

Second Edition



# THE GROUP THERAPIST'S NOTEBOOK

Homework, Handouts, and Activities for Use in Psychotherapy



Edited by **DAWN VIERS**



# The Group Therapist's Notebook

Following in the footsteps of the successful first edition, *The Group Therapist's Notebook Second Edition* offers an all new collection of innovative ideas and proven interventions that will enhance any group therapy practice. Seasoned and up-and-coming experts provide field-tested activities, easy to reproduce handouts, and practical homework assignments for a variety of problems and population types. Each chapter is solidly grounded with a theoretical foundation and includes materials to gather for implementing the intervention, detailed instructions for use, suggestions for follow-up in successive meetings, contraindications for use, and resources for the client and therapist. With an added emphasis on instruction, real-world examples, and extension activities, this new resource will be a valuable asset for both beginning and established mental health practitioners, including counselor educators, social workers, marriage and family therapists, guidance counselors, prevention educators, peer support specialists, and other group facilitators.

**Dawn Viers, PhD**, is an assessment specialist/outpatient clinician with New River Valley Community Services in Blacksburg, Virginia. Her areas of specialization include foster care and adoption, attachment disorders, and trauma-informed practice. She is the editor of *The Group Therapist's Notebook: Homework, Handouts, and Activities in Psychotherapy* (Routledge, 2007) and co-editor, with Katherine M. Hertlein, PhD of *The Couple and Family Therapist's Notebook: Homework, Handouts, and Activities for Use in Psychotherapy* (Routledge, 2005).



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# **The Group Therapist's Notebook**

## *Homework, Handouts, and Activities for Use in Psychotherapy*

**Second Edition**

Edited by Dawn Viers, PhD

 **Routledge**  
Taylor & Francis Group  
NEW YORK AND LONDON

Second edition published 2018  
by Routledge  
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

and by Routledge  
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4RN

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business*

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[First edition published by The Haworth Press in 2007]

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

Names: Viers, Dawn, editor.

Title: The group therapist's notebook : homework, handouts, and activities for use in psychotherapy / edited by Dawn Viers.

Description: 2nd edition. | New York : Routledge, 2017. | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2017017981 | ISBN 9781138209503 (hardcover: alk. paper) | ISBN 9781138209527 (pbk. : alk. paper) | ISBN 9781315457055 (e-book)

Subjects: | MESH: Psychotherapy, Group—methods

Classification: LCC RC488 | NLM WM 430 | DDC 616.89/152—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2017017981>

ISBN: 978-1-138-20950-3 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-138-20952-7 (pbk)

ISBN: 978-1-315-45705-5 (ebk)

Typeset in Times New Roman  
by Swales & Willis Ltd, Exeter, Devon, UK

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## Foreword

When I first began the Therapist's Notebook series in 1998, it was because as a trainer of therapists, I found many therapists (neophyte and established) were versed in theory but had a harder time applying theory to their daily practice. Crafting a practice means not only having your theory in place but also having mechanisms from which to transform the theory into absorbable bits to be synthesized by clients. There are many dynamics that come into play in practice, and therapists need to be ready at the bat to work within clients' narratives and consider each client's particular needs. In short, I wanted the series to be a practical resource to use with clients.

Dr. Viers has done a beautiful job of gathering field-tested group homework assignments, handouts, and activities, and making them accessible to practicing therapists. Group therapy can be challenging as you balance many dynamics in the room, in addition to one's own reactions to the reactions in the room! This book goes beyond being a collection of activities, and the authors thoughtfully include chapters on becoming and evolving as a group therapist. Trainers of therapists will also enjoy this book.

Authors contribute decades of experience to make this book exceptional. They thoughtfully consider the unique perspective of clients, tailoring contributions to enhance the group therapy environment. Each chapter is detailed to let the reader know the objective of the activity and rationale for use, what materials they will need for the intervention, clear step-by-step instructions, and contraindications for the homework, handout, or activity. Case vignettes make the interventions come alive, giving further instruction in their clarity. Suggestions for follow-up are also included.

Lastly, each chapter includes a thorough list of readings and resources for the professional, as well as bibliotherapy sources for the client. This richness allows the reader to become immersed in the topic at hand, enhancing their work with clients. There are numerous handouts from which clients can enhance their lives, and the group process can be enlivened by the homework and activities.

