Carolyn Chambers Clark, EdD, RN, ARNP, FAAN, holds a doctorate from Teachers College, Columbia University. Dr. Clark has conducted research on group processes, simulation gaming, and wellness self-care. Since 1966, she has conducted a private practice in group therapy and provided consultation on group work topics. She is a prolific contributor to the literature of group process, simulation gaming, teaching–learning, assertiveness, empowerment, health promotion, wellness, and complementary health.


Contact Dr. Clark on her Web site at [www.carolynchambersclark.com](http://www.carolynchambersclark.com)
To Learners and Faculty ix
Acknowledgments xi

PART I: LEARNING GROUP BASICS 1

1. Introducing You to Group Work 3
   Why Groups Are Important 3
   The Group and Systems Theory 4
   Types of Groups 5
   Concerns of All Group Leaders 11
   Qualities of an Effective Group Leader 12
   Effective and Ineffective Groups 15
   Ways of Learning About Group Function 16
   Simulated Exercises 19

2. Using Basic Group Concepts and Process 27
   Group Process Theories and Research 27
   Group Content and Process 32
   Tension and Anxiety in the Group 34
   Group Conflict 39
   Group Apathy 59
   Norms and Cohesiveness 60
   Themes 63
   Simulated Exercises 64

3. Working to Achieve Group Goals 73
   Phases of Group Movement 73
   Decision Making and Problem Solving 77
   Leadership Skills 84
PART II: BEGINNING AND GUIDING GROUPS  

4. Beginning, Guiding, and Terminating a Group  
   Premeeting Preparation 113 
   Early Group Meetings 121 
   Guiding the Group 130 
   Terminating the Group 133 
   Simulated Exercises 134 

5. Dealing With Special Group Problems 145 
   Monopolizing 145 
   Scapegoating 148 
   Silence 149 
   New Members 150 
   Transference and Countertransference 151 
   Physical Aggression 152 
   Nonverbal Groups or Group Members 154 
   Absences 156 
   Manipulation 156 
   Simulated Exercises 157 

PART III: DEVELOPING GROUP LEADERSHIP SKILLS 163 

6. Obtaining Supervision and Working With a Coleader 165 
   Developing Skills as a Supervisor 165 
   Developing Skills as a Coleader 174 
   Simulated Exercises 178 

7. Using Behavioral Approaches 185 
   Assertiveness 186 
   Changing Unwanted Habits 187 
   Increasing Cooperative Behaviors 188 
   Working With Parents 192 
   Simulated Exercises 193
8. Recording and Analyzing Group Process  199

    Recording Methods  199
    The Group Recording Guide  203
    Events  204
    Analysis of Events  207
    Evaluation of Leader Action  208
    Alternative Actions  209
    Using Recordings  210
    Sample Recordings and Evaluations  214

PART IV: WORKING WITH DIFFERENT TYPES OF GROUPS  235

9. Working With the Older Adult  237

    The Older Adult Population Grows  237
    Group Work With Depressed Older Adults  240
    Reality Orientation  242
    Remotivation Therapy  243
    Health Promotion Groups  245
    Writing Groups in Nursing Homes  248
    Guided Autobiography With Older Adults  249
    Creative Communication Groups  250
    Leadership Training for the Retired  251
    Life Review Groups  253
    Older Adult Group Simulated Exercise  256

10. Working With Focal Groups  259

    Codependency Groups  259
    Focal Groups for Specific Problems or Conditions  261
    Focus Groups  285
    Focus Group Research  297
    Simulated Exercises  299

11. Working With Organizations  307

    The Highly Creative Organization  307
    Diagnosing Organizational Systems  308
    Organizational Interventions  309
    Recognizing and Overcoming Barriers to Change  311
    Conducting Interactions and “Doings”  313
    Lead From Within  321
## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Power and Politics in Organizations</td>
<td>322</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healing Betrayal of Trust</td>
<td>324</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Simulated Exercise</em></td>
<td>325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>12. Working With Communities</strong></td>
<td>329</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Organization</td>
<td>329</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Wellness View of Community</td>
<td>330</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Assessment</td>
<td>340</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples of Community Organization Efforts and Research</td>
<td>344</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Organizational Leadership Simulated Exercise</em></td>
<td>349</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Glossary</strong></td>
<td>353</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Index</strong></td>
<td>357</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To Learners and Faculty

This book contains information that will help you become an effective group leader whether you work in task, support, psychotherapy, or educational groups, with groups of students or clients, in organizations, or even in communities. Despite the type of group, and whether you are the designated or informal leader, the only way to learn group skills is to practice. The Simulated Exercises that appear at the end of every chapter have been developed to assist you in practicing your leadership skills in a variety of situations. They can be used in class to help integrate theory into practice. The simulated situations give a feel for real-life groups but without the risk. They provide a format for trying out different approaches and studying reactions and group members’ responses. Please use them to practice your group skills prior to undertaking leadership of a real-life group. Consider them laboratory experiments that allow plenty of freedom to play various roles.

