



SELF-ACCEPTANCE

Guidelines for Group Facilitators

Thank you for facilitating group use of this self-acceptance workbook. The following information will support you in your efforts.

WORKBOOK PURPOSE

This workbook is a structured psycho-educational tool designed to help individuals recovering from serious mental illness to:

- Improve how they regard themselves
- Avoid blaming themselves for problems resulting from their illness
- Avoid defining themselves by their illness
- Appreciate their strengths and potential for growth
- Facilitate grief work
- Deal with stigma
- Take better care of themselves
- Improve their relationships
- Improve their attention and concentration

WORKBOOK STRUCTURE AND CORRESPONDING GROUP ACTIVITY

The ideal number of participants for group use of this workbook is ten. Before you begin to assemble your first group (see “Selecting Group Participants”), take some time to familiarize yourself with the workbook’s structure. Once you have assembled the group and understand members’ needs, you can decide how to break down the workbook by session. You should aim for thirty-two forty-five-minute sessions. If the group meets four times a week, then members can complete the workbook in eight weeks.

Ideally, groups should be closed, with all participants starting and ending at the same time. Sometimes circumstances, however, will dictate an open structure in which participants start and end individually. One participant, for example, might join in at Skill Area Three and end with Skill Area Two. Keep in mind that it’s more important for participants to do the work than it is for them to complete it in a particular order, with one exception: No matter where open-group participants start, Skill Area Five should conclude their work. Make sure all participants take the pre-test when they begin and the post-test after they finish. Maintaining and regularly reviewing a record of the date and the section at which each open-group participant starts will help you track and support individual program completion.

SELECTING GROUP PARTICIPANTS

You must consider three factors in determining whether an individual is appropriate for group use of this workbook.

- The individual must have an Axis I diagnosis of schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, major depression, or schizoaffective disorder. You will notice the workbook focuses on only the first three disorders in that list. People with schizoaffective disorder experience symptoms of all three of those disorders, so they are appropriate users of this workbook, as long as you share this explanation with them and they meet the next two criteria. The presence of a personality disorder should not exclude an individual from participation, as long as the Axis I disorder is the more prominent of the two.
- The individual must be able to acknowledge having a serious mental illness.
- The individual must show interest in and be willing to commit to participating in the entire program.

PREPARING GROUP PARTICIPANTS

Once you have determined an individual is appropriate for group use of the workbook, your next step will be to prepare that individual for participation. Ask the participant to share his or her desired outcomes. Some common responses include:

- I want to feel better about myself.
- I want to quit beating up on myself.
- I want to get to know myself better.
- I want to be able appreciate my good qualities.
- I want to be able to accept my limitations without putting myself down.
- I want to get along better with other people.
- I want to improve my social skills.
- I want to take better care of myself.
- I want to be successfully employed.

Note to clinicians: *You may notice some goals fall under treatment, while others fall under recovery. This workbook is designed primarily to promote recovery but can support treatment goals, as well.*

Once you have assessed a participant's goals, you should provide a simple explanation of self-acceptance. For example, you might say, "Self-acceptance is being able to accept yourself and be comfortable with who you are regardless of your shortcomings. Self-acceptance also includes accepting your positive qualities."

You should also cover key points on what to expect during participation:

- Give the participant a copy of the workbook and briefly introduce the skill areas as listed in the Table of Contents. Explain that each session will focus on a particular segment of the workbook.
- If the participant is joining an open group, identify the group's current section of focus. Explain that starting and ending at that point will not negatively affect the process for the participant or the group.
- Explain that many of the segments require participants to write down their responses to related questions, and that while sharing is not required, doing so promotes learning and recovery for the entire group.

GUIDELINES FOR CONDUCTING GROUP SESSIONS

Many of the following guidelines have been adapted from the guidelines for leading modules in the Social and Independent Living Skills Program,¹ which were developed by Robert Liberman, MD and his associates.

