



newsletter for nurturing support groups

July-August, 1983
Volume 4, Number 6

Dear Readers,

When I think of the **Change Chain**, I am reminded of Benjamin Franklin.

*"What is the use of this new invention?" someone asked Franklin.
"What is the use of a new-born child?" was his reply.*

A year ago I invented a nine-link behavior change chain for **WE**. Some social workers in Minnesota asked me to expand upon it, which I did in **Ouch, That Hurts**. Betsy Crary of Seattle urged me to separate the either/or choice from the three or more options. I added an eleventh link. Foster parents in Omaha, Nebraska, asked me to write about how each link supports growth at different stages of development and about the pitfalls of overuse of each link. So here it is-- a whole issue on the Change Chain. Please continue to use the chain and let me know what you learned.

Jean Illsley Clarke

Jean Illsley Clarke
Editor

Opening Activity That Offers Everyone a Positive Personal Message ♥

Ask each person to: Find a partner and tell him, "One thing I am glad that I changed about myself is: _____"
Introduce your partner to the group and tell what he has changed if he is willing to share that information.



Closing Activity That Offers Everyone a Positive Personal Message ♥

Ask people to stand in a circle, join hands, and say together, "I can ask other people to change and they may, or they may not. I can decide what I want to change about myself and change it."

Facilitator Training Workshops

February 13 - 17, 1984
Minneapolis, Minnesota
Led by Jean Illsley Clarke

- A week-long workshop for people who want to...
- Facilitate the **Self-Esteem: A Family Affair** parenting model, or
 - Improve group leadership skills for working with growth and education and support groups.
- Write to **WE** for details.

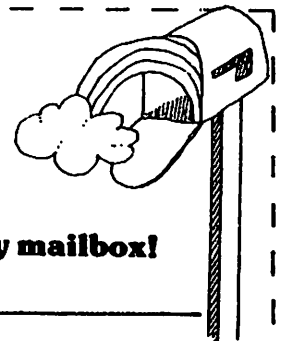
Suggested Format for Group Meetings

Place _____
Date _____
Time _____
Person in Charge _____

PROGRAM:

- Opening Activity that Offers Everyone A Positive Personal Message
- Ground Rules
- Celebrating Wins and Sharing Problems
- Asking for Support
- Practice Skills, new learnings, play
- Suggestion Circle
- Plan the next meeting
- Resentments and Appreciations
- Closing Activity that Offers Everyone A Positive Personal Message

For fifteen dollars,
a rainbow in your mailbox
six times a year!



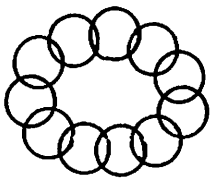
yes, color my mailbox!

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Send check to: WE, 16536 9th Avenue N.,
Plymouth, MN 55447



THE CHANGE CHAIN

Eleven Ways To Ask People To Change

by Jean Illsley Clarke

Have you ever wished you could get someone to change but not said anything because you didn't know what to say? Or said something that sounded critical when you didn't mean it to be critical? Or given up, because people don't seem to change when you ask them? I have, many times.

When a person was doing something that was annoying or destructive for me or could be destructive for him, I knew of three things I could do. I could:

- ignore it,
- criticize, or
- ask the person to change.

Ignoring it usually didn't work. **Criticizing** often made it worse. **Asking** "Wouldn't you like to do this another way?" frequently brought abrupt rejection.

The change chain, this golden chain of eleven links, provides us with eleven positive ways to tell people that we want them to do something, that we want them to change their behavior, or that we are concerned about one of their attitudes. The use of the chain does not guarantee success (some people will say "no" eleven times), but it does increase our chances of being effective by providing us with lots of options.

Assume that someone has criticized you and you have decided not to ignore it and not to criticize back. Here is a list of eleven links and an example of how you could use each in this situation.

- **Report feelings:** "I feel angry when you criticize me."
- **Report a wish:** "I wish you would tell me what you want me to do instead of criticizing me."
- **Offer a warning:** "If you continue to criticize me, I may stop listening to you."
- **Offer to help:** "Do you need something from me?"
- **Give directions:** "I have trouble hearing you when you criticize me. Tell me what you want me to do in a gentle tone and don't call me stupid."
- **Offer a choice of two options:** "Do you want to discuss this calmly now, without critical words, or would you rather wait until tomorrow?"
- **Offer or elicit three or more options:** "Here are several ways you might get me to change my behavior."

