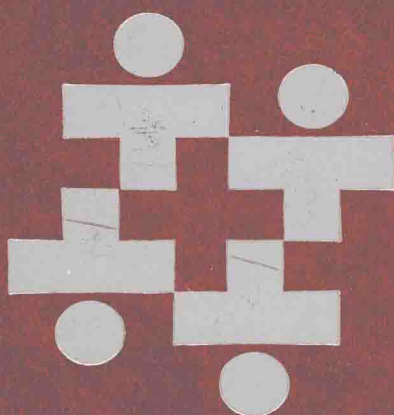


MARGOT C. HOWE  
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# A Functional Approach to Group Work in Occupational Therapy



Second Edition

J.B. Lippincott Company

# A Functional Approach to Group Work in Occupational Therapy

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**J. B. Lippincott Company**  
Philadelphia

Sponsoring Editor: Andrew Allen  
Coordinating Editorial Assistant: Laura Dover  
Production Service: Impressions, A Division of Edwards Brothers, Inc.  
Indexer: Impressions, A Division of Edwards Brothers, Inc.  
Cover Designer: Tom Jackson  
Production Manager: Janet Greenwood  
Production Editor: Mary Kinsella  
Printer/Binder: R.R. Donnelley & Sons Company, Crawfordsville

Second Edition

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6 5 4 3 2 1

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publications Data

Howe, Margot C.

A functional approach to group work in occupational therapy /

Margot C. Howe, Sharan L. Schwartzberg. -- 2nd ed.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-397-55095-2 (alk. paper : casebound)

1. Occupational therapy. 2. Group psychotherapy.

I. Schwartzberg, Sharan L. II. Title.

[DNLM: 1. Occupational Therapy. 2. Group Processes. WB 555

H857f 1994]

RM735.H68 1994

615.8'515--dc20

DNLM/DLC

for Library of Congress

94-34782

Any procedure or practice described in this book should be applied by the healthcare practitioner under appropriate supervision in accordance with professional standards of care used with regard to the unique circumstances that apply in each practice situation. Care has been taken to confirm the accuracy of information presented and to describe generally accepted practices. However, the authors, editors, and publisher cannot accept any responsibility for errors or omissions or for any consequences from application of the information in this book and make no warranty express or implied, with respect to the contents of the book.

Every effort has been made to ensure drug selections and dosages are in accordance with current recommendations and practice. Because of ongoing research, changes in government regulations and the constant flow of information on drug therapy, reactions and interactions, the reader is cautioned to check the package insert for each drug for indications, dosages, warnings and precautions, particularly if the drug is new or infrequently used.

# A Functional Approach to Group Work in Occupational Therapy

*To our students,  
whose interest and response inspired  
our continued study of group work.*

## Foreword

Relation is mutual. My *Thou* affects me, as I affect it. We are moulded by our pupils and built up by our works. (Buber, 1958, p. 15)

. . . Every social organism must attend to four major tasks to keep existing. It must acquire resources from the environment to keep the members of the group alive: a hunting group must find game, a university must find students, a bank has to find deposits. Second, it must coordinate its activities with those of other groups in the pursuit of its goals. Third, it must divide the resources and the tasks within the group while maintaining harmony and cooperation among members of the group. And finally, it must develop and maintain values and beliefs that give the group hope, identity, and purpose. (Csikszentmihalyi, 1993, p. 286)

Recently my dentist asked me, "What do occupational therapists do?" I answered that occupational therapists employ purposeful activity to develop people's skills so that they can function in their daily lives in the presence of or possibility of developing *any* disability which might interfere with their competence, throughout the entire life span. (Notice that I left out the fact that we work with both individuals and groups.) He looked at me incredulously. "How can you possibly prepare students to do that?" he asked. "That has been the greatest challenge of my life as an educator," I replied. "Occupational therapists must learn to deal with human complexity because of the very nature of people and their activities."

This book represents a pioneering effort to educate occupational therapists for a complex and sophisticated subject: the knowledge, skills, and values required to develop functional groups so that individuals may learn how to better fulfill their roles as members of social systems. The authors note that they decided to write this book because of the paucity of educational material available on how to teach group process. The lack was not just in the area of group process but, more significantly, group process as seen through the unique lenses of two occupational therapists.

The emphasis in *A Functional Approach Group Work in Occupational Therapy* is not "talk groups" or cathartic psychotherapy groups

but rather how occupations may be used to develop the rules, habits, and skills required for successful living in a social environment. Engagement in activity in a group context becomes the means to the end of enabling people to achieve their goals and intentions more fully.

The lenses of the authors reflect the “optimistic vote of confidence in human nature,” which Reilly (1962) believed to be an essential component of occupational therapy. Rather than focusing on diagnosis and pathology, this book emphasizes the “reservoir of sensivity and skill” that resides in every human being and that “can be tapped” for health (Reilly, 1962), in this case, through the use of groups engaged in occupation.

In its philosophy and practice, this volume promotes a different view of health than that embedded in the traditional disease model. Health, rather than being an absence of disease or pathology, is seen instead as possession of a repertoire of skills by which people can achieve their own intentions, goals, and purposes (Pörn, in press). The authors’ view of health is compatible with occupational therapy’s traditional concern for people who have chronic conditions. It provides a great deal of hope for people who may never be “normal” according to medical criteria.

