be fair to all members and make sure they have a say. She also realizes some things she could do differently in her own group, such as being an encourager of individuals who are most reflective and less likely to participate overtly.A variation on the fishbowl is the two-way fishbowl, that is, the 2-FB model (Hensley, 2002). This model is primarily a group training approach that can be used in academic classes. Participants learn about group theory, process, and leadership by taking on and integrating four different roles: class participant, group member, observation team member, and group leader. Each role provides students with a different lens through which to view and then reflect on the evolution of working groups as they move in and out of these various roles.Brainstorming/BrainwritingBrainstorming and brainwriting are ways to stimulate divergent thinking. They both require an initial generating of ideas in a nonjudgmental manner (Osborn, 1957). The premise of these approaches is that critical evaluations of ideas and actions often hold back creativity and member participation. Therefore, in these procedures, the ideas of every person are recorded first before any comments are made. Quantity is emphasized in this process—the more ideas, the better. Only after a large number of ideas have been written down do members go back and evaluate the feasibility of what they have contributed. This results in an increase in group activity and responsibility as well as an emphasis on reality. The brainwriting method helps to keep focus without the need for a moderator, takes care of ideas documentation, and is efficient. However, by the time ideas are judged along qualitative lines, many thoughts have been contributed that would not have been voiced otherwise.One way of brainwriting is the 6-3-5 exercise. The name 6-3-5 comes from the process of having 6 people write 3 ideas in 5 minutes. Each individual has a blank 6-3-5 worksheet with the problem to be worked at the top of the sheet (see Figure 6.3). The individual fills out his or her ideas in complete and concise sentences (6 to 10 words). After jotting down three ideas, he or she passes the worksheet to the next person in the group after the 5-minute time limit is up. The process continues until the worksheet is completed. More than one problem can be worked on during brainwriting. Members may build on fellow members' ideas through editing, or they are free to add new suggestions.Figure 6.3The 6-3-5 exercise.Problem Statement: Idea 1Idea 2Idea 31 2 3 4 5 6

Nominal-Group TechniqueAnother helpful procedure for getting the group to work is the nominal-group technique (NGT). This process has up to six steps (Delbecq, Van de Ven, & Gustafson, 1975). In the first step, the group leader introduces the problem or issue briefly and then asks members to silently, and individually, generate a number of ideas or solutions connected with the statement. Members are given 10 to 15 minutes to complete this exercise and are asked to do it in writing. The second step involves members' sharing of ideas, with each person stating an idea in a round-robin fashion and the group leader writing that idea and an identification code on a blackboard or flip chart before the next individual speaks.The third step requires a discussion of ideas for clarification, with "What did you mean when you said . . . ?" dialogue. The fourth step has members write their top five ideas or solutions on an index card. The leader then collects the cards, a vote is tallied, and the information is fed back to the group. In the fifth step, a short discussion of the vote follows. At this time, members can again raise points, seek clarification, or solicit comments. The final step is a possible revote, which usually takes place if the discussion on the original vote has brought out new information that members want to consider in light of their earlier decision.NGT does not require the open exposure of members as much as brainstorming. However, it is quite useful in getting group members to think and work on problematic situations, especially in task/work groups. Overall,

