The background of the cover is a warm, orange-yellow gradient. Several realistic-looking orange and brown leaves are scattered across the top and middle sections, some attached to thin branches. The title text is centered and overlaid on this background.

Group Exercises *for* Addiction Counseling

Geri Miller

Group Exercises for Addiction Counseling

This book is dedicated to Ron Hood, my husband and friend, who once again has been my steadfast partner through the writing of this book; to Gale, Abby, and Jason Miller, and Tom, Laura, Natalie, and Kate Prow—my family whom I treasure; to my personal counselors and fellow group members who years ago helped me learn how to live better in this world through their loving confrontation of me in a community of support; and to the clients I have had the honor of counseling in addiction groups.

Preface

This workbook evolved from a dinner conversation with an experienced addictions counselor years ago who said, “This is a book [a workbook on group counseling] that needs to be written for addiction counselors.” I remembered these words of Jane Albers, whom I respect and care for both personally and professionally. It felt like this book came full circle when she agreed to be a reviewer of it.

I have always drawn on my personal experiences, as a group member in group counseling, to remind me of the importance of a leader providing care, respect, and honesty to clients and creating an atmosphere in a group that is conducive to those factors. I was blessed to have those experiences as a client where group leaders and fellow group members helped me learn, in a supportive community, about my blind and hidden spots that were causing me problems in living.

Since I began working as a mental health professional in 1976, I have been involved in group work. As a counselor, I found it fascinating and powerful and have tried to incorporate it into every professional job I have had. In my Master’s degree

program I studied group work beyond classroom assignments, and my doctoral internship was in a counseling center that emphasized group counseling. Much of my counseling in the addictions field has been in group counseling. I have been privileged both personally and professionally to witness the healing power of groups in all of the settings in which I have worked, and specifically, I have seen miracles of change in the lives of addicts and their loved ones as a result of group counseling.

This workbook of techniques has evolved from trainings I have conducted since 1999 with experienced addiction counselors—each participant described one favorite group counseling technique. I have chosen specific exercises from this body of techniques and described them in a concise, almost recipe-like format for the reader. The goal of this book became to have tried-and-true exercises readily available for busy clinicians.

The book is divided into four sections, and the following is a brief summary of each section:

- **Section 1, Introduction**, provides an overview of the rationale of the workbook.
- **Section 2, Philosophy and Practice of Group Work**, is divided into two areas: an excerpt from my book, *Learning the Language of Addiction Counseling*, that provides my philosophy of group work with addicted clients and their loved ones; and four “Words to the Wise” sections that focus on core, critical areas of group counseling that are needed to encourage healing from addiction.

- **Section 3, Group Exercises**, provides specific techniques (separated into 10 categories) that can be used in group counseling: Icebreakers, Addiction Recovery, Family/Relationships/Culture, Feelings Exploration, Group Community Building, Self-Esteem, Recovery Skills: Communication/Mindfulness/Problem Solving, Values, Openers, and Closers.
- **Section 4, Resources**, lists readings, workbooks/exercises, icebreaker exercises, and websites.

Acknowledgments

I have had numerous excellent teachers in the counseling field who have been my mentors, supervisors, colleagues, and students. I am deeply grateful for the time and energy each one of you invested in teaching me about group counseling in the area of addictions. Through watching your practice of honesty, openness, and willingness, as you examined your strengths and weaknesses both personally and professionally, I learned and continue to learn how to be a better person in this world and how to be a part of the one human community to which we all belong.

I especially thank the addicted clients and their loved ones who I witnessed being brave in group counseling, daring to be different, and as a result, healing from and learning to live with the wounds of the storylines of their lives. Your courageous stories have taught me how to live and encouraged me to continue to believe in the amazing power of the human spirit and its capacity for change, especially in the context of a community of support. Your stories are the miracles I have witnessed that sustain me personally and professionally and are a wellspring of

hope that I am able to pass on to others in my personal life and professional work.

I also want to thank my personal group counselors and fellow group members I crossed paths with years ago who helped me look at my blind and hidden spots as a human being and thereby invited me into a new way of living. Thank you for being a part of saving my life. We had quite an adventure together, and I am grateful to each of you for being my buddies on that journey.

