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Difficult Behaviour in Groups

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Difficult Behaviour in Groups

Abstract: *This article is based on work with 24 groupworkers in a Children's Services agency in the English Midlands. Focus groups to consider the training priorities for groupworkers revealed one of the most pressing issues was difficult behaviours in groups. (This was initially referred to as challenging behaviour, but it was recognised that the word is ambiguous, so it was replaced by 'difficult'). The groupworkers were asked to present an example of difficult behaviour, some of which are reproduced here, as part of a process to understand the meaning of difficult behaviour and to add context. Nine themes arose from the work with the Children's Services groupworkers, and the article explores each theme and its implications for groupwork practice. The article relates the topic of difficult behaviour to the wider literature and suggests that the key to understanding and working with these behaviours in groups is the ability of the groupworker to unlock the meaning of the behaviour, and to find a way to articulate this alongside group members. Groupworkers' honesty with themselves about the feelings aroused by difficult behaviours emerges as a significant factor.*

Key words*: groupwork education; difficult behaviour; group behaviour; co-working; children's services; focus groups.*

Introduction

The enthusiasm to lead and facilitate groups is often tempered by the concerns which potential groupworkers have about their confidence and skills in this role. In order to support a major groupwork initiative by a Children's Services Department in the English Midlands, the author was asked to work with twenty-four workers in three teams in the agency. The teams were Community Support (to prevent accommodation of children and assist rehabilitation), Family Solutions (also to prevent accommodation, using solution-focused approaches) and 16+ (after-care for young people leaving care). The teams were experiencing a reorganisation but wished to maintain a groupwork service. Most of the workers had facilitated at least one group, but their groupwork had largely been learned through experience and they had received little to no formal training in groupwork. The group of workers was ethnically diverse, and all but four were female.

Focus groups to identify priority areas for groupwork training

An initial half-day with 22 groupworkers was an opportunity for introductions and for focus groups to consider what aspects of groupwork were considered most important to cover in the available two days of training. 'Focus groups are a data collection method in which people reflect together on selected themes or questions' (Home, 1997, p.128). Unlike Delphi and Nominal group approaches, focus groups harness rather than control the group process, and are especially apt when the participants are knowledgeable about the topic and interested in it, as was the case with the Children's Services groupworkers.

As a warm-up, a 'name game' was used in which each person makes an introduction by reflecting on their name, what it means to them, how their name was chosen, how it might have been personalised and adapted (e.g. shortened). This is an effective way to help people to begin to think beyond the surface, to

disclose a little, and to ease into reflective ways of thinking, which may require a different pattern to the regular working day. Reflecting on what your name might signify and listening to others working through this process anticipates the search for meaning that will underpin later work. It is also usually fun.

In three focus groups, the groupworkers were asked to work on this question: *What aspects of groupworking would you like the training to focus on?* They were reminded that there were just two one-day events, so it would be important to prioritise the topics. Each group did this by asterisking the points which gained deepest and broadest support. Feedback from each group was both verbal and written (on flipcharts) and shared across all groups so that we could establish collective priorities.

The responses were relatively sophisticated and a number of agreed priority areas emerged during the plenary group discussion. The flipcharts and record of the discussion enabled further work to determine topics, six in all, each of which formed the basis of a session in the subsequent two days with the groupworkers.

These topics were, in no priority:

1 Planning groups and underpinning theory
Choosing an appropriate model of groupwork, linked to purpose. Practicalities such as attendance, and getting group members there; contingency plans; timing of the group. Crisis intervention theory and groupwork.

2 Co-working groups
Co-workers' different 'thresholds' with regard to group members' behaviour; professional boundaries; confidentiality; self-disclosure; establishing groundrules; diversity and difference in the leadership and the group.

3 Groupwork techniques

How to use and choose from a variety of techniques to achieve the group's purpose; techniques to workwith quiet members and contain dominant ones; effective icebreakers; confidence to broaden methods, e.g. drama and activities.

4 Difficult behaviours in groups

What to do when you experience behaviour which you find challenging; understanding group dynamics; challenging prejudice; handling a clash of value systems; working with uncertainty; motivating groups

5 Subgroups

Understanding and working with subgroups; groups within groups; understanding and working with youth subculture.

6 Evaluating groups

How to bring sessions to a successful close; how do we know whether the group has been successful, in what ways? Involving service users in 'measurable' outcomes; sessional closure; getting the best from group endings.