A new chapter feature called “Group Leader Challenges” has been added to this edition. These challenges appear throughout each chapter and raise questions meant to make you stop, think about what you’ve been reading, and apply it to a group situation. The effect will be even more powerful if you write down your answers. Taking the time to write your answers will provide a permanent record of baseline answers you can refer to as you advance through this book and as you increase your competency as a group leader. Active participation in this process contributes to the development of your critical-thinking skills related to groups.

New Simulated Exercises have been added to chapters in Part 3. These exercises will challenge you to further develop your group leadership abilities, especially within organizations and within community settings. Faculty may wish to use the Group Leader Challenge and Simulations in class, for exams, or assign them as group projects.

I believe these changes and other reader-friendly approaches make this book a most useful manual that will help make you an effective
group leader. Your group skills will steadily advance if you take part in the Group Leader Challenges and suggested simulations and apply the theory and comments provided.

Best wishes in your group work,

Carolyn Chambers Clark, EdD, ARNP, FAAN
Walden University, College of Health Sciences
I want to acknowledge the group theory and group skills I learned in the intensive clinical graduate program at Rutgers University where I studied under the groundbreaking leadership of Dr. Hildegard Peplau. I also want to acknowledge the many students who have helped me learn about groups and who shared in the development of the course Group Dynamics and Leadership, upon which this book is based, and my many clients over the years, all of whom deserve hearty thanks.

I also am deeply indebted to my peer support group, Susan DiFabio, RN, MS, and Judith Ackerhalt, RN, EdD, who helped me develop my own peer group skills.

Thanks to all the people at Springer Publishing Company and all the group learners who have kept this book in print.

C.C.C.
PART I

Learning Group Basics
Introducing You to Group Work

WHY GROUPS ARE IMPORTANT

Groups are important from the moment you’re born. Socialization first takes place in the group called the family. Later, peer groups, social groups, religious groups, work groups, and political groups become important vehicles for learning and obtaining satisfaction.

The quality of your life may depend on your ability to perform effectively in the groups to which you belong. As a social being, your effectiveness in these groups depends on your ability to assess and intervene in the ebb and flow of processes that affect the internal workings of each group.

Group skills are important for at least two reasons. First, many tasks, such as planning, cannot be accomplished without the cooperation and collaboration of group members. You must learn to work effectively with your colleagues and with other personnel. Group skills in this kind of cooperation and collaboration are especially important now if you strive to be recognized as a peer. Effective group skills can help you be clear and assertive when working with various groups of personnel without resorting to aggressive or helpless behavior, withdrawal, or apathy.

Second, work functions include teaching and supportive assistance to supervisees and clients—two functions that can often best be provided
within a group format. Such a format affords a number of experiences that the one-to-one relationship cannot provide. Group experiences can also supply a more intense and different type of support; assistance in observing a wide range of responses; positive and negative feedback in a supportive way; pooling of resources and solutions to problems; knowledge that others share the same difficulty, fear, or anxiety; validation of one’s own perceptions; and more efficient use of time.

Group skills help you form and lead groups that include clients or families, planning or task groups. You may not always be the designated leader; if you are not, you can learn to provide informal leadership, helping the group function more effectively; in these cases, you become an emergent or situational leader.

**Group Leader Challenge**

Make a list of all the groups you belong to and your current and planned leadership role in each one.

**THE GROUP AND SYSTEMS THEORY**

**The Group Is a System**

Systems theory provides an overriding theoretical framework for understanding and intervening in groups. A *theoretical framework* helps organize group information into an understandable whole. It provides categories to help group leaders organize their thoughts and observations. A framework provides a format for organizing your observations. It provides a perspective or specific way of looking at what is happening in a group.

A group is a *system* because it has identifiable parts (members)—yet it is a whole entity (a group) with each part influencing each other part (if one member is angry, other group members will react to the anger). Systems also have *subsystems*. In groups, these are subgroups or pairs of individuals who cluster together around shared interests. The group is a whole and is different from the sum of its parts; even if one group member remains silent throughout a group session, the group as a whole can achieve a goal; even if a group is composed of mature individuals, the group as a whole must struggle to be a mature group and develop ways to work together. Systems also have the property of openness and closedness; human systems are believed to be open systems, exchanging energy, matter, and information with their environment. Groups can be
influenced by their environment, too. For example, if the room is too warm, group members’ energy levels may be low; if group leaders bring in handouts there can be an exchange of information with the environment; and if group leaders serve refreshments from the cafeteria, matter from the environment (food) can be exchanged for energy. Systems have inputs (people, energy, information), throughputs (what goes on in the group), and outputs (products, such as decisions that are carried out between group meetings, and influence on interactions outside of the group). A system has interactive parts: the leader influences the group members and vice versa. Leaders and group members continually influence each other, even when there is silence in the group.

