



Group Beginnings

THEORY

Structuring a group with some common elements at the start of a session will help you organize your group sessions for maximum effectiveness. **Effective beginnings and endings are major determinants of the effectiveness of the group.** In this TIP, guidelines are offered in the way of a checklist to remember important elements of effective group beginnings.

IMPLEMENTATION

Most effective group sessions will include most of the following common elements for effective group beginnings.

For each session, check off the items that you are including in the beginning of your session:

- _____ **Sharing Successes and Challenges:** Make time to allow members to share their successes and challenges during the week. See TIP #4 *Sharing Successes and Setting Agendas* for more detailed ideas on this topic.
- _____ **Feedback from the Last Session:** It is often helpful to tie up loose ends from the last session, get feedback and clarify any issues from the previous session.
- _____ **Do an Informal Mood Check:** Informal mood checks can be in the form of going around and asking group members how they feel today. A more formal way would be to use quick tests such as The Burns Mood Inventory (Burns, 1993, Ten Days To Self Esteem).
- _____ **Homework Review:** The importance of reviewing homework at the beginning of each session cannot be over emphasized. It reinforces the importance of taking the homework seriously and will encourage practice between sessions. You can do this at first with the entire group, which can be followed by some breaking into small groups or pairs to go over the homework in more detail.
- _____ **Agenda Setting:** For each session, state your agenda for the session so members know the psycho-educational topic of the day.
- _____ **Establish Goals:** Within the context of the agenda, each member should consider at least one personal goal they have for the session. Setting goals can be simply done by asking for each member to go around and complete this sentence: For this topic, I would like to learn _____ or improve my skills to: _____.
- _____ **Use Quick Self-Tests:** If you have quick self tests to help set the stage for the day's session, have members fill them out. For example, if the topic for the session is forgiveness, start with TIP #124, *What is Your Forgiveness IQ?*.
- _____ **Take a Mindful Minute:** If you want to incorporate mindfulness in your group, the beginning of the session is a great way to remind members of the importance of practicing mindfulness as you lead a brief breathing exercise, guided imagery, or visualization.

PROCESSING

Each of these elements will bring structure to the group and consistency throughout the group duration. Although each group might not have all the elements suggested above, effective groups will have most of them. Use this checklist as a way to ensure your group is structured for maximum success.