

SWRK 409
Social Work with Groups
(Ragg, 2007, Garvin 2011-2012)

CRITICAL GROUP WORK SKILL SETS 2: SETTING NORMS AND DIRECTION

- 1. Activating Group Capacities.** As the group develops a sense of commonality and desire to achieve a collective outcome, the worker must get the members to begin contributing toward the group direction.

 - **Inter-member Sharing.** Initial member disclosures are often very safe and superficial. Workers help members to become open with each other building a relational foundation for future work.
 - **Inter-member Responding.** As members begin sharing it is important that the other members respect each other's disclosures and suggestions to develop collaboration. Workers shape respectful responding by dissuading disrespect and promoting helpful responding.
 - **Encouraging Input.** To tap into member strengths it is important to solicit their input into the issues vital to the group and group direction. Often members are used to authority figures providing the lead so workers must actively solicit input.
 - **Developing Democratic Processes.** Workers help members make their own decisions about what is important to achieve and how the group might best approach situations or concerns. As the group makes these decisions, the worker helps clarify and disencumber the group efforts.
 - **Developing Mutual Aid.** Members need to become a source of support and input for each other rather than relying on the worker. However, many members will initially focus on the worker. The worker must consequently defer back to the group members to communicate an expectation that people will support each other.

- 2. Developing Identification.** As commonalities emerge, workers help the group members to identify possible solutions or directions for action that will involve all members of the group working together. There are four skills inherent in this skill set.

 - **Validating Shared Experience.** Workers reflect on the shared concerns and experiences of the group members validating both individual member stories and shared concerns among the members.
 - **Strengthening Commonalities.** Workers stress the elements, events and processes that members have in common to help the members to identify more strongly with each other.
 - **Identifying Shared Visions.** As shared desired emerge, the worker helps members identify and ratify things that the group members want to achieve together.
 - **Building Shared Motivation.** Workers help the group members identify personal reasons and shared benefits associated with achieving group goals. These reasons and benefits are highlighted to help members maintain their motivation for action.
 - **Building Common Purpose.** Workers desires inherent in the common themes and stories. Through reflecting on the individual wants and hopes, the workers can engage multiple members in identifying things that the members want to achieve.

- 3. Managing Differences.** As members come together they want to exert their own agendas and preferences in the group. Workers need to disrupt selfish agendas while building the sense of common purpose.

- **Disrupting Selfish-Orientations.** When members propose a direction for the group that is a poor fit for the full membership the worker must respect the member's ideas while re-establishing the common purpose for the group.
- **Integrating Differences.** When different experiences and thoughts emerge the worker must validate each member's position and help the member to bring their unique elements into service for the group purpose.
- **Promoting Role Flexibility.** When members enter the group they carry past roles with them. Workers often attempt to expand the role set of members so they can adopt roles that will help the group.
- **Side-step Power Struggles.** As factions appear to emerge in the group the worker must find ways to keep the factions from taking control of the group direction or shifting away from the common purpose.
- **Resolve Power Struggles.** When members or factions are competing for influence in the group the worker must be able to resolve the power struggles as "differences" before they elevate into open conflict.

4. **Developing Direction.** As the common purpose emerges and individualistic strivings lose their power the group requires direction so they can achieve their goals. Workers must help them shift from an abstract sense of commonality so they can mobilize action.

- **Focusing Direction.** As common purpose emerges the worker needs to help the members commit to a unified direction and goals.
- **Requirement Identification.** When discussing group direction and goals the worker helps the members understand what will be required of them in achieving these goals.
- **Asset Identification.** When working toward group goals the worker helps the members identify traits and other elements unique to the members that can help the group be successful.
- **Indigenous Leadership.** As requirements and assets are identified the worker helps the members take action on their own behalf rather than relying on the leader to respond to every situation or challenge.