

New Jersey Self-Help Group Clearinghouse

1-800-367-6274 or 973-989-1122 * 375 East McFarlan St., Dover, NJ 07801 * www.NJgroups.org

Ya Gotta "Accentuate the Positive..."

WAYS TO KEEP YOUR SELF-HELP GROUP MEETINGS UPBEAT

Here are some ideas to help your group members focus on sharing positive experiences, insights and information—and avoid the risk of having a “pity party” meeting that has members going home feeling worse than before they came.

1. Consider adding a **new group guideline** (if you don't already have it) that explains that an important purpose of your group meeting is to help all members to **recognize and share their strengths, successes and hopes no matter how small**, not just their problems. Consider having a member periodically read your group guidelines at the start of each meeting to remind members.
2. **Help your members share their good experiences** by reminding them to contribute their insights, quotes and information on helpful resources or literature they have used, or practical coping techniques that work for them. For example, you could build this into the structure of your meetings by regularly **starting your meetings with introductions and brief “go-round” that permits each member to briefly answer a question that draws out a positive experience**, e.g. “Describe one good experience you've had since the last meeting?” Or a similar question could be developed that helps peoples to share their successes and joys for which they are thankful, etc.
Likewise, **think of a positive note, upon which to end the meeting**. Draw it from the meeting, or perhaps a motivational thought, quote or news item. Then thank them for coming & sharing, and wish them the best till the next meeting.
3. Another way to help members share move from just complaining about the same problems at each meeting is to **consider having them set personal goals at each meeting** and then report back at the next meeting how they progressed in meeting that goal, or (if not accomplished) what they will try to do to address it before the following meeting.
4. **Share good news gathered from outside the group** related to your issue or disorder, e.g. new research results, helpful magazine articles, news from national organizations and agencies that deal with your issues, etc.
5. **Encourage those who are now doing better or recovered to come back to help others who are not**. Bring your more experienced members or “veterans” back by encouraging them to “give back” and help others.
6. **Make members more aware of the real health benefits of helping others**. “One of the best ways to take your mind off your own problems is to help others with theirs” e.g., helping members to recognize how helpful it is *to them* to give other members feedback, whether it be to point out the progress of group and/or members, or in simply just give a helpful “nod of understanding” when a member is sharing. Research is increasingly showing how helping others provides real mental and physical health benefits, i.e., from recognizing the “helper's high”, to understanding the benefits of “helper therapy.”

*Do you have another suggestions based on your own group experience? Please let us know.
We would be most grateful. - Ed Madara ed@selfhelpgroups.org*