The book is organized in a way that helps the therapist understand group process from establishing initial rapport to saying goodbyes at termination (some might say "soup to nuts!"). In addition to following the chronology of group development, Viers has ensured that a range of human developmental stages are included, allowing therapists to have access to resources for many group populations, including individual groups, child and young adult groups, and couple and family groups. Support groups are also included. Viers has taken care in this new edition of the book to ensure that instructions for use include variations of the activity, enhancing the therapist's ability to deepen the experience of the activities for clients.

Viers has ensured that this book is not a dull academic text. You will find group process laced with candy, music, mandalas, superpowers, and more. The creativity the authors bring to the table will ensure group members will find sessions memorable! This book should find

a good home on the shelves of any type of therapist: counselors, social workers, marriage and family therapists, psychiatric nurses, psychologists, and more. It will not gather dust; you will pull it down time after time to enhance your planning, process, and fun in group therapy.

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## Acknowledgments

I would like to thank a number of people, without whom this book would not have been possible. First, I would like to thank the talented contributors who wrote inspiring and thoughtful chapters. Several of these authors also contributed to the first edition of *The Group Therapist's Notebook: Homework, Handouts, and Activities for Use in Psychotherapy* (Haworth Press, 1997), which shows the breadth of their talent. Second, I would like to thank Lorna Hecker, PhD for writing the Foreword of this book. Lorna, along with Sharon Deacon and Associates, wrote *The Therapist's Notebook: Homework, Handouts, and Activities for Use in Psychotherapy* (Haworth Press, 1998), which paved the way for future books in the Therapist's Notebook series. Lorna is a renowned author, educator, researcher, and supervisor and will forever be one of my heroes. Third, I would like to thank the editorial staff at Taylor and Francis, especially Elizabeth Graber, Nina Guttapalle, and Chris Teja, for answering my many questions, and for convincing me to jump into editing one more time. Finally, I would like to thank my daughters, Brynn and Mia, for the privilege of being the mother of two supremely smart and assured young women, and Brian for always being my rock.

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# Introduction

Dawn Viers

Why be a group therapist? A better question is likely why *not* be a group therapist? Since group work emerged as a viable therapeutic modality in the 1940s (Leddick, 2011), group therapy has continued to grow and thrive in the public and private sectors. The American Psychological Association indicates “group therapy appears to be gaining popularity for two reasons: More clients are seeking it out as a more affordable alternative to one-on-one psychotherapy, and more research is demonstrating its effectiveness” (Paturel, 2012, p. 48). Groups are thought to be as effective, or more effective, than individual psychotherapy in treating a number of issues, including numerous externalizing and internalizing disorders (Foa, 2009; McDermut, Miller, & Brown, 2001; Volpato et al., 2003), substance use/abuse (Velasquez, Crouch, Stephens, & DiClemente, 2016), personality disorders (Gutteling, Montagne, Nijs, & Van den Bosch, 2012), and health concerns (Tkachuk, Graff, Martin, & Berstein, 2003). Groups can be structured around age, population type, and family status, making them ideal for a number of settings. In fact, one can argue that group work is an almost universal therapeutic modality.

Groups are also thought to be more efficient, especially when resources are limited (Brabender, 2002; Jacobs, Masson, Harvill, & Schimmel, 2016; Weisbrod, Test, & Stein, 1980). Groups can take many forms, including therapeutic, psychoeducation, support, and self-help, among other forms. This accessibility allows groups to take place in locations such as schools, outpatient and inpatient mental health centers, residential treatment centers, group homes, day treatment programs, hospitals, and nursing homes. With the added benefits of social support and the opportunity to effect change in a relational setting, which can translate outside the group venue, it is no wonder that group therapy practice is so popular.

Group therapists can hail from many different professions and backgrounds. Social workers, marriage and family therapists, counselor educators, school counselors, play therapists, prevention specialists, and psychologists all employ the use of groups to effect therapeutic change. Further, lay groups have also become more popular. Peer support and self-help groups allow the prospect to learn new ways of interacting “from the trenches,” as group leaders are often in recovery and therefore able to offer a personal perspective. Yalom and Leszcz state “the multiplicity of forms is so evident today that it makes more sense to speak of ‘group therapies’ than of ‘group therapy’” (2005, p. xii).

