

# GROUPWORK PRACTICE FOR SOCIAL WORKERS

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# INTRODUCING GROUPWORK

## Chapter summary

In this chapter you will learn about

- the overall purpose, aims, scope and features of this book
- how the book is structured and the brief contents of each chapter
- how the book is aligned with a range of national standards and requirements related to professional social work education and practice
- the key themes that underpin the whole book
- the range of terms, words and phrases used to describe groupwork

## INTRODUCTION

Groups are the basic expressions of human relationships; in them lies the greatest power of man. To try to work with them in a disciplined way is like trying to harness the power of the elements and includes the same kind of scientific thinking, as well as serious consideration of ethics. Like atomic power, groups can be harmful and helpful. To work with such power is a humbling and difficult task. (Konopka, 1963: vii–viii)

Social work practitioners work with groups of people in many different ways and in many different contexts. Whilst some of the wording in the above quotation may reflect the date it was written, some fifty years ago, it powerfully reflects the complexity of challenges and opportunities that may arise in contemporary groupwork practice. This book sets out to help you, the reader, understand and develop the knowledge, skills and values that are required to practise effectively in this complex

context. In exploring groupwork for social workers who work with adults and children across a whole range of needs, this book takes a generic approach.

This introductory chapter will provide you with an overview of the whole book, laying out its purpose, aims and scope through an outline of the structure, key themes and learning features. This chapter will also identify how the contents of this book are related to key national standards and requirements for social work practice and education. As an introduction to your learning across the book, this chapter can be likened to a course induction process. Given the significance of language, terminology and discourse to how we understand and interpret the world around us, in order to inform your studies through the book, this chapter also includes discussion about the different definitions and understanding of the terms ‘group’ and ‘groupwork’.

Despite the acknowledged complexity and powerful opportunities offered through effective groupwork, there has been recognition over a number of years that this aspect of practice is at times perceived as marginal, out-of-date (Doel and Sawden, 1999) and of less value or importance than other aspects of practice, particularly those underpinned by procedural and managerial drivers (Preston-Shoot, 2007). It is our intention through this text to further your understanding of the value of working with groups and thereby to raise the profile of groupwork practice as one of many aspects of effective professional social work intervention. By engaging with the materials in this book you will be able to develop your knowledge, skills and values for groupworking in the complex interprofessional care and support environment. Throughout the chapters there is an emphasis on the experience of group members and how they can fully and meaningfully participate in all aspects of the group process. This chapter summarises how the two parts of this book address theoretical, practical and methodological concerns, alongside thematic foci on empowerment, user participation and professional development.

## BOOK STRUCTURE

This book is set out in two parts; the first part, Chapters 1, 2 and 3, set the context, background and theoretical approaches that underpin an understanding of groupwork practice in social work. The second part of the book, Chapters 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8, builds on this knowledge, exploring practice skills and directly discussing groupwork practice. The chapters that make up this second, practice-orientated part of the book are structured to address the ‘life course’, or processes, of working with a group. The final chapter will summarise the book in a way that helps you to focus on your development as a social work practitioner. Thus, by incorporating theory and practice, with interactive content throughout, the book provides a practice guide to support you in developing your skills, knowledge and approach to working with groups. Each of the chapters is briefly summarised below. As well as addressing key national standards for social work, including the Professional Capabilities Framework, as you read and study this book, you will become aware of recurring **key themes** that are threaded throughout the text of each chapter. These themes are:

- Values and ethics, anti-oppressive practice, empowerment – use of power;
- The development of practice skills and evidence-based practice;
- Multi-agency and interprofessional working with others in groups;
- The service-user experience and opportunity for participation in all processes of group-work development;
- Professional development, evaluation of practice, reflective and reflexive practice.

## Chapter 2

This chapter sets the background and current context of groupwork in social work practice. It includes some brief historical perspectives and contemporary examples of groupworking, including models of groupwork. Thus the chapter will discuss the professional context of groupwork, also exploring where the concept of groupwork practice interrelates with the work of other professionals, including community work. The chapter gives a broad overview of the tasks and responsibilities of the groupworker and consideration of groupwork as a social work intervention; this is then further developed in Chapters 4–7. The chapter will also introduce you to some of the different types of groups that you may work with in social work practice.

