

NEW JERSEY SELF-HELP GROUP CLEARINGHOUSE

100 E. Hanover Ave., Suite 202, Cedar Knolls, NJ 07927-2020 * 1-800-367-6274 * <http://www.njgroups.org>

IDEAS FOR STRUCTURING YOUR GROUP MEETING

Meeting formats for self-help groups range from loosely structured discussion groups to more formally structured meetings. If you are not following the specific program of an established national group, the following may be helpful. These activities are common to some self-help group meetings and can be used as an initial guide for structuring your meeting. It is not necessary to incorporate every activity mentioned here in each meeting agenda.

1. Welcoming New Members: It is a practice of many self-help groups that a volunteer member greets and welcomes new members at the door when they arrive, introducing them to other members, especially those who have a similar situation.
2. Formal Opening of Meeting: At the agreed upon time, the meeting should be called to order by the chairperson. Some groups open their meetings with a welcoming statement, a formal statement of the group's purpose, and possibly more, e.g., a serenity prayer.
3. Introduction of Members: Going around the room, each member can introduce himself/herself and may state their reason for coming to the group. This is especially appropriate for new groups forming to help members get to know one another and learn about common concerns.
4. Discussion, Education, and Information Sharing: For new groups, it is helpful to regularly ask members to suggest topics that are of interest to them. Groups can also invite guest speakers to address issues. Tapes, books or articles can be reviewed and discussed. Time is allotted for sharing of personal experiences and helping each other.
5. Business/Planning Section: This time can be set aside for any business the group wishes to do, such as planning projects, arranging future meetings (choosing topics, speakers, etc.), making announcements, collection of dues.
6. Formal Closing: It is important that some signal be given to indicate that the meeting is formally closed, e.g., a closing statement or other ritual at the end of each meeting. Members are reminded of time and place of next meeting.
7. Refreshments are often served after some meetings, providing an important time for informal meeting and conversation.