

Module 12 Lesson 4

Transcript

Chances are you've thought about running a group or two and what that could look like for your business. If you're thinking you're interested in running a weekly weight loss group or maybe a healthy lifestyle group that meets regularly, this lesson is for you. In this lesson you can look forward to identifying strong characteristics and behaviors of a good group facilitator, learning how to structure a group meeting, strategies to guide participation and the flow of content, and obtaining information on skills to deal with difficult group participants. So, let's get started. No matter if your group is three people or 30, it can be daunting to run a group counseling session. Small groups tend to lend themselves to being pretty intimate, especially if everyone is very comfortable and getting pretty intense. Larger groups can get out of control and hard to direct people if people aren't fully engaged.

I'm starting this lesson with the focus on you and what makes for a good group facilitator. If these are not your strong points, either hone in on your skills or reevaluate if you think running a group is really a wise idea for you. Let's begin with some basic qualities you'll want to master. Good group leaders. Good group leaders actively listen and observe. The ability to be quiet, hear the participant out, and notice nuances is a true skill. Show respect and empathy. Maybe this seems like an obvious thing to say, but being respectful and empathetic takes skill and practice. Be honest and fair. Be mindful to give all participants equal floor time. Be accessible. Allow for relationship building and trust. Ask probing questions. Take the conversation to a deeper level. Go there. Think quickly, intervene with quick redirection, and adapt when things go in a direction that is unexpected.

Good group leaders are assertive. This demonstrates confidence and offers you the opportunity to control situations so participants don't take the group down an unintended path. Good group leaders are also flexible. If things don't go as planned, still deliver an amazing group experience. Use humor. People need a little levity. You don't have to be a comedian. You just have to keep the energy light and upbeat. Know a variety of techniques. Lots of people learn in lots of ways, so keep it a little unpredictable. It's up to you also as a group leader to energize the group. If you're positive, bright, and enthusiastic, there's a much stronger likelihood your group will be, too. Okay, so now you know how you need to be yourself, but now let's move on to how you're actually going to structure the group. Your group needs some organization, and so, I'm going to go over some key structuring for your lesson so your group runs smoothly.

First, try to always start your meetings on time and in the same way. Maybe have everyone introduce themselves and go over the agenda. Maybe start with something that is relevant to your

group that happened in the news that day. Second, have a plan in place for how you're going to handle late comers. You should do what you feel is most comfortable and be consistent with that though. If someone comes in late and someone in the group is speaking, let the speaker finish their time. Then welcome the late comer briefly and maybe give a 10 second explanation of what you're up to at that moment, but be consistent. You don't want someone to come in late the next time and not get that same treatment. Next, guide the meeting with the chosen topic and what you've planned. The most challenging thing is that you want to do very minimal educating here, just a few minutes because the goal of a group is for the participants to support each other and to learn from each other. You're there to guide.

I have a few strategies to help you guide the participation and flow of the group. Paraphrase using, "What I hear you're saying," or, "If I'm understanding you," to highlight important points that may need clarification among your participants. It also helps participants feel validated and understood. Draw people out. Go ahead and use phrases like, "How so," and, "Can you further with that idea," to have someone clarify their own ideas that may be unclear, and you may get some good "aha" moments there. Stack away. Stacking is a really good way to organize your group members who are eager to share and to get those who are more hesitant to share in the queue. Say, "Let's hear first from Angie, then let's give Marissa the floor." Track. This skill may mean you take some notes, but if you can connect various themes throughout the group, you can really make some strong connections.

For example, "We started talking today about Marissa's point with the holidays and eating consistently when traveling, and I'm really liking how Angie built on that with her suggestions for planning ahead and stopping at a supermarket before checking into the hotel." Encouraging. This is an important one. Put yourselves out there by asking if the discussion is raising questions, especially if there are people who haven't participated. Something like, "Does this discussion raise any questions for anyone?" Balance is key as well. Take note if people are preaching to the choir and not all viewpoints are being represented. "We've heard a lot about watching the cards to deal with the holidays today. Does anyone have a different strategy we might want to discuss?" Make space. If you see a participant is hesitant or unable to break in, invite him or her in by asking, "Is there something you want to add?"

Embrace differences as just that. Without using politics as an example, if your group is diverse, you may get some really radically different opinions. I think it's a good thing, and it's also a good idea to acknowledge that. "I'm hearing we have lots of different opinions here. Marissa's going to try to make it from Thanksgiving to New Year's with intermittent fasting. Angie says carb counting is going to be her approach, and Eileen to sticking to her usual healthy ways." Okay, you

know what you should do. You know how to manage participation and flow. Now, who among us hasn't run a group that has a, I'm trying to be kind here, difficult participant? I've run groups where one person dominated so strongly that I swear she was going to take my microphone. I've run a group where a participant disagreed so strongly she stood up and started shouting at the people in the group, including myself.

I spoke into a room of middle schoolers with a bratty 11 year old who told the class my talk was a waste of their time. People can be challenging, right? Plan for a disruptive personality or two. You need to make this conscious, deliberate choice to learn about difficult people so that you can handle yourself professionally and come out feeling good about the situation no matter what happened. You can manage the situation. You may just have to practice and prepare for it a little bit. The rest of your group is going to be watching you. Remember, an adversity is a great way to earn the respect of these people who you want to feel favorably towards you. So, check out the handout on common group behavior problems and how you may think about handling them. I'm telling you, this practice is really important here.

I hope this is helpful, and I want to remind you to bring closure to the session on time with a little summary of the session. You may want to close by connecting the session to the individual by having them think about a question or how they're going to apply what they've learned. Honor the group as a whole for coming and for their work and for their work together, and tell them that you look forward to seeing them the next time. To summarize this counseling group lesson, you learned some common skills a good group facilitator should have, some strategies to guide the flow of the discussion presented, and you've learned some strategies to manage the difficult clients that you're sure to have from time to time. I know if you follow all of these guidelines you are sure to nail your group counseling lesson. I'll see you in our next lesson.