## Chapter 3

As the final chapter in Part I of the book, Chapter 3 provides an overview of the theoretical context of groupwork practice as it explores some examples of theories that might be used to aid understanding and practice with groups. Essentially a chapter in two parts, the first part of Chapter 3 examines theories that explain group development; behaviours in groups and group processes; descriptive theories. The second part of the chapter moves on to explore theories that can inform practice interventions through groupwork; prescriptive theories. The separation of descriptive and prescriptive theories in this way is a purely artificial one that aids structure and understanding through the text, as the two parts have significant overlap in that descriptive theories commonly inform prescriptive theory and thereby both are influential on groupwork practice.

## Chapter 4

Chapter 4 is the first chapter in the second part of the book, where each chapter will draw on earlier learning from Part I, but will focus on practice skills, knowledge, ethics and values. The chapters in this section follow the ‘life course’ of working with a group, with this first chapter setting the foundation by exploring practice in preparing for groupwork. Central to this chapter are planning processes, in particular the chapter considers how service users may be supported to participate in planning groupwork and the importance of planning, at this early stage, for evaluation of the whole process. As part of the planning work, the chapter encourages you to

consider a range of practical issues, such as the setting and resources needed, as well as preparing for how to address complex issues related to inter-group and intra-group relations. The chapter will also consider how contemporary developments in social networking and the use of information technology have influenced or can support groupwork practice.

## Chapter 5

Moving on from the groundwork set out in the previous chapter, Chapter 5 explores the specific practice skills, knowledge, values and ethics needed when initiating groupwork. In particular, in this chapter you will learn about the important first session and the roles and responsibilities of practitioners in groupwork. Through your studies in this chapter you will develop your understanding of intergroup relationships, including consideration of issues of authority, control and power between group participants and groupworkers, and how you might manage these. The chapter also addresses the practicalities of process and content, in particular setting aims and objectives, achieving group consensus and establishing roles. Within this, you will also reflect on the role of Information Technology as an aid in the groupwork process and how the skills and tools you need as a groupworker may differ when setting up and facilitating virtual groups.

## Chapter 6

In Chapter 6 you will read about a range of important practice considerations for groupwork practitioners supporting the core phase of groupwork intervention. In particular, the chapter draws on theory from Chapter 3 to support your understanding of behaviours in groups, group development, critical incidents and the different techniques, tools and activities that you can draw upon in response to different circumstances. The chapter explores the important roles and purposes of formative review, monitoring and recording, and how through this and other professional processes, such as supervision, you will gain professional support, guidance and development as a groupwork practitioner.

## Chapter 7

As the final chapter in Part II the 'practice' section of the book, Chapter 7 will consider the final phases of working with a group, in particular addressing issues of 'closure' and ending. This is a key phase of the overall groupwork process and the chapter will address the significance of working through 'closure' and 'what next'; engaging service users meaningfully in the process of groupwork review and evaluation will be a core focus of this discussion. By further developing your knowledge and skills in relation to evaluation, outcomes, recording, reporting, service-user participation, using supervision and support, this chapter builds on and consolidates your learning across all of the previous chapters in this book.

## Chapter 8

With a focus on your development as a social work practitioner and groupworker, this final chapter of the book effectively summarises the book and draws out the book's core themes, as set out earlier. Chapter 8 will also review how your learning across the book will have supported you in meeting national standards for social work practice including the Professional Capabilities Framework. Through reflective questions, activities, practical tasks, tools and guidance, the chapter emphasises the enhancement of practice, particularly reflective and reflexive practice.

### ALIGNMENT WITH NATIONAL REQUIREMENTS FOR SOCIAL WORK

As you study the chapters in this book, your learning and development will be closely linked to national requirements for professional social work practice; these are highlighted throughout the chapters within the content, activities and resources.

### Professional capabilities framework for social workers

In particular the book has been written to reflect the domains of The Professional Capabilities Framework for Social Workers (PCF), particularly the three levels applicable to social work students: readiness for direct practice; the end of the first placement; and the end of the qualifying program. The PCF was developed by the Social Work Reform Board and is available from The College of Social Work ([www.collegeofsocialwork.org](http://www.collegeofsocialwork.org)). A diagram of the PCF, known as the 'fan diagram' is provided at the back of this book, however, for ease of reference, the nine domains are provided below with a brief overview of how they are addressed within the chapters of this book.

