

newsletter for nurturing support groups

january-february 1981
volume 2, number 3

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

Please accept my apology for the very sparse content in the last issue, Volume 2, Number 3. I turned in the copy for the issue just before I left for China. Somehow, the Suggested Activities (WINNERS FOCUS) by me and LIFE IS FOR CELEBRATING by Annette Pattie got lost in transit. Therefore, we have printed them in this issue. In addition, this issue includes:

- a suggested format for group meetings
- suggested activities for group meetings
- news about support groups
- when to use a Suggestion Circle and when to use a Brain Storm session
- ideas about Ground Rules from *Self Esteem: A Family Affair* by Jean Illsley Clarke
- news about an Alanon Support Group by Jean Wagener
- support for a young mother in China

Sincerely, Jean Illsley Clarke, Editor

Jean Illsley Clarke

**LIFE IS FOR
CELEBRATING!**
by Annette Pattie

SUGGESTED ACTIVITY

The purpose of this activity is to offer people ways to CELEBRATE their lives and to give them permission to do so. It is based on the belief that each person is important and deserves to be happy, to feel lovable and capable.

Place 3 signs on the floor, CELEBRATING at one end of the room, SURVIVING in the middle and SUFFERING at the opposite end.

Walk along an imaginary line from CELEBRATING to SURVIVING to SUFFERING while saying, "Fantasize that this is your life line".

Stand by the CELEBRATING sign. "This end is CELEBRATING. You believe you are lovable and capable and you are excited about living".

Walk to SURVIVING sign. "Here you are surviving life, just going along from day to day".

Walk to SUFFERING sign. "At this end you spend much of your time suffering. You often feel unhappy, sad or mad."

"Recognizing that people move back and forth along the line over a period of time, where do you most often spend your life?"

"Will you place yourself somewhere on the line that feels right to you? Maybe it's somewhere between two signs".

Remind people of their right to pass or suggest they might prefer marking their positions on a piece of paper.

After people place themselves on the line, say, "Look where you are. Think about something you can change in your life in order to CELEBRATE life more". "Close your eyes. Visualize that change as if you already have it". "Open your eyes".

Invite each person to share their change and to symbolize taking one giant step towards CELEBRATION, by actually taking a big step and telling what they plan to Celebrate. If some prefer not to share, invite them to take a silent giant step anyway.

Pass out paper circles that say, "Your needs are important," or "You deserve to Celebrate Life," or "You don't have to suffer to get what you need." Invite people to keep their circles, or to exchange them until they get one they want.



on a street in Hangzhou, People's Republic of China

The young woman moved the wet cloth quickly across her baby's face and the tiny girl scrunched her nose in protest. Lunch over, the young mother arranged the baby in a chair just inside of the door and busied herself washing dishes.

I sat in a tour bus directly across the street from the open door of the home. I had left a crowded department store and returned to the bus to snatch a few quiet moments to think about this overwhelming experience, this crowded China. The American tour guide had repeatedly warned us not to compare China with America but to be fully here and to see and to hear whatever we could; therefore, I took permission from the open, curious, friendly way the Chinese stared directly at me to stare back. I never did have the courage to look directly into a home as we walked past the open doors on the street, but several yards away, behind the glass of the bus window, I allowed myself to watch this family scene directly. After all, this was why I had come to China, not to buy tea or silk, but to know as much as I could about the people.

The houses are small, and many of them open directly onto the street. The families extend their living space onto the sidewalk, about six feet wide in this case, and I had observed people cooking, cutting children's hair, brushing teeth, washing clothes, cooking, eating and building furniture using the space and light directly in front of their homes without apparent concern for the sometimes few but frequently multitudes of people who passed their doorsteps.

I stared intently. It was easy to tell that the infant was a girl. The Chinese children reminded me of Easter eggs, wel- spots of brilliant color in a mostly drab world. This child, I judged her to be about six months old, had a bit of black hair spiked straight up by a red ribbon and dainty ruffles on her lime green sweater.

