

A model of emotion transformation for problem anger in Emotion-Focused Group Therapy for Autism Spectrum Disorder

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Autistic people report trauma-related experiences through emotional misunderstandings with typically developing peers. Difficulties in emotion processing, including recognizing own and others' emotions leads to interpersonal conflicts and emotional injuries. This can result in chronic anger and hatred towards others. There are limited intervention methodologies for autism on the impact of emotional injuries and how to work with problem anger.

In this presentation, a rational-empirical model of problem anger and emotional repair is presented. This model is constructed from a Task Analysis of emotion focused group therapy with autistic adults (n=4) across treatment (n=9). Qualitative analysis of moment to moment shifts for each client and interactional analysis between group members is triangulated using an observer based rating scale. The model is presented with a case example illustrating sequential emotional processing shifts. The primary change processes include improving access to and symbolizing one's own painful emotional experiences. Followed by exploration and elaboration in understanding the strategic nature of expressing anger and hate. From activation of vulnerability markers, leading to an emotional deepening process that enables clients to access core pain.

Facilitated mentalization of self-other dialogue that leads to insights into interpersonal function of the expressed emotion. Autistic adults are able to use Emotion-Focused Group Therapy as a therapeutic space to explore problem anger such as hate. This case conceptualization stands as a preliminary model for future hypothesis testing.