

# **Making Group Therapy Work For You**

Mark Sorensen, Ph.D.

*Certified Group Psychotherapist*

*Fellow, American Group Psychotherapy Association*

When group members understand how group therapy works they are better able to benefit from it. This article will provide some guidelines for what is a very complex process. If you are thinking about joining one of my groups, this article will give you an idea about how I think about group therapy and its potential to help people make changes in themselves and in their relationships.

## **Why be in a group?**

When group members talk about what they want to get out of their group experience they often express it in very different ways. Some talk about wanting to be more confident or less depressed or to feel closer to their spouse, family or friends. Others express the wish to be more successful at work or not to be so anxious. What I have found is that regardless of the unique ways that prospective group members have of articulating their goals, most people joining my groups share two primary objectives. The first is that they want more intimacy in their relationships and the second is that they want to feel better about themselves.

Individual therapy is extremely valuable and many patients are both in individual therapy and in group, although it is not a requirement. Some people join a group after having completed individual therapy, while a few have never done individual therapy at all. There is an advantage to having individual and group take place simultaneously because each has their own strengths and they complement each other. In individual therapy you get to take your time and focus on making sense of who you are with a minimum of distraction. The time is completely yours. Group therapy, in contrast, requires you to share the time with others and there is often a lot happening all at once. Events can move very quickly in group and you may be challenged to be more spontaneous in order to be a part of things. It is a place where you will get stirred up and in that process have an immediate experience of how you go about creating intimacy and happiness in your life. It can be useful to talk about what is happening in group in your individual therapy and for you to take what you have learned in your individual therapy and practice it in the group.

## **Is there a structure or a guideline to follow?**

In general, most people have little knowledge of how group therapy works. The few depictions available in the media are comic and not representative of what takes place. The type of group that I lead is called an Interpersonal Therapy Group (also known as a *process group*). Other kinds of group are structured by having a curriculum of material to cover, themes that are presented to be discussed, the use of role-playing methods, or traditions where members take turns speaking. In an Interpersonal Therapy Group the structure is simple but powerful. Members are given this instruction to follow:

**To make an ongoing effort to be aware of your experience in the present**

**moment, especially your experience of the others in the room, and to be open in expressing what you notice.**

Not so complicated, but very hard to do. In fact, if you could do this easily then you might not need to be in the group!

**Why is there so much emphasis on being aware of your thoughts and feelings in the present moment?**

The first part of the instruction is to make an ongoing effort to be aware of your thoughts and feelings as they are occurring. How is that likely to help? Even though it may not seem like it, few of us respond to the present moment as if it were a brand new moment. We tend to respond as if we already know what is going on and as if we have a pretty good idea about what will happen. We are able to do this because our minds have created very complex patterns of thoughts, feelings, memories and sensations called schemas or scripts that act like a set of rules for how to act. These scripts are like maps that tell us what to do right now and what to expect in the future based on what has taken place in the past.

Some of our scripts are effective in many situations and group members often have areas in their lives which feel very gratifying. However, all group members have some areas in their lives which aren't working well. They have developed some scripts that are successful in protecting them from painful experiences but in doing so get in the way of having other experiences which are really important to them. One example would be a script which says "I am inadequate and it would feel really terrible if other people found out, so if I can hide my inadequacies from them then I will feel more comfortable". Another example would be, "I am unloveable and will eventually be rejected so I had better not allow myself to get close to others and get my heart broken".

In addition to interfering with having new experiences, scripts tend to generate self fulfilling prophecies. When you tell yourself that you know how things are going to turn out then you tend to notice all the events that *seem* to fit with the script and ignore all the events that don't fit. Your behavior will be guided by what you already believe to be taking place and you may create familiar outcomes by inadvertently training the people around you to treat you in the way you are expecting. For example, Sally has a script which leads her to believe that others will reject her. When she talks she notices when Joe frowns and Phyllis looks away and interprets these actions as confirmation that she is unliked. She gets anxious, her muscles become tense and her face tightens. Joe and Phyllis see this and think that she is disapproving of them and get defensive and annoyed with Sally. If they were to express their annoyance, Sally might take this as confirmation that "people don't like me" rather than see how she helped to train Joe and Phyllis to respond in the way she was anticipating.

When you join a group, an important piece of your work is the illumination of these scripts by interacting with other members in the way described in the basic instruction. When you pay attention to the present moment you can't help but filter what you notice through the scripts you have developed for yourself. As you reveal to others how you think and feel about them, you become familiar with the way your mind operates. You have the opportunity to become more aware of both your blind spots, those behaviors that

others can see that you are unaware of, and your tendency to behave reactively according to your scripts, as if you were on automatic pilot.