1. Tell me in a soft voice what you want me to do.
2. Write me a note asking me to do something specific.
3. Call me tomorrow and tell me what you want me to do without using any 'put-down' words.
4. Let me know when I do please you."

- **Make a request:** "Will you stop criticizing me and tell me what you wish I would do?"
- **Offer a reminder:** "Remember the agreement we had about not criticizing each other?"
- **State an expectation:** "You are important to me. I expect you to stop criticizing me and to find a way to talk to me that is easier for me to respond to."
- **Issue a demand with consequences:** "Find a way to tell me what you want without putting me down. If you keep on criticizing me, I will avoid spending time with you."

By now you realize that the links are connected in a chain as a symbol of the support and helpful boundaries that a chain can offer. Think about the chain that holds a ship to a dock to keep it from floating away while cargo is unloaded. Recall the chain across a path that keeps cars from roaring through an area that is reserved as a peaceful retreat for hikers. Feel the golden links that circle a wrist and remind us that someone loves us.

The links are not arranged in a hierarchy of least to best, but in a continuous chain to remind us that each link is important, and is most effective in some situations and least in others. It also reminds us that our chances of success are as strong as our weakest link. It is our job to keep each link strong and to increase our knowledge of when to use each one.

Sometimes we try one that doesn't work, so later we try another one. Or we combine two links.

For example, when Tom talks with the adolescents in his charge about truancy, he helps them generate a list of things they can do. (Elicit Options link.) The list includes continuing to skip

school. Tom tells the young people that they can choose what to do. They voice their preferences as they discuss the options. He reminds them that if they continue to skip school, they will be suspended, which will affect their work programs. (Warn of Outcomes link.) The young people say, "Hey, you said we could choose and now you say we will have to suffer the consequences!" Tom says, "Yes, you can choose and you will also have to live with the results of your choice. All people make choices and all of us experience consequences, sometimes pleasant, sometimes unpleasant." Tom used the change link, Elicit Options, to encourage thinking, and the Warn of Outcomes link to encourage responsible consideration of the future.

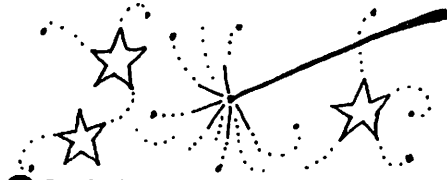
Here is a description of each link, its uses and misuses. While all links are suitable for use with adults, certain links support the developmental tasks of children at different ages and of teen agers. The examples of ways links can help children are general. Watch your child's responses to tell whether a specific link enhances her growth or seems manipulative or heavy at any given time.



- **Link:** Report a feeling.
Description: Report a negative or a positive feeling and relate it to a behavior. Own the feeling. Say, "I feel..." Do not project it onto the other person with a "You make me feel..."
Examples: "I feel frustrated when you let things go until the last minute." (Angry looks)
"When you drive this fast I feel scared." (Shudder)
"I'm glad you kept your promise to me." (Hug, kiss, smile)
Strengths: This link encourages awareness of, concern for and responsiveness to the feelings of others. It is important for children in the three to six age group because they are busy learning who they are in relationship to other people and how to get along with them. Teenagers often recycle these tasks at about ages 15-17, so report feelings to them, but remember they may appear not to care because they are in the process of separating emotionally from their parents.

Hazards: Constant reports of feelings without asking directly for behavior changes are manipulative and encourage the child to be overly responsible for the feelings of others. This produces adults who are overly pleasing and who support dysfunctional family activities such as chemical dependency.

A young child may feel burdened by the incessant reminders of the feelings of others and decide to care only about his own feelings.



○ **Link:** Report a wish.

Description: Tell a specific behavior you wish the person would do. Remember that you are only expressing a wish, not asking for a specific change. Avoid generalities such as, "I wish you would do better," or, "I wish you would be a good girl," or, "I wish you were nicer to me."

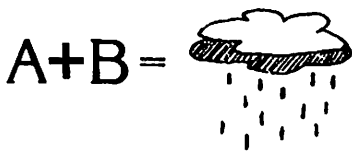
Examples: "I wish you would do your homework in the evening and avoid this morning hassle." (Sigh)

"I wish you would drive within the speed limit."