#### *Professionalism – identify and behave as a professional social worker, committed to professional development*

This book is underpinned by a commitment to professionalism, in particular the whole basis of the text is to support you in developing a professional, knowledgeable, skilful, ethical and responsible approach to groupwork in social work. As a learning text, each chapter is written to support your professional development, with Chapter 8 having a specific focus on enhancing groupwork practice.

#### *Values and ethics – apply social work ethical principles and values to guide professional practice*

Social work values and ethical principles are reflected in the core themes of the book, particularly with regards to professional values, anti-oppressive practice, empowerment

and service-user participation within groupwork practice. As such this domain is embedded throughout all of the book's chapters.

*Diversity – recognise diversity and apply anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive principles in practice*

The principles of diversity are again reflected throughout the text and the core themes. In order to support your learning and recognise the value of diversity, across the book there are examples and discussion about groupwork practice with a range of service users in different service contexts, for example, work with children, in mental health settings, with users who have learning disabilities, domestic violence etc.

*Rights, justice and economic wellbeing – advance human rights and promote social justice and economic wellbeing*

The fundamental principles of human rights, justice, wellbeing and equality are embedded within social work's professional value base and, as such, are also reflected in the core themes of this book. For example, as each chapter in the second part of the book explores practice skills, knowledge, ethics and values, you will gain an in-depth understanding of how groupworking can help vulnerable people address their needs and achieve change in their lives, thus promoting social justice and wellbeing.

*Knowledge – apply knowledge of social sciences, law and social work practice theory*

The first part of the book, particularly Chapters 2 and 3, provide analysis and discussion about the underpinning knowledge and theory that provides models to explain, and models on which to develop, effective groupworking practices. The contribution of theory to our understanding of the complexity of groupworking is considered through examples of particular theoretical perspectives being drawn upon throughout the chapters.

*Critical reflection and analysis – apply critical reflection and analysis to inform and provide a rationale for professional decision making*

The chapters in *Groupwork Practice for Social Workers* will help you to 'identify, distinguish, evaluate and integrate multiple sources of knowledge and evidence' as required by this domain of the PCF. Each chapter includes opportunities for you to develop skills in reflection and analysis through case study examples, examples from research, policy and legislation, interactive activities, reflective practice questions and annotated further reading/research.

*Intervention and skills – use judgement and authority to intervene with individuals, families and communities to promote independence, provide support and prevent harm, neglect and abuse*

The second part of this book focusses on social work engagement and intervention with individuals through groupwork practice. Incorporating theory and practice, Chapters 4 to 7 work through the processes and skills of planning, preparing, establishing, facilitating and ending group interventions with service users to promote desired change, independence and support.

*Contexts and organisations – engage with, inform and adapt to changing contexts that shape practice. Operate effectively within own organisational frameworks and contribute to the development of services and organisations. Operate effectively within multi-agency and interprofessional settings*

One of the recurrent core themes in this book is multi-agency and interprofessional working with others in groups. Also, more specifically within Chapter 2, you will learn about the different contexts of groupwork and interventions that may be undertaken through groupwork practice. Following this, the content, examples and activities in later chapters in the book, reflect the different and changing organisational contexts within which groupwork takes place.

*Professional leadership – take responsibility for the professional learning and development of others through supervision, mentoring, assessing, research, teaching, leadership and management*

This domain of the framework relates specifically to how you might effectively engage in the various professional mechanisms that demonstrate your work with others to support learning and development across the profession. Again, every chapter of this book is underpinned by a desire to influence professional learning, thus as you engage with the materials here you will further your understanding of how processes such as supervision, research-informed practice, teamworking, reflection and evaluation support professional learning and leadership. Chapter 8, as the concluding chapter of the book, summarises this by drawing together the core themes of the book with particular attention to how your learning can enhance your developing practice.

## Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) Standards of Proficiency for Social Workers in England

The Health and Care Professions Council are the professional body or regulator for social work in England, they keep a register of qualified social workers

and they regulate and approve social work education ([www.hpc-uk.org](http://www.hpc-uk.org)). There are three other social work regulators in the UK – the Northern Ireland Social Care Council, the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) and the Care Council for Wales. Essentially the standards for social work published by each of these bodies reflect similar areas to those detailed above in the Professional Capabilities Framework, although presentation and detail may vary; it is highly recommended that you refer to the requirements of the regulator in the country in which you plan to, or are, practising. The 15 Standards of Proficiency for Social Workers in England (HCPC, 2012) summarised below, relate to the standards of practice that a social worker must be able to meet from the point of registration with the Council. The principles that sit within these standards can be found throughout the chapters of this book.

### Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) Standards of Proficiency for Social Workers in England

Registrant social workers must

1. be able to practise safely and effectively within their scope of practice
2. be able to practise within the legal and ethical boundaries of their profession
3. be able to maintain fitness to practise
4. be able to practise as an autonomous professional, exercising their own professional judgement
5. be aware of the impact of culture, equality and diversity on practice
6. be able to practise in a non-discriminatory manner
7. be able to maintain confidentiality
8. be able to communicate effectively
9. be able to work appropriately with others
10. be able to maintain records appropriately
11. be able to reflect on and review practice
12. be able to assure the quality of their practice
13. understand the key concepts of the knowledge base relevant to their profession
14. be able to draw on appropriate knowledge and skills to inform practice
15. be able to establish and maintain a safe practice environment

(HCPC, 2012, [www.hpc-uk.org/publications/standards/index.asp?id=569](http://www.hpc-uk.org/publications/standards/index.asp?id=569))

The approach taken across the text is also related to the academic subject benchmark statements for social work (Quality Assurance Agency 2008 [www.qaa.ac.uk](http://www.qaa.ac.uk)), which set out the nature and characteristics of social work education at Bachelor's with honours degree level.

## LEARNING FEATURES

This book aims to be accessible, informative, interactive and engaging. Your learning is facilitated through the chapters by a number of learning features. Each chapter begins with a brief chapter summary which will enable you to see, very quickly, the overall content of the chapter and what you can learn by engaging with its content. The chapters also include activities with subsequent responses and comments, reflective questions, research examples, examples of groupworking practice dilemmas and case studies. These features are provided to illustrate key points, to enable you to consolidate your learning, to assist you in taking your learning further and, overall to support your professional learning and development. At the end of each chapter you will find some annotated suggestions for further reading and links to web-based resources. These resources will help you if you are interested in exploring particular issues raised in the chapter in more depth and detail. Please note, however, that Internet web addresses are current and available at the time of writing, but are always subject to updates, changing structures and addresses. Finally, although key terms and abbreviations are explained throughout the book, there is a 'glossary of terms and abbreviations' provided at the end of the book as a quick and easy lexicon for you to refer to. As a case in point, the next section of this chapter discusses the meaning of the terms 'group' and 'groupwork'.

## UNDERSTANDING GROUPS AND GROUPWORK

Everyone, throughout their lives, moves in and out of different groups, as groups are central and fundamental to human activity and a core part of the human social experience. Through groups, we learn to socialise and to grow as social beings through forming and developing relationships. It is argued that

The influence of the groups we inhabit has a great and lasting effect upon our behaviour, and also on the way we think – not to say *what* we think. (Douglas, 2000: ix)

Yet our experiences of being in groups, our understanding of what we mean by groups and the types of groups we have been members of or participated in, will differ from person to person. Further to this, the notion of groupwork in the context of social work interventions is also likely to be open to different perceptions and interpretations. Therefore, at this early stage of the book, this section of Chapter 1 introduces the notions of 'groups' and 'groupwork', exploring key aspects of these concepts and definitions.

### Activity 1.1 The experience of being a group member

Think about a group that you are a member of, or have been a member of. You may, for example, think of groups related to your studies, your work or your social and leisure activities.

