



newsletter for nurturing support groups

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Welcome to the 15th 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
- suggested activities for opening and closing meetings
- more about ground rules
- Who Leads a Collective Support Group
- Is attention to details, or concern for the big picture more important in a leader?
and,
 - Information about **AFFIRMATIONS**
 - Why Affirmations are an important part of a Support Group
 - How leaders can Affirm Themselves
 - Recipe for Success
 - Affirmations to Keep
 - Affirmation Guessing
 - Hide an Affirmation Block
 - Notes about the Borbas' book, *Self Esteem: A Classroom Affair*

Jean Illsley Clarke

Jean Illsley Clarke, Editor

AFFIRMATIONS



One of the purposes of support groups is to collect a group of people who will affirm each other. They will encourage each other to recognize their own best qualities and to develop new ones. Affirmations are any words or actions that we use to let people know that they are lovable and capable. Although each person must ultimately be responsible for his or her own self esteem, these affirmations, these reflections or ourselves that other people offer us, are powerful motivators for us to think positively about ourselves. (Messages that encourage us to think negatively of ourselves are called negations.) Members of support groups regularly offer each other affirmations in informal ways. This issue of **WE** describes some activities that can be used to deliberately offer affirmations to each other in the group in fanciful or lighthearted ways.

♥ ♥ AFFIRM YOURSELF ♥ ♥

One way that group leaders can improve their leadership skills is to affirm themselves. Here is an example of affirmations that a leader can repeat five times morning and night and just before the meeting.

- I am a competent, warm, caring, intuitive leader.
- I think well on my feet
- I listen to what people want and need.
- I provide firm but flexible structure.
- I am lucky to have this opportunity and these people are lucky to have me.
- I am enjoying leading this group.

These affirmations were adapted from *Self Esteem: A Family Affair Leader Guide*, Jean Illsley Clarke, Winston Press, p. 18.

suggested activity



An Affirmation to Keep

Affirmations are anything we say or do to let people know that they are lovable and capable. In this exercise people are invited to think of a specific affirmation they wish to give as a gift to be kept.

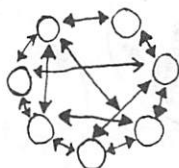
1. Give each person a light colored balloon and a dark felt tip pen.
2. Ask: Will each of you find a partner? Think of an affirming message you are willing to give your partner to keep. Ex.: I love you. You are smart. You are fun. You run fast. Write your messages on the balloon. You can draw pictures if you want to. Give the balloon to your partner.
3. Ask: Will each of you blow up the balloon you were given? Tie the balloon and play with it while you think about the message. Decide if you want to keep this message in your heart or in your head. Prepare to break the balloon. When you hear the pop of the breaking balloon, put the message in your head or your heart to keep as long as you want to.
4. Say: Break your balloon and then be silent for a few moments while you touch your head or hold your hand over your heart to anchor the message.

Who Leads Your Support Group if it is a COLLECTIVE?

Since support groups come in many forms and serve many purposes, leadership responsibilities vary widely from group to group. Some groups share leadership. Other groups have specific leaders. These can be leaders who emerge to spark and direct the group to the completion of a project, people who lead because they have collected the group specifically to lead it toward a certain goal, or people who are elected to lead for a designated period. Groups in which leadership is shared are called COLLECTIVES. I will focus on collectives in this issue and leave the other group forms for future issues.

A COLLECTIVE support group is a small group of people whose purpose is to support each other. These groups, in which leadership is shared, continue to function as long as members' needs are being met.

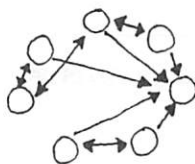
Collectives usually have regular meetings at which people tell what kind of support they want and the group offers advice, encouragement, information, caring and sometimes goods or services. A diagram of a usual meeting of this group shows interaction arrows going in both directions. This group was not designed for one way support, so each person gives and gets.



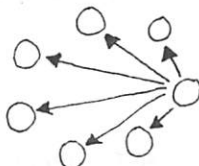
Support does go only one way when one of the members has an acute need. That condition does not continue indefinitely or the group ceases to be a col-

lective support group and becomes something else.

Nancy O'Hara belongs to a collective support group that has been in existence for seven years. When Nancy's father died, members of her support group focused more energy on her and less on each other. They gave flowers, food, child care, phone calls and personal presence to Nancy. The diagram looked like this for a few weeks.



Later, Nancy shared her experience about death, separation and grieving with the group. When members asked, "What could we have done better?" Nancy gave thoughtful answers. The diagram looked like this for a short time.



