

## **TASKS AND SKILLS OF THE SOCIAL WORKER ACROSS STAGES OF GROUP DEVELOPMENT**

Adapted from: Berman-Rossi, T. (1993). The tasks and skills of the social worker across stages of group development. *Social Work with Groups*, 16, 69-81 & Garland, J., H. Jones, and R. Kolodny (1976), A model for stages of development in social work with groups. In S. Bernstein (Ed.) *Explorations in Group Work*, Boston: Charles River Books, 12-53.

### **Stage I. Pre-Affiliation**

#### ***Phase of Work***

- Preliminary and beginning

#### **Character of Group System**

- Non-existent
- Source of stress
- Work of group unknown
- Rules of behavior individually rather than collectively defined

#### **Character of Individual Member Behavior**

- Unable to see connection with others
- Feelings of isolation
- Mistrust of worker and members
- Approach-avoidance
- Indirect communication

#### **Member and Collective Tasks**

- Developing an understanding of work of group and connection between their need and agency service
- Establish a division of labor
- Establish a structure for work

#### **Tasks/Skills of the Social Worker**

- Clarify role and purpose and arrive at working contract with members
- Provide initial structure
- Clarify link between client need and agency service
- Partialize client need
- Reach for feedback
- Tune in and respond directly to indirect messages
- Point out commonalities between members

## **Stage II. Power and Control**

### **Phase of Work**

- Initial work phase: Pre-intimacy

### **Character of Group System**

- Primary concern with power and control
- Power struggles between members and between members and worker
- Danger of dropout high
- Few norms established yet
- Struggle/confusion over affective and instrumental tasks

### **Character of Individual Member Behavior**

- Members slowly drawn into group
- Ambivalence high
- Criticism of worker and group high; confidence in worker low
- Perceived risk of involvement high
- Status differentials important

### **Member and Collective Tasks**

- To develop into a mutual aid system
- To “resolve” relationship with worker enough to move on
- Develop a structure for work

### **Tasks/Skills of the Social Worker**

- Help group develop into a mutual aid system
- Help members develop a structure for work
- Acknowledge challenge to her or his authority so work can go forward
- Maintain balance between affective and instrumental tasks
- Encourage discussion of taboo subjects and difficult feelings
- Point out obstacles to mutual aid
- Point out common group

## **Stage III. Intimacy**

### **Phase of Work**

- Middle work phase

### **Character of Group System**

- Group seen as more satisfying
- Increase in member to member intimacy

- Consensus important
- Cohesion increases
- Mutual revelation
- Shared goal orientation

#### **Character of Individual Member Behavior**

- Increase in personal involvement and investment
- Increase in listening and member support
- Members are protective of group, guard against intrusion
- Transference

#### **Member and Collective Tasks**

- Use sense of cohesiveness for further work
- Begin to satisfy individual need
- Invest in group and increase use of each other

#### **Task/Skills of the Social Worker**

- Help members balance self-revelations and need for privacy
- Increase demand for work
- Partialize problems
- Note recurring themes
- Point out connections between general and specific
- Encourage direct member to member communication
- Translate individual problem into group concern

#### **Stage IV. Differentiation**

##### **Phase of Work**

- End of work phase

##### **Character of Group System**

- Group as a whole most mature, productive, and most cohesive
- Difference tolerated
- Norms for work well-established

##### **Character of Individual Member Behavior**

- Interdependence highest
- Relationship strongest between members and between members and the worker
- Differentiation occurs
- Free expression among members
- Members accepted for who they are

**Member and Collective Tasks**

- Build on intimacy to allow differentiation and uniqueness of individuals
- Use group as end is in sight

**Tasks/Skills of the Social Worker**

- Same as in previous stage
- Use connection between specific to general so that gains can be applied to future situations
- In light of coming to end, clarify needs, gains, and remaining work
- Reinforce strengths and ways of working

**Stage V. Separation****Phase of Work**

- Transitions and endings

**Character of Group System**

- All processes affected by impending demise of group
- Regression and denial
- Loss and sadness

**Character of Individual Member Behavior**

- Begin to move apart
- Approach-avoidance pattern resurfaces
- Feelings of loss stimulate "old" feelings

**Member and Collective Tasks**

- Evaluate work
- Define remaining work
- Dissolve ties without dissolving what group has meant

**Tasks/Skills of the Social Worker**

- Evaluate work
- Define remaining tasks
- Help group complete work and let go
- Focus on affective and instrumental aspects of ending
- Use self authentically and appropriately to help members achieve closure