1. Briefly write down the purpose of the group you have thought of.
2. Think about when you first decided to, or became a member of this group – how did that happen? Write down the two main reasons you had for becoming a member.
3. Reflect on why you joined the group and your experiences as a member of this group, then make some notes under the following headings:
  - i. Strengths – What were the strengths and positives that you experienced through being a member of this group?
  - ii. Weaknesses – Were there aspects of being in this group that you found more difficult or unpleasant? Were there aspects of your experience in this group that you would wish to change?
  - iii. Opportunities – What did you initially anticipate that being a member of the group could offer you? What did you gain from being a member of the group?
  - iv. Threats – Were there any risks or concerns that you had related to being a member of this group?

### COMMENT

Your work on this activity is an important starting point for your learning about groupwork practice. The third part of the activity requires you to develop a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis of your groupwork experience. This model or tool of analysis originates from marketing and strategic business planning where it is used to gather and evaluate information to explore options and inform decisions. Compiling a SWOT analysis in this activity is useful as it can help you to reflect on, and make explicit, a range of factors – both internal factors (perceived strengths and weaknesses) and external factors (potential opportunities and threats) – that support and inform an evaluation of the experience. Later in this book, in Chapter 7, you will learn about evaluating groupwork practice and this tool is referred to again in that context.

Of course, we cannot comment on the specific example you have used in the activity, but at times, during your reading across the chapter of this book, we will return to this activity and reflect on your experiences, so you are encouraged to keep your notes. You may, as suggested within the activity, have thought of groups that you work and learn with as part of your studies. These groups usually have the specific function of encouraging learning together with the sharing of knowledge, furthering understanding, and the personal or professional development of the participants as their common aims.

Perhaps you thought of a group outside of your studies. A social work student, Caroline, working through Activity 1.1 above, drew on her experience of being a member of a slimming club group. She firstly wrote down that the purpose of the group was for all group members to lose weight, but then added that she believed the organisation that had set up the group also had the purpose of making a profit as everyone paid membership and weekly fees. Caroline decided to join the group because another student, a friend of hers, was a member and told her how much she enjoyed the meetings. However, Caroline had two, more personal, reasons for joining – firstly to lose weight and secondly to get advice, support and guidance on how to achieve that goal. Caroline’s SWOT analysis of this experience is shown in Figure 1.1. You can compare your response to Caroline’s; despite being different group experiences, can you identify any similarities?

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Going out with my friend to the meeting</li> <li>• Meeting new people</li> <li>• Sharing menu, diet and exercise ideas</li> <li>• Enjoying success amongst and with others</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As a new member, I was anxious about what I should do and what would happen at the meetings</li> <li>• Feeling ‘exposed’ in front of others</li> <li>• It was expensive to keep going</li> <li>• The timing of meetings often clashed with other commitments</li> <li>• The meetings were held a long way from my home</li> </ul>
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning new ways of doing things (new diets, recipes and ideas)</li> <li>• Improving my eating habits</li> <li>• Becoming healthier</li> <li>• Losing weight</li> <li>• Becoming a smaller clothes size</li> <li>• Fitting into my new jeans!</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• My concern about my weight becoming ‘public’</li> <li>• Others becoming aware of how much I weighed</li> <li>• I might not understand or know how to follow the dietary advice and rules</li> <li>• I might fail to lose any weight, or worse, I could gain weight and been seen as a failure in the group</li> <li>• If other students know I go to the group they might think of me as being ‘fat’ where they didn’t have that view before</li> </ul>

Figure 1.1 Example SWOT analysis of group membership

Although Caroline’s example is specific to her experience in a slimming group, you may see some similarities to your own experiences, in particular, for example, her concerns about being a new member of the group and not understanding the rules and processes, or how she enjoyed meeting new people and sharing common issues.

You will return to considering how service users might experience working in a group later in this book, particularly in the second part of the book, Chapters 4–7. Also, as stated earlier, you will return to this activity later as you progress through the book, however, you can also draw on your reflections from this activity as you consider the next section of this chapter in which you will examine more specifically what is meant by the terms ‘group’ and ‘groupwork’.

## TERMINOLOGY AND DISCOURSE

As you worked through Activity 1.1, you may have questioned some of the terminology, for example, what did we mean by a ‘group’? Or what kind of ‘group’ was being referred to? There are many terms used in our day-to-day language that, when given thought, are not as clear to understand as we may at first assume. There are many different types of groups, including virtual groups; in Chapter 2 you will read about some examples of different forms of groups. However, in this first chapter as a starting point for your further reading in this book, it is important to explore the key terms ‘group’ and ‘groupwork’ and what is meant or understood by these terms.