**Group Leader Challenge**

Think of a recent group meeting you attended. Identify all the system concepts and components you observed, as well as any unique patterns.

From a systems point of view, growth occurs in a unidirectional fashion; a group does not reverse itself or regress. Some behaviors or sessions may seem nonconstructive, but eventually the group will move forward if the leader exerts helpful leadership behavior.

Open systems show regularity and predictability. If you’re observant you will notice behavior patterns in specific groups. In one group, every time a group member speaks, silence, laughter, or encouragement may follow.

Living systems share these common elements, but they also have unique patterns. No two groups are the same; processes occur, but each group may display them in unique ways.

Systems theory can help you view group problems not as personal attacks or attitude problems but as patterns that have been developed and maintained by the system. In other words, many of the system problems discussed in Chapter 3 are best viewed as patterns that serve a purpose for the group. This does not mean that a pattern cannot be disrupted; suggested interventions for system pattern change are found in Chapters 3 and 4.

**TYPES OF GROUPS**

There are three types of groups: task groups, teaching groups, and supportive or therapeutic groups. Table 1.1 lists the types of groups, their
TYPES OF GROUPS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GROUP TYPE</th>
<th>PRIMARY PURPOSE</th>
<th>EXAMPLES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Task</td>
<td>Accomplishing the task</td>
<td>Curriculum committee meeting, Service planning committee, Team meeting, Conference, Staff meeting, Community organizational meeting, Political action meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching</td>
<td>Imparting information</td>
<td>Group continuing education, Nutrition group for clients, Sex education group for adolescents, Sensory-motor group for preschoolers, Reality orientation group for nursing home residents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive/Therapeutic</td>
<td>Dealing with emotional stress</td>
<td>Group for infertile spouses, Group for expectant spouses, Group for middle-aged people in midcareer crisis, Group for people with chronic illness processes, Group for rape victims</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1.1

table 1.1 primary purposes, effective group size, and examples of groups belonging to each type.

Task Groups

The primary purpose of task groups is to accomplish a given task; they place high priority on decision making and problem solving. Planning committees, service committees, teams, conference groups, staff meetings, community organizational meetings, and political action meetings are all examples of task groups (see Table 1.1).

Task groups are often formed to solve a given problem. For example, how can the consumer have input into health care planning? Consider breaking task or teaching groups of more than 12 members into subgroups for maximum interaction and learning. Groups of 6 or fewer are more productive.
Some other questions task groups may grapple with include the following:

- What is the most effective way for the team to function?
- How can personnel best provide services for a group of 25 clients?
- How can the staff deal more constructively with Mr. A’s behavior?
- How can members of this community be assisted to improve their level of wellness?
- How can professionals take political action?

Task groups are usually under pressure to complete the task within an allotted time period. There is also a tendency to ignore, deny, or try to smooth over existing conflict.

**Group Leader Challenge**

Think of a recent task group meeting you attended. What would have made it more productive?

---

**Teaching Groups**

The primary purpose of teaching groups is to impart information to the participants. Although the tendency to separate the learner from the teacher always exists in these groups, research shows that students learn as much—or more—when teaching their peers as their peers do.

You may participate in a number of teaching/learning groups. Hospitals, institutions, and agencies often present continuing education courses to teach new skills or to enhance previously learned basic skills. You may utilize the group format in a program designed to teach others.

When you lead a group in which the primary purpose is to teach or to learn, the following questions need to be considered: Which material is best suited to group or individual learning? Are the students ready to learn? What do they already know? Do the members of the group have similar levels of knowledge? How much repetition of material is needed to enhance learning? How can students be helped to plan and evaluate their own learning experiences? Is the pace of instruction too fast or too slow? How can the teacher provide the students with adequate feedback about how well they are learning the material? How can effective learning behaviors be increased?
Innumerable subjects are suitable for handling via the group-teaching format. A sampling includes the following:

- Labor and childbirth techniques
- Birth control methods
- Nutrition
- The management of diabetes
- The management of colostomies or ileostomies
- Effective parenting
- Orientation to nursing home living
- Appropriate exercises for nursing home residents
- Sensorimotor skills for preschoolers
- Preparation of families to enable them to care for discharged family members
- Couple massage
- Getting along in a group or unit environment
- Job preparation skills
- Preparing for discharge
- Self-help and complementary health procedures

**Supportive or Therapeutic Groups**

The primary purpose of *supportive or therapeutic groups* is to help members deal with emotional stresses due to hospitalization, illness processes, growth and development crises, situational crises, or socially maladaptive behavior. Supportive or therapeutic groups focus on the examination of members’ thoughts, feelings, and subsequent behavior. Clients often benefit from ventilating their feelings, from seeing that others share and accept these feelings, and from learning healthy and constructive ways of coping with them. Support or therapy focuses on preventing possible future upsets; one way to help group members is to teach them effective ways of dealing with emotional stress that arises from situational or developmental crises.

