


I WANT TO START A GROUP

A Step-By-Step Guide for Designing and
Implementing Your Own Group Therapy
Program for Children and Adolescents





Director, Dr. Deborah Pontillo, Ph.D

Director of **SDKF** (est. 2005) & **San Diego Behavior Solutions** (est 2021)

Child and Adolescent Clinical Psychologist
Development, Behavior, and Learning
Specialist

Voluntary Assistant Clinical Professor, Dept.
of Psychiatry, School of Medicine, UCSD

Site/Clinical Supervisor at Alliant
International University
Clinical Supervisor for Alliant Educational





Our SDKF Team

Clinical Psychologists

LMFTs

Behavior Interventionists (BCBAs)

Educational Psychology (M.Ed.) specialists

Educational Therapist

Doctoral (Psy.D.) Interns, Alliant University

Social/Emotional Learning (SEL) Curriculum Specialists





We are a collaborative team of 13 interdisciplinary clinicians who are committed to maximize the developmental potential of children, and to support their families, teachers, and caregivers

More About SDKF...



Developmental Screens and Evaluations
Teacher Trainings/Professional
Development
Psychotherapy for Kids, Teens, and Families
In-Home Behavior intervention, Inclusion
Support, and ERP for OCD
Learning Disability Assessment and
Academic Interventions
Parent Coaching and Education





Our Group Services

Social Skills Groups
Social Pairings
ADHD Group
Postpartum Support Group
Mentorship program
Ready, Set, Kindergarten
Social Anxiety Group
ASD Parent Support Group
ASD Parent Buddy Program



My Goals Today!

GUIDE

- I. To provide you a **Step-By-Step** guide on how to bring your passion and unique clinical expertise from the individual to a group format so you can start a group of your own
- II. To show you how to adapt your individual therapeutic modalities to groups (e.g. CBT, DBT, skills-based, etc.)

PROVIDE

- I. Provide you a list of workbooks, etc to use for your groups
- II. If there's time, a few examples at the end

Please insert your Questions into the Text Box- I will answer at the end!
Questions are welcome on any topic, population , etc!

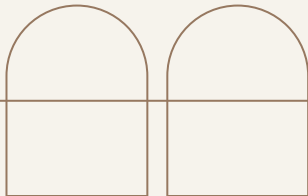




Just because you don't feel **CONFIDENT**, doesn't mean you aren't **COMPETENT**!

REMEMBER - the relationships the kids/teens/ parents/clients make in group is often the biggest benefit!

- I. Even if you feel you don't have the expertise (yet!) to run a group, just the group format itself is therapeutic!
- II. Kids/teens/parents often make connections and create relationships /support networks outside of group
- III. Parents and children often report feeling that they aren't the only one with a certain challenge or problem
- IV. There is no failed attempt!





A 5 Step Guide for Starting your own Group!

Step 1:

Choose Your Group

Focus/Presenting Problems and Age Range

Try to keep age ranges to relatable developmental levels (e.g. 13-17 years is too broad; 12-14, and 15-17 makes more sense developmentally.)

Limit Your Scope

Try to limit your scope so it isn't too broad, and group members can have shared goals. Too narrow means not enough group members!
(e.g. Social Anxiety; Depression/Dysthymia? Social skills? Emotional Regulation skills? Eating/Body Dysmorphia?)

Your Expertise

Start in a clinical area where you feel **COMPETENT** in an individual therapy context.





Step 2: Choose your Exclusion Criteria and Assess/Screen Registrants

Step 2: Continued...

- I. What behaviors would detract from your group? E.g. defiance, eloping, continually off-task, etc.
- II. What diagnoses may not lend itself to relate to the groups (e.g. our Teen ASD Support group vs. our typical Teen Process Group - Social communication, self awareness, insight and perspective taking was different, so we made two different groups)
- III. Any diagnoses you feel less competent in handling in a group format? (e.g. recent suicide attempts, ongoing/current self-harm, Borderline/Cluster B patients).
- IV. Any traits or qualities you feel would be difficult in group? Resistance to feedback? Anger outbursts? Socially avoidant/may not come?

Step 3: Choose your Structure

- I. More open-ended? Support Group/Process Group
- II. Skills -based? Curriculum eg. zones of regulation?
- III. Psychoeducational? Parenting - pick a topic for each group; present and/or Q and A
- IV. For a children's group - How will you structure parent communication/feedback? Parent session (s); feedback forms, etc.
- V. Length of group - 60 - 90 mins usually ok!



Step 4: Choose your Format/Content

MODALITY

- CBT?
- DBT?
- Group Process Therapy
- Other therapeutic modality?
- How do you want to introduce an activity/topic?

