GROUP INFORMED CONSENT

Counselling Program

**Self-Exploration Group Informed Consent**

**Nature, Purpose, and Goals of the Group**

 This is a Self-Exploration group intended to foster, to promote, and to facilitate the Counselling students’ continual personal development, growth and self-awareness. It intends to produce awareness on the following areas and to generate an understanding on how these areas influence, interfere, and affect students’ life and can affect their therapeutic work. The following areas of awareness include but are not limited to:

1. Their own life issues

2. Areas of “unfinished business” or unresolved conflicts

3. Personal needs

4. Defences

5. Vulnerabilities

6. Values

7. Beliefs

8. Faith

9. Traditions

10. Family issues, dynamics, and background

11. Relationship and communication patterns

12. Personality

The Self-Exploration group is part of the Counselling program. Therefore, student’s attendance is required. In the event if there is a reasonable excuse for being absent to one of the self-exploration groups students are required to inform the group counselor via email or phone the reason (s) for being absent. The group Counsellor (s) has the right to determine whether the reasons provided are excusable or not. The continue absenteeism will result in failure of the course and program. There is a $600 dollar fees which will be included on your tuition / program fees. Self-Exploration Group will have no more than 6 students per group. It will take place at university lecture hall A, once a week for 90 minutes.

**The Role of Group Counsellor (s)**

1. To facilitate interaction among group members.

2. To help group members to learn from one another.

3. To assist group members to establish personal goals.

4. To provide continue empathy, encouragement, and support to the members.

5. To challenge group members in their thinking process and self-appraisal.

6. To check if group members have carried their learning experience from the group and practiced it in the outside world.

**Ethical and Legal Responsibility of Group Counsellor (s)**

1. To provide group members information about the nature, purpose, and goals of the group.

2. To inform group members about the benefits and the psychological risks involved in group participation and ways to minimise these risks.

3. To inform group members of their rights and responsibilities as members of a therapy group.

4. To inform group members about the methods used to assess and evaluate their progress and accomplishment of their personal group goals.

5. To inform group members about one’s qualification and theoretical orientation.

6. To not condone or discriminate any form of discrimination on the basis of race, color, sex, sexual orientation, age, religion, national origin, or physical handicap.

7. To ensure and safeguard group members rights to privacy.

8. To inform group members about the nature, purpose and limits of confidentiality.

9. To not use group member (s) information for teaching purposes, publication, or professional presentations unless written permission has been obtained and all measures have been taken to preserve group member (s) rights to privacy and anonymity.

10. To not release any information about the group members unless when required by law or when clinical examination suggests that a group member (s) may be dangerous to himself/herself or others. 11. To be aware of one’s own competence and to seek consultation from other qualified professionals or other sources when the needs of group members are beyond one’s own competencies.

12. To be aware of their personal reaction to members—countertransference—and how they are interfering with the group process

13. To avoid using the group for their own therapy.

14. Not to use one’s professional relationship to advance personal or business interests.

**Group Counsellors Theoretical Orientation**

My philosophical approach to counselling is eclectic and holistic in nature. I draw first on the faith foundations of a view of persons and then, I elaborate on most of the contemporary therapeutic models to form an integrative approach to individual, couple, family, and group therapy. Thus, in my professional practice, I employ a variety of techniques from various counselling models and therapies, as well as, spiritual techniques such as prayer and scriptures if and when is appropriate and is consistent with a client value system and beliefs.

**Group Counsellor Qualifications**

I am a Registered Professional Counsellor (RPC) and a member of the Canadian Professional Counsellors Association (CPCA). I am a certified Gottman Method level I Couples Therapist, a certified Premarital Counsellor by Enrich Canada, and a certified Leveling Prayer Counsellor. I have received training in Traumatic Incident Reduction (TIR) Therapy and in Hope Alive Level I Counselling. Lastly, I have many years of experience in individual and in group counselling which I have assisted individuals, couples, families from diverse cultural and social economic background to address various issues such as, but not limited to, interpersonal and/or marital relationships conflicts, addiction, trauma, depression, anxiety, anger, and life transitional issues. I am the Group Counsellor for the Degree of Counselling program. Furthermore, I am one of the Contract Counsellors at the Hope Counselling Clinic (HCC) in Toronto.

