

The Effectiveness of Men's Group Psychotherapy

One of the challenges of counseling men is counseling men is the notion that seeking therapeutic help is a sign of weakness. Many men feel ashamed, embarrassed, or awkward about asking for help and may avoid personal counseling for this reason. "Men's groups" are often an excellent, if not the ideal, alternative. For many men they provide the "corrective emotional experience" they are longing for in a setting which is often more comfortable and more effective than individual treatment.

Men's group psychotherapy is effective for many reasons. The group format promotes cooperation and community thereby **countering isolation**, a common complaint among men seeking counseling. In a society which stresses individual achievement and competition at the expense of connection and intimacy, it is not surprising that many men feel lonely. The cultural myth that financial success and materialism are the road to fulfillment exacerbates this problem and leaves many men feeling confused, inadequate, and alienated. **Men's therapy groups provide a safe and nurturing setting to share and normalize these feelings.**

Many men entering groups often complain about having lost the capacity for "joy or pleasure" in their lives or of only being able to feel "the intense feelings" that arise from dangerous or addictive behaviors. Men's therapy groups **counter this emotional cut-off** by providing a safe, caring community of men where sharing feelings is encouraged and validated. As members learn to recognize and honor their feelings they often experience a decrease in anxiety, an increase in self esteem, and an improved sense of self.

Male group psychotherapy also provides an **ideal setting for dealing with gender issues.** Men's groups are often the only place where men feel comfortable exploring and challenging their values about gender without fear of judgment. The impact of the traditional masculine roles of provider, protector, and performer on group member's lives can be evaluated and questioned and contrasted with the traditional feminine roles of nurturer and caretaker. **Open and honest dialogue about sexual roles, and the merits and burdens of each, often helps members to define where they are, and choose where they want to be, in relation to their partner. Although rarely discussed, the statistics regarding risk factors for men: SUICIDE**

(a. A husband whose wife dies is about 10 times more likely to commit suicide than a wife whose husband dies; b. Unemployed men commit suicide at twice the rate of employed men, in women there is no distinction related to employment status; c. 20 years ago young men committed suicide at twice the rate of young women, now it's four times the rate of young women;) **WORK RELATED INJURIES** (94% of occupational deaths occur to men), **ALCOHOLISM** (men are 7 times more likely than women to be arrested for drunk driving; 3 times more likely to be hospitalized for alcoholism), etc. **are alarmingly high. Men's silence about these issues has resulted in the widely held belief that for the most part women are the ones oppressed and victimized and men are the oppressors in our society.** This belief is compounded by the fact that most men are reluctant to view themselves as oppressed. The reality is that both sexes are oppressed in our culture, but in different ways. **Men's groups provide an ideal forum for educating men about these issues and the cultural assumptions which perpetuate them.**

Men's groups can also provide a level of safety/ comfort in dealing with relationship issues by avoiding the gender polarization that can sometimes occur in mixed groups. Topics which frequently come up in all male groups, but are often avoided in mixed groups, include resentments around men feeling valued more for what they provide than who they are, or feeling women's emotional needs are given more attention in our culture than their own. Many times receiving feedback from another man can have a greater impact than feedback a man receives from their spouse, encouraging greater "emotional intelligence" in the relationship with their partner. **Groups can provide supportive settings to share and validate such feelings and to discuss coping skills and anger management techniques that are helpful in dealing with them.**

Men's psychotherapy groups are an excellent option for men seeking emotional support. **Men's groups counter isolation and emotional cut-off by encouraging, validating, and normalizing the sharing of feelings.** They provide a safe and nurturing setting for dealing with gender and relationship issues and are an ideal forum for educating men about the cultural assumptions which often perpetuate their suffering.

Commonly Asked Questions About Men's Group Psychotherapy

1. How does a professionally led group work? Groups can range from as few as 3 men to as many as 8 who are likely to be helped by the group experience and who are likely to be compatible with other men in the group and able to

contribute and learn from one-another. In meetings, men are encouraged to talk with each other in a spontaneous and honest fashion. The professionally trained therapist provides group structure, productive examination of issues affecting the men and group as a whole, as well as leadership and facilitation of the discussion and process.

2. How is group therapy different from self-help groups? Group therapy focuses on interpersonal relationships and helps men learn ways to improve their relationships with themselves, significant others, and others in their lives whether work or family. A professionally trained therapist, acts as a facilitator/guide, coach, model, catalyst for change, and disseminator of information. Group psychotherapy for men provides a support network for specific problems or challenges unique to men. A men's psychotherapy group is different from a self-help group in that it not only helps men cope with their problems, but also provides a catalyst for change and growth in the context of supportive male relationships. Self-help groups usually focus on one particular shared symptom (for example, addiction to alcohol) or situation and are usually not led by trained therapists.

3. Why is group therapy useful? When a man is thinking about joining a group, it's normal to have questions or concerns. What am I going to get out of this? Will there be enough time to deal with my own problems in a group setting? What if I don't like the people in my group? Besides being cost effective, joining a group is useful because it provides opportunities to learn with and from other men, to understand one's own patterns of thoughts and behavior as well as those of other men, and to experience and process how men react/respond to one another. We live and interact with people every day and often there are things we experience or grapple with that can be beneficial to share with others. In group therapy, men learn that perhaps they're not as different as they think they are, or that you're not alone. Each man meets and interacts with other men, and the whole group learns by working on common problems.

