

10

POTENTIAL MEMBERSHIP PROBLEMS, CONCERNS, AND INTERVENTION SKILLS

Major Topics

- Behaviors and attitudes of effective and ineffective group members
- Involuntary group members and ethical guidelines
- Problem member behaviors and their goals
- The deviant group member
- Teaching group membership skills
- Leadership strategies

Introduction

No amount of planning and preparation will eliminate all problems, especially those provided by members. Most participants will not know good group membership behavior and skills. They will act in the group as they act in other situations. Some will view the group as another social event, others will recall their school days and act as if they were in a class, some will let personal current events influence their behavior, and some will have emotional intensity that makes it difficult for them to respond positively or appropriately to a new situation. A group leader has to be psychologically and emotionally prepared to deal with all of these circumstances.

It is helpful for group leaders to have experience as a group member as part of their education and training as a group leader. I've taught the graduate course in group counseling for over 15 years and find that students have difficulty as group members with expressing immediate feelings, staying present-centered, making reflective or empathic responses, and making personal statements. These membership skills enhance the group, and leaders who expect members to use them must also use them.

Effective and Counterproductive Group Member Behaviors

But, before we get into the discussion of problems and so on, let's take a look at identifying effective member behaviors and attitudes. Table 10.1 presents a summary of positive behaviors and attitudes that contribute to the progress and process of the group, and that can promote growth and development for group members. Table 10.2 presents a list of counterproductive behaviors and attitudes.

TABLE 10.1 Behaviors and Attitudes of Effective Group Members

Have a focus for the group and for the session
Are flexible
Come to each session ready to work
Ask for what they want or need, rather than expecting the leader or members to read their minds
Pay attention to their feelings
Are aware of the feelings of other members
Openly express important feelings, thoughts, and ideas
Actively participate
Experiment with new ways of behaving
Are open to receiving feedback
Make their nonverbal behavior consistent with their verbal behavior
Take responsibility for how much they grow and learn
Maintain confidentiality
Give feedback to others, especially when it is solicited
Are willing to work to resolve conflicts with others
Are willing to consider that their reaction could be a projection
Use facilitative communication skills such as active listening
Speak directly to other group members
Respond directly to input from other group members
Are willing to examine their resistances
Are tolerant of diverse points of view or values
Are able to be centered on the present

TABLE 10.2 Counterproductive Behaviors and Attitudes

Wait to work or become involved in the group
Suppress important feelings
Expect others to take care of them
Expect others to change because they want them to
Make evaluations and judgments about others
Expect others to fully understand them
Give advice—either solicited or unsolicited
Interpret or ascribe motives to and for others
Ask questions instead of reporting their feelings

Gossip

Participate in a clique

Rush to “Band-Aid,” or soothe others to keep them from experiencing uncomfortable or unpleasant feelings,

Frequently engage in storytelling behavior

Make sarcastic remarks or responses

Make indirect expressions of hostility

Label others

Disparage input from others

Ignore or deny conflicts with others

Possible Sources for Members’ Difficult Behaviors

Groups are composed of a variety of individuals who are all unique but also similar in many ways. It can be surprising to a beginning group leader to be faced with group members who do not want to be in the group—members whose behavior is distracting, disruptive, or worse—and to realize that trying to address problems presented by one or two members leaves the other group members to flounder. There are other constraints when trying to deal with problem behaviors, such as the following:

- Other members can become fearful and resistant if they feel the leader will be punitive.
- The members whose behavior is addressed can feel criticized and blamed, so they stop participating.
- Old family-of-origin issues can get triggered along with emotional baggage.
- Group members can feel that the leader is unfair and collude on an unconscious level to let their displeasure be known in even more problematic ways.
- Feelings of safety in the group can be compromised.
- Trust becomes harder, or impossible, to establish.
- Taking care of members’ behavior becomes more of a priority than does accomplishing the tasks and goals for the group.

There will always be some problem behaviors in groups, but the leader can understand the goal(s) for the behaviors; institute procedures to prevent, reduce, or eliminate them; learn to use these as relevant material for group consideration and exploration; and not assume a defensive, attacking, or ignoring stance.

This chapter addresses some of these issues and concerns, and involuntary members and the ethics that play a part in their participation. Also discussed are some problem behaviors with suggested strategies for constructive resolution. The final topic is on teaching group members behaviors and attitudes that will help them maximize their group experiences.

Involuntary Members

A major factor in deciding on appropriate leadership strategies is if members are voluntary or involuntary participants. This can have a significant impact on participant level, expected behavior, and group development. Involuntary members can exhibit some or all of the counterproductive group members' behaviors in Table 10.2, and group leaders will find it beneficial to understand and anticipate these.

There are many instances in which members of a group are involuntary participants. Members may attend because they were ordered to do so by an authority (such as a court or school principal), as a condition for continued participation in a job or school, as part of a program for contained or incarcerated people (such as inpatients, felons, or juvenile group home residents), or as part of their educational training (such as groups for mental health professionals). The reasons for involuntary attendance may vary, but many of the same characteristics are shared and must be taken into account by the group leader.

