

CHAPTER 11

ADVANCED STEPS INTO THE HERE-AND-NOW

Once starting to take greater risks in self-disclosure and feedback, the group rapidly gains momentum and moves ahead into a breathtaking terrain—the here-and-now.

Though most compatible with unstructured groups in their “working stage,” the here-and-now method can benefit many other groups and settings. Indeed, small doses of the here-and-now can actually be used in the early stages of a counseling group and even in psychoeducational groups or mandated groups. The key lies in choosing a level of intensity that suits your group’s needs and capabilities.

In an effort to cover all levels of here-and-now intensity, Chapter 8 presented some *baby steps* toward the here-and-now; Chapter 10, the *intermediate steps*; and now in Chapters 11 and 12, the *advanced steps*. And even at the advanced level, the here-and-now techniques further partition into several levels of intensity. The hope is that your success with the less intense techniques will embolden you to apply those of higher intensity if it so suits the needs of your group.

THE WORKING STAGE AND UNSTRUCTURED GROUPS—ADVANCED LEVEL

Sometimes called the *production stage* (Lacoursiere, 1980) or the *performing stage* (Tuckman, 1965), the *working stage* (Corey & Corey, 2014)—the fourth stage—of a group starts when the group reaches the *halfway point* of its life span. At that time, a seismic shift in group energy happens, demanding a more advanced level of leadership skills since the basic leadership skills no longer suffice to meet the group’s needs. This section depicts this major shift and how to meet the group needs at this new stage.

Trust, Honesty, Productivity, and Humor

Running parallel to the stage of adulthood, the working stage is the period in a group's life when it is finally geared up for the most intense form of interpersonal learning. In contrast to the prior stage (the norming stage, Chapter 10), *speculative* and *confrontive* levels of member-to-member communication (Hill, 1965) now reign the working stage.

It is a time when the strong trust slowly built up over the previous three stages starts to free members up to take even more risks in traversing the unknown of the here-and-now, like a ship sailing into uncharted waters.

The working stage brings excitement to both the leader and the members as they can now rigorously pursue those interpersonal dynamics previously put aside in favor of establishing group function and norms. The group can now afford to target those unprocessed perceptions and relationship issues that have been going on beneath the surface since day one.

Advancing successfully through this working stage, the group will harvest greater levels of trust, intimacy, self-disclosure, feedback, confrontation, and, most importantly, humor.

Yes, humor. You will definitely hear a lot more hearty laughter at the absurdity of our own human conditions. Humor is a barometer, telling us that the group is well into its working stage.

If a group has passed the halfway mark of its life span and still feels like it has not yet reached the maturity and productivity of the working stage, you might want to look into any unresolved issues, carried over from previous stages, that may be stalling the group's progress.

Member Autonomy and Self-Initiation

The working stage is a time when members finally gain a sense of *autonomy* by *initiating their own communication* without relying on the leader's guidance. It is a time when *less is more—the less the group relies on the leader, the more vivacious and confident it becomes*.

As the members become more and more active, you, the leader, can delegate more and more control to them, leaving you with more energy to address those crucial here-and-now issues floating on the fringe.

Members as Cofacilitators and Guardians of the Group Goal

The newly gained sense of *autonomy* can invigorate members to take on the role of *cofacilitators* of the group process. Only when all members take equal responsibility for acting as *c-facilitators* can the group become a true community wherein all commit themselves to the monitoring the group's functioning and progress as well as the growth and well-being of everyone involved.

Establishing an agreed upon *group goal*, outside of individuals' personal goals, can go a long way in heartening members to act as cofacilitators. Consider the examples below:

[To the group] "Before we start our group processing, let's decide on a collective group goal for our group to work on for the rest of our group's life. With a clear shared vision of what we as a group are willing to commit to, our group may reach its highest potential. Let's have a go-around, in no particular order, and have each of you voice your view about what our group could be."

Later,

"If I may condense all of your voices into one sentence, it sounds like you guys all want to speak from your hearts without self-censoring, to be open to feedback and to give honest feedback generously. Does this sound about right?"

Much later,

"Now that we have solidified our group goal, from now on, each of you will be the cofacilitator to help our group reach this goal. Being the cofacilitator, each of you has *the responsibility* and *the authority* to voice whatever the group needs to take care of in an effort to reach our desired final destination. I hope everyone will keep this group goal and your cofacilitator role in mind as we adventure into the rest of our group time together."

Step In and Initiate a Process

Discussion When Members Cannot Cofacilitate

There will come a time when something happens in the group that is beyond members' capacity to cofacilitate and to resolve it. This kind of phenomenon is bound to happen more and more in the working stage. Leszcz (1992) explains:

“As initial anxiety and social politeness diminish, the group becomes a social microcosm and interpersonal laboratory in which members behave and interact, as they typically do in their outside world, reproducing their characteristic maladaptive interpersonal style.” (p. 50)

At such a juncture, when someone plays out his or her behavior pattern in the group, is exactly the time when the leader must step in to do what the members cannot.

For example, a verbal member, César, has dominated the floor for quite a while, and no one in the group has the capacity to comment on this dynamic. Seeing this, the leader intercedes to get the group to look at this interpersonal event:

[To the group] “I wonder, what do you see is going on here?”

And later,

[To the group] “You guys are making great strides in acknowledging your reactions to César's taking over the floor! Now I want to ask another question: *What is stopping you from sharing your reactions honestly? What is the reason that you allowed this one-person show to last for so long?*”

A Comparison of Advanced Versus Basic Leadership

Exemplified above is an example of an advanced level of leadership. How does it differ from that of a basic level? Below we provide a side-by-side comparison of how an advanced versus. basic level leadership would handle an identical scenario.

The Scenario. A member, Cindy, told the group a regretful recent life event. Luis, another member, jumped in to ask her a series of questions. One or two members then chimed in to relate their own stories, which unfortunately wandered off into completely unrelated topics. Following this, Cindy was completely silent.

Basic Leadership Focusing on Content and Rapport. Should the group be in the early stage, the leader would focus on *the content level*—Cindy’s stressful *life experiences*—and on building *a safe environment* where everyone has a chance to feel heard and understood. With these two focuses in mind, the leader would be thinking of the following questions:

- How does Cindy feel in this stressful life event?
- Beneath all his questions, what is Luis really trying to say to Cindy?
- How can I, the leader, help Luis rephrase his questions so that Cindy can hear Luis’s true message?
- How can I redirect the group to offer empathy and validation so that Cindy does not feel alone and uncared for?

Based on these considerations, the leader might do any of the following:

“Luis, I heard you ask a series of questions to Cindy. Behind your questions, there seems to be something you wanted to say. Would you like to state what you want to say to Cindy directly instead of putting it in a series of questions?”

