



Group Process Student Induction Guide

Approved by: Academic Board

Date: 30th June 2026

Metanoia Institute

Group Process Student Induction Guide

Welcome

Group process is an important part of learning at Metanoia. This guide explains what group process is, what it is for and how to take part in a way that supports individual and collective learning.

A Trauma-Informed Learning Environment

Training as a therapist often involves reflecting on personal reactions, relationships and emotional responses. For some students, these experiences may connect with past or present difficulties.

A trauma-informed learning environment aims to support learning while recognising that people may carry different life experiences, including experiences of adversity or trauma.

In this programme Metanoia aims to support:

Physical and emotional safety through:

- Autonomy:
 - Respect for personal boundaries. (The personal and interpersonal limits that help define what feels safe, appropriate and manageable for each person within a group. They support you in taking responsibility for your own participation, while also recognising and respecting the autonomy, well-being and limits of others.)
 - Choice about what you share and when
- Being Trauma-Informed:
 - Awareness of how experiences may affect people differently
- Enhancing Relational Skills
 - Facilitating the rupture, repair and integration cycle
- Honouring Ethical Practices
 - Upholding the Code of Conduct policies

You are always encouraged to take care of your well-being while engaging in the learning process. This might look like employing self-regulation, stating you have reached your current limit, choosing to pass, taking a pause, asking for support or taking time before responding.

Before Your First Group

It is very common to feel nervous before your first group process session. Many students wonder what will happen, what they should say or whether they will do it “correctly”.

There is no single right way to take part in group process. What matters most is approaching the experience with openness and curiosity.

Some things that may help before your first session include:

Allow yourself to arrive without needing to perform.

You are not expected to impress anyone or have something important to say straight away.

Notice how you are feeling.

- You might feel curious, anxious, excited, unsure, or all of these at once. These reactions are normal.

Remember that listening is also participation.

- You do not have to speak immediately. Taking time to observe and reflect can be an important part of the process.

Be open to learning about yourself in relation to others.

- Group process often reveals things about how we communicate, respond to difference or manage uncertainty.

Be patient with the group.

- Like any relationship, groups take time to develop trust, understanding and a sense of safety.

Over time, many students find that group process becomes one of the most meaningful parts of their training.

1. What Is Group Process?

Group process is a learning space, not a therapy group.

It is designed to help you: -

- Understand your emotional responses

- Notice patterns in how you relate to others that may also appear in other relationships in your life

- Learn how groups work including themes of power, hierarchy and inequality within the group, as well as the psychology of group behaviours. For example, unintentionally colluding with problematic behaviours, avoidance of difficult themes/emotions/content, the bystander effect, private support of individuals vs public silence...

- Develop professional awareness and boundaries

- Learn how to give and receive feedback

- Learn how to navigate and tolerate relational risks and ruptures

Sometimes feelings, expectations, or reactions in the group can connect to experiences from other relationships in our lives, past, or present. This might include how we respond to authority, disagreement, feeling included or excluded or how comfortable we are expressing ourselves.

Noticing these patterns is an important part of becoming a therapist. The group offers a place to reflect on these reactions with curiosity and support.

You are never required to share personal experiences or disclose information about your life if you do not wish to. Learning can also happen through observing, reflecting and noticing group interactions.

You will practice skills you will later use with clients, such as:

- Listening
- Speaking thoughtfully
- Sitting with uncertainty
- Enquiry, exploration and reflecting rather than reacting

2. What Group Process Is Not

Group process is not:

- Personal therapy
- A place to “fix” yourself or others
- A complaints meeting
- A debate to win

If you need personal support or want to raise formal concern, your tutor or wellbeing services can help you find the right place to do that.

3. Why It Can Feel Uncomfortable

Group process often brings up:

- Different views
- Strong feelings
- Silence
- Not knowing what to say

This can feel uncomfortable. In this learning space, discomfort is not the same as being unsafe. In group process it may be easy to confuse discomfort, challenge and emotional activation with lack of safety.

Emotional Discomfort vs Being Unsafe

Emotional discomfort might include:

- Feeling challenged or misunderstood
- Disagreeing with someone
- Feeling unsure what to say
- Feeling emotional or exposed
- Feeling worried about judgement

These experiences can be difficult, but they are often part of relational learning.