Some involuntary participants will view group as an opportunity to learn, grow, and develop more effective ways of relating. Others will be defiant, resistant, or resentful about having to participate. Some will be openly hostile and others passive-aggressive. Group leaders can expect that involuntary participation will result in more barriers than voluntary participation.

It is useful to acknowledge the involuntary nature of their participation early on and give members an opportunity to express their feelings about it. This can be done during the screening interview or during the first session. Leaders may also need to be more specific about what will be done in group and what is expected of group members. These members may be more fearful, as they usually can expect unpleasant consequences for failure.

Constraints to Active Participation

Resistance and defenses are more intense for involuntary participants because they lack power and control: they do not freely choose to be in the group. Another reason for resistance is fear of the unknown. All group members share some of this fear, but it may be more intense for involuntary participants because they have been thrust into an ambiguous situation not of their choosing, and they often do not know what to expect or what is expected of them. Fear of harm plays an important role for involuntary participants as well. They may fear that disclosed information will be given to others and used against them, or that other group members will use it to further their own personal ends. They may fear they will be evaluated and found to be inadequate.

Resentment at being forced to participate may also be a part of resistance. Such resentment may be focused on the authority ordering attendance, but it is more likely to be generalized and widespread. Everyone but them is at fault for their

having to be in the group. Resentment may be more openly expressed and demonstrated by some members, such as court-ordered participants, than by others; but it is present, in some degree, in all involuntary participants. Some simply mask the resentment better than others.

The Leader's Role

Leaders of groups with involuntary participants must be prepared to deal with their fears, resistance, defenses, and resentments. Knowing that these are not only likely but are certain to be manifested in some way allows for advanced planning to better plan to address them. The leader's primary tasks are to

- Adequately address safety and trust issues
- Diffuse hostility and resentment
- Empower members to decide their own level of participation and disclosure
- Have clear goals and objectives
- Understand boundary issues and respect them
- Refrain from power struggles

The first task of the group leader is to directly respond to unspoken or indirectly communicated safety and trust issues. Specific guidelines for expected participation should be provided, the extent to which confidentiality can be maintained and requirements for documentation and reporting should be provided the participants at the beginning of the group.

Group leaders can take steps to diffuse hostility, resentment, or defensiveness that may be directly or indirectly expressed. This, of course, is much easier to do in a small group, as eye contact with each member and using some nonverbal behaviors can promote trust. One way the leader can diffuse these feelings is to acknowledge that he or she knows and appreciates that members dislike being forced to attend. If the group size is manageable, have a session in which each member responds to this question: "What do you like or dislike most about having to attend this group?" Or, "What would make this group experience worthwhile for you?"

Empower members to take charge of their group experience by giving them permission to decide how much they can or will participate. Assure them that they will not be pushed to disclose, or that responses will be demanded, but they will be provided opportunities to disclose and encouraged to respond. Give them some measure of control, and follow through on it to help promote feelings of safety and trust.

Another beginning step is to have clear goals and objectives and to review them with members. Develop attainable goals and be willing to modify them if necessary. Ask if there are any goals or objectives the members wish to include, or if there are any about which they have reservations. When group leaders can be

open and flexible, members can buy into the goals and objectives, which will lead to more personal involvement in the group and in achieving the task.

It is very helpful to delineate firm and permeable boundaries for involuntary participants. Take some time to discuss boundary issues such as the following:

- What topics members and the leader can discuss with people not in the group and under what conditions
- What material should not be discussed with people not in the group
- What group content can be talked about between members in the group when they are outside the group (e.g., socializing)
- What data the leader has to share with other professionals and in what form (i.e., with or without personal identifying data)
- What use will be made of the information shared by the members

Talking over these issues helps members to better judge what is appropriate participation, disclosures, and the like.

One boundary that is under the leader's control is time. Adhering to the specified schedule provides support for consistency. Many involuntary participants have not had clear and unambiguous boundaries before. Ambiguity promotes feelings of insecurity and wariness. Group leaders cannot be expected to address and allay all insecurities, but they can provide firm time boundaries so that at least one thing is consistent.

Do not engage in power struggles with members. Many members will attempt to engage the leader in them either to test them or because it is their characteristic way of behaving or relating. People who perceive themselves as having little power tend to mistrust those they perceive as having power as acting in their personal interests most often (Walton, 1987). The group leader can be seen as the high-power person, and members may fear their use or misuse of such power because of past experiences.

Group leaders are not engaging in a power struggle when they develop guidelines for expected behaviors, do not permit physical or verbal violence, or protect a member from emotional abuse or a barrage of questions. These are legitimate leader behaviors designed to protect group members and provide for effective group functioning.

Ethical Guidelines for Involuntary Participants

Ethical issues that are the most important when group members are involuntary participants include freedom of exit, confidentiality screening, orienting and providing information, coercion and pressure and dual relationships.

Freedom of exit—With the exception of students and professionals, most involuntary participants do not feel they have the freedom to exit. While it may be possible for members to physically exit or to refuse to participate, the alternatives

(e.g., jail) are often worse. This promotes feelings of being trapped and forced to do things against their will. For many involuntary participants, this increases defiance and passive-aggressiveness, while others are more open in their hostility.