### Activity 1.2 Defining groups and groupwork

Think about the term ‘group’ in a broad sense.

Write out your own definition of a ‘group’. (The purpose of this is to capture your own ideas and understanding of what might be included or not included in this concept, so, at this point you are advised not to use dictionaries or Internet searches for this.)

Now think more specifically about working with groups in social work practice and construct a definition of ‘groupwork’ in the context of professional social work. (As before, draw on your own current knowledge and understanding.)

## COMMENT

The notion of a ‘group’ may seem straightforward and incontestable. Yet, the literature shows that there are a number of ways to construct an understanding of what a group is, depending on the perspective or context in which you frame that construction. Thus you may be referring to a family group, a working group, a learning group or perhaps a social group, each being potentially described slightly differently. Here are some definitions from the literature:

Two or more individuals who are connected to one another by and within social relationships. (Forsyth, 2010: 3)

A small number of people who have a shared identity, a shared frame of reference and shared objectives. (Elwyn et al., 2001: 4)

A collection of individuals who are interdependent with one another and who share some conception of being a unit distinguishable from other collections of individuals. (Thomas, 1967 cited in Brown, 1994: 5)

Additionally, Konopka (1963: vii), as seen in the quotation at the start of this chapter, draws on the notion of groups as ‘... the basic expressions of human relationships ...’. Through these quotations and our own experiences it is possible to identify four key components that make up our understanding of groups as a broad concept, as shown in Figure 1.2 below.

Thus a group is a collection of connected or interdependent individuals, usually three or more people, who through interaction and developing relationships, work towards a common purpose. All of these elements are important to consider as a social worker preparing to work with groups. Taking this further, and given the notion of a common purpose, it can be seen that groups can be mechanisms for change. Additionally, as seen in the example of Caroline and the slimming group (Figure 1.1), whilst the purpose may be ‘common’ or in some aspects, shared, the