"I wish you would value yourself enough to take your promises seriously." (Hand on shoulder)

Strengths: This link helps people learn how to be successful at pleasing other people, plus the skills listed under "Report a feeling."

Hazards: Same as "Report a feeling."



○ **Link:** Warn of Outcome.

Description: A warning is a reminder to think about the possible outcomes of a behavior or an attitude. The outcome can be positive or negative. Remember to describe the outcome clearly. Avoid generalities such as, "No good will come of that," or, "You will get hurt!"

Example: "This morning homework hassle is a drag. Do you think the family is going to put up with your grumpiness and help you catch the school bus indefinitely?"

"Think about what often happens to people who drive above the speed limit. Is that what you want for yourself?"

"If you continue to break your promise to me, I will not feel like trusting you." (Back away)

"If you pull the kitty's tail, she may scratch you." (Remove child's hand from cat)

"If you continue to be this thoughtful of other people, you will have lots of friends."

Strengths: Encouraging people to think about the outcomes of their behavior fosters clear thinking, responsibility and independence. It is important to begin using this link when children are about two years of age and start the process of independent thinking. It strengthens responsibility in six to twelve year olds and is helpful for teens of all ages, but especially around age 14 when they are recycling early separation tasks.

Hazards: Overuse of this link, or careless, generalized use or global threats may result in specific fears or general anxiety and worry. Or the child may give up trying to cope with the warnings and decide that she will ignore possible consequences of her behavior.



○ **Link:** Offer to help.

Description: Offer to help in a general or a specific way. Avoid offering to take responsibility away from the person or preventing the person from learning and growing, as in, "Here, let me do that for you. You don't know how."

Examples: Open body posture.

"Do you want me to help you set up a schedule for the preparation of your term paper?"

"I'm scared about your safety when you speed. Do you want me to help you in some way?"

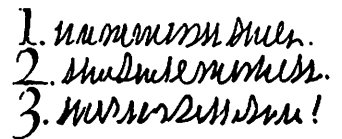
"Do you want ideas from me on how to handle the promise you made?"

"Do you want some help from me?"

Strengths: Offers of assistance encourage trust and respect for self and set the stage for the development of cooperative skills. This link is the only one that is appropriate for infants. When the infant cries or fusses, adults figure out what he needs and care for him. Offers of help are appropriate for people of all ages, and especially so when people are starting something new. **Examples:** 6 to 18 month olds who are stuck under furniture, three to six year olds starting new activities, six year olds starting school, 12 or 13 year

olds starting adolescence with all of the new sex role skills they will need to learn, and adults who are entering any new activity or group.

Hazards: The overuse of offers to help leads to overdependence, lack of responsibility, lack of initiative, the mistrust of one's own ability and a denial of one's power to be in charge of one's own life. Offers to help that are appropriate at one age level are patronizing if offered at a later age. For example, "Would you like me to cut your meat?" is reassuring at age 3 but demeaning at age 9.



○ **Link:** Give directions.

Description: Directions should be clear. When asking for a behavior or attitude change, directions are often more effective if they contain a reason and a specific statement of behavior to avoid (do this, because, don't do this). Directions that describe a state of being are not helpful: for example, "Be a good girl." Instead, use statements that describe behavior such as, "Remember to say please and thank you."

Examples: "Do your homework in the evening. You are crabby and push on all of us when you try to do it at the last minute. Don't fool yourself into thinking that there will be time enough in the morning."

"Stop speeding. You are risking your safety and the safety of others. Drive within the speed limit."

"Keep your promise."

"Don't pull the kitty's tail. He might scratch you. Hold him gently."

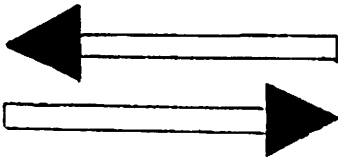
"Your 'don't care' attitude about standards will pull down your grades. Pick one or two things to do well today and do them neatly and completely."

Strengths: Clear directions offer standards and define time limits. They create an environment in which a child can feel confident that she can become competent and self-sufficient and can get her own needs met. Understanding directions makes it possible for her to please other people because she knows what they want. These are important skills for 3 to 6 year olds who are learning how to relate to other people and how to do things. Directions are important for six to twelve year olds who are busy acquiring skills and installing their own personal, internal structures about how to take care of themselves and other people. Clear directions are sup-

continued on page 4

portive for anyone who is starting something new.

