

*The Counseling Center is a mental health program of the Community House in Hinsdale.
We've helped youth, adults and families change and grow for over 40 years.*

The Essential Experience: Group Therapy for Adolescents **By: Jennifer Geiter, LCSW**

Almost every teenager I work with individually is also in group therapy. Many adults who learn of this are also surprised to learn that these young people look forward to both, and many teenagers say group therapy is one of their favorite times during the week.

I have found over the past ten years of working with teenagers that a well-run group is vital, crucial, and essential to creating meaningful and lasting changes in their lives. Why is this? Most teenagers are very accustomed to adults telling them what to do and how to do it. While I and other clinicians are trained to guide teenagers in individual sessions towards mental, emotional, behavioral, and social health (and do so every day), fundamentally we are still adults. Teens are developmentally geared to care much more about what their peers think of them and their definitions of how they should act.

This is normal and healthy for teenagers; however it often becomes a conflict when all around them teenagers are experiencing peer-driven messages which contribute to the problems that bring them to therapy. All too often I have heard teenagers respond to healthy suggestions with the complaint, "But no one else does that." Social acceptance feels like a life-or-death issue during adolescence, a reality we see reflected literally all too often. Effective therapy for teenagers means therapy which is tailored to their social-emotional level of development-therapy which understands teens must feel their change and growth helps meet their crucial need for social belonging.

Teenagers (and many adults too!) feel that they and

they alone have their problems. They have trouble believing anyone else feels the way that they do. The amount of anxiety this illusion creates presents a major obstacle to change. Therapy that results in change requires vulnerability and openness—two things that are difficult when teens are embarrassed and feel fundamentally flawed. Group therapy provides a major bypass of this issue as teens quickly realize that several others (many of whom teens are surprised to hear this from) are going through something very similar. I have seen fundamental progress with teenagers just resulting from this realization alone.

In addition to the great lessening of anxiety teens experience as a result of learning they are not alone, they are very energized by the experience of community. Group is a safe place where the rules of social hierarchy, cliques, subgroups, and so forth do not apply. Here the confusing social dynamics get left behind. "No judgment" is a norm that gets established quickly and group members usually name it as one of their favorite aspects of the group therapy experience. In group there is a lot of vulnerability and painful issues get discussed, but there is always lots of laughter, silliness, and joy too. The energizing experience of group provides much needed energy for teenagers to channel towards changing and growing, and it inspires them with the realization that this process needn't be only painful or done alone.

Just as changing and growing requires a sense of purpose and inspiration, it also requires risk taking and experimenting with new behaviors. This task feels daunting to many, and to adolescents it can feel downright terrifying. They are acutely aware of how harshly they can be judged by their peers. Group provides a safe place to practice. I bring in many group exercises that facilitate this

process and each group member, at the right time, is given ways to branch out, take risks, and experiment with new ways of interaction. Teenagers practice assertiveness, engaging in healthy conflict, providing respectful feedback, asking for needs, expressing their feelings, sharing ideas, and more. The group is led to be supportive of this, and the risk taking with their peers in group provides a bridge to taking these changes with them to their life at home and in school.

Many teenagers love being able to come to group and report with excitement to their peers ways in which they took healthy risks out in the world during their week. For teenagers in group therapy, changing and growing becomes a popular way to live and an effective way to connect to their peers. It is here that the magic happens.

In the ten years I have spent working with young people and in groups, I continue to be amazed, inspired, touched, and challenged by the group therapy experience. I have sought out countless workshops, retreats, and trainings in order to ongoingly become a better facilitator and leader of this healing and transformative process.

"We are all more human than anything else."
-Rollo May

Contact us to learn more about our inclusive and ongoing weekly therapy groups!

- Group for High school students
- Group for young people ages 18-25
- Group for adults ages 25+

For more information, call our intake line at (630) 323-7500 ext. 239

introducing our:
ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

Building a strong foundation

Adolescence can be a tumultuous period for many young people. Many teens today experience issues that hinder or thwart development into adulthood, including:

- * Anxiety and depression
- * Self-injury and suicidal ideation
- * School failure/refusal
- * Acting out
- * Drug or alcohol addiction.

Our highly trained and experienced clinicians recognize the tremendous opportunities for learning and growth presented by troubled teens. We provide adolescents with opportunities for change and growth in three forms:

Weekly Workshops

Topics include: managing and coping with anxiety, stress reduction, college preparedness, and other relevant topics.

Counseling and Therapy Groups

Groups are an opportunity for adolescents to integrate change and growth with their peers. Groups are held on a weekly basis at the Community House.

Individual Treatment

We offer individual short-term counseling and long-term psychotherapy. Therapy sessions occurs on a weekly basis and are 50 minutes in duration.

The Here and Now

By: Jennifer Geiter, LCSW

The Here and Now
Is truly all that exists.
The past is only a story.
The future is only a story.

In this present moment
You are okay
In this present moment
You really are okay
In this present moment
You create you through
your words and actions

But OH how your stories
(internalizations, illusions)
of the past limit you in the present
And OH how your stories
(fears, projections, predictions)
of the future limit you in the present

What stories from/about the past cage, imprison,
limit or harm you now?
What stories about the future cage, imprison, limit
or harm you now?
Why do you carry these with you?

**If you are depressed
you are living in the past.
If you are anxious
you are living in the future.
If you are at peace
you are living in the present.
--Lao Tsu**

We at the Counseling Center have helped many adolescents and adults let go of the stories that contribute to depression and anxiety in order to live peaceful and joyful lives in the present. Feeling peaceful and present in your life here and now is a great indication that you are alive and well!

Call us today to set up an initial session and begin the journey: (630) 323-7500 ext. 239

From The Warrior of the Light

By: Paulo Coelho

"Every Warrior of the Light has felt afraid of going into battle. Every Warrior of the Light has, at some time in the past, lied or betrayed someone. Every Warrior of the Light has trodden a path that was not his.

Every Warrior of the Light has suffered for the most trivial of reasons. Every Warrior of the Light has, at least once, believed he was not a Warrior of the Light.

Every Warrior of the Light has failed in his... duties. Every Warrior of the Light has said 'yes' when he wanted to say 'no.' Every Warrior of the Light has hurt someone he loved.

That is why he is a Warrior of the Light, because he has been through all this and yet has never lost hope of being better than he is."

Contact us to learn how to participate in the Open Hands, Clear Mind retreat! We will be experiencing how Zen practices are essential to lowering anxiety.