I watched the young mother moving quickly about her house- work and wondered what kind of support she had. Most of the many children I saw were being cared for by a grandparent, usually the grandmother. Frequently I talked with a Daddy taking his child for an outing on his day off, but here was a young mother at home, caring for her baby as I had done with mine. I glanced at my watch, wondering how long the child would be content to sit without attention. I looked back. Two middle aged women, talking as they walked, paused briefly to speak to the child. That doorway, I thought, may be a window on the world. I watched and waited. A grandpa walked slowly along, stopped, spoke at length to the child, greeted the mother briefly, and went on. Before long a young boy of about eight came scampering down the street. He stopped and called out to the baby, she responded by wrinkling up her face at him and swinging her arm about. The mother glanced up but went on with her work. The boy moved on and the street was briefly quiet. A young woman approached from the other direction, stopped and spoke affectionately to the baby. The mother dried her hands, picked up the baby and leaned against the door jam to chat.

The tour leader counted passengers. The driver hit the horn and my bus rolled forward. I checked my watch. Twelve minutes had passed since I had first wondered what kind of support that young mother got. I pondered my own lack of knowledge about street life, my own prejudice in favor of lots of privacy, my choice of a deep lawn and my need for lots of space. I thought about the richness of human contact that child had experienced just w I watched and I wondered if that young mother took for granted the support she was getting through her open door. I asked the guides if they had support groups and they said, almost patiently, "Of course. We talk."

Suggestion Circle vs. Brain Storm



What is the difference between a Brain Storm session and a Suggestion Circle, and how do you decide which to use? When people use the Brain Storm technique they give as many ideas about the topic as they can think of without voicing any judgments about the quality of the ideas. They search for creative, new, far out, obscure, even crazy ideas. They spin off of each other's ideas. After they have collected a sufficient number of ideas, the group usually evaluates the quality of the ideas.

When people use a Suggestion Circle, each member gives his or her best quality suggestion and the person who asked for the circle listens to each without indicating acceptance or rejection of any one, takes the ideas home and decides which one to use. (See specific instructions for how to run a Suggestion Circle in Volume 1, Issue 1.)

I use a Suggestion Circle when the person asking for help seems to be asking for people's experience or wisdom. I use Brain Storming when the person asking for help seems to be asking for a wide variety of creative, horizon-expanding options.

NEWS ABOUT SUPPORT GROUPS

by Jean Wagener

I have just gotten back to my Alanon Support group. I am so excited about it. What makes it work for me? I think companionship and the fellowship that we have there. The sharing of ideas and ways of life are important to me. We build community by meeting with people from our geographic area and then we accept and nurture each other. We use the 12 steps and we support each other on each step.



Distribute large sheets of paper and felt pens or crayons. Ask each person to make a "FUN LIST." Items to be listed on a FUN LIST include things I do that are fun, things that I used to do that are fun, and things I think would be fun to do. Post the FUN LISTS all around the room and encourage people to read each other's lists and find someone to share fun with before the next meeting.

GROUND RULES

for support groups

by Jean I. Clarke

"Why didn't you tell me that you were angry during the meeting?" you ask. "Oh, people never get angry in that group. I thought it was better to skip it and tell you later," I reply. In this case, I am probably responding to a group rule or norm that has never been directly stated or talked about, but that is agreed upon by the group.

All groups have norms or rules about what is acceptable behavior in that particular group. Sometimes these norms are not talked about, but they do operate. One way that groups can have their ground rules work **for** them instead of **against** them is to discuss, agree upon and post their rules. The following section about Ground Rules is excerpted from the section, "Who, Me, Lead a Group?" in *Self Esteem: A Family Affair Leader Guide*, by Jean Illsley Clarke, Winston Press, March 1981.

The leader protects herself or himself and the group by negotiating ground rules and by setting the rules needed in order to provide a climate that is informal, respectful and collaborative.

Consistently used, ground rules can provide protection and permission for people to make their own decisions and to grow. Ground rules can also provide a framework for indirectness. The ground rules that I like to use when I am facilitating a group that is practicing new skills or behavior changes are:

1. everyone participates
2. everyone has a right to pass
3. everyone's opinion or belief is correct
4. no gossip
5. leader stays in a position of respect for self and others

These ground rules define people as having worth and protect them from getting put down for their mistakes while they learn.

Think about these ground rules and how you could use each to provide protection for people to grow.



1. The Full Participation ground rule, the assumption that everyone, including the leader, will mentally participate in each activity protects the participants from being asked to do something that the leader is not willing to do.

2. The Right to Pass protects each individual, including the leader, from having to speak out, from revealing himself when he isn't willing to do so.

3. Acceptance, the position that each person holds his attitudes, opinions and beliefs because they have helped him make sense out of life and therefore they have personal validity, affirms adults' ability to think and decide, and protects the group from the competitiveness of having to decide who is right or wrong when people disagree.

