



newsletter for nurturing support groups

Issue 36, Volume 6, Number 6
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Dear Reader,

Welcome to the 36th issue of **WE**, a newsletter for and about groups of people who get together for the purpose of giving each other personal support, examining attitudes and learning new skills.

In response to the *STRUCTURE CONTINUUM*, Connie Dawson identified the *NURTURE CONTINUUM*. Here are her thoughts and an activity that I invented in response. Read, think, try it out, write and let us know what you think about it and how you are using it.

Also see:

- Elizabeth Crary's structure in a children's group.
- Evelyn Goodall's suggestions for nurturing yourself with affirmations.

Jean Illsley Clarke

Jean Illsley Clarke
Editor

SUGGESTED ACTIVITY SELF-NURTURE

by Evelyn Goodall

One way we can nurture ourselves is to give ourselves affirmations for being.

Here are examples of those messages as they appear in the "Help!" books.

- ★ I'm glad you are alive.
- ★ You belong here.
- ★ What you need is important to me.
- ★ I'm glad you are you.
- ★ You can grow at your own pace.
- ★ You can feel all of your feelings.
- ★ I love you, and I care for you willingly.

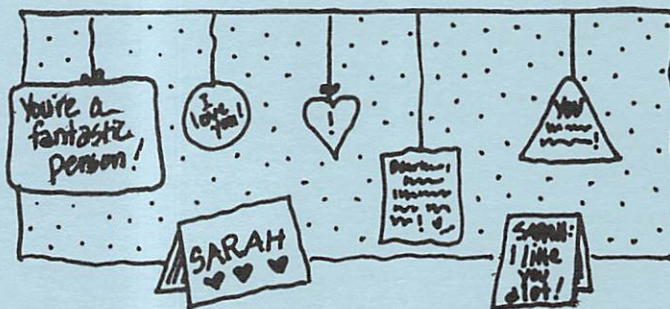
NURTURE: What It Is and Does

According to the American Heritage Dictionary, nurture is "something that nourishes; sustenance." Nurturance is, "The providing of loving care and attention." To nurture is, "To help grow or develop."

This **WE** focuses on *NURTURE* as unconditional love, the intent, and the affect issues of helping people grow. The *STRUCTURE*, or the bones and boundaries of life, were discussed in the last issue. Let us use *NURTURE* to indicate the soft tissue of giving care and attention.

What does nurturance do for us? It gives us hope and joy and the self confidence to be, to live, to feel free to develop both our uniqueness and our skills. If it is oppressive or overdone, it teaches us that we are lovable but not capable or responsible.

Think about the kinds of nurturance that are supportive to you. Lead and participate in the *NURTURE CONTINUUM EXERCISE* to learn more about which habits and situations are helpful and healthy for you and which need improving.



Suggestions for Accepting Being Messages

- Write Being Messages on paper scattered about the house for you to see.
- Be proud and confident.
- Give Being Messages—use touch, and think about what you are saying—test how you feel giving them.
- Flesh out Being Messages to be the way you need to hear them, and read them to yourself morning and night.
- Give Being Messages to yourself verbally in front of your family.
- Spend time doing nothing.
- Once a day, every day, do something for yourself.
- Write the messages the way you want to hear them, and get someone to read them to you.
- Show yourself you love yourself.

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THE NURTURE CONTINUUM

by Connie Dawson

I visited Jean Clarke's **Self-Esteem: A Family Affair** class* last week. Jean invited me because she was presenting an "extra" class devoted primarily to her new **Structure Exercise**. (See the last issue of **WE**.) I was excited by the many helpful qualities of the exercise and by the Structure Continuum on which it is built.

I was stimulated by experiencing the Structure Exercise and thought that a way of describing nurturing on the same sort of continuum would be helpful. Here it is:

ABUSE

CONDITIONAL
NURTURING

CARING
NURTURING

SUPPORTIVE
NURTURING

INDULGENT
NURTURING

NEGLECT

It is important for people who are uncomfortable with the ways they parent, and for people who feel "stuck" because their parenting isn't working well to understand how their parenting legacy has provided them with certain beliefs and skills. By inviting parents to understand the **Nurture Continuum**, we offer them an opportunity to identify the skills and beliefs they tend to favor, and, if they see other nurturing styles that would be more helpful, to make decisions about accepting and affirming new beliefs and learning new skills. This visualization offers parents a way to think about where they are and where they aim to go.

The ABUSE and NEGLECT positions, are at opposite ends of the continuum, as it reflects amount of involvement, but they generally have the same effect on children. ABUSE and NEGLECT both negate personhood. I believe that ABUSE means NEGLECT and NEGLECT means ABUSE, remembering that abuse and neglect are psychological as well as physical.

These positions tell children they don't deserve to be able to count on anyone. Abused and neglected children hear "Don't be" and "Go away." Paradoxically, the child seems to develop an extreme sense of loyalty to the parent(s). John Bowlby in his *Separation* book surmises that children find it extremely painful to acknowledge that their parents do not love them. When they feel unloved, they may protest even more sincerely that they, in fact, are loved and will protect the parents and themselves from exposure.