[To the group] “Can anyone imagine what it is like for Cindy to undergo such a betrayal and abandonment by a person she thought she could trust with her life?”

[To the group] “From the stories shared by Cindy, there seems to be a sense of ‘I’m too intense, or I’m too much of this or that for others.’ I wonder whether this ‘I’m too much of this or that for others’ strikes a chord for you?”

The above-listed leadership skills represent the bare bones of a basic level group facilitation.

Advanced Leadership Focusing on Interpersonal Processes. In the working stage of the group, rather than focus on the content level or on highlighting a supportive environment in the group, the leader will zoom in on *interpersonal processes between members*. With this focus in mind, the leader might be thinking of the following questions:

- How does Luis’s questioning style shut Cindy down?
- Does Luis recognize how his questioning style has an impact on others?
- For those members who used self-referencing to try to show support for Cindy, do they recognize that their self-referencing is actually contributing to Cindy feeling invisible?

- How does Cindy's silence in this moment resemble her silence and lack of voice in her personal life?
- How does the lack of support that Cindy got from the group resemble the lack of support in her early life?
- What is going on inside the minds of the rest of the members as they see Cindy being ignored? What stops them from saying something about it?
- How do I feel about all of these unspoken dynamics? Do I trust the group process enough to tackle immediacy issues, to take the bull by the horns?

With these questions in mind, the leader will do something at the advanced level to pursue the meanings behind these behaviors. This and the following chapters present methods for unearthing these meanings.

A New Paradigm and a Unique Responsibility

As illustrated above, when we focus on what happens at the interpersonal level, we open our eyes to an entirely new vista of the group. To adjust our eyes to these new views, we must make a radical shift in our counseling and therapy paradigm. Going beyond *the content* level of *verbal presentation*, we must hone in on the *unspoken messages* at the *process level* of the group.

And if there is one thing that members cannot do by themselves at the working stage, it is this: They cannot elevate themselves above the group to address the immediacy issues happening within the group. Members instinctively stand by an unspoken social rule of not commenting on the interpersonal process, and anyone who violates it risks being perceived as acting superior and becoming the target of resentment.

Given this, the responsibility of addressing the immediacy and interpersonal process issues falls squarely on the shoulders of the leaders.

THE HERE-AND-NOW METHOD AND THE PROCESS LEVEL OF COMMUNICATION

A powerful therapeutic concept, the here-and-now is originated by Jacob Levy Moreno (1978), an Austrian-American psychotherapist who was a leading pioneer of group psychotherapy. Moreno was a bona fide legend for his ability to guide clients to re-enact and work through their unfinished past business in the present moment of the group. Taking delight in Moreno's ability to do this,

Yalom refined the concept, coining it *the here-and-now method* (Yalom, 1983; Yalom & Leszcz, 2005).

This method has inspired many therapists, including us (the authors), to concoct various therapeutic intervention strategies in an effort to move the therapeutic encounter in the group to a more intense, present-centered place. This section depicts the fascinating concept and method of the here-and-now.

“Content” Level of Communication Transmits Only 35% of Message

To understand the concept of the here-and-now, we must understand two levels of communication: the content level and the process level.

Content refers to the *words, stories, and life events* verbalized in the group. Focusing on the content level of communication will only help us pick up less than 35% of the messages (Pease & Pease, 2006) of the communication in the group. Consider the following scenario:

- Mary:* “I am angry with my sister for not sharing the responsibility of taking care of my parents. But she is an alcoholic and cannot even take care of herself.”
- John:* “Why do you let her get away with this? Being an alcoholic is just an excuse.”
- Mary:* [looks distressed and feels compelled to defend herself]
- John:* [gets nervous and tries harder and harder to convince Mary of her self-defeating behavior]
- Other members:* [feel frustrated about the argument between Mary and John, yet feel hesitant to say anything.]

Given this scenario, if the leader focuses on what Mary said, what happened between her and her sister and its accompanying distress, the leader will probably try to get the group, and especially John, to help Mary feel supported, mostly by giving her affirmation, information, resources, wisdom, and support. Doing so will ignore the other 65% of the messages transmitted in the interpersonal context—a choice that will only take the group so far.

“Process” Level of Communication Transmits 65% of Message

The other 65% (Pease & Pease, 2006) of the message transmitted back and forth in the above exchange is called the “process” level of communication (Yalom, 2009; Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). It includes reactions, attitudes, communication patterns, relational styles, nonverbal cues, tones, facial expressions, and so on. These kinds of communication, although unstated and hard to pinpoint, have a powerful and visceral impact on the people involved.

Take the previous scenario. The dynamics felt instinctively by everybody in the room may include the following:

- John’s way of communicating, including *advice-giving, confrontation, and accusation*
- Mary’s feelings of being *unheard and unaccepted* by John. She might be triggered to become defensive in the next moment.
- John’s lack of awareness of how his communication style has an unpleasant impact on others
- The sense of *powerlessness* felt by the group

Felt in the body but not talked about openly, these unstated dynamics lead to most of the interpersonal misunderstandings and difficulties in people lives. Not confined just to the group setting, these kinds of interpersonal difficulties can, indeed, happen in workplace relationships, between family members, between couples, and in intimate relationships.

Relentlessly Pursue the Meanings of the Process Level of Communication

Unearthing the meanings of the process level of communication gives an extra oomph to any form of therapy, but for group therapy with the here-and-now focus, it gives blood and oxygen. As Kiesler and Van Denburg (1993) point out, all other jobs of the leader pale in comparison to the job of helping the group get how their own metacommunication messages come across to others.

Being the crux of group counseling and therapy, this job of meaning decoding has inspired our profession to conjure up numerous terms to describe it: *process observation, process exploration, process commenting, process illumination, and process examination.*

Observed by an outsider, a effective leaders' work in a group may seem effortless, yet *their minds are constantly alert, relentlessly tracking the process level of communication within the room*. Sensing any dynamics going on below the surface, the effective leader will lead the group to *catch these elusive dynamics in action*, in an effort to shed light on the meanings and the impacts of these dynamics.

This relentless quest to shed light on the process level of interpersonal communication is rather *atypical, unusual, and, indeed, precious*. During our daily interactions with people, seldom will others listen carefully to what we say without impatiently interrupting us with their own views. And rarely do others carefully track our messages, or read between the lines, to detect the personal implications of our oftentimes convoluted stories.

Hence, it truly surprises a member when others in the group share with him or her how they interpret his or her behaviors, letting him or her know the impacts, positive or negative, that the behaviors have on them. It is a cherished find for many members.

