

## Long-Term Childhood-Trauma Group

Using the Relationship Recovery Process (RRP) developed by Amanda Curtin

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### Basics:

- ❖ **This group is intended for adults...**
  - who have **begun to recognize** that in childhood they were **treated in ways that did not meet their legitimate needs**, and that they have reactions to present situations that stem from those difficult childhood experiences.
  - who **appreciate the need to reparent** their wounded inner child in order to find relief and improve their quality of life.
- ❖ **Goals:** The group seeks to help participants to become a healing community of survivors, to provide a healthy group experience such as children deserve in their family of origin. The work of the group, both in individual practice outside of sessions and in interaction among members, **focuses on the painful childhood past** to accomplish two related goals:
  - By processing stuck places rooted in childhood trauma (e.g., toxic core beliefs, unhealthy coping strategies), members work toward **finishing business with parents** and the system they created.
  - By cultivating interpersonal-relationship skills (e.g., expressing emotions, being empathetic, addressing conflict in healthy ways, and being vulnerable while setting boundaries), members increase their capacity for **intimacy in close relationships**.
- ❖ **Format:** the group combines *task-oriented group* sessions and *open group* sessions.
- ❖ **Frequency / duration:** groups meet weekly (with some breaks) via zoom for 90 minutes for about three years, although this duration is adaptable to the particular group's needs.
- ❖ **Cost:** \$85 per session; not in any insurance network, but invoices are available to present to insurance as out-of-network.

### Beginning Phase:

- ❖ Members each have a full session to present, in the form of a **genogram**, the story of what it was like to grow up in their family's dysfunction.
- ❖ Basic tools for finishing business with parents (used throughout the work) are:
  - **Dialoging:** as a practice of reparenting their inner child, members develop an ability to dialogue with them from a mindful and empathetic adult awareness.
  - **Roleplaying:** in a brief exchange, the leader models reparenting a member's inner child while inviting the member to speak from their inner child; the roles can be reversed, with the leader roleplaying the member's inner child and the member doing the reparenting.
- ❖ The main tool (used throughout the work) for intimacy and conflict work among group members is the **1-2-3 process**.
  - It involves recognizing how one group member is triggered by another (and the other is usually then also triggered), and the two use the trigger to allow each other to be allies in supporting their injured inner children about the painful past.
  - People may feel anxiety when initially hearing about this process, which usually is their inner child anticipating the same kind of harmful results of conflict that they experienced as kids. However, after doing the process members are often amazed by how these inner-child expectations don't occur, and the members feel closer to each other.

- ❖ **Truth-and-anger work:** In role plays, 1-2-3's, and experientials (see below), members become empathetic witnesses attuned to other members in standing up for their inner child by expressing the truth about both how the parents hurt them in childhood and how effects of that injury have persisted.
  - This holding of parents accountable does not engage the parents, themselves; it's a symbolic activity designed to reclaim voice, speak truth, and release buried emotions. It often includes a safe, controlled expression of anger involving both movement (e.g., tearing paper or cloth, using a nerf bat to hit a mattress) and vocalized words.
  - Many survivors experience anxiety about anger, and so early in the group, participants engage in group and individual activities to normalize expressing anger and to address inner-child stuckness that overgeneralizes all anger as dangerous.
- ❖ Group members are encouraged to **interact with each other outside of group** (excluding sexual interaction) to facilitate the practice of intimacy skills.

### **Experiential Phase:**

- ❖ **An experiential** involves a structured activity in which one member confronts some aspect of being hurt in childhood. The activity takes most of a group session and is planned in advance by the participant in consultation with the leader.
  - During the activity, the member is triggered in a good-enough (not overwhelming) way and is aware of how the inner child expects the same harmful consequences as in childhood but instead has a new experience that is healing.
  - There is a menu of experiential structures, including writing a letter to each parent, but the structure is adaptable to the member's needs. Over the course of the group, each member does three or four experientials.
- ❖ **Two additional tools to enhance intimacy skills:**
  - **Gift-giving:** each member negotiates with each other member and the leader to have them give a gift of presence and time that is inner-child focused. *Example: if a member was not celebrated or engaged in play by a parent, they may ask someone to spend time with them in that way.*
  - **Focus group:** each member has a session to turn to **group members as resources** to provide feedback on how they show up in group and how they are engaging the reparenting work; feedback can note positives as well as possible stuck places.
- ❖ Throughout this phase, the leader guides members in building capacity to be open and real with other members about their own triggers, and to increase their confidence to engage in dialoging and in doing 1-2-3's with other group members.

### **Concluding Phase:**

- ❖ As the group begins to anticipate its closure (usually sometime in the third year), members take stock of their process in two ways.
  - **What remains to be done:** in term of both finishing business with their toxic parents, and practicing intimacy skills, both among members and in close relationships.
  - **Sexual histories:** members have the option of telling about their sexual life from childhood on, linking that story to what was taught, modeled, and neglected in their upbringing.
- ❖ Six weeks before the group's concluding date a **goodbye process** begins, including: a personal healing statement (contrast before/after group), a long dialogue with inner child about group ending, and a two-session goodbye process and celebration.