Hazards: Too many directions discourage independent thinking and invite overdependence. If a person feels overburdened with directions, she may give up or find manipulative ways to ignore or sabotage the directions.



○ Link: Offer a choice of two things.

Description: "You may do either this or this" offers a choice with limited options. The technique is often referred to as "the grandma question," as in "do you want an apple or a peach?" in which case a cookie is not an option, or "Are you going to dress yourself or shall I dress you?" in which case staying in pajamas is not an option. The two items offered should be somewhat parallel and should not involve a threat. "Do you want to get dressed now or do you want a spanking?" is not an offer of two choices-- it is a crooked way of using the *Demand with Consequences* link.

Examples: "Are you going to do your homework before you go to bed or are you going to set your alarm for six and do it before breakfast?"

"Are you willing to stay within the speed limit, or shall I drive today?"

"You promised to sweep the garage today. Are you going to do that this morning or this afternoon?"

Strengths: Two choices are often used as a convenience or to assure compliance when there is some issue of safety or when the person requesting the behavior is in a hurry. This link can be used to distract a six to eighteen month old who is exploring something dangerous or breakable.

Choosing between two alternatives strengthens thinking because the person gets to decide which thing to select. It is useful with a two year old who is practicing saying "No," because it provides limits for his behavior. "Are you going to climb into bed or shall I put you in?" circumvents an argument over whether he wants to go to bed if the adult is firm about the options. Offering a choice of two actions can help direct a three to six year old into appropriate social behavior, which is one of his developmental tasks.

Hazards: Since the person offering the two options is clearly in charge of the possible activities, the invitation to think is present, but limited. This link does

not encourage responsibility, and, if grossly overused, can invite overdependence as in, "You haven't told me what I can do yet." Or, if the child tires of constantly having someone limit his options, he may use deliberate or manipulative ways to defy both options. The choice of two should not be offered unless the choices are appropriate, and unless the person offering is willing to carry through on the offer.



○ Link: Offer or elicit three or more options.

Description: This method involves inviting the other person to think of several options, or making several suggestions that would be practical or whimsical solutions to the problem.

Examples: "I hear you say that driving fast is fun. What are six safe things you can do that are fun?"

"David, you are to practice half an hour today. You can do it before school, during lunch hour, after school. Can you think of another way you could do your 30 minutes of practice?"

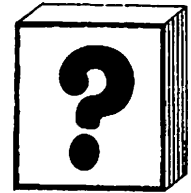
"You have not been keeping your promises lately. Let's think what you could do. You could continue to break them and deal with the consequences. You could break half of them and keep the rest. You could keep them all. You could stop making promises you don't intend to keep. You could do more things when the need arises so you aren't in a position to make so many promises. You could take 3 days' vacation from all promises and then start over and make only reasonable promises you intend to keep. What options can you think of?"

Strengths: The use of three or more options strengthens thinking, responsibility and competence. It can be used with 6 to 18 month olds to offer safety and variety in their environment and to support their developmental task of exploration. It encourages thinking in two year olds and helps three to six year olds feel powerful. It supports the growth of competency and responsibility in six to twelve year olds and affirms independence and separation in teenagers. It helps adults avoid the

limitations of either/or thinking.

Hazards: Overused, or used exclusively, the three or more options link does not offer enough structure, direction and guidance to other people.

Children or adults who are subjected to it incessantly may act combative or whiney and nervous and show evidences of insecurity. A person who feels overwhelmed by too many choices may become passive and long for the comfort and direction of firmer structure.



○ Link: Make a request.

Description: A request is a question that begins with the words "Will you" or "Are you willing to..." or "Is someone willing to..." "Who will..." may sound like a request but often holds a hidden demand or plea, as in, "Who will help me finish this disagreeable job?" A request is a suitable link to use ONLY when both affirmative and negative answers are acceptable. Asking, "Will you set the table now?" Receiving no for an answer and then saying, "Well, set it anyway," is crooked and crooked questions encourage crooked answers.

Examples: "David, will you take your shower in the evening and leave more time for yourself in the morning?"

"Will you stop speeding?"

"You promised to go to the movie with us tonight. Do you still intend to go?"