I also want to thank the North Carolina Foundation for Alcohol and Drug Studies Board and its coordinator, Dr. Jim Edmundson, who invited me to be a trainer of group counseling skills, at their winter and summer schools, year after year. These opportunities allowed me to practice what I love (group counseling) with those I respect (addiction counselors), counselors who are working so hard to be a part of saving the lives of addicts and their loved ones who are suffering with the disease of addiction. A special thank you goes to Jane Albers, reviewer of this workbook, who currently serves on the board and kicked off the idea for this workbook over a dinner years ago.

Additionally, I want to thank the people at John Wiley & Sons, Inc., who helped me write this book in so many ways: Marquita Flemming, my editor, who has helped me be the best writer I could be on this book and on two previous books. Marquita's knowledge, precision, enthusiasm, high expectations, and sustaining support have been gifts to me; I'd also like

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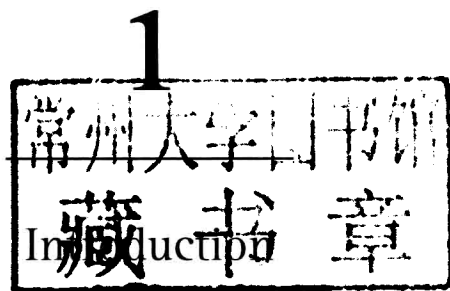
Thank you also to the owners of the Higher Ground Coffee Shoppe in Boone, North Carolina, Matt and Gloria Scott, who let George and I work on the book for hours in their shop and for sharing their delightful personalities and intelligence with me.

And an extra-special thank you to Ron Hood, my husband and best friend, who read every word of every draft of this book and gave up weekend and evening time with me so I could work on the book. In so many ways, I truly could not have written this book without you. My thank you remains the same as it has been in other books I have written: “Thank you, Ron, for being with me on this life path. I love you.”

Contents

	Preface	<i>ix</i>
	<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>xiii</i>
1 ♦	Introduction	I
	Personal Reflections	I
	Main Section Points	2
	Overview	3
2 ♦	Philosophy and Practice of Group Work	II
	Personal Reflections	II
	Philosophy of Group Therapy	13
	Types of Groups	14
	Stages of Group Development	23
	Stage 1	23
	Stage 2	25
	Stage 3	27
	Stage 4	28
	Group Leader Techniques	28
	Specific Issues	32
	Therapist Self-Care	35
	Words to the Wise	38
	Developing an Addictions Counseling Group	38
	Handling Stage 2 Confrontations of the Leader	41

	Addressing Specific Addiction Issues	42
	Developing Group Member Awareness	43
	References	45
3 ♦	Group Exercises	47
	Icebreakers	49
	Addiction Recovery	58
	Family/Relationships/Culture	79
	Family	80
	Relationships	85
	Culture	87
	Feelings Exploration	88
	Group Community Building	96
	Self-Esteem	102
	Recovery Skills: Communication/ Mindfulness/Problem Solving	105
	Communication	105
	Mindfulness	106
	Problem Solving	107
	Values	109
	Openers	112
	Opening Statements	112
	General Opening Activities	112
	Specific Opening Activities	113
	Closers	115
	Closing Statements	115
	General Closing Activities	116
	Specific Closing Activities	117
4 ♦	Resources	121
	Readings	121
	Workbooks/Exercises	122
	Icebreaker Exercises	126
	Websites	126



PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

This book, *Group Exercises for Addiction Counseling*, has a lot of meaning for me personally as well as professionally. I believe that group therapy, as practiced by experienced, trained counselors, saved my life—which is why I am writing a book about it. In group therapy, I learned, in the moment when I was engaging in specific behaviors, exactly which behaviors were inhibiting my ability to connect effectively with others and to set up a community of support with others. That is a nice way of saying counselors and fellow clients confronted me on destructive behavior when I was doing it, and I could hear, see, and feel the

impact of that behavior on others through their confrontation of me. I hated group therapy because I lived in fear of it. I was terrified of learning about my blind spots and hidden spots and having them pointed out in front of others. However, I also felt cared about in group therapy. Counselors and other clients cared enough about me to tell me hard things—hard things for them to say, hard things for me to hear. People took risks to tell me things that I did not want to hear and cared enough about me to extend their own vulnerability as expressed in their honesty. They also nurtured me and supported me after the confrontation and reminded me that progress, not perfection, is important in living.

