The Orientation Group

PSOT’s Approach to Welcoming and Further Resourcing Clients

Building Awareness, Skills & Knowledge:
A Community Response to the Torture Survivor Experience

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Learning Objectives

1. To identify benefits of group work in healing from torture
2. To learn a manualized group treatment model for survivors of torture
3. To begin designing a group session unique to your clients' needs and program's resources
4. To share group intervention strategies with peers

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Large Group Exercise: Experiences of Group Work

• Think of a group you have participated in (e.g. psychotherapy, religious, parenting, support, class)

• Did the group serve a function for you that could not have been met if you were on your own or with only one other person?

• What do you remember about first walking into the group?

• What was your participation like in the beginning and did it change?

• What role/function(s) did you serve in the group?

• Did you ever have conflict with someone in the group?

• Did you become particularly close with anyone in the group?

• Did you sometimes not want to attend the group?

• What was your withdrawal from the group like?

• What is your most fond memory of the group?

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Group Work with Torture Survivors: Benefits

- Reducing Isolation
- Normalization of experiences - “I’m not the only one”
- Breaking the Silence
- Community in healing
- Culturally syntonic community support
- Recipient and giver
- Resource-wise
Group Work with Torture Survivors: Challenges

- Fear of being with others who are unknown
- Fear of what they might have to say
- Fear of what others will talk about
- High avoidance to manage other trauma symptoms
- Lack of familiarity with group therapy
PSOT: The Program

- History
- Setting
- Personnel
- Strengths
- Limitations

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PSOT: The Clients

- Demographics
- Functioning
- Strengths and Resources
- Utilization of the Program
- In the context of NYC
- Barriers to Care
Orientation Group: Structure

- 4-session, weekly manualized psycho-education support
- 1.25-2 hour long sessions
- Semi-structured framework
- Co-leadership (often cross discipline) with supervision by licensed clinician with minimum of four years experience working with tortured and/or traumatized populations
- Orients clients to the program services, to program personnel, and to their own bio-psycho-social health
- Led in a single language (with use of live or telephonic interpretation if needed)
- Didactic and experiential components each session
- Guest speakers
Orientation Group: Membership

• Adult clients
• Recently admitted to the program
• History of torture, significant human rights abuses, or exposure to wartime trauma
• Report loss of community, isolation, disruptive trauma symptoms, difficulty navigating NYC and its systems, and confusion about the asylum process and their rights as immigrants
Orientation Group: Goals

- Increase knowledge about trauma and normal reactions to trauma,
- Strengthen coping strategies,
- Provide mutual support among participants,
- Assess treatment readiness for further therapy, and
- Increase knowledge of program services and community resources and how to access them
Orientation Group: Approach

- Warm and welcoming
- Safety and respect
- Confidentiality
- Empowerment
- Foster connection
- Value cultural perspectives and experiences
- Reflect on healthy risk taking, engagement, community building, increase in knowledge and skills, challenges, other group and individual processes

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Orientation Group: Curriculum, Session 1

- Member and leader introductions
- Rules and expectations
- Introduction to the program and hospital
- 2 coping strategies: earth-grounding and wind-deep breathing
- Homework: skills practice
Orientation Group: Curriculum, Session 2

- Review homework
- Discuss trauma, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and depression
- Presentation: de-mystifying psychopharmacology
- Introduce thoughts-emotions-behavior-physical sensations paradigm
- 2 coping strategies: thoughts & emotions tracking, pleasant event scheduling
- Homework: skills practice
Orientation Group: Curriculum, Session 3

• Review homework
• Presentation: immigration and asylum process overview
• Process reactions to the immigration discussion
• 2 coping strategies: water-calm and control, progressive muscle relaxation
• Homework: skills practice

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Orientation Group: Curriculum, Session 4

- Review homework
- Review information covered in previous sessions
- Process reactions to group coming to an end
- Presentations on future services at and outside of PSOT: ongoing group therapist, social services provider
- Coping strategies: 4 elements bracelet and fire-vision board
- After group has ended, leaders make service recommendations for each client and facilitate engagement
Small Group Exercise: YOUR Group

• Join staff from your own organization and begin to design a 5th session OR begin to design your own multi-session group treatment model
  – To run for your own clients (e.g. treatment centers)
  – To offer to another program (e.g. if you have an expertise but don’t provide services to groups of clients)
  – To bemodeled off of PSOT’s group or to address entirely different needs of your population

• If you are the only representative of your program, join a group that represents the same type of services you provide (e.g. another health center, school, social service agency)

• Big Group: sharing

• Next Steps: Write down group model or session proposal and the date when you will meet with colleagues to finish designing it
References

• Fraenkel, P. (2007). Groupes multifamiliaux pour familles sans domicile fixe (Multiple family discussion groups for families that are homeless). In S. Cook et A. Almosnino (Eds.), Thérapies Multifamiliales, des groupes comme agents thérapeutiques. (Multiple family therapy: Groups as therapeutic agents).