

The Elderly Project: Attitude of Gratitude Group Intervention

Maria Cristina J. Santos ¹, Tabby Y. Pinor ²,

¹Counseling and Educational Psychology Department, De La Salle University,
Manila, PHILIPPINES,

²Al-Noor Training Centre for Children with Special Needs, Dubai, UAE.

maria.cristina.santos@dlsu.edu.ph

ABSTRACT

This developed group manual intends to help the elderly who are suffering from loneliness and isolation to gain control over their negative emotions. The aim of this manual is for this special population to improve their well-being by being grateful with the things that they have in order for them not to focus on what they lack or they do not possess. There will be six (6) sessions which will be executed on a weekly basis. The pretest or baseline observation will allow the researcher to determine the effectiveness of the intervention by comparing pretest and posttest results of the Gratitude Six-Item Form (GQ6). The implication of this would be for these elderly to have an attitude of gratitude which will allow them to thrive and not just survive their day-to-day routine or activities.

Keywords: gratitude, Group intervention manual, elderly, subjective well-being, group counseling

INTRODUCTION ABOUT THE ELDERLY

Resolution and Commitment-Sessions

The elderly may suffer from ageism, pension problems, and loneliness and isolation. Thus it is pertinent to help this population with special needs to realize that at their state and age there are a lot of things to be grateful for. Gratitude-based interventions cannot be undermined since some important life concerns are addressed by such interventions. Past researches revealed that due to gratitude-based interventions there was improved physical health and well-being among patients with neuromuscular diseases (Emmons & McCullough, 2003), improved sleep quality among subjects (Digdon & Koble, 2011) and enhanced romantic relationships (Algoe, Gable, & Maisel, 2010). Furthermore, a number of studies identified several determinants of gratitude which includes positive affect (Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Froh, Kashdan, Ozimkowski, & Miller, 2009; Froh, Sefick, & Emmons, 2008; Froh, Yurkewicz, & Kashdan, 2009) and life satisfaction (Froh, Yurkewicz, & Kashdan, 2009; Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2004; Wood, Joseph, & Maltby, 2009).

PURPOSE

This group manual intends to help the elderly who are suffering from loneliness and isolation to gain control over their negative emotions. This manual aims to instill hope, optimism and the attitude of gratitude in their hearts. As pointed out by Wood, Froh & Geraghty (2010, p.892) gratitude can be conceptualized as “part of wider life orientation towards noticing and appreciating the positive.”

GROUP COMPOSITION

This developed gratitude-based manual will be used with the elderly (65 years old to 75 years old) who are experiencing loneliness and isolation. These are the elderly who are no longer

working and are just relying on their pensions. They may be single or married. Exclusion criteria will include Major Depressive Disorder as per DSM-V and a number of psychotic disorders (i.e., bipolar or psychotic types of depression, panic disorder, past or present form of schizophreni form disorder) as well as those suffering from Dymenia and Alzheimer's. The ideal group size will be around 8 – 10 participants. The group is homogenous based on the pre-screening interview.

OUTLINE OF SIX GROUP SESSIONS

The format will be structured following the modules in the developed Gratitude-Based Group Manual. This Gratitude-Based intervention consists of 6 weeks (1 session /week = 2 hours/session), involving a maximum of 10 participants every weekend.

Session 1

Purpose

The purpose for this session is to set expectations and norms. Session 1 will be focusing on getting to know each other and Expectation and Norm Setting. The following are its objectives: to explain group counseling meetings; to introduce themselves to each other and to agree on norms expected from all of them.

Theme: Getting to Know You & Norm & Expectation Setting

The theme revolves around setting their goals for counseling and setting ground rules for the 6sessions. The ground rules include: (1) coming on time and doing their activities, (2) being supportive to each other and (3) respecting confidentiality.

Activities

The participants will introduce themselves and mention some things that they are grateful for. The facilitator will encourage them to share specific emotions brought about by those things which they are grateful for. The facilitator may start the sharing to make the other group members at ease if necessary. Furthermore, the facilitator will focus on the emotions of the participants that are elicited when they feel grateful. The assignment for this first session is for the participants to come up with a Gratitude Journal for 1 week until the next session.

In their journal, they would list things that they are thankful or grateful in their everyday experience for that week.

Process

This initial session is an opportunity for members to realize that there are people who are in the same situation as they are. Moreover, that they have reasons for them to feel grateful. This is the initial step in paving the way towards having an attitude of gratitude.

Session 2

Purpose

The objective of the second session is to have a better understanding of the role of gratitude in our life. The participants could reflect on the following questions: (1) What does the word gratitude mean to you? (2) Why is it important to practice gratitude in our life?

Theme: Instilling an Attitude of Gratitude

The theme of the second session is looking at how gratitude plays an important role in our life. Having an attitude of gratitude would tend to improve their well-being since the focus would be on what they possess and not on what they lack.

