

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE OFFENDER GROUPS

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Focal Group Psychotherapy

Domestic Violence Offender Groups

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Table of Contents

[Introduction](#)

[Selection and Screening](#)

[Time and Duration](#)

[Structure](#)

[Goals](#)

[Ground Rules](#)

[Starting the Group](#)

[Ground Rules](#)

[Main Concepts and Skills](#)

[Feelings List](#)

[The Feeling Statement](#)

[Main Interventions](#)

[Check-out Criteria for Measuring Change](#)

[Problems Specific to the Group](#)

[Relapse Prevention](#)

can you spread this dependency around? Whom else can you build relationships with? It's easy to respond by saying that you could form more open relationships with other men—even men in this group, but it's also important to challenge yourself to consider what kinds of thoughts would get in the way of such relationships. What prevents men from being close to one another?"

P. Concept: The Package—Homophobia, Racism, and Sexism

"In this exercise, we are going to work on building some appreciation of how homophobia, racism, and sexism are inseparable and oppress us all. This is a huge topic, and could lend itself to a well-spent, long term of study; we're just going to get a small start.

"In the exercise on male socialization, you learned that the ways in which we rigidly cling to and enforce oppressive gender roles ultimately oppresses all of us. Now we're going to look at oppression more broadly by understanding how homophobia, racism, and sexism are part of one package, inseparable because of their common roots in fear.

"People fear being 'less than' or being victimized. To prove that they are 'better than,' and immune to victimization, they oppress gay people, women, poor people, and people of other races. Some of you may claim not to be homophobic, racist, classist, or sexist; but all of us are stopped by some of

these issues from establishing close relationships or trusting other people. The impulse is to protect yourself from identifying with these groups and, hence, subjecting yourself to the oppression that goes with being gay, nonwhite, poor, or female. Denying your prejudices prevents you from looking at them and working to free yourself from them; and also prevents other people from trusting you. Acknowledging your fears, and listening to gay people's experiences of homophobia, women's experiences of sexism, and other people's experiences of racism, is a way to learn and change.

Homophobia

"Homophobia is the fear of homosexuality, and also reflects a fear of being gay or being perceived as gay. Each of us, even the most stereotypically masculine male (maybe especially the most stereotypically masculine), has feared the consequences of acting outside the prescribed male gender role. Because of this fear, and because we have few accepted outlets for the display of love and affection between heterosexual men in our culture, people oppress gay men (and gay women, too). Sometimes the oppression takes the relatively subtle form of creating stereotypes in your mind about what gay people are like, so that you can easily differentiate yourself from someone who is gay. This can take the form of such unconscious thought as, 'Since I don't lip and like opera, I'm not subject to the kind of treatment gay men get.' Sometimes the oppression is less subtle, and includes such things as

employment and housing discrimination, harassment, and physical abuse. And this oppression doesn't affect just gays: it stops us all from having close relationships with members of the same sex, because we fear being gay or being perceived as gay. It locks us in the male gender role through fear that non-macho behavior will leave any man subject to oppression. By isolating you and increasing your dependency on your partner, it also makes you more prone to violence.

"Think of a time when you were with a best buddy or a loved male family member and felt affectionate toward him. How did you express your affection? How did he respond? What stopped you both from being more expressive? What stopped you at that point is homophobia. It is important that we look at this and how it affects our lives and relationships."

Racism

"Racism is another way in which people attempt to feel different and better than other people and to protect themselves from the oppression those people experience.

"Systematic mistreatment of people of color generates misinformation and ignorance that ultimately sanction racist attitudes, beliefs, and assumptions. These, in turn, become the justification for further mistreatment. It is a vicious cycle.

"There is much to be learned when people are willing, and feel safe enough, to share some of their experiences of racism and its effects. There are some ground rules that help people feel safer about this: for instance, when someone says your behavior is racist, listen—don't argue with them. What other ideas do you have about how to foster communication about racism and prejudice?"

Sexism

"When you believe that your sex is superior to the other one, you are being sexist. The term sexism also refers to the oppression that follows such beliefs.

"At this point, I want to take a minute to acknowledge that this is hard work talking about and looking at issues of sexism, homophobia, and racism. Let's consider how sexism is similar to racism and homophobia, as well as the ways in which it is different.

"In its roots, sexism is conceptually very similar to racism and homophobia, but the stereotypes that accompany sexism may be different. There is also less perspective on this topic in a domestic violence group, since there are no women here. Sexism is also the oldest prejudice, as it has been around since the days of Adam and Eve [or, if you prefer: "since the first men and women roamed the earth."].

