



## newsletter for nurturing support groups

Issue 52  
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Dear Reader,

Welcome! Let's think about Ground Rules, and the many ways in which using them can help you lead groups.

Please pretend that you went with me to an almost excellent workshop. The information was relevant and well presented. The format was clear and appropriate. The topic was timely and the sixty people in the room seemed eager to learn. Late in the day, in the absence of any stated Ground Rules, we were encouraged to take some risks before the whole group. A few people did and those who shared first were subtly criticized for not risking in the correct way. The feeling in the workshop changed. The participation level dropped and at closing time we all clapped politely and left quickly. Would that experience have been different for you if the group had been using a "mutual respect" or a "no put-downs" Ground Rule?

I have been collecting ideas and samples of Ground Rules for this issue for a long time. Enough, I find, for two issues. This one will discuss the use of Ground Rules in adult groups, a later one will focus on family, school and play groups.

Here you will find:

- What Ground Rules are and why we use them.
- How they differ in the 4 types of adult groups.
- Samples of rules for different groups.
- How to establish rules in a group.
- What to do when someone breaks a rule.

I hope that you use this issue to think about the importance of Ground Rules in a new or deeper way. Some of the material on the Four Types of Groups, the Explanation of Ground Rules and How to Establish Ground Rules is taken from Who, Me Lead A Group?, by Jean Illsley Clarke, Harper & Row, 1984. You can read more about Ground Rules and other group leadership skills in that book. Send me your ideas about Ground Rules and/or sample sets of rules and I will share them in future issues.

Safe rule setting!

Jean Illsley Clarke, Editor

## What Are Ground Rules and Why Use Them?

Ground Rules identify behaviors that help groups function well. Read the following axioms for group work, and think about them in reference to a group that you lead. They were identified at a Family Life Educators Workshop and are applicable to most learning groups. Consider each axiom and notice in reference to that principle, whether stating and following Ground Rules will help facilitate individual learning and growth.

### Axioms For Family Educators

1. Family work is group work.
2. People learn more from what you do than what you say.
3. Power is the ability to keep what you want to keep and change what you want to change. Parents and children need to be able to be powerful.
4. In any given situation the person with the most options has the most power.
5. Everything you *do* teaches families options for ways that they can be with each other.
6. The less openly rules are stated, the more restricted the group norms will be.
7. People learn more from their internal maps (beliefs, decisions, assumptions, prejudices) than they do from the external reality.
8. People convinced against their will are of the same opinion still.

What is the meaning of the axiom, "The less openly rules are stated, the more restricted the group norms will be?" My American Heritage Dictionary says: A *norm* is a standard model or pattern regarded as typical for a specific group. A *rule* is a direction for conduct. A *ground rule* is a basic rule of procedure or behavior.

In Adult and Continuing Education Today, Barbara Temple writes, "All groups have norms. And not all of them are healthy. What is OK here? What do you expect of me? What can't I do? Why? Who is in charge?" With norms these questions don't need to be answered each time a group gathers. Norms are behaviors which

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## Ground Rules *cont'd. from page 1*

when violated cause the violating group member to experience some form of censure."

It follows then, as the axiom points out, that when norms or Ground Rules are not stated, discussed, agreed upon and observed, the members of the group will restrict their behavior, will hold back, and will participate less openly in order to protect themselves.

In practice, when Ground Rules designed to allow open participation, differing positions and independent thinking, are stated, an individual participant will usually not believe or act upon them immediately. After a period of observing and testing the leader, each person will notice if the leader really follows the rules. He will also decide whether enough of the other participants accept the rules in order for him to feel safe. When the use of the Ground Rules establishes that disagreement or making a mistake will not bring censure, the individual can use less energy on self-protection and more on learning.

Leaders need to be willing to reinforce the importance of the Ground Rules by referring to them at the opening of each meeting, by keeping them posted, by calling attention to them as a way of stopping unwanted behaviors, and by reminding people of the protection the Ground Rules offer.

### How Do You Establish Ground Rules in a Group?

What are the best ways to establish ground rules?

1. Explain the meaning of each ground rule in one or two sentences.
2. Negotiate ground rules with the group. If there are safety or administrative rules that are not negotiable, at least the group can add other rules that are important to the group members.
3. Post the ground rules—in large and clearly written type so all participants can see them.
4. State the ground rules or refer to them in some way at the beginning of each meeting.
5. Demonstrate the ground rules by practicing them throughout the meeting yourself.

## Choosing Ground Rules for Four Different Types of Groups

### Four Types of Groups

Think about what kind of group you are going to be leading. There are four general types of learning groups:

Discovery groups

Sharing groups

Skill-building or task groups

Planning groups

Some Ground Rules work well in all four types of groups, but there are instances in which different rules are appropriate. First, notice the differences in the four groups.