"We are going to the game at seven. Do you want to go with us?"

Strengths: Requests encourage thinking and independence. Since it is the developmental task of a two year old to practice saying no, requests can be used to encourage straight no saying. "Would you like to give me a kiss?" "Shall I eat your ice cream?"

Direct requests that can be easily met are helpful for three to six year olds who are practicing being powerful, and who also enjoy being pleasing to adults. Requests encourage competence and independence in six to twelve year olds and support the separateness of teenagers.

Hazards: The hazards of overuse are apt to rear their ugly heads when people forget that they really want someone to do something and say, "Will you?" as in, "Will you stop speeding?" When the answer is no, they are stuck with that answer unless they are willing to say,

"Sorry. I shouldn't have asked that question. My mistake. There is not an option about doing that. Slow down right now."



but explicit statement of expected behavior.

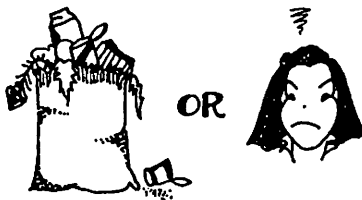
Examples: "I expect you to be ready and at the bus stop when the school bus comes."

"You are important to me. I expect you to drive safely."

"I'm depending on you to keep your promise."

Strengths: Expectations give signals about who the speaker thinks the other person is. They offer a solid background for children to live up to and to push against. The two year old may test defying expectation to see what will happen. The three to six year old may internalize the expectation as part of the mosaic of who other people think he is. Six to twelve year olds can test their competence against the expectations, or defy them to see if they reflect important family or community rules. Teenagers can use them to reflect upon who they are. "Am I really this person you expect me to be? Am I still OK if I don't live up to your expectations?" Sometimes adolescents defy the expectations to achieve separateness.

Hazards: Expectations may be inappropriate or too general to be useful, as in "I expect you to be the man of the house now that Daddy is gone." Too many expectations can feel overwhelming and may be met with over-compliance in which the individual gives away his power to think and act for himself and to establish his own identity. He may conclude that he must be perfect, or always be strong, or always please, or constantly try harder or always hurry. Or, high expectations may result in the opposite behavior which is a "so what?" attitude.



○ **Link:** Offer a reminder of a rule, a contract or a promise.

Description: When you offer a reminder, you make a statement that is designed to encourage the listener to think, to remember, and to act. It can be given with a supportive sound or with a warning ring. In the latter case the hidden message is, "Remember the consequences part of the contract."

Examples: "David, remember our agreement about what we are each responsible to do before breakfast."

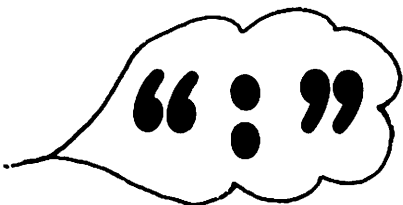
"Remember the rules about safe driving."

"You made me a promise on Thursday about my birthday."

Sometimes a reminder is given by pointing a finger (at an unmade bed) or by handing the person an object (an unemptied waste basket).

Strengths: Reminders encourage thinking and responsibility. They are appropriate for people who are 18 months old or over. Before that time, adults are in charge of providing a safe environment for the child to explore and should not be expecting her to remember rules. Reminders for young children should be explicit. "Remember, it is your turn to feed the dog," or "Do you remember our agreement about the dog?"

Hazards: Constant reminders become nagging and encourage irresponsibility and lack of attentiveness. They sound as if the person who reminds is willing to be in charge of the other person's behavior. Overuse of reminders can result in fearfulness in young children (What have I forgotten now?) and temporary deafness or resentment in older children and adults (Get off my back).



○ **Link:** Demand with consequence.

Description: A demand with consequence is usually thought of as being a directive, "Shape up," followed by a negative consequence, "or ship out." It can also have a positive consequence. "Continue to treat me like this and I will love you more and more!" or "Keep up your studies as you have been and you

will make the dean's list for sure," or "Continue this type of work and attitude and you will make the team." In either case, the sender is in charge, is doing the thinking, setting the standards and setting the limits.

Examples: "You are not to watch TV until you have finished your practicing." "If you miss the bus you will have to walk to school today."

"Drive within the speed limit. Any time that you exceed it you will lose the use of the car for the weekend."