Feeling unsafe usually means something different, such as:

- Threats or intimidation
- Harassment or discrimination
- Persistent boundary violations
- Behaviour that prevents people from participating safely
- Collective targeting of an individual participant
- Absence of appropriate containment or intervention by the Facilitator/Group Members

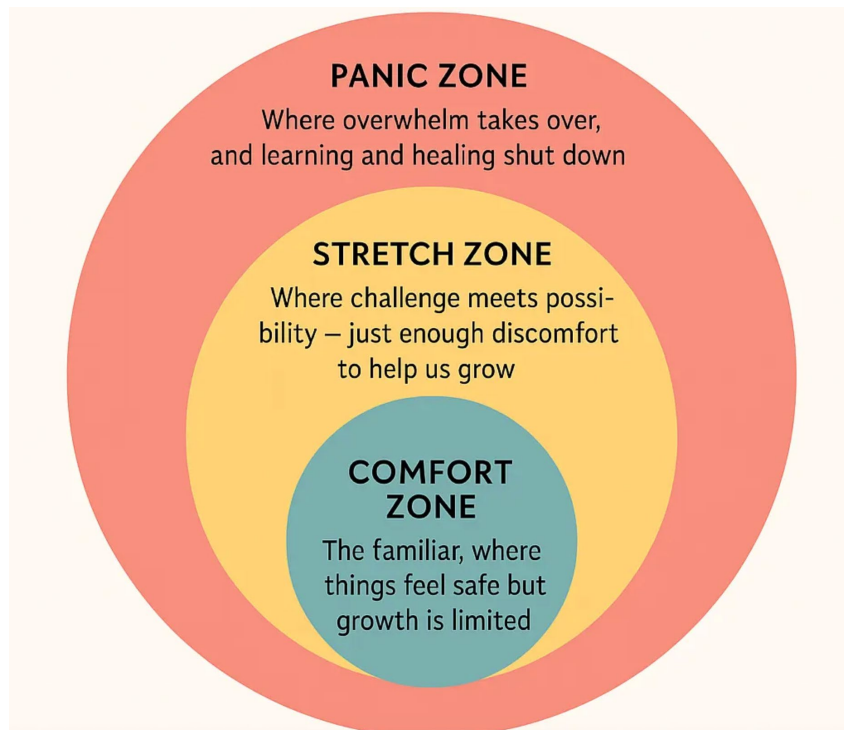
If this happens it should be raised with the facilitator or programme team.

The aim of group process is not to avoid all discomfort, but to ensure the environment remains physically and emotionally safe, respectful and professionally boundaried while people learn from relational challenges.

At times, group interactions may evoke strong emotional responses. This is a normal part of relational learning, particularly when reflecting on identity and interpersonal experience. If you feel overwhelmed or emotionally activated, you are encouraged to pause, take time to regulate, or let the facilitator know that you need support.

On occasion, a participant may become sufficiently overwhelmed that they are temporarily unable to articulate their own boundaries or needs. In such situations, the facilitator or another group member may offer a supportive intervention by naming what is happening and helping to create space for the individual. This is intended as advocacy rather than rescue, supporting the person to regain their voice and agency.

Suggested image



Adapted from Karl Rohnke's Experiential Learning Model, 1970

The stretch zone is where you feel safely challenged but still able to think, reflect and learn. This is where growth is most likely to happen, and you are encouraged to notice and manage your own level of participation to stay within this zone where possible.

4. What Many Students Notice

Students often report that at different times they may:

- Feel unsure what their role is in the group
- Worry about saying the wrong thing
- Feel strongly connected to some group members and distant from others
- Notice strong reactions to particular people or situations
- Become more aware of their own communication and interpersonal / relational styles
- Feel isolated, different, or outside of the group

These experiences are normal parts of relational learning and can be explored with curiosity rather than judgement.

5. Common Myths About Group Process

Students sometimes arrive with expectations about group process that can make the experience feel more intimidating than it needs to be. The following are some common misunderstandings.

