

newsletter for nurturing support groups

November-December, 1982
Volume 4, Number 2



Welcome to the 20th 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 lists a dozen qualities of a good opening activity and includes an opening and closing group activity.

The focus of this issue is on the **Holiday Season** and on the importance of **family history**. It includes an opening and closing and several suggested activities. Some activities mention Christmas, but if that is not your celebration, try substituting the name of your own holiday; the activities are designed to work for all holidays. Several of the activities mention families. You can substitute "support group" for "family" and use those activities at your meeting.

Have a wonderful holiday, each one of you!

Jean Illsley Clarke

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Editor



Each Person, Great and Small

The celebration of a Holiday by a family or a small group can honor each person involved if the other people in the group know what is important to each individual. This is most easily done as a group but can be done separately, even by mail, with posting or mailing copies of individual lists.

Ask each person to list the parts of the Holiday that are most important to him. If some members are too young to write, let them dictate their lists. After the lists are completed, ask each person to star three items that are especially important. Plan the Holiday Celebrations to include at least one starred item from each person's list.

Sometimes people will find surprises in the lists. One mom who asked her family to make lists had already decided that this year she would not insist that the family cut their own Christmas tree. She had heard some grumbling and it was difficult to find a day when everyone could participate. Guess which item was starred on every list. . . ? *Cut our own Christmas tree!*

HOLIDAY FANTASY

This fantasy trip is a way to find out some important information about how to celebrate holidays.

1. **Say:** *I invite you to go on a Holiday Fantasy Trip. This is a fantasy trip to a place and time where you can celebrate your holiday in a most amazing and wonderful way. I am here and I will protect you. You can come back at any time during the trip, or I will bring you back at the end. Get in a comfortable position. Close your eyes and breath deeply. Hear the sounds in this room. Let them go. Smell the odors in this room. Let them go. Feel the air entering and leaving your body; feel the weight of your body against the floor or the chair. Let those feelings go.*



Imagine that you are in a place where you will have everything you need and want to celebrate the holidays in the way that is most satisfying and wonderful for you. Also, you are in a time when you can have whatever people you want to celebrate with you. Take your time as you see and hear and feel the activities, the fun, the excitement, the joy and the peace of your holiday.

2. After three or four minutes. . . **Say:** *Finish your fantasy and come back to this room. Be in the present. See, hear, smell, and feel here, now.*
3. **Say:** *Think about your fantasy for a few minutes and then make a list of the elements of your fantasy that were most important to you.*
4. After three or four minutes. . . **Say:** *Choose a partner. Read your list to your partner and tell him how you can make some of those elements be part of your next holiday. If some element of your fantasy seems impossible, think of a way to create the activities or enjoyments anyway. For example, "We went on a sailing trip in the Tropics and we have no money for such a trip this year. Let's declare one day of our holiday 'Sail Away Day' and create some of the elements of the trip at home!" Or perhaps your holiday included a person that it is not possible for you to be with this year. How about planning some activity to celebrate how and why that person is important to you?*
5. **Say:** *Remember — you can make at least some of your fantasies come true!*

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

Family History – Paste It



For each of us, our family history is significant. It is an important part of our identity and it helps us stay connected to special people in our lives. But sometimes details of that history, so clear when experienced, are later lost or forgotten. One way to record Family History, and to say Good Bye to the old year in preparation for saying Hello to the New Year, is to paste the old year in a scrap book on New Year's Day.

One family that regularly makes a year book has a small chest in which they deposit mementos during the year. On New Year's Day they open their chest, sort their items, talk about them and decide which ones to include in their Family Year Book.

Last year they included a program from a band concert, a sales slip for an important purchase, a newspaper clipping about a community project the whole family had worked on, snapshots of a family vacation and a birth announcement.

Editor's Note: Someone invented this activity and I don't know who. Please feel thanked!

Family History – Hang It



"We have a special way of remembering each Christmas past in our family. We do it with ornaments." Shann Valentine Bulger shared how she has created an ornamental history for her family. Each year she makes or purchases five identical, special ornaments for the Christmas tree. Each of her four children know which ornaments belong to which year — this one is the year I was born, this one the year I started kindergarten, this one the year we moved to Burnsville, etc.

Each child also knows that the year he establishes a home of his own and trims his first Christmas tree he will have one ornament for each year of his life to hang upon it, and he can think about other family members hanging similar ornaments on their trees. Thank you, Shann, for a delightful new way to make a family tree.

Family History – Write It



My mother was the last member of her generation. She told her family stories lovingly and always with the same details, but when she died I realized that my children did not know some of those stories and that they might be forgotten. As in every family, some of those stories are marvelous and some are interesting mainly because they remind us of life in very different circumstances, but all are important because they are part of the history of our family.

