



REFERENCES

Group Therapy on Post-Secondary Campuses

What is Group Therapy?

“Group therapy is a form of psychotherapy in which one or two therapists work with a number of clients simultaneously.”¹

Group therapy spaces can be a place where post-secondary students come together to share their concerns, gain a better understanding of their situation, and to learn from and with each other.⁴ In this setting, “members learn not only to understand themselves and their own issues but also become therapeutic helpers for other group members.”⁴

Group therapy typically involves:



10-12 members



Meeting for 1-2 hours, weekly or bi-weekly (every two weeks)



Discussion of a specific issue (depression, anxiety, academic stress, transition to post-secondary, etc.)

Group therapy can also be:



Structured as a drop-in format (i.e., no set number of weeks or requirement to attend all or most sessions in a particular time period)



Offered in-person or virtually



Used alongside or in conjunction with individual therapeutic approaches

What are the Different Kinds of Group Therapy?



Process-Oriented

› Focuses on interpersonal experiences between group members

› Often based on a shared issue (i.e., a specific mental health concern such as anxiety) or a shared identity (i.e., racialized or 2SLGBTQIA+ students)

› Facilitators’ role is to manage the conversation and ensure a safe environment for the participants

› Focuses on a specific topic, such as Dialectical Behavioural Therapy (DBT), Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), or eating disorders

› Goal is to learn about a topic and gain relevant skills that can be utilized outside of the group setting

› Facilitator plays a large role in directing the conversation and instructing on relevant material throughout the process

Benefits and Drawbacks

BENEFITS:

Potentially less wait times for students to access support

Lower-cost alternative for schools seeking to provide support to large student populations

Provides structured and routine support

Can assist students with community building and reduce feelings of isolation

Improve communication skills

Participants may feel validated hearing that their concerns are echoed by a group of their peers

Learn from the successes of other group members³

DRAWBACKS:

Some students may not feel comfortable sharing in a group environment ²

Some students may need more specific, specialized one-on-one support to meet their needs

Conflict within the group (personality clashes, bullying, harassment, etc.) could lead to a lack of group cohesion and increased conformity

Confidentiality cannot always be guaranteed

Date and time of group may not work with some participant's schedule

Group Therapy in the Post-Secondary Environment

Many campuses across Ontario are already leveraging this intervention to serve students across a variety of topics. Some institutions offer these sessions on an ad-hoc basis (determined by the immediate needs of their students) while others have more robust offerings that remain consistent each year. Below you will find some examples of group therapy services on campuses.

George Brown College | Wellness Skill-Building Groups

“Learn techniques to help you better manage your thoughts, behaviours, and emotions in a supportive community of other students.”

Algonquin College | Group Counselling & Peer-Led Mental Health and Wellness Groups

“Group counselling sessions are offered on a variety of topics to help you develop skills to manage your mental health concerns and improve mental wellness. Group counselling boosts your skills, coping strategies, and support system by providing a safe, supportive environment where you can share your experiences. It enhances your connection to others and provides you with a variety of approaches and perspectives to help you deal with challenges.”

Toronto Metropolitan University - Group Counselling - Student Wellbeing

“Sometimes group counselling is the best way to address certain personal issues rather than through individual appointments. At the Centre for Student Development and Counselling, we offer a number of group programs on topics ranging from managing stress and anxiety to enhancing personal relationships.

All groups are free, led by trained counsellors, and last for one to two hours. Groups take place in a confidential environment on campus, or are offered through virtual appointments.”

University of Toronto Mississauga – Groups & Workshops

“Groups & Workshops are powerful vehicles for change. When we participate in a group with others who are living with similar concerns, we begin to realize that we are not alone in our struggles. We explore and learn new skills, practicing these in the safety of the group. Groups can be an empowering experience; feeling the support of the facilitator(s) and fellow group members can increase our motivation and energy to create the change we want for ourselves.”

York University | Support Groups | Division of Students

“Facilitated by trained counsellors, our SCHW [Student Counselling, Health & Wellbeing] support groups offer safer spaces for you to express yourself and share experiences alongside fellow students at York. During these virtual sessions, you can feel free to participate as much or as little as you prefer.”

University of Guelph Therapy Groups | Student Wellness

“Therapy groups at the University of Guelph can offer professional support over a longer duration and peer support from others experiencing similar challenges. Groups may be offered virtual and/or in-person. When running virtual they will be done using Microsoft Teams. “