

A Guide to Group Therapy

Regional Department of Psychotherapy

Patient Information Leaflet

Shining a light on the future



Introduction

This aim of this leaflet is to provide information about Group Therapy at the Regional Department of Psychotherapy. If you are not sure about anything in this leaflet please ask a member of staff.

What is psychoanalytic psychotherapy?

There are many different types of therapy, based on different traditions and schools of thought. Benfield House specialises in psychoanalytic psychotherapy.

Psychoanalytic psychotherapy is a type of therapy which aims to help identify your problem, to understand its underlying meaning, how it has come about and to work it through.

Your problem could involve a range of difficulties, such as

- symptoms
- feelings
- behaviours and relationship difficulties

The therapy involves talking as openly as possible to the therapist, working together to try and understand the problem and looking at any difficulties that arise in your relationship with the therapist. This process helps to increase your understanding of yourself, helping you to see how your problems interfere with how you relate to others.

Psychoanalytic psychotherapy originates in the work of Sigmund Freud and the developments of later psychoanalysts working in this tradition.

Psychoanalytic psychotherapy has been adapted from this and applied to work within the NHS.

What are the basic principles of psychoanalytic psychotherapy?

- All psychiatric symptoms have a meaning, in terms of the life of the person experiencing them.
- Mental health difficulties and symptoms are linked to the presence of emotional conflicts between different parts of the personality. These conflicts and difficulties are linked both to inborn biological factors, like temperament, and to actual experience, particularly early experience and relationships.
- These conflicts are often unconscious, and can be played out in relations between different parts of the self, and in relation to other people, and the world more generally – sometimes including the system of care.

What are the aims of psychoanalytic psychotherapy?

- The aim of psychotherapy is to create a setting where difficulties can be relived and better understood, so that there becomes more choice and flexibility in the person's life. The aim is not considered to be complete "cure", which is not realistic, or removal of painful emotion and conflict, which are part of life, but increased self knowledge, and a degree of change.

- Change does not come easily. Though there might be a conscious striving to do things differently, there are often other parts of the personality working against, and resisting this change.
- Psychoanalytic psychotherapy is an attempt to provide a setting where intellectual understanding and emotional experience can come together, in a way that can help the person move on with their life.

Group psychotherapy

Groups are run on the same sorts of psychoanalytic principles as those applying for individual psychotherapy. For this reason it is usually considered that anyone who might benefit from individual psychotherapy might also benefit from, and consider, the group option.

There are specific reasons why you might want to consider group therapy;

- The group offers an opportunity to learn about how others might see you, and the types of interaction you tend to get into with other people. You may, for example, feel that you try too hard to help people, and neglect your own needs. You may feel that you never fit in, and easily become offended, or that you avoid certain situations of conflict. You may feel that you don't know who you are in a group situation, that you have no identity, or lots of different contradictory identities. There may have been an issue in your family of rivalry and jealousy between siblings and these sorts of feelings may get stirred up in other group situation. Who is getting something? Who is losing out? If you feel that these sorts of issues are your main problem then you should consider a group therapy.
- The group can lessen a sense of isolation, as you realise there are other people in the group who may have had similar experiences and/or difficulties.
- Unlike individual psychotherapy it is possible to take up different roles in a therapy group; you might be explore your own feelings in the group, but also be in a position to observe and comment on the struggles of other group members. You may find that you can both help, and be helped by, other group members.

Before joining a group

- Having completed your consultation you may have to wait for a place within a group. The therapist who saw you for a consultation will discuss with the clinical team the sort of group that could best help you and once a place becomes available you will be invited to meet the group leader(s) to discuss joining the group. At this meeting you will be able to talk about the sort of group you will be joining, its frequency and all other ground rules.
- Should you be waiting for longer than three months, you will be sent a review appointment by the psychotherapist who you saw for your consultation. In this way we can monitor your progress and update you on our own in relation to your wait. A letter will be sent to your referrer and other relevant third parties following these review appointments. A note will also be entered into your electronic record on the Trust database.

Particular types of therapy group at Benfield House

- There are a number of **long term psychotherapy groups** ran by the department. There will be people in the groups (usually 6-8) with different diagnoses. Some of these groups will be “**closed**” and fixed term, perhaps running for a year or a two year period. In these groups everyone will be scheduled to start and finish therapy at the same time, though some new members may come in if any original members leave.
- Other groups will be “**slow-open**” and will be ongoing. This means that members will begin and leave at different times. When people do leave is a matter of individual judgement, as to when they feel they have got as much from the group as they can, or for another reason. We recommend however that in order to give the group a chance to be effective potential group members should plan for a **minimum** of one year. There is a **maximum** time, and this is of two years.

What happens in group therapy?

