

Group Guidelines

The purpose of group therapy is to promote growth and healing for every group member. In order to optimize group's therapeutic effectiveness, it is important that every group member abide by certain guidelines. These have been established to ensure a safe, respectful group environment, which is essential to the development of trust and cohesion among group members.

Please read each of the guidelines below. The phrases in ALL CAPS contain the actual group guideline, and the regular text provides additional information about the rationale for the guideline. When you are finished, please mark the box at the end to indicate your acknowledgment of these guidelines.

CONFIDENTIALITY

GUIDELINE: IT IS ESSENTIAL THAT EVERY GROUP MEMBER RESPECT THE CONFIDENTIALITY, PRIVACY, AND ANONYMITY OF EVERY OTHER GROUP MEMBER BY NOT DISCLOSING ANY INFORMATION OUTSIDE OF UVU STUDENT HEALTH SERVICES (SHS) THAT COULD BE USED TO IDENTIFY ANOTHER GROUP MEMBER.

Rationale: One of the most important aspects of any form of psychotherapy is confidentiality. Confidentiality is necessary to ensure that the group environment remains a safe and trusting place in which all group members feel comfortable sharing their feelings and concerns. For this reason, protecting the confidentiality of every group member is the shared responsibility of all group members and all group facilitators.

ATTENDANCE

GUIDELINE: IT IS IMPORTANT THAT EACH GROUP MEMBER ARRIVE TO EACH GROUP SESSION ON TIME, REMAIN FOR THE ENTIRE SESSION, AND MAKE EVERY EFFORT TO INFORM THE GROUP LEADERS ABOUT ANY ATTENDANCE ISSUES (E.G., MISSED APPOINTMENTS; LATE ARRIVALS; ETC.) BEFORE THOSE ISSUES OCCUR. IN ADDITION, ANY GROUP MEMBER THAT DOES NOT ATTEND 3 CONSECUTIVE SESSIONS (WITHOUT MAKING PRIOR ARRANGEMENTS WITH THE GROUP'S FACILITATOR[S]), WILL BE INELIGIBLE FOR GROUP SERVICES FOR THE REMAINDER OF THAT ACADEMIC SEMESTER.

Rationale: In group therapy, each member benefits from feedback from the facilitators as well as from the other group members. In other words, everyone in the room matters! If people are absent, then it impacts the degree to which others can benefit from the group experience. Also, the individual who is absent misses out. In addition, when a group member arrives late, they may inadvertently interrupt the ongoing group process that has begun. This could result in people repeating themselves in order to get the late group member "caught up," or could affect a group member's processing of an important emotional experience. To minimize the possible impact of late arrivals, we ask that you do not attend a group session if you are going to be late by 15 minutes or more.

As with all of the services at Mental Health Services, group is in high demand and there are a limited number of therapists and therapy spots. This makes it essential that we utilize our limited resources for those students who can make the commitment to attending treatment consistently. For this reason, students who do not attend 3 consecutive group sessions (without making prior arrangements with the group facilitator[s]) will be dropped from the group and will be ineligible to participate in group for the remainder of that academic term. Further, we ask that any group member who has made the decision to end their participation in their group, communicate their decision to the group facilitator(s) as soon as possible. This will allow the facilitator(s) to begin the process of filling the open spot in the group.

NUMBER OF SESSIONS

GUIDELINE: WE ASK NEW GROUP MEMBERS TO MAKE AN INITIAL COMMITMENT OF 5 SESSIONS BEFORE MAKING A DECISION ABOUT WHETHER THAT GROUP IS RIGHT FOR YOU.

Rationale: The most common experience for new group members is nervousness. This is completely normal. It can be uncomfortable to walk into an unfamiliar room and be with unfamiliar people. For most new group members, it takes some time to get to know other group members, and to feel safe disclosing personal information. Letting the group know about you and your challenges will be helpful for you, though this can be done at your own pace. Many new group members find that when the group feels safe enough to share what they are apprehensive about, the group can be very helpful and affirming.

In addition, there are times when, after these 5 sessions, a new group member may feel that group is not the most effective treatment choice for them at the time. Should this occur, we ask that group member to openly discuss their concerns with the group. While this can sometimes seem intimidating, this act of respect for the group and its members will provide an opportunity to explore whether the group can make changes that will make the experience more helpful for that member. If this is not possible, then it will give all group members the opportunity to say goodbye.

SUBSTANCE USE

GUIDELINE: IT IS ESSENTIAL THAT EVERY GROUP MEMBER NOT ATTEND GROUP UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF ALCOHOL OR ANY DRUGS THAT COULD INTERFERE WITH THEIR ABILITY TO MAKE PRODUCTIVE USE OF THE GROUP EXPERIENCE.