The findings from a single project of this nature cannot be generalised, but they do help to illuminate the kinds of priorities made by workers in human services (or certainly children's services), in terms of preparation for groupwork. We should remember, too, that there is a culture of groupwork in the teams involved in this project and that these participants probably have more active experience of groupwork than is typical.

The topic of 'difficult behaviours in groups' emerged as one of the most urgent concerns for the groupworkers and it is this aspect of groupwork which this article considers in detail.

What is 'difficult' behaviour?

How might we understand this notion of difficult behaviour? (First named as 'challenging' by the participants, but this was found to be ambiguous, so re-named 'difficult'). Behaviours in groups have often been conceptualised in terms of role theory. However, the groupwork literature has tended to anthropomorphise roles by describing individuals as if they *were* the role itself: the scapegoat and the deviant member; gatekeepers, clowns and monopolizers (Northen and Kurland, 2001; Shulman, 1999); visitors, complainants and customers (Sharry, 2001); even Sherman tanks, snipers, exploders and clams (Bramson, 1981). An understanding that these behaviours are much more fluid and volatile reflects the reality in groups more accurately (Szymkiewicz-Kowalska, 1999). Understanding scapegoating behaviours in a group, rather than identifying the scapegoat, helps groupworkers focus on the meaning for the whole group in the context of the wider world, and not just on the individual (Doel and Sawdon, 1999).

Even with this transformation from the person to the behaviour, it remains unclear whether there are any advantages to being able to name and categorise behaviours in this way. We have no evidence that labelling some behaviour in a group as 'defensive' makes the groupworker any more capable of working with it.

Although difficult behaviour is not necessarily conflictual, an understanding of conflict in groups and how to work 'with it rather than against it' is likely to be helpful (Lordan, 1996, p74). Tuckman's (1965) classic 'storming' stage does, after all, envisage difficult behaviour as part and parcel of a group's development. The literature on the notion of 'practice dilemma' is also relevant (Maram and Rice, 2002; Preston-Shoot, 1992), though the idea of 'a difficult behaviour' is more specific. Authors who give honest accounts of making mistakes in groupwork also contribute to our understanding of difficult behaviour (Malekoff,

1999; Manor, 1996), even if the mistakes are not necessarily technical errors, but missed opportunities (Manor, 1999).

It seems reasonable to suppose that definitions of 'difficult' will be subjective and that different kinds of behaviour will challenge different groupworkers in different ways. Indeed, to elicit more information about what 'difficult' meant, each groupworker in the project was asked to consider a recent example from their groupwork practice. This began the session on *Working with Difficult Behaviour in Groups,* which took place during the first of the two training days. Each person wrote a response to the following five prompts on an index card:

Briefly describe:
1) What the **behaviour** was
2) What **led up** to the behaviour
3) How it made you **feel**
4) What you **did**
5) What you would **have liked** to have done.

This format evolved from Doel and Sawdon's (1995, p199) 'Sticky Moments' concept and has links with the classic ABC (Antecedent, Behaviour, Consequence) approach (Skinner, 1969).

The group's agreement was sought to have the examples typed up (anonymously), and distributed for our collective learning. It might not be easy to dissent to this request in the full group, so the groupworkers were asked to leave their index cards alongside their feedback forms on the 'evaluation chair', if they wished. This was done at the end of the day, with no scrutiny as to who was leaving what. Interestingly, though 19 evaluation forms were placed on the chair, there were only 14 index cards. Indeed, one participant tore hers up, saying that she was 'destroying the evidence!' She was smiling, but it is likely that a number of these incidents brought back uncomfortable feelings.

Immediately after completing the five questions, the groupworkers were asked to rate their perception of the degree of physical risk in the situation, using a scale of 1-10 (lowest to highest risk), and note this on their card. The reason for this was a concern that the volunteered examples in the full group might well be dominated by the dramatic, high risk situations - in effect, *dangerous* behaviour. Situations in the higher risk category are likely to be less ambiguous and it is just this kind of ambiguity which can promote the best learning, an assumption based admittedly more on practice theory than empirical evidence. In addition, examples of dangerous behaviour are likely to demand greater time and support for the individual involved which, though necessary, can be frustrating for the learning needs of the group as a whole. By asking each individual to rate their example high or low risk, the nature of the volunteered examples could be controlled, by asking for examples in one or other category.

