Understanding Group Development

3

Chapter

Understanding group dynamics and developing the skills necessary to be an effective leader are fundamental to becoming a successful leader. Likewise, understanding group development is essential to group planning and actual group practice. In this chapter we detail the stages of group work starting with group planning during the pregroup stage. We explore beginning, middle, working, and ending stages and address common issues and concerns.

Stages of Group

Information on the various stages of group is well documented in the literature (Brabender, Fallon, & Smolar, 2004; G. Corey, 2004; M.S. Corey & G. Corey, 2006; Gladding, 2004; Jacobs, Masson, & Harvill, 2006; Yalom, 2005). There are various perspectives on the number or stages and the specifics of what exactly happens during each stage, yet the overall consensus is that groups have a pregroup period and a beginning, middle, and ending. Table 3.1 illustrates how various authors have identified these stages.

In general, our view mirrors the various stage models shown in the table. We believe that our version of group development is both comprehensive and sensible. It contains a pregroup stage followed by a beginning, middle/working, and final stage. Pregroup issues that involve group planning and group formation are summarized here and addressed in further detail in Chapter 7, which addresses how to successfully engage in group practice within an agency. Our primary focus in this chapter is on the stages of group work that follow the pregroup stage.

Table 3.1 **Various Views on Stages of Group**

Researchers	Stages
Jacobs, Masson, & Harvill	Beginning
	Working
	Closing
Tuckman	Forming
	Storming
	Norming
	Performing
Donigan & Malnati	Orientation
	Conflict and Confrontation
	Cohesiveness
	Work
	Termination
Brabender, Fallon, & Smolar	Forming a Group
	Authority and Power Issues
	Intimacy
	Dealing with Differences
	Termination
G. Corey; M. S. Corey & G. Corey	Forming the Group
	Initial Stage of Group
	Transition Stage
	Working Stage
	Final Stage

Pregroup Issues

Group Planning and Group Formation
Sound group planning is the foundation for an effective group. The seven-step "Planning Model for Group Work" proposed by Toseland and Rivas (2009) provides a framework from which to begin to explore group development:

1. Establishing a group purpose
2. Determining potential group sponsorship and membership
3. Recruiting members/attracting members
4. Group composition: Forming the group

5. Orienting members to the group
6. Contracting
7. Preparing the group's environment

Beginning Stages of Group

The first session marks the beginning of the group. During this "orientation and exploration" stage, members are "determining the structure of the group, getting acquainted, and exploring the member expectations" (G. Corey, 2004, p. 90). One of the primary tasks of this first phase is that of "inclusion and identity" whereby group members strive to find an identity in the group and decide how much they will allow themselves to be involved. According to Tuckman (1965), it is in the first stage of "forming" where emphasis is on helping members feel they are part of the group and when trust and inclusiveness is developed. Yalom (2005) considers the "initial stage" as one of orientation. Box 3.1 outlines factors that leaders should consider in the first session.

Factors to Consider in First Session

- Beginning the group
- Helping members get acquainted
- Setting a positive tone
- Clarifying purpose
- Explaining leader's role
- Explaining how the group will be conducted
- Helping members verbalize expectations
- Drawing out members during the first session
- Use of exercises during the first session
- Checking out the comfort level
- Explaining group rules
- Explaining terms
- Assessing members' interaction styles
- Being sensitive to multicultural/diversity issues and any dynamics that may be present

(Continued)

- Cutting Off members during the first session
- Focusing on the content
- Addressing questions
- Getting members to look at other members
- Other first-session considerations
- Closing the first session

Initial Session(s)

The initial meeting is often filled with both excitement and apprehension, regardless of how well the leader(s) planned for the group or how prospective members were prepared. Members are often anxiously observing other members and assessing their own level of comfort about sharing in the group. G. Corey, Schneider-Corey, Callanan, and Russell (2004) note that "members are typically anxious about not fitting in, about revealing themselves, about meeting new people, and about being in a new situation" (p. 70). Reid (1997) offers his view of this first session:

> *The beginning of the first session is marked by hesitant statements, awkward pauses, and reoccurrence of previously answered questions. In the initial stages of the group, clients are preoccupied with themselves rather than with group concerns, and they experience only a limited sense of connection with other group members. (p. 191)*

M.S. Corey and G. Corey (2006) made similar observations. They note that at the onset, members are getting acquainted and discovering how the group functions. This is a time when spoken and unspoken norms that will govern group behavior are developed; ideally it can be a time for the promotion of healthy norms. Members are consciously or unconsciously exploring their fears and hopes concerning their participation in the group. Their expectations are clarified, personal goals are identified, and ultimately members are determining if the group is safe and appropriate for them to continue in.

We concur with Reiter (2008) who feels that "getting off to a good start" is extremely important. "The beginning of the group interview sets the tone for how that session and subsequent sessions will go. Clients feel out the therapist, along with other members, and judge how safe it is for them to open up in this multiple-person format" (pp. 315–316). We, like many others have (G. Corey, 2004; M.S. Corey & G. Corey, 2006; Jacobs et al., 2006; Yalom, 2005), advocate allowing members to express their

expectations, concerns, and anxieties openly during this initial phase. During this time, the leader should clear up any misconceptions about the group process in general. G. Corey (1996) sees this initial phase "as akin to the first few days one spends in a foreign land, having to learn the rudiments of a new language and different ways of expressing oneself" (p. 95).

Earlier literature has emphasized the importance of leadership preparation in conducting this first session. We agree that it is critical for group leader(s) to permit members to stay involved with the group's beginning by allowing them to experience the inevitable awkwardness and tentativeness rather than to push for a perfect climate where everyone feels positive, which is impossible anyway. The primary goal during this initial phase of a group is to facilitate the discovery of a common base that will set the foundation for future work together. Doing this requires skillful work by the group leader, who must not only be sensitive to the normal anxiety typical at the onset of any new group but also be cognizant of each individual member's dynamics and needs, all the while attempting to integrate material presented into a common theme from which to start.

Logically, the first session is often the most difficult. Jacobs et al. (2006) note that the leader has "many different dynamics and logistics to manage: starting the group, introducing the content to the members, and monitoring the members' reactions both to being in the group and to the content" (p. 85). Numerous factors must be considered in the first session: how to begin the group, help members get acquainted, set a positive tone, clarify the purpose of the group, explain the leader's role, explain how the group will be conducted, check out members' comfort levels, assess members' interaction styles, and be sensitive to multicultural/diversity issues. Using exercises, focusing on content, cutting off members who are inappropriate, addressing questions from group members, getting members to acknowledge others in the group, and closing the first session are additional topics that should be considered.

Group Structure
Early on in most groups, members look to the leader for direction and understanding. Reid (1997) maintains that one way group leaders can help lessen the anxiety in a group and enhance commitment by members is by reiterating information previously presented in pregroup interviews and reviewing the overall purpose, objectives, and expectations of the group. Providing the group with structure is especially important during this initial stage, when members are apt to be anxious and confused about what is expected of them in the group.

"Groups function best when members feel a sense of confidentiality" (Gladding, 2004, p. 260). The subject of confidentiality, initially discussed during the prescreening interview, is important to raise at this juncture as well. Corey et al. (2004) concur that confidentiality needs to be stressed during the first meeting of the group and on a regular basis thereafter; doing this entails defining confidentiality, discussing why it is difficult to enforce, and addressing issues regarding betrayal of confidentiality. Group leaders can guarantee only their own adherence to the principles of confidentiality, yet they are ethically and legally bound to strive to ensure the rights of all group members (Gladding, 2004; Olsen, 1971). Group members will likely want to talk about their group experience. What they say about *what* they have learned about themselves does not violate confidentiality, yet when "they talk about *how* others made changes by describing what others did or what techniques were used," then confidentiality is likely to be breached (Corey et al., 2004, p. 13).