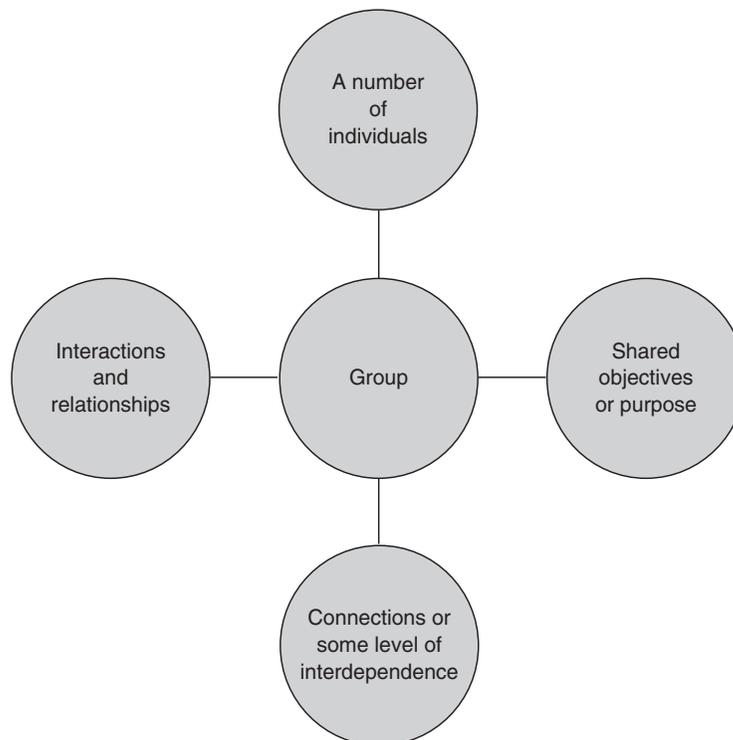


Figure 1.2 Key components of a group

individual is the focus and as such, there will be both individual and collective goals across the group. Further to this, Doel and Sawdon stress the importance of ‘a sense of *belonging*’ (1999: 14, emphasis in original), but also highlight that belonging arises from being distinctive about commonality and the identity of the group and its members; running parallel to this there is also a risk of being exclusive and that members become stereotyped (Doel and Sawdon 1999); indeed Caroline expresses this as a ‘threat’ in her SWOT analysis. Thus whilst groups are an inevitable and significant part of human development across the life cycle, their processes and constituency may be experienced as oppressive, exclusive and discriminatory (as stated earlier, you will read more about the experience of group members in later chapters). It is, therefore, crucial that as a social worker, planning, facilitating and evaluating groupwork, you develop the appropriate skills, knowledge and values to practise anti-oppressively, to understand and identify these issues, and to intervene sensitively and supportively where such concerns arise; groupwork in social work requires reflective, knowledge-based, skilled practitioners.

Here are some examples of how ‘groupwork’ is defined in the literature:

Social groupwork is a method of social work which helps persons to enhance their social functioning through purposeful group experiences and to cope more effectively with their personal, group, organisational and community problems. (Konopka, 1963: 15)

... that element of social work which goes on within, and through, interactional processes and structures ... which is to some degree deliberately designed and self-consciously carried out. (Davies, 1975: 7)

Social groupwork is a method of social work that aims, in an informed way, through purposeful group experiences, to help individuals and groups to meet individual and group need, and to influence and change personal, group, organisational and community problems. (Lindsay and Orton, 2011: 7)

We have deliberately cited some definitions from older literature and a more recent example. Whilst the definitions may be seen to differ, they do not conflict. Davies’ (1975) definition is taken from a much longer discussion on the meaning of groupwork in different settings and as such this is one part of a more in-depth exploration, although by his own admission, the definition remains broad. Both Konopka (1963) and Lindsay and Orton (2011) describe groupwork as a method and draw out the importance of the method being ‘purposeful’. Similarly Doel (2006) argues that ‘purpose’ is central to groupwork practice. The purposes and potential of groupwork are explored further in Chapter 2.

Thus building on our understanding of what is meant by groups and the key components of a group as shown in Figure 1.2, the definitions, and discussion above, it becomes possible to identify the core elements of groupwork that can inform a succinct definition, as shown in Figure 1.3.

Groupwork in social work can therefore be seen as the method, process, activity, or practice of working with groups of people who come together (either in person or by other means, such as virtually) in one or more sessions to facilitate a desired

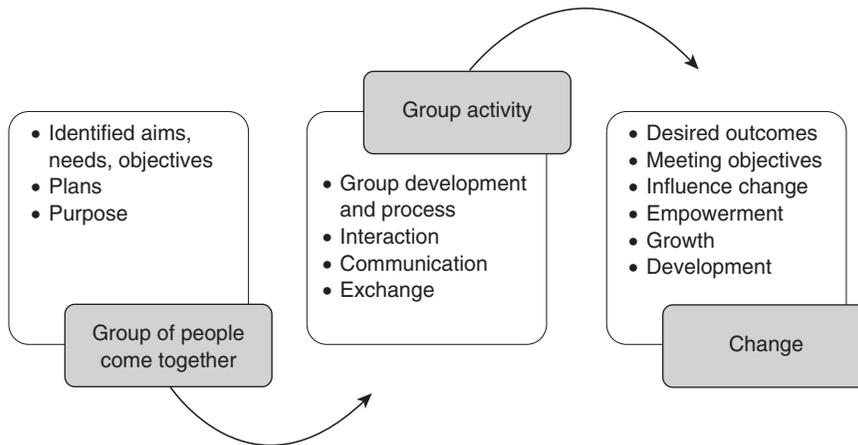


Figure 1.3 Core elements of groupwork

change, growth and/or development. This practice sits in contrast to interventions characterised by one-to-one practitioner-user sessions as seen, for example, in case-work or care-management practice, as discussed further in Chapter 2. It is important to note, too, that groupwork should not be confused with ‘group care’. The term ‘group care’ is sometimes used to refer to residential or day services where a number of people, often with some similarities in their assessed needs, receive care and support as individuals; in essence this term refers more to the environment or setting than the social work method or practice employed. These service users may also participate in groupwork, but, as indicated above, this would be separate and additional to any care and support they might be receiving in a ‘group care’ setting.