"What are some stereotypes you know about that are applied to women? What 'rules of sexism' are used to oppress women? Some examples might include the following:

- All women want to get married and have children; women who don't want children are unnatural.
- A woman should put her husband's and children's needs before her own.
- Women should doubt their own thinking when a man asserts what he believes to be true.
- Feminine women do not act powerful.
- Women do nothing of lasting value: their work disappears.
- Women are weak, confused, and hysterical.
- All women secretly want to be overpowered by a man.

"How have stereotypes affected your attitudes about important women in your life? How have stereotypes affected your behavior toward women?"

Closing Thoughts

"You don't have to be straight to be homophobic—some gays also use stereotypes of out-of-gender role behavior to feel different from 'butch dykes'

or 'queers' to make themselves immune to anti-gay violence or discrimination. You don't have to be white to be racist, middle or upper class to be classist, or male to be sexist.

"Also, things don't divide up so evenly along racial or sexual lines of orientation. Many of us are racially mixed, and many more of us than we might realize fall somewhere other than completely heterosexual on the Kinsey scale. Some of us now live in a different class than the one into which we were born. This causes conflicts about racism, sexism, class identity, and homophobia within each of us, as well as in society."

Q. Concept: Sex

"What attitudes prevail about women and sex? Women may be forced into a rigid role in which they are treated as a 'whore' or a frigid madonna or snow queen. Some women feel pressured to pretend that they don't crave sex or, in order to gratify their partner, that they're enjoying it when they're not. Many women fear that they will be thought unfeminine or overly aggressive if they take the initiative in sexual encounters or communicate their sexual preferences to their partner. Yet these same women may feel that it is their duty to supply sex on demand for their partner, and fear the criticism or withdrawal of affection that may accompany a refusal. Do you think that these conditions get in the way of women enjoying sex? Given the effect on them,

how does it affect your enjoyment of sex?

"What are the conditions that apply for men during sex? Where did you learn the 'rules' about what is and isn't acceptable sexual practice? Why do we continue to enforce and live by these rules? Can you imagine sex being improved by not adhering to them? What is it like to live with the requirements of always being strong, always ready for sex, always taking the initiative, and having permission to always get what you want?"

Main Interventions

Domestic violence offender program counseling does not lend itself to a weekly formula, since self-reporting and the group's response of supportive confrontation is such an important aspect of the treatment. The group facilitators continuously strive to strike a balance between making space for productive group process and problem solving about reported incidents and presenting the needed didactic and structured experiences.

Certain exercises do take precedence, and some naturally follow from others. For example, the time-out exercise comes at the beginning of the program, and is naturally followed by "Recognition of Warning Signs," which answers the question, "When do I take a time-out?" Some lectures or exercises, however, are best presented when they correspond to an identifiable theme in the presentation of one or more group members. The

"Cycle of Violence," for example, is most useful when one or more members are saying that they have nothing to worry about because they are getting along well with their partners.

Self-reporting is part of the session every week. In some weeks, because of the amount of time needed to process the reports of group members, there will be inadequate time to cover even one skill or concept fully. In other weeks, there will be ample time to cover two concepts or skills, in addition to leaving some time for open process.

Different exercises, discussions, and lectures have a different emotional impact on the group; this needs to be taken into consideration as well. In the beginning sessions, when clients are reporting the incidents that brought them into the group and are being held responsible, the mood can be serious and depressed. After a few weeks, when the group is becoming more united and the men are enjoying the group and each other, a discussion such as "Types of Abuse" can bring back a more serious mood again. In each group, it is ideal to have time to process the feelings brought up by the exercises; but this is not always possible, since the priority is always to teach the skills that will stop violent behavior.

Because each session will vary depending on the business at hand, the week-by-week schedule below is only an example: many variations of this

schedule are possible within a 24-week format.

Week 1

Check-in

See Starting the Group.

Skill: Self-Reporting

Intervention 1: Didactic Presentation (See Concepts and Skills section)

Intervention 2: Discussion

Members are prompted to be very specific in their descriptions of their own behavior. Use very concrete questions, such as, "You say that you hit her. What were you feeling just before you did that? Which hand did you hit your partner with? Was it open or closed? What did your partner's face look like? Where were the children? What were you doing with your other hand? Were you wearing that ring? How are you feeling right now?" Attempts to deflect or talk about the partner's behavior are confronted: "It's hard for you to focus on your behavior; but your partner isn't here, and we are interested in talking about is you, how you felt and feel, and what you might do differently in the future."

