

## Topic Page: [group psychotherapy](https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/group_psychotherapy)

Summary Article: **group psychotherapy**

From *The Columbia Encyclopedia*

a means of changing behavior and emotional patterns, based on the premise that much of human behavior and feeling involves the individual's adaptation and response to other people. It is a process carried out in formally organized groups of three or more individuals who seek change, whether their problem is alcoholism, overeating, or poor social skills. The composition of a group may be heterogenous or homogeneous with reference to the age of the members or the type of problem. The therapist may be directive or nondirective, allowing the group to set their own agenda for discussion. The group becomes a "sample" of the outside world, reproducing conditions of interpersonal relationships; its members jointly participate in observing personal motivation and styles of interaction. They also participate in attempting new behaviors and dealing with the consequences of such behaviors, with the intended result that they will eventually be able to employ these behavior patterns outside the group. In observing the totality of the events that take place in group therapy, the process by which elements of personality are developed in each member is also studied.

### **Origins of Group Therapy**

The technique of formally organized group therapy is said to have been devised by J. H. Pratt in 1905. Pratt was holding general-care instruction classes for recently discharged tuberculosis patients when he noticed the impact of this experience on their emotional states. In 1925 psychoanalyst Trigant Burrow became dissatisfied with individual psychoanalysis, and began experimenting with group techniques. Burrow hoped to decrease the authoritarian position of the therapist, and to more thoroughly examine interpersonal interactions. The application of group therapy methods to prison inmates and discharged mental hospital patients was pioneered by Paul Schilder and Louis Wender in the 1930s. At that time group therapy was found to be particularly useful in the treatment of children and adolescents. The development of group therapy was given impetus during World War II, as a result of the large number of soldiers requiring treatment.

### **Types of Group Therapy**

There are various types of group therapy; approaches include behavior therapy, psychoanalytic therapy, sensitivity training, or Gestalt psychology (see psychotherapy). The composition of groups varies as well, with family therapy and marriage counseling common forms in recent years. Peer group therapy usually consists of a group of individuals who have similar problems, and can be mediated by a psychoanalyst or by the members themselves. Many people seeking help prefer this sort of group therapy over individual therapy, largely because of the comfort derived from knowing that others share their problems. The approach is nondirective, and in some cases, the individual can continue attending sessions whenever they are needed. Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) is a well-known peer support group, run entirely by members. AA has been influential in the formation of similar groups, particularly support groups centered on addictions.

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