Secrets to Group Facilitation

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Agenda

- Why Groups

- Challenge of group work

- Common pitfalls of groups

- Principles of adult education

- Use of theme centered, structured- curriculum based groups

- R.O.P.E.S: A group model that is practical, easy to understand, easier to use and effective

- One Practitioner's Perspective - Cheryl Gerber, LISW-S, Firelands Recovery and Counseling Services, OH

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Poll Question: Which best describes your current provision of groups in your organization?

A. I facilitate 2 or more groups each week
B. I facilitate 1 group each week
C. I facilitate groups less than 1/week
D. I don't facilitate groups currently

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Poll Question: How challenging is it to facilitate groups?

A. Very Challenging
B. Challenging
C. Somewhat challenging
D. Not challenging

Why Groups?: The Promise

- Personal benefits to participants

- Universality (you're not alone)

- Social/emotional support from people you trust

- Safe way to try out new behaviors

- Social-observational learning

- Builds hope and confidence

- Corrective experiences (opportunities for people to receive feedback on their thinking/beliefs/behaviors)

- Power of peers to influence behavior

Let's Chat: First Five Comments will be Read Out

What are the most important challenges you face in facilitating a group?

Challenge of Groups

- Groups are "high risk-high vulnerability" situations.
  - ○ Safety and trust is paramount and not easy to establish
- Wide diversity of experiences, background, knowledge, skills, needs, expectations and readiness among members to make the most out of the group learning opportunity
- How to ensure that each member of the group benefits (i.e., how do you personalize the experience for each person) -- very, very challenging
- Learning readiness, learning styles differ (how does this affect the pace of the group)
- Membership often changes
- People start and stop at various points (Oye vay!)
- Open groups vs. closed groups
- How to ensure the group is interesting and meaningful to participants

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Types of Groups

General therapy (process oriented) group

- No specific theme
- Focus on immediate life problems, especially as they present themselves during the group interaction
- Has tendency to be an "individual session with audience participation"
- Open to all who
  - o want and can share meaningful (distress and/or functional problems) issues.
  - o willing and able to interact with each other
- Time frames vary
- Outcomes highly individualized
- Membership is not highly restricted with respect to diagnosis, age, gender, cultural background, expressed goals or life circumstances

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Theme Centered Group

- Membership based on interest in and expressed need of participants

- Aligned with problems/concerns/needs/interests of participants

- Focus of discussion and learning is aligned with the theme

- Mode of learning

  o Verbal conversation

  o Use of informational materials related to the theme

  o Learning exercises may also be employed

  Examples: Stress management, current events, healthy living, how to get a job, steps to a sober lifestyle, skills oriented groups

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Important Concept in Theme Centered Groups

The I-WE-IT Balance

Ruth Cohn: Theme centered interactional methods

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Dynamic Balance

One principle is that in group processes, interests of the *individual participants (I),* the *group (We)* and the *theme (It)* works best to be in *dynamic balance*.

