Peer support in groups

Advanced Peer Support Session #4 - August 24, 2023

Session Objective:

You will be able to lead and facilitate a practice support group effectively in order to implement effective peer support strategies as assessed by a support group facilitation rubric. You will be measured by your ability to facilitate group discussions, manage group dynamics, and apply appropriate techniques and strategies in line with best practices.

Session Sub-objectives:

- Develop and implement effective peer support strategies within group settings demonstrating the ability to lead and facilitate support groups in a manner that displays professionalism, maintains confidentiality, and adheres to ethical boundaries
- Provide well-informed insights and appropriate resources.
- Apply facilitation techniques skillfully, managing group dynamics, resolving conflicts constructively, and encouraging meaningful participation.
- Showcase professionalism and sensitivity while facilitating support groups, maintain confidentiality, and adhere to ethical boundaries consistently.
- Adapt their peer support approaches to cater to diverse needs.
- Apply creative strategies to promote group cohesion and effective support.

What experiences (good and bad) have you had in groups?

01

Benefits of group peer support

Benefits of group peer support

- Shared Understanding & Empathy
- Normalization of Experiences
- Validation & Acceptance
- Diverse Perspectives & Learning
- Empowerment & Self-Efficacy
- Social Connection & Belonging
- Reduced Isolation
- Continuous Motivation
- Skill-Building & Role-Modeling
- Opportunities for Giving Back

"The collective strength of shared stories and empathetic connections becomes a potent catalyst for healing, reminding us that our journey from adversity to empowerment is a path we walk together."

Common group structures

Curriculum-Based:

-Psychosocial education
-Books and worksheets
-Predetermined order
-Information

Topic-based:

-Open discussions based on a topic or written material
-Random rotation
-Flexible to needs
-Specific topic

Open forum:

-Not structured
-"Drop-in" format
-Unique group-to-group based on interests

What is the role of the facilitator?

Functions of the facilitator

Maintain a Safe Environment

Ensure a Supportive Environment

Affect Exploration

Leadership

management

intervention

03

What Skills are necessary?

Important Skill Domains

01

effective listening

02

communication

03

Problem-solving

04

Conflict resolution

05

boundaries

06

Managing disruption

Important Skill Domains

07

CRISIS SITUATIONS

08

SELF-CARE

09

SELF-REFLECTION

10

ADAPTABILITY

11

KNOWLEDGE

12

INCLUSIVITY

Effective listening

- **Reflecting back words, thoughts, and feelings**
- **Responding with affirmations**
- **Clarifying**
- **Summarizing**
- **Eye contact**
- **Positive facial expressions**
- **Gestures and body posture**

Problem-Solving

- Identifying and specifying the problem(s)
- Pinpoint the cause(s)
- Explore feasible approaches
- Select an approach
- Mediation
- Implementation
- Assess outcomes

Conflict Resolution

- Prevent conflict when possible
  Address each issue as it arises
- Speak in the affirmative stating what is wanted instead of what is not wanted
- Suggest possibilities and recommend ways to move forward
- Speak in first person
- Try to engage all group members

Boundaries

- **Promote trust, increase safety, demonstrate respect, develop a rapport, provide structure to the relationships, and create clarity and predictability**
- **Be cautious not to set boundaries that create a power dynamic or imbalance and avoid dual-relationships**
- **Potential areas: mutuality, respecting time, personal space, how one would like to be addressed, topics considered to be "off limits", cultural/religious or other considerations**

Managing Disruptive Members

- Utilize a balanced combination of control and kindness
- Keep the focus on the disruption itself
- Posing the problem generally to the group
- Determine if disruptions can effectively be addressed to the entire group or if speaking to the member in private outside of the meeting is better.
- Refer to pre-established guidelines and agreements

Managing Disruptive Members

Sample Scenarios:

1. A group member is consistently 15 minutes late
2. A group member is monopolizing the conversation
3. A group member is frequently interrupting
4. A group member brings up something inappropriate
5. A group member uses triggering language
6. A group member digresses to irrelevant topics

Handling group conflict

1. Clarify the issue
2. Encourage "I" statements
3. Allow people to finish statements
4. Keep the discussion focused
5. Encourage and model active listening
6. Take a short break
7. Invite others to help out

Self-Reflection

- Be open to group reviews and suggestions
- Be aware of when you need to step aside
- Embrace mistakes
- Support and learn from each other

04

Starting & Ending meetings

STARTING MEETINGS

- **The Welcome**
    - **Introduction**
    - **Facilitator's role**
    - **Purpose and mission**
    - **Agenda**
    - **"Housekeeping"**
- **Review the Guidelines**
    - **Every meeting**
- **Icebreakers**

Closing meetings

- Warning 10-15 minutes before end of discussion
- Inviting members to make any final comments
- Brief reflection on the group and key takeaways
- Summarizing the group
- Goals and action steps
- Encouraging new attendees to try out a few meetings
- Making mention of the literature or other materials
- Announcing information for the next meeting
- Express appreciation to the group

05

Facilitating discussion

Facilitating discussion

Be an active, supportive listener who ensures smooth discussion. You initiate discussion and support it in becoming free-flowing between members.