Psychologist Tara Brach said, “We can’t honestly accept an experience unless we see clearly what we are accepting”. For example, Joe is always feeling irritated with Sally. Although not aware of it, he tends to ignore her or scowl when she talks. As the group gives Joe feedback about his behavior and his feelings are expressed and examined, Joe becomes aware that he thinks Sally is really smart and that he feels stupid when he is around her. The pattern of getting annoyed with people whom he regards as superior to him is something that happens a lot in his life. His reaction to such people usually distances them and contributes to the loneliness which he considers his biggest problem. By noticing his experience of the other group members the habit of mind that undermines him in his life has now become more visible to him.

In addition to becoming more aware of your scripts, the other main reason to focus on what is happening in the present moment is to give yourself the opportunity to have new experiences. Even though problem-solving or analyzing a situation in the life of a group member may feel helpful and be appreciated, this alone will not alter habits of mind and behavior patterns. We tend to forget things we have been told but remember things we have done and repeated. Current research supports the idea that it is through interactions that are accompanied by strong emotions that long-standing scripts are changed. Sharing your thoughts and feelings in the present moment about the others in the room will insure that you have new interactions accompanied by strong feelings. It may be uncomfortable at times but it will allow you to develop new ways of being with others.

Most group members come to experience the focus on “staying in the room” and talking about what is going on between members to be far more helpful and interesting than anything else they can do. Yet most would prefer to talk about what is going on in their lives because that is what feels familiar and comfortable. It is important to disclose to the group how you came to be the person you are (your childhood and other significant experiences that have shaped you) as well as major events that are taking place while you are a member (a medical problem, death of a friend or family member, job changes, etc.). Emphasizing interactions between group members does not mean there is a ban on revealing information that helps people to get to know you better.

It is also important to note that *how* you tell people about the meaningful events in your life takes place in the present moment. For example, when relating how a friend had stood him up, Joe laughed and joked. The group quickly pointed out how it was hard for them to feel any of the painful feelings he said he was experiencing because his lighthearted presentation sent a different message. Joe came to realize that this was a kind of “wall” he put up to protect himself from being disappointed in his relationships.

It may be difficult to know when telling the group about your life is a way of getting close and when it is a way of staying safe. Don’t worry about it. The group and the leader will let you know how they experience your participation and you can learn from their reactions.

**What is meant by “being open”?**

Having taken a look at the importance of awareness as one goes through the group experience, let's consider the task of being open. You are asked to do your best to be open in expressing what you are thinking and feeling. Openness is an attitude or frame of mind towards what you are aware of. You are encouraged to develop an attitude of

acceptance and compassion towards your own thoughts and feelings. The opposite of openness is rejection, judgment or aversion. Openness will help to create the conditions where you can change those scripts that are ineffective and can strengthen those scripts that are effective. Avoidance tends to amplify the importance of whatever it is that is being avoided. For example, people can't overcome a fear of dogs by avoiding dogs. Only by being willing to be open to their fear and being with a dog can their behavior change. This is true of interpersonal fears as well. One cannot overcome a fear of rejection by avoiding becoming emotionally attached to others.

The openness talked about here goes in two directions. First, let's consider openness towards your own thoughts and feelings. At times you may have difficulty being aware in the present moment. I sometimes ask group members what they are aware of thinking and feeling and they say "I'm not having any thoughts or feelings". They should be so lucky! To have one's mind be free of mental chatter would be a real gift. However, something else is going on. Usually there is a script operating where such an individual has learned that "if I don't think about it, I'll feel better". What they have learned is not to stop thinking (very hard to do!) but to stop noticing what they are thinking and feeling. The group agreement to be aware is the opposite of what has helped them to feel a little bit more comfortable in their own skin. The *stop noticing* habit or script carries a big price tag however. If you have learned to not notice your own experience it will be hard to tune into the experience of others.

Empathy, an important aspect of intimacy, relies upon having the emotions of other people trigger similar feelings within us. If the channel that would pick up the signals is turned off, then the best you can do is to know intellectually what someone is feeling but you would have trouble feeling it in your heart. A good example is when someone is crying. If the person crying is open to their emotions and you are as well, then it will be relatively easy for you to have tears in your eyes in addition to knowing that they are sad.