Careful attention is needed in structuring every session, especially the very first one. Shulman (1999) believes that the first few meetings should be structured to meet these objectives:

- Introduce group members to one another.
- Present a brief but simple opening statement to clarify the agency's reasons for sponsoring the group. Members raise issues and concerns they feel most important.
- Encourage feedback from group members about their feelings of the match between their needs and the agency's view of the treatment it can provide them.
- Clarify the role and method of conducting group.
- Deal directly with any obstacles that present themselves.
- Encourage intermember interaction versus discussions held between individual members and group leaders.
- Develop a supportive environment that engenders a sense of safety and trust among members.
- Support members to develop a tentative agenda that addresses both individual and group needs.
- Identify the mutual expectations of the agency and group members.
- Gain some consensus about how to proceed within group.
- Advocate honest feedback from members about the group's effectiveness.

Some of these objectives are simple and easily met during the first session. Others, however, may require more time for members to feel enough trust to verbalize their views. Groups vary as to what marks the beginning and end of this initial stage. For instance, some groups engage in open and honest dialogue almost from the onset, creating a trusting and comfortable environment that allows the group to quickly move to the working stage. Typically groups take a couple of sessions, at the very least, to coalesce and develop a working environment. Some groups many never reach the working stage. Leaders must be careful to not allow the group to remain too long in the beginning stage; this could lead to boredom, frustration, and early dropouts. Leaders who move the group too quickly into the working stage, however, may also create a situation where members feel frustrated, confused, and perhaps even angry.

Group structuring allows for positive *group norms* to emerge. Group norms are those "shared beliefs about expected behaviors aimed at making groups function more effectively" (M.S. Corey & G. Corey, 2006, p. 149). Typically, norms develop early on during a group's life and have a huge impact on its overall success. When standards that govern group behavior are unclear, there is likely to be more tension within the group. When norms are explicitly stated, members may understand more clearly what is expected of them. Implicit norms may develop as well. They are more likely when members make false assumptions, when leaders modeled by leaders themselves, and as a result of condoned group interactions.

Group Composition and Characteristics

Group characteristics of the initial stage of group work are additional key areas that must be addressed during this early stage. First, various types of reactions by members are likely; some may be tentative and vague about the group, appear impatient and ready to work, appear hesitant and uninvolved, or seem eager to find quick solutions to their problems. The group leader must know how to deal with each type of reaction and work toward developing cohesion in the group.

Most group members typically experience some form of initial resistance during the first session(s). Members may be hesitant, suspicious, or struggle with cultural dictates that reinforce keeping family matters private. Often members complain about the place or time of meetings or what appears to be inconsequential matters, yet these complaints may serve to hide underlying fear and anxiety. "Although members may have very particular fears about the group, a shared

concern is the loss of autonomy, individuality, and privacy that accompanies connection with others" (Brabender et al., 2004, p. 145). A more qualified group leader will be sensitive to these reactions and help members identify and discuss these fears early on. Sometimes the very act of sharing fears helps members begin to bond with one another and to recognize that their fears are very similar.

Hidden agendas often plague the initial stages of a group. Often certain issues that affect the way a group progresses are not openly discussed.

> *If encouragement to face these issues is lacking, the group process gets bogged down because the norm of being closed, cautious, and defensive replaces the norm of being open . . . trust is low, interpersonal tensions emerge, people are guarded and unwilling to take risks, the leader seems to be working harder than the members, and there is a vague feeling that something just does not make sense. (M.S. Corey & G. Corey, 2006, p. 135)*

Clearly, the group suffers when hidden agendas are not challenged; in extreme cases, the group may even disband. To avoid this, leaders must remain persistent in assessing and exploring underlying issues.

In beginning groups, it is common for group members to talk about others and focus on people and situations outside the group instead of focusing on themselves. "The content of initial sessions frequently focuses on those member concerns that lie outside the group, and a high level of externalization will be evident" (Brabender et al., 2004, p. 145).

Since this is a normal reaction, group leaders must be careful to respect members' anxiety yet still work toward encouraging them to focus on themselves and explore their own reactions to others. If leaders wait too long to challenge members on this, not discussing personal issues may become a group norm.

The "here-and-now" and "there-and-then" focuses are both encouraged during the initial phases of group work. It has been said that "members studiously avoid focusing on the here and now" (Brabender et al., 2004, p. 145). Since members may wish to focus on problems outside the group, they are encouraged to connect these to their experiences in the group. Ideally, members can benefit most when they are able to see how their behavior in the group may be similar to that in their personal lives. Since the manner in which group members behave within the group is indicative of how they interact with others outside the group, this allows for valuable interpersonal learning

through group. When interventions are used to encourage members to gain awareness of what they are experiencing in the here-and-now by paying attention to what they are thinking, feeling, and doing in the moment, they are challenged to recognize how they may similarly interact with others in their daily lives. "The more members are able to immerse themselves in the here and now, the greater chance they have to enhance the quality of their interpersonal relationships in everyday life" (M.S. Corey & G. Corey, 2006, p. 139).

Group Cohesion
Effective group practice is difficult without cohesion. Cohesion is considered the glue that holds a group together (Coyle, 1930; Henry, 1992). Deemed universally as an essential ingredient for effective group practice, cohesion is thought of as a "bond that permits members to feel close enough to each other to allow their individuality to be expressed" (Henry, 1992, p.13).

> *The greater a member's feelings of attraction to or belongingness to the group, the more likely the member will be to feel his or her presence is vital to the group and the more likely the member will be to ''risk'' participating in and contributing to the group. (Donigan & Malnati, 2006, p. 44)*

Cohesion has also been connected to "a sense of belonging or attraction to a group" (Donigan & Malnati, 2006, p. 44). Aspects of a cohesive group include members who are invested in remaining in the group and feel they belong and can relate to other group members. Zastrow (1985) asserts that cohesion is "the sum of all the variable influencing members to stay in a group. . . . It occurs when the positive attraction of a group outweighs any negative implications a member might encounter" (p. 21). This notion tends to parallel lasting relationships in real life where positives outweigh the negatives. For instance, many people have been able to surmount difficult times in order to maintain long-term relationships because of the overall good between them.

Cohesion has been described by Yalom (2005) as analogous to the relationship in individual therapy; that is, group cohesion is "regarded as the group counterpart to the therapeutic alliance in individual therapy" (Brabender et al., 2004, p. 93).

Cartwright (1968) wrote about cohesion early on. He discusses "group attraction," which is essential for cohesion to develop. In his work

Cartwright identifies four interacting sets of variables that are believed to determine a member's attraction to a group. Alle-Corliss and Alle-Corliss (1999) outline these variables in this way:

1. Needs and affiliation, recognition, and security
2. Incentives and resources of the group, such as the prestige of its members, the group's goals, its program activities, and its style of operation
3. The subjective expectations of members about the beneficial or detrimental consequences of the group
4. A comparison of the group to other experiences

Others cite similar reasons as to why cohesion tends to develop within a group: attraction of members to each other, to the activities group members do together, or to the goals the group is working on (Henry, 1992). Zastrow (2009) writes about the payoffs and cost of group membership that affect group attraction. Payoffs may include: companionship, attaining personal goals, prestige, enjoyment, and emotional support. Costs may include: being with people one dislikes, expending time and effort, criticism, distasteful tasks, and uneventful sessions. When costs are too high, cohesion is limited and group viability is threatened.

Cohesion that develops internally within the group forms gradually and may be affected by events that occur inside and outside the group; cohesion is ever changing. Groups are likely to be more productive and longer lasting when cohesion exists and when group and individual goals are met. Because cohesion is so vital to the success of the group, it is essential for leaders to assess the level of cohesion present in their groups regularly and make necessary adjustments to increase communication. Donigan and Malnati (2006) believe that "member behavior" must be elicited for cohesion to occur; that is, members must actively participate in sharing their concerns and expressing their feelings. Group leaders are therefore encouraged to use interventions that stimulate members to talk openly and interact freely with one another.

