

### STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT OF THE PERSON-CENTERED GROUP

Dimension	Initial Stage	Working Stage	Final Stage
Key developmental tasks and goals	Early stage of a group is characterized by some floundering and a search for direction. Typically, members present a socially acceptable facade or reveal the "safe" sides of themselves; they describe themselves in a "there-and-then" manner. There is a milling around and a sense of confusion concerning the purpose and the function of the group. A key task is to build trust.	Negative feelings often surface over the lack of leadership. Then, a more accepting and trusting climate may prevail. Members show more of themselves, cohesion develops, and members find support in the group. Some confrontation occurs, especially when members sense that others are not being genuine. False fronts give way to a real expression of self. There is a willingness to explore significant personal concerns.	The group develops a healing capacity, and members are able to move forward based on the support offered. Members develop self-acceptance; they offer feedback to one another in a climate of honesty, and a sense of community develops. Behavior changes are noticed in the group. Members show increased ease in expressing their feelings, and they gain insight into how they relate to others.
Role and tasks of group leader	Facilitator's main role is to grant freedom to members to develop a structure of their own. Leader places responsibility on members for the direction they will take and follows that lead. Leader is concerned with creating a climate that is psychologically safe for the members. Leader's role is to be without a role. Central function is to help members interact honestly.	A central task of the leader is to adopt an empathic viewpoint; it is important that members feel deeply understood and cared for. Leader needs to accept negative as well as positive feelings. Leader needs to share ongoing feelings and reactions with the group. Leader listens actively, reflects, clarifies, summarizes, links members' statements, demonstrates respect, and shows acceptance and caring for members.	Central role of leader is to help members express how they have experienced this group and to encourage honest feedback. Leader helps members apply what they have learned in the group to life outside of it. Leader provides support for members in making significant changes. Leader helps members accept responsibility for these changes.
Role of group members	Members are expected to develop their own goals and decide for themselves how they will spend their time together. At first members are rather confused and search for a structure. They are resistant to sharing personally significant material. They are encouraged to express whatever they are feeling.	Members decide what they will reveal about themselves; they express feelings to others in the group. They offer both support and challenge to others; they give and receive feedback. Members at this stage are usually willing to express immediate interpersonal feelings of both a positive and a negative nature. Self-exploration occurs on a deeper level.	Members move from playing roles to being real, from being relatively closed to being open and able to tolerate some ambiguity, from being out of contact with internal and subjective experience to being aware of the ongoing subjective process, from looking for external answers to looking inward for direction.

2. The person-centered approach emphasizes the personal qualities of the group leader rather than techniques of leading, because the primary function of the group facilitator is to create a climate in which healing can occur. The therapeutic relationship between the facilitator and members helps the members grow and change.
3. The therapeutic core conditions for growth are genuineness, or realness, of the facilitator; unconditional positive regard, which is an acceptance of the members; and empathic understanding of the members' subjective world. To the extent that facilitators experience and demonstrate genuineness, warm regard, and accurate empathy for the members and to the extent that the members perceive these conditions, therapeutic change and growth will occur.
4. External measures such as diagnosis, testing, interpretation, advice giving, and probing for information are not useful in group work. Instead, group counseling comprises active listening, reflection and clarification, and understanding the inner world of the members. Accurate empathy is a core dimension in a person-centered group.
5. A basic characteristic of this approach to group work is the focus on the members as the center of the group. Members of a person-centered group are often as facilitative as the group leader.

## Glossary of Key Terms for Person-Centered Therapy

**Accurate empathic understanding** The act of perceiving the internal frame of reference of another, of grasping the person's subjective world, without losing one's own identity.

**Congruence** The state in which self-experiences are accurately symbolized in the self-concept. As applied to the therapist, congruence is matching inner experiencing with one's external expressions; genuineness.

**Formative tendency** A central source of energy that seeks fulfillment and actualization, involving both maintenance and enhancement of the organism.

**Genuineness** The quality of realness of the group leader; being without pretenses; congruence.

**Humanistic psychology** A movement, often referred to as the "third force," that emphasizes freedom, choice, creativity, spontaneity, values, growth, self-actualization, humor, and peak experiences.

**Personal power** A state in which individuals are aware of and can act on their own feelings, needs, and values rather than looking outside of themselves for direction.

**Presence** The ability to "be with" someone fully in the present moment.

**Self-actualizing tendency** A growth force within us, leading to the full development of one's potential; the basis on which people can be trusted to identify and resolve their own problems in a therapeutic relationship.

**Therapeutic conditions** The characteristics of the client/therapist relationship necessary and sufficient for change to occur. These core conditions are therapist genuineness, unconditional positive regard, and accurate empathic understanding.

**Unconditional positive regard** The nonjudgmental expression of a fundamental respect for the person as a human; acceptance of a person's right to his or her feelings.

