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# group techniques

FOURTH EDITION



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Patrick Callanan, J. Michael Russell**

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Dedicated to the people who have been members in our groups, especially those in our residential workshops, who gave us the opportunity to learn more.





## About the Authors



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Recent publications by Jerry Corey, all with Brooks/Cole, Cengage Learning, and most having been translated into various languages, include:

- *Issues in Ethics in the Helping Professions*, Ninth Edition (2015, with Marianne Schneider Corey, Cindy Corey, and Patrick Callanan)
- *I Never Knew I Had a Choice*, Tenth Edition (2014, with Marianne Schneider Corey)
- *Groups: Process and Practice*, Ninth Edition (2014, with Marianne Schneider Corey and Cindy Corey)

- *Theory and Practice of Counseling and Psychotherapy*, Ninth Edition (and *Student Manual*) (2013)
- *Case Approach to Counseling and Psychotherapy*, Eighth Edition (2013)
- *The Art of Integrative Counseling*, Third Edition (2013)
- *Theory and Practice of Group Counseling*, Eighth Edition (and *Student Manual*) (2012)
- *Becoming a Helper*, Sixth Edition (2011, with Marianne Schneider Corey)

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Jerry has made several educational DVD and video programs on various aspects of counseling practice: (1) *Groups in Action: Evolution and Challenges DVD and Workbook* (2014, with Marianne Schneider Corey and Robert Haynes); (2) *DVD for Theory and Practice of Counseling and Psychotherapy: The Case of Stan and Lecturettes* (2013); (3) *DVD for Integrative Counseling: The Case of Ruth and Lecturettes* (2013, with Robert Haynes); (4) *DVD for Theory and Practice of Group Counseling* (2012); and (5) *Ethics in Action: DVD and Workbook* (2015, with Marianne Schneider Corey and Robert Haynes). All of these programs are available through Brooks/Cole, Cengage Learning.



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- *Issues and Ethics in the Helping Professions*, Ninth Edition (2015, with Gerald Corey, Cindy Corey, and Patrick Callanan)
- *I Never Knew I Had a Choice*, Tenth Edition (2014, with Gerald Corey)
- *Groups: Process and Practice*, Ninth Edition (2014, with Gerald Corey and Cindy Corey)
- *Becoming a Helper*, Sixth Edition (2011, with Gerald Corey)

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Michael became a National Certified Counselor in 1984, a registered Research Psychoanalyst in 1985, and a Graduate Psychoanalyst in 1988. He is a member of several professional organizations, including the American Counseling Association, the Association for Specialists in Group Work, the American Philosophical Association, and the American Philosophical Practitioners Association. He is particularly interested in integrating traditional academic material with in-depth personal exploration in a group format, drawing together his interests in psychoanalysis and existentialist philosophy. Some biography, course materials, publications, and articles are available on his Web page: <http://jmichaelrussell.org>.



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## Preface

Since the four of us began working together in 1972, we have been involved in almost every aspect of group work as members, leaders, teachers, and workshop conductors. In the course of this long association, we have found ourselves continually faced with questions about techniques in groups—their place, their usefulness, their abuse. In many of our training workshops and group courses we have observed beginning leaders having difficulty using techniques appropriately and effectively. Students are interested in learning about techniques but often have some anxiety over their ability to know when and how to draw on techniques in various group situations.

Our primary assumption in this book is that techniques are never the main course in group work. This assumption has many implications. It puts the focus on the members and the leader and on the quality of the interactions between them. Techniques are means, not ends, and their primary aim is to increase knowledge and awareness on the part of the group members. Techniques are fundamentally at the service of the group members, not the group counselor.

To avoid having the techniques described in this book used as the primary focus of group work, we concentrate on showing group leaders how to develop and use techniques in their own evolving groups. You can best use this book by reading a chapter, and then asking yourself what relevance the techniques described have for you in your situation and how they might be applied. We hope you will not borrow our techniques verbatim and use them without consideration for the members of your groups and their unique relationships with you and with one another. We expect that this book will stimulate your interest in the broad field of working with people in groups and in thinking about the theoretical and ethical dimensions of what you do.

In addition to being direct responses to problems presented by participants in groups we have led, the techniques in this book bear the stamp of our own therapists, of leaders of groups and workshops in which we have been members, and of a great many writers with various theoretical orientations. These techniques did not arise in a vacuum, and the Suggested Readings at the end of the book are provided to further your thinking about how you might develop your therapeutic style as a group counselor.