Supportive or therapeutic groups are usually under less pressure than teaching and task groups to complete the task during one or two
meetings. Another difference is that conflict among group members should be pursued and explored because it is often related to the ways members deal with emotional stress. As leader, you may even choose to maintain anxiety and conflict at fairly high levels if this allows the group to continue focusing on feelings rather than covering over or withdrawing from the discomfort. New tasks such as how to deal with a tardy or new group member may be generated spontaneously and dealt with by the group.

In convening a supportive or therapeutic group, you frequently gather together people who are undergoing similar emotional stresses. Such groups could consist of the following:

- Individuals with a chronic condition and/or their families
- Families of the dying
- Individuals who have recently lost a body part through surgery or accident
- The severely burned
- Individuals awaiting diagnosis, admission, surgery, or hospital discharge
- Nursing home residents
- Rape victims
- Parents of infants with birth defects
- Clients with a drug or alcohol problem
- Prison inmates
- Those with suicidal or homicidal tendencies
- Veterans suffering from posttraumatic stress disorder
- Individuals with a new diagnosis
- Middle-aged men or women facing a career or midcareer crisis
- Anxious preschoolers who fear going to school
- Child-abusing parents
- Adolescents with inadequate knowledge and meaning of their current physiological changes
- Adolescents not engaged in school activities or social activities
- Parents at a worksite

**Group Leader Challenge**

Choose a group from the list above (or define your own group) that you would like to lead and do a Web search for ideas/studies/group tips for that entity.
Part I Learning Group Basics

Leaderless or Self-Help Support Groups

Support groups can be leader-led or leaderless. Self-help groups or SHGs are leaderless groups that have a common problem, meet to exchange psychological support, charge minimal or no fees, are member-governed, and may use professional consultation.

SHGs are growing in numbers and members. Somewhere between 7 million and 15 million people belong to such groups. Groups such as Weight Watchers or groups run by hospital staff are not really SHGs because they are not member-governed. A study by Ouimette and colleagues (2001) found evidence that participants with substance abuse and posttraumatic stress disorder benefited from participation in a 12-step self-help group.

SHGs may have arisen due to the erosion of the family, the increasing number of people still living with significant disease, eroding confidence in care providers, lack of mental health services, increased faith in the value of social support as a buffer against stress, and increased media attention provided by TV docudramas (Jacobs & Goodman, 2002).

SHGs can often work as well as leader-led groups. Three facts can explain their likely success:

1. Members are highly motivated to change. They join the groups because they want relief.
2. The unique focus of each SHG creates a reciprocal exchange, a balance of give and take and risk and reward.
3. Because of the focus and balanced exchange, higher levels of self-disclosure are triggered; this leads to empathy, cohesion, and feelings of success (Jacobs & Goodman, 2002).

As long as SHGs stick to support and empathy, they can be useful. SHGs that turn to popular media for self-help materials can have a detrimental effect. Zimmerman, Haddock, and McGeorge (2001) analyzed and critiqued the best-selling self-help book, Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus. Their analysis revealed that the authors’ materials are inconsistent with family therapy research findings and encourage unequal power differentials between women and men.

For more information on self-help groups, go to www.selfhelpgroups.org.
Computer-Mediated Support Groups

The computer can also be the focus for a support group. Robertshaw (2000) discussed the use of support groups in distance education. Social support groups can address teaching and learning needs and social needs in the distance education system where time, distance, and/or opportunity isolate learners from their teacher and fellow students. Bragadottir (2008) studied computer-mediated support groups with parents of children diagnosed with cancer. She found the groups to be a valuable addition to, or substitute for, a traditional face-to-face mutual support group for both genders.

Dangers of incorporating groups into a support system include students developing dependency on the group, succumbing to peer pressure, and crossing the line between collaboration and plagiarism.

The Internet has even bred a form of addiction called Internet addictive disorder or pathological Internet use. Several forms of Internet addiction appear to exist, categorized by type of misuse: cybersex, chat rooms, net gaming, with the pathological search for information or video games being the most frequent. Bipolar disorders are the most common psychiatric condition linked to Internet addictive disorder (Dejoie, 2001).

CONCERNS OF ALL GROUP LEADERS

Although at first glance it would seem that each group would demand different group skills, to be effective all three types of groups require that a balance be maintained between adhering to the task and meeting the interpersonal needs of group members. For example, if task group leaders are so concerned about following the agenda that they fail to note how upset the curriculum committee is about a proposed cut in faculty salaries, the group will not function effectively. Likewise, if leaders in teaching groups are so concerned about giving information that they forget to find out whether all members understand the information, or if they support dependency on the leader by always giving the correct answer themselves, the group will not function as effectively as it could.