The group's reactions are important. One common defense mechanism among group members is to cultivate safety by creating distance from the experience of other group members. That is, while some members may say that they relate to another member's story, others may want to focus on differences, especially ways in which the other member is "worse." This is important to interpret.

Example

Facilitator: Who will begin by telling us about the incident that brought you here?

Joe: Sure, I'll go.

Facilitator: Thanks Joe. What I'd like you to do is tell me as specifically as possible about the incident, focusing on what you were feeling and doing before the incident, what you actually did, what you felt during the incident, how and why you stopped, how you felt afterward, and what the consequences were. We'll be helping you to stay focused.

Joe: Okay, right. Well, first, you've got to understand about my wife. See, she's always hurting herself and...

Facilitator: (interrupting) Okay, Joe. Here's one way I'll need to help you focus:

We're not going to be talking or understanding about your wife. This is about you, your feelings, and your behavior. If you'd like to tell us about what you were feeling before the incident, we'd like to hear that.

Joe: Hmmm. Okay, well, I just don't want to seem like such a bad guy... So anyway, we were arguing about something, she was all in my face and I told her to leave—I just said, "Get out of here." So she just kept on and I could feel myself getting pissed.

Facilitator: How did you know you were getting pissed?

Joe: I can always feel the tension in my face.

Facilitator: Good, that's an important warning sign for you. So you could feel yourself getting pissed, then what happened?

Joe: Well, my hand just flew out and hit her. I don't know what happened, but I didn't hit her very hard, and the next thing I knew, she's flying across the room, slamming into the wall. I think she has hollow bones or something. [There's laughter from the group.]

Facilitator: Joe, I'm going to have to help you some more here. First of all, your hand didn't just fly out and hit her. Who's in control of your hands?

Joe: Well, I am of course, but..

Facilitator: (again interrupting) Good. I'll invite you to stop there, and take responsibility for what happened. What happened is that you hit her, and you need to say that and acknowledge your responsibility for it.

Joe: Well, I...

Facilitator: Joe, did you hit her or not?

Joe: Yes, I hit her.

Facilitator: Good. You just took partial responsibility, and that's an important step. Now, I want to help you go the rest of the way. You hit her, and you blame her for flying against the wall. Do you really think she has hollow bones?

Joe: No, I know she doesn't.

Facilitator: I know that you know. Why did she fly across the room and hit the wall?

Joe: Because I hit her that hard.

Facilitator: Good. Thanks Joe. Then what happened?

Joe: Nothing much. The little idiot called the police, they came and arrested me, cost me \$300 plus what this program costs.

Facilitator: Again, Joe, I'm going to apply the rules here. We're not going to be trashing our partners here. You may be mad at her for calling the police, but we're not going to collude with you abusing her in here by referring to her as the "little idiot." And I'd add that she didn't cost you \$300—that's just a way of deflecting. You cost yourself \$300, plus a lot more. Whatever she is, whatever she does, you're responsible for your behavior, and for the consequences. We're going to tell the truth about that in here.

The discussion continues in this admittedly painstaking way until Joe has reached the end of his report. The facilitator then asks Joe what it was like for him to tell the story, and how he is feeling now. Then group members can give Joe feedback about how it was for them to hear it, sticking as closely as possible to their emotional experience.

Note: Due to the critical group-formative nature of this initial exercise, only men who are present at this first group should be allowed to attend the rest of the groups in the cycle. Men who miss the first week should be asked to enroll in a future cycle.

If there's time, add the material below.

B. Skill: Time-out

Intervention 1: Didactic Presentation (See Concepts and Skills section)

Intervention 2: Discussion

When the time-out is presented, men invariably have reasons why it would not work for them, or why they wouldn't want to do it. These reasons that surface are the very entrenched ideas these men have about their rights and needs for power and control.

The facilitator should ask the men to practice saying the words to the time-out during the session, and afterward should ask them to specify when they should have taken the time-out. By trouble-shooting in advance, it is possible to iron out any problems that might come up when taking a real time-out.

The times when men initially say that they would take a time-out are typically too late. Tell them that the key operative in the time-out phrase, "I'm beginning to feel angry," is "beginning." Especially at the beginning of a domestic violence offenders' program, clients need to play it very safe, taking time-outs when the danger level is low. The time to take a time-out is not the second before a man hits his partner, but when he first notices his muscles tightening or his voice rising.