NGT places more objectivity in the group decision-making process than almost any other method.SynecticsA novel way of helping groups in the working stage become more productive is synectics. The word synectics, from the Greek, means the joining of different and apparently irrelevant elements. Synectics theory applies to the integration of diverse individuals into "a problem-stating, problem-solving group" (Gordon, 1961, p. 1). Synectics follows the general pattern of group discussions—problem statement, discussion, solution generation, and decision. There are several important differences, however.First, throughout the discussion, members are asked to analyze all sides of an issue by adopting a spectrum policy. This policy is the recognition that few ideas are totally good or bad. Next, members are encouraged to express their wishes and hopes throughout this process. Although they may not receive what they wish for, members are able to clarify what they want more clearly through this process and to relieve some pent-up frustrations.A very refreshing and stimulating part of synectics is called excursions. In these activities, members actually take a break—a vacation—from problem solving and engage in exercises involving fantasy, metaphor, and analogy. For example, members might play with how many career paths they could take to be elected president of their country. The idea is that the material generated in these processes can be reintegrated into the group later, specifically to issues that are of individual and group importance.Written ProjectionsWritten projections are yet another means to help a group during the working stages. Members are asked to see themselves or their groups in the future as having been successful and to describe what the experience was like. Group members are able to play with their fantasies at times as well as be realistic. An example of projection that captures the spirit of this approach is the writing of a therapeutic fairy tale (Hoskins, 1984). Within 6 to 10 minutes, members are to write their story beginning with "Once upon a time" and including: (a) a problem or predicament; (b) a solution, even if it appears outlandish; and (c) a positive, pleasing ending. The time limit helps members focus on the task and prevents resistance.A group member in a therapeutic group once wrote this fairy tale:Once upon a time, there was an old woman who had managed, like the woman in the shoe, to raise a number of children. The only problem was that the children now knew what they wanted to do with their lives, and the old woman did not. At first, she got depressed and thought if she got sad enough, the children would come back to her. They did, but they were angry and put her in a mental health facility. She tried getting even more down, but her strategy just did not seem to help. The children abandoned her.One day the old woman woke up and said to herself, "Today, I'll wear purple, a healing color, and I will go out in the wards and say hello to everyone I meet." She did, and, to her amazement, most of those she encountered responded back in a positive way. She felt better, they felt better, and as a result she realized all the world could now be her surrogate children. Therefore, she left the hospital with a good feeling and a great plan and lived happily both with her children and with her neighbors.Group ProcessingAnother strategy for helping groups maximize their resources in the working stage is through group processing. "Processing can be defined as capitalizing on significant happenings in the here-and-now interactions of the group to help members reflect on the meaning of their experience; better understand their own thoughts, feelings, and actions; and generalize what is learned to their life outside the group" (Stockton, Morran, & Nitza, 2000, p. 345). Group processing "refers to the dynamics that naturally occur in the group" (p. 345) or, as Yalom and Leszcz (2005) have characterized it, "the nature of the relationship between interacting individuals" (p. 143). To enhance processing for group workers and group members, the strategy of note taking is recommended (Falco & Bauman, 2004; Hall & Hawley, 2004). Such a procedure prevents memory decay (where more frequent life events of members overshadow previous group experiences). In addition, making process notes provides group members with an opportunity for self-reflection and growth by motivating group leaders and members to "recall each session in detail in order to provide meaningful insights" (Falco & Bauman, 2004, p. 186).ReflectionWhen have you made notes about an event in your life, that is, a journal,

log, or diary? Were you surprised when you reread this material and remembered events you had forgotten? How do you think making notes in a group would help you in the group? What might be some drawbacks?As previously discussed, another way to make the most of processing is to bring a process observer into the group. This individual is a professional human services worker (e.g., counselor, psychologist, social worker) who is neutral in regard to the group agenda and personalities but who helps the group understand the dynamics within their setting by observing and feeding back to them what is occurring between members and in the group itself. The job of the process observer is not to judge but to inform the group objectively about what is occurring (Benson, 2010; Trotzer, 2007). For instance, in a task group, the observer might say something like the following: "I noticed during this portion of the group that Beverly was trying to make sure the group was aware of the ramifications of investing money in the foundation. She did this through providing the group with many facts. Bree, you were supportive of Beverly and encouraged her. Chuck, you were also supportive, but you seemed to grow impatient as Beverly's presentation continued. Michael, on the other hand, I observed you wanted to end the discussion and kept asking the group if there were other agenda items to cover. I'm not sure exactly what that was about."Hearing such feedback, group members are then free to discuss and process what the observer has presented. They may do so through talking with one another, owning their feelings, or asking the observer for more detailed or clearer information. In any case, through process observation, the work of the group is enhanced because members begin to see patterns in themselves and others and to address issues related to who they are with one another as well as the content on which they are focusing (Kormanski & Eschbach, 1997). It is prudent for most groups, regardless of their emphases, to have the process observer "report" either right before or after they take a break or when they seem to be getting bogged down. Process observing energizes the group and gives it useful information.Teaching of SkillsA final strategy for improving performance in the working stage of a group is teaching skills. Sometimes group members are not successful because they do not know how to relate well to others, such as giving and receiving interpersonal feedback (Toth & Erwin, 1998). Novice group participants may be especially lacking in feedback skills.Through teaching members skills, group functioning improves. The reason is that members feel more confident in their abilities and indeed improve them. Basic counseling responses in groups can be learned in a systematic and interesting way (Haney & Leibsohn, 2001).

Outcomes of the Working StageThe result of the working stage of a group is usually tangible. Goals have been worked on and achieved. Some of these goals take the form of personal objectives. For example, in counseling and psychotherapy groups, members are usually involved in improving particular areas in their lives. Other goals evolve as the result of a combined group vision and effort. Group members often gain a clearer idea of what they have accomplished in the working stage when they put their group session goals on paper before each session.One of the most productive aspects of the group in the working stage is the learning and sharing of ideas and information among members. As a result, the entire membership is enriched. Some groups achieve the ability to generate new thoughts spontaneously. "Group stuckness" cannot remain if the group is really working.An important aspect to realize about any group is its cyclical nature between task and social/emotional vectors (Bales, 1951). Certain roles are primarily task oriented, such as presenting material in a psychoeducational group. Others are either positive or negative in regard to the creating of social/emotional atmospheres, such as welcoming people to the group or ignoring them. Leaders and members must be vitally aware of roles, because by being so, they can best promote strategies and resolutions.Other procedures used in the working stage of a group overlap with techniques previously described in prior group stages. For instance, in counseling and psychotherapy groups, as participants make

