



NEWSLETTER for NURTURING SUPPORT GROUPS

sept.-oct., 1979
volume 1

Welcome to the first issue of **WE**, a newsletter for and about groups of people who get together for the purpose of giving each other personal support.

This issue contains:

- a suggested format for group meetings
- Sally Dierk's thoughts on why it is important for each group meeting to have some pre-agreed task, such as practicing skills, new learnings or play
- Sheila Hartmann's explanation of how to use a Suggestion Circle
- Betty Beach's information about Mothers, Fathers and Others Support Groups in the Minneapolis and St. Paul area
- my thoughts on Resentments and Appreciations, and
- Judee Hansord's information on how you can order this newsletter

Future issues will include suggested activities, and more ideas about why the various parts of this format are helpful.

I have been active in support groups for over three years and the suggestions in this issue come from the experiences in those groups. If you have ideas about how to make this newsletter more useful for yourself or if you want your ideas included in the newsletter, write to Judee Hansord or me. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Jean Illsley Clarke

Jean Illsley Clarke, Editor

The Mothers, Fathers and Others Facilitator Support Group has been in existence for three years. The members made a list of what they got and gave to their support group:

- People care for me and I for them. • I feel needed and important here. • Trust. • Straightness. • Respect for everyone's attitudes. • That it exists and is here for me is most important for me. • I offer new learnings. • I don't have to play "Lone Ranger" any longer. • It is ongoing and I help set goals and expectations. • Closeness is allowed

here—we protect each other. • I get positive reinforcement for behavior changes. • I can be myself. • I get good stuff when I'm feeling down. (I thought I was the only one who had difficulty coping.) • I get praise for my wins. • I get energy. • I have fun here.

If you are starting a support group or are a member of an existing support group you can use this list to help you. Star the items that are important to you. Cross out the items that are not important to you. Rewrite the items that are almost what you want. Compare your list with the lists of other members in your group to help you set your goals.

Start your group, improve the quality of support, think about what you want, be creative, have fun, and get the support you deserve.



How to Use A

SUGGESTION CIRCLE

by Sheila Hartmann



Often when groups of people gather, one person brings up a problem and gets others to try to solve it. Then the person explains why the offered solution couldn't possibly work or how s/he has already tried it and it was a disaster. One way a support group can keep itself healthy, nurturing and clear thinking is to offer the person with a problem the Suggestion Circle.

The Suggestion Circle is a method of problem solving that gives support to a person with a problem, shares suggestions without putting anyone's ideas down, stimulates thinking, and encourages people to take responsibility for their own problems.

Here's how it works:

1. State the problem clearly.
2. Go quickly around the circle, each person either tells one possible way to solve the problem or passes.
3. The person with the problem listens to each answer and does not say anything except thank you. (not "that was a good answer" and "that was a poor one".)
4. The person considers the answers and uses them in the way that fits for him/her.

When I, as a support group facilitator, use the Suggestion Circle it is very important for me to set the standards. By setting standards and following them, the Suggestion Circle remains an efficient and powerful tool.

The standards I keep in mind are:

1. Review how the Suggestion Circle works each time before it is run.
2. Remind the person who is receiving the suggestions to state the problem in one sentence. Complex problems need to be broken down into simple components. Also, since the statement of the problem is to be in one sentence, it is important not to go into all of the details. Rambling details lead to confusion and a good leader needs to learn the art of interruption. I am often surprised and always pleased to realize just how little explanation is needed for others to offer quality suggestions. In order to concentrate on listening, the person who is receiving the suggestions may ask another participant in the group to write them down.
3. Ask the person offering the quality suggestion to stick to one or two sentences (I think you should . . . or what I would do is . . .). Lengthy details and descriptions are not necessary; they are not part of good problem solving. Remember that this is not brainstorming, but is to collect the "best" quality idea from each person in the room. For

those with the same offering as one already given, or with no suggestion, an "I pass", or "My suggestion has already been given" is encouraged.

4. Neither the facilitator nor the person receiving the suggestions may say anything except "thank you". Judgment is left until the listener is **at home**. If the facilitator were to jump up and down for a "good" answer and look disgusted at a "poor" response it might change the offerings of the other participants.
5. The facilitator is responsible for setting the pace of the Suggestion Circle. If it is moving too slowly s/he can stand up and increase the tempo by moving from person to person, or by calling the participants by name as the circle progresses.
6. When the suggestions have been given the facilitator reminds the suggestions receiver that it is her/his job to take all the suggestions home and decide what will work.
7. After thanking both the problem giver and other participants the Suggestions Circle is finished—a group of twelve takes from 3 to 5 minutes.

Remind your Support Group that anyone can ask for a Suggestion Circle at any time.