Explore with the group whether members believe that the time-out could work for them. It's common for men to react as if they're being asked to back down from a fight. Taking a time-out may feel like backing down. Men's

presented reactions can vary from "I wouldn't go out in the rain" to "It's my house, she should leave" to "But what if she says something that really gets my goat as I'm going out the door?" What is underlying all such reactions is the fact that the time-out forces men to let go of the power struggle, at least temporarily letting the partner win. It's important in your discussion to raise this phenomenon to a conscious level and get members' commitments to practicing the time-out anyway.

The time-out is reviewed in some form nearly every week, either as part of a didactic presentation or during the discussion of self-reported incidents.

Check-out

See Group Process section.

Week 2

Check-in

Review Time-out

Intervention 2: Discussion

Explore how and whether group members successfully used the time-out or practiced it with their partners

Check-out

Week 3

Check-in

C. Skill: Recognition of Warning Signs

Intervention 3: Guided Visualization (See Concepts and Skills section)

Intervention 2: Discussion

Group members report on what they noticed, and their warning signs are written on the board or flip chart in categories. Use the examples below if group members are having trouble getting started:

Sensory

Tension in arms, shoulders, chest

Heat sensations or chills

Seeing red

Ringling in ears

Faster heartbeat and breathing

Shallow breathing

Thoughts

Specific words ("You bitch," "shit")

"This is not fair."

"Somebody's gotta do something."

"I'll fix you."

Actions

Pacing

Stalking

Being in partner's personal space

Shouting

Being very quiet

Individuals in the group will relate to the warning signs of the other

men. As a group, they will come up with many more than if they had done this exercise individually. When the exercise is completed and all the warning signs are noted, the men should be encouraged to write down those that are most important to them and to keep these for reference.

It's important to take time to process the feelings brought up by this exercise, as it takes men back to their original incident, stimulating fear, shame, and guilt. By this time in their therapy, the men have had time to rally their defenses, distancing themselves from the incident, telling themselves that they are getting help and that things are better now. This exercise—appropriately—debunks that notion.

Occasionally, a man may report a lapse in memory or consciousness during an incident of abuse. For example, at one moment he was arguing at the top of the stairs, and the next thing he knew, his partner was on the floor on the landing below with a broken arm: the man doesn't remember what happened in between.

Such cases are sometimes difficult to assess. It's possible that the man indeed experienced dissociation or has a multiple personality. This is the case more often than many clinicians realize, since many offenders were victims of serious abuse as children. The lapse may also be a function of the man's denial—or may be an outright lie.

In any case, identifying the warning signs that precede a "blackout" will be helpful to someone who has experienced such incidents in order to avert them in the future.

Review Time-out

Intervention 2: Discussion

Review the concept of a time-out. Explore what, if anything, is getting in the way of practicing time-outs.

Check-out

Week 4

Check-in

D. Concept: Cycle of Violence

Intervention 1: Didactic Presentation (See Concepts and Skills section)

Intervention 2: Discussion

Have members identify their particular behaviors that correspond to the different points of the cycle.

Check-out

Week 5

Check-in E. Concept: Emotional Funnel

Intervention 1: Didactic Presentation (See Concepts and Skills section)

Intervention 2: Discussion

Check-out

Week 6

Check-in

F. Skill: Three-Breath Technique

This technique is best taught when a man in the group has been asked how he feels or how he felt when something happened, and is unable to identify his feelings. The facilitator then describes the three-breath technique and asks the man to try it.

Intervention 1: Didactic Presentation (See Concepts and Skills section)

Intervention 3: Guided Visualization

Intervention 2: Discussion

G. Skill: Feeling Statement

Intervention 1: Didactic Presentation (See Concepts and Skills section)

Intervention 2: Discussion

The facilitator should encourage the expression of feelings in the group. For many men, the difficulty isn't merely one of learning to give expression to feelings, but goes much deeper, involving a lack of training in even recognizing a feeling when it comes up. Before men can express their feelings, they must learn to acknowledge and experience them. Explore these difficulties with the group.

Check-out

Week 7

Check-in

H. Skill: Goal Setting

Intervention 1: Didactic Presentation (See Concepts and Skills section)

Intervention 2: Discussion

The group is divided into dyads, and one copy of the handout is passed out to each member (see Concepts and Skills section). Each dyad establishes and writes two goals (on the form) for each member. While the group is working, the facilitators should check in with each dyad, giving assistance when needed.

