

GROUP THERAPY COMMON MYTHS AND MISPERCEPTIONS

I will be forced to tell my deepest thoughts, feelings, and secrets to the group, or be coerced into doing something I don't want to do.

You control what, how much, and when you share with the group. It can be very helpful to simply sit and listen to others and think about how what they are saying might apply to you. Most people find that once they have had a chance to observe the group for a little while they begin to see that the group can be very helpful and affirming to its members, and they begin to feel more comfortable about participating more actively. You may hear even experienced group members say "I'll pass" every now and then, when they are asked for their participation if they feel they need some time to think or collect themselves. This is perfectly acceptable. Again, you control what, how much, and when you discuss anything with the group.

Group therapy will take longer and be less effective than individual therapy because I will have to share the time with others.

Actually, group therapy can be more effective than individual therapy for two reasons. First, you can benefit from the group even during sessions when you say little, and merely listen carefully to others. You will find that you have a lot in common with other group members and as they work on a concern you can learn about yourself and your own situation. Group members may bring up issues that strike a chord with you but that you might not have been aware of or brought up yourself. Second, group therapy has been recommended to you because your counselor determined it is the best way to address your particular concerns, concerns that individual therapy may not be able to address in the same way. The Center does not suggest group therapy because we don't have enough room in individual therapy -- we recommend it when it is the most effective method to help a particular student. Feel free to ask your counselor if you have questions about why group therapy is being recommended for you.

I will be confronted or humiliated by the leader or other group members.

It is true that feedback can be very difficult to offer or to hear. Feedback can certainly cause hurt feelings when delivered in anger or with insensitivity, when it is intended to manipulate or intimidate, when it is just plain off the mark, or when it is simply true but painful to hear. It is very important that the group members feel safe. Group leaders are there to help ensure a safe environment in which everyone in the group has the opportunity to seek out and receive feedback in a supportive, confidential context. As group members begin to trust and accept one another they generally experience the feedback they get in group to be remarkably positive, constructive, and thought-provoking. The leaders and group participants alike work to give and receive feedback in respectful and helpful ways, and the ability to give and receive feedback appropriately is a valuable skill that you can develop through participation in the group.

If I don't like the other people in the group, it will be a waste of my time.

We usually choose to talk about things that are troubling us to a close friend or a family member, because we like and trust them and know they like and trust us. For this reason, many people expect that the group members should become their close friends. It just seems odd to talk about personal things to "strangers" with whom we don't have that foundation of security and with whom we may not have a lot in common. But groups can work well together and be very helpful even when the group

members might not otherwise chose one another as friends. In fact, sometimes talking to others who are different from ourselves, our family, and our friends, can be particularly helpful in bringing new perspectives to our situation.

A group will just blab my personal issues all over campus.

Confidentiality is essential to any counseling relationship whether in individual or group therapy. The leaders and members of groups are very dedicated to ensuring the confidentiality of the group -- even the fact that you are in the group is considered confidential information. Confidentiality is protected not only by the policies of the Center, but by law, and each group member must sign a confidentiality agreement which specifies the civil and criminal penalties that can result from breaches of confidentiality.

**Thanks to the Virginia Commonwealth University Counseling Services for allowing us to incorporate their text into this page.*