The group leader will receive the brunt of participants' feelings about lack of freedom to exit. Many participants are not able to accept personal responsibility, cannot or will not express their negative feelings to the official(s) who sent them to group, and are fearful of what will happen if they stay or if they leave.

Confidentiality—Typically, there are fewer limits on what can be kept confidential with and about involuntary clients. Legal, moral, and training issues often prevent confidentiality from being complete—for example, case notes sometimes must be kept and can be read by others; consultation with supervisors may be mandated or encouraged; certain crimes (e.g., incest) must be reported to the proper officials; and participants who might harm themselves or others must be screened. Further, in a closed setting, such as a group home, hospital, or jail, there is no way to fully ensure that the content of sessions can be kept confidential.

Members must be informed at the beginning of group what cannot be kept confidential. Ideally, the issue of confidentiality and constraints should be discussed in screening or pre-group sessions as well as in the first session. However, if it is not possible to do so prior to the first session, the group leader must initiate the discussion early in the first group.

Screening—Screening of potential group members is desirable. Even when group leaders are not able to reject members because of policies or rules, it is still desirable to have an individual pre-group interview session. It may also be possible to reject those who would be disruptive to the group if officials making decisions about participants can be shown sufficient reasons. The screening interview could provide a group leader with a rationale for why a particular person would not be suitable for the group.

Orienting and providing information—When leaders cannot schedule pre-group orienting sessions, the first session can be used for this purpose. Group work is scary for many participants, and when involuntary participation with possible negative consequences is added to the usual fears about participation, the situation is greatly exacerbated. An important thing to remember is that group business—goals, process, and so on—gets accomplished during orienting sessions. Group leaders' time will not be wasted in helping members understand what is expected of them, how they should behave, and what will be done in the group. Group participation is enhanced when there is adequate orientation.

Coercion and pressure—Although there is an element of coercion implicit for involuntary participants, group leaders must take care to ensure that neither identification with the aggressor nor displacement of feelings around the coercion has a negative impact on the group. It is not possible to prevent either of these from happening, but if it is anticipated and realized that identification and/or displacement are possible and take steps to neutralize their impact, that can help both individual members and the functioning of the group.

Identification with the aggressor produces behavior similar to that perceived by the authorities. Examples of such behavior are giving orders and expecting to be obeyed, expecting deference from others and becoming angry or enraged if it is not given, sadistic acts that are passive, and so on. While these behaviors may be characteristic for some members, others may assume them as a defense mechanism.

Displacement is a common defense mechanism used by many people for various situations. Under these circumstances it may be manifested in the group and become a barrier to progress. This is one reason it is so important to get the issue of coercion on the table early and the feelings around it expressed. Group leaders can expect to be the target of displaced feelings, but other members may also be targets.

Dual relationships—Dual relationships involve a power differential, and effects on the leader's objectivity. It is difficult to avoid dual relationships with involuntary group participants. Even if the group leader has only arm's-length input into an evaluation or decision, he/she cannot avoid it altogether and therefore, the leader will probably be perceived by group members as having an evaluative role and function. For example, in training groups for professionals the leader may also be the clinical supervisor. It may not be possible to separate the impact of group participation and disclosure on the perceptions of clinical behavior/expertise. The group leader/supervisor typically makes every effort to do so, but as these effects and interactions are not clearly understood, you cannot be sure that the roles and functions are kept separate.

When the group leader also has an evaluative function, no matter how slight, there is an increase in the power differential between the leader and members. Members may perceive the power differential as being greater than it actually is and relate to the leader in terms of their perception. This perception can increase mistrust, inhibit disclosure, intensify resistance and defenses, promote deference, or prevent honest participation.

Having more than one role and function has an impact on the leader. His or her objectivity can be impaired because of interactions, behaviors, and relationships resulting from group participation. Countertransference, projection, and projective identification are all possible for the leader and can lead to impaired objectivity. The leader's objectivity is subject to manipulation by group members and can carry over into other leader roles and functions.

Problem Member Behaviors and Their Goals

Most problem behaviors in psychoeducational groups can be categorized as overly participatory or under participatory: Overly participatory includes behaviors such as monopolizing, storytelling, exhibiting distracting behaviors, acting as the leader's assistant, attention seeking, and socializing. The goals for over participation are usually to be the center of attention, as a means for the member to substantiate their uniqueness and importance, their usual behavior in social situations, and/or to prevent silence from occurring, as that is very threatening for them. Following

are a brief description for some overly participatory behaviors, possible goals, and an activity for each category of over participation.

Monopolizing—The monopolizing member wants attention from the leader and from other members. At first, the behavior may be appreciated. Having a group member respond or initiate questions can energize the group, which helps the process move along. It does not take long, however, for one member's over involvement to become a real problem. The dilemma for the leader is how to block the monopolizing behavior without squelching the member or discounting him or her in some way.

Remember that other members will assume that how the group member is treated is also how the leader will treat them, whether or not they engage in the same type of behavior. Sometimes the group will handle the behavior by confronting the member with its impact on them. For example, if one member interrupts others frequently, at some point another member may ask the interrupter if he or she would let the speaker finish.