This book is designed as a supplementary book for group courses or for advanced group counseling courses with an emphasis on techniques. Students in an introductory group counseling course will want to learn more about group process and theories of group counseling than this book provides. This book is for students and

practitioners in any human services field, from counseling psychology to social work, where the group is an accepted modality. Intended readers include psychiatric nurses, social workers, counselors, psychologists, ministers, marriage and family therapists, teachers, clinical mental health professionals, and paraprofessionals who lead groups.

Some group-leading experience or prior course work in group counseling is important for students to benefit from this book. *Group Techniques* can be a valuable auxiliary text in a practicum in group work. The techniques described are most appropriately used with counseling groups with an open-ended agenda. In practice the book can be used to stimulate thinking and creativity in one's approach to group work, and it can be used in conjunction with supervision. *Group Techniques* can be used in various cultures, as is demonstrated by the fact that it has been translated into Portuguese, Korean, Japanese, and Czech languages.

In this fourth edition, we have given more attention to explaining the therapeutic rationale for the various techniques we describe. At times we link particular techniques to one or another of the eleven theoretical approaches to group counseling described in detail in *Theory and Practice of Group Counseling* (Corey, 2012). Specific chapter references are included to point readers to these comprehensive discussions.

In this fourth edition of *Group Techniques* we have fine-tuned the various techniques and given further thought to how these techniques can be applied to therapeutic groups. Discussions of techniques reflect current practices in working with therapeutic groups, and the examples of various techniques represent contemporary group work practices. More attention has been given to incorporating the contextual variables, especially multicultural and social justice perspectives, in implementing techniques in a group. This book is based on our collective experience with groups, and citations continue to be at a minimum. The annotated Suggested Readings at the end of the book have been updated and provide a comprehensive overview of group work literature.

We take an integrative perspective and avoid a single theoretical bias, but we emphasize throughout that a sound theoretical rationale is an essential guide when using any technique. We hope that the tone and spirit of this book will encourage group leaders to develop their own therapeutic style. At the same time we recommend necessary cautions, both procedural and ethical, as group leaders design and implement various techniques.

## **Guide to Using *Groups in Action: Evolution and Challenges* DVD and Workbook**

*Groups in Action: Evolution and Challenges*, DVD and Workbook (Corey, Corey, & Haynes, 2014), is an ideal supplement to this book and is available at a reduced price when ordered as a bundle option with *Group Techniques*. At the end of Chapter 1 and

Chapters 4–7 we reference specific parts of the DVD and how its various programs fit with a given chapter. *Groups in Action* consists of three different interactive programs. The first program, *Evolution of a Group*, is a 2-hour educational video designed to bring to life the development of a group at a 3-day residential workshop cofacilitated by Marianne Schneider Corey and Gerald Corey. The group workshop included people who were group members willing to explore their own issues and concerns. They were neither actors following a script nor were they role-playing the topics. The second program, *Challenges Facing Group Leaders*, is a 90-minute educational video designed to address some of the most problematic situations group counselors often encounter. In this program the Coreys cofacilitated a group that was composed of members who role-played a variety of scenarios depicting critical issues in a group. The participants of the second program did not follow a script; rather, they improvised around themes that typically evolve in groups. Although participants were engaged in role playing, these sessions often reflected real personal involvement and genuine interaction in the group. In short, the participants demonstrate a blend of role playing and drawing on their experiences from the present and the past, both in their roles as group members and as leaders. The third program, *Lecturette on Theories and Techniques of Group Counseling*, consists of a 1-hour presentation by Jerry Corey in which he briefly describes four contemporary theoretical approaches to group work.

The first program, *Evolution of a Group*, illustrates significant group process and leadership techniques in a therapeutic group. You will see the development of the group process and how the coleaders facilitated that process as the group moved through the four stages: initial, transition, working, and ending. These stages correspond to Chapters 4 through 7 of *Group Techniques*.

In the initial stage, the focus is on building trust and emphasizing the here-and-now. The leaders set the stage by exploring ground rules for the group operation and assisting members in developing goals for this group. In the transition stage, identifying and challenging members' fears, hesitations, and resistance are the main topics. The level of trust deepens and members begin reluctantly to talk about personal material. The working stage is characterized by a high level of trust, clearer goals, and members exploring feelings, ideas, and beliefs. Group cohesiveness is high, and members interact with each other with less reliance on the leaders. In the ending stage, the group members review what they have learned, discuss how they will put this learning into action, and prepare for ending the group.