discoveries about themselves, they often experience a catharsis—a release of pent-up feelings. In such cases, they may cry, laugh, become angry, or tap into any other emotional state that has been released. For example, in a psychotherapy group, Irene found herself still mad at her childhood peers for teasing her about matters over which she had no control, such as where she lived and what her parents did for a living. Her awareness and release of bottled-up feelings were therapeutic, as was the discussion she had later with her group members. However, catharsis by itself does not create lasting change. As Yalom has stated, "No-one ever obtains enduring benefits from ventilating feelings in an empty closet" (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005, p. 90).Thus, group members need to add actions to the emotions they are experiencing during the working stage. Such a process allows participants to gain insight and become more cognitively aware of themselves and their options. If this developmental process occurs, members cognitively restructure their lives (they begin to think of and perceive themselves differently). They see that, although change is difficult, they are not helpless, and the situation is not necessarily hopeless (Ellis, 1977, 1986; Watzlawick, 1983). Expressing negative emotions without cognitive restructuring only reinforces such feelings and in the end leads nowhere.However, with heightened awareness come increased intermember exchanges and a giving and receiving of honest, direct, and useful information. Group members seem to genuinely care how others perceive their behaviors in the working stage. The impact of their actions in promoting or inhibiting relationships becomes valued. The focus is on the present, and it may include confrontation. The idea behind confrontation is for members to challenge one another to examine the discrepancies between their words and actions. For example, in a counseling group, Paul may say to Allison, "I hear that you really want to make your own decisions, but I see you are constantly asking your mother for advice. Help me understand how these two behaviors relate." Confrontation does not usually lead to conflict or withdrawal. Instead, members become more thoughtful about what they are doing and why.Feedback, which is known as "immediacy," "here-and-now interventions," and "impact disclosure," is the pantheoretical intervention in group work (Claiborn, Goodyear, & Horner, 2001). It refers to the response of one individual to the words and actions of another and is used in the working stage and indeed throughout the group. Feedback usually involves sharing relevant information with other people, such as how they are perceived or how they behave, so they can decide whether to change. Information should be given in a clear, concrete, succinct, and appropriate manner. Feedback is not usually unidimensional (about one thing) (Bednar & Kaul, 1985; Morran, Robison, & Stockton, 1985) but rather often encompasses a variety of information, both conscious and unconscious. Timing and the type of feedback given are important variables on its impact. Positive feedback is generally received more willingly and has a greater impact than negative feedback (Dies, 1983; Morran et al., 1985). However, research shows that the positive–negative sequencing of feedback increases the acceptance of negative feedback (Kivlighan & Luiza, 2005). Likewise, group members rate specific feedback about behaviors as being more effective than general or nonspecific feedback (Rothke, 1986; Stockton & Morran, 1980).In giving feedback, it is important to "carefully assess" a person's readiness to receive a corrective message (Stockton, Morran, & Harris, 1991, p. 253). It is also essential to allow enough time for processing feedback messages. If adequate time is not allowed, then group members may rationalize or forget the messages they receive. Overall, the quality of feedback is higher during the latter stages of the group, and feedback is likely to be more accepted, especially if other group members give it (Ward & Ward, 2014). This may be due to a number of factors, including less projection or transference (Lev-Wiesel, 2003). Regardless, it is important that feedback be given within the group throughout the entire group experience. The group leader can do much to facilitate feedback exchanges in a group. Activities that may be employed include the following:Structured feedback exchange exercises (where the leader sets up ways for members to give exchanges to one another, such as in writing);Modeling (where the leader regularly gives feedback to members in a direct and

caring manner);Connecting (where the leader helps a group member relate feedback to a goal or behavior);Consensual validation (where the leader uses other group members to give their reactions to feedback directed at a particular group member); andFeedback paraphrasing (where the leader has the recipient of feedback repeat what he or she heard in his or her own words) (Morran, Stockton, Cline, & Teed, 1998).Using a variety of feedback methods may be most helpful in getting messages across.Brief CaseUnaware OlgaOlga joined the psychotherapy group because she felt she had a way of alienating people from her. Sure enough, she did. When QuiQue stated that he was thinking of taking a social skills class, Olga said, "That's stupid! Be a man!" Zack, the leader, and the rest of the group wrote Olga notes of concern about her action, but Olga did not slow down in her blatant criticism of others. She thought Julie was "a tramp" for flirting with men and told her so.At this juncture, Zack asked if someone in the group might model other ways for Olga to express her disdain for what Julie was doing. Katie did, using milder language. Others followed. Still, Olga was outspoken and usually hurtful when she responded to others. The next time Olga exploded, it was at Zack, who this time responded by paraphrasing, saying, "Olga, it sounds like you hate me." Olga finally got it. "Oh," was all she could add. "I didn't realize my words were so powerful." After that, Olga watched her words and actually asked others to help her frame her thoughts in a gentler style.