Creating Trust among Members, and with Leader(s)
Trust is said to be at the core of any successful group. "Trust is an important factor throughout the group's development, but even more so in the early stages" (Reid, 1997, p. 64). Developing trust early on

sets a strong foundation for the future of any group; without it, "group interaction will be superficial, little self-exploration will take place, constructive challenging of one another will not occur, and the group will operate under the handicap of hidden feelings" (G. Corey, 2004, p. 91).

Two levels of trust exist: (1) membership trust in the group leader, and (2) member trust with one another. Long (1996) writes that trust and rapport are related:

> *Trust is an effective experience and a desired outcome within the helping relationship. It grows from rapport and is built on acknowledged cognitive beliefs, particularly the belief that individuals have the right to be themselves and to have their own feelings, thoughts, and actions. (p. 81)*

Many factors contribute to the level of trust that develops within a group. The leader's preparation and planning demonstrates interest and commitment to the group process. Structuring the group reduces the amount of anxiety and ambiguity that is common at the beginning session. Introducing confidentiality and informing the group of guidelines, responsibilities, and expectations early creates a climate of trust. Encouraging diverse members to be respectful of one another also inspires trust. A leader with a positive attitude who demonstrates a genuine interest in the welfare of individual members engenders trust as well. Encouraging members to share their fears and concerns early on also fosters trust; members begin to feel they are not alone when others are able to share similar feelings and concerns.

Once trust is developed group leaders must continue to explore ways of maintaining this trust. When group members are allowed to jump in and give advice instead of allowing problem solving to occur, a sense of distrust and uneasiness may emerge. Also, when negative feelings about other members or the group leader arise and they are not handled properly, trust can break down. Brabender et al. (2004), G. Corey (2004), and Donigan and Malnati (2006) all consider the way in which conflict is dealt with as instrumental in ensuring that trust is maintained; if issues are brought out into the open and negative feelings are listened to in a nondefensive way, resolution is more likely.

It is important to keep in mind that levels of trust are dynamic within a group; levels of trust will likely change as the group progresses and members begin to form more intimate bonds. However, a trusting climate created during the initial stages of the group sets the tone for a

more trusting environment during the group's more difficult transition and working stages.

Group Goals and Individual Member Goals
Once trust and rapport is established, group leaders must turn their focus on helping members, as well as the group as a whole, to identify and clarify goals. According to Reid (1997), establishing manageable goals:

> 1. *Focuses the member's attention and action and provides a vision toward which the member can direct his or her energy,*
> 2. *Mobilizes the member's energy and effort,*
> 3. *Increases the member's persistence, that is, ability to work harder and longer, and*
> 4. *Motivates the member toward action and away from the inclination to engage in aimless behavior. (p. 198)*

For some members, developing realistic goals is a fairly simple matter. These persons are usually clear about their problem, are able to articulate their expectations, and can identify strategies to achieve these goals. Also, members who have been in counseling previously may be more familiar with the goal-setting process. In turn, goals are much more difficult to develop for involuntary clients, for those who are vague about the reasons for entering therapy, or for those who have sought treatment to placate others (i.e., significant others, school, work, etc.). Often initial goals as defined by clients are too broad, unrealistic, and difficult to measure. When this is the case, the group leader will need to be more active in helping shape these goals into more specific and concrete ones. When leaders are unwilling or unable to use intervention skills necessary to challenge group members to identify concrete goals, groups are likely to be unproductive and directionless.

Workable goals must contain four elements:

1. Goals must be defined in explicit terms and stated as specific outcomes.
2. They must be both realistic and attainable during the length of the group.
3. Goals must be measurable and verifiable, allowing members (and the leader) to be able to measure their own progress.
4. The goals must truly be owned by the client, not imposed by others, including the group leader.

When clients are fully invested in the therapeutic process, the likelihood for success is much greater. Similarly, group leaders must be careful to not create a group that is solely goal governed, so tense and rigid that the beauty and freedom of the group experience is lost. DeShazer (1991) identifies seven characteristics of workable goals, some of which echo views just cited: Goals should be small rather than large; salient to clients; described in specific, concrete behavioral terms; and achievable within the practical contexts of clients' lives. In addition, goals should "be perceived by the clients as involving their hard work; be described as the 'start of something' and not as 'the end of something'; and treated as involving new behavior(s) rather than the absence or cessation of existing behaviors" (p. 112).

Along with developing workable goals, being able to prioritize them is often necessary. Group members often present with more than one issue on which to work and become confused when they attempt to work on too many goals at once. Reiter (2008) explains that "client goals are usually based on intensity levels, with some goals being more important and significant for the client" (p. 155). He believes that it is the group leaders' responsibility to help members determine which are the primary, secondary, and tertiary goals. When goals are clear and prioritized, members will be more likely to see them through completion.

Once members identify their individual goals, the group leader may need to cement these goals by establishing a contract that allows clients to be more precise in their goals, encourages them to be responsible for assuming an active role in their treatment, and holds them accountable. Group exercises and homework assignments can also be used to encourage clients to work on their goals, both inside the group and outside.

Group goals are also important to consider and have been separated into two general categories: general group goals and general process goals (M.S. Corey & G. Corey, 2006). General group goals differ from group to group and are based largely on the purpose of the group. For instance, goals for an incest survivors' group may be to assist clients to resolve past issues that will allow them to lead more fulfilling lives.

Group process goals are those that apply to most groups. For example, in a men's group, members are encouraged to express feelings and thoughts directly. In a pain management group, members learn skills to decrease pain. Generally, group process goals consist of:

- Staying in the here-and-now
- Challenging one another
- Taking healthy risks

- Giving and receiving feedback
- Using active listening
- Honest and specific responses
- Willingness to deal with conflict
- Openness to dealing with feelings as they arise in the group
- Mutually agreeing on what the group focus will be
- Acting on new insights
- Practicing new behavior in and out of the group

Inherent in these process goals is the creation of trust and acceptance, the promotion of an appropriate level of self-disclosure, and the encouragement to take healthy risks. Since these goals are for the group as a whole, they must be clearly stated, and the leader must make every attempt to ensure that each member understands and accepts these goals.

Middle Stages of Group

When members are ready to focus on the purpose of the group, they have entered the "middle" stage of group work. Stages of group development have been compared to developmental life stages: initial stage (childhood), middle stage (young adulthood), working stage (mid-life), and final stage (later life). Reid (1997) states:

> *The middle, or adulthood, stage of group evolves as a result of each group member's growing sense of trust in the other members, in the worker, and in the group process. There is a definite move from the tentative involvement typical of the childhood stage to a greater feeling of commitment. (p. 230)*

Movement from one stage to another is a process. Although movement usually means that one stage leads to another, this progression does not always flow smoothly. In most groups, a great deal of work occurs during the middle stage. For this reason, this stage is often broken down into two phases: the "transition phase" and the "working phase."

Transition Phase
It is commonplace for members to begin to truly work on various issues at a deeper level as they transition into the middle stage. Characteristics of this stage include anxiety, establishing trust, defensiveness, resistance,

struggle for control, member conflicts, confrontation, challenges to the group leaders, and the emergence of problem behaviors among difficult group members (G. Corey, 2004; M.S. Corey & G. Corey, 2006; Corey, Schneider-Corey, Callanan, & Russell, 2004).

In order for the group to successfully progress to the working stage that follows, these issues must be recognized and dealt with appropriately. If insufficient time is spent acknowledging and dealing with members' feelings or concerns, the ability to be genuinely open and trusting in the group process will be minimal and ultimately may serve to stifle more intense, realistic therapeutic work by members to be genuinely open and trusting in the group process.