Myth: “I have to share very personal things for the group to work.”

You are not required to disclose deeply personal experiences. Participation can take many forms, including reflecting on what you notice in the group, how you experience discussions, or how you respond to others.

Myth: “If there is silence, something has gone wrong.”

Silence can be part of the group thinking together. It may mean people are reflecting, noticing their reactions, or considering how to speak thoughtfully.

Myth: “I have to speak often to be seen as participating properly.”

Some people process internally and speak less frequently but very thoughtfully. Participation includes listening, reflecting and noticing group dynamics as well as speaking.

Myth: “Disagreement means the group is failing.”

Difference of opinion is natural in groups and can be a valuable opportunity to explore how people communicate, repair misunderstandings and understand each other more fully.

Myth: “The facilitator will solve difficulties in the group.”

The facilitator helps hold the learning space, but part of the learning involves group members noticing and reflecting on what is happening between them, the facilitator does not have all the answers.

Myth: “If I feel uncomfortable, it means I’m doing something wrong.”

Feeling uncertain, self-conscious, or emotionally activated can be part of relational learning. The aim is not to eliminate these experiences but to become curious about them.

Like therapy itself, group process is not about performing correctly. It is about noticing, reflecting and learning from experience.

6. The Purpose of Sitting with Uncertainty and Difficult Feelings

In group process you may experience uncertainty, disagreement, silence, frustration, or strong emotions.

The purpose of sitting with these experiences is not to make them disappear quickly, but to learn how to stay present with them thoughtfully and respectfully.

As a therapist you will often sit with clients who:

- Do not know what they feel
- Are confused or conflicted
- Feel stuck or overwhelmed

Group process helps you practise tolerating these moments without rushing to fix, argue, withdraw or shut things down.

Learning to stay curious in these situations, while also taking care of your own emotional wellbeing, is an important professional skill.

Learning From What Happens Between People

In group process, learning often comes from what is happening between people in the moment, not just from what is being talked about.

For example, you might notice:

- Who speaks easily and who finds it harder
- How disagreement is handled
- Moments when someone feels included or left out
- Reactions to silence, strong emotion or challenging content
- The roles people adopt/are assigned within the group. For example, challenger, scapegoat, vulnerable one...
- Differences that arise from different individual sociopolitical contexts

Paying attention to these interactions helps develop the relational awareness needed in therapeutic work.

6. How Group Process Develops Over Time

Groups often change as people get to know one another and begin to feel more comfortable speaking openly.

In the early stages, it is common for people to feel unsure about their role, cautious about what to say, or curious about how others are experiencing the group.

As time goes on, groups often begin to explore differences more openly. People may notice stronger feelings, different viewpoints, or moments of misunderstanding. These experiences can sometimes feel challenging, but they are also part of how groups learn to communicate more honestly and respectfully.

Over time, many groups develop a greater sense of trust and understanding. Members often become more able to reflect together on what is happening between them and to support each other's learning.

Each group develops in its own way, and there is no single "correct" path. The learning comes from paying attention to the process as it unfolds. Different groups develop at different speeds, and moments of uncertainty can appear again later in the process as new issues emerge.

7. Working With Silence

Silence is a natural part of many group discussions. At times the group may pause, and no one may speak for a while. This can feel uncomfortable, especially at the beginning of group process. Some people may feel pressure to fill the silence or worry that something has gone wrong. In many cases, silence simply means that people are thinking, reflecting on what has been said, or noticing their reactions.

Silence can also provide space for people who need more time to process their thoughts or emotions before speaking. Rather than seeing silence as a problem to solve, it can sometimes be helpful to notice what the silence feels like in the group and what thoughts or feelings it brings up for you.

Over time, many groups become more comfortable allowing moments of quiet reflection as part of the learning process.

8. Our Shared Values

In group process, we aim to practice:

- **Respect** for ourselves and others
- **Curiosity** about different experiences and viewpoints
- **Responsibility** for how our words and actions affect others
- **Honesty** about what is happening for us
- **Care** for the shared learning space

We do not have to agree with everyone. We do need to treat others with dignity.