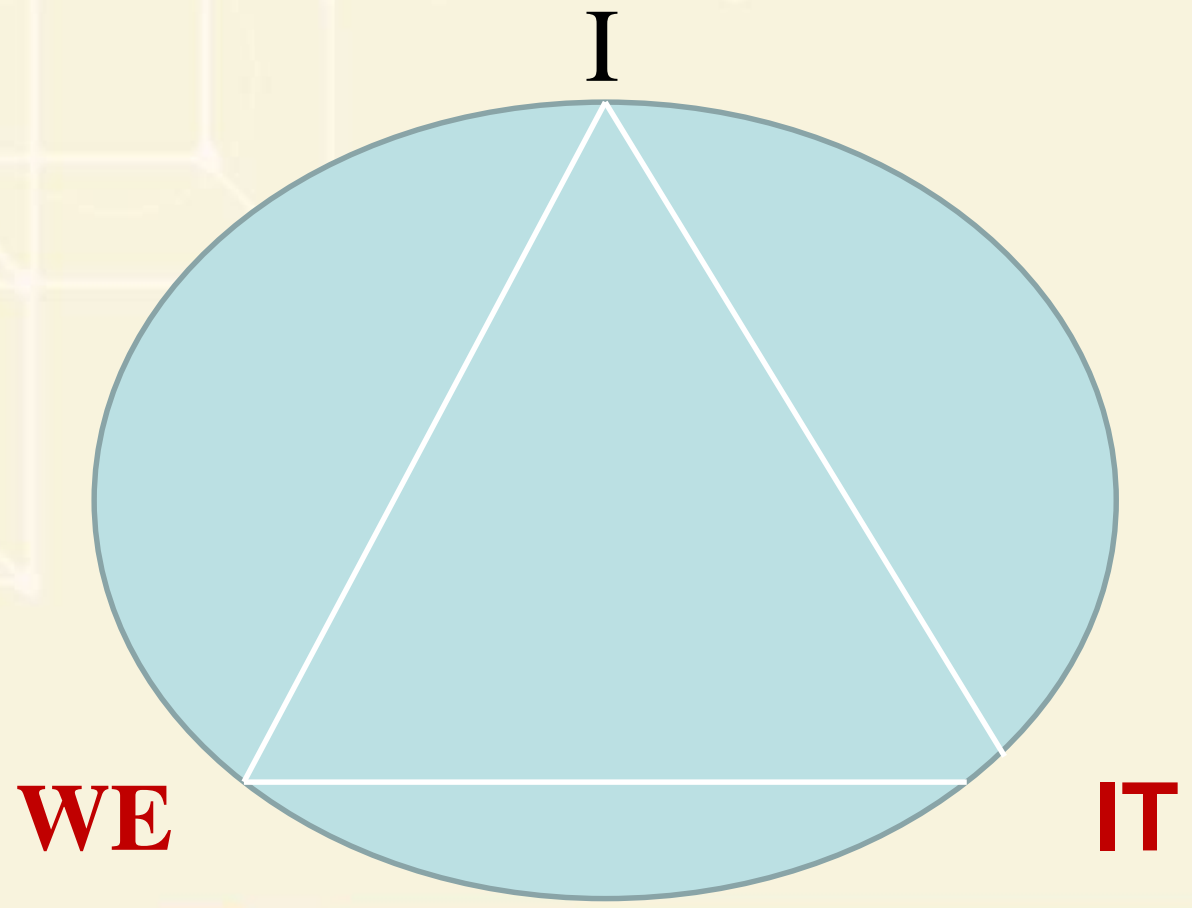Whenever one side dominates, there are negative side effects.

- When the theme dominates, this may be a sign that people hide problems, individuals may get bored as the theme has no personal relevance, people are so absorbed that they forget basic needs, no group feeling and no personal relationships develop.

Dynamic Balance

In We-centered groups, group dynamics govern –

- Group thinking can develop, individual views and needs are suppressed and group dynamics may get so overwhelming that no work is done.

- The theme gives communication a productive focus, but it must be balanced with the other needs.

- The "We" of the group develops from centering around a theme.

- This calls for group leaders or moderators to balance these three interests and to take care for a process in which theme-centered, group-centered and individual centered phases alternate.

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Curriculum Based Theme Centered Groups

- Structured learning process (staying on task is high priority)

- Focused on a high priority improvement and goal area

- Curriculum organizes the
  - focus of each meeting
  - learning activities
  - interaction among participants

- Enhancing knowledge and/or skill

Conducting Purposeful and Effective Groups is Challenging

Typical Dilemmas

- The Meandering Group
- The Monopolized Group
- Individual Therapy with an Audience Group
- Multiple Individual Therapy with an Audience Group
- The "Pulling Teeth" Group OR Group Leader Does Most of the Talking Group
- The "I just hope to survive this group" Group
- The " Filler Group" - I don't care what we talk about because we need to "fill in" the time

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Pitfalls Often Encountered in Groups

The Meandering Group

- Groups that have difficulty keeping to the task or topic: Numerous topics touched on. Group jumps from one topic or person to another during the group.

- The experience of both group leaders and participants is that little attention is given long enough for group members to process and remember information.

- Group feels disjointed and pointless

- Feelings (confusion, frustration, impatience, restlessness, boredom)

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Monopolized Group

- General open discussion type groups vulnerable to being monopolized
- Group leader efforts to change or broaden the topic to involve others are resisted
- A person who may monopolize the group, exerts influence by focusing the topic, independent of the questions asked, on a topic of personal interest
- Attention may be the primary reinforcement
- Group leaders often feel frustration in such groups because most of the participants are disengaged
- Less aggressive clients may become even more passive in such groups
- Likely experience of members
  - Anger towards the group leader and the monopolizing member
  - Boredom
  - Passive withdrawal

Individual Therapy with an Audience Group

This is a common pitfall in a group.