- Greet each member individually and enthusiastically.
- Start and end each session on time to help create a sense of reliability and predictability. Invite late members to take their seats and join in with the rest of the group.
- Each workbook skill area features an introduction, and each skill area subsection features a title and a stated purpose. Ask new or slower participants to read these aloud to help them feel connected.
- Each skill area subsection also features a stated background; ask for a second volunteer to read these aloud.
- Provide any needed clarification on the session's topic and invite brief discussion.
- Read the first skill area subsection reflection and ask the group members to write a response in their workbooks. Some members will want to share their responses right away; make sure the group knows it is important to wait for all of the participants to complete their answers before sharing begins.
- The first reflection of many of the skill area subsections asks the user to define the topic (e.g., hope, belonging). Listing each group member's response on a dry-erase board or tablet creates a shared sense of the topic and acknowledges individual contributions. Avoid pressuring participants who do not want to share; this freedom will actually foster sharing over the course of the workbook.
- Present each additional reflection in turn and give each participant the opportunity to write a response and share it before moving on to the next reflection.
- Some answers will require especially skillful responses from you. Below are some examples and corresponding suggested responses.

1. A participant may share an obtuse or vaguely relevant response. You can reframe the

response or part of the response so that it appears more relevant, which will help defuse any anxiety among the other participants, who will then become more accepting of the participant with the deviant response. For example, if the question is, “What is your definition of trust?” and a participant says, “I used to play baseball in junior high,” you could state that athletes working together cooperatively as team does foster trust.

2. A participant may start to veer off topic. You should politely point out that discussion must stay on topic for the good of the group and, if the off-topic matter seems important to the participant, offer to meet after the session for further discussion.
 3. A participant may respond with pessimism. Try to respond with optimism and encouragement. For example, a participant may share, “I have never felt a sense of belonging,” to which you might say, “Then I am really glad you are here with us now, and I hope you find belonging here.”
- Consistently thank participants for sharing.
 - Use criticism sparingly, if at all.
 - At the conclusion of each session, summarize the group’s responses to reflect them and illustrate themes. For example, at the end of the session on “Belonging,” you could summarize as follows: “Many of you gave answers that showed you have experienced belonging at various points in your lives. Many of you also said that you don’t feel as much belonging now. Many of you gave some good examples of ways to regain a sense of belonging, and I hope this will happen for each of you.”

During each session, it is more important for each group member to write down at least one reflection, share it, and obtain some nurturing feedback than it is to cover all of the material. You must strike a balance, allowing each participant to have a say while not belaboring any point beyond its usefulness to the group as a whole.

The ideal session is one in which each participant shares readily and no one participant dominates the discussion. In addition, participants should develop a shared understanding of the topic and feel a greater sense of optimism and self-acceptance at the conclusion of each session. If you observe at least some of these outcomes during each session, then you will know you have conducted the group well.

FIRST AND LAST SESSIONS

When a new member joins an open group, all of the group members should introduce themselves and share their understanding of self-acceptance and their goals for participation. You should address confidentiality every time a new member joins the group. Whenever a member of an open group completes the workbook, you should facilitate a “graduation” exercise. Consider sharing your observations of the member’s progress, and invite the graduate to state his or her accomplishments. Ask the other members to share their observations of the member’s progress and their appreciation for the graduate’s contribution to the group. Providing a certificate of completion will enhance the participant’s sense of accomplishment.

With a closed group, you can address confidentiality during the first session and touch on it again as you feel necessary. Approach graduation in the same fashion as you would for members of open groups, keeping in mind that the ceremony will most likely require a significant amount of time for everyone to share.

Endnotes

1 Charles J. Wallace, Sally MacKain, and Robert P. Liberman, *Demonstration Videocassettes and Self-Directed Training Program for Leading Modules in the Social & Independent Living Skills Program* (Camarillo CA: Psychiatric Rehabilitation Consultants, 1990).