

NEWSLETTER for NURTURING SUPPORT GROUPS

november-december 1979
volume 1 number 2

Welcome to the second 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
- suggested activities for a group meeting
- Sally Dierk's thoughts on why some new people stay with a group and others leave
- Sheila Hartmann's description of a Suggestion Circle on How to Get Group Members to Do Their Share
- Further reading about support groups
- How to use Resentments as a positive force in the group
- Judee Hansord's information on how you can order this newsletter.

I appreciate the positive response to the first issue of **WE**. Three readers have already sent ideas for future issues. Thank you! Elaine Born's is printed below and the other two will be included in future issues. Let us know about your successes and ways you turn set-backs around.

Sincerely,

Jean Illsley Clarke

Jean Illsley Clarke, Editor

*Q. How do I get what I want even when
I don't know what it is?
by Elaine Born*

A. During a time of personal tragedy, crisis, or low self-esteem (and we all experience it from time to time), we may come to our support group meeting not really knowing what we want or need from the others there. We are aware that we need and want something (desperately, even) but can't seem to verbalize specifically just what that something is. We may be a bundle of feelings and just have trouble THINKING. Or, we could be sitting on our feelings, covering them up in order to participate or to help keep the agenda flowing smoothly.

At such a time it is important to remember that our needs are **IMPORTANT**, even though we may not know what they are. We do not have to know for sure what we want or need in order to get support. We do not have to know what to ask for. We do not have to have it all together to get what we want.

One way of taking care of ourselves at a time like this is to remember that each one of us in the group counts, and that each one of us cares. Then, we can be aware of what we are feeling. We can share our pain, if we choose, by a simple "I'm hurting and I can't even tell you why." Or, "I need something from you but I don't know what." Thus, the lines of communication are open, inviting the support we need. People may say, "I care about you. Sit by me," or "When you know what you need, let me know." Sometimes, just knowing that we have been heard is supportive. And sometimes, just **BEING THERE** is all we need.

Remember, we help maintain our Support Group by asking **WHEN** we need, not by waiting until we can state perfectly **WHAT** we need.



You are facilitating this meeting of your Support Group. The meeting has begun. You've gone over the format for today. You've done the opening activity and now P. has asked for help with a problem. You offer a Suggestion Circle (Vol. 1, pg. 2).

A Suggestion Circle is a way of inviting people to take responsibility for their problem as well as for the solution. Remind people to:

1. State the problem clearly in one sentence.
2. Go quickly around the group. Each person offers one quality suggestion or passes.
3. The person with the problem listens and says nothing except thank you (no judgment, no "I tried that").
4. The person with the problem considers the suggestions and uses them in a way that fits for him/her.

P. agrees to listen to a Suggestion Circle and states the problem: I belong to a group where we are supposed to share responsibilities and I am doing all the work. I need suggestions on how to get other people to help.

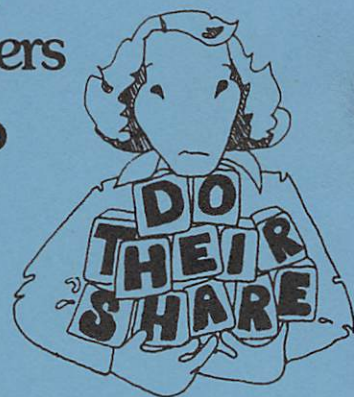
Facilitator says: "Thank you P. Does everyone understand what P. is asking? (Pause) Will you take a few seconds and think about the problem and the quality suggestion you have to offer? Remember you have the right to pass." When you offer suggestions state them simply. Remember that your quality suggestion is for the person with the problem. Offer something they can do, "You could . . ." not your feeling, "I would be mad." Facilitator continues, "P. do you want someone to write the suggestions down for you? Will you ask someone? Now please state your problem once more and then we will go around the group and collect suggestions."

P. "How can I get other people in my group to share responsibility?"

Facilitator says "Ok, who is ready to begin and offer a suggestion to P.?"

- S. My suggestion is that you tell the other members of the group what help you need and see who volunteers.
- P. Thank you.
- J. You could tell the others that if they don't help you'll quit!
- P. Thanks.
- W. Ask them to chip in and hire someone to run the group. Then you can attend as a regular member.
- P. Thanks.
- R. Pass.
- D. You might try writing all the jobs that need to be done on slips of paper and ask people to draw a job out of a hat.

how can I get group members to



- P. Thanks, D.
- B. I pass.
- A. Use humor! Banner them, draw some cartoons, wear a sign or a button saying "Despair, despair!" Ask each person to contribute \$25.00 to hire an efficiency expert to come in and fix the group.
- P. Thank you.
- L. Think if there are things you are doing to keep it the way it is.
- J. P., you could ask for help. List the jobs to be done on a sheet of paper, pass the sheet for people to sign up. If there are jobs not taken, ask the group what is to be done. It is a group problem.
- P. Thanks.
- M. My suggestion is like J's. Pass.
- P. Thanks, M.
- C. Think about the task and size of the group. Maybe you need to recruit more people.
- P. Thank you.
- S. Ask people to think about the purpose of the group and if they really want the group to continue. Maybe it is time to disband the group.
- P. Thank you.
- K. P., you should talk to the group. Let them know what you're thinking.
- P. Thank you.

Facilitator—thank you all for your suggestions. P., you're a smart person. I trust you to take the suggestions you heard and that S. wrote for you and decide what will work for you. Next meeting, if you're willing, you can tell us what you did about this problem. Remember, anyone can ask for a Suggestion Circle at any time.

by Sheila Hartmann

♥ APPRECIATIONS and RESENTMENTS by Jean Clarke

Allowing time for Resentments and Appreciations (See Volume 1, page 3) at the end of each meeting helps groups keep the air clear. It is important to remember that when a resentment is stated, it is to be heard and not responded to verbally. No explaining, no defending. If I can do something about a resentment and I want to do it, I will.

