

Interpersonal feedback in group therapy: How to give it and how to get it

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People join groups because something in their lives isn't working out for them. If you are like most group members, you will have developed habits or patterns of thinking, feeling and behaving in the world that you feel stuck in and which seem to present obstacles to your happiness. In order to break free of these patterns, something different has to happen. Interpersonal feedback in group therapy provides an opportunity to develop a new perspective on yourself and your relationships with others.

There are some generally accepted guidelines about what constitutes useful interpersonal feedback in groups. One thing to keep in mind is that the feedback should be **clear** so that it can be easily understood by the group member receiving it. Keeping the feedback concise and direct will help make it clear. Another quality feedback should have is that it should be **relevant**. Relevant feedback is often directed to something that is happening in the group at that moment and will tend to elicit a response or reaction from the person receiving it. An aspect of feedback that is often overlooked is that effective feedback will **focus on the sender**. This usually makes it easier for the person receiving feedback to really listen and take it in. Useful feedback also tends to include **emotions**, involve some **self-disclosure**, and will **avoid being judgmental**. Lastly, one hallmark of successful interpersonal feedback is that it will say something about **the relationship between the sender and the receiver**.

An example of useful interpersonal feedback would sound like this: "Joe, I am finding it very hard to listen to you right now. It sounds to me like you are preaching to us. I am getting annoyed and irritated. I guess I feel like you think I'm not very smart. I end up shutting down and not really hearing you."

Since receiving feedback is going to be one of the best ways for you to make the changes you want to make, there are some ways to ensure you get feedback. One way is to simply ask for it. While it may not be easy, at any point you can come right out and ask the other group members to give you feedback. Another way to elicit feedback is to give it. Since good feedback tends to elicit a reaction, feedback usually leads to more feedback. In addition to giving feedback, taking any kind of emotional risk that reveals something the group doesn't know about you will often lead to feedback from the group. Finally, how you receive feedback when it is given will effect how comfortable group members will be giving you feedback in the future. If you are defensive and try to justify what you have said or done, then it may have the effect of discouraging future feedback. Try to be open and learn from what is said. Remember that feedback often says as much, if not more, about the person giving it as it does about the person receiving it.

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