The purpose of this book is to offer group therapists and facilitators a repertoire of field-tested interventions grounded in specific theoretical approaches. Focusing on theory serves to differentiate this book from other group therapy books that offer “one-size-fits-all” interventions, which assume all groups (and all group facilitators) are the same. Further, this book

proffers group interventions for a multitude of different population types, including individual groups, child to young adult groups, family and couple groups, population-specific groups, and support groups. Finally, many of the chapters include clinical vignettes to allow the reader to experience the intervention in action, and envision how to use these tools in group practice.

### ***Changes from the Previous Edition***

*The Group Therapist's Notebook: Homework, Handouts, and Activities for Use in Psychotherapy Second Edition*, offers all-new or expanded interventions for your group practice, making it a great supplement to the previous edition of *The Group Therapist's Notebook: Homework, Handouts and Activities for Use in Psychotherapy* (Viers, 2007). In this edition, more emphasis has been placed on the instructions for use and variations of exercises to extend the activities. New to this edition, each chapter includes a section entitled "Materials for Use," which allows the group facilitator to know at a glance what materials they will need to prepare for the activity, homework assignment, or handout.

Contributors to this edition include up-and-coming stars in the field, as well as highly seasoned and decorated professionals. Several of the authors from the previous edition have written original or extended chapters, showing their versatility as group therapists. Areas targeted include traditional therapy groups, as well as support groups. This edition also focuses on in-the-moment topic areas, such as trauma-informed care, LGBTQ+ cognizant practice, and grief and loss.

### ***Audience***

*The Group Therapist's Notebook: Homework, Handouts, and Activities for Use in Psychotherapy Second Edition*, is an essential resource for beginning and veteran practitioners working in mental health. Both action-oriented and experiential group facilitators will find interventions to enhance their group practice. Every agency, counseling center, private practice, school, hospital, treatment facility, nursing home, or training center that organizes and implements therapy groups of any type should keep this guide on hand.

This volume leads a group therapist from learning group therapy skills and starting a group, to focused interventions with established groups, to successfully ending a group. Professors and instructors training the next generation of group therapists will want this book to help teach group facilitation skills, whereas practicing therapists and counselors will find many interventions to enrich their everyday practice. When paired with the first edition of this book, group therapists will find more than sixty chapters filled with fresh ideas for groups and group therapy.

### ***Organization***

This book is comprised of seven main sections. Section I, "Getting Started," helps therapists and therapists in training prepare to engage in group work. Chapter 1 is designed to help beginning counselors learn basic counseling and group facilitation skills. Chapter 2 focuses on help for designing agency with the best fit for the practitioner, while Chapter 3 prepares clients for group work through pregroup orientation meetings.

Section II, "Interventions for All Groups," offers interventions for all group population types from the group formation stage to the working stages of the group. Starting off this section, Chapter 4 is a fun icebreaker activity, while Chapter 5 helps group members to practice team building skills. Chapter 6 focuses on fostering coping skills, while Chapter 7 helps group

members build resilience, both in unique ways. Following are chapters on healthy self-esteem development (Chapter 8) and recognizing and changing one's expenditures of emotional energy (Chapter 9). The last chapter in this section (Chapter 10) helps group members foster a safe setting to discuss family life issues.

Section III, "Interventions for Population-Specific Groups," showcases a variety of activities, handouts, and homework assignments for specific presenting problems. Starting this section, Chapter 11 incorporates the use of music as an intervention in trauma-focused cognitive behavior therapy groups. Chapters 12 and 13 provide original interventions for groups focusing on substance abuse. The last chapter in this section (Chapter 14) highlights the use of narrative therapy with clients identifying as LGBTQ+.

Section IV of this book, "Interventions for Child, Adolescent, and Young Adult Groups," offers interventions for groups in both school and outpatient settings targeting children to young adults. First is a chapter on helping children develop self-awareness and problem-solving techniques (Chapter 15), while Chapter 16 uses bibliotherapy in groups with young children. Chapter 17 helps children, tweens, and teens to identify challenges in their life, and develop a support plan to address these challenges. Chapter 18 uses sculpting to help children and youth going through a family separation. The last chapter in this section (Chapter 19) helps build a support network for young adults providing care for their siblings with special needs.