Anxiety and Defensiveness

Anxiety and defensiveness at this stage are to be expected when you consider that members are now ready to let their guard down and allow others to see their true colors. Most of us can attest to feeling anxious when embarking in any new venture we are not completely sure of; this is what many group members experience as they embark into new territory. Sources of anxiety at this stage can be many. For instance, some clients feel anxious by the mere notion of letting others see them in a different light from how they present publicly. Others may feel anxious simply due to the lack of structure within the group or the lack of clarity regarding purpose, goals, or expectations. For still others, there is the fear of appearing foolish or different, of being misunderstood or feeling alone, and of being rejected. In most cases, a normal human reaction to feeling anxious is to respond defensively and with resistance. Anxiety is normal in new situations. G. Corey (2004) contends that anxiety can result "from the fear of being judged and misunderstood, from the need for more structure, and from a lack of clarity about goals, norms, and expected behavior in the group situation" (p. 98). Group leaders must be sensitive and accepting, and certainly be careful not to push clients too hard to open up. Depending on the clients' diagnosis and their level of crisis, encouraging them to open up may not be therapeutic. Respecting clients' emotional states while gently encouraging them to move forward is a delicate matter that requires continual examination by group leaders.

Resistance

Since anxiety is often high as group members enter the middle stage, true resistance often manifests itself at this time. Reacting defensively is often an outcome of anxiety and can be considered a form of resistance. Corey

et al. (2004) consider resistance "as behavior that keeps us from exploring personal conflicts or painful feelings" (p. 181). As a defense to protect us from anxiety, resistance is a normal process that is inevitable in groups. Because resistance is often misunderstood, we explore it in further depth here.

According to Brammer (1998), resistance that is experienced in any beginning therapeutic work represents a client's "conscious or unconscious reluctance to begin a helping relationship as well as their covert thwarting of the goals of the interview once the process is under way" (p. 52). Egan (2002) believes that clients are often reluctant and ambivalent about making changes that will require some discomfort. Resistance then is any behavior that deters clients from exploring personal issues or painful feelings in any depth, and as such, serves as an "obstacle presented by the client that blocks treatment" (Meier & Davis, 1993, p. 15). Resistance is not always clearly stated as "I don't want to go on any further"; it can take many forms, from open hostility to passive-resistive behaviors. When resistance is not recognized or explored, it can serve to block the group's progress. In fact, resistance is often the very material that leads to further productive exploration within the group. Also, an individual member's defensiveness may be a clue to how the person relates interpersonally outside of the group. Ormont (1988) believes that often resistance is tied to a fear of intimacy, which may take on various forms, such as conflict, detachment, distrust, or diverting. Underlying these behaviors is the basic fear "of getting close and the vulnerability this implies" (Corey et al. 2006, p. 181).

The group leader must attempt to understand the many underlying reasons for resistance. Alle-Corliss and Alle-Corliss (2006) cite these causes for resistance: as a defense mechanism, fear of change, cultural factors, authority issues, manipulation, depression, and being involuntary clients.

Additional fears experienced by group members that must be explored during this transition phase include fear of: appearing foolish, rejection, emptiness, losing control, and self-disclosure. Savvy group leaders will be able to assess for these conditions by recognizing certain behaviors that group members manifest. Such leaders will know to expect and respect resistance. Expecting resistance helps them not to become defensive. Leaders who respect resistance can work more creatively in understanding and confronting it. Following we provide some considerations in therapeutically working with resistance.

Considerations for Dealing with Resistance

- Emphasize the importance of developing a trusting relationship that sets a positive tone from which to better deal with resistance.
- Display acceptance and strive to develop a respect for resistance, as it may serve a valuable purpose.
- Be open to examine your own issues with regard to resistance.
- Express a desire to explore the significance of the resistance and its inherent dynamics.
- Be open to addressing the resistance directly and empathetically.
- As appropriate, use constructive confrontation; that is, confront in a caring and concerned way that is descriptive, specific, and well timed.
- Recognize that dealing with resistance may lead to an opportunity for positive change and growth.
- Refrain from pushing your own agenda and accept that change is not universally accepted or rigidly defined. Thus, what appears as resistance may not necessarily be.
- Consider that resistance may be a result of poor communication or underlying depression.
- Be flexible, creative, and willing to work with the resistance, not against it.
- Be willing to relax and listen to the client; this might allow you to gain new insights and awareness.

(Adapted from Alle-Corliss & Alle-Corliss, 1999, p. 64)

Conflict, Control, and Confrontation

Like resistance, conflict has been said to be ever present during the transition phase, where the struggle for power and control seems to be the greatest. Group members may be openly negative, critical, judgmental, or quietly observing the group dynamics to determine who will gain the power. According to Yalom (2005), this stage is a time when there is a struggle for power among the members and with the leader. "Each member attempts to establish his or her preferred amount of initiative and power. Gradually, a control hierarchy, as social pecking order emerges" (Yalom, 2005, p. 314). Although likely to be manifested differently, this struggle for power is evident in every group. Yalom

(2005) notes that "this struggle for control is part of the infrastructure of every group" and "is always present, sometimes quiescent, sometimes smoldering, sometimes in full conflagration" (p. 314). Group members may become competitive, jealous, and judgmental of others in group, and may challenge the group leader over the division of responsibility and decision-making procedures (G. Corey, 2004; M.S. Corey & G. Corey, 2006).

Recognizing and openly discussing issues tied to control as they arise is best; ignoring these behaviors can further problems and thwart group cohesion. Also, as with resistance, control issues that surface may be clues that members struggle with similar issues outside the group and may warrant further exploration. Conflict is unavoidable in any group setting; leaders who demonstrate an openness and willingness to deal with conflict as it arises show members that conflict is an important aspect of group development that they will not shy away from.

Conflict is an inevitable outcome of challenging or confronting group members. Too often, however, conflict is feared, ignored, or avoided, due to its negative connotation. Nonetheless, for group work to be productive, group leaders first must acknowledge that conflict exists and then make an effort to explore the underlying dynamics that are present.

Toseland and Rivas (2009) distinguish between *task conflict* and *relationship conflict*. Task conflict, also called instrumental and substantive, is

> *based on members' differing opinions about ideas, information and facts presented during the task group's work. Relationship conflict [also known as affective, social, or process conflict] is based on the emotional and interpersonal relationships among members within and outside of the group. (p. 323)*

Task conflict is said to be helpful to development and maintenance of group cohesion; relationship conflict is more detrimental to group process since it is generally resistant to persuasive reasoning.

Besides understanding the different types of conflicts, leaders must be aware that certain personality characteristics have also been associated with productive and nonproductive conflict. A win-win orientation and flexibility are connected to productive conflict whereas "zero-sum" orientation and rigidity is associated with conflict escalation (Jehn & Chartman, 2000; Wall & Nolan, 1987).

The manner is which conflict is handled by both the group leader and group members will undoubtedly set the tone for how the group views

and handles conflict. Fisher, Ury, and Patton (1997) suggest that group leaders educate group members on four steps of conflict resolution:

1. Separate the person from the issue or conflict being addressed.
2. Focus on interests or attributes of the conflict rather than on the group member's positions on the issue.
3. Generate a variety of possible options before deciding how to proceed.
4. Insist that the decision about how to proceed be based on an objective standard rather than on subjective feelings.

Practitioners must learn to instill in the group an acceptance of conflict as a natural part of relationships and help members learn to deal with conflict constructively. When this occurs, members not only gain a deeper respect for the leader but may also realize that working through conflict is actually more therapeutic and psychologically healthier than avoiding it. G. Corey (2004) sums up the importance of dealing with conflict:

> *The way conflict is recognized, accepted, and worked with has a critical effect on the progress of the group. If it is poorly handled, the group may retreat and never reach a productive stage of development. If it is dealt with openly and with concern, the members discover that their relationships are strong enough to withstand an honest level of challenge. (p. 98)*

During this transition stage, conflict with the group leader is also possible as members are feeling more trusting, safe, and courageous enough to challenge him or her. A leader must be able to distinguish between a challenge and an attack and to respond nondefensively and in an assertive manner. The ability to challenge the group leader positively is an important step for group members and can serve to empower them with a sense of autonomy. When members are able to speak up and be heard successfully this signifies that the group has reached a level where there is trust. This of course depends largely on how effective group leaders are able to deal with challenges to their authority and in managing their own anger. Leaders with many unresolved anger issues themselves will find it difficult to respond therapeutically. Also, leaders must consider the tendency to avoid conflict by caretaking and rescuing; such actions will not only stifle the group process but also get in the way of modeling healthy conflict resolution.