Integrate the "Task" and the "Process" Aspects of Group Work

Though starting to put increased focus on the "process" aspect of group work, the group never veers away from working on *its primary task*—helping members to achieve their goals. Instead, the "process" aspect slowly interweaves with the "task" aspect, as the group moves back and forth between these two areas of focus.

Thus, anyone who presents a life stressor will receive the group's attention just like in the early stages of the group, and the sense of acceptance and cohesion never cease to nurture the group. It is when certain dynamics emerge during the group interaction warranting process exploration that the leader will step in and take action to examine them.

Working on both the task and the process aspects, simultaneously, may feel overwhelming at first; eventually, though, your brain will start to incorporate these two different perspectives into your awareness. It will eventually feel like the most natural thing in the world to integrate the there-and-then and the here-and-now, like knitting threads of colorful yarn into one beautiful strand.

Embrace Members' Doubts or Anxiety

Members may perceive the here-and-now focus as irrelevant to their personal goals of working through their life difficulties. Soon, however, their

doubts subside. They will begin to see how their here-and-now relational styles faithfully reflect their relational styles *outside* the group. They will realize that what happens at the process level *within the group* is real—these here-and-now events have tremendous power in revealing how they function in interpersonal contexts.

Fearing becoming the center of the group's process examination, members may feel like deer caught in the headlights, anxious or surprised, not knowing what to predict or anticipate. You can channel this anticipated anxiety by using a prompt to invite members to *talk openly about their anxiety* of the process level of communication. It is only when members embrace their own anxiety, and when they perceive the group as safe and trustworthy, will they accept the value of diving into the here-and-now encounter. Consider the following prompt:

[To the group] "I can sense some hesitancy or anxiety floating around the room right now. Perhaps we could spend some time talking about what concerns or anxiety you might have about looking at our interpersonal styles in the here-and-now. Who would like to start?"

Another anxiety that members experience has to do with their fear of having nothing to talk about that is worthy of the here-and-now exploration. This kind of anxiety can be turned into an opportunity for a different type of check-in. For example,

[To the group] "We would like to start with a more adventurous kind of check-in. During this check-in, please tell the group *what you have wanted to say but haven't yet had the courage to.*"

Following the check-in, you might ask a member to expand upon what she said:

"Stephanie, during the check-in, you said that last session had stirred up a lot of strong emotions in you, reminiscent of the way you often react to your siblings. Would you like to expand a bit on that?" [using Stephanie's emotions as a springboard for group interaction.]

Alternatively, if a group is ready to take the necessary initiative, you can ask members to speak when they feel so moved, allowing any silence to linger:

[To the group] "Our floor is completely open. Whoever feels moved to say anything, please take the liberty of jumping in."

THE HERE-AND-NOW METHOD: THE TWO TIERS

The here-and-now method actually consists of *two tiers* (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005):

- Affect stimulation (experiencing the emotions)
- Process illumination (examining the process)

These two tiers form a continuous, circular action in a fluid process. The two tiers are *not cut-and-dried or linear*. As Yalom and Leszcz (2005) stated well, “Therapy is a continuous sequence of experiencing and then examining the process” (p. 34). It is only for educational purposes that we separate these two procedures.

It Takes Two Tiers to Boost Neural Plasticity

Working on these two tiers is exactly what it takes to facilitate *neural plasticity*. As proposed by Cozolino (2010), neural plasticity happens when the following conditions are met:

- A safe and trusting relationship has been established.
- There is the presence of moderate levels of stress.
- Emotion and cognition are both activated.
- New meanings have been co-constructed for the clients’ life stories.

Without a doubt, the two tiers in the here-and-now method involve all the required conditions for neural plasticity.

First Tier: Stimulate Group Affects—“Stir the Pot”

A group can achieve a moderate level of emotional animation through a procedure called “*here-and-now activation*” or “*here-and-now disclosure*” (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). In this text, we call it “*stirring the pot*” just to make it a bit more visual.

When used properly and with the right timing, the technique of stirring-the-pot can embolden members to disclose emotions stuffed beneath the surface, providing an eye-opening experience for all involved, as reflected by the following comment by a group member:

“As we begin to delve further into our unstructured sessions, and as *the pot continues to be stirred, the group is becoming more interesting and worthwhile.*”

See the following method of how a leader stirs the pot to bring the group into the here-and-now:

A group member, Jim, has been going off on a tangent about some infuriating events in his life involving various people. Feeling bored by his rambling and by his excessive fixation on details, the group begins to tune him out. Seeing the group starting to check-out, the leader steps in to stir the pot:

[To the group] “From what I am hearing, it seems that *Jim is telling us that he has difficulty sharing his anger with others.* [borrow Jim’s words] I wonder, *with whom in the group* do you think Jim would feel safe expressing his anger, and *with whom in the group*, is he likely to suppress it?” [first tier of here-and-now; leader trying to *shift focus of conversation toward people inside group*]

Causing somewhat of a commotion, this here-and-now technique sparked emotions in the group, resulting in a much-heated discussion. During this heated discussion, certain interpersonal dynamics came out organically, and it was time to move to the second tier of this technique.

Second Tier: Illuminate the Meanings Hidden in the Interpersonal Process

With its ability to touch and stir up emotions in many members, the here-and-now technique must be carried to completion. Don’t just hit and run. Rather, make sure that everyone affected by the here-and-now activation has a chance to explore and examine the *meanings* of the event for them.

That is where the second tier, *process illumination*, kicks in. This is the tool that decodes the meanings of the following interpersonal processes:

- The group or individual behavior patterns happening in the moment
- The functions that these interpersonal patterns serve in this particular moment
- The ways these interpersonal patterns have an impact on members of the group
- The ways the here-and-now reflects members’ unresolved past issues or interpersonal difficulties outside the group

Process illumination, itself a *cognitive reflection*, helps members make sense of what's going on inside of them. It serves as a *meaning-making* device through which members come to understand *the meaning and implications* behind their emotions and the behaviors. During process illumination, as Yalom and Leszcz (2005) so succinctly put it, the group “performs a self-reflective loop and examines the here-and-now behavior that has just occurred” (p. 142).

Let's continue with the above case of Jim. After the leader stirred the pot, a heated discussion—about which person in the group Jim would feel safe enough with to express his anger and with which person Jim would suppress his anger—ensues, bringing to surface various buried feelings and reactions. Some people smiled, Anne got upset, and Charlie started to tell a story.

