



Vulnerability

- **Vulnerability**- *Willingness to show emotion or to allow one's weaknesses to be seen or known; willingness to risk being emotionally hurt:*
- Brene Brown defines vulnerability as "*uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure.*"

Brief Opening Exercise – Feeling Vulnerable

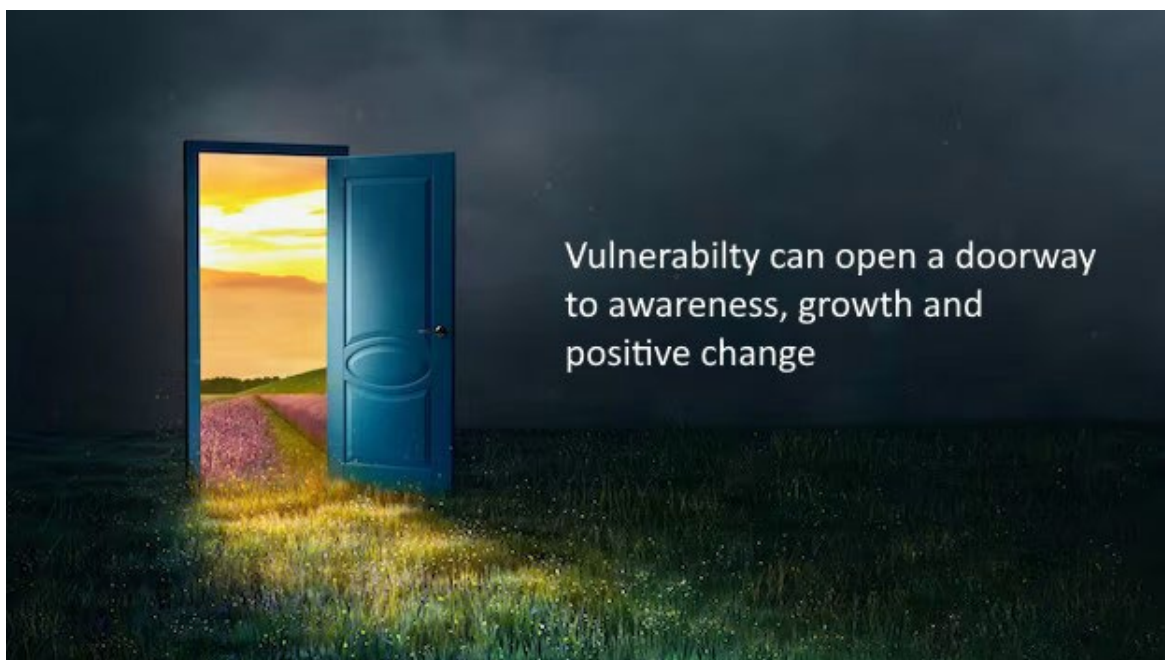
Directions – Take a few minutes to imagine something that you feel vulnerable about. It could be something you feel insecure about, a secret, something embarrassing, a weakness, a perceived failure, something you are ashamed of, or anything at all that you feel vulnerable about. All that you need to do is think about it without sharing at this point. If you think of something that feels like too much for you to handle right now, pick another example that is less intense or painful.

Group opening discussion questions:

- Why should group therapy be a place where people can allow themselves to discuss what we may feel vulnerable about? (The same applies to individual therapy as well)
- What is required to explore vulnerability in a group setting?
- Discuss as a group: What specifically is needed for group therapy to be a safe space emotionally?

Exploring Vulnerability

Why allow ourselves to be vulnerable? When in a safe space, if we explore things that we feel vulnerable about we can open a symbolic “doorway” in our minds to growth and positive change. Part of learning and exploring who we are inside often requires allowing ourselves to feel vulnerable by letting our guard down and letting others see what is “behind the door”. This can be uncomfortable or even scary, but it can be liberating and empowering too.