When the 14 examples were examined later, nine were rated low risk (1-5) and only five were high (6-10). It is reasonable to suppose, then, that most of the group would wish to focus on the less traumatic examples of difficult behaviour, and this was substantiated in two comments written on the evaluation feedback forms (see later). It was clear that the notion of difficult behaviours differed from that of conflict, though conflict resolution approaches could have useful application in some of the situations (Fatout, 1989). However, amongst the 14 examples of difficult behaviour, none were of the more subtle kind, such as denial (Getzel and Mahony, 1989), or reluctance (Behroozi, 1992), and none related to responding to racist or sexist comments.

The raw data of the 14 examples of difficult behaviour is illuminating. Most concerned the behaviour of an individual in the group, but some related to the group's behaviour as a whole, and others to subgroups. Some focused on the impact of the behaviour on the group leader or co-leader, others concerned behaviours between group members. Perhaps these differences also reflect the

range of groupwork, from working with groups as groups to working with individuals in groups (Kurland and Salmon, 1993; Ward, 2002). By way of illustration, six of the 14 examples are presented below:

Examples of behaviour in a group that was experienced as difficult by the groupworker

Example A
Whole group behaviour towards the groupworker (rated low physical risk).

1) What the behaviour was
My role as the group leader was questioned by the fact that I had been appointed to a management post, and whether the group would function better without me.

2) What led up to the behaviour
An ongoing difficulty in establishing a working relationship with the group members.

3) How it made you feel
Defensive; criticised; upset; uncertain; angry.

4) What you did
I mumbled something about this was the way the group was set up and looked generally uncomfortable and upset.

5) What you would have liked to have done.
Not to have had such an emotional reaction and been more assertive and confident.

Example B

Behaviour of an individual group member towards groupworker (rated low physical risk).

1) What the behaviour was

Disclosure of sexual abuse by an individual in the group.

2) What led up to the behaviour

Discussions in the group about personal experiences, parenthood and childhood.

3) How it made you feel

Awkward for the rest of the group; slightly out of control as the facilitator; concerned for the person and wanting to support her.

4) What you did

Listened and acknowledged the difficulty in sharing the experiences, made space for person at end of session, and tried to get back to the group tasks whilst realising dynamics had changed.

5) What you would have liked to have done.

Stopped the discussion earlier as members of the group knew the family in question (i.e. prevented it in the first place); taken more control.

Example C

Behaviour of the whole group towards a co-groupworker (rated low physical risk).

1) What the behaviour was

Whilst facilitating the group, the young people became loud and were talking amongst each other and ignoring my co-facilitator.

2) What led up to the behaviour

There had been a change of facilitator and a change of focus. It was towards the end of the session and the young people were becoming bored.

3) How it made you feel

Annoyed and uncomfortable for my colleague.

4) What you did

I spoke to the group about what was happening, using a firm tone, and about showing respect. I asked them to show the same courtesy they would expect.

5) What you would have liked to have done.

(not completed).

Example D

Behaviour of an individual towards the rest of the group (rated low physical risk).

1) What the behaviour was

A young woman (teenager) in a predominantly male group was being loud, disruptive and challenging during a group session.

2) What led up to the behaviour

She had spent some time texting on her mobile phone [cell phone] prior to the group session beginning and during the initial part of the session and presented as not interested.

3) How it made you feel

I felt as though I had no control as the leader/faciliator; some of the young people who were present were interested in the topic but were unable to focus due to the behaviour of the young woman.

4) What you did

I asked the young woman if there was anything she wanted to share with the group, effectively 'putting her on the spot' as she appeared to want to dominate the contributions being made.

5) What you would have liked to have done.

Upon reflection, I felt as though I hadn't spent any time with her prior to the group beginning - I also failed to fully appreciate her potentially isolated position in the group. I felt 'putting her on the spot' isolated her further.

Example E
Behaviour of a subgroup within the group (rated low physical risk).

1) What the behaviour was

Disruptive, by [a group of young people within the group] not partaking in the group and actively disturbing others with private conversations, giggling, whispering.

2) What led up to the behaviour

Nothing particularly - the behaviour was exhibited from the start of the group session.

3) How it made you feel

Increasingly frustrated. I wanted to stop it as it was affecting other group members who were wanting to participate. What was the point?

4) What you did

Initially I asked them to settle down and explained it was affecting others. I reinforced the groundrules. Finally, I was becoming stronger in my 'requests' to stop, stating the group would either have a shorter break or finish later to cover the items on the agenda.

5) What you would have liked to have done.