Confrontation is also common during the transition phase of group process. When skillfully used, confrontation can help members over-come resistance and motivate them to continue working. In the

literature, confrontation is viewed as the ability to clarify, examine, and challenge behaviors to help group members overcome distortions and discrepancies among behaviors, thoughts, and feelings (Egan, 2002; Toseland & Spielberg, 1982).

Toseland and Rivas (2009) caution that since confrontations are often "potent and emotionally charged," group leaders must be prepared for strong reactions and be willing to explore underlying feelings before making "direct, full-scale confrontation" (p. 116). They further maintain that "although confrontations are often associated with pointing out member's flaws and weaknesses, they can be used to help members recognize strengths and assets." There is a difference between "caring confrontation" and "inappropriate confrontation." It is the leader's responsibility to teach clients about confrontation and appropriate ways of challenging comembers and leaders in constructive manners.

Confrontation should not be "tearing others down carelessly; hitting others with negative feedback and then retreating; being hostile with the aim at hurting others; telling others what is basically wrong with them; and, assaulting others' integrity." (M.S. Corey & G. Corey, 2006, p. 188). Rather, caring confrontation can be viewed "as a form of constructive feedback an invitation for participants to look at some aspect of their interpersonal style or their lives to determine if they want to make changes" (M.S. Corey & G. Corey, 2006, p. 188). Through caring confrontation, helpers are able to point out discrepancies in members' thoughts, feelings, and actions. Such confrontations must be well timed, presented in a genuinely caring manner, and be clear and specific (Alle-Corliss & Alle-Corliss, 1999, 2006).

Group leaders must continually assess confrontational styles within the group, strive to understand their underlying meaning, and attempt to ensure that only caring confrontation is used. When used appropriately, confrontation helps foster growth and promote change.

Problem Behaviors and Difficult Group Members

It is often during the transition phase that leaders and members become aware of the deeper problems of certain members. Certain problem behaviors are more apt to emerge at this time as well. According to the literature and from our own group leading experience, leaders are often challenged to deal with member silence and lack of participation, sexual feelings, monopolistic behavior, storytelling, questioning, advice giving, band-aiding, hostile behavior, dependency, acting superior, prejudice and narrow-mindedness, socializing, intellectualizing, and emotionalizing. Jacobs et al. (2006) have identified various types of group members;

these include the chronic talker, talkative member, dominator, distracter, rescuing member, negative member, resistant member, and member who tries to get to the leader. In Table 3.2 we provide suggestions for intervening with different types of problematic behaviors or clients.

Table 3.2 **Problematic Behaviors/Clients**

Type of Client	Suggested Intervention
Talkative clients	Be aware that clients may feel intimidated, angry, or anxious. Point out body language. Discuss your own reaction in a nonjudgmental way.
Overwhelmed clients	Resist becoming overwhelmed yourself. Explore with the client ways in which he or she becomes overwhelmed.
Involuntary clients	Be careful to not become apologetic or defensive.
	Place the responsibility on the client.
Silent or withdrawn clients	Be aware of the possible purposes of the silence: protection, lack of knowledge regarding the helping interaction, cultural issues, or intimidation.
"Yes-but" clients	Such clients are seldom satisfied, so you may find yourself working too hard. If so, place the responsibility back on the client. Point out the behavior. Clients who deny needing help—refrain from trying to convince such clients that they have problems.
Blaming clients	Place the responsibility and focus for change back on the client.
Overly dependent clients	Explore how you might possibly be fostering dependence. Encourage individuation and separation in a supportive way.
Moralistic clients	Help them recognize how their judgments of others affect their relationships and may distance them from others.
	Ask them to indulge their tendency to lecture. Have them make up very stern diatribe. This may reveal how they possibly have incorporated a critical parent.
Intellectualizing clients	Recognize that intellectualization is often a defense mechanism, developed out of a need to insulate people from their deeper feelings. Refrain from insisting that these clients dig deeply into their feelings. Rather, gradually encourage their expression of feelings.
Emotionalizing clients	These clients are similar to intellectualizing clients in that they may also be defending against deeper emotions and have become stuck in their pain.
Passive-aggressive clients	Explore the underlying dynamics. Be aware of how the client's behavior affects you. Share your reactions while avoiding making judgments about the behavior.

Source: Adapted from Alle-Corliss & Alle-Corliss, 2006; G. Corey, 2004; M. S. Corey & G. Corey, 2006; Corey, Schneider. Adapted from Corey, Callanan, & Russell, 2004; Donigan & Malnati, 2006; Jacobs et al., 2006; and Yalom (2005).

Transference and Countertransference

Transference and countertransference issues are likely to surface during the transition phase. Transference is considered an unconscious process "whereby clients project onto their therapist past feelings or attitudes they had toward significant people in their life" (M. Corey & G. Corey, 2003, p. 143). Common feelings evoked by transference range from love, lust, high praise, and regard to anger, ambivalence, hate, and dependence.

Transference   *Transference* is common to some degree in every relationship, yet it is more likely when emotional intensity is so great that objectivity is lost and the client begins to relate to the therapist or group leader as a significant person in his or her life (Cormier & Cormier, 1998, p. 49). Transference can be positive, negative, or neutral. Furthermore, it may be easily recognizable or very subtle and difficult to pinpoint. In groups, recognizing transference becomes even more complex since there is an opportunity for multiple transferences to exist. "Members may project not only onto the leaders but also onto other members in the group" (M.S. Corey & G. Corey, 2006, p. 211). When transference is not handled properly, it can seriously interfere with the helping process. Group leaders must be astute in recognizing signs of transference and in deciding what and how much needs to be discussed directly with the client. Group leaders must continually assess if and what kind of transference exists and weigh the advantages and disadvantages of exploring it further. The decision to explore transference further will depend in large part on the type of group being conducted and its purpose. In less clinical, more psychoeducational groups, for instance, it may be enough for the leader to be aware of the transference. In more therapeutic types of groups, the transference issues may require in-depth discussion and working through. Either way, "paying attention to your client's feelings can give you key insights into how they interact with others in their social sphere" (Alle-Corliss & Alle-Corliss, 1999, p. 59).

Countertransference   *Countertransference* is defined as feelings helpers have toward their clients. Viewed as any projection that could conceivably interfere with the helping process, countertransference must be recognized and addressed by the group leader. The possibility of experiencing countertransference is greater for group leaders, simply because a greater number of clients are present who are apt to trigger feelings in the leaders. When group leaders acknowledge the feelings evoked by the

group members and make an effort to understand them, the risk of harm is greatly reduced. However, when group leaders ignore or do not recognize countertransference, more serious problems can ensue.

"Hurtful countertransference" as described by Cormier and Cormier (1998) can be dangerous to the therapeutic process if not dealt with early on. Such countertransference is more likely when group leaders are (1) blinded to an important area of exploration, (2) focus on issues that are more their own than their clients, (3) use clients for "vicarious or real gratification," (4) use "subtle cues" that lead the client, (5) make interventions not in the clients' best interest, and most important, (6) "adopt the roles the client wants [them] to play in his or her old script" (Alle-Corliss & Alle-Corliss, 1999, p. 60).

