

COMMON MISPERCEPTIONS ABOUT GROUP THERAPY

"I will be forced to tell my deepest thoughts, feelings, and secrets to the group."

You control what, how much, and when you share with the group. Most people find that when they feel safe enough to share what is troubling them, a group can be very helpful and affirming. We encourage you not to share what you are not ready to disclose. However, you can also be helped by listening to others and thinking about how what they are saying might apply to you.

"Group therapy will take longer than individual therapy because I will have to share the time with others."

Actually, group therapy is often more efficient than individual therapy for two reasons. First, you can benefit from the group even during sessions when you say little but listen carefully to others. You will find that you have much in common with other group members, and as they work on a concern, you can learn more about yourself. Secondly, group members will often bring up issues that strike a chord with you, but that you might not have been aware of or brought up yourself.

"I will be verbally attacked by the leaders and by other group members."

It is very important that group members feel safe. Group leaders are there to help develop a safe environment. Feedback is often difficult to hear. As group members come to trust and accept one another, they generally experience feedback and even confrontation as positive. One of the benefits of group therapy is the opportunity to receive feedback from others in a supportive environment. It is rare to find friends who will gently point out how you might be behaving in ways that hurt yourself or others, but this is precisely what group can offer. This will be done in a respectful way, so that you can hear it and make use of it.

"Group therapy is second-best to individual therapy."

Perhaps group therapy is being recommended to you because your individual counselor believes that it is the best way to address your concerns. We do not put people into group therapy because we don't have space in individual therapy, or because we want to save time. We recommend group when it is the most effective method to help you. Your counselor can discuss with you why group is what is recommended for you.

"I have so much trouble talking to people; I'll never be able to share in a group."

Most people are anxious about being able to talk in group. Almost without exception, within a few sessions people find that they do begin to talk in the group. Group members remember what is like to be new to the group, so you will most likely get a lot of support for beginning to talk in the group.

We hope the group experience is a good one for you! This text was developed by Jack Corazinni, Virginia Commonwealth University; slight modifications have been made to accommodate MU groups.