

# Group Development

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What to expect in a Balint group over time and how to handle it

# Development = Change

- Group dynamics evolve as groups mature

Changes show in

- » How members interact with each other,  
Becoming more varied, spontaneous;
- » How they interact with the leaders,  
Becoming more relaxed or collegial;
- » What they find interesting,  
Becoming broader, possibly more speculative;
- » What they ignore,  
Becoming less likely to ignore emotional content.

# Group Development

- Broad outlines of stages and their tasks help anchor the leaders.
- Forward movement will not be linear, but fluctuating.
- It's not on a timetable.
- Individuals profit from different stages – every stage is valuable.

# Stages of Development

- 1.) Formation stage (“forming and norming”)
- 2.) Reaction stage (“storming”)
- 3.) Mature stage (“performing”)
- 4.) Termination stage (“adjourning”)

# Formation stage

- Member tasks
  - Orienting to the group through trial and error to see what's useful and safe.
  - Tolerating not knowing what's "right" or what one will be asked to reveal.
  - Sharing internal details of one's professional life: loosening one's boundaries and trusting that they can be reestablished.
  - Handling anxiety.
  - Managing the conflict between wanting to belong and wanting complete control of the self, even at the cost of isolation.
  - Attempting to establish a level of intimacy/self-revelation/emotional vulnerability that has been historically safe.

# Formation stage

## Member tasks

Orienting to the group through trial and error to see what's useful and safe.

Tolerating not knowing what's "right" or what one will be asked to reveal.

Sharing internal details of one's professional life: loosening one's boundaries and trusting that they can be reestablished.

## Leader tasks

Orienting explicitly and implicitly.

Establishing a nonjudgmental atmosphere to allow curiosity and exploration

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Noting for future reference how feelings are handled, which may influence group norms.

# Formation stage

## Member tasks

Handling anxiety.

Managing conflict between wanting to belong and wanting complete control of the self, even at the cost of isolation.

Attempting to establish a level of intimacy/self-revelation/emotional vulnerability that has been historically safe.

## Leader tasks

Tolerating anxiety and individual variation – remaining calm.

Remembering that Balint learning is experiential and every stage is important in itself.

Addressing things when they reoccur, after conferring with your co-leader.

# Reaction stage

## Member tasks

Asserting reactions to belonging to the group; asserting individuality.

Testing the safety of complaining or requesting change.

Naming differences or surfacing conflicts with other members or with leaders.

## Leader tasks

Appreciating this is a developmental stage – members are not trying to destroy the group but to protect their individuality.

Knowing that almost always the appearance of “storming” represents a sign of progress, not failure.

Listening respectfully; keeping goals in mind.



# Mature stage

- The work appears goal directed.  
“We’re not getting to the patient on this one, not as easily as usual anyway.”
- Members interact spontaneously.  
“Let me guess. You’re going to have twins and you want double maternity leave.”
- Leadership may seem shared as leaders are treated as experts but demystified.  
“We’re laughing so much, this case must be pretty uncomfortable.”
- Strong feelings, and intense differences can be tolerated and are not prematurely cut off.  
“Of course, I wouldn’t do it that way. I’d be more cut and dried. But this patient might even like that.”
- Uncomfortable similarities among members are also tolerated.  
“I hate it when I do that.”

# Mature stage

## Member tasks

Experiencing professional cooperation.

Experiencing a balance of open boundaries, allowing play and intuition, and closed boundaries, providing safety.

Learning from genuine differences and uncomfortable similarities.

## Leader tasks

Allowing members to work without undue interference or intrusion.

Managing external and internal boundaries for optimal functioning.

Recognizing the value of the leader role, even when tempted to participate like a member.

# Termination stage

- Significant in time-limited groups
- Everyone goes through it together, but it will have different meanings for individuals.
- Even where members do not seem to speak about the ending of the group, assume the content is related: themes of separation, goodbye and loss become more prominent.

# Termination stage

- Member tasks

Tolerating complex feelings: the pain of loss, joy, relief, pride, fear.

Reviewing/consolidating learning.

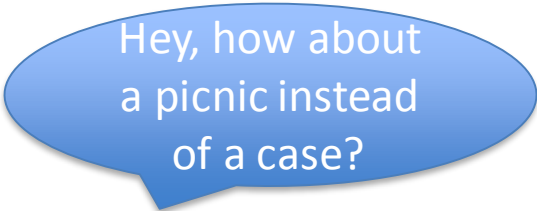
Saying good-bye.

- Leader tasks

Keeping the group focused as usual.

Allowing some time to say good-bye.

Processing your own feelings with your co-leader: What will you miss about this group? Who could use more time? What did you learn from them for use in the future?



Hey, how about a picnic instead of a case?

# Summary

- Group Dynamics, Leadership, Managing Group Boundaries, Group Cohesion,
- Stages of Group Development
  - Formation (forming and norming)
  - Reaction (storming)
  - Mature functioning (performing)
  - Termination (adjourning)