

newsletter for nurturing support groups

September-October, 1981

Volume 3, Number 1

Welcome to the thirteenth 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:

- a suggested format for group meetings
- articles on how the format structure helps a support group, and
- How to use a check list to be sure that meeting activities involve Seeing, Hearing and Doing
- More about the importance of Ground Rules, by Jean Clarke
- A Review of **BIRTH ORDER THEORY** by Marnie Lilja Baehr
- and Suggested Activities for group meetings: F*I*V*E*Y*E*A*R*S*F*R*O*M*N*O*W*



BIRTH ORDER POSITION

A Book to Read Aloud, "The Tale of the Second Mother"

Affirmations for New and Old Family Members

Sincerely,

Jean Illsley Clarke

Jean Illsley Clarke
Editor

ground rules

an idea that is frequently found among the ground rules that various types of support groups use is the idea of *mutual respect*. The **WE CARE** ground rules state: "We avoid judgements and attempt to accept individuals at what ever point they may be." (Volume 2, Number 4) That implies that people may be in a happy or a sad frame of mind. It also suggests that people bring their total experience with them to the group. So does the ground rule, "Everyone's opinion or belief is honored." (Volume 2, Number 6)

Sometimes when people hear that ground rule for the first time they say, "But I do not agree with all of your opinions! In fact, I think some of them are wrong." Yes, indeed, you may not agree with all of my opinions. Our conversations would be rather boring if you did. But the ground rule is not about agreement, it is about respect.

Let us suppose that a group is discussing the advisability of hitting children for discipline purposes. One person has made a strong case against hitting. Several other people in the group agree and offer supporting arguments and examples. Then someone says, "Well, I was spanked when I was a child and I think I learned from it. I love my parents and I don't resent that they hit me."

Without the protective ground rule, the dissenting person might have remained quiet or an argument might have followed his statement. A group that is observing the "Everyone's opinion or belief is honored" ground rule will honor his dissenting opinion and may ask more questions about his feelings and reasons. The whole group can learn more from the discussions than they would have if they had heard only one point of view.

affirmations

for Family Members

This activity focuses on affirmations for health that people need whenever they are new — new born or new in a situation. You may want to review *Three Ways of Hearing Affirmations*, Volume 2, Number 1.

1. Post an affirmation poster:
 - You have a right to be here
 - Your needs will be honored
 - You can take your time getting to know your new situation
 - The sex you are is OK with us
 - You are likeable
2. Read each affirmation in turn and discuss what it means with the group. (Further information in **Self Esteem: A Family Affair** by Jean Illsley Clarke, Winston Press; Ch. 2 and pp. 256, 257.)
3. Choose one of the following activities:
 - a. Discuss ways each affirmation is offered to a newborn.
 - b. Discuss and list ways each affirmation could be conveyed to a three year old whose family has just had a new baby.
 - c. Lead a Suggestion Circle (Vol. 2, No. 4) on ways to offer any of these affirmations to two children who are engaged in sibling rivalry. Let the group choose the ages and sex of the children.
 - d. Divide the group into five small groups. Give one affirmation to each small group and ask them to come up with a list of ways the Support Group can extend that affirmation, indirectly, to a new member. Ask each small group to share their ideas with the whole group.

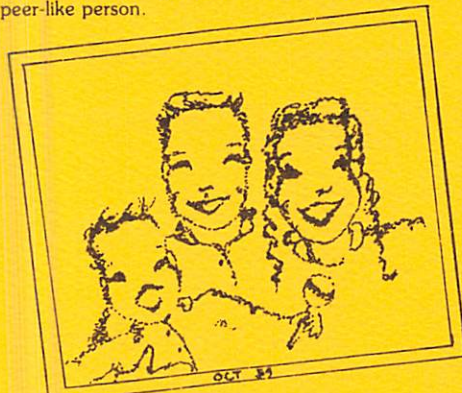
I was four when my sister was born. I have delightful memories of pre-Nancy, and then other happy memories of post-Nancy, but the recollections skip months after her birth, with no memory of her immediate babyhood. When I realized there was an eight or nine month gap there I thought, "I must have been a nasty sister, to have anticipated her birth with such excitement and then for my next memory to be of me, holding candy just out of her reach, skipping around her high chair chanting, Nanny-want-a-lollipop?"

