



Tip Sheet #1 **Engaging Clients in Virtual Groups**

Use the Pre-Group Screening/Individual Session

Alliance Building/Goal Setting

- Build working alliance (similar to in-person; task, goal, & bond focus)
 - Goals: Collaborative agreement on goals in treatment plan
 - Give examples of specific tasks for the client to do in each group that are specific to their goals and their life or important relationships
 - Emotional bond: Build emotional connection with the leader via telehealth means

Norm Setting

- Encourage members to think about whether something would be okay to do in an in-person group (work to change their expectations about clothing, location, use of other technology during session, etc.)

Technical Considerations

- Confirm appropriate headphone use/sound quality
- Confirm/educate on appropriate location
- Address need for confidentiality/privacy concerns

In-Group Techniques

Use the Environment

- Take advantage of seeing the client in their environment
 - Consider an early session activity that builds connection. Ask client to “Gather three things: 1. something that represents your self-care, 2. something that represents someone who is important in your life, and 3. something that brings you joy. These could be photographs on your phone, tangible items you can share on your video, or a description of something if it's an intangible object that best represents the topic.”
 - Ask a client a question about something you see in their background
 - Build connections between clients by noting any commonalities in their environment

Use Technology to Enhance Connections

- Consider using a shared GoogleDoc, Whiteboard, etc. for collaborative brainstorming or sharing
 - Can be used for group rules/guidelines, individual and group goals (shared creation helps with accountability; posting goals publicly means they can follow-up with each other)
- Use a poll for quick universality building at the start of session
 - “What are some of your fears in coming to group today?” “What are you hoping you might get out of group therapy?”
 - Anonymous answers allow for more honesty; Showing the poll results helps members feel less alone/unique in fears or hopes
- Create a Google Form and have members anonymously write three hopes for group therapy and three fears (often done at the end of a first session)
 - Next session, distribute the shared hopes/fears to members in a chat box. Have members take turns sharing them verbally and talk about them *as if they were the hopes/fears they had written*.
- Share handouts from your screen or send them to clients right before the group



- Send new material right before the group to remind them what group they are in/what the focus will be
- Have clients send you pictures of their homework before group so you can share them on your screen
- Use breakout rooms to pair members to interview each other (and report back 3 specific things they heard from their partner to the large group)
- Have young adult groups use technology in ways that fit for them (e.g., sharing a meme at the start of session the represents how they are feeling; play 30 seconds of a song that represents how they feel right now)

Enhance Member & Leader Presence/Connections

- Increased use of therapist self-disclosure
 - “When you said that, I felt...”
- Encourage members to use each other’s names
- Make talking directly to each other the norm (i.e., you do not want to be the “center hub” that all conversation has to pass through)
- Use bridging comments to connect members to each other
- Model moving closer to the screen when you want to really connect/emphasize something
- Encourage imagination
 - “If you were in a room together right now, who would you want to be sitting next to and why?”
- Assign a task of having each member share one thing they appreciated about another member from the group (i.e., they need to pay attention the whole time, as every person needs to be given one appreciation at the end of the group)
- Ask members to share via a metaphor as an ice breaker at the start of group (e.g., What color are you feeling like right now, and why?)
- Consider using a structure where the first half is an assigned topic (DBT topic for the day) and the second half is a different topic (elicit from the group ideas for the group topic, for example, resentment or grief – empowers them to identify what is important for them)
- If members are engaging in a lot of social chit chat (might signal yearning for casual connections like they used to get in the waiting room), consider setting part of the time aside for this in the middle of group or open up your virtual waiting room sooner (if members can interact freely there)
- Consider using contingency management to reward good behavior

Technical Considerations

- Set the norm for:
 - All microphones to be unmuted the whole group
 - Video to be on the whole group
 - Have explicit discussion why this is necessary and builds connection
- Consider using one or two monitors, as using a tablet/iPad can be especially challenging for groups and sharing documents.

Other Recommendations

- Considering giving yourself more time to prepare for group

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