In the next millennium, societies around the globe will be struggling with the issue of how to integrate people with disabilities into the daily routines that provide them with a place in their culture (Beisser, 1989). Occupational therapists often act as a bridge between the world of medicine and the real world of family and community. This book, therefore, is on the cutting edge. The use of groups to enable people to develop new skills to meet the challenges of their environments and, in so doing, perceive themselves as competent to master those challenges, is an essential component of occupational therapy for the 21st century and beyond. Rather than the old idea that people with disabilities need to “adjust” to their “misfortune” (Bickenbach, 1993), it provides the new idea of “adaptation” or development of a goodness of fit between the individual and his or her environment. Adaptation with disability rather than adjustment to disability is emphasized. Thus it helps to restore dignity and value to people with disability and places them, appropriately, within the mainstream of humanity.

This book is both intellectually challenging and practical. It provides stimulating, generative ideas by presenting a new model of practice, called a “Model of Group Work,” complete with a set of explicit assumptions, comprehensive principles, concepts, and strategies. The

model retains the necessary complexity required to explain how people engaged in occupation together can “influence the state of their own health” (Reilly, 1962). The work is unique in presenting case studies that illustrate the occupational therapists’ actions and thought process during the evolution of two different kinds of groups, including an honest explanation of problems arising and successes achieved.

Finally, this work contributes to a holistic, nonreductionist, generalist perception of the occupational therapist’s scope of practice. In this era of specialism, it is refreshing and inspiring to read about a model of practice that puts the human being back together again and is concerned with his or her ability to function effectively, with others, in the real world.

Elizabeth J. Yerxa; Bishop, California

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## *Preface*

Groups are a part of people's experience not only in normal or healthy life but also in life interrupted by disease and distress. Because of the potential benefits of group work and its versatility, a variety of professionals use this format in settings as diverse as hospitals, schools, businesses, and governmental agencies.

Many books have been written about group process, but most have been directed toward psychotherapy, social case work, or organizational development. Until the time of the publication of the first edition of this book, none addressed the unique orientation of occupational therapy group work that is skills oriented, action oriented, and here and now oriented. As occupational therapy educators, we had to rely on material developed by other disciplines. We were concerned with the limitations and biases that this may have brought to our profession's practice and education.

In writing this book it is our goal to present a model for group work—a functional approach to group work—that combines theory, research, and practice in occupational therapy. Rather than being derived from other frames of reference in occupational therapy, it is a model of practice in its own right. Because the model is based on our experience and practice in teaching and conducting occupational therapy treatment groups, as well as our research in group work, this book is presented from the vantage points of the normal group, the therapeutic group, and the occupational focus group, or functional group.

It is important for a model to be expanded and evaluated through research and the empirical evidence of clinical practice because this is how the validity of a model is tested. We are encouraged that this second edition can feature research studies that verify aspects of the theoretical model. These have been conducted since the inception of the functional group model. Other studies relating to issues of group treatment in occupational therapy are also presented and discussed.

The material in this book is organized to lead the reader through the logic of planning, implementing, and evaluating a functional group. The content is not focused on a verbal, insight-oriented approach to

group work; rather, we explain the functional group as a method to aid individuals in adaptation to their life roles and tasks through the “doing” or “action” in a group. The model we propose is an approach designed for people with physical, social, emotional, or developmental problems, as well as those desirous of maintaining health and well-being. It is an approach that stems primarily from occupational therapy philosophy and practice.

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## Acknowledgments

A book such as *A Functional Approach to Group Work in Occupational Therapy* is not conceptualized or completed without contributions from many people. We wish to thank Anne Briggs and Linda Duncombe for their help in the initial stages of the book and Linda's continuing research on the material in Chapter 3; Virginia Drachman, Paul Nash, and Kathlyn Reed for their welcome expertise in model development and historical analysis; the Tufts University–Boston School of Occupational Therapy for the use of their photographs; Glenda Wong for her assistance in drawing; and Ann Bonner for her patience and skill in managing department-related activities so that scholarship could be pursued.

We also wish to acknowledge the financial support that initially allowed us to research and develop a model for occupational therapy group work: Everest and Jennings, S & S Arts and Crafts, Roylan Medical Products, and the Mabel Louise Riley Research Fund of Tufts University–Boston School of Occupational Therapy.

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# *PART I*

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## **Group Work and the Functional Group Model**

The recognition of group work in occupational therapy is a recent development. Although the importance of constructive activity in maintaining or recovering the health of individuals has been acknowledged for centuries, practitioners and researchers have only recently attempted a systematic approach to the use of group work as a therapeutic tool. In this section we shall examine the various types of groups in use today, the history of the development of group work in occupational therapy, and the current practice in the field. To conclude this section, we shall introduce a model for group work.





# 1

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## The Group

*Every group develops its own unique character, and yet all groups present to the observer certain common features that enable us to speak of the dynamics of groups. (Benjamin, 1978, p. 6)*

### **Definition of a Group**

#### **Characteristics of Groups**

- Group Structure
- Group Context and Climate
- Group Composition
- Group Cohesiveness
- Stages of Group Development

#### **Curative Aspects of a Group**

#### **Overview of Models of Group Treatment**

- Activity Groups
- Intrapsychic Groups
- Social Systems Groups
- Growth Groups
- Natural Groups

### **Conclusion**

### **References**

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Group life has always played an important role in civilization, and throughout history people have considered groups to be essential to survival. We are born into a family group and later expand our social network to include work groups, social groups, recreational groups, and the like. It is through groups that we avoid isolation and learn about ourselves and other people. Many of us participate in group processes even when we are unaware of doing so.