Grief Recovery and Support for Human Rights Activists Serving War-Zone Refugees: Group Outline

Sarah Potter · CNL-520 Group Counseling · Grand Canyon University · August 2024

Group Subject: Grief Recovery

Why grief recovery and support? The profound psychological impact of bearing witness to systemic violence and human rights violations, such as those faced by the Palestinian community, cannot be overstated. Grief recovery and support is a quintessential subject for group counseling in this context, highlighting a commitment to a therapeutic intervention rooted in social justice and ethical practice. The vicarious trauma experienced by activists engaged in the Gazan conflict makes the need for structured, communal therapeutic spaces that cater to their unique psychological needs essential (Heller and LaPierre, 2012).

Group counseling offers a collective milieu in which a shared narrative of grief can be constructed and navigated, embodying the Jungian notion of individuation through the integration and acknowledgement of the collective unconscious (Jung, 1953). It is within this shared space that communal healing can take place, allowing for the grief experienced by each individual to be both personally acknowledged and collectively witnessed. This shared witnessing plays a pivotal role in validating the reality of the suffering seen and felt, which can be a powerful agent in the healing process (Heller and LaPierre, 2012).

Population being served: Human rights activists who have been watching the Gazan Genocide livestreamed as they have been working to support Palestinian families. The program must honor the intersectionality of the trauma experienced, both direct and vicarious. The subject of group counseling, particularly concerning those who bear witness to systemic oppression and violence, necessitates a deep understanding of the activists' empathetic engagement, their unyielding commitment to equality, and their sense of solidarity.

Number of sessions: 8 weeks, 2 hours, three times weekly.
Proposing an 8-week program, spanning 2 hours per session, conducted three times weekly, is based on a synthesis of psychotherapeutic evidence, ethical considerations, and social justice principles. The eight-week duration is supported by empirical evidence suggesting a significant period is required for participants to establish trust within the group, delve into the intricacies of their grief, and begin the processes of healing and transformation (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). This timeframe allows for the unfolding of group dynamics essential to the therapeutic process—safety, cohesion, and mutual aid, which are foundational to the efficacy of group interventions. The decision to hold sessions three times weekly is grounded in the understanding of the nature of grief as a complex and multifaceted experience, especially within contexts of systemic oppression or collective trauma. This frequency ensures that participants remain engaged with the therapeutic process and have ample opportunities to explore their grief in a supportive environment. 2 hours, is designed to provide sufficient depth and breadth in explorations of grief, yet is also cognizant of the psychological and emotional stamina required for such intense work.

Number of participants: 15 members
Jungian therapy emphasizes the exploration of the unconscious and the facilitation of individuation processes. Within a group setting of 15-20 members, there is an optimal balance that allows for rich, in-depth exploration of both personal and collective unconscious dynamics. This size supports the Jungian method of engaging with symbols, archetypes, and dreams within a collective therapeutic milieu, enabling participants to explore and integrate these aspects into their conscious awareness in a manner that a larger group may impede due to logistical constraints and reduced personal attention (Jung, 1961).

Goals of the counseling group:
The subject of group counseling, particularly concerning those who bear witness to systemic oppression and violence, necessitates a deep understanding of the activists' empathetic engagement, their unyielding commitment to equality, and their sense of solidarity.

The primary goals of this group counseling program should include:

1. **Safe and Affirmative Space –** The program must strive to build a secure environment where activists can express their feelings without judgment. This is fundamental in fostering trust and openness. A therapeutic milieu consistent with a person-centered theoretical approach allows individuals the freedom to explore and integrate their experiences (Rogers, 1951).
2. **Witnessing and Validation of Experiences –** Bearing witness to suffering must be acknowledged as an empathetic and human response to profound injustice. The group setting offers a platform where shared narratives are affirmed, according to the Jungian perspective that individuation is not just personal but also collective (Jung, 1953).
3. **Culturally Sensitive Grief Processing –** Recognizing that grief does not exist in a cultural vacuum, the program will aim to integrate culturally respectful and sensitive methods in therapy. Given the contextual backdrop of the Gazan situation, interventions must be sensitive to the nuances of cultural and religious background as well as the political aspects of the grief experienced.
4. **Development of Coping Strategies –** To equip activists with coping mechanisms that enable them not only to process their grief but also to continue their vital work sustainably, without succumbing to burnout or compassion fatigue. These strategies would draw on evidence-based practices while being attentive to the individual's unique process of grieving.
5. **Constructing a Collective Narrative –** Enabling participants to co-create a narrative that not only speaks to loss and despair but also to resilience and solidarity. This narrative construction considers individual stories as part of a larger tapestry of social and political lived realities.
6. **Advancing Post-Traumatic Growth –** Fostering an environment where activists can collectively and individually identify areas of growth and transformation stemming from their traumatic exposure, aligning with the modern feminist ideology that emphasizes empowerment and positive change (Heller and LaPierre, 2012).
7. **Supporting Activism as a Healthy Response to Grief –** Affirming activism and advocacy not merely as professional commitments but as legitimate and

meaningful responses to grief and loss, reinforcing participants' sense of agency and purpose.

8. **Preparation for Reintegration or Continuation of Activism –** Addressing the integration of their experience of grief with their ongoing commitment to human rights and exploring pathways for continued activism that are psychologically sustainable and ethically grounded.

Theoretical approaches: Feminist therapy, person-centered therapy, and jungian therapy.

Feminist, person-centered, and Jungian therapy approaches are highly effective for grief recovery in activist contexts, addressing both personal and sociopolitical dimensions of grief. Feminist therapy integrates the personal with the political, providing a framework that resonates with activist experiences. Person-centered therapy fosters an environment of empathy and affirmation, supporting activists in their personal growth and resilience. Jungian therapy enhances this approach by linking personal suffering to universal archetypes, deepening the therapeutic experience and reaffirming activists' collective endeavors. Collectively, these modalities create a holistic healing space that honors the intricacies of activist grief and validates the interconnectedness of individual experiences and broader social issues.