Sometimes people think, or have been told, that they are lacking in empathy. They may think that they never developed this ability and that since they are an adult it is too late to achieve it. Many men often come away with this message from many years of being told that they are unemotional. I disagree with this perspective. There is a lot of evidence to suggest that almost all infants are extraordinarily empathic. They respond quite readily to the emotions of those around them. What happened to this capacity then? The problem is not an absence of empathy but the presence of an *empathic wall*. One has learned not to feel so much, perhaps because being empathic may have been overwhelming in early childhood. In addition, some families and cultures teach their children to disconnect emotionally. Men, in particular, get this message from society.

If you are having trouble being aware of your thoughts and feelings in the moment, it will take consistent effort on your part to begin tuning in to yourself. One strategy for taking

down the empathic wall is for you to just tell the group, “I’m having trouble being aware of what I’m thinking or feeling right now”. This tells us something about your experience and helps to develop the habit of noticing and expressing your inner world. You also might find it easier to report on your physical sensations (“I have a knot in my stomach” or “I have a headache”) than on your thoughts and feelings. This also can be a way of warming up to the task so that gradually other aspects of experience can begin to get noticed as well.

I would also encourage you to start by naming any stray thoughts or feelings that show up. For example, “I notice Joe got a haircut” or “I like Sally’s shoes”. This may sound trivial but it both serves to develop the habit of naming what is going on in the mind as well as telling us something about you. After all, why are you noticing Joe and Sally instead of someone else in the group? Your simple observation is a possible tip-off about an aspect of a relationship that could be worth exploring.

At those times when you do have awareness of your thoughts and feelings, what does being open to them mean? One way of thinking about this is that it means learning to relate differently to the inner critic which will generate such thoughts as “that’s too obvious” (or “unimportant” or “embarrassing” or “inarticulate”, etc.) or will attempt to convince you that others think that you are “stupid” (or “pathetic” or “a loser”, etc.). Notice that I didn’t suggest silencing the inner critic. No need to get into a battle. Even if you were to win this round, the mind tends to return to what is avoided. The strategy I recommend is to notice the inner criticism, maybe even say it out loud in the group, but to realize you don’t have to buy into the message and can speak up even if you have the thought “this is stupid”. This is a skill worth developing. Imagine not being bullied by the messages that your old scripts generate (usually well-intentioned but awfully out dated).

Group members often worry about speaking up for fear of it not being the right time (i.e. not wanting to interrupt) or taking more than their fair share of the time. These are not dilemmas suited to clear-cut guidelines. It is OK to interrupt in group or to use a significant portion of the time, yet they can both be done to excess. There is a balance that needs to be experienced but unfortunately people tend to err on the side of not interrupting enough and not using enough of the time. In under-doing it, they miss out on potentially important experiences. As the writer, James Thurber, said, “You might as well fall flat on your face as lean over too far backwards.” When it comes to interrupting and the use of time it is best to push the limits of too much rather than too little and allowing the group to help you to know if you have found an effective balance.

Being accepting means understanding that the mind generates all kinds of wonderful and awful thoughts and feelings. It’s what minds do as they try to solve the problems that arise from being in the world. Tara Brach describes acceptance in this way:

“Rather than trying to vanquish waves of emotion and rid ourselves of an inherently impure self, we turn around and embrace this life in all its realness—broken, messy, mysterious and vibrantly alive. By cultivating an unconditional and accepting presence, we are no longer battling against ourselves, keeping our wild and imperfect self in a cage of judgment and mistrust. Instead, we are

discovering the freedom of becoming authentic and fully alive”.

The attitude of relating to your mind as if it were an internal organ in your body, like your kidney or heart, can be a useful habit. It acknowledges that we don't have control over what the mind does. As I mentioned earlier, thoughts, feelings and sensations form scripts and stories that our mind uses to guide us in the world. The point of doing this is adaptive: so we can act automatically and reflexively. Some of what gets generated is useful and some of it is mental chatter that really gets in the way.

An unfortunate tendency humans have is to confuse *the mind* *the self*. This way of thinking leads to the belief that having troubling thoughts means you are a troubled person. When one has a perspective that allows one to step back and look at the mind and not get lost in the thoughts and feelings it generates, you get some wiggle room. A helpful image is of being on a bridge looking down upon a train with open box cars where each car carries one of your thoughts or feelings. Perhaps you can imagine seeing one of those cars carrying the “I'm so stupid” thought rather than simply believing that thought to be true.

