

SELF-HELP Philosophy*

The goal of a self-help group is to empower its members with the tools necessary to make adjustments needed to continue a life of dignity and independence.

Self-help group(s) ...

- ... share a common health concern
- ... govern themselves and their agenda with success dependent on each member's feelings of ownership.
- ... may use professionals as resource persons but not as leaders.
- ... **provide non-judgmental emotional support.**
- ... gather and share accurate and specialized information.
- ... membership is fluid; newcomers are helped by veterans and become veterans who may outgrow the need for the group.
- ... have a cause and actively promote that cause.
- ... increase public awareness and knowledge by sharing their unique and relevant information.
- ... charge small or no dues for involvement and typically struggle to survive.

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Did you realize that when we listen to someone, we generally concentrate more on what we're going to say rather than on listening? Have you noticed that our first response usually includes the words "I" or "me"?

Listening involves more than just hearing. Many of us don't realize what is involved in being a good listener. Many times people share important things with us, but instead of really listening, we give them advice or solutions or we are too distracted to give our full attention.

There is a strong temptation for these things to happen in a support group where people are regularly talking about the concerns in their lives. Do members of your support group make statements one after another without being acknowledged by the other group members?

Below are some ways that we listen and don't listen to people.

You are not listening to me when ...

- You say you understand before you know me well enough.
- You have an answer for my problem before I've finished telling you what my problem is.
- You cut me off before I finish speaking.
- You feel critical of my vocabulary, grammar, or accent.
- You are dying to tell me something.
- You tell me about your experience, making mine seem unimportant.
- You are communicating to someone else in the room.

- You refuse my thanks by saying you really haven't done anything.

You are listening to me when ...

- You come quietly into my private world and let me be me.
- You really try to understand me even if I'm not making much sense.
- You realize the hour I took from you has left you a bit tired and drained.
- You allow me the dignity of making my own decisions even though you think they may be wrong.
- You don't take my problem from me, but allow me to deal with it in my own way.
- You hold back your desire to give me good advice.
- You give me enough room to discover for myself what is really going on.
- You accept my gift or gratitude by telling me how good it makes you feel to know you have been helpful. ☐

Active Listening

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