

Suggestion Circles

Purpose:

The Suggestion Circle is...

- a problem-solving tool that offers high-quality alternatives,
- a powerful way to share information and ideas quickly,
- a way to honor someone with a problem,
- a time-efficient way to meet the needs of individuals in the group and,
- a way to include all members in the problem-solving process.

Procedure:

1. The person who wants the groups' input states the problem briefly - in one or two sentences.
2. Someone is asked to record the group's individual suggestions.
3. Participants sit in a circle, and each person is asked to suggest one high quality, briefly stated solution. (Everyone has the right to pass.) No questions are allowed. No one may comment on another person's suggestion. (This includes the person who owns the problem.)
4. When a suggestion is made, the person with the problem says thank you. At the end of the circle, the person with the problem makes her own decision to act (or not) on any of the ideas.

Policy:

When to use a Suggestion Circle, a brainstorming session, or a discussion? Each has advantages for different purposes.

- Brainstorming elicits a wide variety of creative, horizon-expanding options. Creativity is tapped when people are not concerned with the practicality of ideas.
- Discussions provide times for social interaction and opportunities to express feelings and concern. But they take time, and sometimes people become competitive rather than helpful, comparing and judging other's ideas.
- Suggestion Circles are efficient. A large number of options are aired in a short period of time, and everyone can participate.

(Adopted from WE Newsletter for Nurturing Support Groups, Jean Illsley Clarke, Editor.)