When the dyads are finished, each man reads at least one of his goals aloud to the group (some members may want to set some private goals). This provides group members with some alternative suggestions for goals, and establishes a basis for supporting each other by checking in about their progress.

Review Time-out

Intervention 2: Discussion

Explore what, if anything, is getting in the way of using time-outs and taking practice time-outs.

Check-out

Week 8

Check-in

I. Concept: Responsibility

Intervention 1: Didactic Presentation (See Concepts and Skills section)

Intervention 2: Discussion

The presentation and discussion of this concept works best when it is raised in the context of a man's avoiding responsibility as he reports an incident. The more group members can participate in this intervention, the better. Part of what you hope to accomplish if you're doing your best work is to teach men to organize a social system—for which the group serves as a laboratory—to confront abuse in a way that supportively holds men accountable for their behavior. That is, men in the group are at once creating a tool—the group culture or environment—and a result. This means that they both assume greater ownership in the concept and learn how to create relationships, institutions, and a society in which abuse is no longer the norm.

This concept can be referred to throughout the course of the group by the facilitator—or preferably by group members—any time a man is avoiding responsibility.

Check-out

Week 9

Check-in

Review Feeling Statement

Intervention 2: Discussion

Ask group members to discuss their understanding of the use of the feeling statement.

Intervention 4: Role-Play

Use a group member's reported incident to practice using feeling statements.

Intervention 5: Moderated Group Process

Use moderated group process to practice using the feeling statement with current feelings in the group.

J. Concept: Gender Roles and Male Socialization

Intervention 1: Didactic Presentation (See Concepts and Skills section)

Intervention 2: Discussion

Men like answering the questions about what men are supposed to be

like. The object of this exercise is not to demean men—so it is fine if there are some positive qualities on this list, too.

In an articulate, verbal group, after making the list of positive human qualities, the facilitator can simply ask what the men notice about these two lists. If, in the facilitator's judgment, the men wouldn't be able to respond, or if the group doesn't come up with a complete list, the facilitator can continue with the didactic material.

Check-out

Week 10

Check-in

Review Goal Setting

Intervention 2: Discussion

Review by having group members check in with each other about their progress in working toward their chosen goals. This can be done by the group as a whole, or in dyads.

Review Time-out

Intervention 2: Discussion

Again, it is important to check in about actual time-outs and practice ones, identifying and confronting resistance and problems.

Check-out

Week 11

Check-in K. Skill: Empathic Listening

Intervention 1: Didactic Presentation (See Concepts and Skills section)

Intervention 2: Discussion

Have a group member describe how empathic listening might have worked for him during an incident.

Intervention 4: Role-Play

Next, set up a role-play in which two group members have a disagreement. One is the speaker, and the other is the listener. The speaker begins by making a provocative statement about the disagreement, and the listener, coached by the facilitator, only uses active listening skills. This is a good skill to present when there is a real disagreement in the group.

L. Concept: The Abusive Behavior Package

Intervention 1: Didactic Presentation (See Concepts and Skills section)

Intervention 2: Discussion

The purpose of this exercise is to expand the definition of abuse to include all behavior that has the effect of controlling or hurting someone else; or behavior that has this intention.

Start the discussion by asking that clients report on the kinds of abuse that they have perpetrated or by which they've been victimized. Then write the following column headings on the board or flip chart: Physical, Emotional, Verbal, and Financial. As the men mention instances of abuse, the facilitator writes them under the appropriate column (some instances may fit under more than one category).

The important thing is to get as large a list as possible. Discuss the men's feelings about contemplating so many types of abusive behavior.

Check-out

Week 12

Check-in

M. Concept: Victim and Victimizer

Intervention 2: Discussion

The facilitator divides the group into dyads, and instructs them to take turns discussing a time or incident in which each man was a victim of violence. The speaker is to stick to this topic, describing exactly what happened and what it was like; and the listener is to participate only by asking questions that will clarify what happened and what the speaker's emotional experience was.

This discussion should be given about five to ten minutes. The facilitators should move between dyads, helping and coaching as needed. After the allotted time is up, the roles within dyads should switch. When all the men have had a chance to do this exercise, they should be given another topic to discuss: they can tell about an incident from the same period when they themselves were violent.

After group members have had a chance to discuss this topic, the group should be reconstituted as a whole. A more open conversation should be initiated around what the exercise was like emotionally, what the men learned about their violence and its roots, and what the consequences of violence are.