When discussion hasn't helped, the Suggestion Circle is an efficient and powerful learning method that invites participants to take responsibility for both their problems and the solution.

Why It Is Important For Each Group Meeting To Have a TASK

by Sally Dierks

I can remember going to neighborhood coffee parties (which were supposed to be fun) where the women in the block got together to explore new desserts and support each other. What happened was we explored new desserts and ended up talking about how "awful" things were, and I was ignored. If I talked about how great the raspberries were, the conversation changed to how awful picking the berries was.

My husband said the "guys" at work talked about how much weekend work they got done on the yard, the great fertilizer and weed kill they found, the super job they did getting their kid up on water skis and what great mileage they got from their cars. Neither of us was getting the kind of personal support we wanted and hoped to get.

When I went to the neighborhood coffee party I assumed my presence was enough. I believed that being there was all there was to it. I was lamenting to some friends the fact that in my neighborhood group, I was not getting the support I wanted. Six friends and I decided to form a group and get and give the type of support we

wanted. We started by "brainstorming" ideas of what we wanted to keep and discarding the items we did not like. We discovered many words such as "support, care, nurturing, acceptance, and be myself". How were we going to "show" those words? We decided that to give "support" we needed a task.

- A task gives direction to the group and provides comforting time structure.
- A task helps keep the members aware of the purpose of the group.
- A task helps avoid coffee party, water cooler shallowness.

How your group does this depends upon the interests and common goals you share. Whether your tasks are thoughtful ones like "Different ways to better the quality of family physical touching" to "How to say 'No'" or playful ones like roller skating or a picnic, the task is a vehicle for support, discussions, practice, problem solving and fun.

♥ APPRECIATIONS and RESENTMENTS

Why Say Them & How To Lead Them
by Jean Clarke

I believe it is important to ask for Resentments and Appreciations at the end of each meeting. This is a quick, open way to say "Everyone is important and both negative and positive feedback about this meeting are OK". When you lead the Resentments and Appreciations, say "Will you share your Resentments and Appreciations and take responsibility for them?"

Encourage people to take responsibility for their own feelings. They can say, "I feel angry" rather than "Mary made me feel angry". "Thank you for the help you offered; I feel good now" is more personally responsible than "You all made me feel so good!"



When I have closed meetings with Resentments and Appreciations I have received appreciations that I didn't expect. I have expressed appreciations that I might have forgotten to share. And the resentments have been fascinating. In some groups it is weeks before anyone dares to breathe one. In other groups people express negative feelings after the first meeting.

When you are leading the group encourage people not to justify their resentments. Don't promise to do anything about these resentments and appreciations except to listen; don't defend, just listen! Sometimes there is a big resentment which people can't do anything about at the time, but the sharing seems to reduce the tensions about it. As a leader, don't expect personal appreciation—if you get huge amounts of it, you may have been inviting it or signaling that you expect it. People are sometimes more free to express both Resentments and Appreciations after trust has been established and they have become a cohesive group.



further information about support groups

Self Esteem: A Family Affair by Jean Illsley Clarke, published by Winston Press has a chapter entitled "The Care and Feeding of Support Groups, or If You Haven't Got a Good One, Start Building". A variety of different kinds of support groups are described. Several Support Groups in the Twin City area have formed from parenting classes called Mothers, Fathers and Others Who Care About Children. If you have taken one of these classes and want to start an ongoing support group or get ideas for one you are now in, or want to get in touch with one that is already functioning, call Betty Beach at 473-7291, or write to her at 625 Queensland Lane, Wayzata, MN 55391.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITY

Each person think "What was the most important thing in my life when I was 16?"

In turn they tell the group what the most important thing was in their lives and how thinking about that helps them understand and nurture 16 year old people.

OPENING ACTIVITY THAT OFFERS EVERYONE A POSITIVE PERSONAL MESSAGE

Ask people to find a partner and each tell the other person: "One thing that I enjoy about you is . . ."

CLOSING ACTIVITY THAT OFFERS EVERYONE A POSITIVE PERSONAL MESSAGE

Ask each person to go quickly to four other people and say, "I'm glad that you are here today". They may add a because or not add one, whichever they want.

Suggested Format for Group meetings

WE Support Group meeting:

Place _____

Date _____ time _____

Person in charge _____

Program:

- ★ Opening Activity that offers everyone a positive personal message
- ★ Celebrating wins and sharing problems
- ★ Practice skills, new learnings, play
- ★ Suggestion Circle
- ★ Plan the next meeting
- ★ Resentments and Appreciations
- ★ Closing Activity that offers everyone a positive personal message.

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- Suggested activities
- Thoughts on theory and purpose of support groups
- News from other support groups

WE

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newsletter for nurturing support groups