**Group Counseling For Addiction**

**What is group counseling?**

Group counseling for addiction can be a very effective treatment option. It's a place where people can get support from other group members who are dealing with similar issues. The group is facilitated by a mental health/addiction professional who has experience working with people suffering from addiction and other mental health issues.

Group counseling is usually kept fairly small, between 3 and 10 people. If there are more than ten people, it can be difficult for everyone to get a chance to speak and get the attention that they need. Group therapy for addiction can be anywhere from once per week for 1 hour to 5 times per week for 6 hours.

**Different Types of Group Counseling**

There are different types of group counseling that can be very helpful for people struggling with addiction. Some groups focus on being a place where people struggling with addiction can get support, whereas other groups focus on education about addiction and developing coping skills. There are also groups that utilize cognitive behavioral therapy, which focuses on changing a person's thoughts and patterns that often lead them to make unhealthy choices. Ideally, group therapy for addiction should be a combination of all of these aspects.

The support aspect of group therapy is beneficial. Receiving support from other people suffering from addiction can be a very positive experience. Many people dealing with addiction don't feel connected to their friends or family, or they feel like they aren't worth anyone's time. Being accepted by a group of people who truly understand their problems can be very healing.

**Group Counseling Options**

**Inpatient setting**

When a person enters an inpatient treatment facility for addiction, a significant part of that experience will include group counseling. Most inpatient facilities have a lot of group therapy sessions, combined with some family sessions and individual sessions with a mental health professional. Many facilities have people attend groups multiple times throughout the day.

**Partial Hospitalization Program**

The partial hospitalization program (PHP) is generally a step down from an inpatient facility. However, some people go straight to the PHP if they don't feel that they need inpatient treatment or if their insurance won't approve inpatient. The treatment offered in a PHP is similar to treatment a patient would receive at an inpatient facility; patients who engage in the partial hospitalization program often attend treatment sessions along with the patients of an inpatient rehab.

Patients attend the PHP every day, usually for a few weeks or a couple of months, depending on their needs. The partial hospitalization programs offer a very high level of care while still allowing the patient to go home at night. A significant portion of a PHP will include group counseling.

**Intensive Outpatient**

Intensive outpatient (IOP) is a step down from partial hospitalization programs. Once a patient is discharged from an inpatient facility or a PHP, they will step down to intensive outpatient. IOP services consist primarily of group sessions, with limited individual sessions with a counselor and/or a psychiatrist. IOP is usually two or three times per week for two to four hours for each group session.

Many intensive outpatient treatment programs focus on education and learning how to change negative thoughts and behaviors. Intensive outpatient groups usually have fewer people than an inpatient setting, so the patient gets more individualized attention in an IOP setting.

**Why Group Counseling For Addiction?**

One of the significant benefits of group therapy is that it allows people suffering from addiction to meet and relate to other people who genuinely understand what they're going through. Part of treatment for addiction is simply learning how to engage in day-to-day tasks without using substances. Group counseling provides an opportunity for the group members to learn how to relate to people appropriately. If something inappropriate is said or done, there are multiple people, including the mental health professional in charge of the group, who can hold members accountable and help them learn how to behave appropriately.

Not only can a patient receive support in a group setting, but they can also provide support to other group members. Providing support for other people struggling with addiction can be a very positive experience. In the recovery world, people often say that the best way to stay clean and sober is to give back and be of service to other people.

Group therapy can also help patients learn how to relate to other people appropriately. People who have been using substances for a long time often lose the ability to interact with people in a healthy way. Being in a group setting essentially lets them role play and try out their social skills, which they can use in their everyday lives. Group counseling also helps patients learn how to ask for and receive help.

Additionally, group therapy gives patients the opportunity to recognize maladaptive behaviors and unhealthy coping mechanisms in other people in the group. Once they see the behavior in another person, a patient may realize that they engage in similar maladaptive behaviors and learn how to change them.

**Challenges of Group Counseling**

While group counseling for addiction has many benefits, it also has its challenges. Many people are uncomfortable sharing personal things in front of people they don't know very well.

Additionally, when sharing thoughts and experiences in a group setting, there won't be the same confidentiality that exists when speaking to a therapist or counselor one-on-one. People aren't supposed to share what others say during group sessions. Still, it's unrealistic to expect group members to maintain the same level of confidentiality as a therapist or counselor who is bound by the rules of their profession. Without this guaranteed level of confidentiality, it can be difficult for group members to open up and make the most of the group sessions.

Another challenge with a group setting is making sure that every person in the group is getting what they need out of the sessions. When someone sees a licensed mental health professional one-on-one, the professional can tailor the sessions to that specific individual. Some people need a lot of time to open up to their counselors, where other people walk in and just start sharing everything they are thinking. Group counseling for addiction can be challenging for the people who need to go at a slower pace and learn to trust the person running the group.

When a group of people gets together to discuss very personal thoughts and experiences, there will inevitably be some people who just don't like each other or don't get along very well with someone in the group. When this happens, it can be disruptive not only for the individuals involved in the conflict, but also for the group as a whole.

Lastly, group counseling can be problematic for people who suffer from an anxiety disorder. [Research has shown](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3775646/) that anxiety disorders and substance abuse disorders co-occur more often than would be expected by chance alone. For people who suffer from anxiety, especially social anxiety, speaking in group settings can be incredibly challenging. Speaking in group settings about personal experiences may feel almost impossible for some people who suffer from an anxiety disorder.

**Other Treatment In Conjunction With Group Counseling**

Group counseling for addiction isn't really meant to be a long-term experience. Once a person is finished with an inpatient facility and all of their outpatient services, group therapy ends. Ideally, the patient can take what they've learned in their group sessions and apply it in the real world.

While treatment in a group setting can be a beneficial tool for people suffering from addiction, there are many other things they can do to help them in their recovery. In addition to group counseling, it's important that patients engage in individual counseling. Ideally, the individual therapist has a lot of experience and knowledge about addiction and recovery. While it isn't a requirement for someone dealing with addiction to find a therapist who is also in recovery, it can be advantageous to find someone who truly understands the struggle.

In addition to individual therapy, 12 step meetings can be a very helpful tool. 12 step meetings are similar to group counseling; everyone shares their fears, successes, and failures, and members receive a lot of support from other group members. It can take time to find the right 12 step meeting. Attending multiple meetings is the best way for someone to figure out what meetings they feel most comfortable in and which meetings are the most helpful for them.

**Is Group Counseling Right For Everyone?**

Group therapy might not be a good fit for everyone, but it's worth trying. Before deciding if it is the right setting, it's essential to give it a chance. Most people will be able to get something beneficial out of group counseling for addiction.