Throughout the *Evolution of a Group*, you see the Coreys coleading and facilitating the group process and using a variety of group techniques from various group treatment approaches. It is the combination of viewing both the implementation of group leadership techniques and the movement of the group through the four stages of group process that makes this a unique DVD training program. This multimedia integration is aimed at expanding the learning experience and skills for students of group counseling.

The second program, *Challenges Facing Group Leaders*, consists of improvisational enactments of problematic scenarios and critical incidents in a group. The Coreys encouraged the participants of this second program to be themselves as much as possible, even though they were at times enacting different roles. Some of the scenarios that are enacted include working with members who do not want to be a part of the group; dealing with a group when they are making little progress; addressing conflict; dealing with silence; exploring a member's reactions to being left with unresolved feelings about a prior group session; working with members who are uncomfortable with expressing emotions; addressing a member's concern over feeling pressured to talk; managing a member who assumes a role of assistant leader; dealing with trust issues and concerns about confidentiality; working with a quiet member; and the challenges in dealing with a range of difficult behaviors in groups. A significant part of this second program involves addressing the ways that diversity influences group process, including experiencing identity concerns; feeling different from others; dealing with stereotypes; speaking in one's primary language; looking to leaders for answers; and looking at the ways in which people are both the same and different.

The second program is intended to teach ways of understanding and effectively working with a range of challenging situations that group counselors frequently encounter, especially during the early stages of a group. Key points illustrated in the *Challenges Facing Group Leaders* program include the following:

- Group work is slow and tedious at times, which demands patience on the leader's part.
- Group facilitators have the responsibility of creating safety within a group.
- The earlier phases are critical in terms of laying a foundation for work at the later stages.
- Work takes place at all stages of group—not only during the beginning stages. How effectively a leader deals with challenges from group members at an early stage determines how effective a group will eventually become.

As students view this video program and respond to the questions in the accompanying workbook, we want them to do so with an openness to learning how group process works—and with a willingness to examine their own beliefs as a group leader. This program can provide the experiential component that helps students more concretely understand the nature of group process, and it can be a catalyst that prompts them into self-exploration. The art of group leadership is far more than a technical endeavor; it involves a group leader's capacity to use his or her intuition and human responses. To be sure, effective group leaders need a theoretical grasp of group process along with the knowledge and skill base to make effective interventions in a group. Competent group leaders possess self-understanding, knowledge of dynamics of behavior and group process, and technical skills in group facilitation.

The third program, *Lecturette on Theories and Techniques of Group Counseling*, consists of a 1-hour presentation of the main theoretical approaches to group work. The message of this lecture is that a theory informs the way group leaders operate in facilitating a group. It guides the work with members and defines both the leader's and the members' roles in a group. A theory provides a frame of reference for understanding the world of the client, especially when it comes to making an assessment, defining problems, and selecting appropriate techniques in meeting the goals of the members. Most theories have a variety of techniques for use in group counseling, and some techniques are applicable to more than one theory. Four general categories of theoretical orientations are described in this lecture program:

1. *Psychodynamic approaches*, which explore the individual's past and work toward gaining insight in therapy (psychoanalytic and Adlerian therapy).
2. *Experiential and relationship-oriented approaches*, which value feelings and subjective experiencing (existential, person-centered, Gestalt therapy, and psychodrama).
3. *Cognitive behavioral approaches*, which focus on the role of thinking and doing and tend to be action-oriented (behavior therapy, cognitive therapy, cognitive behavior therapy, rational emotive behavior therapy, and reality therapy).
4. *Postmodern approaches*, which stress understanding the subjective world of the client and tapping the existing resources within the individual for change (solution-focused brief therapy, narrative therapy, and feminist therapy).

In addition to these four general categories, Jerry Corey describes the integrative approach, which borrows and integrates concepts and techniques from a number of different approaches.

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*Gerald Corey*

*Marianne Schneider Corey*

*Patrick Callanan*

*Michael Russell*







## CHAPTER



# The Role of Techniques

Introduction

Using Techniques Effectively

The Therapeutic Relationship

Choosing Techniques for Various Types of Groups

Adapting Group Techniques to the Client's Cultural Context

Introducing Techniques

In a Nutshell

Concluding Comments

Questions and Activities

Guide to Using *Groups in Action: Evolution and Challenges* DVD  
and Workbook

## Introduction

The title of this book is *Group Techniques*. What exactly is a counseling “technique”? This word is not as simple to define as you might think. Virtually anything a group leader does could be viewed as a technique, including being silent, suggesting a new behavior, inviting a group member to explore a conflict, maintaining eye contact, arranging seating, offering reactions to members, or presenting interpretations.

