

Self-help groups

Guidelines for a self-help group

For more information on self-help groups, get the extension publications *The role of organizer in a self-help group* (SP 149*), and *Self-help groups: What they are and how they can help you* (SP 150*).

1. Members or couples take turns as leaders.

If you're uncomfortable being a leader, you can get help from your group organizer to invite an outside speaker when it's your turn. Or you can agree with other members to serve coffee for them if they will take your turn as leader.

2. Group maintains confidentiality.

What is said in the group stays in the group. If members know that what they say will not be repeated outside the group, it will be much easier to express thoughts and feelings.

3. Everyone has a chance to talk.

In successful groups, all members share. Naturally some people talk more than others, but it's important not to "hog" the time. Everyone should have a chance to speak.

4. Group members care for each other.

If a member seems upset during or at the end of a meeting take the time to talk and listen to that individual. If the person agrees, you also can call the counselor who serves as a referral source for your group.

5. Members accept each other's feelings.

Expression of feelings relieves pressure. It's good for members to express feelings—anger, sadness, discouragement, as well as hopefulness or happiness. Of course, acting on feelings by hurting another person or oneself is unacceptable.

6. Differences of opinion are OK.

Different people in a group have different feelings and opinions. Remember that in a group discussion you're not looking for one right answer. If the discussion gets heated, remind each other that there are several different viewpoints on every topic.

7. Group organizer has continuing role.

The person or couple who helped organize your group can continue to be a resource for your group if problems arise or you need new discussion ideas.

8. Give notice if leaving the group.

If you decide to leave the group before the agreed-upon number of sessions are completed, attend a session and say goodbye or write a note to the group letting members know you are not going to remain in the group and why.

* Also available on the World Wide Web:
<http://www.extension.iastate.edu/pubs>

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