To unravel the meanings of all these reactions, the leader stopped the group and asked members to comment on what was going on according to their observations:

[To the group] “I may be wrong, but I sense that some important things have been happening in the last 5 minutes. I wonder, what do you see is going on here? And why?” [second tier of here-and-now; leader trying to illuminate the meanings of aroused behaviors]

For Charlie's benefit, the leader followed up with a further process illumination:

“Charlie, the group seems to say that you have a tendency to use your storytelling to pull the group's attention away from any tension happening in our group. They pointed out that when Anne got upset just a moment ago, you changed the focus to something else, perhaps trying to reduce her emotional upset. I wonder, when you do that, how does it have an impact on Anne and on the group?” [second tier of here-and-now; leader trying to illuminate the impact of the aroused behaviors]

The leader wrapped up the process illumination with Charlie by saying,

[To the group] “It seems that Charlie is becoming more aware of how this rescuing behavior has an impact on all involved. I wonder whether any of you see any connection between Charlie's need for rescuing others and his feeling of helplessness as a child when he witnessed his sister being abused and was not believed when he told his parents about it? [second tier of here-and-now; leader trying to illuminate the connection between the present and the past]

For Anne's benefit, the leader followed up with the following process illumination:

[To the group] "It seems that Anne is reacting strongly to the group feedback about her being the person in the group to whom Jim might have difficulty expressing his anger. How are you experiencing Anne right now? And why are you feeling the way? [second tier of here-and-now; leader trying to illuminate the impact of the aroused behaviors]"

Later,

"Anne, I wonder what you get from the group's feedback for you? How does it sit with you? What feedback fits with the way you see yourself, and what does not fit?" [second tier of here-and-now; leader trying to illuminate the perception of the member receiving feedback]"

The above illustrated here-and-now technique gives you some idea of how the first tier starts the emotional experiencing, and the second tier finishes the cognitive reflection loop.

KEY TO THE HERE-AND-NOW METHOD: ZIGZAGGING THE HOT-SEAT

Being the center of here-and-now processing is such an intense experience that many of our group members call it the "hot seat." When on the hot seat for too long (more than 20 minutes), members start to feel flooded. As you can well imagine, a person typically needs to take a breather to recover and to reflect after being on the hot seat for a while. To accomplish this, you can shift the group's attention to others whose emotions and behaviors also have been aroused. We call this transferring back and forth of the hot seat "zigzagging."

What Do You Zigzag and When to Do It

As a *nonlinear* way of here-and-now processing, "zigzagging" has nothing to do with a disorganized discussion or a haphazard change of topics. Rather, it depicts the tempo and the movement of *moving the hot seat from member to member*.

A question that frequently comes up is, when can I best zigzag to the next person for here-and-now processing? From our experiences, the following markers present ripe opportunities for zigzagging.

Zigzagging Marker 1: When Someone's Interpersonal Style Is Stirring Up Group Reactions

Whenever a member's *interpersonal pattern* shows up, provoking *charged reactions* in others, you can zigzag the group processing to that person without delay. Don't fret over not finishing up with the previous member—you can always go back to revisit the member whose topic has been interrupted.

To zigzag in this case, you may say,

[To the group] “As Ted told Sabrina—that it is her decision if she wants to feel resentful toward what he said, that it's up to her how she wants to feel, and that he won't change a thing—I saw strong reactions in the group. I would like to invite the group to tell Ted directly what you were reacting to in that moment.” [2nd tier processing. The group is already reacting, there is no need to go to the first tier for a dose of affect stimulation.]

Zigzagging Marker 2: When You Hear Loaded Words

Whenever you hear *loaded words* from a member, grab the moment, and zigzag the hot seat to that member, asking him to expand on it.

For example, the spotlight has been on Cathy for a short while, and now you hear *some charged words* from Diana. You could zigzag seamlessly to Diana:

“Diana, in your response to Cathy just now, you said that *you know exactly what it feels like to be always hiding*. [recap the loaded phrase] Would you please say more about that? What parts of yourself do you need to hide, and from whom in the group do you have to hide?” [a combination of the first tier and the second tier]

Zigzagging Marker 3: When the Group Attention Lingers too Long on a Member

Sandra has been on the hot seat for awhile, but the group seems stuck with her, not knowing how to peel its attention away from her and shift to other members. Sandra expresses that she wishes other people would speak, so therefore, she does not dominate the floor.

You take the hint from Sandra and get ready to zigzag the hot seat to some other members who need the group's attention:

[smiling and nodding to Sandra] “Sandra, thank you for noticing other people's needs for group attention! I wonder from whom in the group do you wish to hear more from and why?” [The leader uses an opening to zigzag the hot-seat to someone else.]

Let's say that Sandra names three *quieter members*, Rosie, Kate, and Mary. You can then shift the focus to them:

“Rosie, Kate, and Mary, many members nodded their heads when they heard Sandra expressing her desire to know more about you three. How would you respond to this?” [This naturally draws the quieter member to open up more.]

THE PRINCIPLES OF ENGAGING THE FIRST TIER: STIMULATING GROUP AFFECTS

For organizational purposes, the remainder of this chapter will focus on just the first tier, leaving Chapter 12 to cover the second. This section reviews the principles of using the first tier of the here-and-now method—affect stimulation (stirring the pot).

1st: No Need to Engage the First Tier When the Group is Already Reacting

The first principle of engaging the group in the here-and-now is this: You don't always need to start with the first tier. If the group's emotions are already heated up, stimulating group affects by stirring the pot is *not necessary*.

Indeed, most of the time you don't need to stir the pot because *the group has a number of built-in mechanisms that will organically stir up members' emotions* (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). These built-in mechanisms may include but are not limited to the following:

- Competition
- Projection
- Distortions

- Sibling rivalry
- Members playing out the roles they took on in their family of origin, and so on

As any of these inherent elements kicks into action, members will emotionally and viscerally react to one another. At this moment, the leader can skip the first tier and jump directly to the second tier (next chapter) to illuminate the meanings of what's going on.

2nd: “Stirring the Pot” to Permit Suppressed Inner Reactions to Break the Surface

That said, circumstances exist where you do need to use the first tier of the here and now to fan the flames of group energy. These circumstances mostly have to do with members internally reacting to others' interpersonal patterns while outwardly concealing these reactions. In a society where we prize above all images of being strong and rational, it is no surprise that members deem it weak to display their emotions.

Fearing being judged as such, many people will go out of their way to employ tactics to avoid experiencing emotions, for example, suppressing them, deflecting them, dodging them, masking them, ignoring them, denying them, intellectualizing about them, or so on.

For example, when someone is dominating the group, group members might employ the tactic of suppression. Even when seething with anger on the inside, they might appear peaceful and agreeable on the outside. Hence, the second principle of the here-and-now involves giving suppressed inner reactions a chance to break the surface.