Activity: Ashley was very active in the first session and seemed eager to talk about her concerns. It is now the fifth session of this group of late adolescent males and females who have social competency concerns. Just as she has in the previous four sessions, Ashley is once again talking about her concerns in great detail. Other members are restless and beginning to tune out. How, or would you intervene?

Storytelling—Storytelling behavior can be the result of social convention where it is expected that the person will provide details about the event or situation. Sometimes, the storyteller thinks that others will not be able to understand if they do not know the details, and/or want the listeners to agree that he/she is in the right, and that the other is wrong. In addition, group members can encourage storytelling by asking questions or asking for more details, and giving other such encouragers. Whatever the reason for the storytelling behavior, the actions are taking the focus away from the real issue(s), consuming considerable group time with irrelevancies, and not helping the speaker to find solutions.

The task of blocking monopolizing and storytelling behavior can be a difficult one. Most often, the group has not progressed to the point where members feel safe handling the leader's intervention. One rule of thumb is to let the storytelling or monopolizing behavior occur the first time without comment. Try to link what the person is talking about to the goals of the group. Express appreciation for the member's input to encourage others to participate. After that, try to intervene before the storyteller gets started.

If several members want to speak, let others talk before the monopolizer. Call on reticent members by asking if they have comments. Do not ignore the storyteller; just try to limit the time he or she has the floor. If necessary, you can break into a story with, "I am sorry to interrupt you, but it is time for a break (or the

next scheduled activity, or to move on if we are to stay on schedule). I would like to get back to you on that.”

Activity: Ray constantly says that he doesn’t want the group’s attention, but at this seventh session, he once again has the group’s attention with his strong response to a disagreement between two group members. In spite of his protestation to the contrary, most of every session is focused on him. How, or would you intervene in this session?

Leader’s assistant—It will not be unusual to find one or more group members who assume the role of leader assistant where they begin to probe and respond as would a leader. This action may be a desire to replace the leader, to assert their dominance and control, to prevent the real self from being seen by the group and leader, and/or as an attempt to demonstrate their superiority. This person may start to structure and direct sessions, suggest what the group should or ought to do, give helpful and not so helpful responses, interrupt the leader to respond to another member, and other such actions that take on the leader’s role. The leader has to judge if the person is just trying to be helpful, or if there are other reasons for becoming the leader’s assistant.

Activity: You are leading a group of young adults working on relationship issues. During the second and third sessions you find that a member is responding before you do, even when your input is directly sought. This member’s responses are generally acceptable, but you find yourself becoming annoyed that he/she seems to be assuming your role. What would you do or say when he/she jumps in again?

Physically distracting behaviors—Children and adolescents are more apt than adults to engage in physically distracting behaviors, such as pushing, getting out of their seats, and walking around. You should clearly articulate guidelines for expected group behaviors. These may be somewhat flexible but are developed to ensure smooth running of the group and focus on the task. Members who engage in distracting behaviors can be gently and tentatively confronted. The group leader might say, for example, “I am interested in what Joe is saying, but I find it hard to pay attention when you are making noise kicking the chair.” If the group has developed to a point where members can handle being reminded of the rules without feeling criticized or put down, a simple reminder of agreed-upon behavior may be adequate.

Activity: During the third session of a group of fifth-grade children, you notice that two boys are kicking and shoving each other, but always stop when they see you looking at them. How, or would, you intervene?

Attention seeking—Basically, group leaders must decide to either ignore or attend to attention-getting behavior. Sometimes ignoring the behavior causes the

person to stop because it was not reinforced. Sometimes the behavior will cease or be modified if attention is received. At other times, attention simply escalates the behavior.

See previous activity.

Socializing—The socializer is having a grand old time. He or she is talkative, enjoys interacting with others, may giggle or laugh a lot, and wants to be involved with others and have them involved with him or her. In counseling/therapy groups, other members often will confront the socializer. But in short-term groups, the group usually does not take responsibility. Further, the task function of psychoeducational groups makes it less likely that personal development is a significant goal, and the group is not likely to confront the socializer.

The socializer engages in side conversations when others are talking, interacts repeatedly with the same person(s), introduces topics at variance with what is being discussed under the guise of being friendly, starts conversations instead of participating in the activity, is late coming back from breaks, and so on. The socializer does not act alone; you are likely to have two or more in the group.

Activity: Monica is telling the group about her sadness about her grandmother's death, but two members are whispering in a side conversation. How, or would, you intervene?

Under-Participation

Under-participatory behavior will be discussed as disengagement from the group. The disengagement can be physical, mental, emotional, or any combination. *Physical disengagement* is seen in the following:

- Absence
- Tardiness
- Putting or having one's chair less than completely in the group
- Lack of body orientation to speakers
- Eyes focused elsewhere—for example, ceiling, floor, window
- Back turned to the group or speaker
- Leaning back in chair
- Turning chair around and sitting with the back of the chair facing the group
- Temporarily leaving the group
- Premature termination

The disengaged member is present in body but not in any other aspects of his or her being. Nonparticipation is due to being emotionally or psychologically somewhere else other than in the group.