Even in supportive or therapeutic groups, leaders have to maintain a balance between giving support and working toward a task. The task may be to understand one’s thoughts and feelings and to learn effective ways of dealing with them, but leaders cannot be too supportive as this
may prevent group members from learning new ways of coping with their thoughts and feelings. In all three types of groups, leaders focus on achieving a balance between interpersonal and task functions, and with system difficulties. Some questions to ask in this regard:

- What patterns of behavior are developing in the group?
- Which patterns promote positive growth and which seem to promote negative growth?
- What can be done to promote primarily positive growth?
- How can subsystems be influenced to have congruent interests with the larger group system?
- What can be done to enhance openness in the group system?
- What is contributing to closedness in the group?
- What common group patterns and what unique group characteristics does this group have?

Group Leader Challenge

Choose a group you belong or belonged to and answer the above questions.

QUALITIES OF AN EFFECTIVE GROUP LEADER

Group leaders must have a high tolerance for anxiety, frustration, and disorganization. They must be capable of accepting group confrontation, hostility, and conflict without directly or indirectly punishing group members or ignoring the fact that such processes are occurring.

A group leader needs to accept and organize a great deal of information and observe both verbal and nonverbal messages and make sense of both. Group interactions can be intense and quick-moving, and the amount of input can overwhelm the novice group leader. With practice and supervision by a skilled group leader, you can learn how to organize extensive amounts of information and when and how to intervene in group interaction. At times, you must be able to stop listening to what is being said in the group and instead tune in to the nonverbal communication being conveyed.

Preparation for each session includes becoming informed about the task at hand and thinking of ways to structure the meeting to delegate responsibility to group members and to enlist their aid before and between meetings. Effective teaching requires that the teacher digest
information about the topic to be taught and plan how to present it to the learners in their language and on cue. Effective teachers establish a give-and-take rapport with learners and provide feedback and support to help group members feel comfortable when talking, practicing, or demonstrating in the group. They involve learners in learning activities, teaching them how to apply theory to practice.

A supportive or therapeutic group leader has to reread logs or recordings of past sessions, look for evidence of nonparticipation by members who may need attention or for strong feelings or opinions that need to be explored in future sessions, and be alert for interaction patterns that seem to be developing. Supportive or therapeutic group leaders likely do not have an agenda or teaching plan in mind but are aware of potential problem areas and move to intervene when appropriate. They must be willing and able to seek out assistance in understanding group processes—knowing when supervision from a more experienced group leader is needed is an important quality to have.

A sense of humor is also a great asset to a group leader. Despite adequate preparation for group sessions, unforeseen circumstances can disrupt the best-laid plans. Being able to detect humor in unexpected situations allows the group leader to ride with the ebb and flow of group processes without becoming irritated, angry, punitive, or withdrawn. Such a leader often uses humor to decrease group tension levels.

**Group Leader Challenge**

Journal about ways to use humor in the group setting. Look up some references to support your point of view.

In theory, you may promote independent action in clients, but in practice you may “do for” group members and stay in the role of authority or expert. You will be most effective as a leader if you promote independence and more effective behavior and encourage group members to be more responsible for what takes place in the group. In the beginning, limits need to be set on who will be part of the group, where the group will meet, and what topics will be discussed. You will also need to decide how group members will be prepared to enter the group. These somewhat competing goals of fostering independence yet structuring the group require a blend of skill acquired through practice in group leadership and through studying group processes.
Another asset of effective group leaders is the ability to blend your own style of relating to constructive communication techniques. You may believe that asking, “What’s with Betty and Tom?” seems too informal, even rude. Or, you may think that saying, “It seems the group has some feeling about what John said” sounds stilted or too formal. Develop your own words and ways of conveying the same idea. Learning to apply communication principles in a clear, direct manner takes practice.

**Group Leader Challenge**

Journal about what leader style you plan to use—formal or informal—and give a rationale for your choice.

Your willingness to examine your own expectations for the group and to deal with them realistically is important to group leadership. You may deny wanting the group to progress in a certain way yet feel quite frustrated when it does not proceed as expected. For example, the leader of a health discussion group may have in mind that 10 preplanned health topics will be covered in 10 weeks. If the group members have many questions, cannot absorb the information, or are concerned about other issues, the group will probably not proceed as expected, which may cause you to react with anxiety, frustration, anger, and/or resentment. Effective group leadership requires that you examine your own expectations and acquire the ability to correct or change them if they turn out to be unrealistic. This may evoke further anxiety in you, but it is a necessary side effect of learning. Decisions about how or when to intervene with a group are based on group needs and system patterns, not your need for security, self-esteem, or support.

