

## **Informed Consent for Group Therapy**

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### General Information

Group counseling works because it plays by different rules than everyday social situations. Specifically, the group needs to be a place where members feel safe enough to be open and honest with one another. The guidelines below are important to establishing this sense of safety. Following them carefully will maximize the benefit each member obtains from the group.

In the group, you will play an important role in the growth of your fellow group members. Therefore, your agreement to abide by these guidelines represents an acknowledgement of your responsibility to the other members, as well as to yourself, to the group leader, and to the functioning of the group as a whole.

Please read and indicate that you have reviewed this information and agree to it by signing at the end of this document.

### Attendance

*I agree to be present, on time, and to remain throughout the meeting. In the event that I know I will be absent or late, I agree to inform the group leader ahead of time.*

Your attendance is crucial to the development of cohesion in the group. Being present each week helps establish a sense of comfort and trust and ensures that members don't miss out on what is shared. If you absolutely cannot make it to a meeting or know that you are going to be late, let the leader know ahead of time so that she can inform the group. When a member is late or absent without explanation, the other group members wait and wonder, and therefore have difficulty proceeding.

Being present also means setting aside distractions while in the group. This can include turning off cell phones, not eating or drinking, and not using alcohol or drugs before the group. This can ensure that you can devote your full attention to the other group members and to your own feelings and experience.

### Confidentiality

*I agree to protect the names and identities of fellow group members.*

It is essential that members can trust that their participation in the group and whatever they share in the group will remain confidential. While it is perfectly acceptable to discuss your personal

experience of the group with other people in your life, it is very important to always protect the confidentiality of other group members when doing so. This means not only being sure to never mention any names, but also to avoid sharing information that would make it possible for someone else to figure out who the members are (e.g., any identifying information as such ethnicity, age, or specific aspects of a person's life story).

Limitations of such client held privilege of confidentiality exist and are itemized below:

1. If a client threatens or attempts to commit suicide or otherwise conducts themselves in a manner in which there is a substantial risk of incurring serious bodily harm.
2. If a client threatens grave bodily harm or death to another person.
3. If the therapist has a reasonable suspicion that a client or other named victim is the perpetrator, observer of, or actual victim of physical, emotional or sexual abuse of children under the age of 18 years.
4. Suspicions as stated above in the case of an elderly person who may be subjected to these abuses.
5. Suspected neglect of the parties named in items #3 and # 4.
6. If a court of law issues a legitimate subpoena for information stated on the subpoena.
7. If a client is in therapy or being treated by order of a court of law, or if information is obtained for the purpose of rendering an expert's report to an attorney.

If we see each other accidentally outside of the therapy office, I will not acknowledge you first. Your right to privacy and confidentiality is of the utmost importance to me, and I do not wish to jeopardize your privacy. However, if you acknowledge me first, I will be more than happy to speak briefly with you but feel it appropriate not to engage in any lengthy discussions in public or outside of the therapy office.

### Participation

*I agree to work on the problems that brought me to the group by being as open and honest as possible about my inner experience, feelings, and reactions in the group.*

When one member takes a risk by being open in the group, it makes it easier for the other members to do so. Although being open can feel scary, it is one of the most helpful things members can do for themselves and for others. That said, no one will ever force you to do anything in group counseling. You control what, how much, and when you share with the group. While members typically get the most benefit out of group when they participate actively, even silent members often gain a lot by listening to others and paying attention to how they feel about what is being said.

### Verbalizing Feelings Instead of Acting-In or Acting-Out

*I agree to put my feelings about the group and the other group members into words, rather than behaviors. I agree to keep the group informed if I start to feel worse or to experience an increase in problematic behaviors while attending the group.*

Paying attention to your feelings and inner experience is an important part of the group. Just as important is learning to put these feelings into words, rather than having them come out in some other way. *Acting-out* refers to ways we take our feelings out on other people, such as by aggressing on them when we're angry. *Acting-in* refers to ways we take feelings out on ourselves. Examples may include cutting oneself, binge eating, purging, alcohol and drug use, and suicidal thoughts. If you start to feel worse or if you experience an increase in problematic behaviors while attending the group, it is very important to tell the group so that you can find ways to prevent this from happening.

### Outside Relationships with Group Members

*I agree to use the relationships made in the group therapeutically, not socially.*

Because group therapy is different from most outside social situations, it is best to avoid social relationships with the people you meet in the group for as long as you remain in the group together. Developing outside friendships with other group members can make it more difficult to be fully honest with them in the group. Also, when some group members develop an outside relationship, other members can feel excluded. This can undermine the sense of safety and cohesiveness of the group.

It is possible that you will know someone in the group from an existing relationship. Because this could be uncomfortable for you or for the other person, please let the group leader know immediately if this happens. The group leader, in consultation with you and the other members, will decide how best to resolve this situation.

### Commitment

*I agree to remain in the group for a minimum of five (5) meetings. When I decide to leave the group, I agree to inform the group and to come for at least one final meeting in order to give the group and myself a chance to share reactions to my departure.*

The level of trust in a group is enhanced when all members make a commitment to the group. Also, it usually takes some time for new members to start feeling comfortable enough to open up. *Sticking it out* for at least five (5) meetings will help ensure that you've really given the group a chance to be helpful to you.

As you move towards leaving the group, keep the other members informed. If you decide to leave suddenly, be sure to come to at least one more meeting. Group members typically become important to one another, and this will give everyone the chance to share their reactions to your departure (as opposed to have you disappear without the chance to say goodbye).

BY SIGNING BELOW, I AM AGREEING THAT I HAVE READ, UNDERSTOOD AND AGREE TO THE ITEMS CONTAINED IN THIS DOCUMENT. BY SIGNING BELOW, I AM AGREEING TO ABIDE BY THESE GUIDELINES AND ACKNOWLEDGE MY RESPONSIBILITY TO THE GROUP.

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Printed Name

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Signature

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Date