The group leader's unresolved conflicts and/or repressed needs can seriously interfere with the group process and create a situation where power may be abused (G. Corey, 2004). Because group members are sure to set off feelings in group leaders, especially where there are old or current wounds, it is crucial to be vigilant to triggers that may affect the client-worker relationship. Themes of separation, loss, dealing with anger or assertiveness, or denial of sexuality are common ones that tend to surface through work with our clients. According to Chiaferi and Griffin (1997): "Common reactions include a need for approval, identification with the client, sexual and/or romantic feelings toward a client, a tendency to refrain from confrontation, or a compelling need to rescue the client" (p. 50).

When these reactions "are intense, persistent, and compelling," they can become detrimental to members and group leaders alike. Group leaders must learn to recognize these themes and risk introspection; they need continual self-awareness. Many times, such awareness will be sufficient. Other times, group leaders may need to work through deeper issues and would benefit from seeking added supervision or even counseling themselves. An example might be when a leader is directly confronted within the group, as this situation can set off difficult emotions and reactions. Knowing how to react nondefensively is very important, as is the ability to engage in appropriate self-reflection.

Table 3.3 summarizes general guidelines for working with countertransference as described in the literature.

Since so much is apt to occur during the transition phase, new group leaders can feel overwhelmed and fearful. New leaders may be at a loss of how to handle problem behaviors, when to encourage members to take risks, how to set limits, or deal with their own

Table 3.3   **Guidelines for Working with Countertransference**

- Strive to accept your feelings as they may contain significant information about your clients or about yourself.
- Try not to judge or to disregard your own feelings.
- Be prepared to use your feelings and reactions appropriately to enhance the helping process. Be open to gaining insight by examining your countertransference feelings.
- Be willing to consult with professional colleagues or supervisors if your feelings are interfering in your work with your clients. A more objective viewpoint is often helpful and sometimes necessary to guide you in the right direction. At times the most appropriate action to take is to secure a referral.
- Be ready to engage in your own counseling or therapy if extreme countertransference reactions persist. Also seek therapy when a theme continues to surface with certain clients or issues.

Source: Adapted from Alle-Corliss & Alle-Corliss, (1999, p. 62).

countertransference. Being open to consultation at any time during group leading is necessary.

The transition phase is a challenging one that sets the stage for the working phase that follows. When all the different facets of this stage are recognized and properly handled, the group can proceed smoothly. When not, the group process may be affected, and in most severe cases, permanently stifled.

Working Phase

The title *working phase* reflects how pivotal this stage is in the overall scheme of group development. Considered "the core of the group process, "it is the period when members benefit most from being in group" (Jacobs et al., 2006, p. 30). Tentative feelings about being in a group have pretty much dissipated. The discomfort and anxiety characteristic of the transition phase have been expressed along with conflicts and resistance. At this point, members are ready to work through many of their issues, cohesion is usually stronger, and productivity within the group generally increases. Reid (1997) suggests that members are more willing to identify their goals and concerns and more open to assuming responsibility for making changes. Members tend to engage in more risk-taking and action-oriented behaviors and are more honest as they self-disclose. Members may express stronger emotions more freely as they feel more comfortable with the group process. "The members are also more likely than before to talk directly to one another rather than to the worker. And they appear more secure and therefore less concerned about the other members' and the worker's expectations" (Reid, 1997, p. 230). During this stage, more in-depth exploration of important issues is the norm because members are more ready to work.

Cohesion A sense of belonging, inclusion, and solidarity necessary for cohesion are typically present at this stage. The initial testing period is over, and group members seem to trust each other and the leader more. By this point, members have developed common history. Through the disclosure of their feelings, thoughts, and experiences, they have developed a better understanding and appreciation for one another that leads to greater cohesion.

Members may not always agree, conflict may still arise, and trust may be tested from time to time, yet there is no longer a threat to the group's very existence, as is typical in the beginning stages, when group cohesion was weak. A sense of family and working together to help one another indicates that the group has reached a place where deeper issues can be dealt with. "Cohesion provides the group with the impetus to move forward and is a prerequisite for the group's success. Without a sense of 'groupness,' the group remains fragmented, members become frozen behind their defenses, and their work is of necessity superficial" (G. Corey, 2004, p. 107). Yalom (2005) contends that cohesion allows for other therapeutic factors to exist and serves to foster action-oriented behaviors, which include immediacy, mutuality, confrontation, risk taking, and translating insight into action.

Common themes among members evolve during this phase, which lead to a sense of belonging within the group. For instance, members feel more understood, more lovable, more positive about having the capacity to change, more hopeful, and more willing to share and be close to others. Painful experiences of childhood and adolescence can be revealed, and members become more aware of the need for, and fear of, love. Repressed feelings are expressed, and members seem more focused on struggling to find meaning in life. Similarities and differences among members are noted and generally more accepted during this stage. Members often feel guilt over past mistakes and for inaction. Many during this stage are open about their longing for meaningful connections with others and their search for their own identity.

Cohesion alone is not sufficient, however, for the group to prosper. Sometimes groups may feel so comfortable and secure in their cohesive state that they resist challenging themselves further. When members are no longer challenged to move forward either by fellow group members or by the group leader, the group can reach a plateau. It is the leader's responsibility to continue to encourage members to note their commonalities and focus on a common bond that links them. To prevent cohesion

from resulting in passivity or inertia, at this juncture leaders must encourage members to actually work on goals and challenges.

Movement toward Goal Attainment The existence of trust and acceptance, empathy and caring, hope, freedom to experiment, a commitment to change, and intimacy are common therapeutic factors that are critical during this stage. Catharsis, or the expression of pent-up feelings, and self-disclosure are more prevalent, and clients seem to benefit most from feedback since they feel more accepted and committed to the therapeutic process. Given the presence of these factors, clients are more ready to move toward goal attainment than in earlier stages.

Characteristics of an Effective Working Phase An effective working group is focused on goal identification and attainment (Corey et al., 2004). A here-and-now focus typically exists. Members themselves can readily identify goals and concerns. Members have learned to take responsibility for setting and reaching their goals and are clearer about expectations. They are more willing to practice outside the group to bring about behavioral changes that will lead to goal fulfillment. They complete homework assignments and are more willing to share with the group the difficulties they experience outside group. Most members have a feeling of inclusion, even if they are not as active as others in the group. During this stage, the group is encouraged by the leader to challenge members who appear distant to deal with issues that may be contributing to their withdrawal. Members recognize that they are responsible for their own growth; they must be active in assessing their level of satisfaction and making the necessary changes if they feel unsatisfied.

Leadership Responsibilities
A major responsibility for group leaders is to continually encourage active participation among group members. At times this is easy enough, as the group is a dynamic one that has taken charge. At other times, however, group participation may be limited. In such cases, the group leader must assess possible underlying reasons and challenge the group to become more involved in the group process.

The group leader has to be continually in tune with the group process and forever assessing both individual members and overall group dynamics. The leader often has to choose to which direction to move in. According to M. S. Corey and G. Corey, (2006), some of the choices that must be made during the working stage that help to shape the future of

the group itself include: disclosure versus anonymity, honesty versus superficiality, spontaneity versus control, acceptance versus rejection, cohesion versus fragmentation, and responsibility versus blaming. We concur with their belief that "a group's identity is shaped by the way its members resolve these critical issues" (p. 237). Group leaders must be knowledgeable and open to exploring the best way of dealing with each of these issues.

Especially difficult is the emergence or reemergence of conflict or anger, which can plague a group if it is not handled properly. Leaders must openly acknowledge any conflict or anger that exists and make every effort to work it through. To do so, leaders must be open and willing to accept that working through conflict and anger can be productive.

Role Models Leaders, by the very nature of their role, are models to the clients they work with. They often set the tone for what will be discussed in the group and how feelings and conflicts will be handled. Through verbal and nonverbal channels, leaders communicate their values, their preferences, and what is acceptable and unacceptable to discuss.

