

## Mentalization-Based Group Treatment

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Mentalization refers to the integrative cognitive capacity that underlies self-awareness, the awareness of inner states of feeling and sensation. It also allows us to recognize the intentions of others by making sense of their non-verbal communications. When we are mentalizing, we recognize that a mental state underlies behavior and emotional expression. We understand that every experience can be seen from multiple perspectives, and that we cannot truly know what is in another's mind. Most mentalization is implicit. In group, we seek to make it explicit.

This perspective focuses us more on process than on content, more on inquiry than on knowing. The task is to explore the self from a mentalizing perspective: to think about feeling, and to feel about thinking. The therapist seeks to find the affective focus that underlies what is being said or done, linking interpersonal events to the here and now. We want to look at people's feelings and reactions from a various perspectives. On the other hand, we will not pursue affect for its own sake. We will look for moments when mentalization has been lost, leading to confusion, misunderstanding, and painful, inexplicable affects. We will find the last moment of integration, before feeling overwhelmed, of thinking and perspective-taking.

The therapist asks people to take a reflective stance vis-a-vis their experiences, to be curious and inquisitive about how a feeling led to a particular thought, judgment, or reaction. We will stop what seems to be unproductive process – psychobabble, projection, aggressive outbursts that reduce safety, long confusing narratives that disengage group members. We will actively engage members to discover their perspectives on the moment or on the other members.

In many respects mentalization is what we do when we're actively engaged in processing experience – particularly when we feel supported and in touch with ourselves. The therapist plays an active role, encouraging the emergence of mentalization and its recovery when lost. Inquiry, integration, and here-and-now awareness take

precedence over interpretation, deepening of affect, and insight. The therapist also uses his or her subjective experience in an active way – particularly to notice when mentalization is lost.

Otherwise, the mentalization group looks like an interpersonal psychodynamic psychotherapy group.

## **Mentalization-Based Treatment READING LIST**

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Wallin, D. Deepening the clinical dimension of attachment theory: intersubjectivity and the relational perspective. Chap. 11 in Attachment in Psychotherapy N.Y. Guilford, 2007. See also Chapter 15 The Non-verbal realm: working with the evoked and enacted; Chapter 16 The Non-verbal realm II: working with the body.