All these behaviors can be disruptive to the group's process and progress, and are especially of concern when they appear as a change from a member's usual behavior. Some of these behaviors are subtle, nonverbal ones that can trigger leaders' and members' concern just below the level of consciousness—that is, you sense something but are not consciously aware of just what you are sensing or why. Other physical disengagement behaviors are more overt (e.g., absence) and can be openly explored.

Mental disengagement cannot be observed and must be inferred, unless a member reports it. Examples for mental disengagement include:

- Thinking about outside-the-group concerns
- Daydreaming
- Wondering how and what to talk about, or how to respond
- Planning what to say or do (e.g., questions)
- Mental rehearsals
- Free association, stream of consciousness
- Analyzing

It can be relatively easy to use mental disengagement because thinking speed is very fast, especially when compared to speaking or acting speed. This differential can make it easy to mask or deny being disengaged. Thus, someone can pretend to be attentive if challenged, because you generally say or do something, such as using the member's name, prior to challenging him or her. This allows for just enough time for the member to snap back into the present. Free association and analysis can be tied to self-exploration—that is, the member has something triggered by an event or comment in the group and begins to follow where that leads; hence the disengagement. Sometimes new learning and understanding can emerge for that person.

However, most mental disengagement is an attempt to flee the group, get away from uncomfortable triggered feelings, and/or deny personal associations to what is taking place in the group. Leaders will want to know what the stimulus was that triggered the mental disengagement.

Emotional disengagement can be less difficult to observe for some group members than mental disengagement, because the leader has become familiar with this nonverbal attending behavior and is aware when it changes to withdrawal. The person can physically alter his or her posture, eye contact, limb positioning such as crossing arms across chest, and tone of voice. Emotional disengagement is generally the basis for the following behaviors:

- Changing the topic
- Moving back from the group or turning away from the speaker
- Refusing to initiate or maintain eye contact
- Starting side conversations
- Fiddling with possessions, or self, such as hair
- Trying to soothe or reassure someone by giving advice, or making comments to lessen emotional intensity

- Asking questions, especially rhetorical questions
- Intellectualizing
- Becoming numb or confused
- Monopolizing group time by telling a personal story in detail
- Becoming aggressive

These behaviors and others are used to keep the person from awareness and from experiencing personal and uncomfortable feelings. The fear and dread of this personal discomfort motivates the disengagement, not the other person's emotions. Other people's emotions may trigger emotional detachment, but the person who uses it is trying to get away from something that is personally threatening.

The short-term nature of psychoeducational groups can make it difficult for group leaders to effectively challenge, manage, and explore these disengagements. Rather than working through the causes for the disengagement, leaders may have to be content with noting it, reflecting on what may have triggered it, and encouraging members to speak more often about their feelings, ideas, and thoughts in the here and now. In-depth exploration requires a strong therapeutic alliance and more time than is available for most psychoeducational groups.

Understanding the Goal for Under-Participation

The goals for under-participation typically are rebellion, self-protection, or revenge. Rebellion ("You cannot make me participate") usually occurs with involuntary group participants. They did not choose to be in the group, and because they were forced or coerced in some way to attend, they will refuse to participate. The refusal may not be open and direct, but their lack of participation speaks volumes. The leader needs to go slow and not try to force participation, acknowledging that they, indeed, cannot be forced to participate.

For some, such as court-ordered participants, you may want to address the issue of involuntary participation openly and make the topic a part of the group process. Asking participants for their thoughts and feelings about the proposed group and its activities, and acknowledging that you can only encourage participation and cannot force it, will allow some members to express their resistances. Generally, many will then cooperate, if only on a superficial level. You must model genuineness by not insisting that the under- or nonparticipant become more involved. Offer opportunities to become involved in the group, but do not push.

When under- or nonparticipation has the goal of protecting the self, you are wise to let the member alone. Even in a counseling/therapy group, the member would be allowed to determine the level and extent of his or her participation. Safety and trust are critical issues, and it is unlikely that these issues can be sufficiently addressed in a psychoeducational group because of the limited time frame. You can encourage input by asking members directly from time to time if they have any comments. Acknowledge comments with a response to reinforce

the positive behavior of participation. Ask nonthreatening questions that do not require self-disclosure or opinions.

The revenge goal is similar to the rebellion goal but with the added component that members are getting back at those who hurt them by trying to hurt others. These members are the sullen, hostile, silent ones. There is a kind of threat about their silence, whereas the rebellious member is not necessarily sullen and hostile. The best strategy is to leave these members alone but block attacking behavior. Extend an invitation to participate, but openly acknowledge that you cannot make them participate and that you will respect their decision. If they must be present—that is, they do not have the freedom to leave—you can try asking them what the group can do to make the experience more meaningful for them.

Activity: 1. It is near the end of the sixth session of a ten-session training group for counseling students and Lee has not said anything during the session, which is his usual behavior. In previous sessions, the leader and some other members have made efforts to draw him in, but he resists by saying he's shy and introverted. Occasionally he will respond if called on, but he never volunteers. How, or would, you intervene?

