
Psychoeducational Groups: Process and Practice, Third Edition

Nina W. Brown

CHAPTER 2

PLANNING

Direct and Effective Communication

Group leaders need to have an ability to communicate directly and effectively with members. While tact and sensitivity are essential, the leader needs to have an ability to convey information that is important and helpful but that may not be palatable. That is, the information can trigger painful feelings. However, even that can be conveyed in a manner where it can be heard, understood, and accepted with the likelihood of defensiveness and resistance reduced. The ability to be direct and open in your communication contributes to your effectiveness in conveying this information.

The value of being direct and open can be seen in the following:

- Reduces or eliminates misunderstandings
- Allows for genuineness and honesty in communications
- Promotes trust
- Addresses the fear of hidden agendas for both the sender and the receiver
- Can contribute to keeping sessions in the here-and-now
- Demonstrates taking personal responsibility.

It is relatively easy to have misunderstandings about what was said and what was meant when communications are not direct and open. For example, indirect communications can permit the speaker to change their intended meaning when challenged by the receiver, or when someone disagrees. This situation then puts the receiver in the position of being chastised for misunderstanding when, in fact, he/she did understand. This is a dishonest way to communicate and does not foster trust development.

It is not unusual for speakers and receivers to use the same words, to have different meanings, and not realize that they are talking about different things. For example, what do the terms “next weekend” and “this weekend” mean to you? For some, “this weekend” is the forthcoming one while for others it is the one that just passed. Lots of confusion could result if plans were to be made and there was this misunderstanding about what was meant. This is a relatively mild example. Consider how much more important it will be in groups where you are the leader.

The following table presents some common situations that can occur in your small groups where indirect and closed communication is ineffective. Each is accompanied with an example of a more effective communication that is direct and open.

Closed, Indirect and Ineffective Communication	Direct, Open and Effective Communication
This group is not here-and-now.	I'm having trouble being present-centered this session.
You shouldn't apologize.	When you apologize for something like you just did, I feel _____.
No one in the group will self-disclose.	I haven't self-disclosed and I wonder what does not feel safe for me in the group.
You aren't hearing me.	From your response, it doesn't feel that you heard my feelings.
This group is resisting conflict.	I've helped ensure that conflict does not emerge in the group.
There are a lot of feelings.	I suppress many feelings in this group.
What are we supposed to be doing?	I'm confused and anxious.
Are we doing it right?	I need some assurance and certainty. I feel really unsafe in unknown and ambiguous situations.