- A group leader may easily fall into an extended exchange with a member who brings up a very clinically meaningful issue that may or may not be related to the purpose of the group.

- The group leader begins exploring and discussing this issue with a member while others are watching this go on. The group leader may lose sight of the need to involve all group members.

- It has the characteristics of an individual session with an added factor - an audience.

- One variation of this is the multiple individual therapy with an audience group when 2 or more group members occupy the "hot seat" so to speak for a time.

- The "counseled" individual may experience positive benefit or may feel self conscious. Others may be concerned that to speak up may mean becoming the focus of the group.

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The "Sermon / Lecture" Group

- The group leader has a strong message to deliver and does so in a manner that resembles a sermon or lecture

- This is usually around a topic of "things you shouldn't do"

- This is one way to deal with a "pulling teeth group"

- Group leader is typically in a "critical parent" mode of behaving

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The "Pulling Teeth" Group

- No one's talking or answering questions

- Group leader tries every trick in the book

- Time goes by very slowly

- Group leader begins to sweat and wonders why he/she didn't become an accountant!

- Group members may find some pleasure in seeing the group leader sweat a little

- Boredom and discomfort dominate the experience for all

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The "Filler" Group

It doesn't matter what we talk about, we need to fill in the time - it's on the schedule, we need to run some type of group.

Day programs, inpatient settings may find themselves needing to fill in a schedule of activities during the week.

Feelings: Cynicism, boredom

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The " I just hope to survive this group" Group

- If you've been around long enough, there is a good chance you have had such groups

- Everything seems to be going wrong

- The group leader is worried that the group will cause more harm than good

- This group seems to never end

- Once ended, without a catastrophe, the relief is similar to the removal of a nail from one's foot!

So, How Can We Avoid These Pitfalls?

- Understanding the principles of adult education
- Having clear and easily visible ***ground rules*** that have been generated and agreed upon by members can go a long way

- Structure, focus and engaging material also goes a long way

- Having a clear, transparent and easy to follow group learning format is a real plus!

Principles of Adult Education

Personal Relevance

Practical Application

Multi-sensory learning

Self direction

Context specific

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Ground Rules

- Ground rules promote safety and help people to stay on task, for example

  - o One person talks at a time

  - o Treat each other with respect (no put downs)

  - o What is said here stays here

  - o Stay on topic

  - o Avoid separate conversations

- Ground rules are established very early on in the process, typically during the first group meeting.

- It is essential to engage group participants in establishing their ground rules – this will result in members owning them.

- Posting ground rules also helps

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Ground Rules are Not Enough!

It's helpful to have an organizing framework that:

- Promotes safety and trust
- Personalizes the experience for each participant
- Transparent and clear to all (makes sense)
- Keeps people on track and on topic but also flexible
- Focus on issues that empower people
- Emphasizes shared decision making and choice
- Helps participants to remember and revisit the main ideas of the group
- Gives participants an opportunity to continue and/or apply their learning
- Gives group leaders a common sense and easy to apply group format

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Poll Question: What best describes the formal training you have received in facilitating groups for adults with mental health problems?

A. Great deal of training
B. Some training
C. Little training
D. No training

One Practitioner's Perspective

Cheryl Gerber, LISW-S

Firelands Counseling and Recovery Services

Sandusky, Ohio

Position: Mental Health Therapist

Adult Outpatient Program

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Main Points and Key Questions

In what way is using the ROPES approach…..

- A benefit to you as a group facilitator?

- A benefit to the group members? (how have group members responded to this approach?

- What part of the ROPES framework has been most challenging and most helpful?

- Would you recommend that group facilitators explore the use of the ROPES approach in their work? Why?

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Center for Integrated Health Solutions

Dr. Salerno's Famous Group Format for Conducting a Theme Centered and Curriculum Based Group

The multi-phasic, temporally sequential, tri-partite group pedagogical process (M.P.T.S.T.P.G.P.P)

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The Key Elements of the (M.P.T.S.T.P.G.P.P) Model

Beginning

Middle

End

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The R.O.P.E.S. Framework: One Effective Approach to Facilitating Groups

The ROPES framework is based on the principles of adult education and the work of Bill Anthony and associates at the Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation at Boston University