We generally use the term *technique* in a more precise way to refer to a leader’s explicit and direct request of a member to focus on material, augment or exaggerate affect, practice behavior, or solidify insight. This definition includes the following procedures: conducting the initial interview, in which a prospective member is asked to focus on his or her reasons for wanting to join a group; asking a nonproductive group to clarify the direction it wants to take; asking a member to role-play a specific situation; asking a member to practice a behavior; encouraging a member to repeat certain words or to complete a sentence; helping a member summarize what she or he has learned from a group session; challenging a member’s beliefs; and working with the cognitions that influence a member’s behavior. We also consider as techniques those procedures aimed at helping group leaders get a sense of the direction the group might want to pursue.

When we facilitate a group, we may use techniques that flow from various therapeutic models. Techniques are tools to help group members broaden the ways they live in the world and become aware of their choices and their potential for action. We must have a clear rationale for using a specific technique and understand what we hope to accomplish by implementing it. We adapt the techniques to fit the needs of the group participants as we strive to understand the subjective world of our clients. When implementing techniques, we consider members’ readiness to confront their problems, their cultural background, their value system, their trust in us as leaders, and the stage in the development of the group.

## Using Techniques Effectively

Misconceptions about the use of techniques abound. When we give workshops on groups, participants sometimes ask us to suggest techniques for working with specific clients. The implication seems to be that there is a “proper technique” for every situation. Perhaps for some models of group counseling, such as behavior therapy, specific methods are appropriate to achieve well-defined behavioral outcomes. In many types of groups, however, the techniques that are most useful grow spontaneously out of the work of the participants and are tailored to the situations that are evolving in a particular session. Effective group counselors incorporate a wide range of techniques in their therapeutic style. Much depends on the purpose of the group, the setting, the personality and style of the group facilitator, the qualities of the particular client, and the problems selected for intervention. Effective group counselors continuously assess their group and decide *what* relationship

style to adopt; *what* techniques, procedures, or intervention methods to use; *when* to use them; and with *which* clients.

Given our assumption that techniques are means and not ends, we naturally have some concerns about how this book could be used:

- Will the book contribute to the problem of group leaders overemphasizing techniques?
- Will readers memorize specific devices and use them ineffectively rather than treating them as a means to deepen their own therapeutic inventiveness and judgment?

It is impossible to predict what the exact nature of a group will be. Relying on a recipe-book approach to therapeutic techniques may provide opportunities to try different procedures, but surely it does not replace the main function of a group leader. We suggest that you use your own creativity and learn to develop techniques spontaneously from the work being done. An excellent cook creates a different dish each time, and we encourage you to approach your groups with a little of the same creativity. Use your intuition, use what is available at the moment, and trust your own judgment.

**PAYING ATTENTION TO THE OBVIOUS.** Techniques can deepen feelings that are already present, and they should preferably grow out of what is already taking place. When a person says, “I’m feeling lonely,” for example, it is appropriate to introduce a technique addressing loneliness to help explore this feeling further. For this reason, we generally prefer to work with the themes developed by the group. This is not a hard-and-fast rule; many group practitioners work effectively with preselected techniques, exercises, and themes. Indeed, for certain populations, this approach is indicated. Many short-term structured groups use topics and exercises to help members learn. These techniques are employed to help members accomplish their personal goals within the framework of the group’s basic purpose.

In the groups we lead, we tend to use techniques to focus members at the beginning of a group and often also to summarize material at the end. We may use techniques to elaborate on what is already happening, letting members lead the way. It is best to follow the energy and the clues provided by the members rather than to be overly directive.

Most groups have moments of stagnation or reluctance. In these situations it is easy—but often unwise—to employ a technique to get things moving quickly rather than paying attention to the important material being presented, that is, the hesitation or reluctance. It can be therapeutically useful to teach group members how to assess what is occurring in the group process and how to mobilize the group’s energy. By looking around the room, for example, you may notice that members show signs of disengagement: being bored, displaying distracting behaviors, or appearing to be frustrated. We think the best technique at such times is to ask the members about their sense of what’s happening. As a leader, you might

say: “I’m willing to work hard to help you get what you came for. Most of you are silent and are not responding to each other. I’d like to hear from each of you what is happening with you now.” You can then share your reactions at the moment, or you can save them until all members have expressed what they are experiencing. Do not try technique after technique to stimulate movement in a situation such as this. Deal with what is actually occurring within the group by describing without judgment the behavior you are observing and by encouraging the members to decide what they want to do about their level of involvement in the group.

