

newsletter for nurturing support groups

January-February, 1983

Volume 4, Number 3

Dear Reader,



Do you sometimes wish you were better able to REJECT DESTRUCTIVE CRITICISM? This issue of **WE** focuses on that topic. It includes opening and closing exercises and these Suggested Activities:

- **Don't Let Destructive Criticism In**
- **Finding The Kernel Of Truth**
- **Identifying Constructive Feedback**

In addition, there are suggestions for group leaders who feel like criticizing but want to do something else instead.

Welcome to this 21st issue of **WE**, a newsletter for and about groups of people who get together for the purpose of giving each other personal support. Let us all practice running our support groups and our lives without criticism!

Jean Illsley Clarke

Jean Illsley Clarke

SUGGESTED ACTIVITY

Don't Let It In

from **OUCH, THAT HURTS!**



One way to deal with a destructive message is not to let it in.

When someone criticizes you,
Play Deaf!

When someone gives you a dirty look,
Play Blind!

When someone slings mud at you,
Let It Roll Off!

Watch a duck preening in the water.

Visualize destructive messages forming into tiny droplets as soon as they hit you and rolling off your body the way the water rolls off the duck.

When someone sends you an arrow, throw up a protective shield of light or energy or any material you like, made invisible, and let the arrows bounce off and fall harmlessly to the ground.

Practice each of the five "**Don't Let It In**" methods. One person says something critical and the rest of the group practices not letting it in.

WE

GROUND Rules

The consistent use of the ground rule, "All opinions and beliefs are respected," gives the leader an easy way to intervene if someone in the group indulges in destructive criticism.

An example of this is, "Bryan, please remember the ground rule about respecting all opinions and beliefs."

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 Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Question: When someone says something negative, how do you know if it is destructive or constructive?

1. When it is destructive, the person's face often looks hostile and the voice feels sharp.
2. Constructive criticism will tell me what I have to do differently. Destructive tells me I'm not an OK person.
3. When I think about it rationally, I can decide whether it is valid or not.
4. Destructive is long and harrangs; constructive is short and to the point.
5. Destructive gives me a pain in the stomach. With constructive, I feel yucky but I'll also have the feeling that there is some truth in it.
6. Past history with that person.
7. With constructive I feel hopeful, with destructive I feel depressed.
8. Constructive comes at a time when I can look at it. Destructive comes at a time when it is embarrassing.
9. I know I can do something with constructive.
10. For me, if I am really angry about the criticism, it is likely to be valid. If I can laugh it off, it is probably invalid.
11. Add your own suggestions.

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.

Finding The Kernel of Truth In Criticism

**Suggested Activity From
OUCH, THAT HURTS!**

Some criticism is not helpful in any way. It hurts, it is inaccurate and there is nothing in it that is of help to the individual criticized. The only learning from that kind of attack is to stay away from the criticizer.

Other criticisms hurt, but they have a ring of truth about them. We can use the kernel of truth to help us grow if we can separate it from the hurt and the inaccuracies.

Finding The Kernel of Truth In Criticism is an exercise designed to help people find the truth and discard the hurt. If you can't find someone to help you, use it by yourself. It works well with two people, and better with a group where you can get ideas and support from several people.

If you are leading the group and there are more than twelve people, divide them into circles of six at the start and use the group of six wherever the directions refer to the "whole group."

The context of this exercise is often highly emotional and sometimes people miss directions. Go slowly, give directions clearly, repeat, if needed, and do not slight the demonstrations. **THIS IS A POWERFUL EXERCISE.** Take as much time as people need. To fully internalize the skills of finding the kernel of truth and letting the hurt go, some people need to repeat the exercise several times, preferably at one or two week intervals.

Preparations:

1. Make a copy of the enclosed worksheet for each person.
2. Prepare 10 slips of colored paper for each person.
3. Make and post the following Poster:

Finding The Kernel

1. Sort elements into 3 piles.
2. Tear up **No Help**.
3. Keep **Helpful**.
4. Rewrite **Maybe Some Help**.
5. Make a self contract.
6. Congratulate each other.

Introduction:

Say: Sometimes in the middle of a heap of criticism, there is a kernel of truth. This exercise is designed to help us discard the destructive part of a specific criticism and will help us find the bit of truth that we can use to help us grow.