Maybe taken them [the subgroup] out and spoken in private, but this may have made it worse if they felt singled out.

Example F

Behaviour of one individual towards another individual in the group (rated high physical risk).

1) What the behaviour was

One young person started to push another young person and was swearing. This became a fight.

2) What led up to the behaviour

The group were working in pairs about body language when angry, and the young person said the other one was 'copying' him.

3) How it made you feel

Frustrated, angry (with co-groupworker as well).

4) What you did

Made light of it initially but had to remove the young person from the group and told him off.

5) What you would have liked to have done.

I would have liked to have made links between his [the young person's] reaction and the content of the session.

Four examples were volunteered in the plenary group, two from the low risk and two from the high risk range. This was an opportunity to model a systematic approach to enquiry, already begun in the clear instructions given by the five

questions on the index card. The incident and the difficult behaviour were considered in careful detail, borrowing techniques from the problem exploration stage of task-centred practice (Reid, 1992) and from critical incident analysis (Fatout, 1998; Henchman and Walton, 1993). This forensic process of detailed and careful examination is important before moving on to any problem solving or speculation about alternative approaches. Once this forensic method had been demonstrated and repeated in the plenary, the participants moved into small groups to use the method to work on the examples which they had generated.

Whilst the groupworkers were discussing further examples in the small groups, the author collected the learning from the plenary discussion to present at the conclusion of the session. An invitation to include any further points arising from the small groups did not produce any additional themes.

Practice guidance

The following nine themes emerged from the detailed process of considering specific examples of difficult behaviour in groups. They have been shaped and refined to provide practical guidance for groupworkers to respond to difficult behaviour in groups.

1 Importance of prior and contextual knowledge

Although difficult behaviours could be experienced at any stage in the group's progress (and not just in 'storming' stages), it became apparent that preparation and awareness of the wider context was a key factor to anticipating possible difficulties, even though the good groupworker should always 'expect the unexpected' (O'Connor 1992, p84).

One groupworker described how she was troubled by the silent, withholding behaviour of a group member, and only later discovered that the silence was

explained by her being bullied outside the group by a number of the other group members. One way to increase the likelihood that such knowledge becomes available is to ensure that each potential member of a group is offered the groupwork service individually (Doel and Sawdon, 1999; Manor, 1988).   The groupworker in Example D noted that 'upon reflection, I felt as though I hadn't spent any time with her prior to the group beginning.' Developing a knowledge of an individual outside the group is possibly even more important in work with young people where there is a need to understand the youth subculture, which has a particularly strong impact within the group itself. The experiences of group members and group leaders *outside* the group are significant in understanding their responses *within* it.

2 Sampling the behaviour

Although some difficult situations arise suddenly, like the disclosure of sexual abuse in Example B, in most cases there is a build up and the point at which the behaviour becomes defined as 'difficult' is not clear cut. There is often a need to sample behaviour, sometimes even over a few sessions, to identify it and to understand it. Example A describes 'an ongoing difficulty in establishing a working relationship with the group members' as leading up to the difficulty. In Example C we learn that 'the young people *became* loud' (my italics), indicating that this was a process not an event. In some cases the 'outside' is brought into the 'inside' of the group from the very beginning of the session, as in Example E: 'Nothing particularly [led up to the behaviour] - the behaviour was exhibited from the start of the group session'.

Reflecting later on the cues which indicated difficult behaviour, and the point at which the groupworker defined the behaviour as 'difficult' helps future learning and recognition of cues.

3 Groundrules

Establishing a reference point to guide the behaviour of the individuals and the group is especially important in groups with young people, where issues of control are likely to predominate. Negotiating what is acceptable and what is not and recording this in a way that it can be displayed (e.g. flipchart / butcher's block) makes it possible to call on the group's sanction, avoiding a sense that it is the groupworker's whim. Of course, groundrules cannot detail every possible circumstance, but their principles can be called on in most cases. All six examples above would benefit from recourse to groundrules; for example, groundrules about disclosure in the group would have guided the facilitators in Example B. However, Example E ('I reinforced the groundrules') shows that agreeing groundrules does not guarantee that they will be respected.

We should also allow for groundrules which 'accept resistance as legitimate' (Sharry, 1999: 85). In other words, groundrules should not just concern themselves with control and containment, but should also acknowledge that there will be resistance and that the group can accept this.