When considering whether to introduce a technique, take into account the stage of the group’s development. For instance, trust is often an issue at the initial stage of a group, and members may be silent and cautious. To introduce a technique to get things moving is to ignore the obvious and to impose a dynamic that is either premature for the group or that forces a process. Doing so can interfere with the group’s natural development. By introducing a technique that stresses and clarifies what is happening, you augment the process rather than interfere with it.

**MAINTAINING FLEXIBILITY.** As group leaders, we encourage you to develop flexibility about which material to work with; it is important that you be ready to go wherever the members want to go. Be prepared to abandon a technique that seems to be going nowhere or modify it as needed. We once witnessed a therapist demonstrating work with an angry woman. He kept urging her to hit a pillow with her hands, apparently failing to notice that she was already twisting the pillow. A more insightful approach might have been to work with what twisting the pillow meant to her. To take a different illustration, a leader may determine that a client needs to pursue an issue with her father. The leader may introduce a technique designed to accentuate her sadness and yet should be alert to whether or not she is actually feeling sad.

In a group therapy session we supervised, a violent patient kept reiterating that he was “different.” The leader tried to focus the client on dealing with his violent feelings rather than exploring his more pressing concern about being different. Either theme could have been worked with, but the outcome might have been more useful to the client had the leader pursued the member’s feeling of being different. By being open to members’ needs at the moment, the group leader can choose techniques that are most effective.

When material is presented by a member, the direction you choose to follow and the techniques you will use depend to a great extent on who you are as a person and your theoretical orientation. If you were to observe 10 different group leaders working with the same material brought up by a member, each of the practitioners might work quite differently, yet each one could be helpful in a variety of ways.

Although it is possible to make mistakes because of insensitivity to promising and pressing material, try not to be too anxious about pursuing the “right” or the “most pressing” material. There is rarely one “right” way to proceed. If you become

too focused on doing exactly the right thing at the right time, you are likely to impede your creativity. Your search for perfection can diminish your leadership skills and also stifle the work of the group members.

Often, several directions are equally worth pursuing. When we are asked why we chose one direction rather than another in a given situation, we frequently believe we also could have taken the work in a different direction. In addition to our theoretical orientation and therapeutic style, our own interests and level of energy come into play. Techniques are seldom picked randomly; rather, they are connected to a therapeutic process.

## The Therapeutic Relationship

Much of the opportunity for significant change is based on the members' relationship with the group leader. Just as many of the behaviors we label maladaptive had their origins in faulty early relationships, new and more appropriate behaviors can be cemented through the new relationship with the leader and other group members. If this relationship is inauthentic, superficial, or otherwise impoverished, we doubt that clients will make significant changes. Changes must be attempted, and the therapeutic relationship provides this testing ground. Let's look at three issues in the use of techniques that illustrate the significance of the therapeutic relationship: timing, avoiding self-deception, and becoming aware of your motivations.

**TIMING IN THE USE OF TECHNIQUES.** A critical skill in group work is using techniques with consideration for whether clients are prepared for change. When we push beyond clients' readiness to change, we violate their integrity. To attack defenses without consideration for their importance in maintaining equilibrium is to expose individuals to possible psychological damage. No technique will provide you with information on how ready group participants are to give up their defenses. You need knowledge, wisdom, and, above all, a concerned sensitivity to your relationship with those in your groups. This relationship provides them and you with the hold on reality individuals need to move away from nonproductive and excessively defensive conduct.

As group members learn to trust you, they are likely to move toward change. In the absence of such a relationship, they are being asked to trust techniques without any sense of what the leader is all about. Clients in that position do well to resist. The group leader who pays attention to the leader–client relationship develops a sixth sense that makes it possible to gauge the course of therapy and to judge the optimal time for inviting clients into areas they previously avoided. This skill is above and beyond technique. To some degree it is a part of the practitioner's makeup, but it can be refined through training, supervision, and practice.

