

Ep 13 Group Support and Why It Is Important

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SPEAKERS

Pam B., Lyschel, Bonny

P Pam B. 00:03
Hi, I'm Pam Blizzard from Recovered Peace.

L Lyschel 00:05
And I'm Lyschel Burket with Hope Redefined.

B Bonny 00:08
And I'm Bonny Burns of Strong Wives. We're so glad you're joining us. Welcome to another episode of hope for wives. Today we are discussing why support groups are important for women overcoming the impact of sexual betrayal. for over 50 years support groups have been empirically supported as a place of healing for trauma survivors, groups offer partners an opportunity to connect with other partners who really get it because they've been through the same experiences. groups help ease partners emotional stress, including feelings of isolation, loneliness, depression, helplessness, and hopelessness. groups will help strengthen you to help you cope with the pain and move forward towards healing. So let's just start off by sharing some of our own personal experiences with groups.

P Pam B. 01:04
My therapist told me you need to go to a group and my first question was no. Why? Why do I need to go to a group. And she said, you can get the benefit of knowing you're not alone. You're not the only person dealing with this. You can see how other people are processing and maybe pick up some tips and tools for how to deal with what you're going through. As much as I just really did not like the idea of walking into a group full of people that I've never seen before in my life, because my feeling at the time was nobody has experienced what I'm experiencing that nobody can possibly understand. Nobody else's spouse could possibly have done what my husband did. I just was so catastrophizing. And so it was the hardest thing that I

did to walk into that group for the first time. And I am so grateful that I did, because I found people who understood people who got it, people who nodded their head, yes, there was also there were people who were further along in recovery than me, that I could look to who kind of became my role model at the time. Over time I saw new people come in, it gave me a sense of purpose to also start welcoming new people in it helped. It helped me to feel that I was a part of something healing to also provide this empathy and understanding for other people. And I didn't feel alone.

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Lyschel 02:54

So over the course of the 16 years of our recovery journey, I've been in several different groups, styles of groups. I've been in groups that were led by biblical counselors, I was in a group that was a peer facilitated group, and then eventually ended up starting my own group at my church. And while I know I was technically the, quote, facilitator, I definitely felt like I was a part of that group because I was I was just appear another woman looking and seeking safe community. I think the hardest part about joining group very similar to Pam, was why do I need a group I'm not the one with the problem. I really wanted him to be in group. And if I'm honest, that felt like enough of a wrestle. I didn't understand what a group was going to do. For me, I also had a lot of apprehensions, I didn't want to have to listen to other people's mess because my mess was big enough as it was. And so I really didn't want to have to hold other people's mess and then just feel like there wasn't space for me. And so I think that was a lot of the hesitation to it. However, when I got into healthy groups and healthy community, it was a very different experience much like Pam, there was a lot of validation. There was a lot of support, there was a sisterhood. And while at first I kind of got really grumpy about being in this kind of sisterhood on the backside of it I didn't know how badly I needed these women in my life to be able to just show up and not be okay. And that was okay. So that was my all my experiences with group. So

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Bonny 04:31

my experiences with group have been more limited when when it revolves around betrayal trauma, because my my journey has been a lot more recent than Pamela shells. But what I will say is of the group's I have done outside of betrayal, trauma, the feeling of sisterhood is incredible. Just having a woman to walk alongside you especially if you haven't had a really good mother figure or if you haven't had sisters in Unlike your biological world, it's just so comforting to have Jesus whisking on as a sister. But when it comes to the betrayal trauma groups that I've been a part of, I've been a part of a peer led. And that's been really great. I'm still a part of a peer led group. The hardest part about joining a group for me was, I don't like to be emotional in front of people. I don't like to be vulnerable. I didn't want to cry, I was very willing to tell you all the crap he did, though, I was very willing to talk about his stuff. But when it came to putting the finger, you know, towards my own heart and my own pain, and what I was dealing with, and what I wasn't dealing with, I didn't want to go there. So that was the hard part, which, of course, is the most is the healing part, once you figure it out, that once you point the fingers back at yourself, that's when the true healing starts. So that those are my experiences. So some

