Community Connections

TREM and M-TREM Leader Techniques

Overall Group Approach

1. **Cognitive Restructuring**: Because trauma shapes fundamental assumptions about oneself, other people, and the world in general, a key goal is to help group members come to a different <u>understanding</u> of trauma and its impact in their lives (Including ongoing, current impact). The group draws attention to current ideas about coping and to developing alternative recovery plans.

2. **Skills Training**: In addition to a revised understanding of trauma and trauma recovery, the group is designed to enhance the development of specific recovery skills. Both in group exercises and in recommendations for problem-solving outside the group, there is an emphasis on trying out new skills, evaluating their usefulness, and practicing and consolidating those that are helpful.

3. **Psychoeducation**: Because group members often have little information—or considerable misinformation—about trauma and the breadth of its impact and because trauma often disrupts the development of fundamental personal and social capacities, leaders provide information relevant for each topic in the intervention.

4. **Peer Support**: A history of interpersonal violence often contributes to problems with other people, including a sense of shame or self-blame that isolates people from each other. The peer relationships in TREM and M-TREM groups explicitly respond to these needs by emphasizing shared experiences and problem-solving approaches.

Specific Group Techniques

1. **Leader Style:** Group leadership style demonstrates the following five characteristics:
- is strongly engaged interpersonally;
- communicates hopefulness, optimism, and encouragement;
- has a persuasive and appropriately definitive tone;
- is emotionally expressive and enthusiastic about the session's material;
- draws clear, direct lessons from the session goals.

2. Trauma Specific Education: Group leaders maintain psychoeducational stance through interventions such as the following:

A. Providing information about trauma and explaining common trauma related experiences (e.g., defining a flashback, citing prevalence data, describing common responses to abuse or violence).

B. Describing specific links and mechanisms between experiences of trauma and sequelae (e.g., "Abuse may lead to problems in relationships because survivors are not sure who they can trust.").

C. Accurately labeling members experiences (e.g., "When someone forces you to have sex, that is rape." "When someone beats you like that, it is abuse, not discipline." "It sounds to me like you were sexually abused.")

D. Emphasizing general shared experience (Women: "You are not alone in blaming yourself. Many women who have been abused think that the abuse was their fault.")(Men: "Many men feel ashamed about being overpowered.")

E. Adjusting information to fit group needs and preferences. Mini-lectures and academic discourses are out. Short, succinct, and accessible sound bites are in.

3. General Psychoeducation: Leaders maintain a psychoeducational stance throughout the intervention. In domains that are not trauma-specific, leaders define and clarify key terms and concepts; explain patterns of thinking, feeling, and behaving; and interpret meaningful themes so that the group develops a shared language and understanding of common experiences. (Trauma-specific discussion is included separately.)

Examples:
• "When I say compulsion, I mean a behavior that we constantly repeat and that feels out of control--like compulsive eating, for example."
• "One of the things we mean by having good boundaries is knowing the difference between what you really want and what someone else wants from you."
• "Part of self-esteem is thinking that you are a valuable person. Good relationships can be a source of self-esteem."
• "It is easy to take on too much responsibility when you've been blamed for everything that goes wrong."
• "It is understandable to give up when you've been told constantly that you're no good and will never amount to anything."

This psychoeducation also frequently focuses on recognizing and labeling a range of emotional and physical states:

•"It sounds like you could have felt put-down (or dissed or embarrassed) when your girlfriend said that."
•"I wonder if you were feeling something else just before you got angry…maybe you were feeling hurt or rejected."

4. Session Structuring: Group leaders enhance the quality and predictability of the group by clarifying the agenda and flow of the session through comments such as the following:
•"Today's session deals with the topic of physical abuse."
•"After we talk about definitions, we will identify some of the specific feelings that go with trauma."
•"We will spend about fifteen minutes doing this exercise and then talk about your reactions to it."
•"Next week the topic will be self-esteem."

Leaders will structure the group by **sharing the responsibilities among two or more leaders.** One leader writes the responses, while others lead the discussion, keep track of the questions, participate in the conversation, support a vulnerable group member, or just listen.

5. Activity: Group leaders control the content, affect, and process of the group by talking frequently without dominating the process.