This book adopts these broad definitions of groups and groupwork as it considers and draws on examples of a wide range of different types of groups and groupwork practice across the spectrum of social work, service-user groups, interprofessional practice, and health and social care agencies. However, whilst acknowledging that groups can emerge informally, and that very valuable work can take place with people who come together in an unplanned, natural, loosely formed way, this book sets its focus on planned, formalised groupwork in professional practice with groups of service users who intentionally, purposefully come together.

You may also have noticed that through this discussion of key terms there has been frequent reference to the importance of interaction, communication and exchange between individual group members. Later in the book, we use the term ‘group dynamics’ and in Chapter 3 of this book you will have the opportunity to learn about how different theories explain relationship formation and social interaction in groups.

At this point, in this chapter, however, it is relevant to underline the significance of the social interaction to groupwork. Group dynamics, in its broadest sense, refers to the behaviours, social processes, relationships and attitudes that occur within and across the group.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter has ‘set the scene’ for the rest of this book and before you progress with your learning, you will find it helpful to take some time to reflect on what you have read, and think about your own learning needs.

### Activity 1.3 Planning your learning

Make notes in response to the following questions:

- Which sections or chapters of this book are likely to be of most interest and value to you at this time and in the future?
- Are there elements of the book’s contents in which you already feel confident that you have the core knowledge and skills for practice? If so, which areas are these and can you identify how your knowledge and skills were gained?
- Are there elements of the book’s contents in which you feel you wish to particularly focus your learning at this time? If so, which aspects of groupwork are they and how will you ensure you achieve this focus?

## COMMENT

Essentially, Activity 1.3 is encouraging you to make a study plan for your own learning about groupwork in social work practice. Developing an individual learning plan can be a really effective way of increasing your awareness about your own strengths, skills and knowledge and, crucially, your learning needs and the most effective way for you to address them to ensure appropriate and proficient continuing professional development. Professional development, evaluation of practice, reflective and reflexive practice form key themes of both this book and the Professional Capabilities Framework and, as such, throughout the chapters you will be given the opportunity to reflect on your learning; then in Chapter 8, at the end of the book, this activity and your learning throughout the book will be reviewed.

This first chapter has given you a ‘flavour’ of the range, scope and purpose of the book, its overall structure, aims, themes and approach. You have also considered how key terms, that we may assume we have common understandings of, such as ‘groups’ and ‘groupwork’, have more complex definitions that include a number of elements even in their broadest interpretation. In the next chapter of this book you will explore the purpose, potential and limitations of groupwork as a social work intervention. Chapter 2 sets the concept of groupwork in its historical and contemporary professional context and, in doing so, it provides underpinning knowledge for the remainder of the book. We hope that you will enjoy your studies as you move through this book.

As the chapter started with the words of Konopka, so it seems appropriate to close the chapter with some key thoughts from the same author; you will learn more about Konopka's seminal writing on groupwork in Chapter 2.

Describing groupwork, Konopka writes:

1. It belongs or should belong to any work with human beings – to social work, education, psychiatry, community action and others.
2. It enhances individuals and their relationships to each other only when it is based on and carried through a philosophy of absolute respect for every person. This means honest and open with people, not a manipulation of them (Konopka, 1970: preface xviii).

### Further reading

Lindsay, T. and Orton, S. (2011) *Groupwork Practice in Social Work* (2nd edn). London: SAGE, Learning Matters.

*Part of the Learning Matters Transforming Social Work Practice series, this book provides an introductory overview to groupwork practice. Of particular interest with regard to the content of this chapter is the first chapter of Lindsay and Orton's (2011) text in which they consider some of the key terminology and some different forms of groups.*

Doel, M. (2006) *Using Groupwork*. London: Routledge.

*This book is based on Doel's research with groups. In particular, in this book, he details nine illustrative groups from that work. In the second chapter of this book, titled 'Understand', Doel explores a range of concepts that help the reader to understand different aspects of groups and groupwork.*

### Internet resources

The College of Social Work ([www.collegeofsocialwork.org](http://www.collegeofsocialwork.org))

*The College of Social Work website provides a number of interesting resources and up-to-date information for the profession. For example, there is a wealth of detail about the Professional Capabilities Framework, the domains, levels and progression across them.*