I don't need to give an explanation of how or why. I can say, "Thank you for bringing that to my attention." Answering a resentment with a resentment will sabotage the process. Glenn says, "I resent that you pushed your ideas on Jim, Bill." Bill says, "I resent that you resent that." Whoah! The leader can ask Glenn to rephrase his resentment, taking responsibility for his own feelings. Maybe, "I resent it when people push ideas so hard that I feel backed into a corner." And the leader should definitely remind Bill that resentments are not to be answered. Invite people to listen to the resentments and decide if there is a kernel of truth in it and whether or not they want to do something about that kernel. Resentment and Appreciation time is not a time for attack and counter-attack! If people want to play "My Resentment is Bigger Than Your Resentment," they should find another time and place to do that.

It is a time for expressing feelings and collecting data about other people's feelings.



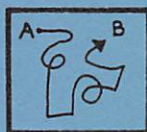


IS THIS GROUP FOR ME?

by Sally Dierks

"Julie is new in our group and I like her. I wonder if she will stay in our support group. Every so often someone joins, like Julie, enthusiastic and fun, stays a few weeks and then doesn't come back. I wonder if we didn't do something that we should have done to keep her. I wonder what did happen?"

The joining and leaving of groups is a normal, healthy process. People who become part of a group go through several stages ending with acceptance of the people in the group and the general goals of the group.



ARE THE GOALS OF THIS GROUP THE SAME AS MINE?

When John joined a support group he ignored the fact that all the other men in the group were over fifteen years younger than he, just starting to raise a family and interested in the local school activities—this year a Christmas bazaar. John's children are all away at college and school bazaars do not interest him any longer. John was accepted by the group, did get support there, and liked the people, but something was wrong. He did not feel the support he wanted from the meetings. John went to three meetings and then no more, leaving in the middle of the first stage of group adjustment, stage one where obvious similarities and wants are identified, accepted or rejected.



WHY AM I SO ANGRY?

Jan joined the group at the same time as John. Jan had more in common with the group: her children are in grade school, she likes talking about new ideas in parenting and she enjoys working on bazaar projects. Jan feels close to the people in this group, has similar goals and likes going to the meetings; although sometimes she gets angry at the people, especially a couple of the women, and some of their ideas on parenting. Jan has been angry more often than not the last two weeks. Jan is probably in stage two. She is angry at the group for not being all she had hoped it would be.



LET'S BARGAIN

Barb has been in the group a few weeks longer, is creative, energetic, and supportive of new ideas. Sometimes it seems apparent that she wants change for the sake of change. Being a determined person, Barb is pushing and pushing. This is the stage of bargaining. Jan is attempting to get the group to change to meet her expectations and wants, to get the group to fit her expected way of thinking and behaving.

John did not stay in the group. His leaving does not mean he does not want to belong to a group or that this particular group is not OK. It means that the support John wanted and the reality of the group did not mesh. Jan's goals match this group. She intends to stay, but will probably test her power, see if she can change the group, in some way before she accepts the group as "hers".

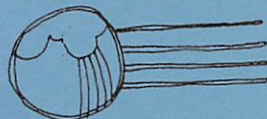


LET'S COOPERATE

Barb has decided to stay with the group and be less pushy. She sees that people will change somewhat to accommodate her, but she has given up the dream of a magical group, able to provide everything. She now sees the group as a place to get and give support with people she likes and wants to be with.

Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, in her book **On Death and Dying**, identified the steps in accepting death. In a sense, when people join any new group they experience the death of a dream, a dream of a place where "it will be exactly the way I want it to be." Only when they have moved through the steps of giving up their dreams and coming to terms with the reality of the group can they become full functional members.

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further information about SUPPORT GROUPS

"Making Change, a Guide to Effectiveness in Groups" by Eileen Guthrie and Warren Sam Miller, published by Interpersonal Communication Programs, Inc., 300 Clifton Avenue, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 55403.

Chapter four, "Taking Care of Yourself: Your Support Group", has thoughts on how to collect a support group, how to build one, rules for relationships, notes on the helps of being honest with yourself, and suggestions on how to ask for what you want. This helpful chapter is especially directed toward "process politicians", people who actively create community changes, but the concepts apply to anyone who wants to improve the quality of his or her life support.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITY



Each person make a collage titled, "WAYS I AM OR WILL BE A WINNER." Materials needed: newspapers, old magazines and catalogs, glue. Scissors are optional, tearing is fine. Ask people to flip quickly through two or three magazines and catalogs and, without thinking about it, tear out pages that strike a chord or catch their eye or feel important. When they feel or think they have selected enough, ask them to spread the pictures out on a newspaper, allowing the pictures to arrange themselves. Glue the pictures in place. Anyone who wants to tell the group why some of the things represented in the collage have special meaning may do so.

OPENING ACTIVITY THAT OFFERS EVERYONE A POSITIVE PERSONAL MESSAGE. Ask people to interview a partner; find out what that person is proud of having learned how to do during the past year.

CLOSING ACTIVITY THAT OFFERS EVERYONE A POSITIVE PERSONAL MESSAGE. Ask "Will each of you go quickly to three other people and tell each one something you appreciate about that person today?"

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Published by Judee Hansord
Marnie Lilja

Layout Design by Maren H. Lilja and Marnie Lilja

\$15.00 per year (6 issues)

WE

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Plymouth, MN 55447

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

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