You don't have to believe what the mind tells you. Instead of getting into a struggle to try and control the mind (a losing battle!) you can gain mastery over the mind by working on what you do with what shows up. (I have heard it expressed this way—“you can't stop the waves, but you can learn to surf”). From this perspective, having a negative thought can be responded to with acceptance and curiosity. It becomes something to share with others rather than something to be controlled or squelched.

### **Shouldn't I keep quiet about my negative thoughts about other group members?**

One significant challenge of being open comes up in response to critical or angry thoughts about others. It is generally important that outside of the group therapy room that everyone observes *social rules*. Those rules call for politeness and being careful about what one says. In the group therapy room those rules are replaced by *group rules* and in the group room respectful honesty is valued over politeness. I encourage group members to be “messy”, meaning that they should voice thoughts and feelings, even if they may seem to be impolite or imperfectly spoken. This takes courage initially although with an attitude of acceptance it becomes easier. There can be less guilt when one realizes one is not *being* mean or seductive or fearful or needy but is *expressing* mean, seductive, fearful or needy thoughts and feelings. Too often, group members have private conversations in their heads about the appropriateness or timing of their thoughts and feelings and end up stifling them. Their inner critic has decided that it would be wrong to speak up. How are we to know what your mind is up to if such mental processes are hidden? If you keep these kinds of thoughts to yourself the group experience is likely to be limited to supportive interactions as members avoid going too deeply below the surface for fear of what will get stirred up.

There are ways to express potentially hurtful thoughts and feelings that are more helpful than others, but there is no way to do it that can protect you or others from having reactions. The important guideline here is to try and present critical and judgmental thoughts and feelings in a way that is not accusatory. It helps if you make it clear that you

are telling the group what is going on in your mind rather than making a statement of fact about the other person. “You are a negative person” sounds like you are presenting a truth whereas “I feel like you are very negative” makes it clearer that you are presenting your experience of the other person. Not only might this allow the other person to hear what you have to say a little more easily it can also help to weaken the habit we all have of believing that we are relating to the facts about someone else rather than becoming aware that we are always filtering what we notice about others through the scripts our minds have created.

Having encouraged you to present your negative thoughts in a particular way that creates the best chance for everyone to be accepting of what gets expressed, please know that due to anxiety or lack of practice or other complicating emotions, you may still end up sounding accusing. However, if we want to practice openness, this has to include being open and accepting when we miss the mark. If our words don’t come across just right it is still better to have tried and to have learned from that than to keep silent. It is also the case that no matter how skillfully a negative thought is presented, it may be hard for a fellow group member to hear it. Group members can only do their best to express themselves in a particular way and the habit of taking responsibility for what others do with your words is one that must be unlearned. This does not mean we don’t pay attention to the effect of our words but that we accept that we can only strive to master our own responses.

One last thing about expressing anger. It is important that this, and all other feelings as well, be put into words and not expressed through actions. It should be obvious that no physical assaults are allowed but other actions are also discouraged, including leaving the session early, screaming at someone, throwing a piece of paper or even shaking one’s fist at someone else. For group to be effective, it needs to be a safe enough place for everyone. It is not unusual for groups to include members who were bullied as children or even assaulted by parents, siblings or neighbors. For these individuals even the expression of anger in words can be a difficult, although worthwhile experience, to tolerate. Physical expressions of anger tend to overload the emotional circuitry and when emotion is that high it isn’t possible to think straight. Keeping the expression of anger limited to words makes these challenging interactions easier to learn from.

### **What do I do with feelings of attraction?**

Being open means tuning into *everything*. If what you are aware of are positive thoughts and feelings about someone in the group then your task is to express those as well. Like expressing anger, revealing feelings of caring or attraction, including sexual attraction, can also seem like a risky thing to do. Many people have learned scripts about intimacy that include the beliefs that intimacy will end with being hurt and that they won’t be loved in return. Such scripts can interfere with closeness in friendships and in sexual relationships. Group is a place to begin to allow yourself to have and express these feelings. Communications such as, “You are someone who I could imagine being friends with outside of group”, “I really like how you said that” or “I find myself very attracted to you” are examples of statements that members learn to become comfortable making towards one another.

As you consider expressing feelings of attraction you may experience the prohibition

which social rules dictate about not excluding others. If you tell one person that you like them then others may feel hurt and left out. Similar to what has already been stated about expressing angry feelings, it is important to be open to what shows up when one is honest. For the person who feels excluded this is an opportunity to explore this pain and how they manage it. Do they berate themselves and replay all the times in their lives when they feel left out? Do they protect themselves by beginning to find flaws in others? Do they remind themselves of the times when they were the one chosen?