**AVOIDING SELF-DECEPTION IN USING TECHNIQUES.** Techniques are powerful sources for emotional release and can generate tremendous energy in the therapeutic group. But they can easily mask the relationship between the leader and

the members. When the intensity has subsided, any insights gained may be dismissed by clients as having been brought about by something foreign to their own resources: the power of a special environment or the magic of the leader's technical skills. At the other extreme, because of the impact of a cathartic moment, clients may cling to the false belief that the issue has now been worked on and is finished. Although catharsis can be beneficial, it can convey a false sense of change. The leader who is anxious to produce a heavy emotional session may use techniques to generate such emotion without being sensitive to the needs of the group members and their process.

**BECOMING AWARE OF MOTIVATIONS WHEN USING TECHNIQUES.** Some leaders use techniques to meet their own needs for power or to control the members of their groups. Group leaders who are unaware of their motivations may misuse techniques in various ways:

- Leaders may apply pressure on certain clients to get them to perform in desired ways.
- Leaders may use techniques to impress participants.
- Leaders may direct a member away from exploring feelings and issues the leader personally finds threatening.
- Leaders may use highly confrontational techniques and exercises to generate an emotional response from members.

In all such cases, the leader's needs become primary, and members' needs assume a secondary role. Even experienced leaders sometimes are slow to recognize their motivations in the use of various techniques. Self-reflection is critical in recognizing the motivation for our practices. Coleaders can provide us with insights and useful feedback.

## Choosing Techniques for Various Types of Groups

The type of group you lead will determine, to a large degree, the appropriateness of various techniques. Some techniques may be ideally suited for a therapeutic group, yet they may not be appropriate for certain groups with an educational focus.

The majority of the techniques we describe in this book work best in therapeutic groups. Some of the techniques we describe in the chapters on the transition and working stages, for example, would not be suitable for a short-term structured group with children. However, our purpose is not to present techniques with the idea that you will copy them. Instead, we provide many examples of techniques we have used in our therapeutic groups to stimulate you to create techniques suited to your particular population, your specific groups, and to you.

In designing groups, you will certainly need to focus clearly on the basic goal you hope to attain. The time structure, the setting, the techniques you employ, the candidates you accept for the group, and your role as leader are all largely



determined by the type of group you are designing. It is of central importance to consider the role techniques will play in the service of clients. In certain task groups, you may want to employ structured exercises and use a clear agenda to guide your group sessions. If you are conducting a psychoeducational group for adolescents in a school, you may rule out certain techniques designed to bring about an exploration of intense emotions; these techniques are better suited to therapeutic groups. In creating and using techniques, you must always keep clearly in mind the primary purpose of your group. Techniques are tools to help you and your members accomplish that goal.

In addition to a range of suggestions about recruiting, screening, informing, and preparing group members (see Chapter 3), we recommend a generic technique for virtually all groups. This consists of some form of invitation for members to declare their perception of the group, what they want from it, or something that will involve them in formulating the group's direction. Specific suggestions for these "check-ins" are found throughout the book. We routinely ask group members at the outset of a workshop, a group course, or a session of an ongoing group to say something about what particular hopes, expectations, and fears they bring with them to the group.

In any given situation in a group, several different techniques can be used, and each may be equally beneficial to a client. What basis does a leader have for choosing one technique rather than another? Leaders do well to consider factors such as their theoretical orientation, the population that makes up the group, and the personality of individual group members.

**THEORY AS A BASIS.** The theoretical persuasion of the group leader can determine the selection of a technique. For example, free association by clients with minimal intrusion from the leader usually leads to regression and reexperiencing earlier memories. Asking individuals to pay attention to what they are thinking and feeling as others are working tends to focus a person on the here-and-now. Techniques of reinforcement for behavior direct attention away from intrapersonal dynamics. Thus, the choice of techniques depends to some extent on the theoretical framework of the therapist.

We devise techniques that tap the thinking, feeling, and behaving dimensions of human experience. Each of the theoretical frameworks has a good deal to offer in providing strategies for creative work. At times, members can benefit from exploring their beliefs and assumptions, some of which can be self-limiting. At other times, they need to experience their feelings more deeply. Finally, members need to develop an action plan for translating their insights into new behaviors. The same person can profit from a different focus at various stages in his or her work.

In working with group members, we emphasize the *thinking* dimension. We typically assist members in thinking about the decisions they have made about themselves. We stress paying attention to "self-talk." How are members' problems

actually caused by the assumptions they make about themselves, about others, and about life? How do members create their own problems by their thoughts and beliefs? Many of our group techniques are designed to tap members' thinking processes, to help them think about events in their lives and how they have interpreted these events, and to work on a cognitive level to change certain belief systems.