Section V, "Interventions for Family and Couple Groups," consists of interventions suitable for groups consisting of couples and families. Chapter 20 presents a multimodal approach to helping new parents navigate parenting, while Chapter 21 helps parents reflect and reconnect with their experiences when they were younger to effect change in the present. Finally, Chapter 22 helps families and couples practice communication skills.

New to this edition, Section VI, "Multiple Session Groups," offers interventions spanning the course of a group. Many of the interventions can also be used individually. Chapter 23 highlights multiple activities for a group for adolescents focusing on relationships, while Chapter 24 provides interventions for groups including/for transgender and gender expansive youth. Chapter 25 spotlights activities and handouts for young adult relationship groups, and Chapter 26 focuses on support groups for those with dementia and their caregivers. The last chapter in this section (Chapter 27) highlights interventions concentrating on grief and loss.

The last part of this book, Section VII, "Termination and Wrap-Up," helps group therapists and members to say goodbye to the group, and to each other. Chapter 28 highlights considerations and interventions for the termination stage of any group, while the final chapter, Chapter 29, provides activities for closure.

Each chapter follows the same format: type of contribution (activity, homework, and/or handout); materials needed for implementation; objective or purpose of the intervention; detailed and easy-to-use instructions for use; suggestions for follow-up; contraindications to using the intervention; resources for the group therapist; and references. Many of the chapters also include bibliotherapy sources for the client, and a brief clinical vignette.

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*SECTION I*  
*GETTING STARTED*



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## A Reflecting Team Format for Learning Basic Counseling Skills

Carlos M. Del Rio

***Type of Contribution:*** Activity and handout

***Materials Needed:*** Basic Skills Practice Inventory (Handout 1.1), pens or pencils

### ***Objectives***

The objectives of this activity and handout include the application of a reflecting team format for the acquisition of basic counseling skills. This intervention is applicable for counseling students regardless of their academic concentration in counseling, whether it is clinical mental health, school counseling, addictions, rehabilitation, or couples and family counseling. Engaging in a reflecting team format is also presumed to help students practice group dynamics and group leadership styles.

### ***Rationale for Use***

Counseling students enrolled in current American higher education programs, including sanctioned Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP), are required to meet a level of competency regarding the acquisition and demonstration of basic counseling skills for the practice of counseling (CACREP, 2016; Losey, & Norman, 2016). Educators use diverse pedagogies to teach these basic counseling skills to students. Common among these skills are: attending behaviors, encouraging, paraphrasing, reflections of feelings and reflections of content, open questions, and even silence. These skills arguably emerged from a Rogerian emphasis on listening as an essential aspect of empathy (Hawley, 2006). Learning basic counseling skills takes time and practice. Students usually learn from textbooks and discussions about basic listening skills, and then put these skills into practice under the direct supervision of their faculty educators, and often their peers.

Acquiring formative knowledge through classroom work is easier compared to acquiring skills through practice, observation and feedback, and more practice. Being observed is difficult for students who are learning how to listen attentively to their peers. It is likewise difficult to integrate feedback during skills acquisition courses. To facilitate this transformative process, using a reflecting team format seems promising because the team remains intentionally focused on the strengths that are exhibited early on in the skills practice portion of counseling education.

Thus, integrating reflecting feedback that is positive and process-focused increases students' self-efficacy, and also stimulates a self-monitoring awareness. These are also effects from exposing students to here-and-now group dynamics that a reflecting team format offers.

Reflecting teams are typically used to help stuck systems. This is the primary application of the circular interaction between therapists and clients that Tom Andersen developed in the 1980s (Andersen, 1987; Pare, 1999). Reflecting teams are interventions in systemic therapies, and these teams have also been used in the training of professionals within the mental health paradigm, particularly those who desire to work with couples and families (Chang, 2010). A reflecting team consists of a group of people who observe, document, and reflect on the interaction of others the team observes. During reflection, team members share their impressions of what occurred, and ask questions about what occurred and what it may mean (Cox, Banez, Hawley, & Mostade, 2003). This expands upon the meaning of the observed interactions. The implication is that hearing the positive emphasis of the team's feedback has the power to enhance the awareness and confidence of those hearing the feedback. The power of the reflecting team, both as a therapeutic intervention and as a pedagogic initiative, rests in the tentative, yet, curious questions the team members raise about what they observe. These reflections and questions tend to elucidate new meanings for those who hear them (Cox, 1996). Using a reflecting team format is useful to help counseling students to grow in self-awareness about their professional competence, and to grow in confidence while practicing these basic counseling skills.

