**TIPS FOR GROUP WORKERS: USING ACTIVITIES**

*By Andrew Malekoff, Association for the Advancement of Social Work with Groups*

In using manuals or in creating their own activities group workers should be thoughtful in deciding what activities they will use, in what context, and for what purpose. A few important questions / tips to consider were posed by Robert Vinter.

1. *How prescriptive should the activity be?* (i.e. is it a free wheeling activity like a game of tag or one that requires detailed instruction like chess?);
2. *How is the activity regulated or controlled?* (i.e. does the activity allow for some autonomy and control among the members or is it purely leader controlled?);
3. *What are the relationship demands or levels of interaction required?* (i.e. is it a side-by-side arts and crafts activity or a face-to-face intense role playing exercise); and
4. *What is the level of competence required?* (i.e. is it an activity that will leave anyone feeling incompetent or inferior or does everyone have a reasonable chance at feeling they have successfully participated; or is it an activity that might frustrate a bit, in an attempt to help members, in part, to develop greater frustration tolerance, for example).

**TIPS FOR GROUP WORKERS: CAUTIONARY NOTES FOR MANUALIZED GROUP WORK** *By Andrew Malekoff, Association for the Advancement of Social Work with Groups*

Activities manuals and exercise books are tools that can be helpful in group work. However they should never drive the group work. Following are some cautionary notes for the use of activities, particularly in group work with children and teens.

1. Activities should never be used to keep kids busy and group worker’s anxiety-free;
2. When using curricula (i.e. anger management, conflict resolution) activities should not be curriculum-driven, rather curriculum-guided so as to promote opportunities for interaction, mutual aid, and spontaneity;
3. Have a clear and above board purpose for the use of activities and no hidden agendas (i.e. don’t use activities to “get them to talk about their feelings,” unless group members understand that it is an activity might promote conversation and expression of emotion, for example);
4. Be conscious that the outside world might devalue the use of activities with kids, especially when the groups are noisy or messy (i.e. there is a tendency to trivialize as frivolous, anything that is not particularly psychological and anything that looks like good fun).

**TIPS FOR GROUP WORKERS: CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS IN GROUPS**

*By Andrew Malekoff, Association for the Advancement of Social Work with Groups*

Group work with children and adolescents can be very tough if you are working in an environment that does not understand kids or accept the noise and movement of a typical kid’s group. Some things to keep in mind follow.

1. Group workers who work with kids are professionals who look like amateurs. Get used to it, put your ego outside the door, don’t take yourself so seriously and get a sense of humor;
2. In group work with kids here is an intuitive integrity that leads to conceptual clarity, but only if you are willing to stay in the mess. So, get in the mess;
3. To stay in the mess it really helps you understand and embrace your fallibility and to understand that, as anthropologist Joseph Campbell once stated, “…perfection is not lovable, it is the clumsiness of a fault that makes a person lovable;”
4. Group workers who work with kids in groups need to be itinerant educators or roaming teachers, always looking for opportunities to teach-on-the-go; and finally
5. Always, always, we need to be good colleagues to one another.

**TIPS FOR GROUP WORKERS: MY KIND OF GROUP WORK**

*By Andrew Malekoff, Association for the Advancement of Social Work with Groups*

Sometimes poetry can best capture the spirit of social work with groups as the following original poetry illustrates.

**My Kind of Group Work (GW)**

It’s the GW with ragged edges that belie its genius

It’s the GW that can be messy and noisy and chaotic and profound, all at once

It’s the GW where children and youth are group members, not clients or patients

It’s the GW where the group worker does with the group, not for or to the group

It’s the GW where learning by doing is as important as insight by talking

It’s the GW that is not ashamed to laugh and have fun

It’s the GW that makes use of everyday life and not only canned curricula

It’s the GW where worker and group members share responsibility

It’s the GW that threatens grown-ups who are uptight

It’s the GW that welcomes parents, and doesn’t avoid them

It’s the GW that invites the rational and spontaneous

It’s the GW that lets difficult, painful, and taboo subjects see the light of day

It’s the GW that begins with felt need, not a label and diagnosis

It’s the GW that respects pathology, but never worships it

It’s the GW that embraces strengths, not deficits

It’s the GW that welcomes the whole person, not just the troubled parts

It’s the GW that has a social conscience and social consciousness

It is the GW with a dual focus of individual change and social reform

It’s the GW that is a rare gem in the human services, yet faces extinction

It’s the GW that is the hidden treasure in youth development

It’s the GW that needs workers to stay the course

administrators to support the way

and missionaries to spread the word

**TIPS FOR GROUP WORKERS: CLARITY OF GROUP PURPOSE**

By Andrew Malekoff, Association for the Advancement of Social Work with Groups

Good group work requires good planning. Good planning means starting with the needs of group members and developing a clear purpose for the group. Roselle Kurland offered these tips for ensuring clarity of purpose.

1. The purpose of the group can be stated clearly and concisely by both the worker and group member;
2. The stated purpose is the same for both group member and worker;
3. The purpose is specific enough that both client and worker will know when it has been achieved; and
4. The purpose is specific enough to provide directed implications for the group content.

**TIPS FOR GROUP WORKERS: STRENGTHS-BASED GROUP WORK**

*By Andrew Malekoff, Association for the Advancement of Social Work with Groups*

What in my view qualifies as strengths-based practice with adolescents in groups? Group work that adheres to seven practice principles.

1. Form groups based on members’ felt needs and wants, not diagnoses;
2. Structure groups to welcome the whole person, not just the troubled parts;
3. Integrate verbal and non-verbal activities;
4. Develop alliances with other relevant people in of group members’ lives;
5. Decentralize authority and turn control over to group members;
6. Maintain a dual focus on individual change and social reform; and
7. Understand and respect group development as key to promoting change

**TIPS FOR GROUP WORKERS: ADDRESSING VIOLENCE**

*By Andrew Malekoff, Association for the Advancement of Social Work with Groups*

Children and youth face increasing violence in their lives, whether it is on a local (e.g. gangs, domestic violence) or global scale (e.g. terrorist acts). Group workers must be prepared to help their group members to address these troubling and often traumatic circumstances. Following is a guideline for addressing violence.

1. Group interventions to violent events must occur as close to the actual event as possible;
2. Youth need order and consistency in their lives and, therefore, in the groups to which they belong;
3. Forming alliances with parents and other relevant people and systems is needed to contribute to a sense of grounding, particularly in times of crisis;
4. Conflict must be addressed with a recognition that the outcome is less important that an adolescent’s capacity to deal with conflict on a more mature level;
5. The group purpose must include addressing members’ needs arising out of the socio-cultural context of their lives – the situational surround; AND
6. Provide protection, support, and a safe climate in the group.