Humans are social creatures and we begin functioning as members of groups the moment we are born. We continue to work, play, and live in groups for the entire span of our lives. Therefore, it is not surprising that group therapy has been a common and popular treatment option for over half a century. There are a number of key considerations about the application of group therapy when working with children and adolescents, and, more specifically, about the application of REBT and cognitive change methods in these groups.

According to Ellis (1997), Rational-Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) and Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT) lend themselves particularly well to use in group settings. Ellis (2002) stated that:

Rational-Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) and Cognitive-Behavior Therapy (CBT) are efficient kinds of group therapy, because they involve people who regularly meet together with a leader in order to work on their psychological problems, they focus on the members’ thoughts, feelings and behaviors, and they encourage all the participants to help each other change their cognitions, emotions and actions. (p. 51)

Ellis has been successfully using REBT in groups since 1959 (Ellis, 2002) and claims that it is usually more effective than individual REBT. Its use in child and adolescent groups has been described in the literature over the past three decades (e.g., Elkin, 1983).

Initially, we will present an overview of group therapy, followed by a discussion of some of the specific applications of it when working with children,
specific discussion of REBT when working with children and adolescents, a brief discussion of the research regarding the effectiveness of group therapy in comparison to individual therapy as well as control groups, along with the effectiveness of REBT group therapy.

General Considerations in Group Therapy with Children and Adolescents

*The advantages of and disadvantages of group therapy with children and adolescents will now be briefly reviewed*

**Advantages**

Group therapy is a common method used with children and adolescents due to its numerous advantages over individual therapy. Several authors, most notably Yalom (1994), have identified specific therapeutic factors that exist in groups. Corey and Corey (1997) refer to these factors as “the special forces within groups that produce constructive changes” (p. 239). “Universality” is one such powerful factor and it can be used in group therapy, as when students recognize that other members of the group share in some of the same afflictions as they do and, as a consequence, it may help them to feel less isolated in their struggle. In this and other ways, students in group therapy can serve as excellent support for each other. Children and adolescents who have already made progress toward overcoming universal hardships (such as divorce of parents or death of a loved one) can also provide hope and inspiration for those who are still struggling.

An additional advantage of group therapy is that children and adolescents receive feedback from a number of people as opposed to only receiving feedback from the clinician in individual therapy. Giving and receiving feedback helps members to understand “the impact they have on others and decide what, if anything, they want to change about their interpersonal style” (Corey and Corey, 1997, p. 243). We have found that students are very frank in their giving of feedback to their peers and are readily comfortable in “calling out their friends” when they are not being forthright, something that as clinicians we may not always be able to pick up upon.

An example of where feedback can be helpful may be seen in an REBT-based study group, in which homework is discussed as well as beliefs that interfere with completion. Students in group therapy may receive several critiques of their homework and actively participate in reviewing the work of others, which can facilitate increased awareness and improved critical thinking. The mild competition that exists in groups with children and adolescents can also be beneficial, especially in its ability to motivate members to work harder toward completing their homework, as well as toward reaching personal goals. At the same time, students may receive feedback from multiple