
A Guide to Evidence-Based Group Work, by Mark J. Macgowan, Ph.D., LCSW, is a scholarly work. This book is written as a guide to assist the reader in understanding and developing evidence-based group work (EBGW). This highly organized guide emphasizes and describes the process of evidence-based practice (EBP) evolving to EBGW. This would be an excellent textbook for an undergraduate- or graduate-level academic course on group therapy. Psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers, and other counselors would perhaps be wise to become familiar with this work.

This outstanding book is also practical. Each chapter is filled with very useful information on the approach of EBGW. Clinicians and researchers would benefit from learning and using this material in their group work. As an invaluable resource, it put forth a framework for current and future practice in group work. Important resources fill the book’s chapters with current facts, Web site information, and an extensive review of the process of evaluating research studies. The importance of best evidence, application in practice, and evaluation are essential to EBGW, and this provides the conceptual framework for the entire book. The author presents a strong perspective for creating best practices for EBGW.

The content is constructed into three parts and a total of six chapters. Part I, Chapter 1, reviews six assumptions of EBGW. It then focuses on the historical origins and development of evidence-based medicine and EBP. In Part II, Chapters 2, 3, 4, and 5 describe in great detail the four stages necessary to operationalize EBGW. The four stages are: formulate an answerable question; search for evidence; undertake a critical review of the evidence; and apply the evidence with judgment and skill and evaluate outcomes. Part III, Chapter 6, is entirely devoted to the dissemination of EBGW in research, clinical practice, and education. The transrelational research approach described in this chapter explores how a planned, system-wide collaboration between education, research, and clinical practice could be achieved. Such an organizational context supportive of EBGW would use practice-relevant research readily available to group workers, with ongoing education and consultation to all.

EvidenceBasedGroupWork.com is a Web site evolved from the author’s book. The site also serves as a link to research-based evidence about group
work. Its intention, as described on the Web site, “is to make research evidence available to those who want to make group work demonstrably more effective and beneficial to participants.” The EBGW Bookmarks link is a very user-friendly resource tool to assist in keeping current with useful research studies pertaining to EBGW.

It appears the EBP and EBGW will continue to become the practice standard in clinical settings. For example, group therapy for patients coping with both active additions and recovery from active addictions will benefit from the clear-eyed approach that EBGW can provide. This in turn, if embraced, can facilitate ongoing research with this population and sharing of outcomes. Let’s imagine a group therapy that is focused on treating an actively addicted population, using a motivational interviewing approach. The group facilitators as “researcher-clinicians” carry on the tradition of seeking and applying the best research evidence to a specific question in the group work, apply the intervention, and evaluate the impact of their intervention. In another scenario, a group that is composed of recovering professionals in early recovery who meet weekly for support and confrontation to continue their healing process would also benefit from the EBGW model. The group leader(s) of such a group could critically evaluate a specific aspect of the group, such as building cohesion, for example. An EBGW approach might reveal specific research regarding enhancing group cohesion with a similar population. A specific intervention could be applied to the group to enhance the group cohesion. Following the intervention, a measure of any change in group cohesion could be evaluated. Using solid tools of evaluation would reveal specific results. As clinicians, our ability to rigorously evaluate our group work is essential. EBGW can be an ongoing process of bringing about more effective group work and of greater benefit to group participants.

Learning about EBGW in academic settings seems to be an inevitable practice requirement for future clinicians and researchers. The author is advancing best practices that improve the beneficial impacts of group work. In an age of restricted resources, EBGW is being viewed by many administrators, educators, researchers, and clinicians as a framework for clinical practice with groups. This guide provides essential material and extensive resources. I highly recommend this book to you.

Kevin M. Murphy, LCSW, CSADC, CGP
Chicago, IL