Intervention 1: Didactic Presentation (See Concepts and Skills section)

Check-out

Week 13

Check-in

N. Concept: Family of Origin

Intervention 1: Didactic Presentation (See Concepts and Skills section)

Intervention 2: Discussion

Note: This may require more than one week. Group members gain more insight into the roots of their violence and the origins of their assumptions about power and control. This exercise is, of necessity, somewhat superficial—men, particularly if they have never been in therapy before, have a lot to say on this subject. However, the exercise can still be powerful by stimulating the curiosity of group members about how they continue to be affected by their upbringing. In addition, this can be a healing way to experience anger and forgiveness, concluding with empathy for their parents.

After the final speaker answers the last question, the facilitator asks him to speak in his own voice again, specifically to talk for a minute about what

the exercise was like for him, and what he learned about his current relationship to power, control, and violence.

Check-out

Week 14

Check-in 0. Concept: Dependency and Isolation

Intervention 1: Didactic Presentation (See Concepts and Skills section)

Intervention 2: Discussion

Ask the group to discuss their reactions to the didactic material, and how they could respond to the problem.

Review Time-out

Intervention 2: Discussion

Again, discuss resistance to, and problems with, taking real and practice timeouts.

Check-out

Week 15

Check-in

R Concept: The package—Homophobia, Racism, and Sexism

Intervention 1: Didactic Presentation (See Concepts and Skills section)

Intervention 2: Discussion

Discuss each of the three issues below separately, following the relevant didactic presentation.

1. Have the men discuss how homophobia may have gotten in the way of their relationships with other men.

2. Many domestic violence offenders' groups are multiracial. The balance of the group will depend on a number of social factors, including police response to domestic violence in the various cultural communities in your area, what services are available, and whether the court racially discriminates in terms of who gets diversion programs versus jail terms.

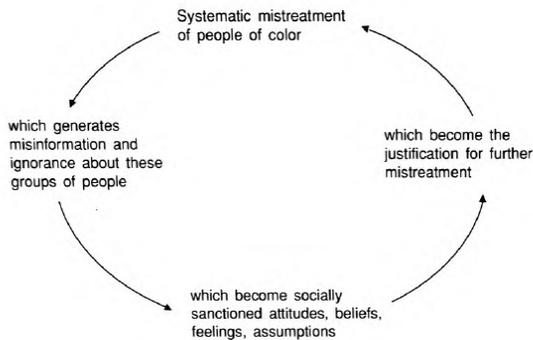
Dealing with racism directly in the group makes it safer for everyone, and is especially important when the group is led by Caucasian facilitators. Racism should always be dealt with—both as part of this exercise and whenever it crops up in the group process.

The facilitator might open the discussion by drawing on the board the diagram on the next page and asking for the men's reactions.

3. Next ask if men feel safe enough to share more of their feelings of anger, fear, or isolation in the group; ask what would make the group safer. There should be consensus about safety before proceeding. It's important that men not be railroaded into saying that they feel safe enough if they really don't.

When agreement is reached, some questions for discussion include:

- How have you been hurt by racism?
- What stereotypes about your race make it hard for you to believe that you can stop acting violently?
- From where and whom did you learn about racism?
- What fears and beliefs did those people have?
- What fears and attitudes have kept you from getting closer to people of your own or other races?
- What have you noticed about your own or other men's racism in this group?



Intervention 4: Role-Play

After the initial didactic presentation on sexism, set up a role-play in groups of three clients: one group member plays the part of a husband confronting his wife about not having dinner ready for him. The other client plays the wife, and must follow the rules described in the didactic section. Another group member plays the woman's conscience, chastising her when she fails to follow the socially imposed rules for female behavior.

After the role-play, the men should discuss what feelings the wife and husband had, and what they sacrificed through rigid adherence to the rules.

At this point, the facilitator should ask the group how men and women learn these rules, and why they keep following and enforcing them. "What attitudes do we have and what behaviors do we practice that reinforce

sexism?"

Check-out

Week 16

Check-in

Review Goal Setting

Intervention 2: Discussion

Have group members check in with each other about their progress in working toward their chosen goals. This can be done by the group as a whole or in dyads.

Review Feeling Statement

Intervention 2: Discussion

Have a group member or group members review the concept of the feeling statement, including how and why to use it.

Intervention 5: Moderated Group Process

Process feelings in the room by coaching members in using the feeling

statement.