4 Exploring the meaning of the behaviour

The concept of *difficult* behaviour can imply that it needs to be managed and controlled, even eradicated. True, in groups with children and young people, issues of control are keener than in groups of adults. However, there is a balance between working with the behaviour and controlling it. Unless there are evident physical and emotional risks, it is usually important to explore the meaning of the behaviour rather than containing it. As Trevithick notes (1995, pp11-13), establishing meaning for and with the group is essential for the group's success, and it is always important not to pathologise difficult behaviour (Sharry, 2001).

What often seems to prevent this exploration is the strength of the groupworker's feelings, which is why the third statement on the index card, *how it made you feel?* is so important. The range of feelings expressed in the 14 examples of difficult behaviour included:

defensive; criticised; upset; uncertain; out of control; frustrated; angry; uneasy, unsure; afraid; anxious; annoyed embarrassed; vulnerable; undignified; childish; wary.

Frustrated, angry and annoyed were particularly common feelings. Discussion of anger goes back some way in the groupwork literature (see Redl, 1966), and more recently Malekoff considered whether it is a help or a hindrance to express anger in groupwork with adolescents. He felt that his mistake in expressing anger was 'not in the doing but in the understanding … it felt to me as if I was on a runaway train or, perhaps, left behind' (Malekoff, 1999: 74).

When strong emotions are experienced, we focus on our own needs rather than those of others, which closes off new avenues of thought and action, just when we need to open them up. 'I mumbled something about this was the way the group was set up and looked generally uncomfortable and upset' (Example A). In response to 'what you did', one groupworker wrote 'panicked'. Unless acknowledged, these feelings can make it difficult to explore the meaning of the difficult behaviour and to move on to 'find the positives in the challenge' (Sharry, 1999, p84). Groupworkers can find themselves scolding the group or individual members (Sharry, 2001).

If groupworkers have the opportunity to prepare for these kinds of situation there is more likelihood that they will be able to manage their own feelings so that they are able to focus on the needs of the group. Difficult behaviour can be useful behaviour, in the sense that it is an opportunity for the groupworker to help the group to practise how it collectively responds to the challenge. Sometimes the

behaviour reflects little more than an individual's state of mind, but most times it is an important piece of communication about where the group is, and controlling or removing the behaviour is a missed opportunity for learning. In Example F, there was an exact match between the topic of the session (body language and anger) and the angry behaviour of one of the individuals. As the groupworker notes, 'I would have liked to have made links between his [the young person's] reaction and the content of the session'. This could have entailed introducing an activity that drew attention to group processes (Craig 1988).

5 Self, the individual, the group

Even if we are able to focus beyond our own feelings in these difficult situations, it is not uncommon to find oneself centring entirely on the individual whose behaviour is experienced as difficult. Sometimes this is unavoidable, especially if there are physical risks, but groupworkers need to find a balance between their own feelings, the demands of the individual concerned and the needs of the group. This is the challenge. Actually, *this* is the difficult behaviour, in the sense that it is difficult to achieve!

Although we need more empirical evidence in this area, it seems reasonable to suggest that if groupworkers can articulate feelings and meaning in all three arenas - that is, in respect of themselves, the individual(s) concerned and the group as a whole - this is the significant step to achieving learning from the behaviour. 'Articulating' will usually suggest an actual verbal dialogue with the group, but might sometimes be an inner dialogue as part of the careful balance in groupwork between suppression and expression of feelings (Turkie, 1992).

The groupworker in Example B shows an awareness of these three elements (in this order: group, self, individual) in response to the statement *how it made you feel:* 'Awkward for the rest of the group; slightly out of control as the facilitator; concerned for the person and wanting to support her'.

The groupworker in Example D attempts to make a link between the individual and the group, but is aware even at the time that this is not successful:

  'I asked the young woman if there was anything she wanted to share with the group, effectively 'putting her on the spot' as she appeared to want to dominate the contributions being made … Upon reflection … I failed to fully appreciate her potentially isolated position in the group. I felt "putting her on the spot" isolated her further'.

To Schwartz's (1976) classic notion of the 'two clients' (the individual and the group) we should perhaps therefore add a third 'client', the self.

6 First stage and second stage strategies

Most of these groupworkers faced decisions about whether and when to move from a first stage position of working with the behaviour *in* the group to a second stage position of calling time-out to work with the behaviour *outside* the group. The dilemma about whether to move to the second stage is succinctly described in Example E, in response to the statement about *what you would have liked to have done:*

  'Maybe taken them [the subgroup] out and spoken in private, but this may have made it worse if they felt singled out.'