Techniques	<p>Person-centered leaders tend to avoid using planned exercises and techniques to “get a group moving.” They rely on the capacity of the group to decide how time will be spent. Leader’s attitudes and personal characteristics are far more important than the techniques used.</p>	<p>Key techniques include active listening, reflection, clarification, self-disclosure, respect, and congruence. Members are encouraged to speak in an open way about whatever they are feeling at the moment. These tools do not represent techniques so much as basic attitudes/ behaviors.</p>	<p>Leader is really not necessary at this stage if the group has been effective, for now the group is fairly self-directive and can draw on its own resources for direction. Leader may help members summarize what they have learned and encourage them to apply it to life outside the group.</p>
Questions to consider	<p>Since active listening is a basis of this approach, ask yourself how your ability to hear and to understand might be hampered. What are some barriers in yourself to hearing others? Consider the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• talking too much and too soon</li> <li>• being too concerned with answers and not allowing members to explore feelings</li> <li>• being too quick to give advice or to look for an easy solution</li> <li>• asking too many closed questions</li> <li>• being overly directive and doing too much for the group</li> <li>• selectively listening or looking for ways to confirm your preconceived notions about members</li> <li>• paying too much attention to the content and to words and failing to hear subtle meanings</li> </ul>	<p>Are you able to tolerate the expression of negative feelings within a group? Can you accept in a nondefensive manner negative feelings that are directed toward you?</p> <p>Are you able and willing to share your own reactions in an appropriate manner with the members?</p> <p>Are you able to be yourself in the group, or do you hide behind professional roles?</p> <p>Do you trust the members with your feelings? Are you able to let them know how they are affecting you?</p> <p>How do you demonstrate respect for the members by your behavior in the group? Does your behavior indicate understanding and acceptance?</p>	<p>Are you able to facilitate a group rather than direct it? Can you let the members lead the way, helping them look at their process when necessary?</p> <p>As a person and as a group facilitator, have you allowed yourself to be changed by a group? Are you open to growth yourself? What changes do you detect in yourself?</p> <p>Are you able to be both supportive and confrontive? Can you provide nurturing and challenge at the same time?</p> <p>Have you facilitated the group in such a manner that the members no longer look to you for direction or answers? Is the group able to function largely independently of you?</p>

Reactions: Summarize your reactions to the person-centered perspective on group developmental stages. What do you like *most*? *least*? What aspects of this approach would you incorporate in your style of leadership?

## Exercises and Activities for the Person-Centered Approach

### Rationale

As is true for the existential approach, the person-centered approach emphasizes the group leader's attitudes far more than the techniques employed to facilitate a group. The most important consideration is the quality of the relationship you are able to create among the members and between yourself and the members. As you practice the exercises, do your best to keep within a person-centered framework. Attempt to attend to, listen to, and clarify what you hear, and *facilitate* more than *direct* the group process in these exercises.

### Exercises

1. Think about what you have learned about yourself to this point that will either enhance or restrict your effectiveness as a group facilitator. What do you see as your single most important personal quality or strength? Can you identify at least one specific personal characteristic that is likely to get in the way of your effectiveness? If you are exploring these issues in a group, it would be a good idea for everyone to assume responsibility for the direction of the group. This could be an interesting exercise in itself to see what occurs in the absence of structured leadership for a session. As an alternative exercise, one or two members can assume the responsibility for being the facilitator of the group. In this facilitation do your best to keep within the framework of the person-centered approach. Allow some time before the end of the exercise to share your reactions to being a member and a facilitator during the session.
2. One of the cornerstones of the person-centered approach is accurate empathy. Use the following questions as catalysts for discussion in your class or group: What is your understanding of empathy? How can you become empathic? What are the barriers? Do you expect to have the problem of overidentification, or losing your own identity by immersing yourself in another's world? What part does leader self-disclosure play in the expression of this empathy? How can you improve your ability to develop appropriate empathy for others? What kind of person do you have a hard time empathizing with, and what does this tell you about yourself?
3. This exercise is designed to help you increase your empathy for people you might identify as "problem group members." Think about a particular kind of person (especially a group member) you are likely to have the most difficulty understanding or accepting. It can be helpful to think about the kind of group member you hope would drop out of the group or, better, who would not have joined in the first place. In your class or group each member can talk about the specific behaviors of clients that present the greatest challenge. As an alternative exercise, instead of talking about these difficult group members, assume the identity of one of these clients, and role-play that person. Each person in the group stays in the role of a problem member for most of the session. Again, two members can assume the role of co-facilitating the group by staying within the person-centered spirit. Leave enough time to discuss these questions:
  - a. What was it like for you to assume a particular role of a difficult member? What did you learn about this kind of member?
  - b. What did you recognize about yourself in relationship to this person?