EXAMPLES

Examples: 1 - 2 CBT worksheets; An Activity with a Desired Goal per session(e.g. turn-taking, good sportsmanship); 5 insight-oriented questions - have each teen choose to answer one)

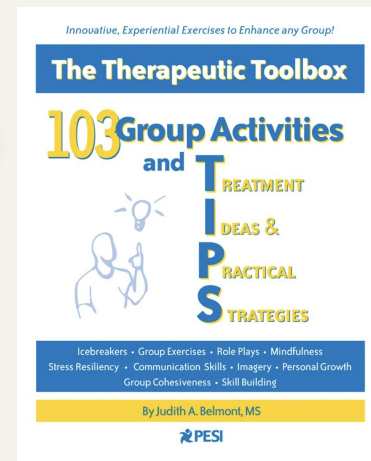
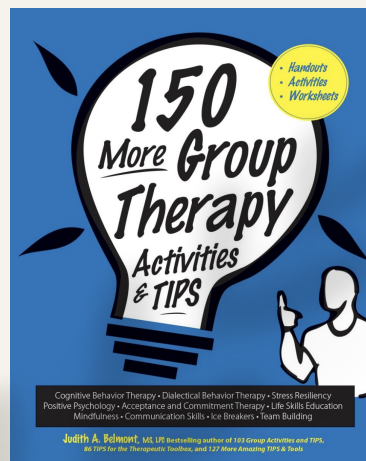
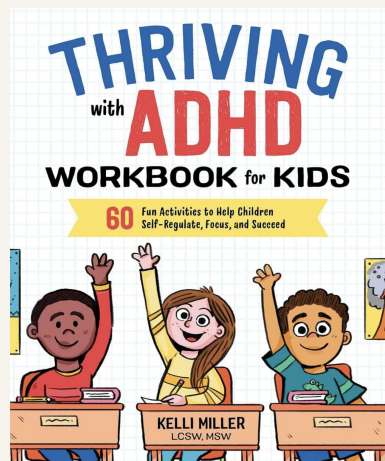
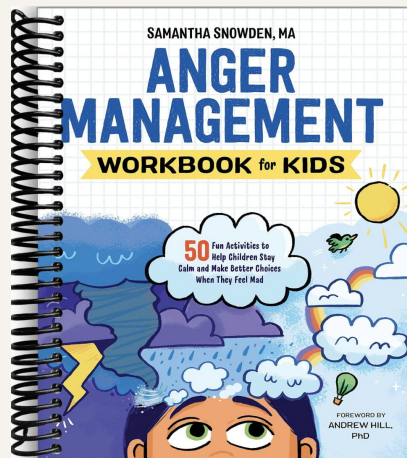


Step 5: Set your Group Rules

- Set Group Rules to discuss with children/teens based on developmental level
- Older children (12 and up) it's ok to have them sign an agreement on group rules; Parents too
- Once you have established group rules, it is important to consistently reinforce them to ensure you maintain a safe, supportive group environment.

Examples: Behaviors-No interrupting, raise your hand, No shouting etc.; Confidentiality is imperative - the 'sanctuary of secrets'; No drugs/alcohol/sex; No invalidating, hurtful, or negative comments to peers, etc.

Resources to Utilize for Groups



LEARNING ACT for GROUP TREATMENT

AN ACCEPTANCE *and* COMMITMENT THERAPY
SKILLS TRAINING MANUAL *for* THERAPISTS



*Includes downloadable bonus WORKSHEETS, EXPERIENTIAL EXERCISES, and
MEDITATION SCRIPTS to help clinicians apply the ACT core processes to group settings*

DARRAH WESTRUP, PHD | M. JOANN WRIGHT, PHD

Group Exercises FOR Adolescents

THIRD EDITION

A manual for therapists, school counselors, & spiritual leaders



SUSAN CARRELL

Copyrighted Material



CBT

WORKBOOK for KIDS

40+

Fun Exercises and Activities to Help
Children Overcome Anxiety & Face Their Fears
at Home, at School, and Out in the World



HEATHER DAVIDSON
Psy.D, BCN



**San Diego Kids
First Group
Examples**



Our Social Skills Groups - GOALS

Social Communication

Turn-taking, not interrupting,
sharing thoughts/feelings,
listening skills

Self-Regulation

Learning to identify feelings in
self or others , learning to
communicate and self-manage

Perspective Taking

Understanding how others in the
group think/ feel and 'why' (social
reasoning)

Self-Awareness

How am I doing? Am I meeting
my own goals for behavior?

Flexibility

Changing the rules, playing a
different way, collaboration,
taking direction, switching gears,
transitions





Our Social Skills Groups Format:

One Goal per session (although any skill seen is reinforced)

90 minutes for older children; 60 minutes for younger children

1. Greetings
2. Talk about the goal with the kids to ensure understanding
3. Review the Rules
4. Play a game/activity to reinforce the skills
5. Reinforce all skills observed
6. How did I do? (encourage at least 2 positives for every 'negative' self-reflection.
7. Compliment a friend/Conclude on a positive note!



Our ADHD group - Modality: The Zones of Regulation

We use this tool across many of our groups, and adapt for all ages:

- I. Feelings are associated with colors on a scale
- II. Children learn to identify the 'middle ground' usually starting with themselves, before they apply to others
 - III. Helps with the o-60 phenomenon (self-regulation)
 - IV. Helps with communicating feelings to others
- V. Helps with social motivation - I care what others feel, sometimes I just don't know unless it's pointed out to me
- VI. Helps with self-awareness " I get frustrated when' , 'i can feel better by...'



Thank You!

Deborah Pontillo Ph.D.

Director, San Diego Kids First & San Diego Behavior Solutions

www.sdkidsfirst.com

858-692-4187

contact@sdkidsfirst.com