CONDITIONAL NURTURING means that children are taken care of to the extent that they *earn* the right to be taken care of. Their Being and Doing get bound together. They are what they do and it is never enough. Children understand that positive attention and nurturing carry a pricetag. The irony is that no matter what the child does to earn loving care from the parents, he/she always falls short. Such children report feeling inadequate and lacking any sense of truly being admired for themselves or for what they did.

INDULGENT NURTURING is marshmallowing. It is the sort of nurturing that fails to affirm because it robs the child of the true sense of who he is and asserts instead that the sender is more powerful or important. (Think of a time when you were indulged and didn't ask for the "gift", or were not asked, and indulged anyway, and how you felt.) CONDITIONAL and INDULGENT NURTURING carry definite "Don't be who you are" messages with a heavy parent overlay of "My needs are more important than yours."

The two positions in the center of the continuum represent clear nurturing appropriate to the child's age and development. CARING is the sort of NURTURING evident when a parent notices distress and affirms the child through word or deed, stroke or touch. The parent *does* for the child.

SUPPORTIVE NURTURING is *offered* by the parent and accepted or rejected by the child. Support implies a mutual contract that takes into account the type of nurturing agreed upon and its limits.

As a parent of adults, this continuum offers me a way to think of my parent role now. I believe that the strength of my nurturing and love is the same now as it was when my children were little; the frequency and nature of my nurturing interactions varies considerably with their age and has a lot to do with what is going on with them.

My daughter moved recently and was very ill with the flu the week before she was to do so. I asked her what she needed and proposed how I was willing to help her meet those needs. We negotiated an arrangement that was okay with both of us. She felt cared for and I didn't feel resentful.

This scheme may be helpful as a tool for assessment and as a planning chart for change. I see lots of possibilities for describing behaviors appropriate to each position on the continuum as we invite parents to identify and *think* about where they are and where they want to be.

I solicit your feedback, impressions or personal stories that this continuum may stimulate. I will write about your responses in a future issue of **WE**.

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*See **Self-Esteem: A Family Affair Leader Guide**
by Jean Illsley Clarke, Harper and Row.

OPENING ACTIVITY

for focusing on NURTURING skills

- Hand out name tags.
- Choose a partner. Make a name tag for him and ask him to tell you one or two ways he likes other people to let him know they care about his welfare.
- Introduce your partner and tell the group one way people let him know they care, if he is willing for you to share that information.

CLOSING ACTIVITY

that offers everyone a positive personal message

- At the end of the meeting briefly review the activities of the meeting.
- Ask for Resentments. Listen to resentments, do not defend or explain.
- Ask for Appreciations.
- Ask people to repeat together the following affirmation: "I can find satisfactory ways to nurture other people and I can find other people to nurture me."

The NURTURE CONTINUUM DESCRIPTION

*Despair and failure
flow from*

*Self-confidence,
Self-responsibility
and success flow from*

*Failure and despair
flow from*

ABUSE	THREAT	CARE	SUPPORT	INDULGENCE	NEGLECT
<p><u>Description:</u> Unless it kills a child, abuse is part of keeping a child alive.</p> <p>Spanking is touching and human beings need touch to live.</p> <p>Babies who are not touched die of a disease called marasmus.</p>	<p><u>Description:</u> Threat connects with the child but is critical or withholding.</p> <p>It implies that I will care for you only on my terms or as long as you please me.</p>	<p><u>Description:</u> Care is— comforting, freely given, helpful to the child, appropriate to the circumstances.</p>	<p><u>Description:</u> Support offers— help, comfort, love.</p> <p>It encourages the child to think and to do for himself what he is able to do.</p>	<p><u>Description:</u> Indulgence is a kind of patronizing, sticky love.</p> <p>It promotes dependency and signals the child not to think for herself, or be responsible.</p> <p>The parents seem to be there for the child but are really fulfilling their own needs through the child.</p>	<p><u>Description:</u> Neglect is the lack of attention by parents who are gone, are fulfilling their own needs at the expense of the child, or are “there but not there.”</p>

NURTURE CONTINUUM WORKSHEET

To get acquainted with the Nurture Continuum

1. Read and think about the six points on the Nurture Continuum
2. Read each underlying message and draw a line from the message to the corresponding point.
3. Read each description of behavior and words and draw a line from it to the corresponding point.

Underlying Message:	NURTURE CONTINUUM	Behaviors and Words
a) "You can have care as long as you earn it. My love is conditional."	1. ABUSE	g) Gives loving care. Says, "your arm is scraped! I'm sorry. Come here and I will clean and dress it for you."
b) "Don't grow up."	2. THREAT	h) Does not care for wounds. Says, "Stop that screaming or I will give you something to scream about."
c) "You are not important, you do not exist."	3. CARE	i) Gives rough care. Says, "I am getting sick of this. Do it again and you can clean your own scrape."
d) "I don't love you, or you don't matter or don't exist."	4. SUPPORT	j) Ignores the scrape. Says, "Don't bother me. Can't you see that I am busy?"
e) "I love you and your needs are important."	5. INDULGENCE	k) Speaks with love. Says, "Oh, I see that you have a scrape. Does it hurt? Do you want to take care of it yourself or would you like some help?"
f) "I love you and you are capable."	6. NEGLECT	l) Rushes to child. Says, "Oh, you hurt your arm, you poor thing. I'm sure that it hurts just terribly. I'll fix it. Go and lie down in front of the television and I will do your chores for you."