The group is simply formatted into a beginning, middle and end phase. The ROPES acronym stands for….
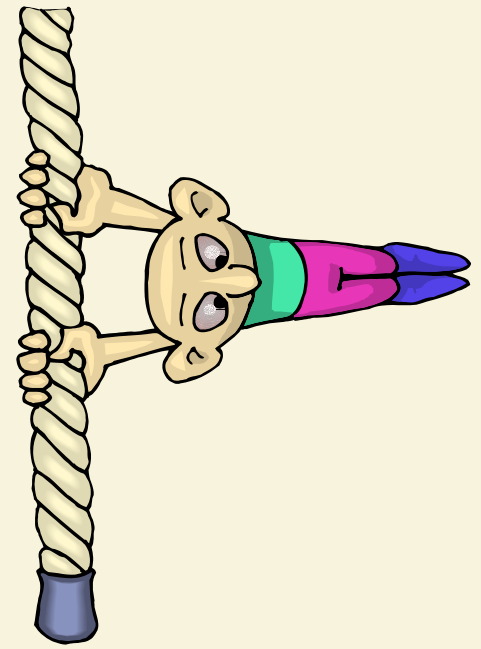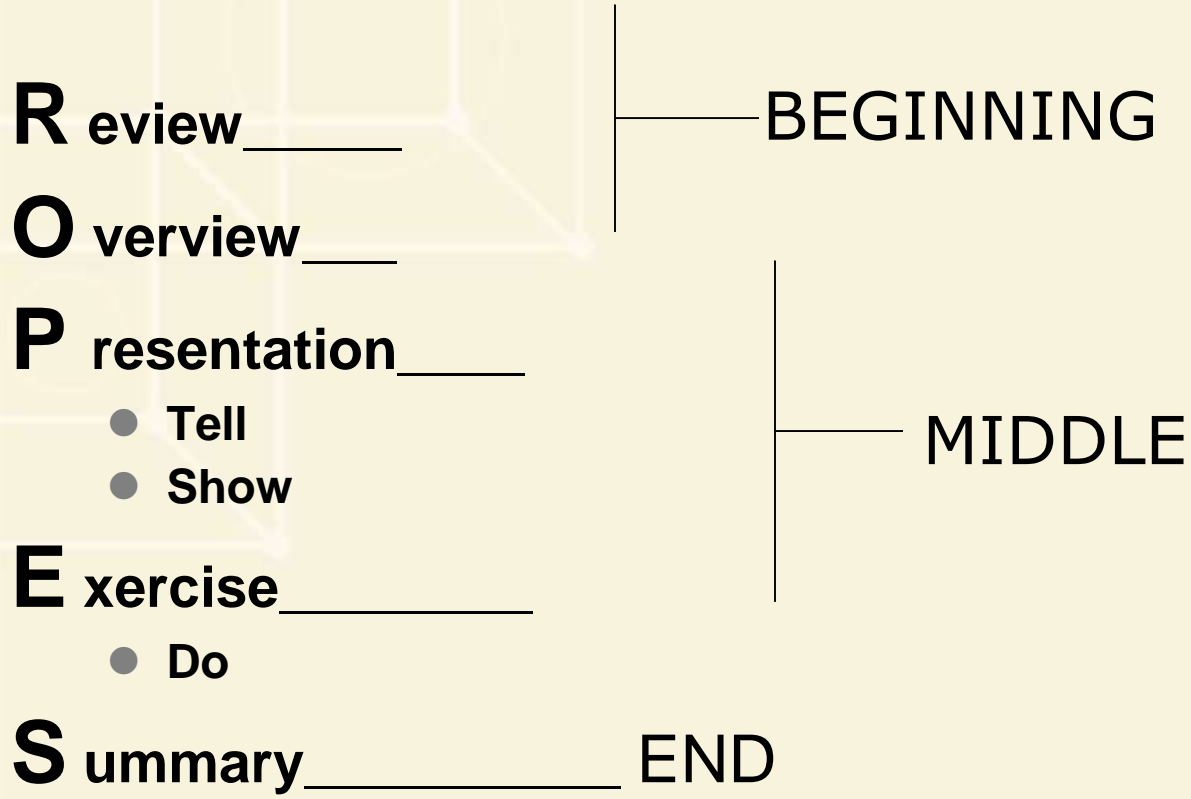
R = Review

O = Overview

P = Presentation

E = Exercise

S = Summary

R.O.P.E.S.