Activities

The facilitator would ask the participants what transpired during the week. Then he or she will ask for a volunteer who would like to share about their gratitude journal. From the sharing, the facilitator will encourage an interactive discussion on the experience of the participant or similar /related experiences of the other participants. After which, the facilitator would ask the participants on the role of gratitude in their life. Based on the group's sharing, the facilitator emphasizes the core points and commonalities of the answers of the group and highlights the importance of gratitude in terms of improved well-being. The assignment for this second session is for the participants to continue with their Gratitude Journal and to continue reflecting on gratitude and its place in their heart and life.

Process

This session focuses mainly on discovering the role of gratitude in the participants' lives. In the process, the participants will have a realization that a grateful heart paves the way to a happy heart.

Session 3

Purpose

The objective of the third session is to have an appreciation of where they are at right now at this particular age. The participants could reflect on their accomplishments may it be at work or in their career or in terms of their personal relationships. With an attitude of gratitude, one can see a personal tragedy into a triumph or a predicament which turned out to be an achievement since there will be appreciation for the hardships or sufferings that they went through. By doing this, the participants may tend to find meaning in their suffering.

Theme: Finding Meaning in Suffering (Turning Tragedy into Triumph)

The theme for the third session is in line with Viktor Frankl's statement in *Man's Search for Meaning*: "Instead of possibilities, I have realities in my past, not only the reality of work done and of love loved, but of sufferings bravely suffered." And "For what then matters are to bear witness to the uniquely human potential at its best, which is to transform a personal tragedy into a triumph, to turn one's predicament into a human achievement. When we are no longer able to change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves."

Activities

The participants will be asked to list 3 things that they would consider being a source of suffering that eventually turned into a success in their life. The facilitator will ask for volunteers to share their experiences so that there will be an interactive and collaborative discussion. This activity is to make the participants realize that their sufferings or the challenges that they went through were not in vain and that it shaped them to be who they are right now. The participants will carry on with their Gratitude Journal and write a Gratitude note to someone who has helped them in their struggles in life.

Process

The session focuses on discovering the essence of aging and being grateful for having survived life's storms. Through the activities the participants will be able to challenge themselves to change their attitude instead of trying to change a situation that they cannot reverse anymore or change. It is pertinent for the participants to be grateful for where they are right now for that signifies emotional resilience despite of the hardships that they went through. Furthermore, these hardships in life molded them to be the person who they are

today. The point here is to show the participants that in a way they are emotionally resilient for having reached this far or this point in their life.

Session 4

Purpose

The session focuses on loving, accepting and appreciating oneself despite of flaws and imperfections. It is highlighting the point that both for the good and bad still one embrace him/her fully.

Theme: Having Unconditional Self-Acceptance

The theme for this session is in line with Dr. Albert Ellis' Unconditional Self-Acceptance. Despite of one's flaws and imperfections, we embrace and accept who we are and are grateful for our uniqueness or individuality. As Dr. Albert Ellis pointed out: "To accept yourself unconditionally means to accept yourself even if no achievements or approval are met." Dr. Ellis explains "that when people do not accept themselves it leads to shame, embarrassment, feelings of inadequacy, anxiety, and depression."

Activities

The facilitator talks about what transpired during the initial session—that they have reasons to be grateful for they have "realities" instead of "possibilities." Furthermore, they will come up with a list of three (3) things or qualities that they appreciate about themselves. Since people have a tendency to be self-critical it is good to acknowledge the positive traits that they possess. There will be sharing of answers among the group members. An increased positive self-appraisal will tend to promote greater self-appreciation and subjective well-being. The assignment is to carry on with their Gratitude Journal and to continue making a list of the things or qualities that they appreciate about themselves.

Process

The session focuses on accepting oneself unconditionally despite of the "Ifs" and "Buts". Through the activities, the participants will have a realization that all of us have imperfections and that nobody is perfect just like the saying goes. By having unconditional self-acceptance one would not only embrace oneself despite of flaws and imperfections but this would pave the way for loving oneself fully. The highlight is to shift the focus on what they do not have to what they have or possess and to embrace them fully.

Session 5

Purpose

The objective of the fifth session is to have a validation of the things or qualities that their co-participants appreciate about themselves by asking fellow participants' three (3) things or qualities that they like about them.

Theme: Having Unconditional Acceptance of Others

The theme for this session is in line Dr. Albert Ellis' Unconditional Acceptance of Others. This session will highlight the things or qualities that the participants appreciate about their co-participants. That despite their flaws or imperfections, still there are things or qualities that people appreciate about them or are grateful for. Thus, if people accept them for whom they are all the more that they should accept themselves.

Activities

The facilitator talks about their homework and their feelings while writing the qualities that they appreciate about themselves. There would be a sharing among the group members. After which, the participants would now be asked to share three (3) things that they like about their fellow participants. The members of the group are encouraged to share, discuss and thank their fellow members for their sharing. Their homework is to write a Gratitude Note to each and every member of the group and to carry on with their Gratitude Journal.

Process

This fifth session is an opportunity for members to express their appreciation of others despite of their flaws and imperfections. This session will showcase that despite of one's flaws they are still likeable and loveable and that each one of us deserves to be respected and appreciated. The Gratitude Notes will serve as a visual reminder that people accept and appreciate them for simply who they are.