When given a chance via the first tier of the here-and-now, those core materials locked inside get to come up to meet the light of the day and benefit from group exploration and examination. This focus on here-and-now truly “energizes group members, heightens their interest, and often evokes insightful responses” (Ferencik, 1991, p. 169).

3rd: Don't Be Afraid of Stirring Group Affects

The third principle is this: Don't let fear block you from stirring group emotions. You will do good to the group when you stir the pot. As stated previously, for neuroplastic processes to happen, members need to experience a moderate level of emotions (Cozolino, 2010).

Many new group leaders shy away from the here-and-now method due to their fear of stirring up members' censored emotions. If only they could see past their fear and recognize the benefits of group affect stimulation! Yes, the first tier will definitely bring submerged, dormant emotions to the surface, but this gives the group opportunities to talk about things *long left unspeakable*. In so doing, it ignites the fuse of group aliveness; members will sit up straighter, lean forward, and maintain alert and focused eye contact. Even in moments of silence, the focus is so alive, you can almost hear a pin drop.

4th: Follow It up With Process Illumination

The fourth principle is that the second tier should follow the first tier to complete the here-and-now loop.

As we explained previously, the second tier removes members' blinders, enabling them to see who they are in an interpersonal context. This meaning-making must be an integral part of group work, and we should not leave our members in a state of emotional arousal without helping them make sense of it.

BEHAVIORAL MARKERS FOR GROUP AFFECT STIMULATION

This question frequently comes up: What *signs* do I look for that tell me that it's time for me to go to the first tier to stimulate group affects? To answer this question, this section provides several behavioral markers that tell you when it's time to stir the pot.

Stirring the Pot Marker 1: Excessive Niceness and Politeness

The first behavioral marker has to do with excessive niceness and politeness among members even when the group has already passed its early stages. As stated previously, external pleasant exchanges do not necessarily reflect people's internal reactions. Due to social conditioning, they prefer to appear nice and polite; maybe too nice to be true.

A group displaying such excessive niceness and politeness often becomes lethargic and lifeless. The longer members mask their feelings, the harder it

becomes for them to interact with one another on an authentic level. Therefore, when you see excessive niceness and politeness during the working stage of the group, go stir the pot.

Stirring the Pot Marker 2: Excessive Storytelling

The second behavioral marker involves excessive storytelling. Excessive storytelling keeps the group stuck on the *content* level of communication, stripping the group of any sense of immediacy. Slife and Lanyon (1991) indicate that any type of therapy that lacks immediacy will become sterile.

To be clear, members do need to talk about their stressful or problematic life events. This kind of there-and-then disclosure (Leszcz, 1992) helps group members understand each other's world, enabling them to give empathy and support to one another. Time is well spent in this manner.

But when stories of there-and-then events go on and on in the group, problems will happen—sessions will become stuck, and members will soon find themselves tuning out. Take this as your green light to step in with a here-and-now activation.

Stirring the Pot Marker 3: Excessive Agreement—Group Collusion

The third marker concerns *excessive agreement* among group members. This is called *group collusion*. Comparing it to the tension and conflicts of the transition stage, group collusion in the working stage doesn't sound too bad, does it? However, by colluding to ignore critical events and sweep them under the rug, members are unconsciously avoiding their *primary tasks* while chasing after the bait of certain *secondary gratifications* (Gladding, 2015; Shields, 1999). Common secondary gratifications may include being popular, being liked, a sense of coziness, a secure position in the group, avoidance of conflict or confrontation, or so on.

For instance, a member might excessively agree with others in the group in order to gain popularity but does so at the expense of being truthful to his or her own feelings. This behavior represents a type of regression toward self-protectiveness, distracting the member from working on his or her primary goals and ultimately, from personal transformation. Seeing this marker, you can go ahead with the first tier of the here-and-now.

Stirring the Pot Marker 4: Other Signs That the Group Needs You to Stir Affects

Other signs signaling that the group is becoming removed and bored—and is in need of a here-and-now stimulation—may include the following:

- Members wriggling in their seats
- Emotions of group members flattened
- Group interaction staying at the intellectual level
- Group hitting a wall in trying to help a member
- Members remaining externally focused

These signs indicate that the group members are having a hard time interacting with one another in a meaningful and authentic manner. The group is becoming stagnant. When you see these signs, you know that you need to stir things up to bring the group into the here-and-now.

Choose the Right Dose of Here-and-Now Activation

With these behavioral markers in mind, you can choose how much of a dose of here-and-now solution you want to give to your group. As stated in the opening of this chapter, leaders don't need to wait until they have a process group or when a group enters the working stage to lead the group into the here-and-now.

Whether you have experiential groups, psychoeducational groups, or even mandated groups, small doses of here-and-now solution can boost members' self-awareness as well as the group's sense of aliveness. The key is in choosing a proper level of intensity, one that suits your group.

In the sections that follow, we present here-and-now oriented leadership techniques, ranked by the level of their intensity. You can pick and choose whatever level suits the specific needs of your session.

(I) MEDIUM-INTENSITY STIMULATION: MEMBERS SETTING HERE-AND-NOW SESSION GOALS

Chapter 8 in this text introduced the low-intensity stimulation techniques suitable for most groups in their early stages to become acquainted with an intimate level of communication. Please review Chapter 8 if you are seeking some mild *affect stimulation techniques* to bring more buzz to your group.

To kickstart this presentation of a series of advanced here-and-now techniques, this section presents medium-intensity here-and-now activation techniques.

Here-And-Now Oriented Session Goals

More synergistic with the mature stages of a group, the here-and-now oriented session goals reshape members' goals to become *more interpersonal and more immediate* (Kivlighan & Jauquet, 1990). This resonates with Ferencik (1991), who asserts that "External issues must first be transformed into the here-and-now in order for the group to work on them" (p. 170).

In re-orienting members' goals to the here-and-now, the leader adds zing to the group atmosphere and stimulates the group to a heightened state of emotions.

How to Reshape Members' Goals to Become Here-And-Now Oriented

Below we present a few examples of how to reshape members' goals to become more here-and-now oriented.

Example 1:

Member: "I would like to practice speaking up more openly."

Leader: "With whom *in this group* do you need to practice speaking up more openly?"

Member: "Well, I would like to practice expressing myself more openly *toward Kelly* [another member] regarding my feeling unheard whenever I try to tell her how her behaviors affect me in the group."

Example 2:

Member: "I would like to practice becoming more honest in my conversations with people."

Leader: "Has there been any event *in the group* where you wish you had been able to speak more honestly?"

Member: "Yes, many times *in the group* I only say positive things to placate other members even when I feel the opposite. In this session, I would like to

work on honestly expressing my feelings even when I feel uncomfortable or even when I disagree with something that happens in the group.”