4. Does that mean that I have to talk a lot in the group? The more you involve yourself in the group, the more you'll get out of it. Involvement however does not equal time spent in verbal communication. It is perfectly fine to silently consider your own thoughts and feelings in the group setting. Contributing your own thoughts and feelings as you are willing and able to, certainly serves to enrich the experience of others who might benefit from your input. Bottom line though: The amount of time that one spends talking does not equate with benefit gained from the group

experience.

5. What kinds of men should participate in group therapy? Group therapy can benefit many different men, from those having difficulties in their interpersonal/family relationship-issues to those dealing with specific problems such as a serious medical illness, loss, addictive disorders or behavioral problems.

6. Will there be men with similar problems in my group? The professional therapist's role and responsibility is to evaluate each member's problems prior to forming the group. Usually there is a mix of members who can learn from each other. While some members will have similar circumstances, it's not necessary for all members in the group to be dealing with exactly the same concern. Each participant develops their own therapeutic contract' or focus for their treatment that represents the goals they've established to work on in the group. Group members support each individual man's effort in accomplishing the goals they've established.

7. What if I'm uncomfortable discussing my problems in front of others? It's not unusual to feel uneasy or embarrassed when first joining a men's group, but soon most men develop feelings of interest and trust in each other's lives and in sharing their own. Most men find that group therapy provides a great deal of relief because it allows them a chance to talk with other men experiencing similar problems -- in a private and confidential setting.

8. What focus or direction do these groups take? The operative model in our Men's Groups addresses the need for men to effectively 1) identify 2) express and 3) integrate emotion with intellect. This synergistic feeling/thinking approach allows men to develop a powerful tool for self-support/development and the support of others. Healing the split between emotional and intellectual realities is a major focus of men's work. Men often find it difficult to express their emotions and usually prefer the stance of intellectualization. Many of us have been taught since childhood to present a strong external, seemingly independent facade. Admitting weakness or dependency is a traditional male taboo that has exacted a huge toll, resulting in a diminished sense of wholeness and self-acceptance. Men's Group encourages mutual support, cooperation, identification and encouragement by striving to counter the traditional alienation of men from other men and to encourage relationships between men.

9. What kind of commitment do I need to make?

In order to establish a cohesive and stable group of men who come to trust one-another and are committed to each other's growth and therapeutic goals, a minimum of 3 months (12 weeks) of group therapy is required to participate.

10. What does the Men's Group cost? The cost varies depending on the individual man's gross family income and is paid on a monthly basis. The following fee scale for groups is used as a guideline for discussion with the therapist when establishing an appropriate fee. Lutheran Counseling Network seeks to establish fees in a manner, a.) that makes services available for persons at various levels of income and life circumstance, b.) that encourages in each man a degree of commitment/priority needed to make changes in their lives, and c.) that reflects the value of the services being received. Fees are negotiated individually between each man and the therapist at the time of the initial individual interview which also is designed to establish whether group treatment is appropriate for any particular individual.

Men's Group Fee Schedule*

Gross Family Income By Year	Gross Family Income By Month	Gross Family Income By Week	Suggested Group Fee By Month*
75,000	6250	1442	290
65,000	5417	1250	269
55,000	4583	1058	251
45,000	3750	865	239
35,000	2917	673	209
25,000	2083	481	176
15,000	1250	288	113
12,000	1000	231	95

*Final determination established per discussion between therapist and each prospective men's group member.

11. When & where do the Men's Groups meet?

Weekly groups for men are available on Mondays from 7-9 pm in Issaquah (745 Front Street S.)

12. How do I find out more information to determine if I wish to, or someone I wish to refer should, participate? Call the Men's Group therapist, Paul A. Anderson, MC at **425/455-2960, x2**

About Men's Group Therapist:

Paul A. Anderson, M.C., LMFT, LMHC



Paul received his master's degree from Seattle University in 1980 and began his clinical practice with LCN in 1981. He is a Clinical Member of the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (AAMFT), a Certified Clinical Mental Health Counselor (CCMHC) and a National Certified Counselor (NCC) through the National Board of

Certified Counselors. In addition to experience as a practicing therapist he's also been a County Designated Mental Health Professional, a behavioral health managed care company case manager, and the Manager of Virginia Mason's Section of Psychiatry and Managed Mental Health & Chemical Dependency Program.

Paul's areas of interest are working with families, couples, individuals, and groups dealing with issues of personal & career transitions, grief and loss; parenting issues; intimate relationships, faith/belief, adjusting to chronic health conditions; and a particular interest in working with issues common to men. He is also available to teach classes and retreats dealing with these topics.

He has office hours on the Eastside in Issaquah, Sammamish, and Bellevue and can be reached at **425/455-2960, x2.**

When To Consider Counseling

The American Association of Marriage and Family Therapy (AAMFT) has suggested the following as potential signals of emotional distress which may benefit from professional therapy or counseling:

- A death in the family.
- Chronic marital conflict or marital dissatisfaction.
- Constant parent-child conflict.
- Divorce or separation.
- Sexual problems or concerns.
- Teenagers experimenting with alcohol, drugs or sex.
- Adults abusing drugs (including prescriptions) or alcohol.
- Chronic feelings of loneliness, sadness, or depression.
- Unexplained fatigue or pain.
- Unexplained physical injuries to spouse or children.
- Repeated financial difficulties.
- Drastic weight fluctuations and/or irregular eating patterns.
- Inability to set or attain goals.
- Repeated employment difficulties such as frequent job changes or difficulties with co-workers.

Every beginning is a merging of holding on and letting go ...

GROUPS FOR MEN

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