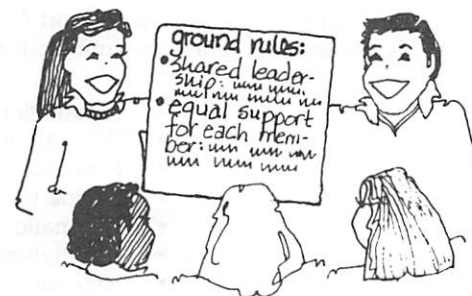
The group then returned to its usual style, with support arrows going in both directions.

If some person, perhaps Robert, continues to be overly dependent on the group for a long period of time, the group changes. If the group does not address the situation, it will drift. After a time some members become disenchanted or feel put upon by the continued drain of emotional or physical resources for one person. Attendance drops and the quality of support offered to Robert suffers. Some members subtly or actively express their resentment toward Robert, blaming him because their needs, which were to have been met by the support group, are no longer being met. Others may get fixed in a helping role and resent Robert when he wants to

resume his independence and equality.

In a situation like this, a group has several choices. It can stop being a collective and become an active support group, focused on Robert instead of the whole group. It can decide to stop offering extra support to Robert and ask him to get extra needs met someplace else so the group can resume its original support functions. If the members of the group have enough time and energy, they can separate the two functions and do both without letting one consume the other.

A clear statement of the purpose of the group and an awareness of agreed upon ground rules help a collective avoid the kinds of pitfalls described here.



The individuals who function best in collectives have well-developed internal structure or discipline and high self esteem. These qualities are supported and encouraged to grow in the collective. The **WE** format for support groups works well for collectives because planning for the next meeting is built in. Some groups have one person lead a whole meeting. Others have the leader open and close and members share the leadership of the rest of the meeting.

If you have not yet been part of a collective support group, try it! It is a sometimes frustrating, frequently rewarding, often exciting and very interesting experience. It is a great way to get support and an excellent place for everyone to practice leadership skills.

Details or



Every group needs consistent leadership that attends to details, and reflective leadership that keeps in mind the big picture. If you are a leader who enjoys details, likes to plunge in and get things done, and likes to keep things in order, learn to keep the larger purposes of the group in mind. Otherwise, find a co-leader who thinks about long-term outcomes.

If, as a leader, you enjoy thinking about the long term implications, enjoy seeing how things fit together and augment each other, but you despair of the many details that keep a group functioning smoothly, learn to organize. Do the details or else get a dependable co-leader to do them. Remember, one way to learn new leadership skills is to co-lead with people whose skills are different from your own.



The Big Picture?

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

suggested activity

GROUND RULES FOR

CHILDREN'S GROUPS



Ground rules are important in any group. If any of you run support groups for young children you may be interested in the ground rules for Concept Circles offered by Michele and Craig Borba in *Self Esteem: A Classroom Affair*, p. 51-52.

The Borba's describe Concept Circles as "the time when the children gather in a circle and concentrate their thoughts and activity on one specific, designated idea or concept."

Rule 1. Remain seated in the place you choose. Have the children sit in a large circle on the floor. Sprinkle a little pretend glue on the floor to remind them not to move from their spots.

Rule 2. Make only nice, friendly, true comments. We call such comments "fuzzies."

Rule 3. Talk only when it's your turn. Use a pass-around prop to remind the group whose turn it is to speak.

Rule 4. Plan your comment or answer during the thinking time. To move circle activities along, set aside a few minutes early in the session as thinking time.

Rule 5. Put your hands on your heads while instructions are given. This posture helps children concentrate and remember your instructions.

How do these ground rules compare with the ones you use?

? AFFIRMATION GUESSING

The purpose of this activity is to collect a large list of affirming messages and then encourage each person to focus on the messages that are most helpful to him today.

1. Ask: Will each of you suggest some messages that are positive and encouraging? (Leader writes them on newsprint large enough for all to see. Ex.: You are enthusiastic. I like your honesty. I like you. I like to spend time with you. It's okay to be angry or crabby sometimes. You do some things very well. You can be flexible. You are responsible.) Continue until you have a sizable list.
2. Ask: Will each of you choose messages from the list, including the one that you would most like to believe is true of you today, and write them on a sheet of paper?
3. Ask: Will one of you read your list? Will other people in the group guess which affirmation on the list is the special one for today?
4. Ask the list owner: For each affirmation, will you say a clear "yes" if you want that affirmation today and a clear "no" if you do not? Continue until the group guesses the correct affirmation or until the list holder has heard all of the affirmations.
5. Repeat for each person in the group.

An adaptation of **AFFIRMATION IS HIDE A BLOCK**.

This exercise is a favorite of a support group that knows and uses the developmental affirmations described in *Self Esteem: A Family Affair*, Winston Press, by Jean Illsley Clarke. These affirmations are designed to promote health and growth at every age level. Our group uses the **Affirmation Blocks** designed by Annette Pattie (brochure enclosed), but you could make your own blocks or lists of the developmental affirmations from the book.