Rationale: For group members to be able to give and/or receive accurate, helpful feedback, it is necessary that each group member's cognitive functioning not be impaired. Alcohol and certain recreational drugs (as well as some prescription medications) affect the brain in ways that can impair normal, rational thinking, as well as the ability to experience emotions. These kinds of impairments can affect the group experience and your ability to benefit from it. (Note: This guideline does not apply to the use of prescribed psychotropic medications such as antidepressants; anti-anxiety medications; etc. If you have concerns about the potential impact of any prescription medications on your ability to participate in or benefit from group, please discuss these concerns with your prescribing physician and/or the facilitators of your specific group.)

OUTSIDE RELATIONSHIPS

GUIDELINE: WE ASK THAT GROUP MEMBERS AVOID FORMING RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER GROUP MEMBERS OUTSIDE OF THE GROUP.

Rationale: One of the things that makes the group therapy environment unique is that it is a closed and safe system. Feelings of safety are built on trust, and trust develops when there is confidence that what happens in group, stays in group. If two or more group members were to form a relationship with each other outside of group, other group members may wonder whether they too can participate, or whether they are being talked about. These kinds of questions can interfere with the maintenance of trust within the group and can easily disrupt group members' feelings of safety in the group setting. For these reasons, we ask that group members not form relationships with other group members outside of the group setting; and that, if you do have contact with another group member outside of group, you share that contact with the group at the next group meeting as this kind of open transparency helps maintain trust and safety.

CELL PHONES/TECHNOLOGY

GUIDELINE: WE ASK THAT GROUP MEMBERS AVOID USING THEIR CELL PHONES (OR ANY OTHER DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY SUCH AS LAPTOPS AND/OR TABLETS) WHILE GROUP IS IN SESSION.

Rationale: For group therapy to be effective, it is important that every group member actively attend to what is occurring in group throughout each session. This is not possible if a group member is distracted by their cell phone. If group members are distracted by their cell phones, they will not be able to give thoughtful, supportive feedback to each other, detracting from the overall productivity of the group. At the same time, we also understand that there are occasions when extenuating circumstances necessitate students be available to others outside of group. Because of this, we ask that any group member experiencing such a situation inform the group and the facilitators at the start of group about their predicament, and their need for a temporary exception to this guideline.

ATTENDING A NEW OR DIFFERENT GROUP

GUIDELINE: BEFORE ATTENDING ANY GROUP FOR THE FIRST TIME, EACH GROUP MEMBER MUST RECEIVE APPROVAL FROM THE GROUP'S FACILITATOR(S) AND/OR THE GROUP COORDINATOR.

Rationale: Due to the significant increase in the demand for group services at SHS, the agency has had to make changes to some of the practices that have been in place in past years. One of these changes is the implementation of a new intake process. These new procedures allow new group members to be more informed about the group therapy process, be better prepared to make effective use of the group experience, and prevent any of our groups from growing beyond the point of maximum effectiveness. This intake process requires that any student wishing to join any of our groups, receive prior permission from either the group's facilitator(s) and/or the agency's Group Coordinator. This also applies to those students who have attended our groups previously, though they do not necessarily need to go through the entire process. These students can have a more streamlined process by simply contacting the agency's Group Coordinator.

*** * * Addendum For Teletherapy (i.e., online groups) Only * * ***

Below are items specific to Telemental Health (TMH). These items are not intended to replace the *Group Guidelines* above, but rather, to provide you with additional information about issues that are relevant to group therapy done in an online format. All of the issues addressed in the original *Group Guidelines* above also apply to TMH treatment. TMH consists of live video conferencing through a personal computer, laptop, or tablet that has a webcam and a microphone. In order to continue protecting your confidentiality, MHS is offering TMH through a secure, third party, web-based provider.

CONFIDENTIALITY

TMH GUIDELINE: IT IS ESSENTIAL THAT EVERY GROUP MEMBER BE IN A LOCATION THAT GUARANTEES THEIR PRIVACY AS WELL AS THE PRIVACY OF OTHER GROUP MEMBERS, AND THAT PARTICIPATION IN TMH IS DONE THROUGH A SECURE INTERNET CONNECTION. IT IS ALSO ESSENTIAL THAT NO GROUP MEMBER USE ANY MEANS TO RECORD ANY PART OF ANY GROUP SESSION.

TMH Rationale: For TMH, maintaining confidentiality introduces additional challenges relative to in-person sessions. With in-person sessions, the group facilitators typically have control of the setting (e.g., the room in which group is held; who is allowed in the room; etc.). This is not the case with TMH. In TMH, each group member is at a different location, and group members may or may not have complete control of the environment (e.g., living with family/roommates who may overhear or walk into the room; being in a public space where others could hear and/or see a group member's computer; etc.). In addition, public/free internet connections (e.g., computer labs; coffee shops; etc.) are subject to hacking and/or various forms of data interception. These possibilities put an additional responsibility on every group member to make certain they are in a location that ensures complete privacy (both physically and technologically) for themselves and for all other group members.