R eview_____   BEGINNING

O verview___

P resentation____

    ● **Tell**   MIDDLE

    ● **Show**

E xercise_____

    ● **Do**

S ummary_____ END

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BEGINNING

- **R**eview

- **O**verview

- P

- E

- S

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Beginning (Review and Overview)

Designed to promote:

- Continuity and follow up from the previous lesson, and
- The process of engaging, orienting and motivating learners about the topic of the current lesson
- Promote involvement and acknowledge strengths

There are five steps involved:

STEP 1: Review of important points from previous lesson

STEP 2: Review of Action Step

STEP 3: Review of participants' current knowledge of and experience
with the current topic

STEP 4: Review of participants' understanding of the importance of the
current topic

STEP 5: Overview of the current group agenda

Let's Chat: Please type in you response to the following question (the first five entries will be read out)

Why is beginning a group with a Review and Overview important?

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The Overview

- What is it? An introductory outline or "roadmap" of the material to be covered.

- Why is it important? It focuses participants on the main points of the learning experience and promotes a sense of safety and predictability by explaining expectations and responsibilities.

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Examples of Group Facilitator Language

Review and Overview

ASK: What was one of the important points you took away from the last group?

CHECK: Who chose to complete an ACTION STEP? What was your experience?

STATE: Today we are starting/continuing a topic called _____ that starts on page __ of your workbook/handout

STATE: The plan for today includes reading and discussing important information on this topic; completing a worksheet and deciding on an Action Step OR
The plan for today includes learning about the parts of a healthy dinner, a demonstration of cooking a healthy dinner and then we will all have a chance to make the meal followed by enjoying the meal together.

ASK: Let's begin by discussing what experience group members have had with this topic. What does the topic mean to you? What experience have you had with this topic?

ASK: Why is this topic important?

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THE MIDDLE PART OF A GROUP
The PRESENTATION and Exercise

Presentation part of the ROPES format begins a focus on the current lesson

- **Important Information**
  - o Introduces the topic: What it is? Why it's important?

- **Personalized Worksheet**
  - o Opportunity for participants to connect to the materials in their own personalized manner
  - o Helps to identify strengths and areas to consider improving

- **Discussion points**
  - o A suggested starting point to stimulate interaction

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Examples of Group Facilitator Language

Presentation TELL-SHOW-DO

ASK: Who would like to begin reading the IMPORTANT INFORMATION about this topic?

ASK: Now that we've read and discussed some important information on this topic, are there any questions about the material?

STATE: One of the goals of the lesson/class is to make sure everyone gets a chance to relate the topic to his/her own life. Please take some time to complete the worksheet. It may be helpful for us to go through the first several items together to make sure the worksheet is clear to everyone. Afterwards you will have an opportunity to discuss what you have learned.

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EXERCISE

- What is it? An invitation to participants to:

  o Continue their learning

  o Apply their learning between meetings

- A twist on homework assignments - the action step

  o Not required

  o Not given by the "teacher"

  o The person chooses to give him/herself a homework assignment

  o High value placed on identifying areas of interest and using it to set the agenda in individual meetings

Example of Group Facilitator Language

Exercise

STATE: One of the important goal of this group is to give you the opportunity to continue your learning and apply what you have learned in a way that works for you through completing an ACTION STEP.

ASK: Here is a guide you may choose to use to decide on an action step in the coming week

Note: Some ACTION STEPS lend themselves to role play and immediate practice

Action Step Planning Guide

Write down one step you want to take to continue learning and applying what you learned

Step:_____

When will you do it? _____

Where will you do it? _____

How will you remind yourself to do it? _____

Who could help you complete your Action Step? _____

What might get in the way of completing your Action Step? _____

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Let's Chat: First Five Comments will be Read Out.

Why is it important to provide group members with guidance on applying what they have learned in "real life"?

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The SUMMARY: How to End a Group

- The ending of a group corresponds to the Summary components of a R.O.P.E.S. teaching process.

- What is it? A very quick review of the material covered in the session and participants' reactions to the material.

- Why is it important? It reinforces learning, assesses participants' understanding and gathers important feedback from participants

Example of Group Facilitator Language

Summary

ASK: **What was one main point you took from today's lesson? What idea was helpful to you?**

ASK: **How do you feel about today's group? Is the topic interesting and helpful or not? Did we go too fast, too slow or just right today?**

STATE: **I'd like to share my thoughts about today's group. NOTE: place emphasis on positive feedback and reinforcement for all efforts and behaviors that contributed to the group.**

Thank You

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