Why do people feel vulnerable? – Discuss some common reasons and share how they may apply to you:

- Negative childhood experiences (being teased, bullied, shut down, ignored, etc.)
- Trauma
- Negative interactions with others (Betrayal, abuse, hurt, disappointment, lying, cheating, etc.)
- Insecurities
- Self-doubt
- Disabilities
- Societal factors such as discrimination, unfair treatment, injustice.

Benefits of allowing ourselves to be vulnerable:

- Allowing ourselves to be vulnerable **opens the door to our inner selves** – We find out who we really are, and what we are really about by opening up and allowing our inner selves to come out.
- **We get stronger and more resilient**– A person can be closed off and avoid vulnerability, but they will stay stagnant as *vulnerability is often needed for growth*. Think about how we need to let our guard down to let things in and out. A city that never opens its gates to let people in or out will not grow.
- **Relationships need vulnerability** – We get closer to people when we allow ourselves to be vulnerable and they can get closer to us. Intimacy increases when we allow ourselves to be vulnerable with others. This applies in both romantic relationships, friendships and even working relationships. Trust needs to be there.

Closing Exercise- Exploring Vulnerability as a Group

Rules –

1. People in a group are encouraged to step outside of their comfort zone and take risks for this exercise. Allow yourself to explore vulnerability. However, no one should feel forced to share something they are not ready to. It's a process. Think things through before speaking. You have the option to choose to share based on your comfort level.
2. The group should focus on being nonjudgmental and supportive. People should feel safe taking risks as appropriate to explore vulnerability. Supportive comments and interchange are encouraged and with no teasing or minimizing the impact of other's experiences. Empathy and support
3. What is said in group stays in group. This is essential for trust building and safety.

Directions: Take turns going around the room sharing some thoughts, feelings and experiences that you may feel vulnerable about. There are three columns to choose from. The first column are easier things to discuss, the middle moderate, and the right column are topics that are more challenging. There is no pressure, so choose based on your current level of trust and comfort. Everyone should have access to the list to choose their topics based on their comfort level.



Choose Your Vulnerability Exercise

Less Threatening Topics	Moderate Topics	Challenging Topics
I was mildly embarrassed when....	I felt like I made a fool out of myself when...	I felt humiliated when...
A silly or unique thing my family does...	I am not proud of the fact that my family....	I often hide or deny the fact that my family...
One thing I won't tell about myself until I get to know you a little is...	One thing about myself that I only tell people whom I feel comfortable with is...	One thing about myself that I only share when I feel safe is....
I need to get better at...	A quality or skill that I feel insecure about is...	A disability or area of weakness or struggle for me personally is...
I can laugh about this strange habit or personality quirk...	Something about myself that I feel is strange or weird is...	A personal area where I have struggled because I feel different or very unusual about is...
One silly or common mistake I made that I can talk about now is...	One thing that I have done that I only share when I know you is...	One thing that I have done that I keep to myself unless I feel safe, and trusting is...
Socially I prefer not to...	Socially a situation I will do what I can to avoid is...	Socially a situation I feel strong fear or panic about is...
This body part (or physical quality) is not the greatest, but I am okay with it...	I am sensitive about this body part or physical quality...	I feel very embarrassed about this body part or physical quality...
Once in a while (but infrequently) one thing I wish was true about my life is...	I think pretty regularly about this thing I wish was true about my life...	Almost every day I think about how I wish this was true about my life...
A missed opportunity from my past (that I am over) is...	I have moderate or occasional regrets from my past about...	I feel shame and frequent feelings of regret from my past about...
I have some mild but manageable feelings I am not over about...	I have relatively strong feelings about...	I sometime experience intense unresolved emotions about....



Closing: Debriefing questions – *Making sure everyone is ok before ending the group*

1. How is everyone feeling?
2. Remember what is said in group stays in group and ends here unless brought up by the person who shared it in later therapy groups. Does everyone understand that?
3. What coping skills and supports do you have in case you experience challenging feelings?
4. What positive things did people experience from this exercise?