**Confidentiality-- the nature, purpose, and limits of confidentiality**

The concept of **privilege communication** means that professional counsellors cannot break the confidence of clients unless in their judgement:

1. The clients are in imminent danger of harming themselves, others, and / or physical property.

2. A child or an elderly are being harmed or abused.

3. If your record is subpoena—ordered by court to provide information.

4. When client give specific written permission.

However, privilege communication generally does not apply in group counselling as it does in individual counselling, unless there has been a statutory exception. Therefore, it is the counsellors (s) responsibility to inform group members about the nature, purpose, limits, and the absence of legal privilege concerning the information shared in the group. Since the success of any group counselling is based and depends upon the level of trust and cohesion among group members, it is imperative that both group counsellor (s) and group members recognize and address the limits of confidentiality. They must take every step possible, such as (a) developing a group confidentiality agreement, (b) addressing the rules of confidentiality, (c) addressing the counsellor (s) and the members’ responsibilities and duties to not break or to not infringe on group members privacy and rights to confidentiality.

It is acceptable for group members to talk to other people or significant ones in their lives about their own feelings and experiences in their group, what they have learned, and how they were affected with something that happened in the group as long as they are not specific about whom or what was said or what trigged that event on the group—without describing the group process and exercises that led to that discover.

Practicum students are allowed to process their Practicum experiences in their perspectives self exploration group counselling but not outside of it.

If group counsellor suspects that a group member maliciously and purposefully broke group confidentiality, the counsellor must outline the nature of the concern with the student and give the student an opportunity to discuss this matter with the group counsellor. If the group counsellor makes a clinical judgement that indeed there was a maliciously breach of the group confidentiality, the counsellor will do the following:

1. Will inform and provide a written statement to the Director of the Diploma of Counselling Program about the situation. The letter will be kept on the student’s file.

2. The group counsellor will give a verbal and written reprimand to the group member who broke group confidentiality. This letter will contain a description of the nature of the offence, and will provide an appropriate guideline to what the student must do in attempt to restore the trust and confidence of the group members and to protect the integrity of the group process.

3. A failure or a refusal to comply with the verbal and written request will result with a dismissal from the group and the student will receive a failing grade for the Self- exploration group course. Consequently, the students will not be able to graduate from the Counselling Program. understands the value and importance of confidentiality as one of the foundational core value and principle that ensures and protects the integrity of the therapeutic relationship and the counselling process. Hence, university has a moral and ethical responsibility to its community to ensure that its graduates counselling students, while studying at university, understand and apply the ethical guidelines with respect to confidentiality set for professional counsellors by the Canadian professional counselling associations. Periodically if needed, I will be providing the counselling Director information regarding the attendance of the group members.

**Group Members Role and Responsibility**

1. To attend the Self-Exploration Group sessions each semester.

2. To follow and apply the group rules, norms, and procedures such as:

a. To be punctual—to arrive on time.

b. To be active participant.

c. To be willing to openly talk about oneself in manner that is culturally appropriate and congruent to ones values.

d. To focus on thoughts and feelings rather than talking about issues in an intellectualized and detached manner.

e. To be present and focus on here-and-now interactions within the group

f. To provide feedback to others

g. To provide therapeutic support to group members—that includes challenge members to look at themselves without arousing defensiveness—that will facilitate and not distract or hinders members from self-exploration.

h. To be assertive—using I statements—and not aggressive in one’s communication style.

i. To respect the rights of others and to behave respectfully towards them by avoid name-calling and pronouncing judgements—by not engaging in nonconstructive confrontations, and sarcasm.

3. To maintain confidentiality

**Group Members Rights**

1. To decide for themselves what to explore and how far they go. Group counsellor (s) will encourage, support, empower, and enforce group members right to make a decision of when, GROUP INFORMED CONSENT 5 how, and what to share with the group—to exercise self-disclosure and still maintain a measure of privacy.

2. To experience significant self-exploration that is congruent with ones, values, culture, and personality.

3. To be treated with respect and dignity

4. To have the freedom to express their views, opinions, and feelings about their personal experience

5. To find their own answer, not to do what the group think is appropriate.

6. To decline any group exercise or activity that they feel extremely uncomfortable with in the group session.

7. To make a decision to stop attending the self-exploration group therapy if attending the group has become detrimental to one’s mental health—putting one’s life harm’s way. The group counsellor reserves the right to make a clinical judgement of the situation and take the appropriate measure to ensure the member’s safety.