Session 6

Purpose

The objective of the last session is for the participants to continuously appreciate the gift of life and for them to thrive and not just survive the remaining days of their life. The importance of truly living and not just existing will be highlighted. Thus, it is important to focus on how to make the participants' lives worth living.

Theme: Appreciating the Gift of Life

The theme for this session is to give thanks for one's life since each new day signifies a new beginning. Just as Viktor Frankl quoted in *Man's Search for Meaning*: "So live as if you were living already for the second time and as if you had acted the first time as wrongly as you are about to act now." This is because the mistake we often commit is carrying on with our lives without finding what gives us meaning or purpose. Thus, it is important to find what gives meaning in one's life.

Activities

The facilitator together with the participants will have a review of the things that have taken place during the past sessions. Then, the participants will be asked to write their Bucket List (things that they still want to accomplish) together with their resources that will make it possible to be accomplished. After which, they will be asked to write a Gratitude Note for themselves giving thanks for their Life. Through these years, the participants have experienced many ups and downs, failures and successes, sorrow and joy but still at the end of the day, they still have survived that is why it is now time to give thanks for their life. Furthermore, there are more days to come, thus it is pertinent to create their Bucket List, so that the participants have something to look forward to and this makes their lives worth living.

Process

The focus of this session is to highlight the role that gratitude plays in our well-being and life in general. Thus, continuously being grateful and finding meaning in their daily living like the pursuit of their bucket list would pave the way to increased well-being. Moreover, the facilitator will commend the cognitive, affective and behavioral changes of each member to reinforce the attitude of gratitude in each one of them. The facilitator will remind the participants that this is continuous work that even though this is the final session, their homework to write a Gratitude Journal will carry on and that the fulfillment of their bucket list is also part of finding meaning or purpose in their daily living. The participants will be reminded that they are a work in progress and that the seed of gratitude in their hearts should

be nurtured daily with or without any counseling sessions for it to continuously grow in their hearts.

The group meetings are helpful because they: help participants realize that they are not alone; provide support from others who are also in the same situation and allow time to share one's concern with others. The most important effect of the group will be how to avoid unnecessary suffering in their lives by gaining control over what has an effect on their feeling of loneliness.

PROPOSED EVALUATION OF GROUP'S EFFECTIVENESS

Gratitude Questionnaire Six-Item Form

Gratitude Questionnaire Six-Item Form is a 6-item is a six-item self-report questionnaire designed to assess individual differences in the proneness to experience gratitude in daily life. The pretest or baseline observation will allow the researcher to determine the effectiveness of the intervention by comparing pretest and posttest results.

Group Counseling Evaluation Form

At the end of the 6-week session, the participants will fill out the evaluation form. The evaluation form covers: progress toward personal goals from sessions 1-6; schedule; facility and the competencies of the therapist.

Group Case Notes

These are notes of the facilitator regarding the group processes and significant events documented per session.

REFERRAL PROCEDURES FOR FOLLOW-UPS

Those members who may not be prepared to terminate will be processed for referral, with their consent. The counselor will have a follow up on all members after 1 month, either through phone or email. Those who have expressed unpreparedness to terminate the group counseling will be called for a meeting in order to discuss the next step. Two options will be considered, either individual or group counseling or psychotherapy.

REFERENCES

- [1] Algoe, S. B., Gable, S. L., & Maisel, N. C. (2010). It's the little things: Everyday gratitude as a booster shot for romantic relationships. *Personal Relationships*, 17, 217-233.
- [2] Bernard, M. (2010). *Rationality and the Pursuit of Happiness: The Legacy of Albert Ellis*. Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell.
- [3] Digdon, N., & Koble, A. (2011). Effects of constructive worry, imagery distraction, and gratitude interventions on sleep quality: A pilot trial. *Applied Psychology: Health and Well-Being*, 3(2), 193-206.
- [4] Emmons, R. A., & McCullough, M. E. (2003). Counting blessings versus burdens: An experimental investigation of gratitude and subjective well-being in daily life. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 84, 377-389.
- [5] Frankl, V. E. (2006). *Man's Search for Meaning*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- [6] Froh, J. J., Kashdan, T. B., Ozimkowski, K. M., & Miller, N. (2009). Who benefits the most from a gratitude intervention in children and adolescents? Examining positive affect as a moderator. *Journal of Positive Psychology*, 4, 408-422.
- [7] Froh, J. J., Yurkewicz, C., & Kashdan, T. B. (2009). Gratitude and subjective well-being in early adolescence: Examining gender differences. *Journal of Adolescence*, 32, 633-650.
- [8] Froh, J. J., Sefick, W. J., & Emmons, R. A. (2008). Counting blessings in early adolescents: An experimental study of gratitude and subjective well-being. *Journal of School Psychology*, 46, 213-233.
- [9] Wood, A. M., Froh, J. J., & Geraghty, A. W. A. (2010). Gratitude and well-being: A review and theoretical integration. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 30, 890-905.