HIDE A BLOCK



1. Carry a basket of affirmation blocks around the group and ask each person to choose one block.
2. After everyone has a block, ask each person to read all sides of her block, choose one side that sounds especially good, turn the block so that side is down, hide the block so no one else can see which side she hid.
3. Ask one person to tell what color her block is and then ask the group to guess which affirmation she chose. Ask the block holder to listen to each guess, and to say a clear "Yes" if she wants that affirmation today and a clear "No" if she does not. Continue until the group guesses the correct affirmation or until the block holder has heard all six sides.
4. Repeat for each person in the group.

V ITER FACILITATORS TRAINING WORKSHOPS



- 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 and support groups.

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

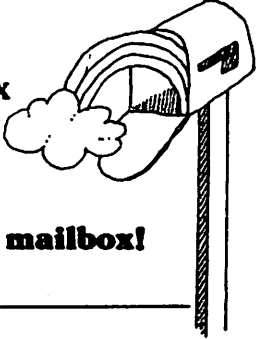
5th Friday Workshop on January 29

A 7:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. workshop for people who want to explore the six characteristics of successful families. Please bring at least one other member of your family, if possible. Led by Jean Clarke. Call (612)473-1840 for details.



Don't forget to ask for Resentments and Appreciations at the end of each meeting. A person who has resentments may not have the energy or courage to voice them during the meeting. Then he is apt to carry them home and embellish upon them. This hazard is reduced if he is fortunate enough to have a group leader who asks for expressions of negative as well as positive feelings at the end of each meeting.

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



yes, color my mailbox!

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

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

BOOK REVIEW

Self Esteem: A Classroom Affair

If you teach young children, if you lead a group of young children, if you live with young children, if you like and spend time with young children, this book is for you. **Self-Esteem: A Classroom Affair – 101 Ways to Help Children Like Themselves** is written by Michele Borba, a special-education teacher, and Craig Borba, a school psychologist. It offers page after page of easy to do activities that help children realize that they are lovable and capable. Sample titles are "Mirror Drawings," "What-I-Can-Do Books," "Self Awareness Circles," "I'm Glad to Be Me" and "People Recipes" (adapted in this issue of WE).

The book also has a variety of ways to encourage children to be positive and responsible in their attitudes and behaviors toward other children. Sample titles are "Pictures of Differences and Similarities," "Awareness-of-Others Circles," "Friendship Circles," "Buddy Award," and "Roping our Friends." The book is easy to use, the short introductory theory section is clearly written, and the activities have been field-tested for five years. I am enjoying using the book. It focuses on children and their parents. I wish it had a section on the self-esteem of the teacher and how to teach children to contribute to that.

Self-Esteem: A Classroom Affair written by Michele and Craig Borba, is published by Winston Press, 430 Oak Grove, Minneapolis, MN 55403. It has 136 pages and the cost is \$6.97.

by Jean Clarke

OPENING ACTIVITY THAT OFFERS EVERYONE A POSITIVE PERSONAL MESSAGE



Choose a partner. Make a name tag for her and write or draw something to indicate three things that she does well. If you do not know what she does well, ask her. Introduce your partner to the group and tell what she does well.

THE RECIPE FOR SUCCESS

suggested activity

This is an affirmation exercise.

1. Ask the group to sit in a circle.
2. Hand out 3 x 5 recipe cards.
3. Ask each person to write the name of the person on his right at the top of the card.
4. Think about that person. Using recipe language such as 1 cup of perseverance, 2 tablespoons of commitment or a dash of humor, identify that person's strengths in a **RECIPE FOR SUCCESS**. Ask people to leave 1 tablespoon blank for the person to fill in the quality he is currently improving.
5. Read or show a poster of a sample recipe.

SUCCESS RECIPE FOR ROGER

- 1 cup of intelligence
- 1 cup of hard work
- 3 tablespoons of kindness
- 2 tablespoons of vision
- 1 tablespoon of light heartedness
- 1 tablespoon

Mix the vision and the intelligence thoroughly. Add hard work and kindness and stir. Sprinkle with light heartedness and send into the market place to rise.

6. When everyone has finished, ask each person to read the recipe aloud and give the card to the person.

CLOSING ACTIVITY THAT OFFERS EVERYONE A POSITIVE PERSONAL MESSAGE



Stand in a circle. Leader reminds people that we can like each other for being, that our liking does not always have to reflect that we like what someone does.

Leader chooses a nonverbal signal that says, "I like you." Ex.: a smile, a handshake, a hug. Leader gives the signal to the first person who then passes it on to the next, and so on around the circle.

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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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