

CONTENTS



Acknowledgements	iv
Introduction	v
GROUP COHESION ACTIVITIES	1
LEVEL 1 Talkabout Me & You	31
LEVEL 2 Talkabout Communication	69
LEVEL 3 Talkabout Body Language	93
LEVEL 4 Talkabout The Way We Talk	139
LEVEL 5 Talkabout Conversations	171
LEVEL 6 Talkabout Assertiveness	213
BIBLIOGRAPHY	245
INDEX	246



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Publisher's Note

For the purpose of clarity alone, group members are referred to as 'he'.



INTRODUCTION

Talkabout Activities is primarily aimed at clinicians using **Talkabout** (Kelly, 1996), and gives suggestions for group activities at all levels and stages of therapy within **Talkabout**. However, it can also be used by clinicians running other models of social skills groups and will complement other social skills training programmes.

Talkabout is a social communication skills package designed to be used with children or adults. It is intended to help clinicians or teachers run social skills groups in a structured way, giving ideas on the process of therapy and supplying worksheets to use at most stages. **Talkabout** includes an initial assessment (which assesses self/other awareness to decide whether the client should start at Level 1 or Level 2) and six levels of therapy:

Level 1: 'Talkabout Me and You' aims to improve self- and other awareness.

Level 2: 'Talkabout Communication' aims to explore what is meant by communication, and allows clients to assess their own communication skills and decide on an appropriate plan of action.

Level 3: 'Talkabout Body Language' aims to improve skills in body language.

Level 4: 'Talkabout the Way We Talk' aims to improve paralinguistic skills.

Level 5: 'Talkabout Conversations' aims to improve conversational skills.


Level 6: 'Talkabout Assertiveness' aims to improve assertiveness skills.

Each level within **Talkabout** includes a section on the 'Aim and Process of Therapy', which gives a broad idea of the way therapy could progress through the different topics, and suggestions for group discussions and role-plays. However, it does not include ideas for group activities, and this book has been written for that purpose.

The first section of this activity resource includes general group cohesion activities that can be used at any stage of **Talkabout** as a starting or finishing activity. The rest of the resource is divided into the different levels of **Talkabout**, and the activities are further divided into the corresponding skills being taught. These activities can also be used as



INTRODUCTION

starting or finishing activities; to prompt relevant group discussion, or to practise relevant skills. Where the activity can lead on to a specific Worksheet in **Talkabout**, a reference is made to this at the end using the **Talkabout** logo and giving the relevant page number. 

In running a successful group, there are several factors that need to be considered:

- Facilitating cohesiveness
- Agreeing group rules
- Structuring the session
- Evaluating the group.

Cohesiveness

As Kelly, 2000, stated, cohesiveness is more likely to occur when there is a good match between individual needs and the group goals. If the clinician has achieved this, then it is hoped there will be less work in ensuring ongoing group cohesion. However, the clinician does need to ensure that the group 'gels' initially, and that they continue to gel and work well as a group. Factors that can help cohesiveness are:

- 1 Arranging the room prior to the group so that no one feels left out by the positioning of his chair in the room. When possible, use a circle of chairs to make everyone feel equal.
- 2 Working hard to ensure that everyone feels valued in the group. If a group member is naturally quiet, then it may be possible to give him a non-verbal role in the group, such as putting up the posters or collecting a less able client for the group.
- 3 Working hard also to ensure that everyone feels part of the group and has an equal 'say'. This does not mean forcing the chatty client to be quiet for long periods, or forcing the quiet client to talk when he clearly does not want to. What it does mean is involving all clients in discussions and activities, even if it means asking the quiet client, 'Do you agree, John?' and the chatty client, 'Tell us what you think, Sarah.'



INTRODUCTION

- 4 Start each session with a relatively simple activity that is fun and stress-free, and which cues each member into the group. It is essential that all members participate so that they feel part of the group.
- 5 Finish each session with another activity that is fun and stress-free. This will help to decrease any anxiety that has been felt by group members and will help them to leave the group feeling relaxed and happy.

Group Rules

In the early stages of the group, whenever appropriate, it is important to discuss and agree on a set of group rules. Douglas (1990) suggests that people entering a group need to know these rules so that they can derive maximum benefit from it. These rules can be used or referred to when problems arise that affect the cohesion or running of the group – for example, continual late arrival of members, or one person dominating discussion. Spending time establishing these rules can also help group cohesion and instil a shared sense of responsibility for how the group functions. Asking the group questions such as ‘What makes a group a good group or a bad group?’ is a good basis for discussion around setting up group rules.

At the same time as discussing group rules, it is also important to help the group members understand the group contract – for example, how long the group will last and what its aims are. Both the rules and group contract could be done in a written or pictorial format and referred to in later sessions.

