

Mindful Support Groups

A facilitative team process for
attachment disorders, trauma, and
explosive and avoidant behavior



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Welcome...

Are you supporting someone with challenging behaviors? Ever feel like you're in it alone? You keep having meeting after meeting, but the person is still struggling to get better?

What's overlooked is the opportunity to transform those meetings into a support group network for the individual. Doing so will help the person feel safe, trust others, learn skills, and increase their capacity to "reach out" when they are distressed.



The Need

There is often a long waiting list and a lack of clinical services for people with explosive and avoidant behaviors. People with these challenges often develop a pejorative reputation; their behavior is labeled attention-seeking or manipulative. Rarely are these behaviors recognized for what they are: an inability to regulate emotions, feel safe with others, and move toward the things they want most in life.

People suffering from these conditions deserve treatment that is timely and appropriate for their needs.

Incorporating mindfulness principles organized around a clinical model into a group process offers a relationship-based treatment approach for understanding, supporting, educating, and helping people to achieve recovery and stability.

“ Trauma happens in relationships and can only be cured in relationships. - Pat Ogden

Explosive and avoidant behaviors are a common reaction from trauma. Trauma reorganizes the entire organism, brain, body, and mind, to respond to threats and danger. Since trauma often occurs in relationships, it causes traumatized people to see others as a potential source of danger. This dramatically limits a person's ability to reach out when distressed, leaving only their other defensive responses of "acting out" or "checking out."



Positive change can only occur when people feel safe; the difference can only happen through positive relationships and real-life experiences. The core of any trauma treatment should be:

- To help people feel safe with themselves and others
- To give them real-life experiences to reinforce that safety

The team surrounding the person can become a support group that accelerates the recovery process through structured and frequent therapeutic meetings that follow a stage model of treatment.

What's It All About?



Facilitative Process

It's a group facilitative process that promotes best practices in developing a support network for individuals with explosive or avoidant behavior brought on by trauma.



Positive Relationships

It teaches support staff the foundations of building positive relationships, so the person being supported can learn to "reach out" rather than "act out" or "check out."



Empowerment

It empowers individuals to have some control over their lives, thus helping to create an environment for them to practice relationship building skills.



Safe Environment

It creates a non-judgmental, safe environment that allows an individual to experience positive feelings and enables them to "reach out" to others when they experience distress.

Mindfulness Principles



Mindfulness is paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, and without judgment.

Using mindfulness principles to inform our group process allows us to be present with the person we are supporting. This creates a safe and accepting environment where we can teach people to "reach out" when they experience distress.

Treatment Components

Using a mindful approach is an opportunity:

- To be present and available to the person being supported
- To demonstrate safety and kinship
- To celebrate their accomplishments
- To model and practice self-regulation skills
- To maintain a positive clinical narrative
- To resolve problems in a clinically appropriate way
- To examine and support positive relationships and behavior
- To process traumatic re-enactments that result in "bad" behavior, all within a clinical framework

3 Stage Model

Our model is based on three stages:

The stages are focused on the different emotional states people manifest in response to internal or external stimuli.

These stages are characterized by different targets for treatment that are prioritized based on the greatest needs of the person at that moment.



1

**Regulation of
the body,
feelings, and
behavior**



2

**Building trust,
relationships,
and skills**



3

**Help people
perceive, feel,
think, and
behave
"reasonably"**

“It is unethical to treat trauma (often manifested as explosive or avoidant behavior) without a stage model.

- Robert Kirchoff

Benefits

Mindful support group meetings are an opportunity for ongoing organized treatment and offers the following benefits:

1 Increased Attachment, Positive Relationships, and " Reaching Out."

Having a safe and supportive group enables a person to experience positive feelings. Positive emotions enable us to connect and strengthen relationships with others. In turn, this creates the environment for someone to reach out when distressed.

2 Decrease "Acting Out, and " Checking Out"

As the mindful support group meets, the frequency, intensity, and duration of explosive and avoidant behaviors will decline. Remember, these behaviors are survival responses to trauma and do not change overnight. It takes time...but this is the path to recovery.

3 Increased Engagement with Others, and The World

When we feel safe and can get out in the world to explore, play, and relate to others, we turn off the defensive systems that drive explosive and avoidant behavior.

Coming Together

To provide effective (and efficient) treatment, regulating the body and building relationships take precedence over other priorities. One way to address this is by structuring interactions and providing opportunities to promote safety and relationships. Using a mindful approach to facilitate meetings and develop a support group is that opportunity. Organizing the time together in a way that improves relationships and makes the person feel safe provides the pathway for recovery and improved behavior.



“ Safety is at the heart of positive change.

- Louis Cozolino