I learned a lot about myself in group therapy that has helped me immeasurably to live and work with others in the world. I came out of the experience knowing my flaws as well as my strengths. I believe it is easier for me to live in the world and, hopefully, easier for others to live with me after the experience of group therapy. That is why I believe in the importance of this workbook. My hope is that counselors can find in these tried-and-true group exercises ways to help their clients understand themselves better, thereby offering them more choices about how they can live their lives and break out of dysfunctional interaction patterns with others. My simple hope is that the techniques may be used by counselors to help their clients live better.

MAIN SECTION POINTS

1. Addiction is a significant problem.
2. Treatment of addiction requires a biopsychosocial perspective and a balance of grassroots-based assistance and research findings.

3. This book, *Group Exercises for Addiction Counseling*, is a complementary book to *Learning the Language of Addiction Counseling*, containing exercises used by experienced addiction counselors.
4. Group therapy is commonly used in addiction treatment because it offers interpersonal learning, a community of support, cost effectiveness, and a history of effectiveness with addicted clients and their loved ones.
5. Counselors are encouraged to adapt these exercises to their own practice.

OVERVIEW

The addiction problem in the United States has reached alarming significance. This widespread problem of addiction results in many clients having an active or historical problem with addiction themselves or having family members who have struggled with addiction. If clients have not had to address addiction in themselves or their family members, they often are aware of someone in their daily lives (e.g., boss, friend, neighbor) whose addiction problem impacts their life. Because many clients are impacted by addiction, all counselors need to have the skills to work effectively with addiction issues. Counselors who work primarily in mental health settings need to be prepared to work with the issues of addiction that these clients bring to counseling, as well as addiction counselors who work directly with addicted individuals and their significant others.

Currently, it is almost impossible to effectively treat addiction issues as an isolated problem because of intrapersonal,

interpersonal, and societal issues intertwining with the addiction. Intrapersonally, the addiction may be in response to a trauma experienced before the onset of addiction (e.g., physical abuse, sexual abuse, dysfunctional family dynamics). Also, the addiction in the individual may be in response to some other interpersonal (e.g., domestic violence) or societal (e.g., homelessness) problem. Counseling, then, requires a biopsychosocial perspective, where the interaction of biological, psychological, and social factors in the individual and his or her significant others are examined. A biopsychosocial perspective can assist the counselor in addressing issues related to the maintenance of the addiction, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of treatment for the addiction.

Accurate, research-based knowledge of the dynamics of addiction is needed to provide effective addiction counseling. Currently, counselors may practice counseling on a continuum, where at one extreme is the grassroots (self-help) emphasis and at the other is the abstract research emphasis. In terms of the grassroots emphasis, the addiction counseling field essentially evolved out of a grassroots network that is still alive today through self-help groups based on abstinence. Because of this grassroots basis and a large body of self-help literature on addiction recovery, counselors may be exposed to myths about addiction that are not founded in any clinical research and then unknowingly apply such myths to their clinical practice. At the other extreme, counselors may be exposed to research findings on addiction but not know how to apply or integrate these findings into their clinical work.

These concerns regarding the training of counselors in the addictions field led to publishing my textbook with Wiley, *Learning the Language of Addiction Counseling* (3rd edition) in June 2010. This textbook is one of the few books attempting to find a balance between the grassroots emphasis and the abstract research emphasis, resulting in a research-based clinical application approach to addiction counseling. Counselors require practical guidelines and suggestions that stem from a theoretical and research-based knowledge base so that they do not inadvertently enable addicted individuals in an active addiction or enable their significant others to directly or indirectly facilitate the presence of the addiction. The third edition of *Learning the Language of Addiction Counseling* presents knowledge that is current, emerges from a biopsychosocial perspective, and is in a user-friendly, practical application format (case examples and exercises), facilitating the integration of knowledge into practice by counselors or counselors-in-training. The book, then, is being used by students and practitioners in the mental health field.

This book, *Group Exercises for Addiction Counseling*, is meant to complement *Learning the Language of Addiction Counseling* (3rd edition). In *Learning the Language of Addiction Counseling* (3rd edition), the fifth chapter of the book, “The Treatment Process for Addictions,” has a section on group counseling that describes group types, stages of development, techniques, issues, and therapist self-care, as well as a case study and exercise. This section of the book is helpful to readers because it provides an overview of the basic concepts of group work and some group techniques (including nine group exercises provided at the end