- Restating what others say
- Questioning and clarifying
- Redirecting
- Validating
- Reflecting and summarizing
- Sharing

Facilitating discussion

- Keep eye contact and address people by their names.
- Notice who talks and who doesn't.
- Be aware of group energy and individual relations.
- Let one person talk at a time. If someone does not get to finish a point, go back to that person.
- If someone tries to contribute but can't get into the conversation, give that person the floor.
- Keep discussions on a personal and feeling level.
- Listen so that you can give positive feedback, extend support, and call attention to similar or conflicting viewpoints
- Let participants speak first and throw questions directed at you back to the group. "What do all of you think?"

06

Support group guidelines

Support group guidelines

The facilitator must ensure everyone understands and adheres to the established and agreed upon guidelines.

- **Demographic Requirements**
- **Confidentiality and Limitations**
- **Safety Requirements**
- **Group Etiquette**
  - **Interrupting, cross-talk, cell phone use, breaks, tardiness, side conversations, eating, etc.**
- **"Comfort Agreements"**

07

SCENARIOS

How Would you Respond?

1. A debate arises during a session about coping strategies for managing stress and anxiety. Two participants have differing opinions on whether seeking professional therapy is a helpful approach, leading to tension in the group.

How Would you Respond?

2. One participant frequently interrupts others while they're sharing their stories, often giving unsolicited advice. This behavior disrupts the flow of conversations and makes some participants uncomfortable, as they feel their experiences aren't being fully acknowledged.

How Would you Respond?

3. In a support group session focused on setting and working towards personal goals, one participant consistently remains quiet and disengaged. He avoids eye contact and appears disconnected from the conversation. Despite the facilitator's efforts, he offers minimal responses and doesn't contribute to discussion.

08

Role Plays

Practice support groups

1. You will be in groups of four
2. You will rotate roles between Facilitator, Character A, B, and C
3. You will spend five minutes reviewing the role play and 15 minutes acting it out
4. At the end, you will spend five minutes completing an evaluation of the facilitator

Support Group Facilitation Evaluation

Facilitator: _____   Assessor: _____

To use this rubric, observe and assess the facilitator during their support group session. Assign a score for each dimension based on their performance in that area. After assessing all dimensions, calculate the overall score, which can give you an objective measurement of the facilitator's ability to effectively lead a support group for individuals in reentry.

Dimension	Exemplary (4)	Proficient (3)	Developing (2)	Unsatisfactory (1)
Engagement and Inclusivity	❐ Establishes a safe and inclusive environment where all participants feel welcome, respected, and encouraged to contribute. Demonstrates exceptional listening skills and empathy. Actively promotes open discussions and fosters a sense of belonging among participants.	❐ Creates a generally safe and inclusive atmosphere, but may occasionally overlook or fail to address certain participants' needs or perspectives. Displays good listening skills and shows empathy, though improvements are possible. Facilitates discussions effectively, but some participants may be less engaged.	❐ Struggles to consistently establish a safe and inclusive environment for all participants. Occasional lapses in listening or empathizing may hinder participant engagement. Group dynamics may suffer due to limited encouragement of open discussions.	❐ Fails to create a safe and inclusive environment, resulting in disengaged or uncomfortable participants. Poor listening and lack of empathy lead to communication barriers. Discussion facilitation is inadequate, hindering meaningful exchanges.
Knowledge and Resourcefulness	❐ Demonstrates comprehensive knowledge of reentry challenges and resources available to participants. Offers well-informed insights, guidance, and appropriate resources. Adapts discussions to address specific participant needs effectively.	❐ Possesses a solid understanding of reentry challenges and available resources, though some gaps in knowledge may be evident. Provides insightful inputs and resources, but further depth is possible. Moderately adaptable to participants' needs.	❐ Displays limited knowledge of reentry challenges and resources, leading to superficial inputs and resource suggestions. Struggles to address specific participant needs effectively.	❐ Demonstrates a lack of understanding of reentry challenges and available resources. Unable to provide meaningful insights or appropriate resources.

References

4 keys to effective meeting facilitation for support group leaders. (n.d.). AdoptUSKids for Professionals.
https://professionals.adoptuskids.org/4-keys-to-effective-meeting-facilitation-for-support-group-leaders/

Peer Support Group Facilitator Guide. (2020). World Bank Group.
https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/178031585674457717-0230032020/render/PeerGroupFacilitatorGuide.pdf

Resources for support group facilitators. (2023, August 14). Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance.
https://www.dbsalliance.org/support/facilitatorresources/

Support Group Facilitation Guide. (2016). Mental Health America.
https://mhanational.org/sites/default/files/MHA%20Support%20Group%20Facilitation%20Guide%202016.pdf

Sweeney, P. (n.d.). Part II of Peer Support Group Facilitation Skills. Veterans Health Administration.
https://www.mirecc.va.gov/visn1/docs/508CompliantProducts/PDFs/PartIIPeerSupportGroupFacilitationSkills.pdf