We also value approaches that emphasize helping members identify and express their *feelings*. Group members often get stuck due to unexpressed and unresolved emotional concerns. If allowed to experience the range of their feelings and talk about how certain events have affected them, their healing process is facilitated. If members feel listened to and understood, they are more likely to express feelings that previously have been out of their awareness or that they have kept to themselves.

As you will see in the many case examples presented in this book, group members can benefit from an emotional catharsis (the release of pent-up feelings), but some kind of cognitive work is also essential if the maximum benefit is to be gained from the emotional experience. Both the thinking and feeling dimensions need to be addressed.

A *behavioral dimension* is essential if the goal is behavior or personality change. Members can spend countless hours gaining insights and expressing pent-up feelings, but at some point they need to get involved in an action-oriented program of change. Bringing feelings and thoughts together by applying them to real-life situations focused on current behavior is emphasized by many of the cognitive behavioral approaches.

Underlying our integrated focus on thinking, feeling, and behaving is our philosophical leaning toward the existential approach, which places primary emphasis on the role of choice and responsibility in the therapeutic process. We facilitate members' awareness of the choices they *do* have, however limited they may be, and encourage them to accept responsibility for choosing for themselves. Most of what we do in our groups is based on the assumption that people can exercise their freedom to change a situation or at least to change their response to it. Thus, we encourage members to focus on what they are thinking, feeling, and doing rather than attempting to change others. This integrative model of group work is described in detail in *Theory and Practice of Group Counseling* (Corey, 2012, chaps. 16 & 17).

**CLIENT POPULATION AS A BASIS.** Sensitivity to the population with whom you are dealing is manifested in the techniques you choose to use. One cannot use the same techniques with an inpatient group that one would use with clients in a personal growth group. Similarly, techniques that tend to bring strong emotions to the surface need to be used cautiously with a group for people considered to be violent. Techniques used for group therapy clients may be inappropriate for professionals such as nurses or teachers in a group for developing interpersonal skills. There is an almost limitless variety of groups, and a leader needs to ask: "What is the goal

and purpose of the group? Is this technique suitable for this group of people? Is it the best available technique for this population in this situation at this time?”

**CLIENT PERSONALITY AS A BASIS.** A technique needs to be chosen with the personality of the individual group member in mind. If it does not fit, it most likely will not lead to productive work. Imagine asking a reserved elderly person to beat a pillow as an expression of her anger. Although the therapist may feel it valuable for her to express her anger, it is equally important to respect her inability to express anger in this fashion. There needs to be a congruence of the technique, the person introducing it, and the person for whom it is intended.

## Adapting Group Techniques to the Client’s Cultural Context

In choosing techniques, it is essential to consider the ways in which the client’s cultural background influences his or her personality and values. If a technique goes against the grain of a member’s personality and culture, it will probably result in alienating the client from the group. The key is to present techniques in a way that respects the uniqueness of an individual’s personal and cultural context.

If you expect to lead groups with culturally diverse populations, you must discover ways to modify your strategies to meet their needs. Perhaps our genuine respect for the differences among members in our groups and our willingness to listen to and learn from them will be the most important foundation on which to build a bridge between ourselves and them. It is particularly critical to monitor our own behavior so that we avoid making generalizations about individuals within a particular social or cultural group.

It is the responsibility of leaders to inform potential members of the values and norms that guide group interaction. These values or norms may include staying in the here-and-now, expressing feelings, asking for what one wants, being direct and honest, sharing personal material with others, learning how to trust, improving interpersonal communication, learning to take the initiative, dealing with conflict, being willing to confront others, and deciding for oneself. Some of the values generally associated with group participation may not be congruent with the cultural norms of some clients. For instance, some individuals might have difficulty being direct because their culture frowns on directness. Other clients may experience trouble putting themselves in the central place or taking up group time, largely because they have learned from their culture that to do so is rude and insensitive. Some members will not be comfortable making decisions for themselves without considering their extended family. Although some group techniques are designed to assist members in more freely expressing their feelings, certain members will find this offensive. Because of their cultural conditioning, certain individuals are averse to expressing emotions openly or to talking freely about problems within their family. They may have been taught that it is good to withhold feelings and that it is improper to show emotional reactions publicly.