- Most groups at Benfield House have between 6-8 members, usually men and women, and across different age ranges, and with a range of difficulties.
- In some groups there are two psychotherapists, often, but not always, a man and a woman, whilst in others there is a single psychotherapist.
- The psychotherapists’ role in most groups is similar to that of the individual psychotherapist. They are required to be real and genuine in their interactions, but also not to put their own personality to the forefront, and to help create conditions where group members can better experience, express and reflect on their pattern of interaction with the group, including with the group therapists.
- This means that the therapists will usually, again in common with individual psychotherapy, usually refrain from offering direct advice, or from immediately acting to reduce anxiety, or from directly answering questions without first enquiring what might have prompted that particular question at that particular time.

Group ground rules

It is important to create a setting where group members can express their feelings, and explore their relationships as freely as possible. At the same time very powerful feelings can emerge in any group situation. The fear of this can lead to anxiety. This can be helped by a secure framework for the group, and some basic group rules/guidelines. There may be different for different groups but the basic guidelines are as follows;

- Group members are asked not to talk about the group outside, and to respect confidentiality.
- Group members are asked to have no contact with each other outside of the group during the period of group therapy.
- If there are difficulties in attending group members are asked to discuss these in the group.
- If group members feel that they want to leave group therapy we ask that members give four weeks notice and try to attend the group during that period.

- Powerful emotions can arise during group therapy, sometimes including anger. It can be very therapeutic if this can be expressed and put into words. However verbal abuse or direct aggression will not be accepted in the group situation.
- Any member who attends under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol will be asked to leave the session, and encouraged to return the following week.

Communication with third parties

During the time that you attend the group, there are various ways that communication is shared with third parties. These include;

- An electronic record of the group session and any relevant information about the individual group member concerning his or her progress. This information is accessible only to clinicians working with the group member and who are employed by the Trust. For example, they may include a group member's CPN, or Psychiatrist or Care Coordinator. This record enables up to date communication to take place between professionals involved in the system of care.
- The person who has referred the group member will already have received a consultation report about that individual and the recommended further treatment option, (in this case a group). This report will have been copied to other professionals involved and who are not employed by the Trust – for example, the group member's GP, or social worker or primary care psychologist.
- Once a group member has begun group therapy, the group leader(s) will write to the original referrer on a 6 monthly basis, advising them of the group member's progress in the group, changes made and any concerns about clinical risk.
- At times there can be a need for more regular contact with third parties, usually where there is a concern about risk, either to the group member or to a vulnerable adult or child.

Risk management

- On occasions group members may feel overwhelmed by the feelings stirred up by the group process. At times this can result in individual's hurting themselves following a group session. Group members are encouraged to return and to talk about their experiences and the group and group leaders will try to help the person understand what has happened. The aim is to develop a capacity to bear feelings, put words to them and in understanding their origins, reduce risk over time.
- However, in some situations where risk increases or if a group member experiences an acute crisis, in order not to interfere with the therapy process, other agencies may be called on to provide more immediate support. In conjunction with the therapy this can enable treatment to proceed.
- It is important to note that this will only be necessary for some group members and will be negotiated on an individual basis as and when required.

End of Group Therapy

At the end of the group therapy a discharge summary will be written to the referrer and copied to relevant third parties.

Should you have any questions having read these information sheets, we would be pleased to answer them.

Our contact details are:

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Benfield Road
Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 4PF
Tel: 0191 287 6100
Fax: 0191 287 6101
Email: cspt@ntw.nhs.uk

Please note that information sent to the Trust via email is sent at your own risk.

Useful contacts

- **United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy UKCP**
Website: www.psychotherapy.org.uk
- **British Psychoanalytic Council** - Information, news and debate about psychoanalytic and psychodynamic psychotherapies
Website: www.pschoanalytic-council.org
- **Royal College of Psychiatrists**
Website: www.rcpsych.ac.uk
- **PALS**
The Patient Advice and Liaison Service can be contacted on free phone 0800 032 02 02, or email northoftynepals@nhct.nhs.uk, for advice and support.

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What if I have a comment, suggestion, compliment or complaint about the service?

If you want to make a comment, suggestion, compliment or complaint you can:

- talk to the people directly involved in your care or the Team Manager at the Centre for Specialist Psychological Therapies: Telephone 0191 287 6100
- ask a member of staff for a feedback form, or complete a form on the Trust website www.ntw.nhs.uk (click on the 'Contact Us' tab)
- telephone the Complaints Department Tel: 0191 245 6672
- We are always looking at ways to improve services. Your feedback allows us to monitor the quality of our services and act upon issues that you bring to our attention.
 - **Points of You** - available on wards or from staff. Some areas of the Trust have electronic feedback touch screens, staff can help you to use these.
 - **Friends and Family Test** - available from staff or online at www.ntw.nhs.uk/fft



Further information about the content, reference sources or production of this leaflet can be obtained from the Patient Information Centre.

This information can be made available in a range of formats on request (eg Braille, audio, larger print, easy read, BSL or other languages). Please contact the Patient Information Centre Tel: 0191 223 2545

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