9. How Groups Work Best

These are common ground rules you will help agree as a group:

- One person speaks at a time
- You can choose to speak or to pass
- Try to speak from your own experience (“I” rather than “you”)
- Listen to understand, not to reply
- Check for consent before offering feedback (e.g. “Are you open to feedback?”), and avoid directing comments about others without their agreement
- Keep personal stories shared in the group confidential

These rules help everyone, especially those who may find groups overwhelming or intense.

10. The Facilitator's Role and Assessment

Students sometimes worry that Group Process is a place where they are being judged for what they say or how confident they appear.

It may be helpful to clarify that, while facilitators do hold a responsibility for assessing professional development, this is not based on saying the “right” thing or speaking frequently. Assessment focuses on your engagement with the learning process, rather than the specific content you share.

Facilitators pay attention to how students engage in order to support learning, maintain group safety, and foster the development of core professional capacities such as self-awareness, reflection, and relational sensitivity.

This may include noticing how you:

- Reflect on your own reactions and feelings
- Respond when something feels difficult or uncomfortable
- Listen and respond thoughtfully to others
- Take responsibility for your impact on others
- Remain open and curious about different perspectives
- Engage with feedback and learning over time

Facilitators use these observations to guide the group, offer appropriate support and challenge, and identify opportunities for deeper learning.

Where facilitators have concerns about a student's engagement or wellbeing, they will normally seek to discuss this with you directly in the first instance. In some situations, they may also consult with colleagues for professional support or guidance. This would be done in line with professional and ethical standards and would not involve sharing personal content unnecessarily.

There is no expectation that you will always respond perfectly or handle every situation with confidence.

In fact, moments of uncertainty, misunderstanding or difficulty are often where the most meaningful learning takes place.

Group Process is therefore not about being flawless, but about developing relational awareness, reflective capacity and professional growth.

What Facilitators May Sometimes Do in the Group

Group facilitators have a role in supporting both the learning process and the safety of the group. At times they may take an active role in guiding reflection or helping the group notice what is happening between people.

For example, a facilitator may sometimes:

- Pace: Invite the group to pause and reflect on what is happening in the moment

- Prompt: Ask questions that encourage people to think about their reactions or experiences
- Invite Reflection: Draw attention to patterns in how the group is interacting
- Contain:
 - Support the group to slow down if emotions become intense
 - Help clarify misunderstandings or bring attention to how people may be affecting each other
 - Remind the group of agreed boundaries or ground rules
 - Explain group dynamics at play (psychoeducation)

These interventions are not intended to judge or criticise individuals. Their purpose is to support the group's learning and to help create a reflective space where people can explore relational dynamics safely. Where possible, facilitators will support the group to move towards some level of understanding or repair if tensions or ruptures arise. However, it is also recognised that not all difficulties can be fully resolved within a single session. At times, groups may end with some feelings or issues still open. This can be part of the learning process, offering opportunities for ongoing reflection, future dialogue and developing tolerance of uncertainty in relational work.

At times the facilitator may also choose to allow the group space to work things out without intervening immediately. This can be part of allowing the group to develop its own awareness and capacity for reflection.

If you ever feel unsure about something a facilitator has said or done in the group, you are encouraged to ask about it or speak with them afterwards.

11. Difference, Power and Social Issues

Dynamics in the wider sociopolitical context become enacted within the group process. Often these dynamics represent fractious and controversial topics, such as identity politics, race, gender, systems of power and oppression. Rather than react to these, the function of the group is to expand our capacity to 'think' about them, to resist the pull of concretisation and acting out while developing our capacity to be curious and reflect on the self, and the self in relationship.

These dynamics may be spoken about directly, or they may show up more subtly in how the group interacts. For example:

- **Power** might show up in who speaks, who feels heard, whose views carry more weight or how authority (e.g. linked to training stage, confidence or social identity) is experienced in the room
- **Belonging** might be felt as feeling included, recognised and safe to contribute or, at times, feeling outside, overlooked or different from others
- **Difference** may become visible through contrasting perspectives, communication styles or emotional responses
- **Identity and culture** may influence what feels easy or difficult to share, how people understand each other or what is taken for granted

Conversations about identity and power can sometimes feel emotionally charged. The aim is to approach these discussions with respect, openness and awareness that people may have very different lived experiences.