**Benefits Involved in Group Participation**

Some of the benefits of a group are, but not limited to:

1. It allows group members to be less isolated as they work on their issues.

2. It helps group members to realize they are not alone in their difficulties / struggles they are experiencing.

3. It helps group members to view their issues from a multiple perspective.

4. It gives group members a chance to learn and to practice new interpersonal behaviours.

5. It provides group members a platform to improve their communication skills—to constructively express their feelings and ideas to others, and to assert themselves in new ways.

6. It gives members an opportunity for them to learn how they are perceived and experienced by others.

7. It provides group members with some unique opportunity to increase their self-awareness and to focus on aspect of their lives they wish to address and to change.

8. It will help counselling students to experience some of the dynamics, struggles, and benefits experienced by clients in a group therapy.

**Psychological Risks Involved in Group Participation**

The psychological risks involved in group participation are:

1. Members of a group may be subjected to scapegoating, group pressure to experience catharsis and crying, breaches of confidence, inappropriate reassurance, and aggressive confrontation.

2. The group process may precipitate a crisis in a member’s life.

3. A person may enter a group feeling relatively comfortable and leave feeling annoyed, tired, upset, or vulnerable and defenceless following a session.

4. Areas of personal conflict may be exposed for the first time, causing much pain and leading to a new self-awareness that is difficult to cope with.

5. A person’s outside life may be drastically affected, for family members may have adverse reactions to changes.

6. After an intense group experience, participants may make rash decisions that affect not only their own lives but also the lives of their families.

7. Group members may experience changes in their relationships or thinking. Usually these changes are very positive in the long-term, but it may be difficult to experience as they are occurring.

8. Self-disclosure is sometime misused by group members. Privacy can be violated by indiscriminate sharing of one’s personal life.

**Ways to minimize psychological risks involved in group participation**

1. Group counsellor during the initial session will discuss with group members the psychological risks involved in group participation and will examine with them how these risks can be avoided.

2. Group ground rules, explicit norms or standards of behaviour will be established and reinforced.

3. Nonconstructive confrontation—judgemental labels at another person--will not be allowed. Instead, group members will be asked to talk constructively about themselves and to state what reactions / feelings / thoughts they are having towards certain behavioral pattern they have observed and reacted to of a given group member.

4. Group counsellor will block any attempt by members to get others to do something they choose not to do.

5. Group members will be informed about the nature, purpose and limits of confidentiality, then, they will be asked to sign a Confidentiality agreement.

6. Group counsellor will continually emphasize the importance of maintaining confidentiality.

7. Students will be required to read and sign an Informed Consent related to their Self Exploration Group Therapy and their group participation and experience.

8. Students will be requested to write and sign a contract. This contract is intended to foster a safe and trusting environment where group members may not feel or be exploited or damaged by a group experience. The contract will state:

a. Their responsibilities towards the group as indicated by the group facilitator.

b. They will clarify and write their own expectations and individual’s goals for their group experience.

c. They will outline steps they agree to take to increase their chances to successfully accomplish their goals.

d. Their commitment to the group by declaring what they are willing to do—in a specific and measureable way—to make theirs and others group members group experience a positive, safe, and beneficial one.

9. At the end of each semester, group members will be invited to and encouraged to periodically re-evaluate, modify, or replace appropriately their individual goals, as well as their group counselling goals, and expectations as group members.

**Methods used to assess and evaluate group members’ involvement, progress / selfawareness, accomplishment of their individual and group goals and the outcomes of the group as a unit**.

Students will be asked and encouraged to use Scriptotherapy—the use of diary or day book to record their feelings and reactions in and outside of the group session—as a means to facilitate continue self-exploration and to monitor their self-awareness and progress. Students will be encouraged to share those self-awareness and progress in the group sessions.

**Evaluation of the Group Experience and Post group follow-up procedures**

At the completion of the Self-Exploration Group, you will be asked to download and complete a **Competency Self-Awareness Survey** designed to help you identify your strengths and areas for development in relation to self-awareness and personal growth. It contains 32 baseline survey items. It is based on a 5 point response scale:

1. Strongly Disagree

2. Disagree

3. Neutral

4. Agree

5. Strongly Agree.

After the survey has been completed, you will be encouraged and asked to upload it on populi after your last group session. Also, as your group counsellor, I will go over the survey with you in our last session. I will be available to meet with you or with any group members who would like to further discuss your evaluation and group experience. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Student Signature \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Group Counsellor Signature \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date