

Six-month Psychoeducation Group for Adults with Childhood Trauma

Christopher Frechette, LCSW
Patrick Teahan Therapy

Who is the group for?

The group is for adults who think they have (or may have) experienced trauma during childhood and are considering any of the following questions:

- Even though I have difficult childhood memories, was it really that bad? In other words:
 - Was it right how my parents treated me (what they *did* and/or *did not* do)?
 - Was it right what they led me to believe about myself, about our family, and about how to interact in relationships?
- Did my childhood experience leave me with emotional and relational difficulties that have significant negative consequences in my present life?
- How can I gain awareness of how those present difficulties are linked to my childhood experience, and how can I create a recovery path, a process toward healing?

The “magic” that happens:

In their families of origin, survivors of childhood trauma experienced ongoing difficulties that were painful and confusing, leaving them with a variety of toxic core beliefs about themselves and the world. Such beliefs continue to adversely affect them, often without their being aware of it. One reason that those toxic core beliefs last so long is that the child relied on them to survive in the dysfunctional family system. Children are hard-wired to see their family as right and good, and so if they feel bad about what is going on in the family, they conclude that it is themselves who are bad. This becomes a source of toxic shame that persists into adulthood.

To challenge their shame and other toxic core beliefs, adults can benefit from sharing about their experiences in a group of other adults who “get it.” In contrast to the confusing and hurtful ways they experienced parents and other family members, the others in the group become empathetic and reasonable witnesses, open to hearing and understanding each other’s experiences. With the guidance of the therapist, the group members establish a safe emotional connection with each other that is powerful for helping participants express their feelings and challenge their shame and other toxic core beliefs. For promoting the healing process, this connection allows for a kind of “magic” to occur that is unavailable in one-to-one therapy. For many adult survivors of childhood trauma who have had prior therapy, group becomes a “game-changer.” Group can offer a powerful supplement to individual therapy, and many people engage in both simultaneously.

Group goals:

- The six-month psychoeducation group seeks to create a safe space for adults who are open to exploring their own childhoods as they learn about childhood trauma, its effects, and paths to recovery from it.
- This space will enable participants to gain healthier perspectives on themselves by sharing their personal experiences with each other as they learn about key concepts and share their genograms.

Group objectives:

- Participants will learn about key topics relevant to childhood trauma, including:
 - the basic needs and rights of children
 - how present experiences can “trigger” strong and recurrent mental/physical reactions linked to adverse childhood experiences
 - distinguishing healthy from unhealthy family systems
 - toxic core beliefs
 - dysfunctional family rules
- Each participant will create and present to the group a genogram of the participant’s family of origin:
 - The genogram covers three generations, indicating information about each of the characters intended to help explain how they affected the participant as a child.
 - In presenting it to the group, the participant uses the genogram to support telling the story of how they experienced the family during childhood.
 - Hearing each other’s genograms will help each participant in these ways:
 - To feel a solidarity with the other participants that strengthens their ability to do the challenging work of processing their own past.
 - To recognize similar themes that resonate with their own story and so help validate their own feelings and new ways of understanding their past.

What happens?

- The group meets via Zoom for 90 minutes weekly for six months.
- The group begins with eight participants, who commit to attending for the entire six months; the group does not add new participants once it has begun.
- In the first session, participants introduce themselves and share briefly about what motivates them to do the group now, as well as hopes and fears about the group.
- Subsequent sessions begin with each participant “checking in” for 1-2 minutes about anything relevant to the group; the sessions conclude with each participant “checking out” for 1-2 minutes about anything relevant to their experience of group that day.
- For many sessions, written materials are provided in advance and presented during the session.
- Beginning after two months, each participant takes one full group to present their genogram and receive feedback from the group. Usually, these presentations occur every other session (not in back-to-back sessions).
- Because of the time it generally takes participants who are survivors of childhood trauma to establish a sense of safety with each other, participants in the six-month group agree to limit their interaction with each other to group sessions; they do not interact outside of group.

Cost:

- The fee for each session is \$75, which is due at the time of the session.
- Not in any insurance network; paid invoices available for out-of-network reimbursement.
- In a spirit of fairness recognizing that participants commit to attending all sessions, but that life can sometimes get in the way, participants are required to pay for the second of every two sessions that they miss.