Check-out

Week 17

Check-in Review Time-out

Intervention 2: Discussion

Any remaining blocks to taking the time-out should be discussed at this point. If members are still having a problem with this, they should be confronted directly.

Review Feeling Statement

Intervention 2: Discussion

Review the feeling statement, and discuss incidents where it could have been, or was, used.

Check-out

Week 18

Check-in Q. Concept: Sex

Intervention 1: Didactic Presentation (See Concepts and Skills section)

Intervention 3: Role-Play

Select a group of four clients: one client plays the man, a second plays his partner, and the third and fourth, respectively, speak for traditional male and female expectations about acceptable sexual practice. Interrupting to keep the dialogue on target, have the female partner express her sexual needs or preferences or take the initiative prior to a sexual encounter. The clients representing expectations should react to what she's said. Then the male partner responds, in effect taking sides either with the woman or with traditional expectations. This exercise allows clients to recognize that they have a choice when it comes to their attitudes about acceptable sexual practice; that there is a whole range of possible responses. When the argument is talked out, have the male and female partners switch roles. Repeat with another group of four if time allows.

Check-out

Week 19

Check-in Review Empathic Listening

Intervention 2: Discussion

Review the skill of empathic listening by having a group member explain how it works, and how he has used it. Instruct other group members to give him feedback.

Intervention 5: Moderated Group Process

Coach group members in using empathic listening as a way of hearing each other's expressions of their feelings.

Check-out

Week 20

Check-in Review

Write all concepts and skills headings on the board. Group members have the opportunity to ask for clarification of any items.

Check-out

Week 21

Check-in Review

Self- and peer review: group members review how they have changed

individually, and how the group has changed over the past 20 weeks. This is an opportunity to discuss any feelings about these changes. The facilitators should keep the discussion focused on feelings and specific behavior changes on the part of the men. For example, it's fine to talk about the disappointment associated with the fact that their

partners may not have changed, but it's unproductive to spend a lot of time talking in detail about what things about the partner or the relationship have not changed.

Example

Jose: Well, for me, this group has been just great. I've learned some great new tools to be intimate, but I can't use them all because Bill just isn't that interested in talking. Yesterday, I fired off a couple of good feeling statements and he just looked up from the carburetor he was cleaning and said, "So? What kind of a reply do you want from me?" I think he should come to this group now?

Facilitator: Sounds like you're disappointed about the limitations of this work.

Jose: No, I think it's been great, but he has to change now.

Maurice: Sorry, but we've observed that our partners don't have to change.

Jose: I know, I know. Yeah, I guess I am disappointed.

Facilitator: Sounds like you've been doing some good work yourself in your relationship, though. Would you like to say any more about your disappointment?

Jose: Well, I would, but I don't know what to say. I guess I'm disappointed because

when we were up against my limitations in the relationship, I came here. Now we're up against his, and we're stuck.

Facilitator: You're stuck?

Jose: Yeah. Like we can't go any further.

Max: I know what he's talking about. It's like we got a taste in here of what closeness can be like, and now we have to go back to our partners every night where there isn't the same level of closeness as in here. It's sad.

Facilitator: This is a big change we're noticing about you, Max. You're sad instead of angry.

Max: Great. Thanks a lot.

Facilitator: It doesn't seem like such a great trade-off to you?

Max: As a matter of fact, no.

Facilitator: Sounds like you're mad at me... Can you say more?

Max: No, I'm not mad at you. It's just... I don't know, [pause]

Maurice: Maybe I can help. This is scary, too. Maybe I have to leave my partner to get the kind of closeness I want.

Jose: Yes! That's right. It's scary alright. Here is this person who I've idolized and abused in the same week, who has put up with me for five years, and now I'm wondering if I still want to be with him.

Facilitator: Max, is that what was up for you, too?

Max: Yeah. I think so.

Facilitator: So, although we see some changes we feel proud of and happy about,

there is a sad, scary side to those changes, too. How about some things that we haven't changed that we still need to?

Check-out

Week 22

Check-in

Review Goal Setting

Intervention 2: Discussion

Revisit goals by having group members check in with each other about their progress in working toward their chosen goals; have them set and commit to new goals to achieve after they leave the group. Staying free of violence is a life-long process, and clients will have to continue practicing some interventions for the rest of their lives. Explore their feelings about this. Some men might be encouraged to make reenrollment a goal; others might be ready for individual therapy or some other type of group therapy. Some may prefer to commit to doing practice timeouts. Unlike the earlier goal-setting exercise, this one is more effective if done by the group as a whole.