"If you break your promise I will be mad at you."

"If you keep your promise, I will be very proud of you."

Strengths: This link is useful when it is necessary to set limits. It encourages thinking in two year olds and helps them with their developmental task of realizing that there are other people beside themselves in the world and that they must adjust to that. The use of appropriate demands with consequences can foster healthy compliance in three to six year olds and competence in six to twelve year olds. It may encourage responsibility in teens and frequently motivates adults to reconsider their behaviors or attitudes.

Hazards: Too many or too few demands and consequences invite irresponsibility. Overuse of this link results in squashed or rebellious children, children who are not thinking for themselves, but are responding to the thinking of the other person. Overuse discourages thinking and responsibility for self and encourages blind obedience (I was just following orders). The underuse of it encourages people to believe that they are not responsible for thinking through their own behavior (I didn't think it mattered). Consequences are usually most effective if they are specific and short-term. "If you don't keep your promise I will fuss at you this evening." is more useful than "I will hate you forever."

Another aspect of consequences is the need to be sure that they penalize the right person. Usually a mother does not "ground" a young child to the house for a week more than one time because that consequence often causes more distress for the mother than the child. Remember, keep the discomfort where it belongs. The teenager who is completely grounded from driving can no longer do family errands. Better to ground him from his pleasure driving and increase the amount of family driving he is to do during the consequence period.

continued on page 6

○ **Link:** State an expectation.
Description: This link involves a simple

PERSONAL ACTIVITIES

HOW OFTEN DO I USE EACH LINK?

For one day record how many times you use each link in the Change Chain. Put a + by the item if it got the desired change and a - if it did not. Think about which links you use most often and when you would be more effective if you used different links.

HOW STRONG IS MY CHAIN?

Make a bar graph to show how often you use each communication when you want people to change their behavior.

<i>Demand / Consequence</i>	
<i>Expectation</i>	
<i>Reminder</i>	
<i>Request</i>	
<i>Option</i>	
<i>Choice</i>	
<i>Directions</i>	
<i>Help</i>	
<i>Warn</i>	
<i>Wish</i>	
<i>Feeling</i>	

1. ASK YOURSELF THESE QUESTIONS:

1. If someone is asking me to change my behavior, which two options do I respond to most readily? Least readily?
2. Do I use most often the ones I like best?
3. Have I asked people I am close to which links they prefer, or do I just assume that I know?

4. Are some of my links as strong as steel and others as weak as paper?

2. MAKE A SELF CONTRACT

Make a self contract about any changes you plan to make to strengthen your links.

3. THE POWER OF PRACTICE

Choose a behavior (interrupting, saying put-downs, hitting, etc.). Write the problem in the middle of the chain. Write an example of each communication inside the links.

Practice for a day: Each time you ask someone to do something, think of two or three links that would be appropriate for the situation before you decide which one to use.

GROUP ACTIVITIES

Hand each person a copy of the Change Chain diagram from this issue.

1. As a group, choose a problem behavior or attitude. Each person write the problem in the middle of the chain.

Example: Interrupting, Saying put-downs, Hitting, Attitude toward epilepsy, Coming late to pick up child from day care.

2. Each person write an example of each communication inside the links. Share your examples in groups of 3

or 4 to get more options for each link.

3. As a group, identify which links you would use to tell a high school senior she will not have a kegger for the party in your home.
4. As a group, share examples of ways in which each link could be misused.
5. As a group, identify the links that **actually ask** for a behavior change.
6. As a group, identify the links that encourage independent thinking.
7. As a group, identify the links that en-

