INTRODUCTION TO GROUP THERAPY:
RELATIONSHIP PROCESS GROUPS

As you consider becoming a member of a therapy group, you probably have a number of questions. We hope this handout will answer some of those questions.

Just what is group therapy?
A therapy group consists of six to twelve members who meet to share their feelings and concerns. One or two group therapists facilitate these discussions, but the success of the group depends largely upon the participation of the members. Members give feedback to each other by expressing their own feelings about what someone says or does. This interaction gives group members an opportunity to try out new ways of behaving and to learn more about the ways they interact with others. What makes the situation unique is that it is a closed and safe system. The content of the group sessions is confidential; what members talk about or disclose is not discussed outside the group. The first few sessions of a group usually focus on the establishment of a level of trust that allows member to talk personally and honestly. Group trust is achieved when all members make a commitment to the group.

Why does group therapy work?
When people come into a group and interact freely with other group members, they usually recreate those difficulties that brought them to therapy in the first place. Under the skilled direction of a group therapist, the group is able to give support, offer alternatives, or gently confront the person. Through this process, the difficulty becomes resolved, alternative behaviors are learned, and the person develops new ways of relating to people. Also, during group therapy, people begin to see that they are not alone. Many people feel they are unique because of their problems, and it can be helpful to hear that other people struggle with similar difficulties. In the climate of trust provided by the group, people feel free to care about and help each other.

What do I talk about when I am in group therapy?
Talk about what brought you to the Counseling Center in the first place. Tell the group members what is bothering you. If you need support, let the group know. If you think you need confrontation, let them know this as well. It is important to tell people what you expect of them. Unexpressed feelings are a major reason why people experience difficulties in personal and professional relationships. Revealing your feelings—also called “self-disclosure”—is an important part of group and directly
affects how much you will be helped by group. While the psychological safety of the group permits you to express feelings that are often very difficult to express outside the group, you will not be forced to tell your deepest and most personal thoughts. Appropriate disclosures are those that relate directly to your present difficulty. How much you talk about yourself depends upon your comfort level. You ultimately are the person responsible for how much you share. If you have any questions about what might or might not be helpful, you always can ask the group.

MYTHS ABOUT GROUP THERAPY

Myth: Group therapy is an advice session.

Fact: Group therapy is a place where individuals learn to find their own solutions to their problem with the help of the therapist and other members in the group. The group provides a safe place for individuals to explore their problems and come up with alternatives.

Myth: Therapists do most of the talking.

Fact: Group members do most of the talking. Therapists will help facilitate discussion, but the success of the group depends on the participation of the members.

Myth: Conflict is going to be played out as it was in my past.

Fact: The main aim of the group is to provide a safe environment where conflict and confrontation will be handled in a supportive way. While difficulties in interacting with people are likely to be recreated in the group, these will be discussed in a manner that will focus on growth and increased awareness.

Myth: Group is a place to make friends and hang out.

Fact: Group is a not a place to socialize. It is a place where members come to work on their feelings and concerns, and it requires commitment and focus. Members are discouraged from interacting with each other outside of group.