



Seven
**SIMPLE STEPS TO
STARTING YOUR
GROUP**

ONLINE OR IN PERSON

*& the #1 reason clients don't
participate in groups*

So let's start right off with letting you know the **#1 reason clients don't participate in groups**. Popular guesses: fear of judgment, concerns about confidentiality, or client's preference for individual work. Those are all great guesses but the reason clients don't participate is actually something you wouldn't consider:

It's their therapist's beliefs about group work!

That's right, it's true! Our beliefs about group work strongly influence our clients. Think about it....most of our clients develop a strong relationship with us. They have entrusted us with their well-being and their most intimate fears, desires, and stories. If they detect even a minor hesitation in us about the potential helpfulness of group work, they too will feel hesitant. And often we DO have hesitations.

We develop strong connections with our clients and don't want to risk that bond, so we may have a tendency to avoid challenging a client to engage in work that may feel uncomfortable. We may also have internalized many of the myths that are commonly spread about group work.

And, yet, we know the facts. **Research shows that groups are just as effective or more effective than individual therapy**. We need to have the mindset that this is one of THE BEST options for the client and can really be helpful (especially because it can be uncomfortable - that's where change happens).

MORE ON THE PODCAST:

<https://www.artofgroups.com/the-surprising-reason-groups-dont-fill/>

Most of my coaching clients have so many great ideas for groups that they have a real difficulty limiting their options. They want to work with everyone but they end up not starting a group for anyone.

This is why it is ESSENTIAL to pick one type of group to run and commit to it for at least one year.

I know, that feels like a long time, but one of the biggest barriers I see to clinicians getting their groups started is changing their niche a few different times so that they never get the traction they need for a steady stream of referrals AND the increased confidence that comes with the experience of facilitating that group week after week.

Here is an exercise that can help you narrow it down:

- Pick 10 clients (past or present) that you thoroughly enjoyed working with - the type of client that felt like a great “fit” for your style and expertise.
- Write each of their names on a sheet of paper and under each write some themes that the client struggled with or tools that they could use etc.
- Now look for themes.

Most likely there will be a thread or two that connects many of them. Now see if you feel that bit of excitement when you think about offering a group that centers on those themes - **this is important! You want to feel excited, inspired, or motivated to offer this group or you won't enjoy it.** The more passionate about it, the better because that excitement will translate to your clients. However, there has to be a “match” between your excitement for a group and the client's needs.

Try to be specific. For example, in several of my sessions I was working with clients who were increasingly hard on themselves and struggled with practicing self-compassion. They showed a desire to use the tools but many didn't end up following through on their own, so I created a group specifically to support them in learning, experiencing, and practicing self-compassion together.

MORE ON THE PODCAST:

<https://www.artofgroups.com/identifying-your-ideal-group-offering/>

Step #3

MAKE A 'SOFT' OFFER TO YOUR POTENTIAL GROUP MEMBERS

After coming up with your niche (ex. interpersonal process group, self-acceptance and compassion, daughters of narcissistic mothers, social skills group, etc.), you want to casually approach your clients in session about the group offering. You should have at least 3 potential clients for the group in your current caseload.

Using my example of a self-compassion group, I said to my clients: "It seems that it's been hard to practice these exercises on your own. I have a few other clients struggling with the same thing - would you be interested in participating if I formed a group so you could support each other and have some time set aside just for that purpose? I think it could be really helpful."

If they say "yes!" you can inquire further to see when might work best for them. Remember, keep this casual. This may also give you a chance to see any hesitations that the client might have about participating in a group. If you are unsure how to address their concerns, check out the podcast episode.



MORE ON
THE PODCAST:

[http://www.artofgroups.com/
addressing-client-fears-
about-groups](http://www.artofgroups.com/addressing-client-fears-about-groups)

Step #4

SET A DAY/TIME AND IDENTIFY THE TYPE OF GROUP YOU'D LIKE TO OFFER

Identify the type of group you would like to offer (psychoeducational, support, process-oriented, skills based, expressive etc) and then set a day/time.

It is important to get very clear on the purpose and outcomes of the group and the type of group you would like to offer becomes very clear. The type of group will inform the time needed to accomplish the group goals. For example, a support group may be able to accomplish its goals in an hour-long weekly session, while an expressive arts group may need 90 minutes weekly. The goals and type of group you are offering are also important to consider when thinking about the space you will utilize for the group. Will the group meet in person or online? Do you need tables or space for movement?

When you are getting started with groups, you can give your individual clients who you have identified for the group a few potential options and find a common time that works for them. Once you've identified the time, then you can begin to market to other practitioners.



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[http://www.artofgroups.com/
open-vs-closed-time-limited-
vs-ongoing/](http://www.artofgroups.com/open-vs-closed-time-limited-vs-ongoing/)

Step #5

CREATE GROUP INTERVIEW SPOTS AND GROUP AGREEMENT

~> *Don't skip this step!*

The group interview and agreement is THE most important thing you can do to ensure the success of your group.

Research shows that proper group preparation can make all the difference in a client's experience of group work and ultimately the success of the entire group.

In this pre-group interview you will have the chance to build rapport, communicate guidelines, answer questions, address concerns, and allay anxiety. This is also a great time to assess if the member is not a good fit for the group and would be better served in another group.

Hint: Create 30 minute slots during the time of the group - then you'll know they are free during that time. If individual interviews are not practical for the type of group you are offering, then a group informational session at the time the group will meet is a good alternative.

MORE ON THE PODCAST:

<http://www.artofgroups.com/addressing-client-fears-about-groups>



Reach out to your professional contacts and community. Identify other therapists in your area that work with the clients you would like to serve. It is best if they know and trust you, but if not, then take some time to take them to coffee or share information about how the group could help their clients. Be sure to communicate that you will not work with their clients individually and that the group is not meant to replace their services.

It is important to establish a collaborative relationship with your colleagues, so that the group supports the work they are doing or meets a need that they cannot fulfill for their client, yet supports the clinical work they are doing.

Make sure to get a release of information and communicate frequently with other therapists that have referred to your group. This is critical in establishing a network of referral sources and creating better outcomes for your group clients.



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If you plan to close the group, keep it open for the first few weeks to allow additional members to join and then close when you reach your maximum participants or the deadline comes. ***The energy generated by a group that is already started attracts more members.*** Other therapists and clients can feel confident that the group is happening and there is more motivation to start quickly so they don't miss out. This is also great for retention of members who may have committed to the group earlier, since members may lose interest between the time of the pre-group interview and start of the group if it lasts too long.

MORE ON THE PODCAST:

<http://www.artofgroups.com/why-you-should-offer-groups/>



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