Being appointed a group leader does not mean that the respect and influence of the title necessarily follow. A leadership title brings with it unexpected disappointments and uninvited problems. You must be prepared to encounter suspicion, distrust, hostility, subservience, passive resistance, insecurity, jealousy, and resentment.

Employees who went to lunch with you may now avoid, exclude, act defensively, become more guarded in their conversations, make more critical comments, or “apple polish.” Resistance and negativism to new plans or helpful suggestions may emerge.

Becoming a group leader invariably brings about significant changes in relationships with group members. Negative reactions to those in power and authority are part of everyone’s behavior—even the group leader’s.
Children develop ways of coping with authority figures, including crying, getting sick, becoming compliant, withdrawing, buttering up, forming alliances, lying, hiding feelings, bullying or dominating, striking back, ridiculing, resisting, defying, showing aggression, perfectionism, blaming others, tattling, and cheating.

The first step to becoming an effective group leader is to identify your own and group members’ reactions to authority figures. Using the unique dynamic interplay between leader and group members without taking member reactions personally will help you help the group move forward effectively.

**Group Leader Challenge**

Identify your reactions to authority figures and journal about how to use or change those reactions to make you a better group leader.

Effective leadership can also be examined from the viewpoint of group members. The social identity theory of leadership holds that the most effective leader–member relationship depends on how strongly members identify with the group. Hogg et al. (2005) argue that group members may perceive leaders differently at different times. For example, early in the group’s life, group members may prefer to receive personalized attention and to be treated as unique individuals, but as the group moves to developing a specific identity, members may prefer to all be treated equitably.

**EFFECTIVE AND INEFFECTIVE GROUPS**

Effective groups are capable of changing goals and matching individual needs to group goals. As an effective leader, you strive to promote behaviors that lead to effective functioning. To accomplish their task, all group members must be aware of exactly what this task is.

In ineffective groups the goals are unclear, the group remains uninvolved or uninterested, and the given tasks often seem to promote competition rather than cooperation and collaboration.

In effective groups, when you lead you make sure that communication between you and the group members and among the group members themselves is open, direct, and clear. Accurate expression of thoughts and feelings is encouraged. Individuality is supported, and activities that foster a closer working relationship and enhance the common good are
encouraged. A high level of trust, support, safety, creativity, and constructive controversy is evident in such groups.

In ineffective groups, communication is usually a one-way affair, from the leader to the group. Ideas are expressed while feelings are denied or ignored. No attempt is made to involve group members in group functions. The emphasis is on conformity, and the leader seems most interested in controlling the group, in making sure that there is order and stability, and in maintaining the status quo.

All members share power and leadership in effective groups. As leader, you teach group members how to be effective, and members participate in decisions according to their ability. Controversy and conflict are assessed as possible clues to involvement and interest in the task. Members learn how to recognize problems and how to solve them with a minimum of energy and a maximum of satisfaction; they also learn how to evaluate the effectiveness of their solutions and the effectiveness of their group.

Leadership in ineffective groups is often based on seniority or authority. Participation of members is unequal; authoritarian members dominate the group and make decisions. Controversy and conflict are ignored, avoided, or squelched. Group members do not learn how to solve problems or how to evaluate their effectiveness as group members or as a group. The status quo is maintained.

In summary, you promote effective group functioning by

- Clarifying the group task
- Changing the group task to match individual and group goals (when necessary)
- Promoting collaboration and cooperation
- Promoting security, trust, support, and creativity
- Encouraging constructive controversy
- Teaching group members to share leadership and responsibility in the group
- Teaching group members to solve problems and to evaluate group functioning and resultant outcomes

WAYS OF LEARNING ABOUT GROUP FUNCTION

Learning to be an effective group leader cannot be accomplished merely by reading about group concepts and processes. An effective group leader
has to have not only the theoretical knowledge about how groups work but also the ability to assess group concepts and processes and to intervene in real-life groups. Assessing and intervening in group processes requires practice supervised by an experienced leader.

**Obtain Experience**

The best way to learn about group functioning is to join a task, teaching, supportive, or therapeutic group. As a participant, you can observe and study group concepts and processes in action. You also study group processes more effectively by becoming an observer/reporter for the group. In this role you can focus your energies on listening and recording and not participating verbally in group interaction.

Prior to intervening in real-life group situations, you can practice interacting in simulated situations; these have many learning advantages that real-life situations do not have. First, simulations contain less risk than real-life situations; learners know they are only pretending. Less risk in simulations can often lead to less anxiety about an unknown situation and to more potential for learning. Second, simulations allow learners to receive feedback for group behavior and skills; they can observe the consequences of their behavior without being concerned about disclosing their feelings, receiving disapproval from authority figures, or psychologically damaging clients. Third, because group simulations are structured to contain elements of possible real-life group situations, experience in simulation is likely to increase your ability to handle real situations more easily. Fourth, simulations are a fun way to learn, and motivation is usually high. By practicing some or all of the group simulations found at the ends of the first seven chapters of this book, you can achieve all four of these benefits.