Example 3:

Member: “I would like to practice being more assertive.”

Leader: “With whom *in this group* would you like to become more assertive?”

Example 4:

Member: “I would like to practice speaking more of how I feel.”

Leader: “What kinds of feelings have you had *in this group* that you would like to speak up more about?”

(II) HIGH-INTENSITY STIMULATION: REVEALING IN-GROUP PERCEPTIONS

Group members’ *interpersonal perceptions* pack the richest data that you can ask for in a group. One way to access these rich data is to stimulate group affects by having members reveal their perceptions about *people within the group*. Through zigzagging of the hot seat, the group will bustle with a high level of engagement.

Since this high-intensity here-and-now technique can arouse strong emotions, it should be applied with prudence. Use it only when group trust reaches adequate levels, and make sure to follow it up with process illumination (second tier).

First Tier: Members Disclosing Perceptions About Others in the Group

In this step, you heat up the immediacy by moving the focus of the conversation from people in a member’s life outside the group to *the people within the group*. Remember to draw out both the positive and the negative side of member perceptions so that you are striking a balance.

The Case of Lisa. The group has been discussing some there-and-then events nonchalantly and for quite a while now. Sensing a need to nudge the group into the here-and-now, the leader looked for an opportunity. After Lisa talked about her fear of disapproval from her family, the leader grabbed a chance to do so:

[To the group] “Lisa has talked extensively about her *fears of disapproval from people in her life*. I wonder whether we could shift the focus just a bit. If you were to make a wild guess, *from whom in the group* is Lisa likely to anticipate disapproval? And *from whom in the group* is Lisa likely to anticipate approval?” [the first tier of here-and-now activation; moving from outside focus to inside focus]

A member, Susan, jumped in and disclosed that Dale would be the one within the group from whom Lisa would most likely sense disapproval. The group became silent. The leader then followed up on Susan’s disclosure by turning to the group to seek more data:

“Thank you, Susan. [turning to the group] I wonder how the rest of the group responds to what Susan just said. Does anyone else feel the same way as Susan does?” [prompt seeking consensual validation]

Two Other Examples. Following are two other examples of how to steer the group toward disclosing their *perceptions about others inside the group*:

[To the group] “Kim has been coming to the group for about seven meetings and has been unable to share with us *due to fear of judgment*. I wonder if the group can guess *from whom in this group* does Kim fear judgment? And *from whom in this group* does Kim feel accepted?” [the first tier; use only in the working stage, and should be followed later by second tier process illumination]

[To the group] “Kelly said that, in her daily life, she tends to *feel responsible for others’ feelings*. *For whom in the group* do you guess Kelly is most likely to feel responsible, and *for whom*, the least?”

Second Tier: Process Illumination

Once here-and-now disclosures kick into action, some members may become defensive; others may try to smooth things over; still, others may try to reduce the intensity by changing the subject to outside events.

Whatever members do, the ways in which they respond to the heated emotions and conversations often mirror their interpersonal patterns outside the group. The group must explore and reflect on these responding and reactive patterns; examining their meanings. Though the second tier (process illumination)

will be covered in next chapter, for the purpose of highlighting the continuity between the first and the second tiers, we underscore it again here.

Let's continue with *the case of Lisa*. When Susan disclosed that Dale would be the one within the group from whom Lisa would most likely sense disapproval, two other members provided similar observations. At that juncture, Dale became defensive and began to rationalize his behaviors.

Sensing that Dale was in direct conflict with the three members, another member, Jane, the peacemaker of the group, broke into the conversation and indirectly tried to diffuse the tension.

It is obvious that *multiple processes have emerged during this event*. Not only was Dale's pattern enacted, but Jane's interpersonal pattern also added another wrinkle to the dynamics. Both processes require illumination. At this point, the leader may pose a process question to the group:

[To the group] "Let's stop for a moment here. It looks like there are two important dynamics going on here. Let's talk about what you saw in Dale's reaction to the feedback, and what you saw going on with Jane's reaction." [multiple process illuminations]

Zigzag the Hot Seat

As the group gains insights through the process discussion, it may organically zigzag the hot seat to other members. If this does not happen, the leader ensures it does.

Let's go back to the case of Lisa. Once the group finished the discussion on Dale and Jane, the group did not know how to move on. To remedy this and to engage even more members in the process discussion, the leader used a prompt to shift the spotlight to other members:

[To the group] "Has anyone else ever sensed disapproval from another in the group?" [zigzagging the hot seat away from Dale and Jane and onto others]

Deal With Reluctance

Suppose that the group was *unresponsive* to your first-tiered question (from whom in the group might Lisa anticipate disapproval). What then? Rather than pressing the group to respond, you might want to consider if it is simply an issue of *timing* or *readiness*.

If the group has not reached a solid level of trust, you can expect members to be reluctant to get too personal. In this case, stay clear of overstimulating the group with here-and-now activation lest members feel unsafe. Instead, you could work with the member (Lisa) and look at the general pattern of her issue, without bringing up the immediacy issue.

If, however, the group is well into the working stage and has reached an adequate level of trust, then *the unresponsiveness is a very meaningful dynamic in and of itself*. You may go directly to it to shine a light on the factors causing the resistance:

[To the group] “Dead silence. Hmmm . . . I wonder what is going on here. What is stopping you from speaking?” [processing reluctance of group]

(III) EVEN HIGHER-INTENSITY STIMULATION: HYPOTHETICAL ROLE ENACTMENT

To crank the level of intensity up a notch, you can have members enact hypothetical roles in the group. This technique is both an affect-stimulation and a process illumination.

Enactment is a technique frequently used in psychodrama (see Chapter 13 for more concepts and illustrations). But, in hypothetical role enactment, members have to project their here-and-now perceptions/reactions to a hypothetical situation. This technique can stir up highly intense emotions, but at the same time, it can also feel *playful*. It gives members the chance to talk about their reactions to one another normally about issues that are *difficult or awkward to talk about*.

To Start, Observe Your Own Reactions and Those of Members'

Before kicking this high-intensity stimulation into action, observe your own internal experiences. Notice what kinds of reactions you have while listening to members talking. For example, you notice that you are reacting to the domineering style of a member, Alvaro, as he interacts with other members. You may first think to yourself,

“Well, am I the only one who *feels ticked off* by Alvaro’s domineering style? How often does he steal the floor with no consideration of others’

needs to talk? How is this domineering style related to his problems in his interpersonal relationships?”