If you are expressing feelings of attraction that exclude others, try to notice the feelings that arise for you as well. This is also an opportunity to discover more about yourself. Do you find yourself full of regret and taking responsibility for the reactions of others? Is there some guilty pleasure in having created in others the same pain of exclusion that may be so hard for you to manage? Do you allow yourself to enjoy the moment of connection it creates with the person you are speaking about? Whatever it is that takes place, being open to it is the first step in allowing for change to occur.

As with anger, these expressions of affection should also be kept to words. Very often the urge is to give a pat on the shoulder or arm to help words of affection to carry their meaning. For most people, this would be a welcome aspect of the communication. However, for some members their past may include situations where affection was a prelude to exploitation. The more extreme example is of someone who has been sexually abused but other experiences of unwanted and forced physical closeness is not unusual. A touch on the shoulder to a group member who has experienced this may trigger old feelings that can make the group feel unsafe.

### **What if I take a risk to open up but don't like how it comes out or its effect on others?**

The learning in group is mostly learning by doing. When you take the chance of being yourself, not editing everything you are thinking three times over before you say it, then what you get will be more spontaneous, more revealing and potentially messier. This is a good thing even if you end up not liking the consequences. As the saying goes, "Experience is a hard teacher because she gives the test first, the lesson afterwards". One of the major advantages of taking interpersonal risks in group is that the only thing at stake is that people will have feelings.

If you end up saying something in a way that you come to regard as a mistake then it gives you an opportunity to examine the script that was behind your words. What was going on inside you so that you said that, at that time, in that way? Being able to recognize your scripts helps you to ask yourself, "What was my intention?" This will become one of the more important questions you can ask yourself after you have taken the risks to let go, be yourself and develop an attitude of acceptance.

As mentioned earlier, you will probably find that some of the scripts that are running your life are organized around solving childhood dilemmas that no longer exist. For example, "I need to take care of people so they will like me" or "My need for love will be too much for others so I will act like I don't need love." There is usually a lot of emotion attached to these scripts, which means that our minds pay attention to them. (That's what emotions have evolved to do—they are nature's highlighter.) What tends to get pushed



into the background are the scripts that carry our intentions and our values (which typically do not have as much emotion attached to them because they never felt crucial to our survival). These kinds of scripts answer the question, “How do I want to be in the world?”

A major source of unhappiness in our lives is due to a mismatch between our actions and our intentions. How can we be happy if what we are doing in our lives is not expressing what really matters to us? The group is a wonderful place to begin to practice trying to be how one wants to be. For example, you might want to feel close to other people but your intention to get close is thwarted by scripts that warn you of the dangers of getting hurt. In group you can start to engage in new behaviors that will help you get what you want. This might involve paying attention to the positive things that are said to you rather than minimizing them or expressing affection or keeping eye contact. In this process of trying to get your intentions and actions to line up, you will get feedback from the group that will help you to know if you are headed in the right direction.

### **Can I really learn new habits after so many years of behaving another way?**

Group is an opportunity to start to strengthen and cultivate ways of relating to yourself and others that reflect what really matters to you and what you regard to be an expression of your *true self*. When this happens a shift takes place from being reactive to being responsive. Reactions tend to come from being on automatic pilot. Responses tend to come from awareness and choice.

It is important not to be focusing on intentions right from the start thereby creating a kind of editing process that would prevent the group and you from becoming intimately acquainted with your struggles and difficulties. To focus on intentions without allowing the messiness to unfold could become yet another attempt to look good to the world and a way of side-stepping the most important task in this process, which is learning to accept yourself as you are. As the psychologist Carl Rogers has said, “The curious paradox is that when I accept myself just as I am, then I can change”.

After the group experience has helped you to discover ways of thinking about yourself and relating to others that more accurately reflect your values and intentions, the task becomes to take what has been learned and to make this into a habit. At this point, awareness is directed towards noticing when you have slipped back into the old patterns and returning to the new behaviors, as well as keeping what you have learned in the forefront of your mind as a means of guiding you. You will find that you spend less time on automatic pilot but that ongoing attention is needed to reduce the tendency for old habits to return. One purpose of the group is to practice what you have learned. Some people choose to remain in group for long periods of time, not because they haven't learned what they've come to learn, but because they want to take advantage of the unique setting of the group to practice new ways of being in the world.