Role playing and simulations are important and powerful tools for learning group skills. Knowles and colleagues (2001) demonstrated that students who role played upcoming interactions with clients and received feedback on their performance improved their communication skills and applied knowledge more effectively than a control group.

Rubino and Freshman (2001) also found that simulated exercise inspired dialogue and program improvement. A simulation exercise that was especially helpful to group leaders was to role play a therapy session during which the people playing the clients spoke a language not understood by the therapist-in-training. This exercise helps students become more cognizant of the need to be cautious and curious in the cocreation
of meaning in therapy. In addition, the exercise builds confidence and clinical skills such as learning about nonverbal communication while observing group process (Helmeke & Prouty, 2001).

These research findings provide evidence that simulated learning can be highly beneficial to students learning group skills. All the chapters in this book provide simulated practice. Be sure to participate fully and learn as much as you can in the protected and powerful learning environment the simulations present.

The next step in learning to be an effective group leader is practice assessing and intervening in group process. This can occur through taking the role of designated group leader in a new or already established group of clients, families, or health personnel. Being designated leader requires more energy and the assumption of more responsibility, at least initially, than does assuming a group member role, a recorder role, or an observer role. Ultimately, the designated leader in an effective group shares responsibility and teaches group members how to assume responsibility for group decisions. You can also practice being a group leader by taking the informal leader role in a group; once you are aware of how and when to intervene, you can assume formal leadership functions in a group.

**Studying Ongoing Group Behavior**

The *sociogram* was one of the early methods of systematically studying groups. This form of relationship charting shows the differential relationships that exist between members (Stock & Thelen, 1958). A sociogram can chart liking, prestige, and influence (among other relationships). As leader, you ask for members’ reactions to other members and then chart them on a chalkboard or large sheets of paper. For example, at a specific point in group functioning, you might ask, “Whose ideas do you feel most sympathetic to so far during this meeting (session)? Please take a slip of paper and write down the name of the person you feel most sympathetic to.” Collect the slips of paper and read the names; for example, Carol named Ezra as the person she felt most sympathetic to and Charles named Susan, and so on. Chart the relationships on the board or sheet of paper. When the charting is complete, ask the group to discuss the implications and interview members about why they named the people they did.

The persons most named often take on spokesperson, bridge, or informal group leadership. There are risks. Members not named may feel unworthy or unacceptable. To avoid negative feelings, use cooperative
planning; avoid hurrying or pushing decisions. Your job is to support the group to clarify and make plans about which everyone feels good.

You can use sociograms throughout the life of the group to show developmental changes in a graphic way. Avoid asking, “Who is the most likable?” or “Who is the best leader?” questions. Focus on group-relevant behaviors, not personality factors. Items such as “Person who thinks most like I do” and “Person who I think clarifies others’ ideas most frequently” are useful. You can use these two items at the same time and then compare the results to show the group that different group members have different kinds of skills that help the group move along.

To study communication blocks in a group, use an item such as “Person who I think understands me least well.” Once results are in, ask individuals who don’t understand each other well to sit in pairs and discuss and clarify factors leading to misunderstanding. Ask each pair to report to the group once reasons for communication difficulty have been identified. Figure 1.1 provides an example of a sociogram.

**SIMULATED EXERCISES**

*Each of the three simulated exercises that follow includes an experiential and a discussion component. When using Exercises 2 and 3, large groups should be divided into subgroups of not more than 15 members. Following the simulation, the entire group reconvenes for the discussion.*

*Ample space should be provided for subgroups to spread out, and chairs should be movable. When subgroups are too close there is a tendency to listen to others’ discussions.*
EXERCISE 1 Perceived Problems of Being in a Group

Objectives
1. To provide practice as leader, recorder, and listener in groups.
2. To compare and contrast the listening and telling skills of various participants.
3. To examine common concerns regarding being in group situations.

