

STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT OF THE PERSON-CENTERED GROUP

<u>Dimension</u>	<u>Initial Stage</u>	<u>Working Stage</u>	<u>Final Stage</u>
Key developmental tasks and goals	Early stages of group are characterized by some floundering and a search for direction. Typically, members present a socially acceptable facade or reveal the "safer" sides of themselves; they describe themselves in a "there-and-then" manner. There is a milling around and a sense of confusion concerning the purpose and the function of the group. A key task is to build trust.	Negative feelings often surface over the lack of leadership. Then, a more accepting and trusting climate may prevail. Members show more of themselves, cohesion develops, and members find support in the group. Some confrontation occurs, especially when members sense that others are not being genuine. False fronts give way to a real expression of self.	The group develops a healing capacity, and members are able to move forward based on the support offered. Members develop self-acceptance; they offer feedback to one another in a climate of honesty, and a sense of community develops. Behavior changes are noticed in the group. Members show increased ease in expressing their feelings, and they gain insight into how they relate to others.
Role of group leader and tasks	Facilitator's main role is to grant freedom to members to develop a structure of their own. Leader places responsibility on members for the direction they will take. Group leaders have the job of being sensitive to whatever direction is taken by the group and following that lead. Leader is concerned with creating a climate that is psychologically safe for the members. Leader's role is to be without a role. Central function is to help members interact honestly.	A central task of the leader is to adopt an empathic viewpoint; it is important that members feel deeply understood and cared for. Leader needs to accept negative as well as positive feelings. Leader needs to share own ongoing feelings and reactions with the group. Leader listens actively, reflects, clarifies, summarizes, links members' statements, demonstrates respect, and also shows acceptance and caring for members.	Central role of leader is to help members express how they have experienced this group and to encourage honest feedback. Leader should help members apply what they have learned in the group to life outside of it.
Role of group members	Members are expected to develop their own goals and decide for themselves how they will spend their time together. At first members are rather confused and search for a structure. They are resistant to sharing personally significant material.	Members decide what they will reveal about themselves; they express feelings to others in the group. They offer both support and challenge to others; they give and receive feedback. Members at this stage are usually willing to express immediate interpersonal feelings of both a positive and a negative nature. Self-exploration occurs on a deeper level.	Members move from playing roles to being real, from being relatively closed to being open and able to tolerate some ambiguity, from being out of contact with internal and subjective experience to being aware of the ongoing subjective process, from looking for external answers to looking inward for direction.

Techniques

Person-centered leaders tend to avoid using planned exercises and techniques to "get a group moving." They rely on the capacity of the group to decide how time will be spent. Leader's attitudes and personal characteristics are far more important than the techniques that are used.

Key techniques include active listening, reflection, clarification, self-disclosure, respect, congruence, and creation of a climate of trust. Members are encouraged to speak in an open way about whatever they are feeling at the moment. These tools do not represent techniques so much as basic attitudes/behaviors of the leader.

Leader is really not necessary at this stage if the group has been effective, for now the group is fairly self-directive and can draw on its own resources for direction. Leader may help the group members summarize what they have learned and encourage them to apply it to life outside the group.

Questions to consider

Since active listening is a basis of this approach, ask yourself ways that your ability to hear and to understand might be hampered. What are some barriers in yourself to hearing others? Consider the following:

- talking too much and too soon
- being too concerned with answers, and not allowing members to explore feelings
- being too quick to give advice or to look for an easy solution
- asking too many closed questions
- being overly directive, and doing too much for the group
- selectively listening or looking for ways to confirm your preconceived notions about members
- paying too much attention to the content and to words, and failing to hear subtle meanings

Are you able to tolerate the expression of negative feelings within a group? Can you accept in a nondefensive manner negative feelings that are directed toward you?

Are you able and willing to share your own reactions in an appropriate manner with the members?

Do you avoid getting caught up in roles? Are you able to be yourself in the group, or do you hide behind professional roles?

Do you trust the members with your feelings? Are you able to let them know how they are affecting you?

How do you demonstrate respect for the members by your behavior in the group? Does your behavior indicate understanding and acceptance?

Are you able to facilitate a group rather than direct it? Can you let the members lead the way, helping them look at their process when necessary?

As a person and as a group facilitator, have you allowed yourself to be changed by a group? Are you open to growth yourself? What changes do you detect in yourself?

Are you able to be both supportive and confrontive? Can you provide nurturing and challenge at the same time?

Have you facilitated the group in such a manner that the members no longer look to you for direction or answers? Is the group able to function largely independently of you?

Reactions: Summarize your reactions to the person-centered perspective on group developmental stages. What do you like most? least?
What aspects of this approach would you incorporate in your style of leadership?