

Introduction to Group Counselling

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Key concepts, benefits, processes, and practical guidelines

1. What Is Group Counselling?

Aspect	Description
Definition	A therapeutic process in which a trained counsellor facilitates a small group (typically 6-12 members) to explore personal issues, develop coping skills, and support one another.
Core Idea	The group itself becomes a therapeutic agent; members learn from each other's experiences as well as from the counsellor's guidance.
Typical Settings	Schools, community centres, mental health clinics, workplaces, rehabilitation programs, faith-based groups.
Population	Adolescents, adults, families, specific-issue groups (e.g., grief, addiction, trauma).

2. Theoretical Foundations

Theory	Main Contribution to Group Work
Psycho-social (Yalom)	Identifies "therapeutic factors" (e.g., universality, altruism, interpersonal learning).
Systems Theory	Views the group as a dynamic system with roles, boundaries, and feedback loops.
Cognitive-Behavioural (CBT) Group	Focuses on skill-building, thought restructuring, and behavioural experiments within the group context.
Humanistic/Existential	Emphasises authenticity, empathy, and personal meaning-making in a safe group atmosphere.
Narrative & Solution-Focused	Encourages members to re-author their stories and identify strengths/solutions collaboratively.

3. Core Benefits

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Category	Specific Benefits
Individual	• Reduced sense of isolation (realising “I’m not alone”). • Increased self-awareness through feedback. • Development of social skills and assertiveness. • Access to diverse coping strategies. • Mutual support and solidarity.
Group/Community	• Shared learning and resource pooling. • Normalisation of experiences. • Cost-effectiveness compared with one-to-one therapy. • Faster progress through peer modeling.
Therapeutic	• Opportunities for role-play and rehearsal. • Enhanced motivation and accountability.

4. Stages of Group Development

Stage	Typical Characteristics	Counsellor’s Focus
1. Forming (Orientation)	Members introduce themselves, test boundaries, express anxiety.	Establish clear rules , confidentiality , and goals ; build trust.
2. Storming (Conflict)	Differences emerge; power struggles, resistance to norms.	Facilitate open dialogue , manage conflict, reinforce group norms.
3. Norming (Cohesion)	Shared values develop, cooperation increases, supportive climate.	Encourage deepening of sharing , reinforce positive feedback .
4. Performing (Productive)	Members work collaboratively on issues; high engagement.	Guide skill-building , foster interpersonal learning , monitor progress.
5. Termination (Closure)	Group winds down; reflection on growth, planning for after-care.	Conduct review , celebrate achievements, discuss future resources .

5. Essential Group Counselling Skills

Skill	How It Looks in Practice
Active Listening	Summarising, reflecting feelings, validating experiences.

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Skill

How It Looks in Practice

Facilitating

Prompting quieter members, managing dominant voices, encouraging turn-taking.

Interaction

Boundary

Management