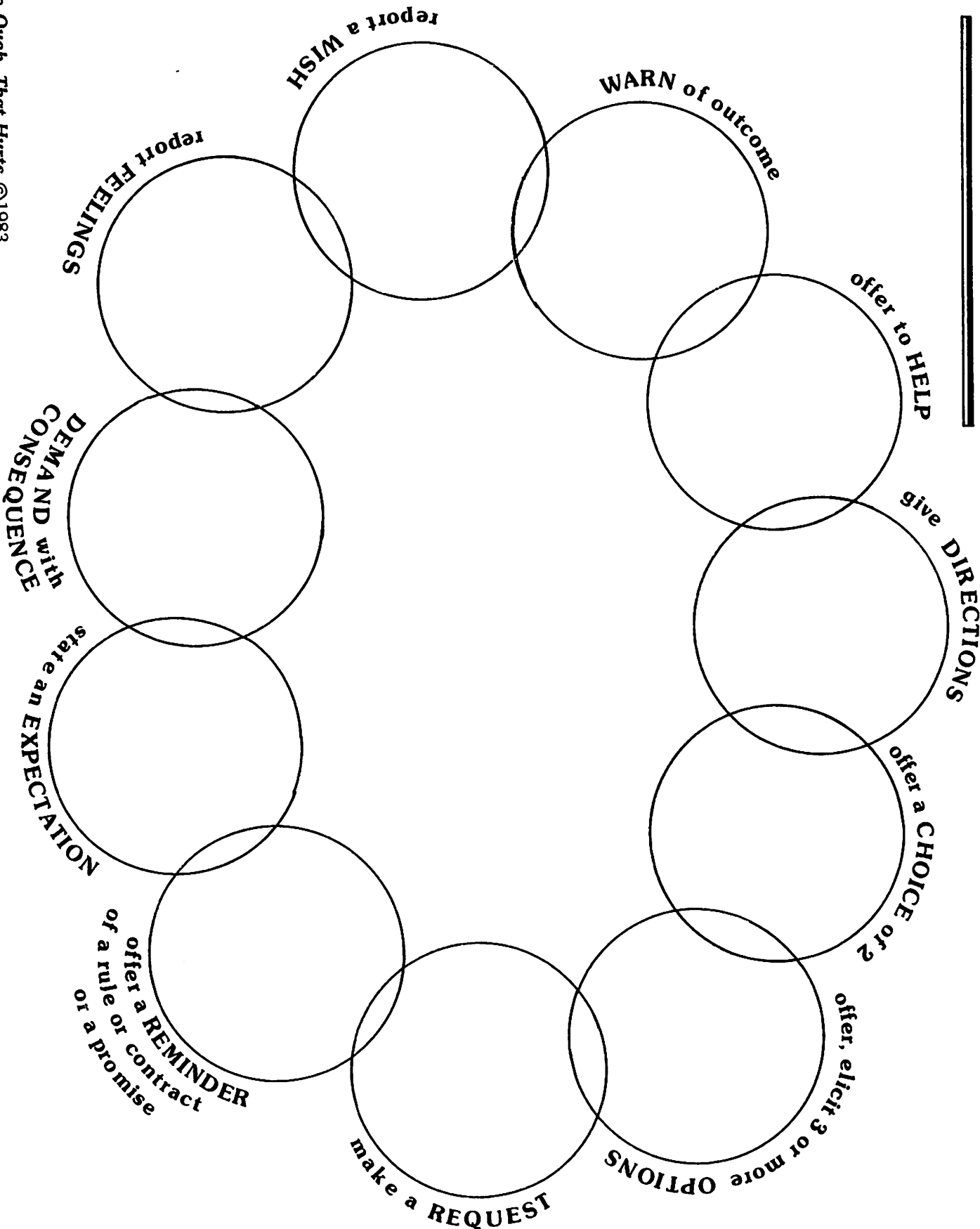
courage responsibility.

8. Individually, make a bar graph to show how often you use each communication when you want people to change their behavior.
9. In your small group, share what you learned by doing your graph, tell which two links you respond to most readily when someone is asking you to change, tell which two links you respond to least readily, tell your group about any changes you plan to make in the way you use the links.

CHANGE CHAIN

Permission to duplicate from
Jean Illsley Clarke.

7



What Are The Qualities Of A Good Closing Activity?

A good closing activity provides a way for people to say goodbye to this occasion and to the people here so they can say hello to the next people and events in their lives. Check your closing activity for these six items:

1. Has clear directions for the activity.
2. Allows time for clarifying obligations and expectations for follow-up activities.
3. Involves participation from everyone.
4. Allows a way to celebrate new knowledge, insight or experience with others who were present.
5. Offers each person a time for receiving and giving positive personal messages.
6. Ends on time!



Edited by Jean Illsley Clarke
Layout Design by Marnie Lilja Baehr

- Suggested Activities
- Thoughts on theory and purpose of support groups
- News from other Support Groups

\$15.00 per year (six issues)

**newsletter for
nurturing support groups**

16535 9th Avenue North
Plymouth, MN 55447