A reflecting team format also provides counseling students with an opportunity to engage in a positive conversation, where multiple perceptions of reality yield different perspectives through which they engage in counseling skills development. Similarly, the exposure to here-and-now dynamics in a group format enables reflecting team participants to experience group dynamics (Cox et al., 2003). The facilitator models for students how to interact with others, offer feedback, seek balance in communication, and draw others to participate. Students in reflecting teams also learn group leadership skills by direct observation and by direct experience. For example, students learn (over sessions) to harmonize communication, challenge one another to participate, and even volunteer to keep time for role play sessions (at 10 minutes each, for instance). They pay attention to facial expressions, body language, voice tone, and other attending behaviors to increase their ability to help others by truly listening to them, thus setting a tone for others in a group to follow.

## ***Instructions***

### *Preparation*

This activity and handout is appropriate for master's-level students learning counseling skills to be able to engage in individual, couple, family, or group therapy practice. Prior to engaging in a reflecting group practice session, an educator will need to spend several class sessions discussing and defining the concepts and practical importance of basic counseling skills. Skills to be taught include attending behaviors (i.e., eye contact, bodily posture, gestures, and vocal expressions and tonalities), encouraging others, paraphrasing content, reflection of feelings and content, using open-ended questions, and effective use of silence. This can also include watching skills practice videos or demonstrating to students what basic counseling skills look like.

These steps are necessary as students need to see and to hear what “attending” and “listening” look/sound like so they can practice according to what is most natural to them.

One session ahead of the reflecting team practice session, the educator will spend time introducing what a reflecting team is and explain how it will be used to learn basic skills. The educator will explain that the reflecting team will observe (whether in the same room or in a separate room through a one-way-view mirror) the counselor and client dyad practicing basic counseling skills. After the practice ends (about 10–15 minutes), the team, which will consist entirely of students not in the role of the “counselor” or “client,” will join the dyad in the same room and begin reflecting about what they observed. The team will sit in a circle and the skills dyad will sit outside the circle listening to what the team has to contribute. The educator will also need to review technology and privacy requisites to record and to review practice sessions as needed.

### *Defining Roles and Setting Up Practice Sessions*

During practice sessions, students engage in conversations to practice basic listening skills in dyads: one counselor and one client. The counselor role requires a student to demonstrate basic counseling skills (attending behaviors, paraphrasing, encouraging, questioning, summarizing, reflecting on feelings, and reflecting on content, etc.), while developing their disposition to care for others by showing a genuine interest in clients.

The client role requires students to select a topic that is real in their lives but also safe enough to discuss in class. Each client will experience what it is like to be listened to and later provide feedback to their counselor about this experience. It is expected that both counselors and clients will experience a level of awkwardness about these exercises, but they must intentionally engage in practicing the skills they are learning to improve their listening and helping competence.

A reflecting team format includes all other students in the same counseling course. This inclusion into the reflecting process provides all students with a level of comfort and collegiality focused on supporting each other’s performance during their role play sessions. To do this, educators discuss guidelines for reflection to include: focusing on strengths and assets, keeping reflections specific and economical, and showing genuine curiosity about possible meanings of observations. Students are rotated to be part of the practice dyad or part of the reflecting team as the course progresses. Usually students will decide who plays what role and there is no need to assign students to a rigid practice schedule. Stating how many minimal times they are expected to demonstrate counseling skills is often all that is needed.

Facilitating the reflecting team format, however, does require an educator with competence in group dynamics to monitor not only student interactions, but also to monitor the content of their communications. For example, if either a counselor or client (or both) feel like they are fake-performing, perhaps they need to switch roles, select other topics for discussion, or discuss further with their educator what is impeding this exercise. Or, if students display a topic or a behavior that may require therapeutic assistance, their educator must make this observation and advise students to seek professional help. Also, to ensure the reflecting team is effective, it is important that all students pay attention to here-and-now dynamics of practice sessions and team members. Taking notes on what skills are displayed, or what phrases may be meaningful for reflection is also a recommended technique. Team members will use the Basic Skills