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Re: _____

Dear _____

Thank you for calling and expressing an interest in my Social Skills/Self-Esteem Groups. In order to provide you with information about my groups while you are waiting for an intake appointment or for space to become available for your son or daughter, I would like to provide you with this letter which details information about the groups and generally provides answers to the most frequently asked questions.

GENERAL INFORMATION

The Social Skills/ Self/Esteem Groups meet approximately every two weeks for one hour sessions. Males and females ages 7 to 21-years-old are accepted and placed into appropriate groups given their age, social level, and particular needs. All group members must identify a particular social goal which they wish to work on and are responsible for working towards it while in group, both in session and in between the sessions.

Group sessions are designed to have an interchange amongst group members allowing for a dialog about any social question, struggle, or as well, success strategies. A dynamic part of the group session is this interchange which occurs amongst the group members allowing group members to both provide help to other peers, and to as receive help and support on their own goal area. At each session, group members are responsible for bringing a Parent Feedback Form which they work together with their parent/guardian to delineate successes that they are having on their goal, as well as any struggles which they might wish to explore in the group sessions.

Each group session also contains a specially designed learning activity for the members of that group. These learning activities include role-playing, games, discussion, and other activities to teach a variety of skills using different modalities. These activities are not “set in stone” in terms of coming from a book and being used as Chapter 1, Chapter 2, etc. Actually, such activities come from a variety of resources, as well as creative ideas from the group leader and the group members.

What are the ages of the group members?

Group members may begin at the age of 7 and continue through age 21 (post high school). Group members are placed in a group which is commensurate with their needs and social level. Group members are generally in a group which consists of other peers within 2 to 3 years of their age. Group members also have the opportunity as they start to build skills to “move up” to another group functioning at a higher level than theirs, if they are ready to do so.

How long to group members remain in group?

Group members remain in group for as long as they need to, until they obtain their individual goal(s). For example, some group members may attend only a few months while others may be in group several years. As group members work on their particular goal area and when they complete their goal, they have the option of creating a new goal which they wish to work towards at that time or completing the group with a celebration of their success.

When does the group meet?

Depending on which group your son or daughter is placed in, groups meet on a variety of days after school, as well as on Saturday. It is my goal to place your son or daughter in the group that is best suited for them and then to see if your schedule meets accordingly. Group members are placed in a group when space is available. If space is not available, then the client remains on a wait list until one of the other participants finishes, creating an open space. Since group is ongoing, openings for groups occur continuously and it is difficult for me to predict how long it will take. However, I will make all attempts to secure treatment for them as soon as possible in a group which will benefit them. My goal is to obtain the best benefits for your son or daughter.

What is the fee for group sessions?

The fee for group is \$50.00 per group session. Most insurance companies supply coverage for group therapy (coded 90853). I am a provider for most insurance companies and you may check with them if you are considering using your insurance coverage. Please be sure to spell my last name, Berk, as many times, I have found that people contact the insurance company and obtain incorrect information based on spelling. It is your responsibility to check with your insurance company to verify any coverage you might have, if you wish to use your insurance for an intake appointment or future sessions. If you are requesting group sessions from your insurance, be sure to ask for group therapy sessions. If my office needs to complete a treatment plan, I will delineate

the particular goals under the group treatment which are specific to your son or daughter. I can also discuss these goals at the intake session. You may also self pay for group

Do we meet with Dr. Berk first?

The initial evaluation will be with at least one parent/guardian and the client. I will meet with both parent and client together and as well, separately, if needed. Most intake appointments will occur during the school day, as after school appointment times are standing appointments or groups. However from time to time, there are other appointments available. The fee for the initial session is \$110.00 and is usually covered by insurance. Please be sure to check specifically with your insurance company regarding any Usual Customary Fee (UCR) that has been agreed with your company. You should attend the first session with an authorization number, if required, if you are planning to use insurance.

If you are expecting to self pay, please indicate that information to me at the intake appointment.

What is the diagnosis of the group members?

I must state that I am an individual who clearly believes that a diagnosis generally consists of nothing more than a collection of symptoms. Many of the children that I see do not clearly fit any one diagnosis and thus, I am hesitant to say that our children have any one particular type of issue. However, some of the members in groups have diagnoses ranging from Attention Deficit Disorder, Asperger's Syndrome, Anxiety Disorder, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, Tourette's Syndrome, and as well, many have very mild symptoms and thus do not meet the diagnostic criteria for any of the aforementioned diagnoses.

Are there children that you do not take?

The purpose of the intake evaluation is to discern if your client is appropriate for group and to be sure that a therapeutic contract is created at the initial session. There are some clients, for a myriad of reasons, who are not accepted for the group sessions. In our initial intake, we will have the opportunity to review records (please bring a copy with you of all testing, I.E.P.'s, etc.) and to make sure that your son or daughter's program is appropriate. My goal is to be sure that a high quality of service is provided to your son or daughter and thus if I believe they will not benefit, I will be sure to tell you this information at the initial session.

What if my child does not want to attend group?

In general, I have two types of clients that attend the group sessions. The first type *is* the child who clearly knows they have an issue and is ready to make changes if they are provided information to do so.

The second type of client, the more difficult one, is an individual that does not believe they have an issue, blames others, and requires a great deal of work before they will arrive to the point that they will admit that they have an issue to work on.

My groups contain both types of clients. Depending on what type of son or daughter you have, they are placed in a group accordingly. Obviously, the latter of these two types of clients takes longer in treatment, since we are working to help them understand and admit their problem and then to utilize skills to change. For this latter type of client mentioned, it may be difficult to get them to attend the original intake session. However, I suggest that you use any means possible to have them come so that we can meet and I can provide you with a professional opinion regarding the likelihood of this type of treatment being successful for them. Note that the client must attend the intake appointment.

Does group therapy work?

I find that many of the referrals are from parents of clients who have already been in group and had success. Also, many clients come to group therapy because they have outgrown the effectiveness of individual therapy and their therapists will refer them to group. After many years of providing group therapy sessions, the parent feedback has been excellent and I find a very positive response from most children in the sessions. If your son or daughter is not making progress in the group sessions, I will contact you to dialog about what needs to transpire in terms of adding additional therapeutic strategies or looking at other options. I must remind parents that we look at progress as the client against themselves, not necessarily children against their peers.

I am worried that my son or daughter will hear things from other peers that I might be concerned about.

Group members are exposed to information from peers in the group sessions. In general, it is my overall goal to try and keep clients placed in groups which are appropriate for their social level. From time to time, information does come up in group sessions which might be surprising to different youngsters in the session. Any information that comes up in this way is processed as a group to be sure that everyone feels comfortable with what has been said.

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Since there is no way to screen what any group member may say, best efforts are made to be sure that closure, as well as an opportunity for dialog will occur with each and every session. Should you have any concerns about your son or daughter in the group sessions, you, as a parent or guardian, may call as needed.

I hope this information answers questions you may have regarding my groups. I thank you for your interest and look forward to meeting with you and providing service to your son or daughter.

Sincerely,

Jay H. Berk, Ph.D.
Psychologist