I thought about writing these short stories, but I felt overwhelmed by the task, so I turned it into a solution of what to give my family for Christmas. I listed some of the stories and invited each member of my family to choose one to be written as a personal gift. Each person will receive a copy of the entire set. I plan to do another set next year.

You don't have to wait until a whole generation is gone to start writing your stories. You can start now. Also, tape recordings of grandpa or grandma telling stories about their childhood make wonderful Christmas gifts. You can probably think of six more ways you can give your children a gift of family history this year. I hope you enjoy doing it.

by Jean Clarke

Family History – Make It



"We Always Do What You Want To Do!"

"We always do what you want to do," the children whine. "I thought we were doing it because you wanted to," the parents weary back. "No, no, I never said I wanted to do that. It wasn't any fun," the daughter scolds. "What I really wanted to do was..."

If this scenario sounds familiar, try making a family Holiday calendar. Find or make a large calendar with plenty of space to write activities for each day.

Decide as a family which Holiday traditions are important and meaningful to you. Remind people that traditions can be a great strengthening factor in families and that each family member does not have to be excited about them all every year. Decide which activities will strengthen your traditions.

| DECEMBER ♥ | | | | | | | | | | | |
|------------|----|---------------------------------------|----|---|----|----------------------|----|------------------------------|----------------|---|-----------------|
| | | | | 1 | 2 | | 3 | | | 4 | |
| | 5 | | 6 | | | 8 | 9 | | 10 | | 11 |
| | 12 | | 13 | | 14 | | 15 | Trim tree | School Concert | | 18 |
| | 19 | Jamie Attends Artcracker Suite Ballet | 20 | | 21 | Justin Play Monopoly | 22 | Caroling | | | 25 |
| 26 | | DAD Hike in the Arboretum | 27 | | 28 | Mom Sliding Party | 29 | Bill Read "Snow Bound" aloud | 30 | | New Year's Day! |

Draw pictures or write words or use colorful stickers to indicate those traditional activities. Then address the issue of "doing what you want to do." Pick one day for each family member and write that person's name at the top of that day on the calendar. Put the amount of money that the family is willing to spend on family fun in an envelope. Observe these ground rules:

1. Each family member chooses the family activity for a day.
2. Each family member agrees to participate in the activities chosen by other family members without complaining.
3. Each activity chosen must be safe and within the capabilities of all family members.
4. The activity may cost money as long as there is money in the envelope. First planned, first served. If the money is gone, the activities must be without cost.
5. The activity can take a lot of time or a little time.
6. The activity must be posted on the calendar two weeks in advance so family members can plan for it.

Post the calendar in a prominent place and add to it throughout the holidays. At the end of the Holidays, use it as a family to help you think about how satisfactory you made your Holiday and to express your appreciation to each other.

News About Support Groups

Judy Popp writes that the staff of the Early Childhood Programs in Yakima, Washington focused their fall preschool workshop week on the WINNERS LIST (WE, Vol. 3, No. 6, July-Aug. 1982). They also spent one morning on the Behavior Change Chain from the same issue of WE.

It's exciting to hear how groups are adapting **WE** ideas for their own use.

Facilitator Training Workshops

February 7-11, 1983, Minneapolis, Minnesota
July 11-15, 1983, Minneapolis, Minnesota

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

Led by Jean Illsley Clarke

Write to **WE** for details

What Are The Qualities of a Good Opening Activity?

These qualities were identified at a Support Group meeting of professional group leaders. A high quality opening activity:

1. Starts on time
2. Moves, has high energy, quickness
3. Is warm and friendly
4. Has clear directions for the activity — spoken and posted
5. Has clear directions as to time — limited or open-ended
6. Is organized — opening signals process for what is to follow
7. Signals content of what is to follow
8. Strokes each person, including the leader
9. Allows for bonding with group and with at least one other person
10. Involves participation from everyone
11. May involve some problem solving or opportunity to expand awareness or knowledge
12. Provides transition time from previous life activity to this meeting

Opening Activity That Offers

Everyone a Positive Personal Message ♥ ♥ ♥

Choose a partner. Make a name tag for her. Ask her to tell you about one or two family traditions that she remembers as favorites from her childhood. After five minutes ask each person to introduce her partner and tell the group about her favorite traditions.

Closing Activity That Offers

Everyone a Positive Personal Message ♥ ♥ ♥

Stand in a circle. Ask if anyone has any resentments about the meeting. Accept resentments. You do not necessarily have to do anything about them. Ask for appreciations. Ask each person to tell in one sentence a wish for the whole group for the New Year.