Working with the behaviour inside the group is an opportunity to enable the whole group to take some responsibility and to learn from the way in which difficult behaviours are processed. Second stage responses may be needed if the first stage is proving ineffective or the behaviour is sufficiently severe or disruptive.

We should also be alert to those times when group members themselves can work with the dificult behaviour without the groupworkers taking over. 'Over time,

the workers learned to hiold back when the children showed that they could challenge or support one another which will, of course, always be more effective'. (Mullender, 1995 p90).

7 Co-working agreements

Co-workers need to know each others' threshholds, and to have a sense of what each might define as 'difficult' behaviour. Consensus about the definition is not essential (indeed, diversity can be less oppressive), but agreement about how they will work together is. Lebacq and Shah (1989, pp130-1) describe how 'one worker was often used to control behaviour whilst the other worker led the exercise' in a group for sexually abused children. Co-workers need to develop mutual awareness (non-verbal signals, etc.) and rehearse strategies to work with a range of likely behaviours in the group.

The examples earlier make two explicit references to co-workers, one in which the groupworker felt angry *for* the co-worker, (Example C) and another where the groupworker felt angry *with* the co-worker (Example F). A preparatory questionnaire is one way of helping co-workers to work though potential difficulties by anticipating them (see Doel and Sawdon, 1999, pp 214-6 for two examples).

8 Policy issues

A group does not take place in isolation, and it is important that there are supports available to groupworkers from their agencies and communities. Especially where risks of physical confrontation are not unusual (and this would include Children's Services), it is important that there are well-developed policies to which groupworkers can refer as non-negotiable elements in the group's groundrules. It might be appropriate to display public notices in group rooms which lay out clearly rules and expectations around personal conduct; discussion

would revolve not around whether but around *how* the statements were to be enforced.

Support for all workers (in groupwork or not) should be available if difficult behaviour has been experienced. This may take the form of peer and supervision support; if the experience has been more traumatic, other forms of help need to be on hand. Groupworkers should feel confident that they will receive the support of their managers when dealing with difficult behaviour.

9 Dangerous and violent behaviour

Finally, it is important to make a clear statement that dangerous and violent behaviour is never acceptable. There is, therefore, 'a bottom line' and groupworkers should not consider that they can or should be able to handle all challenging behaviour. If personal safety is at issue, for groupworkers or members, external help must be sought.

Conclusion

The examples of working with difficulty in this article are, naturally, coloured by the fact that the groups are based in a Children's Services agency. However, the range of groups involves not just young people but their carers, too. It would be an excellent resource to build a data set of examples from across a whole range of practice settings, across professional disciplines, agencies and communities. Examples of difficult behaviour could be supplemented with growing experience about successful interventions, similar to the encyclopaedia of task strategies arising from research into task-centred practice (Reid, 2000). Accepting that novice groupworkers in particular are reluctant to confront in groups (Reid, 1988, p132), these examples could provide knowledge and encouragement and prevent missed opportunities for group learning.

The focus groups proved very effective in ensuring a programme which was in tune with the groupworkers' needs, and mirrored the good practice of the 'offer of groupwork' to potential members. The careful analysis of examples of difficult behaviour proved effective in helping to understand the wider meaning of the behaviour, and revealed the pivotal place of the groupworkers' feelings. However, having devised a scheme to regulate the flow of examples to the plenary group, I failed to use it properly and asked for two high risk examples as well as the two low risk ones; I think the urgency with which these examples were volunteered reflected the strength of residual feelings about traumatic episodes in groups, and a co-facilitator would no doubt have helped to keep this better balanced. Participants would have benefited from more time to consider their own examples in the small groups, and I should have placed more trust in their readiness to take the forensic method forward for themselves.

A ready-made example of a nuanced behaviour (around silence, denial or reluctance, for instance) might have encouraged more case studies of that nature, though it is clear that this group of workers, largely female groupworkers working with mainly adolescent male group members, felt the issue of raw control quite keenly, and the session responded to that. One person reflected the concerns described above: 'an area that needed more time was further discussion to include issues of oppressive language, undermining behaviour and unwilling participants'; and the ambiguity of the term 'challenging' was illustrated by one participant writing, 'perhaps more discussion on how to divert and change this behaviour rather than "challenge".'

Overall, the groupworkers' evaluations were very positive. We all learned much about difficult behaviour and we felt it was important to share this learning with a wider audience. I hope that aim has been successful.

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