Sibling jealousy is not a new or unusual revelation, but how we react to our older and younger siblings, and how those reactions influence our personality development, is what constitutes theories of birth order effects. It was Dr. Alfred Adler, in the early 1940's, who pioneered birth order research and theory, and since then a number of psychologists have furthered birth order study. Three most notable analysts are Dr. Walter Toman, author of *Family Constellation*, and Lucille Forer and Henry Still, co-authors of *The Birth Order Factor*. What explains the personality differences between siblings in a nuclear family, considering the likenesses of a shared environment and the same parents? Toman, Forer and Still, and other birth order theorists claim that for each individual the family environment is very different, depending upon each child's birth order position.

Toman and Forer and Still each detail "major" types of birth order positions; these are generalized summaries of firsts, second, middle, only and lastborn patients and other case studies. This article will include these composites — general personality traits — of each birth order position, stressing that in order to study your own family constellation it is important to consider your family's unique constellation. Dr. Toman's book is an interesting, in-depth analysis useful for this purpose.

A FIRSTBORN is an only child for a period of time, and the two positions share similarities in that they are both usually welcomed into a family and given a strong dose of parental attention, affection not shared by other siblings. But parents of onlies and firstborns also tend to expect more from their children, and have a strict set of rules — more strict than with laterborn children — that set a standard for the firstborn to achieve and to set "proper" examples for siblings that follow. When a second sibling is born, the firstborn is no longer in the limelight; instead, s/he must share parental love at which point many firstborns will try that much harder to achieve and maintain (sometimes perceived as reinstating position) a dominant family position. This tendency to compensate with achievement is likely to shape a firstborn's behavior and personality in his/her adult life.

ONLY children also strive for achievement, but because s/he has no siblings to dominate or compete with it is not a struggle for security or parental attention as it is for firstborns. Only children, often accused of being spoiled due to their lifelong "limelight" positions, DO become accustomed to a lot of attention, but this can be an asset in that it can foster confidence and high self-esteem, which continues through adulthood. Onlies are not put in the position of having to learn to communicate and cooperate with siblings. This can hinder their adult relationships because they have had no "practice" sharing or even dealing on an immediate level with another peer-like person.



SECOND BORN and MIDDLE children are usually born to parents who feel more comfortable with their parenting roles, and consequently, second children tend to be less demanding and more spontaneous than their older sibling. Secondborn children must learn to live with an older, more dominant sibling, and may develop creative ways of gaining attention and marking their own positions in the family. Generally, secondborns have an easier time communicating and making friends due to experience with both an older sibling and with parents. They are also more at ease in terms of achievement; they tend to be motivated but they will also, unlike their older sibling, request help or guidance, and are more readily dependent upon other people than firstborns. On the other hand, says Forer, there is that degree of competition existing between the first and secondborn, and the second child will often decline from comparison to the firstborn. For this reason, first and secondborns will likely choose very different ways of showing their achievement: one may excel in academics, while the other goes in to a more creative field such as art or theatre.



LASTBORN children — the "babies" of the family — may be "parented" by their entire families, particularly parents and the firstborn sibling. Therefore, lastborns have a tendency to expect a degree of protection, or for someone to always be around to help, even as adults. Studies in birth order indicate that lastborns are the least achievement-oriented of all birth positions, and are less interested in academic competition than their other siblings, but they are usually more social and friendly than their siblings and have an easy time maintaining interpersonal relationships. In their studies, Toman and Forer and Still have found that parents of lastborns are, to varying degrees, more hesitant to let go of their last child, and may allow a longer period of dependency to exist than with first and middle children. Lastborns, because of this greater degree of dependency, may be more sensitive to separation or loss within the family.