2. During the eighth session of the previously described group, Vivian turns to Lee and tells him that she would like to hear his thoughts. His response is that he is interested, but has nothing to add. Other members begin to tell him how his silence makes them feel, but Lee does not respond to them. How, or would, you intervene?

The “Deviant” Group Member

A deviant group member can have a significant negative impact on the group and its process and progress, on individual group members, and can present a challenge to the group leader, and is not always recognized until the damage has been done. There are several definitions for the “deviant” group member; all are negative, but the concept is that the deviancy is counterproductive for the group and is not intended to pejoratively label the group member. Their behaviors suggest that they are not in an appropriate group for them at this time.

Deviant, as described in the literature, refers to a group member whose “behavior or characteristics are unambiguously undesirable” (Hutchison et al., 2013, p. 344), disliked (Marques & Paez, 1994), have a demeanor that makes them unsuitable for the group (Burlingame et al., 2011). These group members present threats to the group process (McNair & Corazzini, 1994), disagree with group norms so that the group experiences greater dissonance (Matz & Wood, 2005), are less likeable (Hichy et al., 2008; Morrison & Miller, 2008), and lead to decreased group cohesion (Burlingame et al., 2011). The deviant group member is an outlier for the group’s identity (Hutchison et al., 2013), shared norms or values (Matz & Wood, 2005), and can exhibit self-absorbed behaviors and attitudes (Kearns & Brown, 2016).

Identification of a deviant group member while important for all groups can be especially important for short-term groups and where group members are mandated to attend the group, such as court mandated groups and training groups for mental health professionals. These members cannot exit the group without major or dire consequences and the group experience then becomes less helpful or constructive, and may result in considerable conflict and discord.

Importance and Rationale for Identification of a Deviant Group Member

The concept of the deviant group member and their early identification is important because of their negative effect on the group and its members, such as, the tendency for the group to derogate the member perceived as deviant (Marques & Paez, 1994; Hutchison et al., 2013), to be psychologically isolated (Hutchison et al., 2013; Jetten et al., 2011; Eidelman et al., 2006), for the member to be scapegoated (Yalom & Lesczc, 2005), and for the group to spend time trying to isolate and preserve the group from the deviant group member.

Groups that do not or cannot use screening to ferret out the deviancy prior to composing the group can be especially vulnerable to having to manage and contain the disruptions to the group process and progress. It is also possible that the screening process when implemented will not identify the potential deviant. The use of an instrument such as the Group Selection Questionnaire's Demeanor Scale (Burlingame et al., 2011) would be helpful to identify the deviant prior to his/her being placed in a group.

Deviant Behavior and Demeanor

Deviant in this discussion means that the person is behaving in such a way that is displeasing to the group members, out of sync, or is different in a way that could produce rejection, becoming excluded or psychologically isolated, and where the group expends considerable time and effort trying to make the group member conform to the core values of the group, and to exhibit acceptable behavior, opinions, attitudes, and the like. Deviant behavior has been described as avoiding verbal arguments, holding back from speaking in groups, avoiding sharing feelings, and as someone who does not see the group as potentially helpful. The items on Burlingame's Demeanor Scale lists feeling left out and/or ignored, suppressing negative emotions, making inappropriate disclosures, arguing for argument sake, talking over others, and showing domineering behaviors.

Some example behaviors that can be indicative of a possible deviant group member are seen in the following:

- The know-it-all group member who has an answer or solution for everything talked about in the group.

- A tendency to assume a “devil’s advocate” role. They do not provide their perceptions, feelings, responses, and the like, but almost always say something like, “I’d like to play the devil’s advocate in this discussion. Not that this is my perception, but just saying.”
- Is quick to give advice as to what a group member or the leader should or ought to do.
- Presents his/her life experiences as justification for knowing what needs to be done, usually by others.
- Will boast about accomplishments, material objects, or anything that he/she feels makes him/her feel important and superior to other group members.
- Lacks insight about him/herself.
- Demonstrates little or no empathy toward others, but expects it from them.
- Tends to exhibit indifference to others’ concerns, and his/her impact on others.
- Talks over others, finishes other members’ thoughts, and interrupts to take the conversation in a different direction.
- Seeks admiration and responds favorably to flattery.
- Denigrates others’ beliefs, values, actions, and the like.

This list contains some behaviors that can signal a deviant group member, while others can be issues that can be worked on within the group. It can be difficult to differentiate between behaviors that can be worked with and those that describe the deviant group member.

Teaching Group Membership Skills

Teaching Membership Skills

It may be helpful to plan one session that teaches group members how to be productive and constructive. Their learning, personal development, the group’s progress, and the group’s process are all facilitated when members have and use certain skills. You cannot teach all of these at one time, nor do you want to lose the primary focus or purpose for the group. It can be effective to choose a few skills you want to teach, present them in writing to members in the first meeting, and remind members to use these skills throughout the life of the group.

Do not try to teach all group membership skills at one time. These skills have to be internalized, practiced, and fed back in order for members to learn and use them. This takes time, and you do not want to give members too much new material at one time. The major group membership skills are as follows:

- Speak your feelings, thoughts, and ideas out loud.
- Make personal statements using I, me, and my.
- Do not use the universal or general designation of we or us.