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Lyschel 05:59

types of groups that are available for women in betrayal, trauma, and healing our 12 Step groups, there are processing groups, topical groups, professionally led groups, peer facilitated groups, there's curriculum based groups, there are open groups and closed groups, there's also face to face groups, and zoom, I don't necessarily know that as we as a team would say there is a one way fits all. I think that it's important, though, to know that not every group is created equal. And that there are different goals, expectations, and even an atmosphere. And each of those types of groups that may or may not fit where you're at right now, in your own healing journey.

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Pam B. 06:48

My first entry into groups was 12, step I did s anon. And there's a lot of different opinions out there. And that's because there can be healthy groups, and there can be unhealthy groups. And all of these 12 Step groups, the hallmark is they're led by peers, which means they're not professionals. Or they may be but you're supposed to leave those credentials outside the door, and participate as a peer. So your mileage may vary with those groups. I was very fortunate that my first group, as I said, was a really healthy group with a lot of good recovery. As examples there, there's some good things about 12 step, where they talk about this thing called cross talk, which means I am not supposed to say, Oh, the show, I know exactly what you're talking about our body, here's what you need to do. There is not supposed to be any direct conversation, back and forth, because you're supposed to be able to share, it's just your time to speak. It's your open mic, basically, to talk about whatever you need to talk about. And there's a lot of benefits to that not being interrupted, not being fixed, it's still possible for another person to say, Well, I had this problem, and here's how I solved it. And that's kind of an indirect way to offer a solution. But the beautiful thing about no crosstalk is there is power in story, each person is just telling stories. And so it's much easier for me to see myself in your story and to insert myself into what you did to solve your problem versus somebody saying, okay, Pam, here's what you need to do, you need to do step one, step two, step three, then do this and do that. So there's a lot of power in story. The downside in that is there is no empathy. There is no responding back to that to your emotions, because it's sort of against the rules. It can happen. Once the meeting closes, I've seen there's lots of hugs and you know, then the rules, the meeting rules are out the door, and you can talk about whatever that was my first exposure to groups, and I'm very grateful for that experience. However, I've been in 12 Step groups and three different states. In one particular instance, I was new in the state, and I found a group and I walked into it. And it was started by two people who had very little recovery. I went for a few weeks, and I'm not lying or exaggerating, every time I went, there was four or five new faces, who were freshly out of betrayal. And they were just bleeding out. And there was no real good recovery in the room to keep the meeting guideline boundaries enforced. And so it was a pretty toxic environment and very depressing. And I would say that I was even re traumatized by listening to other people's stories without boundaries. I've been to groups that were book based in nature, workbook, groups, those were really beneficial for me, because we would all go away and do our workbook come back to the group and everybody would share their thoughts and I would see new insights that people had interpreted the information through a certain lens that was really helpful for me, it kind of opened my eyes to a new way of looking at my problems. So that was, that was really helpful.

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Lyschel 10:19

So I predominantly facilitate topical. professionally led curriculum. Zoom groups. However. in

the past, I have done face to face groups, let me just put a plug in for face to face groups, they are by far my favorite, because you can get a hug and a face to face group. And I cannot do that for you over zoom, as much as I want to that little heart gift thing that pops up just isn't the same. So if you're seeking, I would love to encourage our listeners to look for a face to face group if at all possible. But the reality is that it's there, there not a lot available. So the next best thing is to join a zoom group, which is why keep the space and platform we do and I know that Pam also does and Sara society as on Zoom. And it creates a space that allows women to still connect and get the benefits of group without having to be in a location geography wise to actually be in a good group. I agree with Pam, for me my personality style was I couldn't just feel like I was just going to show up and just talk I'm not believe it or not, I'm actually not an external processor, an internal processor doing a topical group fit better for me because I got to go be with myself first and then come back to the group and feel like I could articulate what was going on for me. So a processing group didn't feel safe to me because it felt very reactive. And I didn't, I didn't like that feeling. I didn't want to be reactive in the moment, I wanted time to think through all that stuff. And I also wanted tools. And I felt like a curriculum or a topical base group was going to give me things to help me on my healing journey more than other types of groups. I know now as a professional group facilitator, that every different type that we just listed gives you something. And so whenever I'm connecting with a woman, I'm always asking, I'm seeking to try and hear what she's needing to gain in order to help guide her well into a specific style of group. And I