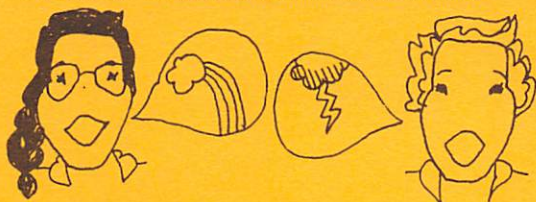
4. The fourth ground rule of Confidentiality or no gossip, provides protections for people to role play new behavior and then decide if they want to keep or to discard it. It also encourages people to solve problems they may have with the group within the group.

5. The fifth ground rule, the rule that the leader is expected to stay in a position of respect for self and others during the meetings protects the participants from criticism and protects the integrity of the leader. The leader is free to express his 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 is also important because it demands that the leader model respectful, accepting behavior for the group.

It does not assume that every behavior is OK, but that the needs of each person are OK. For example, the leader will not allow anyone to hurt someone else, but will respect the need for a way to express anger. The leader will not permit one person to dominate the group with constant talking and questions, but will respect the need for a way to express anger. 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.

Three of these ground rules, Full Participation, Right to Pass and Acceptance for everyone's beliefs are borrowed from the methods used in values clarification. If you have not been exposed to this large collection of activities designed to encourage people to clarify their own values for themselves, Sidney Simon's book, "Values Clarification," Hart Publishing Co., is a helpful one to start with.

RESENTMENTS and APPRECIATIONS



If you include a short time for Resentments and Appreciations at the close of each meeting you are providing a place for people to honor both their negative and positive feelings. That does not prohibit people from expressing both resentments and appreciations at other times during the meetings. If someone waits until Resentment time at the close of the meeting to share information that the group would have willingly responded to earlier, you may wish to announce at the beginning of the meeting that open expression of feelings, without putting down other people, is welcome anytime during the meeting and need not be saved until the close of the meeting.

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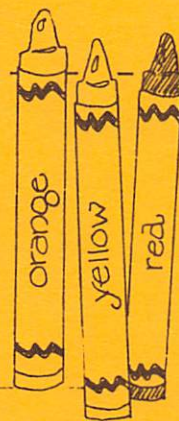
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WINNERS FOCUS

by Jean Illsley Clarke

This is an activity that helps people focus on ways that they display winning behavior. It also helps to focus on the fact that people who are winners do many positive things. Being a winner means being good at living. It does not need to mean "beating" other people.

1. Think about **WINNERS** as people who win at being human beings but who do not necessarily "beat" other people.
2. Make a list of things WINNERS do.
3. Think of three friends who are winners in different ways. Tell the people next to you in what ways these friends are winners. Add these items to the WINNERS list.
4. If you have not told these friends that you admire the ways in which they win you may want to make a phone call, send a card, send a telegram, tell them, write a letter, hire a sky writer. If you plan to tell a friend, share with your group how and when you will do that.
5. Close your eyes and think of three winning decisions you have made during the last two weeks.
6. Tell the people on either side of you about one or more of your wins. Is there someone else who would enjoy knowing about that win? Plan how and when to tell that person.
7. Ask the persons beside you to tell you a way in which they would like to be winners. Think of three different ways to encourage each person to be the winner he/she would like to be and tell them three ways.
8. Think of two times that you have invited or given permission or encouraged someone else to win. Tell about at least one of those times.

suggested format for group meetings

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 appreciation
- closing activity that offers everyone a positive personal message

♥ OPENING ACTIVITY THAT OFFERS EVERYONE A POSITIVE PERSONAL MESSAGE

by Jean Clarke

Ask each person to find a partner, make the partner a name tag, and interview the partner to find out two or three ways that person looks for helpful information when he or she has a difficult problem to solve. Ask people to introduce their partners and tell one way that person collects helpful information.

♥ CLOSING ACTIVITY THAT OFFERS EVERYONE A POSITIVE PERSONAL MESSAGE

Ask people to stand in a circle and then ask each person to share a celebration, some small aspect of daily life that is a pleasure. No once-in-a-lifetime celebrations this time, please. Today we are Celebrating the Usual.*

*If you want help with the process of identifying daily experiences to celebrate, I recommend Clyde Reid's *Celebrate the Temporary*, Harper and Row.

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WE

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

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