Suggested Activity

TOWARD CARE AND SUPPORT

by Jean Illsley Clarke

The purpose of this activity is to help us think about the points on the *NURTURE CONTINUUM*. It is written for a group but can be done alone by recording behaviors on a chart to help you think through Connie Dawson's suggestions about nurturing.

1. Read "The *NURTURE CONTINUUM*" page 2.

2. Ask people to try out "Threat" as a short way of saying conditional nurturing.

- Post a list of the points

ABUSE
THREAT
CARE
SUPPORT
INDULGENCE
NEGLECT

- Without naming the point, read the descriptions of each point from the *NURTURE CONTINUUM DESCRIPTION* chart on page 3. Read the descriptions in any order and ask people to tell which point they described.
- After people have identified the points, give each person a copy of the chart.
- Decide if the descriptions are clear. Rewrite them if you need to.

3. Give each person a copy of the *NURTURE CONTINUUM WORKSHEET* on page 4.

4. Follow the directions on the sheet.

5. See if people agree with the key. (1-d, h; 2-a, i; 3-e, g; 4-f, k; 5-b, l; 6-c, j). If not, rewrite the examples so they are clear.

6. Construct your own examples.

- Write the following situations on cards. Distribute them to people or let them choose a situation of their own.
My child's closest friend won't play with him anymore.
I think my child is using drugs.
Recently my child was jilted.
My child is afraid of failing math.
My child hates physical education.
My friend's mother is dying.
My friend's company is being bought out.
My son is supposed to do his own laundry and he doesn't have any clean clothes to wear today.
The baby is fussing.
The kids are fighting.
My colleague is in a bad mood.
My six year old has sand in her shoes.
My child says that he is gay.
- Ask each person to write an example of responses, behavior and words to her example that would fit each nurture point (or ask people to work together in groups of three to write the examples).
- Ask each person (or one person from each group of three) to share that example with the whole group. Encourage the group to say whether each response fits the point for them. Remind people that it is not necessary to agree on

these as responses may sound or feel different to different people. The purpose of this activity is to think about and get experience identifying the different points for ourselves.

7. Close by reading the following:

"Notice where you have given clear nurturing by CARING or by offering SUPPORT and celebrate those instances! You have been helping your child believe in her own worth and build her own self-esteem.

If you have slipped into ABUSE, THREAT, INDULGENCE or NEGLECT take those instances one at a time and think of three ways you could have offered CARE or SUPPORT in each case."

LEADING CHILDREN'S GROUPS

Elizabeth Crary, regular Brownie leader, asked her substitute how she got along with the girls. "Fine," she said, "Except that two girls got in a scuffle over something. I stopped them and asked, 'What would Mrs. Crary do in a case like this?' 'Well, she'd make us tell her what we did and then she'd make us practice doing it right, and then we'd go on.' It worked beautifully. Thanks."

Elizabeth Crary is the author of *Kids Can Cooperate*, Seattle, WA, Parenting Press, Inc., 1984.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITY SUGGESTION CIRCLE

To collect options or new ideas about how to NURTURE in a specific situation, use a *Suggestion Circle*.

As the suggestion circle leader:

1. Ask people to sit in a circle.
2. Tell the person who has the problem to be the "listener," and to state the problem clearly and concisely. The group may ask clarifying questions.
3. Ask the person to listen to each suggestion with no comment other than a "thank you" response.
4. Ask a group member to make a written list of the suggestions. This will allow the person to give full attention to listening to the suggestions.
5. Ask the group members to think of their best solution to the problem. Ask them to state their suggestions in one or two sentences. They are not to comment on or evaluate each other's suggestions.
6. When everyone has had a chance to give a suggestion, hand the written list of suggestions to the problem-solver to use as a resource when deciding what to do.

A Suggestion Circle of twelve people takes five minutes to complete. It is fast, caring, and efficient and honors everyone in the group. A Suggestion Circle can also be done by telephone.

1. When you have a problem that you need help with, phone six friends.
2. Clearly and quickly explain the problem to each friend, and ask for his or her best suggestion. Writing the problem out before you call may help you state it more clearly.
3. Listen to the suggestion and write it down.
4. Do not comment on the suggestion, other than saying "thank you".
5. After you have phoned several friends, look over your list of suggestions and decide which to use. Acknowledge the support that you have received from your friends.

by Sandra Sittko, MSW

From *Help! For Parents of Children Ages Three to Six Years*, Harper and Row.

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
- Asking for support
- Practice skills, new learnings, play
- Suggestion circle
- Plan the next meeting
- Resentments and Appreciations
- Closing activity that offers everyone a positive personal message

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**Led by Jean Illsley Clarke or Gail Nordeman.
Write to WE for details.**

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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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