Check-out

Week 23

Check-in Review Empathic Listening Review Feeling Statement

Intervention 5: Moderated Open Process

Reinforce skills and process termination by focusing communication using these two techniques. Discuss clients' feelings about leaving the group and each other.

Check-out

Week 24

Check-in

Review Empathic Listening

Review Feeling Statement

Intervention 5: Moderated Open Process

In this session, the facilitator adds that before the end of the group, clients must offer each other individual expressions of appreciation, preferably something a client will miss about that individual.

Check-out

Check-out Criteria for Measuring Change

Unfortunately, no one can predict with absolute certainty whether or not a batterer will re-offend. What is most important is that clients and partners understand clearly that a "cure" for battering is not available. With this in mind, let us look at some ways in which facilitators can assess the likelihood of change for individuals in the group.

One way that change can be assessed is through the use of measurable criteria for program completion. Basic criteria should include a demonstrated knowledge of the skills and concepts taught in the group, group participation, and a cessation of the violent behavior. In assessing the men for these criteria, it's generally true that the more concrete and quantifiable the means of assessment, the more accurate will be the results. For example, if you want to verify a man's willingness to practice time-outs, you would be better served by having him phone in two practice timeouts per week to a phone machine in your office, rather than relying on his self-report of weekly practice.

Another helpful tool for assessing change is the "partner contract." The facilitator can get a very clear picture of a man's progress in stopping his abusive behavior by talking to the partner, after obtaining a signed release of information from the client. Batterers do not exist in a void. The absent

victims deserve support, education, and protection while their partners are in treatment, and their voices need to be heard. An unfortunate reality is that a man may come to group from week to week reporting great success and transformation while continuing his battering behavior behind closed doors. Facilitators need a complete picture of the abuse in order to provide the best treatment possible for their clients.

While re-offenses are disheartening for client and facilitator alike, it is important to keep in mind the larger picture, that, in fact, batterers' groups help reduce the violence visited by men on their partners. Facilitators are increasingly supported in their work by a legal system, which has begun holding men accountable for their violent behavior. The most effective tools to ensure high success rates with clients are a well-constructed program and an open flow of information between all parties involved, including partners and, in the case of court-referred clients, probation officers.

Problems Specific to the Group

Working with this population raises problems for facilitators that should be examined closely before undertaking this work. Motivation is always an issue for batterers. Clients who are in treatment under court-mandate or who are participating as a last resort to save a failing relationship may be in denial about their problem. These clients are generally more

interested in their goal (not going to jail, not losing their wife) than in owning and changing their violent behavior. They can be a drain on a group's energy, as the facilitators continually confront those clients' blaming, denial, and accompanying anger. One way in which these clients can deal with such issues before entering group treatment is through short-term individual counseling. In these sessions, men can be given an opportunity to vent their rage and frustration and to own responsibility for their violence. This counseling can continue until you feel that the client is ready to participate in a group.

Transference and counter-transference present special problems with this client population. Potential group leaders should realize that they will be dealing with high levels of rage that will test their capacity for empathy and caring. Some facilitators will find the things these men have done to be so abhorrent that they don't seem deserving of caring and forgiveness. If a facilitator has unresolved personal issues with abuse and violence, it will probably be difficult for him to work with these men.

These clients are used to controlling and asserting power through force. You, as facilitator, will be challenged to set limits for, and to confront, men who may never have been confronted before. The ability to keep your own feelings in check and not get "hooked" by the client's inevitable attempts to control and manipulate you are essential qualities for doing this work.

Clients may see you as part of the system; and they may feel that you are invading their private space, namely the realm of their family. They may feel that you are challenging their authority to lord over these families as men have for centuries. The fact is, you will be doing these things and, as a result, you may not be seen as the loving, caring professional you know yourself to be. You will need to ask yourself whether you can be comfortable with such clients before entering this exhausting, exacting, and exciting work.

Relapse Prevention

As stated earlier in this chapter, there are no "cures" for abusive behavior. It's important to convey to both client and partner that any decisions made about their future relationship should be made with this fact in mind. However, men who do re-offend should be encouraged to seek treatment; remind men in the final weeks of group therapy that changing violent or abusive behavior is a lifelong commitment that requires continuous work.

Resistance

Male domestic violence offenders are resistant to changing a status quo that gives them power and control over their partners. Paradoxically, they may resist by denying their own behavior while looking down on other men

who exhibit the same objective behaviors. Working with such resistance is the cornerstone of domestic violence work.

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