

Advantage of In-Person Group Therapy in an Intensive Outpatient Program



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Allan Gates is the Director of Inpatient Therapy and Intensive Outpatient Programs for Laureate Psychiatric Clinic and Hospital. Allan's more than forty years of mental health treatment experience includes directing and managing both inpatient and outpatient treatment programs for adults and

adolescents, with an expertise in substance abuse and chemical dependency.

A natural leader, Allan has both mentored and supervised numerous mental health provider candidates, in addition to having served as an adjunct professor for Southern Nazarene University, helping prepare young mental health students for their careers.

Allan's accomplishments include having served as the chairperson of the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Advisory Council, president of the Oklahoma Drug and Alcohol Association, and as an independent evaluator for the National Football League substance abuse program. Allan has authored two books, titled "The Road to Recovery" and "Where's God?" He also served as a crisis responder during the tragic bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City.

Allan began his career in mental health through serving as a counselor in the United States army, thereafter attaining his undergraduate degree in sociology from Oklahoma Baptist University. He earned his master's of science in psychological services from East Central University and his doctorate of Christian counseling from Louisiana Baptist University.

As our community and world continue to adapt to a different version of normal, many patients and parents have had to weigh the benefits and drawbacks of in-person versus virtual experiences, such as school and extracurricular activities. Mental healthcare has been no different, with many providers offering both telehealth and in-person appointments for outpatient or intensive outpatient care. Each individual must evaluate safety and other factors that allow the best care option for his or her needs. Below are several advantages of in-person experiences to consider for those deciding between virtual or in-person therapy in an intensive outpatient program.

Virtual versus In-Person

The path to recovery looks different for everyone. For some people, having dedicated one-on-one sessions with a professional can yield the best results. For others, having a community of like-minded people at their fingertips can give them the motivation they need to continue down the road to recovery. Recovery is a whole-person commitment of physical health, emotional health, relational health, and spiritual health. While not impossible, practicing relational health in a virtual setting can be difficult. In-person group sessions have a number of powerful advantages that can be highly beneficial not only in the recovery process but in re-establishing social and life skills along the way.

Practicing Voice

The idea of "practicing voice" is foreign in a way, since talking isn't something that tends to need much practice. However, using one's voice in a group therapy session is more than just being willing to speak. It is an exercise in agency - voicing opinions that may cause discussions or vocally expressing particular vulnerabilities. Raising one's own voice in these settings is a practice for the "real world" that waits outside after going through an intensive outpatient program.

Developing Social Skills

The sense of isolation that plagues someone suffering from addiction can lead to the need for new social skills. The ability to interact safely and effectively to develop a supportive social circle is important,

especially when someone is redefining how their lives will look outside of their unique addictions. Just like voice, social skills are more than just being able to talk to people. They are a focus on language and context in order to create meaning, as well as the use of body language and maintaining one's own physical appearance to develop a healthier lifestyle in a holistic manner.

A Safe Space by Design

Attending an in-person group therapy session inherently introduces someone to people who are in similar positions in regard to recovery. While expressing vulnerability is a difficult thing to confront, the atmosphere created by a group session is important in the experience. It is a place developed with support in mind, as there will be difficult times ahead. However, this is where group therapy shines the brightest.

In-person group therapy is a judgment-free space where mistakes that were made are expressed and left in the past to pursue a brighter future. Each person is permitted – if not encouraged – to express their own difficulties and the group as a whole comes together to learn and grow from each other's experiences. In a virtual group session, it may be easy to “hide” from other group members. Sharing in tough and successful times humanizes each and every person present. It benefits the group and ultimately strengthens each participant. Group therapy is also a safe space to engage in a conversation about what worked or didn't work in the past few days. Most importantly, the safe space allows each person to glean new strategies or hobbies

from each other. Seeing success in action is incredibly influential, and the space created by group therapy ensures that there is never a shortage of new ideas to try.

Lasting Relationships

During recovery, it can be difficult to try to reset one's life and make new friends in new social circles. It may be likely that old relationships trigger maladaptive behaviors, so finding and developing new relationships is important. Group therapy presents a number of people who are in the same boat, all looking for new friends and acquaintances with whom to spend time without having to discuss where they can or cannot go during the recovery process. Everyone understands. Everyone has been there. And as a result, everyone is going to be sympathetic to the situation of wanting new relationships. A virtual group allows individuals from several locations, maybe hundreds of miles apart, participating in the same group. While these relationships can be beneficial, it can be easier to maintain relationships in the same geographical community.

We are fortunate that the technology of our time has allowed our world to maintain some semblance of functionality via virtual platforms. There are many benefits of virtual interactions, especially for the safety of those who cannot risk in-person experiences. However, there are myriad benefits to in-person group therapy for those who may decide this option is both safe and more effective for their circumstances.

About Laureate

Founded in 1989 by The William K. Warren Foundation, Laureate Psychiatric Clinic and Hospital in Tulsa, OK, provides a full spectrum of psychiatric services as well as research and education for the general public and professional community. At Laureate, we want our patients not only to recover and function, but also experience a fulfilling life within their family, business and community.

Laureate is a private, not-for-profit, freestanding psychiatric facility. The campus is set on 47 acres of rolling hills in a series of related buildings forming a retreat-like atmosphere. Its beautifully landscaped surroundings include wooded courtyards, walking trails, a waterfall and a small lake. Everything on campus, from the outpatient clinic to patient rooms, is designed with patients' needs in mind.

Laureate is dedicated to providing only the latest diagnostic services and medical technologies. The treatment concepts, the programs, the buildings and the campus itself are an outgrowth of the constant re-examination of how behavioral healthcare should be delivered.

For questions, or to schedule an appointment with a mental health professional, please call the Laureate Outpatient Clinic, Monday - Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. at 918-491-3700.