It is also recognised that people may sometimes get things wrong, use the “wrong” words, or feel unsure how to respond. This is a normal part of learning. What matters most is a willingness to reflect, take responsibility where needed and remain open to understanding different perspectives.

Rather than trying to decide who is right or wrong, the learning focus is on:

- How these topics affect people in the room
- What you notice in yourself when they come up
- How you respond to difference

This is essential practice for working with real clients in a complex world.

12. Neurodiversity, Regulation and Different Needs

People think, feel and process differently.

People express their emotions / emote differently. Some people, such as those with complex trauma or who tend towards neurodivergence, may adopt a ‘fawn’ response when under stress and/or may ‘mask’ their emotions.

Some students may need time to process emotionally as well as cognitively. Taking a pause, stepping back temporarily or reflecting before responding can be valid ways of participating.

As a group, you are encouraged to respect and support different ways of participating. This includes recognising when someone asks for more time, space or a slower pace and responding with patience and without pressure. It is important not to make assumptions about what silence, stepping back or reduced participation might mean and not to expect someone to explain or justify their needs in the moment.

You are welcome to:

- Take time before speaking
- Ask for things to be repeated or clarified
- Use writing or chat (if available)
- Identify and sit back, if you feel overwhelmed

Let your facilitator know if something would help you take part and stay more emotionally regulated.

Everyone has different ways of managing emotional intensity and processing information. Some students may need additional time, space or quiet reflection to remain emotionally regulated during group discussions. At times, one person’s need to set a boundary (for example, asking for space or choosing not to engage) may feel difficult for others and can sometimes be experienced as distancing or

shutting down. This can be explored thoughtfully within the group, with support from the facilitator, as part of learning about difference, communication and relational impact.

Taking a pause, stepping back briefly or asking for clarification are all valid ways of participating.

13. If You Feel Upset or Struggle

It is okay to find group process hard or frustrating.

You can:

- Speak to your facilitator
- Contact your personal tutor or Head of Programme
- Use wellbeing or student support services
- Voice how hard/frustrating you are finding it in the group itself
- Explore the experience in your personal therapy

You do not have to manage everything on your own.

If you feel overwhelmed during a group session, you may step out briefly to regulate yourself. If possible, let the facilitator know so they understand what is happening.

14. Raising Concerns

If something happens that feels unsafe, unfair or seriously wrong:

↓

- If possible address it directly (if possible)

↓

- If not possible to address it directly, speak to your Facilitator / Personal Tutor

↓

- If still unresolved, speak to your Head of Programme

↓

- If all other avenues have proven unsuccessful, you can use the Formal Student Complaints Process

Note: Group process is not the place for resolving formal complaints but can be a space to reflect on impact.

15. Your Role as a Learner

You are learning to become a professional.

This means:

- Noticing your reactions
- Thinking about how you impact others
- Being open to feedback
- Trying things relationally, even if it feels imperfect or uncertain
- Taking responsibility for your learning

You will not do this perfectly. No one does. You are encouraged to be compassionate with yourself and continue to engage relationally even when it is hard, or it doesn't feel perfect.

16. How Group Process Links to Clinical Practice

The experiences you have in group process are closely connected to the work of being a therapist.

Many of the skills you develop in the group are the same skills used in therapeutic relationships, including:

- Listening carefully to others
- Noticing emotional responses in yourself
- Staying present with uncertainty or strong feelings
- Reflecting before responding
- Understanding how relationships influence communication
- Working respectfully with difference

Group process offers a place to notice these relational patterns in real time and reflect on them with others.

This helps build the self-awareness and relational sensitivity that are essential for safe and effective therapeutic practice.

17. Taking Care of Yourself During Training

Training to become a therapist involves learning about relationships, emotions and personal responses. At times this can be meaningful, challenging and emotionally demanding.

It is important to take care of yourself during the training process. This might include:

- Reflecting on your experiences after group sessions
- Speaking with a tutor or supervisor if something feels difficult
- Using wellbeing or student support services when needed
- Seeking personal therapy if this is appropriate for you

Looking after yourself is part of developing sustainable professional practice.

