

Chapter Key People

CHAPTER 17

Group Work: Elderly People and Their Caregivers

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Chapter Key Terms

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Ageism
Caregivers groups
Culture
Gerontology
Reality orientation groups
Reminiscing groups
Life review therapy
Remotivation groups
Fulfillment model
Gerontological counselor specialty
Intergenerational groups
Brief group counseling
eGroups
Ethical Standards for Internet Online Counseling
Group mobility
My Life Quilt
4 Ss
Gerontological competencies
Mischievous escapades

Chapter Summaries

CHAPTER 17

Group Work: Elderly People and Their Caregivers

A dramatic increase in the numbers and proportion of older adults in the United States during the 20th century has generated new interest in the mental health needs of this historically underserved population. Beginning in the 1950s, a number of group counseling formats emerged to meet the various emotional, physical, and social needs associated with this long developmental period.

Reality orientation groups help those suffering from dementia more accurately interpret their experiences and take increased responsibility for their own care. Remotivation groups stimulate socialization and involvement in those elderly people who are oriented but alienated. Reminiscing and life review groups foster a sense of connectedness, identity, and ego integrity for older adults in both inpatient and community settings. Psychotherapy groups focus on more intensive emotional conflicts and issues, while theme-focused groups provide support and therapy for older persons as they share a variety of specific concerns. Caregivers of the elderly, whether family members or professionals, can learn from one another and find needed support by sharing their experiences in a counseling group. Finally, a carefully planned brief solution-focused format can be successful in, among other things, helping members formulate and implement plans for change at times of transition.

Organizing the different types of groups requires specific considerations. The initial step involves assessing the appropriateness of the group mode and choosing the type of group to be conducted. Leader skills vary for each type of group. Membership, screening, and settings are different for each type of group. Decisions about group length, frequency, duration, size, and mobility must be carefully considered to maximize the attainment of potential group outcomes.

The cultural diversity of the entire country, as well as other countries, is represented in the older population. Historical differences in the life experiences of older generations from diverse

backgrounds add a new dimension to multicultural awareness. This added dimension challenges group counselors to expand their knowledge and sensitivity about diversity by incorporating into their knowledge base the effects of specific historically significant events on different populations.

Working with the elderly requires training in the three areas of counseling, group skills, and gerontology. Few CACREP-approved gerontological programs are available, but there are numerous CACREP community and mental health counseling programs and medical or social work association approved gerontology programs. Persons interested in this specialty may need to develop individualized plans for receiving training in each of these areas.

eGroups are encouraged as a particularly unique strategy for older persons who may be homebound or separated from friends, relatives, and other potential group members. eGroups are not currently discussed in the research literature but have the potential of emerging into several different types of technology based groups. Possible types of eGroups might include life review groups using eMemories and eStories, career development and retirement planning groups, bereavement groups, various types of support groups, and family discussion groups.

As society ages and we enter the 21st century, the challenges of meeting the mental health needs of the elderly will predictably increase. We hope that growing numbers of younger counselors will respond to the challenge as they come to appreciate the contributions of their living ancestors, thereby enriching their own personal and professional lives. Groups with older persons can help join the past with the present and add continuity, wholeness, balance, and meaning to the lives of participants and group leaders. Further, groups can build the bridges that create a larger community from several generations. These bridges connect the pathways we can all travel to help transform dreams into a healthy world for future generations.

Chapter URLs

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Group Work: Elderly People and Their Caregivers

American Geriatrics Society

<http://www.americangeriatrics.org/>

Association for Death Education and Counseling

<http://www.adec.org/>

National Institute on Aging

<http://www.nih.gov/nia/>

Novartis Foundation for Gerontology

<http://www.healthandage.com/>

Resource Directory of products and services for the disabled, elderly, caregiver and healthcare professional.

<http://www.blvd.com/>

Alzheimer's information

<http://www.alzinfo.org/>

The Senior Source

<http://www.seniorresource.com/>

Senior Wellness

<http://www.seniorswellness.com/>

CACREP Gerontological Counseling Standards

<http://www.cacrep.org/2001Standards.html>

Computers Made Easy for Senior Citizens

<http://www.csuchico.edu/%7Ecsu/seniors/computing2.html>

Generations United

<http://www.gu.org/>

Elderhostel

http://www.elderhostel.org/programs/intergenerational_default.asp

Legacy Project

<http://www.legacyproject.org/kits/index.html>

Web Site Links for Senior Citizens

<http://www.seniorjournal.com/seniorlinks.htm>

Test Your Knowledge

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Group Work: Elderly People and Their Caregivers

1. T F Group work with the elderly emerged in the 1950s.
2. T F Reminiscing and life review groups are considered to be synonymous and are defined as a naturally occurring, universal process whereby experiences and unresolved conflicts are revived, surveyed, and reintegrated into people's views of their lives.
3. T F In 1999, the National Board for Certified Counselors (NBCC) made gerontology one of its specialties because the demand was so high for counselors seeking certification in this area.
4. T F Reality orientation groups are designed to help regressed elderly persons suffering from dementia become more accurately oriented in time, place, and person.
5. T F The primary goals of remotivation therapy groups are to stimulate involvement in life for those who have lost interest in the present and future, increase their communication and interaction with others, and help them progress toward resocialization.
6. T F Reminiscing and life review groups focus on helping an elderly person move on by helping him or her to forget painful memories from the past and also by teaching skills to make the elderly person a more productive member of society so that he or she will use fewer resources.
7. T F The focal point for brief solution-focused groups is always on members' deficits and weaknesses and ways in which those can be overcome.
8. T F Multicultural counseling for the elderly is not relevant as the focus is on aging and not on cultural differences.
9. T F The major pitfall the leader of a life review or reminiscing group may encounter is to allow the group sessions to become an overly structured series of stories.
10. T F Because of increased illness in the fall and winter seasons which often results in more absenteeism, some group leaders advocate that groups for the elderly should be conducted during the spring and summer.

11. T F Because of the strong demand for counselors trained to work with elderly populations, CACREP-approved formal training has become available in nearly every community.
12. T F Working with the elderly requires training in the three areas of counseling, group skills, and gerontology.
13. T F The word ageism is used to describe prejudice and discrimination against the aging population.
14. T F If the barriers of acquiring technology equipment and skills are overcome and ethical challenges are met, the advantages of eGroups for older persons are numerous.
15. T F The issues most prevalent when counseling the elderly are issues related to when a person has been vigorous, active, and involved and now has to deal with the transition from work to retirement, role loss, and related identity problems.
16. T F Psychotherapy groups are only used with elderly persons who are mentally ill or are engaging in psychopathic behaviors.
17. T F Remotivation groups were initially used by Dorothy Smith, a hospital volunteer, to remotivate mentally ill patients.
18. T F Irene Burnside combined the efforts and expertise of many professionals in the first comprehensive nursing text on group techniques for the elderly in 1978.
19. T F An eGroup counselor should identify a backup counselor accessible for each group member in case a referral for a non-group related concern is indicated.
20. T F As the gerontological counseling specialty emerged, goals changed from treating severe disorders to facilitating healthy development, making transitions, finding meaning, and increasing empowerment for all older adults and their familial and professional caregivers.

Chapter 17 Answers

1 T, 2 T, 3 F, 4 T, 5 T, 6 F, 7 F, 8 F, 9 T, 10 T, 11 F, 12 T, 13 T, 14 T, 15 F, 16 F, 17 T, 18 T, 19 T, 20 T