After that, you then further ponder to yourself,

“Hmm . . . so how is the group reacting to Alvaro’s domineering style of talking? Do they see the connection to the problems that Alvaro has in his relationships outside the group? Do members feel put off by his behavior? Do they feel frustrated or resentful, but lack the opportunity to express it?”

First Tier: Initiating Here-and-Now Feedback via Enacting a Hypothetical Role

Having contemplated the parallel between your own and members’ reactions, you are ready to kick off the intervention. You have two choices to help Alvaro see his interpersonal impact clearly: via a low-key here-and-now feedback or via an intense hypothetical role enactment.

A Low-Key Here-and-Now Feedback. To initiate a mild and gentle here-and-now feedback, you may say,

“All of you have known Alvaro for a few weeks now. I wonder, through your own experiences in the group, what do you know about Alvaro that he might not know about himself?”

But this low-key feedback *lacks the subtlety and playfulness of the hypothetical role enactment* below.

An Intense Hypothetical Role Enactment. So, you opt for the hypothetical enactment technique here, allowing your members to speak more honestly about their reactions to one another. *Through the disguise of the hypothetical role*, members often *chuckle and are free and playful in divulging their first-hand experience with a specific member*. You may say,

[To the group] “Alvaro has expressed that he is having many problems in relationships at work. Maybe the group can help Alvaro gain fresh perspectives by *imagining if you were Alvaro’s hypothetical coworker*. After spending all day with Alvaro at work, what would you be saying to yourself at the end of the day? How you would feel toward him?” [the first tier, stirring the pot using hypothetical role enactment]

Second Tier: Connecting Here-and-Now to There-and-Then

After members disclose their reactions and perceptions in the hypothetical situation, the leader may try to help the person in the hot seat to connect what goes on in the group with what goes on in the outside world.

“Alvaro, I wonder *if* there might be people in your life who feel the same way as the group members feel toward you, that is, *if* people at your work might respect your intelligence and desire to help people yet interpret your take-charge style as being domineering and controlling, all because they don’t get to know your underlying fear of appearing inadequate?” [the second tier; using process illumination to elucidate parallel process]

More Examples of Hypothetical Role Enactment

Example 1:

First tier:

[To the group] “Marcia has expressed that she experiences a great deal of stress in relationships with men in her life. To help her see things in a new light, I would like the group to *imagine if* you were to go out on *a date* with Marcia. What would you say to yourself after the date? What would you feel?” [the first tier: stirring the pot using role-taking]

Second tier:

“Marcia, *perhaps* there are people in your life who feel the same way as the group members did toward you; that is, *perhaps* there are people who are attracted to you and want to get close to you but who sense your mistrust and aloofness, therefore, feel pushed away. Your fear of closeness pushes these potential suitors away.” [the second tier: process illumination—illuminating parallel process]

Example 2:

[To the group] “*If* you were to have a conflict with Anika, what do you *imagine* would be your visceral experiences?”

terrain—the here-and-now. To adjust our eyes to this entirely new vista, we must make a radical shift in our counseling and therapy paradigm. Going beyond *the content* level of *verbal presentation*, we must hone in on the *unspoken messages* at the *process level* of the group.

The here-and-now method actually consists of *two tiers* that form a *continuous, circular action* in a fluid process. To be sure, the leader does not always start with the first tier, only once certain behavioral markers arise does the leader get the green light to stir the pot.

Armed with a series of advanced here-and-now techniques (from medium-intensity to highest-intensity), you have the tools now should you feel a need to crank up a notch the intensity level of group affects. Geared up with the markers telling you when to stir the pot and when to zigzag the hot seat, you have the method now to get your group to bustle with a high level of engagement, organically filled with rich metacommunication messages, ripe for the group to hunt for their hidden meanings via the second tier of the here-and-now, explored in the next chapter.

CASES IN POINT

Case 1: Mary

Fear of abandonment and isolation plagues Mary's mind. Her father, an alcoholic, used to hit Mary's mother, and there seemed to be a *parallel pattern* in Mary's own marriage: Mary's ex-husband drank a lot, verbally abused her, and had chased her around the house trying to hit her.

Though Mary got out of the marriage, she was haunted by grief because her ex-husband and his new wife were living in the house that Mary and her ex still owned together, and her ex had adopted the child of his new wife.

Mary had suffered four miscarriages while she was married to her ex, resulting in a great deal of grief and loss. In her mind, Mary was convinced that *due to her difficulty in having babies, men would find her undesirable*. She was afraid that she would be excluded from happiness and would live in loneliness.

As Mary talked, the leader sensed that Mary's sense of inadequacy for not being able to have children had distorted her view about her self-worth as a woman. She had been so inundated with her losses and struggles that she had lost sight of her true qualities.

Although group members tried to give her different perspectives, Mary seemed to take no refuge in their words. At this moment, the leader decided to initiate a hypothetical role enactment:

[To the group] “*If* you went out on a date with Mary, and you had just come home from the date, what kinds of thoughts or reflections might you have about the date with Mary?”

Everyone in the group responded with extremely positive comments about Mary. They said she was funny, attractive, intelligent, insightful, considerate, witty, a good dancer, and so on. Every member stated that he or she would want to see Mary again.

This role enactment exercise made Mary laugh and, at the same time, forced her, in a good way, to listen to the many assets that she had forgotten she had.

After the session, Mary wrote the following in her reflective journal about the influence of this experience:

I must admit that the exercise on “how would you feel if you just came back from a date with Mary” was pretty interesting and strange to hear at the same time. It felt weird hearing members say such nice things about me.

Perhaps the one comment that left me thinking the most was Keith’s. I recall him repeating to me that there were a lot of good men out there, like him, who would appreciate a good woman. It seemed a hidden message somehow because he repeated it as if trying to tell me something.

I didn’t anticipate that people would say such wonderful things about me even though they have only known me for a short time. This group has shown me some of my qualities so visible to others yet unrecognized by myself. It is so heartwarming! It makes me feel I am okay as a person, even though I have felt so miserable in my life. I really appreciate gaining this new perspective on myself.

Case 2: Dianne

The case of Dianne is one that gives us affirmation that, given the proper conditions, the human spirit will always triumph.

Dianne had proved to be a difficult person for the group to get along with. People had been feeling on edge with her yet had not known what to do with their feelings. During the seventh session, Dianne presented her difficulty in her relationships at home and at work.

The group members expressed their empathy to her, yet no one had the guts to tell her how she came across to the members. The group felt stuck because

their empathy could not do a thing to provide the reality check that Dianne so badly needed.