Modality, Approach and Group Process

Group process is a shared element across all programmes. However, each training modality may bring its own emphasis, language and ways of understanding what happens in the group.

For example, some approaches may place more focus on here-and-now relational experience, while others may draw more explicitly on theory, structure or patterns of communication. This means that while the overall aims of group process remain consistent, your experience may vary slightly depending on your programme.

What remains consistent across all groups is the core purpose: to support self-awareness, relational learning, reflection and the development of safe and ethical professional practice.

There is also recognition that facilitators may draw, where appropriate, on a range of perspectives to support learning. This can include thoughtful integration of ideas from different modalities (for example, person-centred, psychodynamic, transactional analysis, or integrative approaches), while remaining grounded in the overall aims of the training.

This does not mean that group process becomes group therapy or a space for delivering specific interventions. Rather, any use of different perspectives is in service of helping the group reflect, make sense of experience and deepen learning.

Students are not expected to have prior knowledge of different modalities. However, over time you may notice how different approaches shape the way group interactions are understood and facilitated.

If you are ever unsure about how group process is being facilitated within your programme, you are encouraged to ask your facilitator, as this can form a valuable part of your learning.

Examples of Modality Perspectives in Group Process

Modality	What it may emphasise in group process
Gestalt	Awareness of the here-and-now experience, including body language, emotions, and what is happening in the moment between people

Transactional Analysis (TA)	Patterns of communication and interaction (e.g. roles, scripts, and “transactions” between people)
Person-Centred	Empathy, acceptance and creating a safe, non-judgemental space where individuals can explore at their own pace
Humanistic	Personal growth, authenticity and the whole person (feelings, values, meaning and potential)
Integrative	Drawing on a range of approaches to understand experience from multiple perspectives, adapting to what may be most helpful in the moment

18. Looking Ahead

The skills you practice here, listening, staying with uncertainty, reflecting, staying present, working with difference are the same skills you will use with clients.

Group process is not always comfortable, but it can be deeply meaningful.

19. Who Can Help

- **Group Facilitator:** _____
- **Personal Tutor or Head of Programme:** _____
- **Wellbeing / Student Services:** _____

Final Thoughts

Group process is a facilitated learning space focused on self-awareness and professional development, whereas group therapy is a clinical space focused on therapeutic change and emotional healing.

Your voice matters. So does your willingness to listen.

Be curious. Be kind. Be patient with yourself and with others.

Optional Further Reading

Group process in training is not the same as group therapy. While it may involve personal reflection and interpersonal learning, its primary purpose is educational, to develop self-awareness, relational understanding and professional skills, rather than to provide therapy.

If you would like to explore these ideas further, the following texts may offer helpful perspectives:

- **The Personal Development Group: The Student’s Guide** by Chris Rose Karnac Books (2008)
A highly accessible guide written specifically for counselling and psychotherapy students. It

clearly explains the purpose of personal development groups within training and how they differ from therapy groups.

- **Developing as a Counsellor** Sue Culley and Tim Bond
A core UK training text that explores personal and professional development, including the role of self-awareness and experiential learning in becoming a practitioner.
- **Learning from Experience** by Wilfred Bion
A older but influential text exploring how people learn and behave in groups.
- **The Handbook of Counselling Psychology** by Ray Woolfe
A comprehensive UK-based text with sections that help situate group learning within broader professional training and practice.
- **The Theory and Practice of Group Psychotherapy** by Irvin D. Yalom
Included here as a contrast: this text focuses on group therapy. It may help you understand what therapeutic groups aim to do and therefore how training groups differ in purpose and structure.

You are not expected to read these texts to take part in group process. However, some students find that reading alongside their experience helps deepen their understanding and supports their professional development.

DOCUMENT CONTROL

Section 2 - to be completed by receiving committee.

Choose an item.	Group Process Student Induction Guide
Circulated to:	

Approved:	30 th June 2026	Date for adoption:	September 2026
------------------	----------------------------	---------------------------	----------------

Version and document Code:		Date for review:	
-----------------------------------	--	-------------------------	--