

Negative Ball Groups
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I have been conducting groups at Millcreek since my second week there at the beginning of the internship. I had already picked a past group activity that I had done which was called the “Confidence Coat of Arms”. It was an easy activity that had been done, so I thought it would be a good group to talk about and then this week happened.

This week I came up with a group activity called “Negative Ball”. It involved a beach ball and the patients’ imagination. I blew up the beach ball. I explained to the patients to imagine that the beach ball was filled with their negative emotions. It was filled with their anger, sadness, fear, panic, grief, etc. and it was to the verge of popping. They had to deflate the ball. The only way that they could deflate the ball, their negative emotions, was to combat it with positive emotions and positive things that make them feel happy. We went outside and got into a large circle. We then hit the ball to each other, but when you hit the ball, you had to say the positive emotion/thing and at one point, I opened the stopper and began to let the air out and we continued the game until the air went out. After the air went out, we went back inside to have a group discussion. This happened with both the older girls’ group and little girls’ group, but to save time, I will just talk about the older girls’ group as it was more intense.

On Tuesday, I did this activity with the older girls. I started group with check-ins, which is where I have them tell me a high and low of their day, so I know where they are at mentally in the present moment. After that, I explained the rules of the game and then we went outside to do it. Group started out fine. The patients were following the rules of the game. I had to redirect them back on track a couple of times, but it was fine, and then it was not.

To give context, on the older girls’ side we have a ten-year-old that has anger management issues. She wanted water because she was getting hot outside. I tried to calm her

down stating that we were going to go back inside in a few minutes and she could get water then. She continued to yell that she wanted water. Eventually, I relented to let group get back on track and I asked the two staff members that were with me to watch the group while I took this patient to get a cup of water. We were only gone two minutes, but when we came back to group, the whole atmosphere of group had turned negative. One of the staff members told me that we needed to go inside because one of the patients said some words that were going to cause a fight. I immediately took group inside and we had a group discussion.

The discussion revolved around two patients that were having a verbal fight. I let them express their emotions to each other. They each got their turn to express their thoughts. The part that got intense is that multiple staff members came in during group and put in input in the group too. I appreciate the staff members' input, because they are with the patients more than I am, so their input helps me piece together what the patients say and understand what is going on. There was, at one point, that a staff member got into a power struggle with one of the patients and I had to deescalate that situation. I also deescalated the situation between the two patients. I placed them on peer restriction, which means they cannot talk to each other, be on the same side of the cottage as each other unless absolutely necessary and with permission, and not to even look at each other. It was that bad between these two. I processed the group with the other members of group and let them express how they felt through that whole ordeal. Many of the other girls just did not want to be a part of group because of the shouting and yelling that was going on. I thanked them for their feedback and group ended after this situation had been deescalated.

At the beginning of the group activity, the group was cohesive. They were working together. There wasn't any favoritism with passing the beach ball and everyone got a chance to go. We were having a good time, but as that situation continued, the cohesion dissolved. Many of

the patients became withdrawn during the discussion because of all of the other people talking and shouting. They just wanted group to be over with.

I could have spotted the tension earlier in group. There was a moment where one of the patients, that was the reason for us to go inside, had walked off from group and I tried to bring her back in. I should have paid more attention to the tension in the group, but I was trying to keep the activity lighthearted and fun. I also should have not let the staff member get into a power struggle with the patient. I should have stopped it when it began, but when multiple staff members are in the room and are trying to say something along with the patients, it's a lot of noise and confusion going on. I will be quicker in stopping power struggles in the future. The main intervention I plan to continue in the future is to have an open-floor discussion with the group when a negative reaction like this happens in group, so they can process it in group and not let it fester until it boils over and there's a fight between patients. That's the whole point of the "Negative Ball" to express your negative emotions in the moment in an appropriate manner instead of letting them grow and grow until it explodes and you lash out at the nearest person or object.

Overall, after seeing the results of this activity in both groups, I think the "Negative Ball" is an excellent way to express negative emotions and explain how these emotions can take over a person's life. I found it interesting that in both groups there was an issue that needed to be resolved in a group discussion. It was as if the activity brought those emotions to the surface and the patients were able to express them and get them out. I will keep this activity for my future groups in my career.