There are unique situations in family constellations that can alter the effects of birth order position, such as the birth of twins, death or separation of one or more siblings, or a parent, and the spacing of siblings in a large family. In the case of a family with six or more children, siblings may split into two or three "sub" families, with the oldest of each subgroup taking on firstborn responsibilities and characteristics. When the spacing of children extends over six years (the first sib is ten, the second sib is six, and the last born an infant), the lastborn is likely to be a combination of only and lastborn birth position, and the second sib a combination of second/middle and lastborn. It is important to examine special circumstances in your own constellation to get an accurate idea of birth order influence on you and your siblings.

For further reading, these sources are suggested: Forer, Lucille and Henry Still, *The Birth Order Factor*, David McKay Company, Inc. Toman, Walter, *Family Constellation; Its Effects On Personality and Social Behavior*, Springer Publishing Co.

suggested activity

WHAT I WOULD LIKE YOU TO KNOW ABOUT MY BIRTH ORDER POSITION

This activity gives people a chance to think about what they like about their birth order position and any disadvantages they have identified.

1. Ask people to group themselves in clusters around the room. Each cluster is to consist of people with the same birth order position. All of the firstborn people sit in one cluster, secondborn in another, etc.
2. Say: "Will you select five or six things that you would like the rest of the group to know about what is like to be firstborn (or whatever your number is). Try to present some positives and some negatives. When you make your report to the large group, be ready to indicate whether all of the people in your cluster agreed on this item or only some of you thought this was important."
3. Give each group a sheet of newsprint or other large paper and a felt pen. Ask them to print their items, simply stated, on the paper.
4. After fifteen minutes, or when most people seem to be finished, ask each small group to present their items to the whole group.

♥ OPENING ACTIVITY THAT OFFERS EVERYONE A POSITIVE PERSONAL MESSAGE

1. Choose a partner. Make a nametag for him and write on it the number position of his birth order in his family. (One for first child, two for second child, etc.)
2. If he had younger brothers or sisters, ask him to tell you what he remembers about the birth of one of them: what he expected or wished for, and what he remembers about how it really was. Perhaps he will remember only family stories about the birth.

OR If he is an only or youngest child, ask him if he remembers wishing to have a younger sibling and what his fantasies were about.

3. Then ask him what he liked about his position in the family.
4. Introduce your partner to the group and share one bit of information from the interview if your partner wants you to.

♥ CLOSING ACTIVITY THAT OFFERS EVERYONE A POSITIVE PERSONAL MESSAGE

Tell one other person two qualities that you learned from your birth order position in your family that are helpful to you now.

NEWS-NEW

Resentments and Appreciations

Recently, at the close of a meeting, a leader said, "It is time to close our meeting with Resentments and Appreciations. Does anyone have any resentments?" A group member spoke up, "Yes, I resent what you said about fathers. I thought it was derogatory." The group leader asked what had been said that was derogatory and discovered that the person (and perhaps others in the group?) had misunderstood the remark the leader had made. The leader restated the comment in another way and made sure the person understood correctly. When it was time for Appreciations, one of the leader's appreciations reflected the opportunity to find out about and correct the misunderstanding.

It is easier to hear Resentments and Appreciations at the close of each meeting than to have people go away with misconceptions and perhaps talk about them outside of the group.

Suggested Activity

FIVE YEARS FROM NOW

This activity encourages people to think about what they want for themselves and for their families in the future and what they can do to make that happen.

1. Hand each person a copy of the FIVE YEARS FROM NOW I WANT sheet.
2. Say: "Will you write in the spaces what you want for yourself and your family in any of the listed categories that you choose to? Then add other categories that are important to you at the bottom of the sheet and fill in what you want for those."
3. After ten minutes or when most people seem to be finished, ask: "Will you choose two items from the list, turn the paper over and write what you can do during the next two weeks to make this wish start to come true?"
4. After five minutes or when most people seem to be finished, ask: "Will you move into groups of four and will each person share one of the items you wrote about on the back of the paper? Tell your group what you can do to start making that wish come true for you. Then ask each person to give you one new suggestion about what you might do." (If your group uses the "right to pass" ground rule, be sure to mention it.)