SUGGESTION CIRCLE

A **Suggestion Circle** is a way of getting people's best suggestions about how to solve a problem. This circle was recorded at a Support Group meeting in Minnetonka, Minnesota.



Problem: I feel a lot of hassle in my family about Christmas. How can I not give in to the overwhelming hassle?

1. Make a list of the heavy old "shoulds." Crumple it up and toss it around among members of the family. Then throw it in the trash.
2. Schedule some specific time just for you. Let it be known this time is just for you.
3. Have a family discussion to decide what to do and what not to do.
4. Have a family discussion about things that mean the most to each of you during the Holiday season. Support each other to say "no" to things that aren't really meaningful.
5. Meet in a family council and decide altogether to eliminate some of the causes of everyone's greatest hassle.
6. Think about which traditions are important to you and ask your family to cooperate on those. Tell why they are important to you.
7. Buy some things ready made.
8. Have each person make a Christmas Fun list. Do things

that are on the lists. For example:
wrap presents together,
sleep late, bake a
gingerbread house.

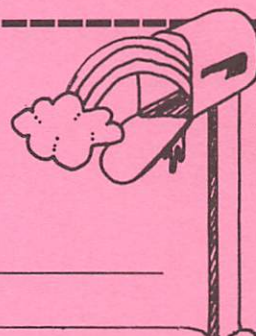


9. Structure your time with the family so they can look forward to specific times when they will have undivided attention from you.
10. Read **Be Your Own Santa Claus** by Sandra Gordon Stoltz.
11. Keep your plans simple.

If you want to use the **Suggestion Circle** techniques in your group, there are additional tips on how to lead a Suggestion Circle in Vol. 1, No. 1 of **WE**, and in **Self Esteem: A Family Affair Leader Guide** by Jean Illsley Clarke, Winston Press.



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



Name _____

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City _____ State _____ Zip _____

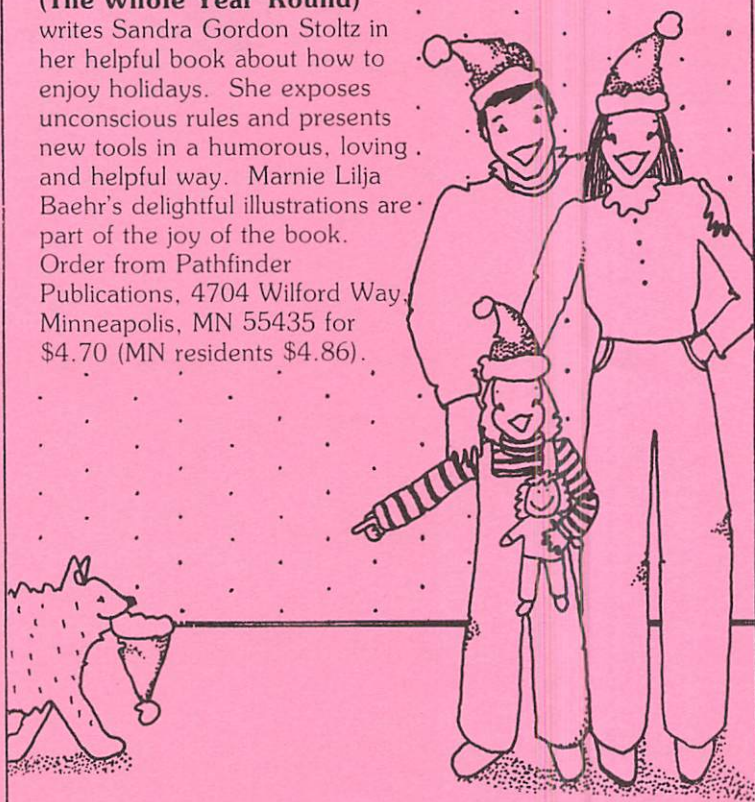
Send check to: **WE, 16536 9th Avenue N.,
Plymouth, MN 55447**

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BOOK REVIEW

Be Your Own Santa Claus**(The Whole Year 'Round)**

writes Sandra Gordon Stoltz in her helpful book about how to enjoy holidays. She exposes unconscious rules and presents new tools in a humorous, loving, and helpful way. Marnie Lilja Baehr's delightful illustrations are part of the joy of the book. Order from Pathfinder Publications, 4704 Wilford Way, Minneapolis, MN 55435 for \$4.70 (MN residents \$4.86).



Some people come into our lives and quickly go. Some stay for awhile and leave footprints on our hearts and we are never the same.

Author Unknown

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
- asking for support
- 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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