We will:

- Choose a partner to help.
- Remember a specific criticism that we are willing to talk about.
- Get some help on separating the parts that are not helpful from the parts that are helpful, if there are any.
- Think about how to use the helpful parts to improve ourselves.

Ask: Will you choose a partner who is willing to help you reject criticism?

Say: Think of a specific time when you were criticized by someone (other than your partner). Recall the specifics of that criticism.

Hand out a copy of the worksheet on page 5 and ten or more slips of paper to each person.

Say: Write a one sentence description of the incident on the top of your worksheet.

Say: On the worksheet there is a list of different **elements in a criticism**. (You may POST a large poster or put these on an overhead projector or read them off your worksheet.)

Read the list.

Ask: Can you think of any other elements of criticism? If so, add them to the list.

Demonstration:

Say: I will demonstrate how to separate out the elements of a criticism.

- a. Read the following examples of criticism with strong facial and body signals:

You are always late! You are so selfish! You don't care if you make the rest of us late. Sometimes I like you but sometimes you don't care about anybody but yourself! You forget your stuff and you never finish things. You turkey! You make our whole car pool late!

- b. Ask the group to help you isolate all of the elements of the criticism. Write each one on a half sheet of paper and post the papers so the group can see the whole list. Don't worry about accuracy — go with your feelings and write short descriptions of behavior. Write the specific. **Always late** instead of the element, Grandiosity.

Examples:

Harsh voice

Tight jaw

Don't care about anybody but yourself

Always late

Sometimes I like you

You make our whole car pool late

Clenched fist

Flashing eyes

Never finish things

TURKEY!

Selfish!

- c. Look at the list of elements of a criticism to see if you missed any specifics. If you did, add them.

Say: Work in couples. Tell your partner about the time you were criticized. Write each part of the criticism on a separate slip of paper. Write specifics. Your partner can look at the list and ask you questions to help you catch all of the elements. When everyone is finished or after about 5 minutes,

Say: The kernel of truth in criticism is information that I can use to change my behavior to improve my life.

Point to the **Finding The Kernel** Poster.

Say: Will you help me sort the elements in my example into three piles?

Example:

NO HELP

Harsh voice

Tight jaw

Clenched fist

Flashing eyes

Turkey!

Selfish

MAYBE SOME HELP

Always late

Don't care about anybody but yourself

Sometimes I like you

Never finish things

HELPFUL

You make our whole car pool late

continued on page 3

FINDING THE KERNEL OF TRUTH WORKSHEET

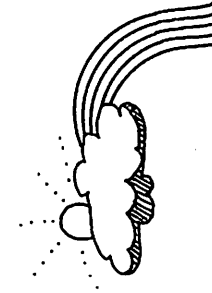
(Permission to copy by Jean Illsley Clarke)

WE Newsletter, 16535 9th Ave. N., Plymouth, MN 55447

The Criticism: _____

Elements of a Criticism

1. Accusations
2. Name calling
3. Grandiosity (always, never, etc)
4. Plastic (positive & negative message combined)
5. Tone of voice
6. Tone of the situation
7. Facial expression
8. Body language and gestures
9. Wrong time
10. Wrong place
11. Ignoring
12. Discounting needs
13. Discounting wishes and feelings
14. Discounting experiences
15. Switching the topic
16. Off-the-wall response
17. Any other crazy-making messages



Helpful



Maybe Some Help

No Help

Finding The Kernel of Truth in Criticism

continued

- **Tear up** the **No Help** pile and throw it in the wastebasket.
- **Keep** the **Helpful** to use if there are any.
- **Tear Off** destructive parts or rewrite **Maybe Some Help**

Example:

Always late

Tear off

Always

late

Say: Is this sometimes true? (If yes, rewrite) If you need help, ask your partner for ideas.

I am sometimes late.

Say: Work in couples. Each of you go through your own pile of specifics.

1. Sort them into **No Help**, **Maybe Some Help** and **Helpful** piles.
2. Tear up the **No Help**.
3. Keep the **Helpful**.
4. Rewrite the **Maybe Some Help**.
5. Make a self contract that will help you. Tell your partner about your contract. Ex: I will pack my lunch in the evening so I will not be late for my ride in the morning.
6. Congratulate each other on tearing up the **No Help** criticisms and on finding the kernel of truth that is helpful to you and deciding how to use it constructively.