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Pam B. 12:23

think it's also important to say that there could be hybrid groups there. I ran up a workbook group based on facing heartbreak and but I also used it as time for check ins and processing. And we held space, if we had to stop the meeting. While we were talking about a particular chapter, we would stop and hold space for that person.

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Lyschel 12:44

I think you said something to Pam, real quick about your not so great 12 Step experience what that what I would call that is triage, right? That is bloody bodies coming into the ER every single week expecting everyone in the group to suddenly morph into ER nurses, that's not going to feel very helpful for women who are not in triage. And maybe they're already they're moving into surgery. They don't want to stay in that space. And so I think it's important for our listeners to and we're going to talk about this kind of assess the health of your group and see if it's a fit for you. Because if you need triage, there's going to be a group space for that. But if you're like, hey, this is why this not feeling well, it's because there's a consistent state of emergency. And that can be exhausting.

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Bonny 13:31

Yeah, and I think another aspect of what you're talking about Michelle is open versus closed groups. So an open group means that you can come and go, new members can come in at any moment, at any time during during any meeting, members may leave at any time, a closed group is open for a short while, members join. And then membership is closed for a period of time. It's usually not forever it can be but it's closed for a period of time so so that that group

can really bond maybe there's topics maybe it's a curriculum, but you're not going to see triage as much in my opinion in a closed group. And if there is triage in the beginning, it becomes more of the rehabilitation center towards the end. Yeah, my my experience is mostly been in peer facilitated although I am now professionally trained to lead groups and I do lead one curriculum based closed group, my prepare facilitated group with the Sara society is really great with processing. There are women all across the board in their journey, but if you want a virtual hug, they do the best job having a group of women who really get it who love each other and and too I think another thing to to stay is there are secular groups and their faith based groups as well. So for us, I mean, we're all faith based. But that's just another element to consider as you're looking at groups. So you've you both talked about healthy groups versus unhealthy groups. So what makes the difference there?

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Pam B. 15:20

Well, I think to start with Michelle touched on it, I think one of the hallmarks of a healthy group is there is an intake process that new members are screened. Even if it's a 12 step group, not all groups have that process, some groups do, I did, I had to meet with a leader, the current organizer, because there's no leaders and 12 Step, technically. But she met with me, she was able to help me understand what was appropriate for the group meeting, like not bleeding out and not swearing and not giving too much detail, no graphic detail and dressing appropriately. So she she helped sort of set the stage for what was appropriate and what I should expect. And you know, she was able to gauge whether or not I was ready for a meeting like that. I think a couple of other things are, you know, if it is even if it is peer led, the people who are leading whether that's one person or people take turns, that there is significant recovery, and the person leading the meeting, if you have a person who is very resentful, very toxic towards her own spouse wants to talk about her spouse a lot, I think that that's going to set the tone for a meeting because another hallmark of a healthy meeting, is most of the discussion is encouraged and geared towards focusing on us, we could sit and vent out about the problem, which is our husband's behaviors, and that's living in the problem, these groups would, would really encourage you to stay focused on the solution and talk about us and ourselves and our feelings and what we're dealing with.