FIVE YEARS FROM NOW I WANT

For Myself

For My Family

Work	
Play	
Education	
Growth	
Religion	
Food	
Housing	
Transportation	
Beauty	
Belongings	
Time for reflection	
Time without pressure	

WINTER 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

February 1-5 Led by Jean Illsley Clarke
at 16535 9th Ave. N., Plymouth, Minn. 55447
Write to her for details.

The Freedom That Comes From Structure

Craig Halverson, who leads a support group at Mercy Medical Center in Coon Rapids, Mn., called with a great celebration. He has just discovered the freedom that Structure gives. Craig grew up in a family and community situation where structure was used to impose will and induce guilt. He himself refrains from imposing his values on other people in the support group because he has a strong conviction that it is important to invite other people to choose, think through and be responsible for their own values. He has been using the support group structure because it seemed like a good idea to him, but without really realizing why. Recently he sat in a different group and watched as another person led a meeting using very loose structure. When someone asked for help with a problem, instead of adhering to the ground rules or using a Suggestion Circle or other structure to collect data to offer the person, the leader offered to solve the person's problem, and then went the next step and attempted to impose his will and his values on the person.

Craig's excitement comes from his discovery that structure gives protection and freedom. Structure makes it safe for people to think and to explore and allows them the freedom to grow, and structure makes it difficult for the group leader or facilitator to impose his values on other people in the group.

Craig further discovered that not all guilt is bad. Guilt, kept small and promptly acted upon to change behavior helps us maintain solid relationships with other people. A small twinge of guilt about a tendency to impose on other people can help us keep our leadership skills democratic.

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



yes, color my mailbox!

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Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Send check to: WE, 16536 9th Avenue N.,
Plymouth, MN 55447

Meeting Check List for Listening, Seeing and Doing







In the last issue I wrote about the idea that most adults get most of their information in four ways: through their eyes, their ears, their bodies and their intuition. I have to leave intuition up to the individual, but as a group leader I can plan experiences that involve looking, listening and moving. Look at the following opening exercise: *Find a partner, make a name tag for your partner and draw a balloon on it. Ask your partner to tell you about one time when she had fun with balloons. Give the name tag to your partner, introduce her to the group and tell about the fun she had with balloons.*

How does this brief exchange involve looking, listening and moving?

When you start a group meeting with an activity that involves looking, listening and doing, you signal to the group that the activities for the day will involve more than listening and you invite them to bring all of their learning capacities to the experience. One way to be sure you are involving a variety of senses during a meeting is to plan the meeting, list activities and then check off each activity to indicate which activities are involved. This allows you to see at a glance whether you are depending too heavily on one sense.

On the following chart the ear symbolizes hearing; the eye, seeing; the head, talking; the pen, writing; the figure, moving; and the circle of figures, interacting in a group. Draw these figures across the top of a page, list the activities for your next support group meeting and notice the balance of senses you will be involving.

Example: A Support Group Meeting

						
Opening (Balloon)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Ground Rules	read	poster				
Each tell a Celebration	✓	?	✓			?
Birth Order Exercise	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Five Years From Now	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Suggestion Circle	✓	?	✓			✓
Plan next Meeting	✓		✓			
Resentments and Appreciations	✓	?	✓			
Closing (Birth Order)	✓		✓			

SUGGESTED ACTIVITY

Read aloud ***"The Tale of the Second Mother, a Fairy Story for Today's Families,"*** by Ed Janoe and Barbara Janoe. This very short story with amusing illustrations uses the idea of a second mother to tell parents about the feelings of the first child when a second child is born. You can order this book from:

Family and Life Enrichment Service
2517 N.E. 20th Street
Portland, Oregon 97212 \$2.95

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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