Each of the four groups has a different focus or emphasis.



*Discovery groups* focus on raising awareness of some kind. The emphasis is often on internal and personal aspects.



*Sharing and support groups* provide an opportunity for people to exchange something of value. The emphasis is on the individual's interactions with other persons.



*Skill-building or task groups* center on the skill or product that the person or group is to acquire or produce. The members of the group concentrate on learning a skill and/or producing a product.



*Planning groups* focus on designing a plan that is future-oriented. The goal is to produce a specific recommendation or blue-print for action.

Let us compare how the activities of the four groups would differ if they were all organized around the same topic. For example, think about how the groups would differ if each were about music. The same group of people could come together:



in a discovery group designed to help each person get more pleasure from listening to classical music. Group name: "Enjoying Classical Music."



in a sharing group to play instruments and sing together just for fun. Group name: "The Joyful Noise Bunch."

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## Four Types of Groups *continued*



in a task group to practice for a band concert to be given at the Fourth-of-July community celebration. Group name: "Minnetonka City Band."



in a skill-building group to increase the individual's ability to sight read and the group's ability to sing difficult harmonies. Group name: "Advanced Chorus."



in a planning group to design the calendar of concerts and parties for the coming year. Group name: "Program Committee."

Now let us think about Ground Rules that will help group members in the various groups reach their goals.

### Discovery Groups



*Discovery Groups focus on self-awareness or increasing an awareness of each individual's relationship to a special group, issue, possibility, or problem. The focus of such a group may be on knowledge, values, or both.*

Members need safety and protection to explore and to try out something new. They need to give maximum energy to their individual needs and feelings and minimum energy to performing to meet a standard, pleasing the group, or protecting themselves from censure.

These rules are appropriate for many types of sharing groups.

#### Ground Rules:

1. Everyone participates.
2. Everyone has the right to pass.
3. All opinions and beliefs are honored.
4. Confidentiality is assured.
5. Leader stays in a position of respect for self and others.
6. No side conversations.

Three of these rules, *full participation*, *right to pass*, and *acceptance of everyone's beliefs*, are borrowed from the methods used in values clarification. If you have not been exposed to these activities designed to encourage people to clarify their own values for themselves, the book Values Clarification: A Handbook of Practical Strategies for Teachers and Students by Sidney B. Simon, Leland W. Howe and Howard Kirschenbaum, Hart Pub. Co., New York, 1972, is a helpful one to start with.

Think about these sample ground rules and consider how you could use each to provide protection for people to grow. The following list explains the role of each ground rule.

### Explanation of Ground Rules

1. The *full participation* ground rule assumes that everyone, including the leader, will participate, at least mentally, in each activity. The rule protects the participants from being asked to do something that the leader is not willing to do and asks that everyone attend to what the group is doing.
2. The *right to pass* protects each individual, including the leader, from having to speak out, from revealing himself when he doesn't wish to do so.
3. *Honoring* each person's attitudes, opinions, and beliefs emphasizes that they have helped him make sense out of life and therefore have personal validity. This rule also affirms adults' ability to think and to decide for themselves. In addition, it protects the groups from the competitiveness of having to decide who is right or wrong when people disagree.
4. The fourth ground rule of *confidentiality* (or no gossip) provides protection for people to role play new behavior and then decide if they want to keep or discard it. It also encourages people to solve *within* the group those problems they may have with the group, rather than complaining about it to outsiders. Take care to check on whether the group wants to use this rule as the leader has no way to enforce it.
5. The fifth ground rule, that the leader is expected to stay in a position of *respect* for self and others, protects the participants from criticism and the leader from loss of integrity. The leader is free to express his or her own belief position but is not to push it on other people or to apologize for it in order to please the group. This ground rule demands that the leader model respectful, accepting behavior for the group. It does not assume that every behavior is all right, but rather that the *needs* of each person are important. For example, the leader will not permit one person to dominate the group with constant talking and questions, but will respect that person's need for attention.
6. The "no side conversations" rule helps the group function as a group and minimizes competition and disruption. In groups composed of experienced group members, this rule may not be needed. It does, however, give the leader an easy way to intervene if members are disturbing the group with whispered conversations or disruptive "aside" comments.

#### Suggested Activity

Think of a discovery group you would like to attend or lead. When you have chosen the topic to be explored, examine each of the sample Ground Rules (page 6) to see if it would fit for that group. Change or add rules as you need to.

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## Four Types of Groups *continued*

### Sharing and Support Groups



Sharing and Support Groups are designed to help members exchange information, feelings, hopes, grief, or concerns.

Like Discovery Groups, Support Groups are places where people need maximum safety. They need to know what is acceptable and what the boundaries are. The same Ground Rules that are suggested for Discovery Groups offer protection and set the stage for a collaborative learning atmosphere in Sharing Groups.