Procedure
1. The group or the instructor appoints a timekeeper.
2. The group or the instructor appoints a leader who directs the exercise.
3. The leader says, “Arrange yourselves into subgroups of three. One will be the recorder who writes down what is said, one will be the listener, and one will be the speaker who tells what problems one faces in group situations.” (Variation: Have the speaker tell what problems are anticipated as group leader.)
4. When the subgroups are arranged, the leader asks the timekeeper to call time when 15 minutes are up. The leader gives the signal to begin.
5. When the timekeeper calls time, the groups scramble so that each person plays a different role for the next 15 minutes.
6. When the timekeeper calls time, the entire group convenes for a group discussion.
7. The group may appoint a leader to focus the discussion.
8. The leader asks the timekeeper to remind the group when only 10 minutes remain for discussion. Generally, 25 to 50 minutes is adequate to cover the issues, but the amount of time required will increase with an increase in group size.
9. The following issues can be topics for discussion:

(continued)
EXERCISE 1  (continued)

a. What did the recorders in each group observe?

b. What helpful or not helpful attitudes did the speakers in each group perceive in their listeners, that is, nonverbal clues of attention, support, boredom, etc.?

c. What did the listeners observe about the speakers?

d. How does a listener encourage a speaker to speak?

e. What skills are required by a recorder as compared to a speaker or listener?

f. Did the recorder interfere with speaking and/or listening; if so, in what way?

g. What concerns were expressed about being in (or leading) a group? (These may be written on a chalkboard or shown in overhead projection transparencies and used for reference purposes.)

h. How could each concern be handled in the most effective way? (Refer to Chapters 1–3 and 5 for specific interventions.)

i. How can what was learned in this exercise be applied in actual group situations?
EXERCISE 2 Introductions

This exercise is designed to give the nurse leader practical experience in giving, hearing, and analyzing group introductions without the risks that would be involved in actual patient or staff group situations.

Objectives
1. To practice introducing self to others.
2. To observe how others present themselves to the group.
3. To observe group processes characteristic of the orientation phase of groups.

Procedure
1. The group or instructor appoints a timekeeper. The timekeeper makes sure that each person’s introduction does not exceed 3 minutes. Whenever a group member takes more than 3 minutes, the timekeeper turns to the next member and says, “Next, please.”
2. The group or the instructor appoints a leader for each group.
3. The group leader appoints a recorder from among her group members. The recorder is asked to jot down observations regarding how people introduce themselves, how group members react toward being asked to introduce themselves, and the level of and changes in group cohesiveness.
4. The group leader asks the group members, “Will each of you introduce yourself to the group, say what you do, who you are as a person, and why you are participating in this exercise? Who will start?”
5. When all group members, including the leader, have introduced themselves, the entire group convenes.
6. A discussion leader volunteers or is appointed by the group. This leader asks the recorder to assist by helping the group present its observations concerning the following issues:

   (continued)
EXERCISE 2 (continued)

a. Did people tend to use socially acceptable, rational introductions? If so, is this characteristic of the orientation phase of a group? If not, what explanations does the group have for the presence or lack of more openness?

b. Do nurses seem more likely to stereotype themselves than others might? Why?

c. Why do people seem hesitant and cautious about expressing themselves in the group? If some people gave too much personal information, what might be an explanation for that type of behavior?

d. Did group members really seem to get acquainted during the introductions? Why, or why not?

e. What information seems most helpful for the leader to give during her introduction?

f. What information seems most helpful for group members to give other group members during introductions?

g. How can what was learned in this exercise be applied to actual group situations? Variation: Two leaders can work together to lead the discussion. In this case, the following discussion question can be added:

h. What advantages and disadvantages were there to coleadership? (Refer to Chapter 6)
EXERCISE 3 Paraphrasing

This exercise provides practice in listening to and restating what others say. Many times the receiver of a message makes judgments about what the other has said and responds to these judgments rather than to the other’s message. Because effective leadership requires expert listening and restating skills, this exercise can be redone whenever the group leader begins to notice a tendency toward interpreting group members’ messages without sufficient basis for the interpretation.

Procedure

1. The group or the instructor appoints a timekeeper who is to make sure that time limits set for each step are kept; the timekeeper also is to remind the group at appropriate intervals how much time remains.
2. The group decides on time limits for each step.
3. The group or the instructor appoints a leader for each group.
4. Each member is asked to talk about the best thing that happened this week. One member starts by telling the person to the right in the group the best thing that happened. The second person paraphrases what the first person has said, using different words to describe what happened without adding new information. The exercise continues in this manner, with one person recounting the best thing that happened, and the next person paraphrasing, followed by another person telling about a best experience and another person paraphrasing that experience until everyone has either told or paraphrased. (Variation: Use a highly controversial topic.)
5. The leader then asks group members to reverse roles and have the person who told of the experience become the paraphraser.
6. The entire group discusses the following points:

(continued)
EXERCISE 3 (continued)

a. What is difficult about paraphrasing another person’s statements.

b. Who in the group found it easier to tell a story than to paraphrase a story? Who found the reverse to be true? What ideas does the group have about why this might occur?

c. What do the speakers have to tell the paraphrasers that may help them be more effective reflectors of what was said?

d. What was learned from this exercise that can be applied in real-life group situations?

e. (Optional) What effect did the controversial subject have on the ability to paraphrase?
REFERENCES


