



newsletter for nurturing support groups

May-June 1981

Volume 2, Number 5

Welcome to the eleventh 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 includes:

- ground rules from a WE CARE group
- news from and about support groups
- ways Judy Listug uses Affirmations at home
- Jean Clarke's suggestions about Four Ways of Separating
- Carol Gesme and Jean Koski's ways to Celebrate
- a suggested format for group meetings
- suggested activities for group meetings

If you have topics that you would like covered in this newsletter, let us know.

Sincerely, Jean Illsley Clarke

Jean Illsley Clarke

Editor

suggested activity

Affirmations



An affirmation is anything we say or do to a person that invites that person to feel lovable and capable.

Hand out colored three by five cards. Ask each person to write his or her name on five cards. Put all of the cards on the table in the center of the group and ask people to write affirmations on each other's cards and on one of their own cards. Write quickly—go for spontaneous, positive statements.

After you have finished writing, give the cards to the correct person and read the affirmations to him or her.

Judy Listug did an affirmation exercise like this in her support group and decided to try one with her six year old daughter, Lori. She asked Lori to do Affirmations with her, and Lori agreed. They did the following exercise:

Mother told five things she likes about herself.

Daughter told five things she likes about herself.

Mother told five things she likes about her daughter.

Daughter told five things she likes about her mother.

Here is Lori's list:

1. You're like the wind—free and loose, not uptight or pushy!
2. You're like a candle—flaming and exciting!
3. You're like a light bulb—glowing, interesting!
4. You're like the sun—many colors and pretty!
5. You're like the dancing ballarina—talented, you can do anything you want to do.

Judy's comment: "Was that an esteem-building exercise!"

CELEBRATIONS

Spring is a great time to have a Support Group Celebration. Carol Gesme shared a Spring celebration which the individual support group members presented to her group. Each person brought a gift for the others which symbolized his/her new awareness or learning from the group. These are the gifts they brought:



- a small cactus about to bloom—a sign of new life
- a dove sticker—peace
- a chocolate bunny—a sign of new ability to celebrate life
- Chinese food—shared cultures
- a yellow flower tied with a green bow—sign of spring and growth
- a blue candle—the group lit up his life.

RESENTMENTS and APPRECIATIONS

The inclusion of Resentments and Appreciations at the close of each meeting helps to keep the group healthy in two ways: It encourages the good feelings that come from sharing positive thoughts and it provides a regular way for negative feelings or thoughts to be heard and perhaps acted upon while those issues are small. This helps to prevent the store up that can lead to a blow up. Ask for Resentments first, Appreciations last.

Four Ways of separating

by Jean Clarke

This is an activity that a group can do because someone is going to separate from the group, because someone in the group is going through some difficult separation, or because it is interesting to learn about separation.

We go through many separations throughout our lives. We separate from our families of origin, we separate from friends, lovers, jobs, organizations, clubs, groups, ideas, dreams, and from our own children.

Background:

Read or tell:

There are four general ways that late teen agers separate from their families. Many of us, without realizing that we do so, use the same process when we go through other separations in our lives. Sometimes we expect other people to separate the way we do. This exercise will give the opportunity to experience some alternative ways of separating and to consider whether we want to make any changes in the way we separate or in the ways we support other people's separations.

Post a poster or write on a board:

1. Leave
2. Out and Back
3. Stay
4. Ejected

Say: These are the four general ways teenagers use to separate from their families. Some people separate pleasantly or with excitement and anticipation. Other people act angry and as if the people they are separating from are dispicable, or disgusting or at least terribly boring.



The first way of separating, "Leave," is used by the child who leaves home in a calm way or in an angry way, is gone for some time (at school, at a job, in the armed services), and then comes home as an adult and functions as a responsible adult in the extended family. He or she may live at home as an adult or may live someplace else.

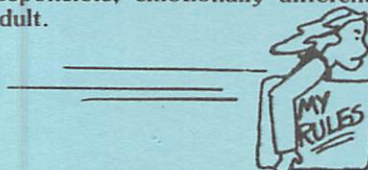


The second way of separating is "Out and Back." This child leaves home for awhile, then moves back home for a few months, then lives with friends for a few months, then moves back home again. This process of separation is

completed when the young person is living at home or someplace else and is functioning as an equal adult in the world, not as a financially or emotionally dependent child.



The third way of separating is to "Stay at Home," to grow up and function as a responsible adult in the family. This used to be very popular in America when we lived on big farms or took children into a family business. It is unpopular in some parts of the American culture now where it is viewed as unusual or as an inability to cut the apron strings. It is possible for the child to stay at home and become a financially responsible, emotionally differentiated adult.