Questions What do you think about the way Olga received feedback? Would other ways of giving feedback have been more effective? For instance?The corrective emotional experience is another benefit that can come in the working stage of the group. Yalom and Leszcz (2005) describe this experience as the hallmark of the working phase of therapy groups. A group supportive enough to permit the risk taking that goes with this experience must have been developed beforehand. If it has, then the corrective emotional experience has several components. The first is that the group member must risk making "a strong expression of emotion, which is interpersonally directed." "Reality testing," which allows the group member "to examine the incident with the aid of consensual validation from the other members," is also necessary. Then the group member must recognize, "the inappropriateness of certain interpersonal feelings and behavior or the inappropriateness of certain avoided interpersonal behavior." Finally, the group and its leader must help the member going through this experience in every way possible "to interact with others more deeply and honestly" (p. 26).In addition to increased intimacy, openness, and feedback, another quality that is useful, important, and likely to be helpful during the working stage is humor—the ability to smile or laugh at yourself or a situation in a therapeutic and nondefensive manner. Groups that last make more frequent and longer use of humor than those that are short-lived (Scogin & Pollio, 1980). In a successful working stage, seriousness may be interspersed with laughter as members gain better insight into themselves, others, and the dynamics of life inside and outside the group. Humor may have a potential benefit by easing tension, distilling hostility, promoting positive communication bonds, and fostering creativity (Baron, 1974; Fine, 1977; LaGaipa, 1977; Murstein & Brust, 1985).The exact role humor plays in a group is not always easy to determine. Certainly, it may distract members from their work or be used to make put-downs. Therefore, it is important for groups to notice when and how humor is used to determine its impact. There are always opportunities to cultivate humor by taking advantage of paradoxes within the group, discrepancies, the unpredictable, the unanticipated, universal truths, the absurd, and the familiar. For example, in a round, the group leader asks members to remember a funny experience in their lives that made them more aware of their humanness. Sam relates that because of his cultural background, he had not understood that a "Danish" was a sweet pastry as well as a person from Denmark. When he was invited by his group to "go get a Danish," he just looked at them in amazement and questioned why they would want to do something like that. It was

only when his peers escorted him to a bakery that he fully understood what they were talking about and laughed with them at the misinterpretation (Gladding, 2010).Well-conducted counseling, psychotherapeutic, task/work, and psychoeducational groups often make use of humor. Sharing a lighter moment from personal experience or enjoying an illustration that makes a point while being amusing helps people remember and enjoy a laugh together at no one's expense. Humor also helps individuals and group members bond and gain insight by smoothing group interaction, forming a collective identity, separating the group from others, and securing appropriate behavior (Fry & Salameh, 1993; Rothwell, Siharath, Bell, Nguyen, & Baker, 2011). It influences them positively about working together. In fact, several major companies, such as Southwest Airlines, General Electric, IBM, and AT&T, have found that successful organizational humor can have a positive impact on a variety of group processes. These include effective communication, development of group goals, and management of emotion. In addition, outcomes such as group productivity, group viability, and development of group members are achieved.ReflectionWhat type of humor have you seen in the groups in which you have been a member? When have you seen humor be therapeutic in a group? When have you seen humor be detrimental to a group? If you were to use humor in a group setting, what kind would you employ—for example, paradox, jokes, exaggeration?

Summary and Conclusion:

The working stage is when the group should be most productive in resolving or solving personal, task, or educational issues. If for some reason this stage of the group does not go well, then group members may leave frustrated and disheartened. In addition, attempts at termination will be impeded. Members who have had a bad experience in the group during this stage are less likely to want to participate in collective efforts again. In contrast, when the group functions well in the working stage, members are positively influenced.Some of the factors group leaders and members must be aware of and execute to help groups help themselves have been highlighted. Among these important elements in assisting the group to be productive are modeling, structured exercises, groups observing groups, brainstorming, the nominal- group technique, synectics, written projects, group processing, and teaching skills. When groups are successful in the working stage, they achieve goals and move toward termination. Members of such groups increase their insight and use of basic therapeutic devices through feedback, confrontation, corrective emotional experience, and humor. In successful groups, the working stage is remembered fondly and proudly by its members.