Group Therapy Participation Agreement-Interpersonal Process Groups

Group therapy is often the treatment of choice for people who experience troubled relationships, loneliness, depression, anxiety, grief/loss, and low self-esteem. People who participate in group therapy have the opportunity to benefit from sharing personal experiences, giving and receiving supportive and constructive feedback, and experimenting with new interpersonal behaviors. In order for group to work, a safe environment must be created, and expectations for members and co-leaders must be understood by all. To ensure a safe environment for personal growth it is recommended that all participants agree to the following guidelines.

I. Confidentiality
Sharing in group can be anxiety-provoking; therefore we ask that you keep all information discussed in this group confidential. This request means that you may not discuss the identity or identifying information, or share the reactions of any member of this group with anyone outside of the group. You may talk about your own personal reactions, and are even encouraged to do so outside of group, but not about others’ identifying information or reactions. If you are engaged in mental health services with a provider in the community for mental health concerns, we will require a release of information so that we may coordinate your care (e.g., discuss appropriateness of group as a treatment option, update provider about your progress, concerns about your safety, and termination of services). It is your responsibility to inform the group leader of any change in your treatment, (e.g. taking medication, stopping individual therapy, or changing individual therapists). Exceptions to confidentiality with regard to your therapist(s) still hold: imminent danger to self and/or others, child/elder abuse, subpoenaed records, and threat to national security. State law requires that all C&CS providers at UHS, as employees of the University, report the total number of students seen who report that they have been sexually assaulted. Only aggregate numbers are reported. Identifying information is not.

II. Attendance
Group members are expected to make a commitment to attend group for the entire semester. Members are also expected to arrive for the group on time every week. Group will always start on time. If you are running late or have an emergency/illness that prohibits you from coming to group, we ask that you call one or send a secure message to one of the leaders. If you know ahead of time that you will miss a later group session, we ask that you share the date of your absence with the group beforehand. Group will also always end on time, no matter what is being discussed. Weekly attendance will allow everyone to continue the discussion that may feel unfinished at the end of a session. Everyone’s weekly attendance promotes feelings of safety and trust.

Members often feel anxious about participating in groups, and seeing the results can take time. Although the expectation is to attend all group meetings throughout the semester, there are situations that cause members to discontinue group participation. In the event you decide not to continue and have explored your concerns with the leaders and other members, we ask that you come back to the group to say goodbye. Though perhaps hard to imagine, members come to care about one another and will feel unresolved if you leave without explanation.

III. Relationships with Other Members
Group is an opportunity to have therapeutic relationships in which you learn more about yourself and the ways in which you relate to others. Group is not a place to make social friends. We say this because, if you use group in the latter way, you may not experience the intended benefits. You may have strong
feelings toward some members of the group, as you do with people in your life. However, group should remain a safe environment where you can explore those feelings and the way you act on them. *If you do have contact with someone outside of group (e.g., see someone on campus), we ask that you share that contact with the rest of the group at the next meeting.*

**IV. Active Participation**
Members are not required to talk in group; however, we know that the more you invest in the group, the more you will benefit. We will encourage you to talk honestly about your feelings as opposed to sharing details of stories or giving advice. We will ask you to do this because not everyone can relate to a life experience, but everyone can understand feelings (e.g., fear, happiness, anger). We realize that asking you to focus on your feelings can be difficult or frustrating at times. However, part of the challenge and benefit of group is to learn new ways of making deeper connections with others. The only time that we will ask you to speak, is when a new member is added to the group and introductions and goals for group are shared.

**V. Completing Surveys for Group**
Members are requested to complete the survey before the first and the last groups of the semester. It is important that you arrive **10 minutes early** to complete the survey before these groupsto allow the group leader(s) to review the survey before the group begins. If you are unable to complete the survey before the group, please forego the survey and ensure you arrive early in the future when the survey will be administered. The purpose of the survey is to assist the group leader(s) in assessing your progress toward your goals in treatment.

**VI. Safety**
If you experience risk of harm to self or others at any time during your group participation, it is your responsibility to (1) share it with group and get support; (2) contact your individual counselor; (3) use access consultation; (4) call the after-hour crisis line at 608-265-5600, option 9; or (5) go to the nearest emergency room or call 911. Members will benefit most when all the members commit to participate in open and honest disclosure/feedback, which may include sharing with others when concerns about safety exist. If risk of harm to self or others is identified at any time during your group participation, a safety plan will be created.

**VI. Recording**
As part of your participation in group therapy, all sessions will be recorded for training purposes. The recordings of our sessions will be kept confidential in the same way that our conversations are held in confidence. No person outside of UHS will have access to the recordings. The recordings will be reviewed by the group leader(s) and/or by the group supervisor to insure that you are receiving the best possible services. All recordings will be deleted upon conclusion of supervision. The group may also have a “process observer” who has specific responsibilities with regard to the group, such as taking notes for continuity between sessions, but will not actively participate in the group. The process observer is a C&CS provider. If you have any questions now or in the future about this policy on recording, please contact your group leaders or the Group Therapy Coordinator, at (608) 265-5600, option 2.

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Signature  Date

__________________________  ________________________
Printed Name  Student ID

__________________________  ________________________
Parent/Guardian Signature (for minor clients)  Date

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Signature of Leader  Date

__________________________  ________________________
Signature of Leader  Date

University Health Services, 333 East Campus Mall, Madison, WI 53715
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