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Bonny 17:00

I think in our our peer group, one of the most important elements of our peer group is confidentiality. That's something we state and emphasize. And in order to be a safe space, to process, we hold things in the strictest of competence. And this is we have a newcomers meeting in order to lay out those guidelines that Pam is talking about. The confidentiality having the lack of confidentiality, that creates gossip that creates ill will it's it's just so to use the very current term, it is so toxic.

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Pam B. 17:40

I think another hallmark of a healthy group is there's no pressure to share that if you're in a place where you just want to sit and listen that that's okay. It needs to be your meeting, you need to feel like you have consent within that meeting within that space with those people. And I think you hit on something very important, too, that you talked about your group's having

special meetings where the guidelines are laid out, even if they don't have special meetings, that when new people come in, or from time to time, there's a reminder about confidentiality, about starting and ending on time about if you're going to miss a meeting, what's the process? Do you need to tell somebody? If you're feeling triggered? What's the process to need to ask for help or go aside with a leader? Just what what are the guidelines and boundaries for the meetings?

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Bonny 18:37

Right? And typically, in these meetings, part of the guidelines is no husband bashing,

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Pam B. 18:43

please? Yes, please.

B

Bonny 18:48

Yeah, we all get it. We've all got one.

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Pam B. 18:53

That is that will destroy a group that will destroy a group. If too much of that is going on. People will say you know what, I just I don't like on the group tonight. I'm not in that headspace. I want to go I want to go and move forward and learn some new tools and see somebody setting good examples. But if everybody's going to sit around and bash their spouse, people will stop coming.

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Bonny 19:16

And I think that is one way to assess a healthy group. When you leave the group, how do you feel if you leave feeling downtrodden and beaten and triggered all over again, but if you leave and you feel like you've inched one step forward towards bandaging up your artery has been bleeding. That's that's a good sign.

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Pam B. 19:39

And that reminds me of another thing that I kind of pride myself on your leader or whoever's organizing the group, whether it's professional or a peer needs to be open to feedback. I tell people in my groups, I am always looking to learn and grow my doors open whether you pull me aside whether you Send me a message. I even tell them, here's my website, even if you don't feel comfortable telling me face to face, and you want to give me feedback anonymously, please go to my website and send me a message, I have received some really good feedback that way that helped me grow. I appreciate when people do that. And I tell people, this is your group, I learned that from Donna Dixon, tell me if something is bothering you, or if there's

something that you need that you're not getting, or there's a way that we can improve the group, the leader should be approachable, open to feedback, because groups are made up of people. And every time you add a new person to the group, the entire group dynamics change. So the group leader needs to be open to hearing from their, from their members, what's going on for them in the group.

B Bonny 20:51

So let's say I'm very fresh wife just discovered not too long ago about the sexual infidelity in my marriage. When will I know that it's time to join a group?

P Pam B. 21:05

When I'm feeling so alone, when I'm feeling like nobody gets it, when I'm feeling just so isolated, and I just need somebody that understands somebody else that gets it.

L Lyschel 21:18

I tend to see another time that is good for women to step into community is when they're really needing some sense of validation, and shared experience. I see this a lot in our intro calls when women are asking me, am I crazy? Is this right? Should I feel this way? Is this wrong? Those are some of the questions that I get. And that's a good indication of community is going to be really supportive for you. Because not only are you learning and picking up tools for yourself, but you're gonna get validation from other people. And it's not necessarily that they're saying, No, you're not crazy, it may be that they share an experience, a lot, like probably listeners hear from just listening to us on a podcast is feeling that validation of like, Ah, I'm not alone. Like there are other people out there who get this and can share this experience with me. A lot of times when I see that that's a great time for them to step into that group process. Yeah,

B Bonny 22:18

so for me, I knew I needed something. And I had, I'm a researcher and investigator, I had maxed out on my Google searches. And I knew I needed real people to start walking with, towards healing. You know, I had all the head knowledge. But I didn't have a lot of heart yet in the game. So that's that when when I had maxed out with that coping mechanism, I knew I needed people. And the other thing was, one of the best things about group for me was it helped me learn boundaries. And I know we've already had that podcast episode. But group work for boundaries is essential to have that support when boundaries feel scary. And I know, Pam, you can probably talk a whole lot about that.

