**Ways of Getting the Most
from Your Group Experience**

**Corey & Corey**

How can your get the most from a group experience? How can you maximize your learning? We offer some recommendations below that you can apply both to yourself as a member and to teaching others about groups.

 1. Recognize that trust is not something that “just happens” in a group; you have a role in creating this climate of trust. If you are aware of anything getting in the way of a sense of safety, share your hesitations with the group.

 2. Commit yourself to getting something from your group by focusing on your personal goals. Before each meeting, make time to think about how you can get involved and think about what personal con­cerns you want to explore.

 3. Rather than waiting to be called upon, bring yourself into the interaction at the beginning of each session by letting others know what you want from this particular meeting. Although it is useful to have a tentative agenda of what you want to discuss, don’t cling inflexibly to your agenda if other issues surface sponta­neously. Be open to pursuing alternative paths if you are affected by what others are exploring.

 4. Realize that if the work other members are doing is affecting you, it is crucial that you let them know how you are being affected. If you are able to identify with the struggles or pains of others, it generally helps both you and them if you share your feelings and thoughts.

 5. Decide for yourself what, how much, and when you will disclose personal facets of yourself. Others will not have a basis for knowing you unless you tell them about yourself. If you have difficulty in sharing yourself personally in your group, begin by letting others know what makes it hard for you to self-disclose.

 6. Don’t confuse self-disclosure with engaging in storytelling. Avoid getting lost in and overwhelming others with mere information about you or your history. Instead, express what is on your mind and in your heart presently. Reveal your struggles that are significant to you at this time in your life, especially as these concerns pertain to what others in the group are exploring.

 7. Express persistent feelings you are having that pertain to what is emerging in the group here and now. For example, if you are feeling intimidated by other people in the group, announce that you feel this way. If you feel somewhat isolated, share this. If you do not want to be part of the group, it is essential that you talk about this. Be willing to assume responsibility for what you feel, rather than blaming others for it.

 8. Don’t be a silent member. Realize that others will not know you if you do not let them know what issues are important to you, nor will they know that you identify with them or feel close to them unless you let them know.

 9. Practice your attending and listening skills. If you can give others the gift of your presence and understanding, you are contributing a great deal to the group process.

 10. Try to challenge yourself if you sense that you are “taking too much group time for yourself.” If you become overly concerned about measuring how much you take and receive, you will inhibit the spontaneity that can make a group exciting and productive.

 11. Use your group as a place to experiment with new behaviors. Allow yourself to try out different ways of being to determine how you may want to change. Discover how to carry any new ways of thinking, feeling, and acting into your outside life. Between sessions, practice the skills you are learning in your group. Give yourself your own homework assignments and let others in your group know how you are applying in-group learnings to your behavior with family, friends, and associates.

 12. Understand that making changes will not be instantaneous. You can also expect some setbacks in the progress you make. Keep track of any progress you are making, and remember to give yourself credit for your efforts and the subtle changes that you make.

 13. Avoid giving advice to other members, giving intellectualized interpretations of their behavior, or using questioning as your main style of interacting with them. It is possible to question others or to offer advice, yet keep yourself very distant in this process. If you are inclined to ask a question, let others know why you are interested in hearing their answer. Or, if you want to give advice, reveal to others what your investment is in giving this advice. Learn to speak *for* yourself and *about* yourself.

 14. Concentrate on making personal and direct statements to others in your group. Direct communication with a member is more effective than “talking about” that person through the leader.

 15. In giving feedback to others, strive to avoid categorizing or labeling. Instead of telling others who or what they are, tell them what you are observing, and let them know how they are affecting you. Rather than judge them as persons, focus on how you respond to some of their specific behaviors in group.

 16. Pay attention to any consistent feedback you might receive. If you hear that others perceive you as being somewhat judgmental and critical, don’t be too quick to argue and convince them that you are open and accepting. Instead, take in what you are hearing and consider their input to determine to what degree it might fit you.

 17. Respect your defenses and understand that they have served a purpose for you. However, when you become aware of feeling or acting defensively in your group, challenge your defenses by seeing what will occur if you strive to be less guarded. At least identify out loud that you are feeling defensive and begin exploring what you might be resisting.

 18. Provide support for others by expressing your care for them, but don’t quickly intervene by trying to comfort them when they are experiencing feelings, such as pain over an event. Realize that they need to experience, share, and work through certain feel­ings; they do not need reassurance that “it will all turn out for the best.” Let them know how their pain may be touching you, but don’t attempt to “cure” them of their pain.

 19. Take responsibility for what you are accomplishing in your group. Spend some time thinking about what is taking place in these meetings and evaluating the degree to which you are attaining your goals. If you are not satisfied with your group experience, look at what you can do to make the group a more meaningful experience.

 20. Be aware of respecting and maintaining the confidentiality of what goes on inside your group. Even though you may not maliciously breach others’ confidences, recognize how easy it might be to talk inappropriately to others who are not in the group about what members have revealed. The way that you handle confidentiality says a great deal about your professional character. If you have any concerns about whether what you are sharing is staying within the group, be willing to bring this matter up in a session.

 21. Be prepared to not always be understood or accepted by significant others, especially as you make changes. Some people may not support the new directions you choose to travel, and your changes may be threatening to them. It is a good idea to create a support system within your group. Contact selected members in your group and ask them to help you remember the lessons you learn in the group. Reporting to others in your group is an accountability procedure that will help you to meet your per­sonal goals.

 22. Keep a personal journal in which you record impressions of your own explorations and learning in your group. The journal is a good place to enter your reactions to books you read for your personal development. A journal will be invaluable in keeping track of your progress and noting changes in your ways of thinking, feeling, and acting.