

COGNITIVE BEHAVIORAL THERAPY GROUP FOR CORRECTIONAL POPULATION

MANUAL FOR A 10-SESSION GROUP

Introduction

The Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Group (CBT Group) is designed to help inmates utilize individual coping strengths and to aid in the development of new skills which may be used to achieve a more adaptive level of coping within a prison environment.

Ten separate coping techniques are reviewed over the course of ten group sessions, with each technique being presented independent of others so that an inmate may reasonably begin the group during any one of the ten Group sessions. This enables group enrollment at any time.

Although the group offers ten sessions, the techniques covered can be categorized into three areas of clinical focus, which include biological, cognitive, and behavioral segments.

Biological: Two group sessions that offer education on the autonomic nervous system and the biological impact of stress. The function of the sympathetic nervous system ("Flight or Fight" response) is a main focus, with instruction provided on specific techniques related to biological stress management in prison. The specific techniques include:

- The Four-Step Deep Breathing Method
- Progressive Muscle Relaxation Exercises

Cognitive: Six group sessions that offer education and instruction emphasizing the cognitive (thought) components of stress. Common precipitants to adjustment difficulties in prison are explored and several cognitive techniques are presented. These group sessions include:

- Identifying Personal Stresses
- Visualization Techniques
- Meditation
- Humor
- Cognitive Distortions
- Cognitive Restructuring

Behavioral: Two group sessions focus on common maladaptive behavior habits in prison and techniques for making changes in the areas of behavioral decision-making, interpersonal style, and impulse control. The specific techniques covered include:

- Assertiveness Training
- Anger Management

Group Rules

In addition to the specific session contents noted, there are three Group Rules that contribute to a more successful facilitation of the CBT Group.

These are reviewed at the beginning of each group session so that review of the three Group Rules becomes a "ritual" that signifies the beginning of the group's business for the day (allowing inmates to prepare for learning and for appropriate participation). Over time the veteran members usually begin to review the three Group Rules without prompting by the facilitator, providing the newer group members an illustration of the degree of investment that veteran group members have in the CBT Group.

This review also contributes to a greater sense of inmate ownership and responsibility for the group, helping both the veterans and the newer group members listen to session content with a more open and receptive mind-set. The three Group Rules are listed below with a brief description of rationale. Again, it is recommended that they be reviewed as a group "ritual" at the start of each individual group session.

Group Rule #1- Voluntary

The CBT group is best facilitated as a voluntary group. Inmates will be referred by staff or will have personally requested enrollment into the group, but they should not be required to enroll in the group. The voluntary nature of the CBT Group is intended to illustrate the power of choice to inmates, who will be encouraged to exercise this power throughout each component of the group (i.e., choosing appropriate versus inappropriate behavior, choosing to build a repertoire of adaptive coping skills versus choosing to blame "the system" and merely complain). It has been found that inmates become more easily invested in the CBT Group and participate more constructively under these conditions.

Once an inmate has decided to enroll in the CBT Group he/she is expected to attend with consistency and to participate in a constructive manner. If an inmate is unable to do so then a meeting with the inmate and the facilitator is in order. This meeting should confront the failure to meet expectations for constructive participation and encourage the inmate to make a choice between making behavioral changes in the group or being removed from the group. Once a new commitment to participate constructively in the group is given then the inmate should be allowed to continue in the group. Often the inmate's desire to be in the group takes over as an internal motivator for improved participation.

Group Rule #2 - Respectful of Others

Throughout the CBT Group inmates are required to interact with facilitators and other group members with respectfulness. Inmates use the term "respect" in a wide range of circumstances and with a wide range of meanings, so that it is recommended that a specific definition be given to avoid miscommunication. Specifically, inmates in the CBT Group are advised that they are expected to listen attentively and to refrain from engaging in behaviors that would interfere with the learning of fellow group members. They are expected to tolerate differences of personal opinion, opposing value systems, confrontation, and questions asked during course of the group.

