

What is Group Psychotherapy ?

It may come as no surprise that the people who can most benefit from a group are often the ones who least want to join one! These notes are aimed to help you make an informed decision as to whether a group might help. Group psychotherapy is an evidence based and effective long term treatment for people struggling with emotional distress and interpersonal problems. It provides a space where you can talk with others in order to understand and overcome these difficulties. It is also a powerful tool for personal development and learning which can be of benefit to anyone who is interested in exploring more about themselves.

Who can benefit?

Groups can help with these common human problems:

- problems in making and sustaining intimate relationships
- social anxiety
- difficulty in finding a voice when in a work, family or social group.
- feeling left out or on the edge in social situations
- being isolated as child / finding it hard to maintain adult friendships.
- feeling ashamed of feelings and anxieties which you have kept private and never been able to talk about. (hearing others share similar experiences can help you discover you are not alone).
- those who are curious about their mind and what lies beneath the surface.

How does Group Psychotherapy work?

Group psychotherapy aims to enable fundamental change in how you think and relate, so it takes time. Group members commit to work on their issues for at least a year and usually longer. Each group consists of up to eight men and women, who don't know each other outside the psychotherapy and only meet during the psychotherapy sessions. Everything shared in the group is confidential. Most groups meet for 90 minutes a week, with some twice weekly groups. Everyone is invited to share whatever feels to be most important to them. This is rather like free-association in psychoanalysis; when one person shares an experience others can add their own memories or experiences so that a full picture can develop of that particular problem. Hearing others experiences can be helpful as we realize that we are not alone and that our problems are part of being human. We can also see ourselves in others who can act like mirrors. Groups can offer honest and frank feedback as to how others experience you, sometimes this can be observations that you are unlikely to hear in everyday life. Belonging to a group is also supportive; having a group of people who are interested to hear about your life, your ups and downs and your reflections.

How does it help?

- Belonging to a group who are interested to hear about your life, your ups and downs and your reflections
- Learning how to reach out and be more open in close relationships
- Learning to communicate under pressure
- Improving quality of your relationships. Eg. not getting stuck in just pleasing others or repeatedly agreeing to do things you don't want to do.
- Becoming more resilient and less reactive when faced with disappointment or rejection.
- Being able to participate in groups without having to be either at the centre or withdrawing completely.
- Being able to be yourself in the company of others.

Who has it helped and how did it work for them?

These are examples of people who have been in group psychotherapy. Their names and key details have been changed to mask their identity.

“it was all about learning to be human”.

This was how one group member summed up their times in a group. Realising that we are all struggling with both painful and joyful experiences, hearing others talk about their vulnerable feelings can be liberating as we realize we are not alone. It is often the feelings or experiences that we feel most ashamed of and won't talk about that cause us the most unhappiness.

David's story.

David came to psychotherapy having grown up as an only child having struggled to make close friends. He had always found social groups difficult, having been teased at school and often felt self-conscious and awkward. In relationships he tended to be drawn to women who were rather aloof and critical of his vulnerable side. During his time in the group he noticed that he tended to either get very involved in focussing on others' problems or withdrawing completely. This was similar to what had happened in his family where he had either felt close to his parents or would push them away and spend long periods on his own. The group encouraged him to learn how to chip in, to stay involved during group conversations and talk about his feelings. Being a valued member of a psychotherapy group helped him in his other social groups where he felt more comfortable being himself.

Jo's story.

Came into the group having had a serious episode of depression. She had a pattern of having a series of internet relationships but never staying with the same partner for more than a few months. Each time she got involved, she started to feel trapped. In the group she found it very hard at first as she felt like nobody would be interested in her unless she was

either funny or helpful. It took some time until she began to talk about long buried experiences from her childhood where she had felt unprotected and lonely. At this point, she started to feel close to others in the group and began to open up and feel closer to her partner outside the group.

John Cleese

John Cleese is probably one of the most well-known people to have publicly acknowledged being helped by over three and a half years of group analysis with [Robin Skynner](#), the [group analyst](#) and [family therapist](#). He reluctantly chose psychotherapy after experiencing recurrent flu symptoms which had not responded to medical treatment and problems in his first marriage. In his book [Families and How to Survive Them](#), he writes: “ After about a year, I began to feel I was undergoing the most interesting experience of my adult life. For a start, once we’d all lowered our barriers a bit, I was able to see my fellow group members behaving in a freer, more open way than you can ever hope to observe in normal social life, except perhaps with your two or three most intimate friends. ... as the months progressed I went through a very wide range of moods and emotions, some of them quite new and difficult to handle. But apart from these emotional experiences, and also certain discoveries I made about myself – which didn’t quite fit my image of myself at that time! – the most startling realisation was that some of my deepest ingrained attitudes were being questioned for the first time – especially some of my basic assumptions about man/woman relationships... what I learnt from the group has helped me enormously. Since that time, I’ve led a much more enjoyable life. My experiences in the group freed me from all the physical symptoms I’d been suffering and reduced my physical tension. I think the group has helped me to empathize better with other people, perhaps on occasion to be able to help friends more effectively than I might have done before; the psychotherapy has also helped me professionally, by allowing me better insights into ‘ character’; and it’s opened my mind up to a whole new way of looking at people’s behaviour in the social and political sphere.... But ... the single thing that has freed me most to enjoy life more, is that any problems I now experience are much milder and more manageable – almost an echo of their former selves, - while the methods of handling them that I learned in the group allow me to deal with them much more easily and efficiently when they do arise.

Sarah

Sarah sought help because she had been in a string of abusive relationships, with jealous partners. What became clear in her initial assessment was that by not having a friendship group, she had become too emotionally dependent on her partner. This left her unable to challenge him through a fear of losing him and being left on her own. Belonging to a psychotherapy group gradually gave her the confidence to also make more friends outside of psychotherapy. This in turn enabled her to be more empowered in relationship to men.

Ok. I'm still unsure of the idea of a group but how can I find out more?

Brighton Psychotherapy Centre's aim is to help everyone find the best fit in their choice of psychotherapy, which is why we offer low cost assessments and a wide range of options. Most of us know something about counselling but very few know anyone who has been in a group. For this reason, we offer a 30 minute meeting with an experienced group analyst, free of charge, to anyone who is considering whether a group might be right for them.

How to book:

To book an initial consultation, please email our practice manager : info@brightonpsychotherapycentre.org.uk or call us on 01273 626 444.

Cost :

Once weekly groups £70 - £100 per month.

Twice weekly group £ 174 - £184 per month.

We are hoping to get funding for those who cannot afford group psych psychotherapy : please ask.

Notes & references:

1. Group Psych psychotherapy at Brighton Psychotherapy Centre is also known as Group Analysis, based on the ideas of Michael Foulkes and Wilfred Bion and sociology.
2. R Skynner & J Cleese. (1983) Families and How to Survive Them. Pub. Methuen.
3. Foulkes & Anthony (1963) Group Psych psychotherapy: The Psychoanalytic Approach Pub. Maresfield Library.