Consistently used, these rules provide protection and permission for people to make their own decisions to grow. They assure a safe place for people to try out new behaviors, change their words, consider their attitudes, and think about their underlying beliefs. The rules provide a framework for self-directed learning. They define people as having worth and protect them from embarrassment if they make mistakes.

#### **Suggested Activity**

Sometimes special rules are needed for groups. Assume that you are going to lead a parenting group where people will be sharing ideas on how to manage children's behavior. Assume that your state has a child protection law that says hitting children constitutes abuse and knowledge of it must be reported. What Ground Rule would you add to the ones on page 6?

### Skill-Building or Task Groups



Skill-Building or Task Groups are intended to help the members complete specific tasks or increase job, recreational, physical, mental, spiritual, personal, interpersonal, or group skills.

Ground Rules for Skill-Building or Task Groups, for example, will often address safety, use, and care of equipment and guidelines for sharing of that equipment.

The "Right to pass" rule is not appropriate here. Since the purpose of these groups is to learn a set of standards and skills and/or to produce a given set of products or services, passing doesn't work. Nobody wants a surgeon who decided to pass on learning how to remove an appendix. Nobody wants a car produced on the line where a worker decided to pass on installing the brakes.

"Confidentiality" is often not appropriate for these groups. While individual members may choose not to

gossip about each other's personal concerns, there is no reason to practice confidentiality about the skills or tasks of the groups unless the purpose of the group is such that matters of security, client confidentiality, or competitive edge demand silence.

### Skill-Building Groups



Let us address Skill-Building Groups specifically. Here we need some different ground rules from the ones used in Sharing and Support Groups.

Should we use "All opinions and beliefs are honored?" Skill building classes are usually not thought of as a place for people to examine their values. Values, nevertheless, are an important part of and underlie skill building.

**Skills are not  
about clarifying values:  
skills promote values.**

The selection of skills to be taught or learned is based upon the assumption that teacher and learner share some set of common beliefs. For example:

In a Trade School the common belief is that the student needs specific skills to hold a job.

Colleges are based on the belief that the professional skills, the thinking skills, and the extended knowledge of one or more cultural backgrounds will help the student hold a job and/or lead a personally fulfilled and productive life.

On the job training is based on the assumption that the specific skills and knowledge to fulfill the job description are best learned on site.

Manners training for young children is based on group values. All human beings deserve to be taught the skills training that will help them function smoothly and easily in their own group/culture. If children learn to do these skills automatically, they will have extra energy for being creative and for thinking about current reality and later even for deciding if their now automatic manners should be practiced or altered to fit the current situation.

Teaching self-care to a child who has a chronic illness such as diabetes is based on the belief that the child deserves to know all of the information others have discovered in order to help her care for herself.

All of these kinds of skill trainings have been devised so students can learn from people who have learned before them, so each learner will not have to re-invent the wheel. Part of the job of teachers is to help students

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## Four Types of Groups *continued*

sort facts from opinions, and commonly held standards from personal preference. The student's job is to learn new facts and values.

Will the Ground Rule "All opinions honored" fit for these skill-building activities? The humanitarian teacher will treat the student and his opinions with respect, but will stay with the job of helping the student sort fact from opinion. Using the Ground Rule "All opinions honored" could heighten the confusion of the learner who resists unpleasant facts by attributing them to the realm of the leader's opinion. Using the Ground Rule "Separate opinion from fact" or "Test all opinions against facts and standards" will give a more productive foundation for the job of learning and integrating new facts and skills.

A basic set of Ground Rules for Skill-Building Groups could be stated:

1. Everyone participates in learning concepts, processes and standards.
2. All opinions listened to with respect.
3. Separate opinions from facts.
4. Honor time and completion commitments.
5. Observe safety and care of equipment rules.

### Task Groups



Do Task Group rules differ from the ones used in Skill-Building? Not much. There may be a difference in the approach to values. People who agree to do a task, especially if it is for pay, are sometimes required to do something that does not fit with their own values. In that case they have to decide whether to:

- set aside their own values and do the task as described or
- attempt to change the situation or
- quit.

The Ground Rules for a Task Group might read:

1. Each person responsible for own part of the task.
2. All suggestions listened to and considered.
3. Meet the standards.
4. Honor time and completion commitments.
5. Observe safety and care of equipment rules.

Of course, these rules could be written in the vernacular of a particular group. One group stated them:

1. Pull your own weight and help your buddy.
2. No put-downs.
3. Do the job according to the manual.
4. Beat the clock.
5. Follow the O.S.H.A. rules, even the stupid ones.

### Suggested Activity

Think of a skill-building or task group you might lead. Rewrite the rules in the vernacular of that group. Decide how you could invite group members to choose their own wording.