Often inmates begin a group session struggling with difficult emotions resulting from a recent or ongoing conflict with another inmate, staff, or even another group member. In all cases inmates are expected to make a decision about their motivation and ability to

participate constructively in the session before attending the session. They are expected to leave the conflict outside of the group, temporarily "letting go" of the conflict and difficult emotions and focusing on the individual session content. Group members are encouraged NOT to discuss recent or current problems in the group, but instead to use the group as a "Time Out" away from the daily stresses, during which they may learn new skills and begin to develop a plan for more adaptive coping with those stresses. Group members are advised that this approach is not intended to display a lack of concern over their current individual problems, but actually to help them increase their personal abilities to manage their problems more adaptively. They are advised that techniques learned in the CBT Group will require them to temporarily "let go" of their immediate impulses and tolerate their discomfort while formulating more adaptive and beneficial responses.

Group Rule #3 - Confidentiality

It is expected that CBT Group members will not share information about each other outside of the group. This includes any personal information disclosed to the group, and it also includes discussion about any group member's individual participation. The maintenance of confidentiality encourages a sense of safety within the group that is essential to learning and effective participation. In referring to this rule, inmates commonly state that "What's said in here stays in here."

For the purposes of the CBT Group, group members are advised that the disclosure of personal information is rare given the structure of the group (i.e., an educational focus on techniques rather than on personal disclosure of individual problems). However, they are also advised that disclosure of personal information is a possibility and that violation of confidentiality will result in discontinuation from the group. Finally, it is recommended that group members not be discouraged from sharing the techniques learned in the group with others, even those who are outside the group. Very often inmates report that they discussed a particular technique with an inmate on their dorm, and in the process of this discussion became more invested in the technique, felt a greater sense of mastery, and/or learned more from the inmate on the dorm than they learned from the group facilitator. Therefore, as long as individual group members are not discussed outside of the group then a discussion of techniques learned within the group is actively encouraged.

Structure of the CBT Group

Finally, it is recommended that the facilitators of CBT Group give strong consideration to the external structure of the group. Consistent attendance by the group facilitators, start times, end times, session length, and planned session content are all important considerations in making the group a successful experience. Toward this end, if at all possible the group should occur at the same time, on the same weekday(s), in the same group room/area, and be of the same duration with as much consistency as possible. It has been found that inmates listen more receptively, learn the coping techniques more effectively, and retain their motivation for learning in a group setting when a consistently applied group structure is put into effect.

Following this introduction is a description of the specific structure recommended for each of the ten individual CBT group sessions. These descriptions will provide an introduction to the group content; identification of lecture content to be covered for the topic area; recommended group activities; summary of group session; and copy of the Inmate Reading to be given to group members at the end of each group session.

Information to be Provided at Beginning of Each Group Session

Group formally begins when the facilitator indicates that it is time to begin the group, and then asks for a show of hands concerning who is new to the group. A useful ice-breaker is to ask group members to go around the circle and briefly introduce themselves, including their estimate of how many CBT groups they have so far attended and one thing they have learned in the group so far. This allows the newer group members to understand that each group member has a different level of experience and familiarity with the group, and also communicates the basic objective of the CBT Group (to learn more successful coping skills).

After brief introductions the facilitator next asks group members to review the three Group Rules for the benefit of the newer members (Voluntary, Respectfulness, Confidentiality). Groups will vary to the extent that members verbalize, and the facilitator should take care to cover all of the rules if the group is a more nonverbal one. However, it is recommended that much effort be placed in encouraging group members to take an increasingly active role in discussing the three Group Rules. The more active and positive group members are during these discussions the more invested new members will become in the group and the content provided.

Group members can be encouraged to take increasingly active roles by the facilitator gradually shifting from informative statements about the three Group Rules to strategic questioning as group members build up time in the group and develop more familiarity with the three Group Rules (i.e., instead of making statements about confidentiality to the group, ask group members to comment about confidentiality specifically as it applies to the CBT Group). Generally, the more often newer group members observe other inmates to be genuinely engaged in the group the more receptive they will be to the lecture material and other group content.

It is important to avoid getting pulled into a debate with an inmate regarding the validity or usefulness of any technique covered in the CBT Group. One way to achieve this is by taking the strategy that it is not the facilitator's role to convince anyone that a technique is the one they should use, but rather the facilitator's role is to present the ideas and steps of the techniques so that each group member can choose for themselves if they feel it is going to be helpful for them and if they are going to use it. Whether or not a technique will be helpful to a group member is each group member's own responsibility. The facilitator's responsibility is to teach the technique in an informative way. If the group facilitator takes this type of approach then a lot of power struggles and useless debates will be avoided.