

# LOUISIANA GROUP PSYCHOTHERAPY SOCIETY

*Affiliate of the American Group Psychotherapy Association*

## GUIDELINES FOR INSTITUTE PARTICIPANTS

LGPS institutes offer a unique learning environment through large group experiences, presentations, and small experiential group sessions. The goal is to provide participants an opportunity to integrate a deeper understanding of the institute themes and leadership styles, as well as group theories and processes.

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### GROUP AS A WHOLE

This experience is attended by all participants, presenters, and experiential group leaders. There is no facilitator. This context offers the opportunity to learn the similarities and differences in psychotherapy and sociotherapy (how we talk in groups), to identify and explore our individual patterns of communication and cooperation as a member of the institute. Lastly, this unique environment affords all members the space to develop an understanding about the interrelationships between the person, the subgroups, and the group as a whole.

**Objectives:** All participants are encouraged to use the group as a whole as a forum to join with others in what we are learning, and what surprised us or any satisfactions or dissatisfactions we may experience. This is all grist for the “group process mill” as well as information that helps us to grow. This forum is also one way we can learn from the groups in which we are not participating.

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### LARGE GROUP PRESENTATIONS

Our presenters typically use a combination of didactic presentation, group discussion, “fishbowl” demonstration groups and other experiential learning tools. Participants are encouraged to volunteer and participate in groups, discussions, exercises, and consultations.

**Objectives:** May be explained at the beginning of each presentation and may include handouts.

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### EXPERIENTIAL GROUPS

Three experiential group sessions will alternate with the large group presentations and group as a whole experiences throughout the institute. There are typically 5-10 members in each experiential group. Institute participants are pre-assigned to a group/group leader at the time of registration. *These sessions are treated as confidential.* Although members may experience a range of feelings and rarely leave without learning something new about himself/herself, the contract is for education, not for psychotherapy. Participants are expected to attend all experiential group sessions.

**Objectives:** The goal of each experiential group is to study its own behavior in the interactive process of the “here and now.” Group leaders will provide a structure to bridge experiential learning with cognitive understanding of the group’s development and the institute themes. Participants may experience firsthand the challenges of joining, finding one’s voice, becoming known, remaining

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## EXPERIENTIAL GROUPS (CONTINUED)

emotionally present, working in the moment, forming relationships, and reflecting on interactions. Group dynamics, transference and counter-transference reactions, projective identification, functional and non-adaptive sub grouping, role selection, individual and group level defense mechanisms and resistances, and other dynamic process may emerge and be observed.

**Structure:** The experiential group meets for three sessions per institute. Leaders may use 5 to 15 minutes at the end of one or all of their sessions to discuss the process to further bridge the subjective experience with cognitive understanding. The leaders may share their perspectives and theoretical basis for making interventions, and questions may be asked about any aspect of the experience. This is the time to “process the process.”

**What to Expect:** An experiential process group provides the therapist the opportunity to sensitize oneself to the experience of our clients as they face the challenge of being in a group. It is natural to feel anxious starting a small group. The leader will welcome the identification of these and other feelings and reactions as they emerge and will help the group explore them in a constructive way. One may also have the opportunity to receive feedback from the group.

**Leaders:** The leaders are experienced group therapists and educators. Many are longtime members of LGPS and AGPA and meet qualifications for becoming a CGP (Certified Group Psychotherapist). The leader’s task is to help the group study its own behavior and to protect the safety of its members as well as the boundaries of the group. They are there to support the process of exploration. They will support any process that leads to further understanding and will guide the group away from advice giving, judgments, problem solving, and explaining.

**Members:** Members are expected to take responsibility for the level of their participation and the extent of their self-disclosure in the group. Members are encouraged to be open, self reflective, and willing to interact. Members are not expected to disclose personal material they prefer to keep confidential or to work at a deeper level than they are comfortable. Personal boundaries will be respected.

**Attendance:** Attendance at all three experiential group sessions is required. Participants are expected to come on time and to stay for all group sessions. Changing groups is not allowed once the group has begun. If there are extenuating circumstances with role conflicts, please see the Institute Chair before the first group begins to request a different group.

**Professional Judgment:** *Professional judgment is extremely important.* The goal of our institutes is to learn with and from one another. Whether in the role of leader or member, each one of us is expected to use our professional judgment by respecting personal and content boundaries inside and outside of the group (ie. keeping names and recognizable details confidential when sharing the experience with others.) “Professional Judgment” in the educational context is synonymous with “Confidentiality” in the psychotherapy arena.

**Experiential Group Leader Meetings:** Meetings with the LGPS institute keynote speaker and experiential group leaders will occur during the institute. The purpose of these parallel experiential leader meetings is to provide support, debriefing, and group consultation to those facilitating the experiential group sessions. As indicated above, names of members and recognizable information will not be shared in these meetings.