### **How will I know when I'm ready to leave group?**

Knowing when it is time to leave group is always a judgment call. Members make an agreement when they join the group that they will stay until they finish the work they came to do. I have always found it interesting that people who have been in individual

therapy for many years somehow expect that group will accomplish the same task in a much briefer period of time. Changing habits that have been present in your life for decades is no short-term affair. You are asked to stick it out until you have made enough progress on your goals so that you have experienced feeling better about yourself and being closer to others and you know what you need to continue to do to have more of these experiences in your life. You will most likely be working towards greater self acceptance and intimacy your entire life and the goal is to leave group knowing how to achieve these more effectively.

In keeping with the idea that we all have blind spots and the benefit of the group is that our awareness of ourselves is increased when we interact with others, members agree to let the group participate in the decision to leave. It will always be your decision whether it is time to go but you agree to be open to what the group has to say about this matter. It is the difference between coming in and saying to the group, "I've decided to leave the group" as opposed to "I think I'm ready to go. What do you all think?"

### **How long do I need to take to say goodbye?**

If you are open to what the group has to say and it still seems like you are ready to leave, then how long it will take for you to say goodbye is a negotiation between you and the group. People sometimes leave before they have finished their work. Their jobs may have changed and they have to travel, they may be moving out of town, or they may feel like they are not ready to take the risks involved in group participation. If this is the case, a lengthy goodbye is not always necessary. My viewpoint is that if you are leaving prematurely then this may not be the time to take advantage of a goodbye to do a last piece of therapeutic work.

If you are leaving after having worked hard in the group and having realized some important therapeutic gains, then ending with the group is an opportunity to tackle an important challenge—opening up emotionally to the reality that in this life everything ends. In childhood and throughout life, our attempts to cope with the pain of having important relationships end or dramatically change shapes many of the troublesome scripts that interfere with happiness. We may learn to dread loss, minimize it or emotionally shut down. When you are ending with the group you will be saying goodbye to a group of people and a leader who have most likely become important to you. There may be many reasons why you will be excited to be leaving (like having a weeknight freed up!) and you will probably feel some pride in the work you have done. But there may also be some negative feelings, like anxiety about what's to come, shame about what wasn't accomplished and sadness about ending. Can you allow yourself to feel these fully even as you move forward into another phase of your adult life? Having a successful goodbye is a significant event in the life of a group member. It will bring up a wide range of feelings as the group both celebrates and mourns the person who is leaving, and the person leaving learns to both stay true to themselves in their intention to leave and receptive to having mattered to others.

Group is a unique and powerful therapeutic experience. It can seem scary and challenging at times however with effort and resolve group will provide you with an opportunity to learn new ways of seeing yourself and relating to others.

# Ten Tips for Getting More Out of Group

Mark Sorensen, Ph.D., CGP, FAGPA

1. **Be aware.** Pay attention to your thoughts and feelings about other group members. What relationship do you have with the group, other group members and the leader? What makes you feel closer or more distant towards others? Express to the group what you notice.
2. **Notice non-verbal behavior.** Remember that *how* people talk is as important as *what* they say. Tune into the non-verbal behaviors in the group—yours and those of other members. Talk about what you notice.
3. **Be honest and open.** It's natural to want to look good to others but this will get in the way of your progress. Try and tell the group whatever is showing up in your mind, even if it means admitting you don't know what is going on or expressing negative feelings about others. Politeness is likely to be the enemy of your growth in group.
4. **Be accepting.** Give yourself permission to be messy. You don't have to be articulate about what you are thinking and feeling. You don't have to understand what others are saying or what you are thinking and feeling. It is better to be expressing yourself regardless of the form it takes rather than to wait until you have figured it all out privately. You may end up wanting to express yourself differently next time, but we learn best through experience.
5. **Ask for feedback.** Find out from others what your blind spots are by asking the group for feedback about how they experience you.
6. **Take risks.** Try out new ways of talking to people and behaving. Let others know about the things that you normally keep hidden from others. We follow *group rules* not *social rules* and these rules allow for greater self-disclosure.
7. **Be direct.** Try to be as direct as possible and be open to the responses of others. Telling a story is sometimes a way of being known, but it can also be a way of avoiding dialogue and intimacy. Aim for dialogue rather than monologue.
8. **Don't hide behind questions.** Let others know what is going on in your mind, even when asking questions about them. Try to say why you are curious and what is behind the question.
9. **Emphasize the emotional.** The expression of emotion will have far greater value than the expression of ideas or information. Try and take the risk to let yourself be emotionally available to others.
10. **Learn to identify your intentions.** As you make the effort to be yourself with others try also to notice whether or not there is a match between how you are being and how you want to be. Explore with the group what makes it difficult for your actions to match your intentions.

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