MAINTAINING ATTENTION

TMH GUIDELINE: FOR TMH GROUP THERAPY TO BE EFFECTIVE, IT IS ESSENTIAL THAT ALL GROUP MEMBERS CONSISTENTLY ATTEND TO THE ONGOING GROUP INTERACTIONS THROUGHOUT THE ENTIRE SESSION.

TMH Rationale: Relative to in-person groups, it can be more challenging to maintain focus during TMH groups due to the increased number of distractions that may be in any group member's environment (e.g., pictures on the wall; clothes on the floor; sounds from outside the room; cell phones; pets; etc.). These distractions can interrupt a group member's focus on what other group members are talking about, making it difficult to offer useful feedback. Also, some of these distracting sounds are easily detectable by modern microphones, and can be amplified by the technology, thereby creating distractions for other group members. For these reasons, it is important that every group member participate in their TMH group from a location that is quiet and free from distractions and interruptions.

TECHNOLOGY

TMH GUIDELINE: IT IS ESSENTIAL TO PARTICIPATE IN A TMH GROUP UTILIZING TECHNOLOGY THAT WILL NOT INTERFERE WITH THE THERAPEUTIC EXPERIENCE OF ANY GROUP MEMBERS.

TMH Rationale: With TMH groups, our only source of information is what comes through our technology, and is typically limited to what we see on the computer screen and hear through the speaker(s). This limits our access to nonverbal aspects of others' communication. If we further compromise this with a poor and/or slow internet connection, our ability to communicate effectively with other group members can be choppy or incomplete. In addition, if we try to participate in a TMH group with a cell phone, the screen will likely be far too small for us to see the expressions on other group members' faces. For these reasons, it is important to engage in a TMH group from a desktop computer (most preferred), laptop, or tablet, rather than a cell phone. It is also essential to have an internet connection that is fast, strong, and stable. Lastly, some group members may be tempted to utilize the video/screen disabling function that may be integrated into their device. It is essential that this feature not be used. In an in-person group, using this feature would be the equivalent of turning your back on the other group members, or forcing them to wear blindfolds. For obvious reasons, this would significantly interfere with the functioning of the group.

EMERGENCIES

TMH GUIDELINE: IF THE FACILITATOR(S) HAVE REASON TO BELIEVE THAT ANY GROUP MEMBER IS IN A STATE OF DISTRESS THAT COULD POTENTIALLY LEAD TO PHYSICAL SAFETY CONCERNS EITHER TO THEMSELVES OR TO ANOTHER PERSON, AND THAT GROUP MEMBER LEAVES THE SESSION, AND THE FACILITATOR(S) ARE UNABLE TO RE-CONNECT WITH THEM, THE AUTHORITIES MAY BE CONTACTED.

TMH Rationale: There is nothing more important than the safety of all group members. However, at times, things are discussed in group that can elicit strong, sometimes painful, feelings. For in-person groups, the environment that is created by the group members can often provide a supportive space that can contain such levels of emotional intensity. Also, the group facilitator(s) are present to assess the situation and take appropriate action. However, in a TMH environment, each group member is a mouse-click away from leaving the session. Also, unexpected technological glitches can occasionally result in screens freezing, internet connections being lost, etc., making it impossible for the facilitator(s) to accurately assess the situation in a timely manner. Because the safety of every group member is so important, it is essential that any group member demonstrating emotional distress who becomes disconnected from the TMH group contact the group facilitator(s) immediately, so that safety can be assessed and confirmed. In the absence of this confirmation, the authorities may be contacted to ensure the safety of the group member.

With regards to TMH, I understand that once I have worked through each of the important issues discussed above, it will be beneficial both to myself and to the group to access each session of group from the same location using the same technology.

By checking the box below, I am acknowledging that I have read and understand each of the guidelines above. I am also acknowledging that I could be required to leave my group if I do not comply with any of the above guidelines. I am also agreeing to discuss any questions and/or concerns about any of these guidelines with the facilitators of my group and/or the SHS Group Coordinator.

**It is important to know that any in-person group could be moved online at any time at the discretion of the group's leaders in response to changes in COVID, flu, colds, etc. This is for the safety of all group members, as well as the larger campus community. If you are experiencing any symptoms of illness (e.g., cough, sore throat, fever, nausea, runny nose, etc.), please do not attend group. If you are experiencing other symptoms and are uncertain whether or not attending group is appropriate, please consult with the group leaders as soon as possible prior to the group session. If you demonstrate symptoms during any group session, you may be asked to leave the group until you are symptom-free.*

☐ I acknowledge that I have read and understand the guidelines above.

Signature

Date