Being "Ejected" by the family is the fourth way of separating. The child who chooses this way does whatever it takes to get the family to say, "Sorry, you can't live here and do that. You have to live somewhere else if you are going to act that way." So the child leaves; the separation is completed when the child has become a full, responsible adult in the community and is also functioning as a competent adult in the extended family.

Activity:

1. Hand each person a cardboard or paper frame with a number 1, 2, 3 or 4 written on the back.
2. Ask people to work in pairs, one person playing the adult role, and one playing the role of the separating teen ager. Make sure that the two people working together do not have the same number.
3. Ask each person to notice the number on his or her frame but not to tell his or her partner what that number is. Ask each person to think of the frame as a reminder that he or she is looking at the situation from his or her "frame" of reference about separating, and to pretend that the way of separating indicated by the number is the correct, the only real way that people should separate.
4. Say: The young person finishes high school or vocational school or a job that he/she held, while living at home, in June. It is the end of April

and the two of you are discussing summer plans. Young person, you look through your frame of reference and make your plans to separate in the way that is indicated by your number. Remember, that is the "right" way to separate as far as you are concerned. Adult, you look through your frame of reference and make your plans to help your child separate the way that is indicated by the number on your frame. Remember, for you that is the "right" way and you expect your child to do it that way.

5. Call the group back together after 5 to 8 minutes.
6. Remind people that it is the job of the late teen ager to separate, to become an independent person from and perhaps in his or her family of origin.



Ask the following discussion questions:

1. Will you share one thing you have learned from this exercise?
2. How many of you think that people may make separations difficult by wanting other people to separate in a certain way?
3. Did anyone notice that they have a favorite way of separating that they have used many times?
4. Did anyone notice that the adult might be having more difficulty with the idea of separation than the child was having?
5. Is there anything else that you want to share or discuss?

Say: Think about the statement, "It is hard to say Hello if you haven't said Goodbye. Before you can say hello to a grown up child you need to say goodbye to the idea of having a dependent child. Before you can say hello to a new dream, occupation, or relationship, you need to say goodbye to the old one if it is no longer possible or healthy."

Ask: If you agree with this statement, what messages or permissions do you need to help you make separations? People may want to write their messages on slips of paper and take them home, or have someone read them aloud.

**Kate Wedll of Onamia, Minnesota,
Mille Lacs Family Education writes:**

The first thing I did when I got home from a workshop about support groups was to organize a support group for the professionals in the helping fields.

We have met twice so far and have agreed to organize and conduct our meetings along the guidelines suggested in **WE**. We meet for one hour, get a lot accomplished, and everyone leaves feeling good! I have agreed to be responsible for the first four meetings; after that the group will start to rotate the responsibilities.

ANOTHER EXAMPLE OF GROUND RULES

The ground rules under which a group operates are important in establishing clear communications and a climate that is helpful to the people in the group.

Following is one version of the Ground Rules used by **WE CARE**, a support group for Single Parents. You can compare these to the Ground Rules your group uses and consider whether your group would be helped by using one of these rules.

WE CARE Ground Rules

1. Each member shares responsibility to make the group meaningful—to express discontents, suggestions.
2. We try to listen actively, to "tune in" to one another. We avoid interrupting and "hooking" the conversation back to ourselves.
3. We avoid side conversations.
4. Every member has a right to equal "air time."
5. We attempt to speak on an "I" level—personally instead of generalizing.
6. We avoid advice-giving; we share feelings and experiences. Each person is responsible for him or herself in the group.
7. The group is confidential.
8. We avoid judgements and attempt to accept individuals at what ever point they may be.
9. Each has the right to ask questions of others; others have the right to pass.

**from LaCrosse, Wisconsin
Karen Theil says:**

Our support group is two years old and going strong. We have had twenty five members at various times and have about fifteen steady members. When people leave the group they become alumnae and they are welcome to return at any time.

We follow the Support Group format from **WE** and it works well. Our group is mostly oriented toward current problem solving and stroking so we have about ten minutes each for opening and closing, about five minutes for new learnings (sometimes people report on something that they have read), and at every meeting we do Suggestion Circles and Four Parent Exercises.*

Every three months we do an evaluation. The last evaluation questionnaire revealed a problem with baby sitting arrangements, so a committee is working on that.

This group started out of some classes that I taught based on the book *Self Esteem: A Family Affair*. What I like about using the **WE** format is that it allows people to develop their own leadership skills and I can be an equal member of the group.

*The Four Parent Exercise is described in *Self Esteem: A Family Affair Leader Guide* by Jean Illsley Clarke, Winston-Press, 1981.