Leaders will **balance the need to share stories with the need for emotional safety.** Lengthy stories that overwhelm and disorganize members are out. Brief vignettes that are expressive but manageable are in. Leaders also **encourage more member-to-member discussion as time goes on.**
•"Can someone comment on what Jane just said?"
•"Does Keith's experience sound familiar to anyone?"
•"Can some of you tell William your reactions to his plan?"

Leaders will **help members to explicitly link current problem behaviors to traumatic experiences.**
•"How do you think your low self-esteem might be linked to your abuse history?"
•"Do you think there might be a connection between the trouble you have setting limits now and the abuse you experienced as a girl?"
•"Do you think there might be a connection between the trouble you have trusting other people now and the abuse you experienced as a boy?"

6. Empowerment and Affirmation: Group leaders respond to and encourage members' strengths and affirm the value of members' experiences in ways such as the following:

- •"That's a great way to put it."
- •"It takes a lot of courage to say that out loud the way you just did."
- •"You have the right to stand up for yourself in that situation."
- •"You found a great way to deal with that."
- •"It's uplifting for all of us to hear about how well you are doing."
- •"That's a great idea. Let's add it to the list."
- •"Excellent question."

Leaders can also be affirming by **acknowledging change and encouraging hopefulness.**

Examples:
- •"Remember how you used to handle that situation before. It sounds like you're handling it a whole lot differently now. You can feel good about yourself for taking that step."
- •"You used to just get mad and then get high. It sounds like you're handling it a whole lot differently now. "

Leaders provide empowerment by **focusing on strengths rather than weaknesses.**

Examples:
- •"Perhaps you didn't solve that problem as quickly as you wanted to, but you certainly did get your message across without any confusion or second-guessing."
- •"OK, you got mad but you didn't blow up."
- •"It sounds like you took care of part of the problem but you were also able to ask for help when you got stuck."

7. Positive Problem-Solving: Group leaders maintain the stance that members' problems can be addressed and solved effectively. Leaders make interventions that invite solution-oriented discussions and that reinforce specific ways of responding.

- •"How can you comfort yourself in a healthy way?"
- •"That is one of the critical things in recovery--remembering 'that was then and this is now.'"
- •"We are looking for better, healthier ways of getting the things that compulsions give us."
- •"You are dealing with this differently than when this group started. Do you remember….?"
- •"It's great that you were able to say that you were angry without being destructive."

Leaders can **encourage focused, time-limited problem solving.**
- "How long should I stay at my family's over Easter?"
- "Should I try to start a relationship with my new neighbor?"
- "What should I do when my partner throws something at me and starts to make our argument physical?"
- "Where can I go when I need a break from my girlfriend?"

As the group coalesces the leaders should **encourage group brainstorming to share positive solutions.**
- "Has anyone had the experience of saying "no" in a way that really worked?"
- "How do other people comfort themselves in times of stress?"
- "Has anyone else had the experience of successfully working out a major problem with a partner?"
- "Have others decided to put off making a relationship sexual? What happened?"

8. Question/Comment Ratio: In maintaining the psychoeducational emphasis of the group, leaders make declarative statements more frequently than they ask questions.

Leaders can achieve this by elaborating and expanding on members' comments.
  Examples:

  A member comments that her expectations of relationships are low. The leader adds, "When you have low expectations you feel that you have to settle for what you can get, even if it isn't very good. You might worry that you will never find anything better, so you have no choice but to hang on to what you have."

  After a member comments that all his relationships are short-term, the leader might add, "Your relationships have not lasted as long as would like and now maybe it's easy to feel like giving up at the first sign of trouble. Your might say to yourself, 'I might as well get it over with now' but in fact you really have begun to learn ways of working out problems in relationships."

9. Goal Achievement: The group achieves the stated session goals as outlined in the TREM manual. Questions can be skipped as long as members are engaged in accomplishing the goals of the session. Exercises can also be substituted to replace the ones listed in the manual as long as they achieve the session's goals.

Leaders will **prepare handouts summarizing helpful information.**
- A list of self-soothing techniques
- A list of anger management techniques
- A list of ways to stay safe in the city and to avoid trouble on the streets