Self-Disclosure The leader's type and extent of self-disclosure will also influence group dynamics. The term *self-disclosure,* in this context, refers to the personal revelations made by a leader to group members. Such revelations may be verbal or nonverbal in nature and may not be intentional. Cormier and Hackney (2005) identify four forms of self-disclosure: (1) disclosing the helper's own problems, (2) disclosing facts about the helper's role, (3) disclosing the helper's reactions to the client, and (4) disclosing the helper's reactions to the client-helper relationship. Danish, D'Aguielli, and Hauer (1980) have categorized self-disclosures into two major types: self-involving and personal self-disclosure.

Alle-Corliss and Alle-Corliss (1999) define self-disclosure as

> *self-involving statements that include messages that express the helper's personal reaction to the client during the helping process. . . . Personal self-disclosing messages are related to struggles or problems the helper is currently experiencing or has dealt with in the past that are similar to the clients' problems. (p. 45)*

"Self-involving statements" are lower risk whereas "personal self-disclosing messages" can be more problematic. Group leaders must be

judicious in disclosures of a personal nature. Not only can excess disclosures serve to undermine the group's confidence in the leader, but they may also divert attention from the group process.

Guidelines for the leader to consider regarding the appropriate use of self-disclosure are:

1. Determine the purpose of the disclosure.
2. Consider if the disclosure is beneficial to the group.
3. Decide how much of the leader's private life will be shared in a group setting.
4. Accept responsibility to seek counseling if it becomes clear that there are issues that require further exploration.

Simply put, self-disclosure is appropriate when it is used to help the group. In situations when the leader's needs take precedence, self-disclosure may be more harmful than helpful.

Additional Leadership Functions Ultimately, the leader must be aware of and ready to explore common themes within the group that foster a sense of universality and allow members to work together in the pursuit of shared goals. The leader must remain attentive to the intensification and further development of group norms that impact the group and be continually open and willing to help members translate insight into action.

When goals are attained and the group has accomplished its goals, it may be ready for the final stage of group, the termination process.

Ending (Final) Stages of Group

The final, closing, or ending stage of group is devoted to bring definitive closure to the group. During this stage, members are encouraged to share what they have learned, note how they have changed, and consider how they plan to use what they have learned. Additionally, members prepare to say good-bye and deal with the group's end. Toseland and Rivas (2009) identify a variety of tasks that are associated with ending a group as a whole:

- Learning from members
- Maintaining and generalizing change efforts

- Reducing group attraction and promoting independent functioning of individual members
- Helping members deal with their feelings about ending
- Planning for the future
- Making referrals
- Evaluating the work of the group

There is no specific time when discussion about ending should take place; however, "as a general rule, the greater number of sessions and the more personal and sharing, the longer the closing stage will be" (Jacobs et al., 2006, p. 362). Far too often, group leaders who themselves are ambivalent regarding ending may avoid the topic until the final few sessions; not only is this professionally inappropriate, but it can create animosity toward the group leader and impede proper closure.

Review and Consolidation

Review Reviewing the group process is an essential part of the final phase. Members are invited to review the entire history of the group experience. They are encouraged to explore what they have learned during their time in the group, cite turning points, share likes and dislikes, and consider ways in which the group could have been more helpful. This review helps members begin the process of ending and also serves as a meaningful evaluative tool. Members are asked to be concrete and specific in their sharing and to feel free to express whatever comes to mind. The manner in which this review takes place varies from group to group and is determined in part by how the leader presents it.

> *This technique of recalling special moments may bring back to life incidents of conflict in the group, of closeness and warmth, or humor and lightness, of pain, or of tension and anxiety. The more members can verbalize their experiences the more they can recall what actually happened, the greater their chances of integrating and using the lessons they have learned. (Corey et al, 2004, p. 171)*

Brabender et al. (2004) contend that by reviewing their accomplishments, group members are able to prepare for the future: "Sometimes members may be helped by recalling a critical incident, an event in the group that was significant because it entailed successfully handling a stressor" (p. 155).

In our groups, we have found this review process to be most important in helping members to acknowledge their strengths, to develop a positive view of the therapeutic process, and to put cognitive meanings to their experience that they can take with them after the group has ended. Giving and receiving summary feedback during this stage is especially valuable if done so in a concise and concrete way. We developed a "personal poster" to encourage the provision of individual support and constructive feedback. Specifically, as a memento of the group, each member personalizes a card with his or her name. The card is then passed around the group during the last session. Each member and the group leader sign the card and offer positive feelings and hopes. The rationale for this exercise is that all group members are able to take with them some useful feedback or supportive comments. When the group ends then, each member has a written account of positive affirmation and wishes. This personal poster can serve as a reminder of the group process and reinforce individual strengths and potential.

Unfinished business is common in most groups. The ending phase can be an excellent opportunity to discuss the many unfinished issues that may exist. Sometimes this working through is the most memorable part of group for the member and perhaps even for the group. Because there is a natural tendency to disengage as the group approaches closure, the leader may have to challenge members to carefully explore any unfinished business that may exist.

Care should be taken to not wait until the very last session, however, as doing so could trigger a crisis for certain members who will need additional support. Corey et al. (2004) concur "that leaders must be cognizant of the timing of discussing new material and be ever so careful to not encourage discussion of deeper issues toward the end of a group."

Consolidation of Gains In reviewing the group experience, members are challenged to consolidate their learning. This process is often a very important one for both group leader and members, since this is when members transfer what they have learned in the group to their outside world. To ensure that group members complete this task of consolidation of their learning, the group leader must prepare them for this work early on. From the onset, leaders must inform members that ending is an eventuality and provide as many specifics about the length of the group as are feasible. Also, members may need periodic reminders, especially as the termination phase approaches. Despite the difficulties inherent in ending, we believe members respond much better when well prepared.

During this ending phase, it is important for group members to examine the effects of the group on themselves. When group members have an opportunity to put into words what they learned from the entire group experience, they are able to begin the process of letting go. Leaders should encourage members to be as specific and open as possible in describing what they have learned; this will increase their ability to retain and use what has been gleaned. In order for permanent learning to take place, the leader must provide members with the structure to help them review and assimilate what they have learned.

Assisting clients to identify their growth and acknowledge the attainment of their goals is an exciting endeavor when the group has been a successful one. Group leaders often feel invigorated and professionally satisfied with this process and welcome the opportunity to help group members recognize their progress. However, when members have not accomplished much or when the group as a whole has not been effective, the task of consolidating gains becomes much more difficult. Since not every group will be a success, it is important to be prepared to deal with such instances. In such cases, we recommend encouraging members to explore what did not go well and why. Sometimes this process is a positive one that results in members feeling that something was gained. In reality, most groups have mixed success and difficulties.

Group leaders are not immune to reactions about ending. Fortune, Pearlingi, and Rochelle (1992) and Toseland and Rivas (2009) list some of the strong reactions group leaders often experience upon termination:

- Pride and accomplishment in the client's success
- Pride in their own therapeutic skill
- A renewed sense of therapeutic process
- Sadness, sense of loss, or ambivalence about no longer working with the client
- Doubt or disappointment about the client's progress or ability to function independently
- A reexperiencing of their own losses
- Relief, doubt, or guilt about their therapeutic effectiveness

Anticipatory Planning As we have seen, often during the termination phase, members are helped to consider ways in which they can incorporate their gains into their daily lives. It is important to be specific, clear, and realistic when helping clients with this process. Similarly, we

advocate use of anticipatory planning with clients at this juncture. Anticipatory planning involves presenting members with realistic situations they may encounter in the future and encouraging them to apply what they have learned in their therapy. Because this process helps solidify their growth and learning, it is an excellent technique to use during closure. In essence, in this final stage of termination, "leaders help members make the transition from the group to their other social environments" (Donigan & Malanti, 2006, p. 43).