Structure of the Session

The structure of the group session will obviously be dependent on the function of the group, but a few rules can be applied to most groups:

- 1 **Group cohesion activity.** This is an important part of any group, especially with people who have a learning disability as they may need more ‘cueing’ into a group. The purpose of the activity is to



INTRODUCTION

bring the group together so that they gel and work well as a group. The activity should be relatively simple and stress-free, and it is essential that all group members participate so that they feel part of the group.

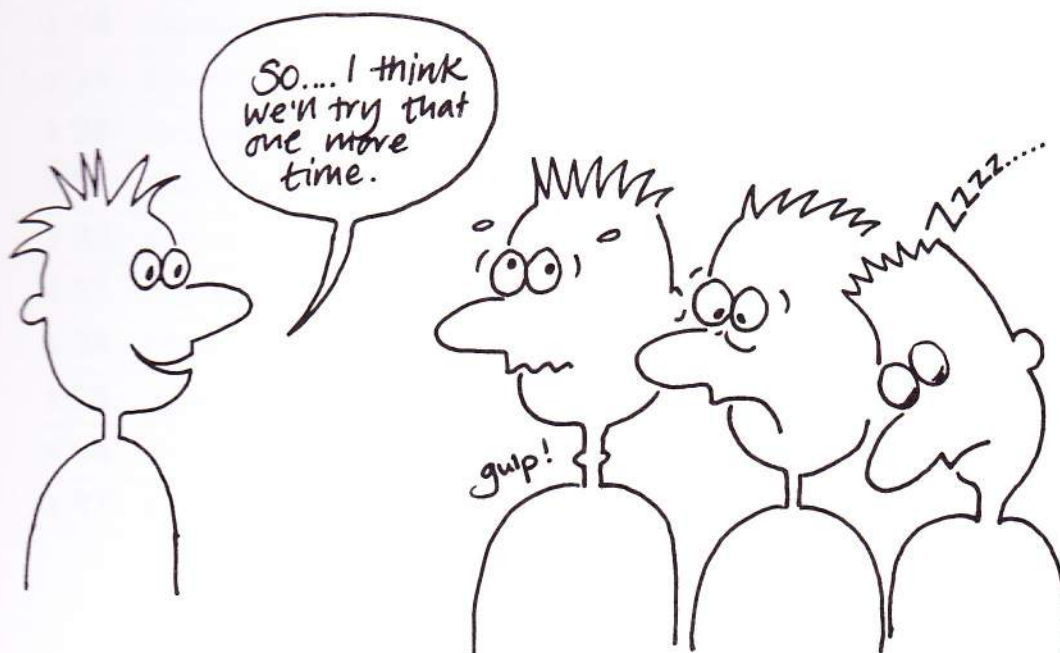
- 2 Revision of previous session.** Where relevant, it is important that the main aspects of the previous session are recalled to ensure cohesion between sessions. It is also important at this stage to recap on the aims of the group and the agreed rules. Sometimes it is necessary to alter the plan of the session if one or more group members express confusion over last week's session, or have had a relevant experience that needs discussion.
- 3 Introduction to the session theme.** The theme for the session is introduced and explained. This can be done through discussion, brainstorming an idea, drawing a picture, or in whatever way is suitable for the group.
- 4 Main activity.** When appropriate, this part of the session may be broken down into smaller components. An example of this would be when introducing a new skill in a social skills group. First, there is the demonstration of the skill through modelling, involving group members when appropriate. Second, there may be role-play or a group activity to allow group members to practise the skill. Third, there is feedback and replay if necessary. It is during this part of the session that it is most important not to lose people's attention by allowing an activity to go on for too long, or letting one person dominate the conversation.
- 5 Summing up.** This involves summarising what has been done in the session and setting assignments where appropriate. This could take the form of asking group members to practise a skill before the next session, or to observe a skill in others.
- 6 Finishing activity.** Each session should end with a group activity to bring the group back together again. This is especially important if the group has become stressful in any way, as a group activity will help decrease any anxiety felt. As with the activity at the beginning of

INTRODUCTION



the session, it should be simple and stress-free, and should include everyone in the group.

Careful timetabling is therefore essential if a session is going to run smoothly. As Fawcus (1992) states: **'The overall aims of a group session can best be achieved where the pacing and timing of activities are skilfully managed.'** She goes on to say that too slow a pace will lead to boredom and a low level of arousal, and too rapid a pace will mean that group members will not have enough time to process the information and respond. Timing is therefore crucial, and this becomes particularly important when judging the length of any specific activity. Fawcus (1992) feels that **'Quit when you're winning'** should be a golden rule in group management as it is better to change an activity at a point where everyone is still **'obtaining optimum satisfaction'**, than to persevere to a point where performance is beginning to deteriorate and interest is lost. Judgements around timing develop with experience, but the clinician should always closely observe group members for signs that it is time to change the activity.



INTRODUCTION



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