- Members and the leader cannot read your mind; you must verbalize what you experience.
- Do not expect your nonverbal communication to be accurately understood.
- Make an effort to not suppress your feelings, and allow yourself to experience and explore them.
- When you find yourself resisting, do not try to deny or repress it; accept it and let it protect you until you are ready to explore it.
- Respond by sharing your feelings instead of asking questions.
- Refrain from giving advice. However, providing information is different and is encouraged.

Feelings, Thoughts, and Ideas

Members will have to be encouraged and reminded to speak about their thoughts, feelings, and ideas in the here and now. A major constraint for members is social convention—that is, many people are taught that speaking openly about these feelings is rude or inappropriate. However, speaking openly and directly facilitates personal development and group process. Leaders can more accurately and easily judge and evaluate members' experiences when thought disclosure takes place. Further, the process and theme of the group is more visible.

When an extended silence becomes uncomfortable, leaders can invite members to speak of what they are experiencing at that time. This intervention also can be useful when a member makes an emotionally intense remark of disclosure. Members may be uncertain how they should respond and this reminder can direct them.

Personal Statements

The group is the one place where it is appropriate and expected that members will use personal pronouns such as I, me, and my in their comments. Culture again may work against members' willingness and comfort with making personal statements. The one group of people that this does not apply to is the narcissist. Indeed, you may have difficulty getting narcissists to recognize that there are other people in the world, much less in the group.

Making personal statements is one form of taking personal responsibility and forces people to acknowledge that they are in charge and have some power. These are all desirable states for group members and should be encouraged.

Leaders must be judicious in reminding members to use personal statements and not remind them every time they fail to do so. It may be better to wait until you are more confident about the strength of the relationship before interjecting a reminder, as some members may take offense or be embarrassed when reminded in front of other members. After a connection is made and a therapeutic relationship is established, it becomes less threatening to remind individual members to make personal statements. It could be effective and helpful to remind the group

as a whole at the beginning of each session to try to use personal statements. That way, no one is put on the spot.

General Designations Are Not Helpful

This skill is closely aligned with the previous one of making personal statements. When general designations are used (e.g., we, us, or they), it diffuses responsibility, and it is inaccurate to speak for other people. While it can be less threatening to speak as if others were in agreement or involved, it may not be reflective of others' attitudes, thoughts, opinions, and so on. Members need to become aware of their reluctance to accept personal responsibility when they use general or universal designations.

Mind Reading Is Not Possible

It is not unusual for group members to have an unconscious expectation or need for the leader to be a fully empathic nurturer and to be able to immediately know what members want, need, mean, and desire without their having to verbalize it. This ability is called mind reading. However, it is very unlikely that leaders have this ability or are adept enough to "read" group members' inner self. Nor should group leaders have this unrealistic expectation for themselves.

It could be helpful to tell members at the very beginning of the group about the expectation that their thoughts, feelings, ideas, wants, and so on must be spoken aloud, and that they should ask for what they want or need from each other as well as from the leader. You may need to give gentle reminders.

This expectation for mind reading may be deeply ingrained for some members because they grew up in families where this was expected. They could have had one or more parents with a destructive narcissistic pattern (Brown, 2001) who expected their children to read their minds and give them what was needed or wanted. Other members may have a deep longing for an empathic nurturer, since they did not receive this at crucial periods in their lives. Whatever the reason, this unconscious desire and expectation can lead to considerable misunderstandings, disappointments, and even resentment. Leaders need to be aware of their own needs and behaviors that are reflective of the expectation of mind reading and to stay aware of members' expectations for it.

Identifying Feelings

Members may have a very narrow vocabulary for identifying and expressing their feelings, be reluctant or embarrassed to identify them, and/or not have much experience at doing this. It is very helpful to the group's progress and process when members are able to identify and express what they are feeling, especially what they are feeling in the moment.

Ask members to name or label what they feel, even if they can only describe body sensations. Encourage them to use metaphors—for example, lower than a snake's belly, free as a bird, jumpy as a long-tailed cat in a room full of rocking chairs, cool as a cucumber, shy as a fawn, or uplifting as a hot-air balloon. Leaders may also want to use some exercises that expand members' vocabulary of words to identify and express feelings.

Nonverbal Communication

Clusters of nonverbal gestures and postures form metacommunication, which carries over 90 percent of the message being sent. Attending to this metacommunication can contribute to understand the real message, which can be different from the spoken one. Some people are very adept at reading these nonverbal messages and base their responses on them rather than on the overt spoken message—for example, you may have a parent or sibling who is able to read and respond to your nonverbal message.

Group members may have an unrealistic expectation that others should be able to understand their nonverbal communication. Group leaders should make it clear from the very beginning that understanding each other's feelings, intents, and so forth will be based more on spoken messages, because trying to read and interpret nonverbal messages is risky and subject to error. Leaders can become more experienced at understanding a member's nonverbal communication over time, but still need to verify their perception rather than accepting their experience as valid and acting as if it were true rather than considering it a hypothesis or possibility.