Conclusion:

Ask: Does anyone want to share your kernel of truth or your self contract with the whole group?

Discussion Questions:

1. Do you think there is always a kernel of truth in criticism?
2. With what age child can you start to use this exercise?
3. At what age would a child start to learn about the kernel of truth by observing his parents do this exercise?
4. How has this exercise helped you? _____ **WE**

FACILITATOR training workshops

July 11-15, 1983, Minneapolis, Minnesota

August 22-26, 1983, Seattle, Washington

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.

Facilitation Skills

What Can A Group Leader Do Instead of Criticizing?

Sometimes a group leader has the urge to be critical — to send a destructive zinger. This feeling usually comes after some small or large frustrating experience in the group. But, good group leaders don't send zingers, so what to do instead?

One option is to be extra nice, helpful and agreeable and hide the frustration. In that case, the frustration often builds, the group leader feels victimized and then is again tempted to put someone down.

Readers familiar with the **Drama Triangle** will recognize that the group leader has hit each point on the triangle, an exercise in ineffectiveness and futility.

Stephen Karmen invented the **Drama Triangle** to give people a tool for realizing when they are engaged in an ineffective series of communications. He identified the three corners of the triangle as **Persecutor**, **Rescuer** and **Victim**, with **Victim** at the bottom because the ineffective dance around the triangle will go on only as long as someone is willing to be victimized.



In our example, the group leader felt victimized by the frustrating events in the groups' interaction (**Victim** position). He then considered criticizing (**Persecutor** position) but instead hid his feelings and was extra helpful. (**Rescuer** position), and soon he was feeling victimized again.

How can we get off the triangle? As soon as we recognize that we are in this vicious triangle, we have clues about how to get off — what to do instead.

From the **Persecutor** position, move to clear structure.

Persecutor: Your interruptions are intolerable! You don't have enough self discipline to choke a fly!

Structure: When people are interrupted, they don't get to finish their thoughts. Ryan, please state your position and then we will go around the circle, clockwise, and each give our opinion or pass.

From the **Rescuer** position the leader can move to clear nurturing — taking the needs of the individuals into account.

Rescuer: I can tell you just can't wait 'til Martha finishes, Ryan.

Nurturer: Ryan, is there something you need from us right now?

From the **Victim** position the leader can move to problem solving.

Victim Thinks: They are interrupting and we will never get this problem solved and there is nothing I can do.

Problem Solver Says: Attention please! Our meeting is supposed to end in 20 minutes and we have not resolved the problem. What can we do now to reach a solution?

These ways of getting off the triangle were identified by Raymond Hostie of Belgium.

You may find it helpful to put a masking tape triangle on the floor, move around it and identify what you, as a group leader, would say and feel at each position. Then practice the three ways of getting off.

You can read more about the **Drama Triangle** in **Born To Win, Transactional Analysis with Gestalt Experiments** by Muriel James and Dorothy Jongeward, Addison, Wesley, Menlo Park, California, 1971.

Characteristics of Constructive Feedback

1. Constructive feedback is useful to the receiver, destructive feedback (criticism) is not.
2. Constructive feedback is specific rather than general. To be told, "You're dominating," will probably not be as useful as to be told, "Just now you were not listening to what other people said."
3. It focuses on behavior rather than on the person. We might say, "she talked more than anyone else in this meeting," rather than, "she is a loudmouth."



CONSTRUCTIVE



DESTRUCTIVE

4. It takes into account the needs of the receiver of the feedback. Feedback can be destructive when it serves only our own needs. Let us avoid giving feedback in a competitive situation, because it makes us feel better, or because it gives us a psychological advantage.
5. It is directed toward behavior which the receiver can do something about. Frustration is only increased when a person is reminded of shortcomings over which they have no control.
6. It is solicited rather than imposed.
7. It involves sharing of information rather than giving advice.
8. It is well-timed. It is best given when the receiver is ready to hear it; i.e. not when the person is very sad, angry or in a hurry.
9. It involves the amount of information the receiver can use, the amount that can be internalized and reflected upon, rather than the amount we would like to give.
10. It concerns what is said or done or how not why.
11. It is checked to insure clear communication. (Paraphrasing)

Thanks to George Lehner and Al Wright for brainstorming this list.