P Pam B. 23:15

It forced me to become a better listener. Because I had to remain quiet, I had to not interject, that was hard. For me. That was really hard. But it did force me to become a better listener. Part of our recovery journey is psychoeducation. And that just means learning some new coping

skills, new tools, boundaries, how to deal with gaslighting, how to communicate my thoughts and feelings and needs in a safe way. And so some of the groups helped me with learning those tools and overcoming some roadblocks with those tools, again, by listening to other people's experiences and how they solved those particular problems. And it gave me a chance to put them into practice and practice them with other people. So that that was a benefit.

B Bonny 24:09

I guess another way to know it's time to join a group when you're feeling stuck, if you're not finding a lot of forward movement, or maybe your bitterness and resentment is starting to skyrocket when I was able to join a group and see women farther down the road in recovery and they had learned to forgive and I saw I learned the process through group of how to forgive, it's not something you do quickly. It's okay. If it takes a long time group just showed me you can be a betrayed partner not better.

P Pam B. 24:38

Another really good thing about group for me was it was it was something I did for me and me alone. It was for my benefit. It was self care, having a lot of trouble in the past with guilt over self care. It was justified. Nobody could challenge me on doing something that was just for myself. Course those were self limiting beliefs. Nobody was saying that to me, you know, you kept taking good care of yourself, it became a time that I cherished, and just the routine and the setting. And just walking into the room and seeing the chairs, and seeing the faces, my blood pressure, I think immediately dropped, I immediately felt relaxed. This is a place where I can be exactly who I am, I can be unhappy, I can be happy, I can even laugh if I want to. But it was my time in it. It. This is something that we all struggle with as women in our culture, being able to focus just on myself. And that encouraged me that encouraged me to put myself first, it was a good habit.

B Bonny 25:52

When is it time to leave a group

P Pam B. 25:55

when you start to get bored, when you're moving past the people in the group, and you're not getting anything out of it anymore. And potentially, your own recovery is moving forward and other peoples are not, and they may be dragging you backwards, I hate to put it that way. We need to surround ourselves with people who are going to challenge us to move forward, challenge us to get out of our comfort zone. There's also value in saying and you being the person who serves as inspiration for people behind you, but we may not all be there, we may not all be ready to be the leader or the role model the inspiration. So that's that's one way that I think people know when it's time to leave a group.

B Bonnv 26:46

Bonny 20:10

I'm one of those people that can't say goodbye. So knowing when to leave a group was hard for me. That's why I really enjoyed curriculum based groups, because there was a natural ending, you got to the end of the book, you got to the end of the workbook. And some of those women I have stayed in touch with even to this day, we developed a bond.

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Lyschel 27:11

I was thinking, as you asked the question, Bonnie, that when you said leave the group, I thought what does that mean, exactly. But I think leaving the group does not necessarily mean leaving recovery. And I think that's an important distinction for us to give our listeners just as we're talking about this, because that's when I oftentimes will see women step out of group work is because they need to move into a therapeutic environment or a coaching environment. Generally, when that's the most appropriate time to do that is when they have very specifics that they are trying to navigate on their own. If it's past trauma, let's say they've got a lot of childhood stuff coming up. As they're, they've now been in some safe community, they're allowed to be right where they are. And they're starting to almost feel their heart open up. And they they recognize Wow, there's a lot of hold old history stuff coming up. For me, that makes me feel stuff, that's a good time to step out of group and go work on individual therapeutic work. If they are, let's say their story shifts and suddenly they're and moving into a separation or they're trying to work into a therapeutic disclosure, things like that. It's it could be that they don't have enough margin and of time and a week to prepare, and do coaching work for that type of need. And then also do groups so that it might be a time for them to step out of group for a season to go do these individual things, and then come back to group. So what I just things that I have seen women do in our ministry is recognize that we only as women, we only have so many hours in a week, I can't stress enough how much community matters in healing. So it's like maybe she's not sitting in a weekly group. But she's got a Facebook community that she's still able to tap into, or a text thread of women, that still group right even though they may not have a specific agenda that they're working through. So that would be my when you're recognizing that your needs have shifted, much like Pam kind of alluded to.