Termination Issues

Review and consolidation of learning is often overwhelming as members are aware that termination is eminent and may be reluctant to end. Some members will avoid bringing up new issues or tying up any loose ends as they feel discouraged that the group is ending. When members realize that the group is coming to an end, it is not uncommon for them to begin distancing themselves from the group experience. There is a tendency to avoid examining what they learned and how it can affect their out-of-group behavior. Members should be encouraged to deal directly with their feelings of loss, if possible, as this can be both an enriching and a learning experience for individual group members and the group as a whole. Some members may already be mourning the loss of the group and are therefore not invested in the group process during this time. To prevent premature separation, leaders must alert members to this possibility and encourage them to share their feelings of loss openly. Since grief and sadness are common, a supportive climate is essential to allow members to experience these emotions freely.

As the final phase nears, some members disengage in order to avoid deeper feelings. It is important to learn to deal with loss and ending relationships, as this is an important life task.

The leader is challenged to deal gently with underlying feelings of loss. There may be times when the group's ending will spur feelings related to other losses that must be acknowledged and dealt with. When issues tied to loss and abandonment are triggered, the leader can take the opportunity to help members work through those feelings in a therapeutic manner.

Some members will have no difficulty ending. They feel little or no attachment to the group and simply consider termination as an indication that the group has accomplished its goals. In groups where there has been conflict that has not been managed properly, members may feel relieved that the group is coming to an end. Conversely, members in groups where a strong level of cohesion and conflict resolution has

existed may find ending very difficult. In either of these instances, the emphasis must remain on the feelings evoked by the pending end of the group. The exploration of feelings engendered, no matter how painful, will help bring proper closure to the group.

This final stage in the life of the group is often an awkward one that is met with apprehension by both group members and the leader alike. "This apprehension will elicit all types of personal ways of dealing with endings, loss, separation, and aloneness. The overall climate of the group will range from sadness to euphoria" (Donigan & Malnati, 2006, p. 77). Since feelings and reactions will vary, it is the group leader's responsibility to make sure closure is dealt with in a therapeutic manner. When group leaders have not adequately dealt with their own existential issues concerning endings, this stage may prove to be more difficult than expected. As a result, some leaders may end prematurely to avoid their feelings, while others may delay ending the group indefinitely. Ending is apt to be particularly painful for a group that has been very emotionally close, cohesive, and worked hard to achieve their individual goals.

Coleadership Issues and Ending Leaders need to be in agreement on termination and in tune as to how and when to approach the issue of ending. Coleaders must also be prepared to support one another in not allowing members to continue bringing up new issues for group discussion that may thwart movement toward termination. To ensure that group leaders are working together at this point, they must meet to discuss such issues as:

- Their own feelings about separation and ending
- Concerns about individual group members
- The need to share perceptions about the group prior to the last session
- Plans on how to help individual members and the group as whole review their growth and be able to translate this learning in their everyday lives
- Ideas for how to assist group members with the consolidation process

Overall Evaluation of Group Experience
Termination, no matter how difficult, affords both the members and the leader the opportunity to evaluate how successful the therapeutic process was. Although evaluation begins at the start of treatment,

and should be continuous throughout the process, often a complete examination of the process cannot take place until the end. Much like a review, this summative evaluation involves determining the outcomes of the therapeutic process, assesses client satisfaction, and checks for success. In order for a successful summative evaluation to occur, the original goals that were set must be examined and efforts made to explore goals that were met as well as those not attained. This process is a gratifying one when treatment has gone well; client strengths can be validated, their courage to participate in the group commended, and their ongoing commitment to change reinforced.

Further examination of unanticipated outcomes is also essential in determining what was effective and what was not. This process is especially important when outcomes were undesirable. Many clients who felt dissatisfied with the process likely discontinued treatment early on, felt insecure about their abilities, or questioned the value of helping. When this occurs, members are more likely to avoid seeking help in the future.

> *Disappointment and unsuccessful outcomes can be caused by incomplete assessment, unclear or unrealistic goals, unrealistic expectations about the helping process, and mismatch between helper and client. Also, the client may not have been completely ready or able to engage in the helping process. (Alle-Corliss & Alle-Corliss, 2006, p.120)*

Clearly, this evaluation process may not be pleasant or easy for either client or helper, yet it can lead to a renewed positive view of the therapeutic process. Also, the feedback gained through this evaluation can provide the helper with useful information as to which skills or interventions were most effective and which require closer scrutiny. A nondefensive attitude on behalf of the leader and a willingness to look objectively at him- or herself is critical during this evaluation process. Upon ending, it is recommended that leaders meet to discuss their own experiences with one another and with the group process.

Coleadership Evaluations Ending also provides leaders with a chance to receive feedback from one another and consolidate their own learning. Reviewing the similarities and differences in how they perceived the group is important during this stage. The "Best Practice Guidelines" (ASGW, 1998) supports leaders in processing the workings of the group with themselves, group members, supervisors, and other colleagues. Taking time to prepare a summary of the group's work is helpful for each

group leader to identify feelings and perceptions and can also be useful in providing feedback to one another.

Follow-up Follow-up sessions after the completion of the formal group treatment program are not mandatory, although they are an excellent way to encourage that group members sustain treatment goals and apply them to individual life situations. Ideally, such

> *follow-up sessions reinforce members commitment to maintaining changes. They remind members of the changes in their lives since they began treatment. Members can share similar experiences about their difficulties in maintaining changes and trying to generalize changes to new situations and new life experiences. (Toseland & Rivas, 2009, p. 389)*

Gladding (2004) states that "follow-up is used in a group to keep in touch with members after the group has terminated to determine how well they are progressing on personal and group goals." (p. 262). Further, ASGW's "Best Practice Guidelines" (1998) stipulate that group workers provide for follow-up after the termination of a group as appropriate to assess outcomes or when requested by group member(s).

Follow-up can be helpful to both the group members and group leader(s) in assessing what they have gained from the group experience and in determining if additional referrals are necessary. In sum, follow-up sessions serve to maximize the effects of a group experience and encourage members to keep pursuing the original individual and group goals set while they were in group (Jacobs, Harvill, & Masson, 2002). Furthermore, it has been found that when members are aware during the termination stage of their group that a follow-up session is planned, they are more likely to continue pursing their goals (G. Corey, 2001; Gladding, 2004).

An example of how effective follow-up can be is noted in the success of a 12-week women's support group for incest survivors:

- Building follow-up procedures allowed a basis for understanding the long-term value of the group experience and the opportunity to improve the design for future groups.

- Several follow-up meetings were scheduled to help members make the transition from weekly group meetings to being on their own and relying on newly developed support networks.

- An additional purpose for this follow-up was to reinforce what was learned and to provide renewed support.

- Postevaluation questions were given along with a rating measure. Members were asked to rate themselves as "better," "worse," or "the same" in regard to these areas:
  - Work
  - Friendships
  - Relationships with family members
  - Intimate relationships
  - Feelings about sex
  - Feelings about oneself
  - The ability to protect and take care of themselves

- Based on the many follow-up groups conducted, it became clear that a well-developed group format with proper screening can result in a therapeutic group experience. Such a group was found to greatly enhance the treatment of incest survivors as it allowed clients to be seen on a regular basis and provided them with the continuity and support necessary for healing.

- As evidenced in the follow-up groups, many members developed a strong support network that provided them with the strength and courage to begin to resolve past incest, overcome old, negative patterns, and set healthy, challenging goals for the future. The greatest message members shared they received was that "they deserve to feel good about themselves and to lead more productive lives."

In Closing

This chapter focused on understanding group development. Pregroup, beginning, middle/working, and final stages of group were outlined. Important topics such as group structure, composition, cohesion, trust, individual and group goal setting, anxiety and defensiveness, conflict, control and confrontation, problem behaviors and difficult group members, transference and countertransference, and leadership responsibilities were presented as they relate to the different stages of group. Chapter 4 discusses the theory and practice of group work.