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

Identify Constructive and Destructive Feedback

SUGGESTED ACTIVITY

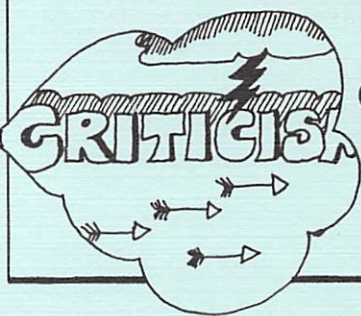
This activity is designed to give a group of people practice in identifying constructive feedback as contrasted with destructive criticism.

1. Read aloud the eleven CHARACTERISTICS OF CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK from page 4.
2. Hand out copies of the FEEDBACK SAMPLES or read them aloud, one set at a time.
3. Ask people to think about the eleven descriptions of constructive feedback as they indicate a C or a D for each item in the sample list. C for constructive or D for destructive for each item.
4. Ask someone to explain for each item which of the eleven suggestions about feedback helped her make her decision.

FEEDBACK SAMPLES

- A. Stop what you are doing and listen to what I think you should do.
I have a suggestion. Will you tell me when you are ready to listen to it?
- B. You are too short!
You can reach that shelf if you use the stool.
- C. Please pick up your books and put them on the desk.
You certainly made a mess of the kitchen!
- D. You will get along much better if you learn not to be so rough.
I like it when you touch me gently.
- E. I do this a lot better than you do; you are so awkward!
What do you need from me?
- F. Slow down, you are over the speed limit.
You drive like a maniac!
- G. When you stepped on my foot, it hurt. Please watch where you are going.
Why are you always bumping into me?
- H. You are a loudmouth.
Please lower your voice.
- I. I think that you are working too hard and not taking good care of your health. Would you like me to give you some examples?
Listen, you work all of the time! Last week you were out four evenings and you have circles under your eyes and you haven't answered your mail and last month you were late paying the bills and when I asked you to go for a walk you were too tired!!
- J. Now, I have told you what I think. Act on it.
Will you tell me what you think I want you to do?
- K. You listen to me. . . I am telling you this for your own good!
Would you like me to tell you how I see this situation?

BOOKS



**OUCH,
THAT
HURTS!**

A Handbook for People Who Hate Criticism

This new 83 page booklet by Jean Illsley Clarke is a handbook for people who hate criticism.

"Criticism hurts; it lowers self esteem; it suggests that we are failures or at least not adequate. At best, it signals us that someone is displeased with us. At worst, it implies that we should not be taking up space on this planet. And then the ones who criticize us often insist that it is good for us!"

"Good for us? Not likely — unless it is offered in such a way that we know what changes are desired of us and that we are worthwhile, valuable people. This is what is called CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM and it is not the main thrust of this book."

"**OUCH, THAT HURTS** is a collection of ideas that focus on DESTRUCTIVE CRITICISM, ANY MESSAGE THAT DOES NOT HELP ONE BE A BETTER PERSON, and how to handle it. There may be a 'kernel of truth' in that message, but people can usually look for the positive only after they have recovered from the hurt of the criticism or rejection."

"Why is there so much hurt? Often because a criticism:

1. Doesn't indicate what new behavior the person wanted, as in 'Stop That, or 'Get Lost,' or
2. Contains an attack on the person, as in name calling, 'You turkey,' or
3. is grandiose, as in 'You never do anything right!'"

You need to be able to throw the messages that hurt away.

This book offers thirteen methods of doing that. Some are short, like "Don't Let It In," and some are longer, like the "Kernel of Truth" exercises reprinted in this issue of **WE**.

Opening Activity That Offers Everyone a Positive Personal Message

Choose a partner. Make a name tag for him. Ask him to tell you about one time he received an undeserved criticism and how he did not let it in, feel bad or lower his self esteem.

After five minutes, ask each person to introduce his partner and tell the group how he rejected criticism, if he wants to share that information.

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. Read aloud, together, the following messages:

It is just as important not to let poison messages into our ears and our eyes as it is not to put poisoned food in our mouths. I am responsible for what I let into myself.

Ask people to congratulate each other for being responsible about what they let into their ears and eyes.

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Edited by Jean Illsley Clarke Published by Marnie Lilja Baehr
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- Suggested activities
- Thoughts on theory and purpose of support groups
- News from other support groups

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