### Planning Groups



The members of Planning Groups meet to plan for the future. They can plan anything from one event for a single individual to the next thirty years for a nation. You may be familiar with these groups as boards, task forces, or committees.

Planning Group Ground Rules will include consequences for commitments not completed on time, methods for evaluating suggestions, and respectful listening to opinions.

Ground Rules for these groups will vary.

One group might use:

- Start and stop on time.

Another might use:

- Start on time and work till the job is finished.

One group might use:

- Majority vote of members present necessary for each decision.

Another might use:

- Quorum required to pass any major decision.

Still another might use:

- Achieve consensus on major issues if possible. 75% of member agreement necessary.

### Suggested Activity

Think of a Planning Group you belong to or you would like to be part of. Write the Ground Rules you would like that group to use.

### Mixed Groups



As time passes some groups move from one category to another. A group on "The Power of the Media" could raise awareness of current media practices, share responses to different media approaches, learn how to design a media presentation, and plan ways to use media for a specific purpose. Such a group would have moved through all four categories.

Other groups will fall into two or three categories at the same time. This is usual in self-help or growth groups.

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# *Ground Rules*

- ♥ Everyone Participates
  - ♥ Right to Pass
  - ♥ All Beliefs Are Honored
  - ♥ Mutual Respect
  - ♥ Confidentiality
  - ♥ No Side Conversations
-



# Ground Rules

- ▲ Everyone Participates
- ▲ All Opinions Listened to With Respect
- ▲ Separate Opinions from Facts
- ▲ Honor Time and Completion  
Commitments
- ▲ Observe Safety and Care of Equipment  
Rules



# Ground Rules

- ★ Each Person Responsible
- ★ Listen to All Suggestions
- ★ Meet the Standards
- ★ Honor Time and Completion Commitments
- ★ Observe Safety and Care of Equipment Rules





# **SUGGESTED ACTIVITY**

## **What to Do When Someone Breaks a Ground Rule**

When a member of a support group that had agreed upon a confidentiality Ground Rule broke confidentiality in a very hurtful way, Carole Gesme developed this activity. You could adapt it as one way of dealing with a break of any Ground Rule.

Tell the group that a Ground Rule has been broken, which rule was broken, and that the group will now deal with that break and make some decisions about this Ground Rule in the future.

1. Hand each person a copy of the Feeling Faces Board (master included).
2. Ask each person to point to the face or faces that show how it is for her when the Ground Rules are followed.
3. Ask each person to tell one reason why that face expresses how it is for her when the Ground Rules are followed.
4. Ask each person to point to the face or faces that show how it was for her when this Ground Rule was broken.

5. Ask each person to tell one reason why that face expresses how she felt when the ground rule was broken. Remind her to say, "I felt" rather than "You made me feel." For example: "This was the first time I have shared in the group. When you told outside of the group I felt angry."
6. Ask each person to tell what she needs now in order to feel safe in the group again.
7. Ask each person, one at a time, if she is willing to follow the ground rule of confidentiality in the future.
8. Re-negotiate the ground rules in the way that seems appropriate for your particular group. For example: "We've all agreed to observe the ground rules so we will continue using them as they are stated." Or "You have heard that one person does not plan to observe the confidentiality ground rule so keep that in mind when you choose what to reveal about your self." Or "Do we need to add another ground rule to give us further protection and safety?"

**The use of Ground Rules builds self-esteem by honoring everyone's rights.**

### **Opening Activity that focuses on Ground Rules** ♥

Hand out name tags.  
Ask each person to:

- Choose a partner.
- Make a name tag for him.
- Ask him to think about a time he joined a new group.
- Ask him how he learned or figured out what the rules of the group were.
- Introduce your partner and tell one way he learned about the rules if he is willing for you to share that information.

### **Closing Activity that honors how people use Ground Rules** ♥

At the end of the meeting, briefly review the activities of the meeting.

- Ask several people to share how this meeting would have been different for them if the Ground Rules had not been stated and posted.
- Ask for Resentments. Listen to resentments, do not defend or explain.
- Ask for Appreciations.
- Say, "Thank you, this meeting is closed."

### Suggested Format for Group Meetings

Place \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Time \_\_\_\_\_

Person in Charge \_\_\_\_\_

#### **Program:**

- Opening activity that offers everyone a positive personal message
- Ground rules
- Celebrate wins and share problems
- Ask 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

## Facilitator Training Workshops



**March 26 - 30**  
**Calgary, Alberta**

**June 18 - 22**  
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**A week-long workshop for people who want to...**

- Facilitate the **Self-Esteem: A Family Affair** parenting model.
- Improve group leadership skills for working with growth, education, or support groups.
- Receive advanced training in the use of Transactional Analysis in educational settings.
- Practice ways of inviting people to "be."

**Led by Jean Illsley Clarke**  
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