Ethical considerations: Secondary trauma, cultural humility for Palestinian people and how they are perceived by humanitarian workers and activists, transference issues may arise.

In facilitating grief recovery groups for activists, group counselors are ethically tasked with the protection of confidentiality, fostering an equitable therapeutic environment, and sensitively addressing the complexities of activism-related grief. The imperative of confidentiality underpins the therapeutic alliance, ensuring a safe space for vulnerably sharing personal experiences. Navigating the intricacies of group dynamics, with a critical focus on equity and respect for diverse perspectives, mirrors the broader societal commitment to justice and equality. Recognizing the unique confluence of personal and collective grief within activist circles demands a

cultural competency, acknowledging how diverse identities shape the grieving process. Maintaining professionalism and ethical boundaries becomes paramount, especially considering potential entanglements in closely-knit activist communities. This compassionate, scholarly approach honors the counselors' commitment to addressing both individual and systemic layers of grief.

Screening questions:
These questions serve to not only evaluate the readiness and compatibility of potential members but also forge a preliminary understanding and practice of the group's values, which include empathy, respect, and an acknowledgment of the deeply ingrained social structures that influence individual pain and recovery processes. It is through careful and intentional dialogue that we can cultivate a therapeutically potent environment, where every voice is heard and the fabric of shared experience and commitment to social justice is woven into the very core of the group's purpose.

Demographic questions:

- Age: This helps in understanding the life stage and generational experiences of the participant.
- Gender Identity: Gathering information on gender identity ensures respectful address and interaction, catering to specific gender-related issues if necessary.
- Ethnicity/Cultural Background: This helps in recognizing cultural influences and any specific needs or sensitivities.
- Relationship Status: This can provide context about the participant's support system.
- Educational Background: This might offer insight into the participant's perspective and communication preferences.
- Employment Status: Understanding a participant's occupational stresses or contexts can be crucial.
- Current Presenting Issue
- List of current medications
- List of current medical diagnosis
- List of current mental health diagnosis

Contextual based questions:

1. Can you share what draws you to this particular grief recovery group, and how you perceive it aligning with your journey as an activist?
2. This question may be triggering, please take it slow. Have you experienced any first or second hand accounts from families who have experienced the death, loss, dismemberment, or decapitation of a child or loved one?
3. On a scale of 0-10, with 0 being "not at all" and 10 "being it's the most disturbing thing I've experienced," how would you rate your current state of grief?
4. In what ways do you feel your activism intersects with your personal experiences of grief or loss?
5. How comfortable are you with engaging in deep, symbolic exploration of your experiences in a group setting?
6. Could you reflect on the importance of confidentiality and how it pertains to creating a trusting environment within the group?
7. In consideration of the diverse backgrounds of activists, how do you approach discussions around cultural, racial, or identity differences?
8. Given the potentially triggering nature of sharing and discussing grief, how do you currently manage your emotional and psychological wellness?
9. Do you have an individual therapist you're seeing currently? If so, how frequently are you in session with your therapist?
10. What expectations do you have of the group, and how do you envision contributing to the collective healing experience?

Approach to Interviewing Potential Group Participants

In the context of screening potential members for grief recovery groups, the approach to interviews should be meticulously crafted to embody neutrality while simultaneously validating and empathizing with the profound grief the interviewees may be traversing. This approach is not solely about gauging the compatibility of personalities within the prospective group dynamic. Rather, it is an ethical commitment to creating a space where individuals feel seen, heard, and

understood—a space where their experiences of loss are acknowledged as inherently connected to larger frameworks of injustice and oppression.

Furthermore, the process of interviewing must be imbued with sensitivity, offering pauses and spaces for participants to reflect on and articulate their feelings and experiences. This practice is not merely a procedural necessity but a critical step in setting a tone of compassion and empathy from the onset. It acknowledges the weight of grief and the courage it takes to share such experiences in a group setting. Ensuring that personalities and experiences have the potential to synergize well within the group context is essential for fostering an atmosphere of trust, safety, and collective healing.

In summary:

- Establish a Respectful Tone
- Demonstrate Authentic Empathy
- Validate Experiences and Provide a Counter Balance
- Mindful Emotional Awareness

Selecting Group Participants Post-Interview

Qualifying for membership within such a nuanced therapeutic space requires the potential members to demonstrate a readiness and capacity to engage in introspective and group healing processes. This readiness is underpinned by a level of self-awareness and an ability to articulate one's experiences and emotional landscapes, which aligns with the person-centered theoretical approach that values the individual's perspective and intrinsic worth. Furthermore, a commitment to fostering a supportive and non-judgmental environment is paramount; members must exhibit not only an openness to navigate their own journey of grief but also a solidarity with others' experiences, embodying the principles of modern feminist ideology which advocate for intersectional awareness and mutual upliftment.

Additionally, a resilient grounding in one's own coping mechanisms, while simultaneously being open to exploring new modalities of healing, signifies a productive potential member. The integration of Jungian therapy perspectives

emphasizes the relevance of engaging with the collective unconscious and archetypal experiences, which can resonate deeply with activists who have faced shared traumas. This theoretical approach supports the broader goal of achieving not just personal healing but also contributing to the collective recovery of the group.

Ethically, candidates must also understand and respect the boundaries and structure of the group therapy process, adhering to established guidelines and codes of conduct that safeguard the therapeutic environment. This acknowledgment of boundaries further reinforces the safety and trust essential for deep emotional work.

Resources

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