SUMMER FACILITATORS TRAINING WORKSHOP

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 groups

June 15-19 Led by Jean Illsley Clarke
at 16535 9th Ave. N., Plymouth, Minn. 55447
Write to her for details.

July 13-17 Led by Jean Illsley Clarke
in Seattle, Washington. For details write to:
Parent Education Associates
P.O. Box 15550
Seattle, Washington 98115

Celebrating Things In Common by Jean Koski



1. Hand each person a twelve inch length of multi colored yarn.
2. Ask each person to choose a partner and find three or more positive things that the two of them have in common.
3. Tie the two yarns together and move to join another couple.
4. Tell the other couple the three things you have in common, listen to the three things they have in common, and find two or more new things the four of you have in common.
5. Connect your yarns and move to join another group of four.
6. Tell the other four the two things you have in common and listen to the things they have in common. Find one new thing you all have in common.
7. Connect your yarns and continue to connect with other groups until everyone is in one group and everyone has at least one thing in common.
8. Stand in a circle holding the connected circle of yarn.
Sing a song that is meaningful to the group, or
Have a group hug, or
Give a circle back rub—each person turn to the left and rub the back of the person in front of you, or
Put the circle of yarn in the middle of the group to remind you of your similarities while you have the rest of the meeting, or
All of the above!

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

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____

Zip _____

Send check to: **WE**, 16535 9th Avenue N.,
Plymouth, MN 55447

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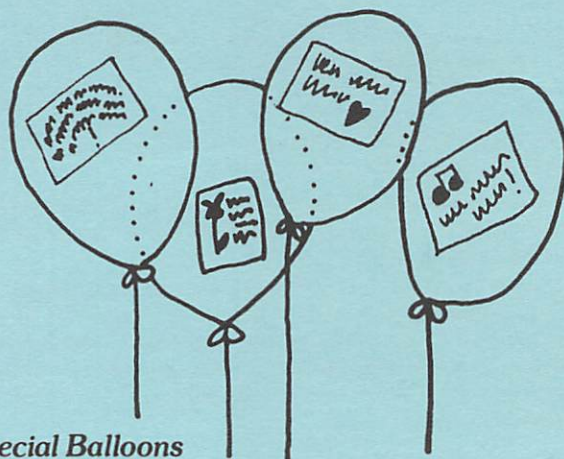
SUGGESTION CIRCLE

Q.: How can I invite people who sit back and away from the group to join our circle?

Suggestions:

1. Emphasize that all input is important and can make a difference.
2. Direct confrontation.
3. Eye contact and message; "I'm feeling uncomfortable when you sit out."
4. Watch reaction and pick up on something person perks up on.
5. Leave them alone and let them come in when they feel ready.
7. Sharing and giving out warm feelings so person will want to join in.
8. Change focus.
9. No laughing at or judgements—when they see others not laughed at they will be more comfortable.
10. Ask the reason person is staying out.
11. Smile, nod, gesture, non-verbal communications.

For other suggestions on this topic see Vol. 1, No. 4 **WE**. When you do a Suggestion Circle, the leader asks each person to give his or her best suggestion or to pass. The person who asked for the suggestions accepts them all with no verbal evaluations and then makes his or her own decisions about which ones to use.



Special Balloons

Give each person a balloon, a pencil and a small slip of paper with the name of a group member written on it. (Put the same name on every slip if you are celebrating a birthday or something special for that person; otherwise make a slip for each person in the group.) Ask each person to write an affirming message for the person named on the slip, then roll the slip up tight and put it inside of the balloon, blow up the balloon and tie it. When all of the balloons are blown, toss them up in the room. Ask each person to catch a balloon, break it, and deliver the message to the correct person.

♥ OPENING ACTIVITY THAT OFFERS EVERYONE A POSITIVE PERSONAL MESSAGE

Find a partner and make a name tag for that person. Find out from your partner one thing he/she did for fun this week, one way he/she solved a problem recently, and something he/she did to take care of someone else. Draw a picture of what he/she did for fun on the name tag. Introduce your partner to the whole group and tell one of the things he or she did.



♥ CLOSING ACTIVITY THAT OFFERS EVERYONE A POSITIVE PERSONAL MESSAGE

Ask each person to tell at least two other people: "One way I am going to improve myself this week is . . ." Ask the other person to give encouragement, to affirm our ability to change and to improve ourselves.

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
 - practice skills, new learnings, play
 - suggestion circle
 - plan the next meeting
 - resentments and appreciation
 - closing activity that offers everyone a positive personal message

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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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