Common Questions and Myths about Group Therapy and Workshops

“I do not feel comfortable talking in a group or sharing my problems with people I do not know.”
Everyone experiences some discomfort starting in a group and in fact, some groups or workshops are aimed at this concern (e.g. Fear-Less workshop). Over time people find that the longer they commit to the group experience, the more comfortable and easy it becomes to share. Members report looking forward to attending group each week given the connections they create with each other. This can become a sense of pride and confidence as you create or build upon the skill of expressing yourself. Being able to have the ability to express yourself in any setting, when you choose to, can also feel empowering and liberating.

“How will talking in this group be different than me just talking to my friends?”
Research shows that group therapy has been found to be an effective form of treatment and is as equivalent and sometimes more effective than individual therapy for certain concerns. Group therapy helps people talk about things in a more genuine way which helps them address the heart of their struggles and find improvements in their symptoms or concerns. In each group there are trained counselors in attendance who will help deepen the discussions and aid you in creating a more meaningful and healing experience. Also, all members commit to upholding confidentiality which can increase feelings of safety.

“My problems are not as bad as others or are worse than others – so I won’t fit in or benefit.”
Elie Wiesel, a concentration camp survivor, stated “We all lose when we compare suffering.” Group may provide a place for you to experience compassion for yourself and others, without having to decide who went through the worst experience. Relief can come when we recognize that we are not alone in our concerns. Group can provide you the opportunity to connect with others and learn how to give and receive support.

“The group will be comprised of over 20 other group members.”
The optimal group size is between 6-12 members depending on the focus of the group. Most of the therapy groups or groups with a focus on discussion (e.g. Understanding Self and Others, Making Peace with Food) include between 6-9 members and 1-2 group facilitators. Groups with a focus on skill building (e.g. Taming the Anxious Mind) may include up to 11 members and 1-2 group facilitators. Group members are asked to commit to attend for the entire semester so the group attendance is consistent. Workshops are primarily educational and focus on skill building. Attendance for workshops vary each week though may include a range of 1-6 students. In a workshop you are welcome to attend and primarily listen. Other students also benefit from asking questions and working with the workshop facilitator to identify ways to alter the material to fit their life and experiences.

“In group I am expected to disclose my deepest secrets.”
You will be encouraged to share at a level that feels comfortable to you. It is common to feel uncomfortable at times when sharing, though most find their level of safety and willingness to talk increases as the group progresses. You may be invited by the group leader or other members to discuss your reactions or personal concerns, but you will never be forced to do or share something you do not want to. While many group members have reported feeling relief or an increased sense of understanding and acceptance after their disclosures, it is accomplished within their personal time frame.
“The group will look like the ‘Alcoholics Anonymous’ groups I have seen on TV”
Students report that groups and workshops look very different when compared to how they are portrayed on TV. The group and workshop facilitators strive to be dynamic, creative and respectful and do not require students to have a diagnosis or label to participate, or feel pressured to disclose any personal information. The CWC encourages students to view themselves as unique, multifaceted individuals, and are thus not asked to define or view themselves in any particular way.

“Will this be another place for me to be judged, just like high school?”
Unlike outside group settings, members in a therapy group are here to grow and improve. People who have found any previous social group or organization to be painful or harmful in the past may find this is their opportunity to heal from these experiences. Many have used the group as a way to create more positive experiences and have benefited from the opportunity to feel valued, accepted and validated. Group members frequently report an increased sense of understanding and acceptance, and find that other group members can often relate to them about concerns they felt were uniquely their own.

“Hearing other member’s problems will make me feel or get worse.”
For many people, this is a fear that prevents them from having more intimate relationships with others. Group members report gaining satisfaction, meaning and a sense of connection by hearing other’s struggles and successes. Group can help you learn to sit with others who are suffering, as well as increasing tolerance of your own suffering, in a way that is compassionate and helpful. This is a learned skill which takes practice but ultimately makes intimacy more possible in our lives. Hearing other’s experience can also be uplifting, provide hope and inspiration, and provide relief as you recognize that you are not alone.

“If I am in group, I will not get enough attention or may not get my needs met.”
Group members are often surprised by the material they can cover in group or how their needs are frequently met even when others are speaking. Being open to recognizing how your own experiences may be related or how you can connect with another member can also help you to learn from others and to facilitate personal growth. If you find that that feeling like you are not getting your needs met is a pattern for you, experiment with ways you can get your needs met in group. This may include asking the group for what you want or sharing your concerns regarding this topic aloud.

“What if another member of the group is my friend or classmate?”
You are not asked to be in a group with someone that you already know or are not comfortable with. Please inform the group if you know someone else in the group. The facilitators can help you explore the extent of the relationship and make adjustments as needed. We will work with you to find the best fit and solution for your level of safety and comfort.

“If I decide I do not like the group, can I just stop coming?”
We ask that you commit to attending at least six sessions to give the group experience chance and time to work for you. If you recognize that things are not working in the way that you want, please verbalize it to the group and the facilitator(s). We encourage discussion about the group process, namely things that are or are not working. Having these discussions can often be a turning point in the group where you can more effective work to improve your experience. If you continue to find your needs are not being met, we can work with you to explore other options.