

## Group and Workshops

**Question:** You know, when I think about suggesting a group or a workshop to someone, I would imagine that the idea of opening up about personal issues to a whole group of other people feels daunting to say the least?

**Answer:** Absolutely! I think this often feels like a real problem for students when we suggest group work to them. But in reality, after 2 or 3 groups, people are getting to know each other, and the whole thing feels less strange and daunting.

**Question:** But even so perhaps it feels 'safer' to talk to just one other person about things that feel personal?

**Answer:** Yes that's a natural reaction. But, you know, a group can feel like a surprisingly safe place to talk: 'A problem shared' and all that ... You're not just sharing it with one other person, but with several people, all of whom will be able to bring the value of their own experiences and viewpoints. That's quite a significant emotional resource when you think about it.

I should point out as well that we take great care over the way in which we set up our groups and workshops: – So, for example, we make sure that they are **confidential**; and try to structure them in the right way for whatever **theme** is being covered. What we hope is that people who come along to our groups and workshops will feel able to talk about things **openly**, and be able to explore things in a way that isn't necessarily possible in a typical social situation.

**Question:** So what do you *do* in a therapeutic group??

**Answer :** We talk about things!

But we discuss things in a way that we hope really enables people to *explore* their difficulties.

There's a chance to think about things from various different perspectives because we get to hear from others about their own experiences and perceptions. We can compare and contrast. It's this variety of experience that can enable people to discover that they are not as alone and isolated as they have perhaps thought themselves to be.

That can be powerfully reassuring.

**Question:** Right, so it's good to know that 'others feel the same way too'... but surely, when we have issues, we need the *expert* advice of a counsellor or someone who knows about these things, and so an appointment with a trained therapist makes more sense?

**Answer:** I can see the point you're making but actually, the best way to learn how to cope with difficult situations or feelings is by actually *discovering* how these difficulties affect us. **Discovery** is a key idea here: we generally need to find out *for ourselves* what helps us and what doesn't help us, rather than, say, simply be told. We really work with this process of discovery in our work here and the discussion that happens in Groups and Workshops provides opportunities for very immediate and dynamic ways of finding out – that is, *discovering things* - about ourselves.

**Question:** So you do GROUPS and you also do WORKSHOPS.... What's the difference between a Group and a Workshop?

**Answer:** A Workshop is a pragmatic look at particular issues – such as 'self esteem' or 'perfectionism'. We want to give people the opportunity to learn about various coping strategies and also ways of thinking about, and understanding the nature of these difficulties. The workshops tend to run as individual events or are linked over two dates and the focus is generally on how to change our thinking about, and possibly our behaviour in relation to certain difficulties. Coming along to a workshop you'll get a chance to hear from other people and share ideas about coping strategies and techniques. I suppose you could say a *workshop* is a '**hands on- learning**' experience; whereas a *group* tends to be more of a **reflective** experience. Our Groups also have themes but they're much less structured and take place on a weekly basis for a couple of months at a time during term time.

**Question:** I must admit, talking in groups seems such a standard part of University Experience ... and life in general. We live and work in groups don't we, so it makes sense to try to understand our difficulties in groups.

**Answer:** Yes I agree, and attending a Group or a Workshop where there's no academic pressure to perform in a particular way can be a great way of developing confidence in this type of situation. Its almost as if it gives us the chance to practice being in a group situation.

The clear feedback we get from our Groups and Workshops programme is how much students value being able to talk in a safe and honest way with other students, away from all the usual social and academic pressures that are a part of University life. They learn from each other, and get a great deal of reward from helping each other too.

**Final comment:** Ok, well thanks. It sounds like a Group or a Workshop is worth a try even if you feel a bit wary...