Sensing that the group was unable to gain any traction, the leader realized that she had to do something to move the group into high gear (remember, members are not in the position to do that). So, the leader took the risk to initiate a hypothetical role enactment:

[To the group] “Please use your first-hand experience with Dianne to answer the following hypothetical question: *If you were to spend 24 hours with Dianne, when the day was over, and you were back at home, what thoughts might you have about your experience with Dianne?*”

The group responded to this question with honest disclosure about their reactions. After that, the group processed more to connect what happened inside the group with Dianne’s relationships outside the group.

It was a powerful session for the group, and especially for Dianne. This is captured in her reflection following the group:

I have just arrived home from the group after probably one of the most intense 90 minutes of my life. There was a lot of truth-telling, and it was very difficult to take in. I have been struggling with my issues of judgment and anger for a very long time. I have been very angry at the world, family, friends, and coworkers, all of them never seem to live up to my standards of what it means to be a moral, humane person.

The group process tonight has changed me forever. I received consistent feedback from seven members—so consistent that I couldn’t easily dismiss it. The essence of the feedback is that it wouldn’t be easy to spend 24 hours with me!

When Linda told me that she would not enjoy how competitive I am, something penetrated the hard shell of my anger. It brought me back to the pattern I had with my siblings in my childhood. It was painful for me to realize how this pattern still haunts my life.

What is paradoxical about tonight’s session is that I have never felt more loved and respected than I did tonight. Everyone took a risk to help me see the reality of myself as it is, all in an effort to help me grow to my full potential. There wasn’t any bullshit. That is what I found most refreshing. Compassionate honesty is very powerful.

AN OVERVIEW OF AN UNSTRUCTURED SESSION WITH A HERE-AND-NOW FOCUS

This section provides you with an overview of an unstructured session with a here-and-now focus. Please remember, a table can never do justice to the richness of the flow of a live group session where multiple actions and circular interactions often occur simultaneously at any given moment.

Table 11.1 An Overview of an Unstructured Session with a Here-and-Now Focus

- | |
|---|
| <p>A. Opening the session (10 minutes)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Relaxation exercise (optional) -Check-in: Members sharing lingering feelings, progress, and personal realizations <p>B. Starting unstructured discussion (65 minutes)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Opening the floor of the unstructured session -Members starting to share and respond to one another with validation and feedback -Using common themes to get more members engaged simultaneously -Stirring the pot when needed to shift attention from there-and-then stories to here-and-now direct experiencing (the first tier—group affect stimulation) -Examining any interpersonal dynamics or behavioral patterns occurring in the heat of the moment (the second tier—process illumination) -Transferring (or zigzagging) the here-and-now processing gradually from one member to another and yet another -Shifting back and forth between here-and-now experiences and there-and-then stories <p>C. Closing the session (10 minutes)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Announcing the time for closing -Checking-out -Reminder |
|---|

EXERCISES**Scenarios for Your Practice**

1. Rocky admits to the group that he greatly fears what other people think of him, but that he cannot bring himself to ask others what they think for fear of being devastated by their response. Upon hearing this, the group members are totally frozen. They are stuck. What are some options for handling this situation?
2. In the sixth session of an interpersonal learning group, Wayne shares that, "At my work evaluation meeting today, my boss told me that I'm not relating well with my coworkers. I don't know what he's talking about. I'm always teasing the people I work with, and I always have a good laugh. Maybe it's some kind of political correctness thing. I just don't know how to figure it out." As a group leader, how might you respond to this statement?
3. Rolf states to the group, "You know, I tried out several of the suggestions that this group gave to me last week in dealing with my boss to show him that I can demonstrate personal initiative. He didn't like the ideas at all, and he looked at me like I was way out of line. What should I do now?"

Take a look at the possible interpersonal dynamics involved, both at the individual and group level. How might you choose to address the issue with the group?

4. As the fourth session of a personal growth group begins, the energy seems low. Members are sharing what they would like to explore for that session, but no one sounds especially invested in the issues they are raising. Jill continues the round of discussion by intellectualizing,

"I am just learning so many tips on how to deal with situations here.

I get to hear what others have faced and learn how to handle those situations. I'm sure it will save me from a lot of trouble someday. It's so good for me to just observe in here."

What do you sense is happening in this group? What does Jill's comment suggest about the depth of involvement that group members are experiencing with one another? Give an example of an intervening statement or question that you might make to move the group more fully into the here-and-now.

5. Gary and Cathy have spent about 10 minutes in the group discussing the pros and cons of whether office workers should bring donuts to work in the mornings. You notice that other group members have been shifting around in their seats for a while but are not offering any significant verbal input. What might this situation suggest to you about the current state of the group's dynamics? How might you intervene in order to change the level of interaction?

6. Zinnia shared the following in the group:

"I usually feel overlooked for my contributions at the agency where I work. I put a lot of work into a grant application for which we were able to get a sizable amount of funding. We are now able to offer some very good programs as a result. Yet, no one took notice. It was just like everyone thought it was no big deal. Others seem to get a lot of recognition for what they do, but what I do is not often acknowledged. I guess it's not really that important. . ."

How might you choose to address this issue in terms of the here-and-now of the group? How might you encourage group interaction around this issue?

7. Bart responds to Zinnia's lead (see Question 6).

He says, "At least you're not getting negative attention. It seems like, for me, I only hear about the bad things I do. It's always been that way, going back to my childhood; my older and younger sisters always got heaps of praise for their accomplishments, and I was some kind of 'bad boy.' Maybe I should just carry out my fantasy of getting a motorcycle and hitting the road."

What options do you have for responding to Bart? If his statement came right after Zinnia's, should you ignore his statement and turn attention back to Zinnia? Alternatively, might there be some way for you to bring the issues together so the group could address both at once?

Self-Reflection

1. How do you recognize potential hot seat issues? In terms of your own emotional self-awareness, what helps you to sort out what could be an important aspect to explore versus something that is truly your "own stuff" and not especially relevant to your particular group?

2. What do you feel physically and emotionally when you are bored in a group interaction? Conversely, what do you feel physically and emotionally when you are engaged and find something interesting or moving when in a group?"
3. Consider recent relationships in which you've been involved and the development of trust and understanding within those relationships. What types of incidents occurred to help move those relationships toward a deeper level? Can you recall some specific examples? What happened, and what occurred afterward? Are there any lessons that you can take from these experiences to apply toward working with group members struggling to improve their relationships?
4. What are some of your primary concerns about "stirring the pot" within a group? How might you deal with each of these concerns?
5. Consider key "I-thou" relationships that have thrived in your life. What aspects tell you that these relationships are especially alive? Are these factors that you can actively promote among group members?
6. How do you feel about working in a "zigzag" fashion within a group? If you prefer to work from a more linear or analytical perspective, how might you balance that approach with working in a zigzag fashion with a group?