Group members are often surprised when they realize that their nonverbal communication is not congruent with their verbal communication. They become aware of this through other members and the leader's feedback and responses to them. This can be important learning for these members, as the incongruence they display in the group could be reflective of their interactions outside the group that are negatively impacted because they are sending mixed messages.

Expressing and Exploring Feelings

Encourage members to express and explore their feelings that emerge during group sessions. The group is intended to be a safe place where feelings are acceptable and new understandings and associations for these feelings are possible.

Members may fear some of their feelings, as they can be threatening to the self, uncomfortable and painful, or very shaming. These reasons for suppressing feelings are common and understandable. However, it is much more beneficial to express and/or explore these feelings in order to promote resolution for underlying issues, problems, and concerns. It is the group leader's job to help members

with this task. Willingness to express and explore feelings is facilitated by building safety and trust in the group.

Leaders can find ways to help members express feelings other than constantly asking, “How does that make you feel?” or “What are you feeling?” Members will tire of this questioning quickly and begin to resist, thus putting another barrier in front of exploration.

When leaders use empathy, or active listening and responding, they can help members express important and difficult feelings. These responses are much more helpful than asking questions about what the person is feeling because these responses convey that the leader understands what the member is experiencing.

Specific Leadership Strategies

There are three common traps that beginning and ineffective group leaders can encounter and fall into: trying to overcome resistance; asking questions as a way of showing interest, or in an attempt to guide the client down a particular road of thought; and wanting to fix the problem by giving advice. Effective group leaders, on the other hand, understand resistance and are not threatened by it; they use their active listening and responding skills to connect to and encourage the client in self-exploration; and they deeply understand that the client is in the best position to fix his/her problem, and therefore do not give advice. These traps are continually present at all times, and in all groups.

Resistance

Leaders have to be patient with resistance. It is not wrong; it is there to protect the person from threatening material. Members have to be taught the following:

- They need to become aware of their personal resistance.
- Defenses are ways by which resistance is manifested.
- When the leader recognizes resistance and highlights it, he or she is not pointing a finger of blame or shame at the member.
- Members do not have to stop resisting.
- It can be helpful for growth and development to analyze the roots of the resistance and what triggered it.
- Members can choose to continue to resist.
- The leader will not attack resistance.

Beginning group leaders can confuse active participation with lack of resistance and think that there is no resistance because members are pleasant, verbally active, and cooperative. However, resistance is always present and is manifested in a variety of ways. Sometimes the resistance is direct and overt, such as when a member is sullen and silent. Most often resistance is indirect and covert, such as a verbally

active member who is actually directing attention away from a sensitive topic. Further, considerable resistance remains on the unconscious and nonconscious levels, and group members employ their defenses to resist without being aware of what they are doing.

Leaders of short-term psychoeducational groups need to become aware of resistant behaviors, as these are clues to the members' sensitive material. This awareness does not translate into acts to reduce, break through, or attack the resistance. It is best to leave the resistance alone. If the therapeutic relationship is developed to the point where members can tolerate being told of the resistance or defense, leaders can gently do so in a manner that does not blame or shame. It can take a long time for members to accept that resistance is not wrong, that it can be helpful to analyze it, and that the leader is not accusatory when pointing out resistant behaviors.

Feeling Responses, Not Questions

Members can be helpful to other members and to the group process when their responses focus on their personal feelings and they do not ask questions to elicit more detail or as a way of showing interest. This practice can be difficult. Social convention and cultural expectations work against open expressions of feelings as responses.

When questions are asked, it moves the interaction to the cognitive level, decreases or moderates emotional intensity, and deflects attention. Worse is when questions are asked to guide thoughts and feelings in the direction the questioner thinks they should go. These are not helpful questions at all.

Members will know how others perceive them or their situation when responses are feeling focused—for example, when a member tells of a distressing situation and members respond with their feelings that reflect the speaker's feelings (e.g., hurt, resentment, or fear), that person may feel validated and supported. On the other hand, if members were to respond with questions, the speaker might feel misunderstood or unsupported, thus becoming resistant.

Leaders can block this questioning behavior by interjecting and telling responding members that it would be helpful to the speaker if they could verbalize their feelings that emerged as they listened. Leaders can also model this behavior and speak of their feelings as they listen to members.

Advice Giving Is Not Helpful

Advice is seldom helpful, since it is given on the basis of personal understanding and status, conveys what the advice giver thinks the other person should or ought to do, seldom fits the receiver's situation or personality, and can be wrong. Many people are aware of the risks and dangers of giving advice, but that does not deter them from doing so. Stage 1 in group development is characterized by advice giving by members who are trying to be helpful.

There can be a strong desire or a life's expectation for some members that leads them to rush to give others the benefit of their experiences. There are many different reasons for advice giving, but they are all for the benefit of the giver, not the receiver.

It is much more helpful for members to find their own answers and to fix things their way. This does not mean that the leader and members should refrain from giving needed information. Whenever it is evident that a member lacks essential information, is misinformed, or is not aware of changes that can affect him or her, withholding facts is inadvisable. Giving information is not the same as giving advice.

Discussion/Reflection Question

1. Share the responses to the activities in small groups.