Working at the Intimacy Stage of Development

Two Critical Issues for the Group Members:
- Allowing Vulnerability
  - Can I be myself in this group?
  - I like you, do you like me?
  - Can we talk?
- Deepening Relationships
  - Can we make this better?
  - Are we special, or is it must me?
  - Can you believe it?

At this stage the group has resolved most of the power and control issues and want to test the water before vulnerability. One will notice increased expression of emotion in the group. Things are less volatile and people begin sharing more. When sharing about life with group members, people most often share past issues first followed by present affect. Group members also tend to share feelings about out-of-group issues first and then proceed with in-group affect.

The worker must accomplish two tasks:
1. Fostering cohesion
2. Facilitating emotional expression.

Fostering Cohesion

The worker wants to reinforce feelings of connection, special-ness and shared experience among the members. This can be accomplished through the following strategies.

Using Inclusive Language.

Cohesiveness within the group can be fostered through the semantic language used by the group leader. The use of words such as "we", "our", and "us" promote cohesion while "I", "you" or "yours" interferes with a sense of connectedness.

Preserving Shared Group History and Continuity

The worker can preserve group history and continuity via a number of strategies:
1) The leader can remind the group of previous experiences in the group.
2) The leader can deliberately link the current session to the previous one by referring to an event or discussion that ensued the preceding.
3) The leader can help the group identify or develop symbols of their past experiences.

Reaching For Consensus

The worker periodically seeks consensus on group experiences, direction and agreements to reinforce the shared decisions. One can also reflect on shared experiences in the group to determine if all are experiencing the situation in similar ways (e.g., I think we made that decision very easily, what do you think?)

Checking In
> This strategy provides an opportunity at the beginning of each session for each individual member to have a turn to briefly share the events that have occurred since the preceding session. It is best to refer back to some shared element in the previous group and as the members to reflect on how it affected them during the past week. When using this type of beginning, make sure it doesn't become serial one-on-one conversations. This can be avoided by generalizing comments so they apply to the entire group and inviting group affirmations.

Highlighting Changes in the Group
> At this point in the group development, relationships will begin to change and interactions will be different. It is useful to identify the changes so the members can see how they are progressing. Express some positive affect to reinforce the sharing of emotion.

Facilitating Emotional Expression

To deepen the relationships one often must promote the sharing of affect. As people share feelings they share a vulnerability with each other that deepens interactions and promotes further cohesion. The following strategies are often used.

Identifying the Affect
> Often when people talk about situations, they talk about behavior and interaction rather than affect and thinking. As people speak, the leader can promote disclosures by asking questions or reflecting on the obvious affect in the story.

Highlighting Non-verbal Communication
> Frequently, affect is expressed non-verbally. Leaders scan the group for non-verbal expressions and use process comments to identify the emotional response of the members. Through the process comment, one can invite people to respond to the affect.

Reaching for Feeling Identification
> When a member shares a story, the worker can ask members to identify what the person must be feeling in the situation. This increases identification among the members and develops empathy skills.

Highlighting Shared Emotion
> Workers often ask members to connect with a feeling being expressed by others in the group. This is most useful when group members have similar experiences to that expressed by the member.

Promoting Expressiveness
> When situations arise in the group, workers often insist that people discuss them and take responsibility for their experience in the group.