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Pam B. 29:05

I think you both make a really important point that just because you leave the structure group and you're not meeting every Tuesday at seven, you still create these connections in the group and you swap phone numbers and you text or you email or maybe even meet for coffee, if you're lucky enough to be physically close, that those connections can absolutely still remain. It doesn't mean you have left the community. But maybe you've left the structured group.

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Bonny 29:34

As we wrap up, we're going to I'm going to ask the question we always ask what hope do we want to leave our listeners around the topic of groups?

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Lyschel 29:47

I was going to share a quote from Pauline Young who is the author of the shack. I watched a documentary that he did several years ago. And this is the quote that I took from that it said As our greatest pain happens in relationships, and our greatest healing happens in relationships, we are made to live naked, fully known and unafraid. And I just I always try to bring that back in whenever I think about community and being in group. The other fun thing I'll tell you is that one of my favorite flowers is a hydrangea. And the reason the hydrangea is my favorite flower, is because I feel like it represents community. When you look at the bloom of a hydrangea, it's a bunch of little flowers, individual flowers doing what they're supposed to do. And they make this big, beautiful flower, right. And that's what to me what I feel like community looks like and can look like. It's not always been what community has looked like for me. But as I've explored groups, and found healthy community, it certainly has looked like that. I can't encourage our listeners enough. The Word of God is just slathered in community, it's part of how God has designed us to be is to live in community man was not to be made, you know, it was not to be alone. So he made Eve, and then moving into tribes, and Jesus having 12 disciples, I think it's one of the biggest games of the enemy is to attempt to kill to keep us in isolation. But first Peter five says that he is on the prowl, he's looking for someone to devour. And someone is singular. So when you're in community, it's, it's a lot harder for you to be picked off. When it comes to your spiritual walk, or even just doing things like we've talked about boundaries, community is essential, and it's vital. It's also the kryptonite to addiction. And so it helps us stay even from making choices in our own self as a woman who's trying to heal. But I have many friends who have struggled with alcohol and other things to help numb some of this pain. And it's like being in community really helps with that. So that would be my hope and my encouragement for them.

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Pam B. 32:09

My encouragement would be find your tribe, find your community. If you go to the first group, and it doesn't work for you keep, keep looking, try another one, that you will be surprised that your healing will be accelerated in community trauma, trauma isolates, trauma, we could be in a room of 100 people. And when we have unhealed trauma, we could feel so isolated and so alone. And being able to bring your trauma out with a group full of people who understand who you can safely connect with can help heal that trauma.

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Bonny 32:51

The hope I would like to leave our listeners with is to know that there are seasons. And this may be a season where you join a group. Or it may be a season where you need to close the door on a group. And that's fine. Just to be aware of your season. I mean, even Jesus left the crowds for a while and that was okay, but he came back. So with our trauma healing, we need to have these choices we need to be allowed to have these choices. We just want you to make wise choices and and know that whatever you decide when you're doing it and prayerfully that it will, God will walk with you through it. Thank you for joining us today. For another episode of hope for wives we hope to be a bright spot on your recovery journey. If you'd like to leave us a comment or question, please go to our website hope for fo our wives.com. And if you're so inclined, please go to iTunes and leave us a five star rating as well as a written review to help other people find us to help other wives who have been impacted by sexual betrayal find us. That's all for today and we'll talk to you again in two weeks. Bye.



Pam B. 34:08

Bye. See you next time. Was beautiful that was good.