

*Personal and Life
Management Skills
for Women*

Introduction



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University College

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Introduction

Personal and Life Management Skills for Women, originally published as *Survival Skills for Women: A Manual for Facilitators*, was prepared to accompany a series of three workshops designed to provide women with basic information about women's mental health issues and to promote a community self-help response to those issues. The three workshops were entitled *Exploring Feelings*, *Dealing with Stress* and *Assertiveness Training*.

The publication of *Personal and Life Management Skills for Women* was prompted in part by the lack of resources for women in many local communities. It is our hope that these materials will be of use to women relating to women in a number of settings such as schools, community organizations and women's organizations. We hope the workshops will result in less dependence on facilitators from outside the community, as the programs are designed to be conducted by local women trained in facilitation.

Having local women as facilitators increases community self-help and decreases dependence on professional outsiders. We hope local institutions such as community colleges, family service agencies and women's organizations would undertake a program offering to train women in delivering these workshops. An orientation to group facilitation is part of this material.

The publication of this manual was also prompted by our awareness that women are traditionally socialized as caregivers. In that process women learn to put the feelings and needs of others before their own. This can lead to emotional

stress and tension that is frequently unidentified, because women may not be skilled in observing their own needs and feelings. Numerous physical and mental health problems can be the result. Additional stress may be created by the conflict between this traditional role and the changing position of women in society and changing perceptions of who and how women should be. As women increasingly become breadwinners (at a lower average wage than men) and single-parent family heads, they continue to be care-givers. The stress load multiplies.

Women attempt to adapt to these changes as best they can, yet carry with them the emotional baggage of the care-giver. This baggage makes them singularly ill-equipped to pursue goals and relationships and to work for their own well-being. Women often need help in creating a balance between care-giving to others and care-giving to the self. When women feel something is wrong and do seek help, the solutions offered — anti-depressants, mood-altering drugs or prescriptions to change their attitudes — often compound the problem. In fact, women may be better helped by de-mystifying and de-professionalizing their problems. Opportunities for women to explore the issues involved, to share their experiences with other women and to develop tools for self-help and mutual support have been available in varying degrees through the feminist movement, the education, health and social service system and local community groups. Such opportunities have become the most credible means of assisting women to address the gap between the expectations of their upbringing and the reality of their current existence.

Many approaches and theories have been used to bridge this gap. *Personal and Life Management Skills for Women* provides

a basic integration of different approaches. Stress management techniques and assertiveness training are expanded by prefacing them with the necessity of first understanding and exploring self-esteem feelings and relating feelings to the world. Without a basic comprehension of our feelings, self-esteem and inner motivations, stress management and assertiveness training become mechanical and mere “Band-Aids.” In order for women to make sense of their inner experiences, it is essential to put those experiences into a feminist perspective of how emotional life is constructed. Although **these workshops are not therapy**, the explorations of feminist psychologists and therapists provide some of the theoretical framework woven into the workshop material. Critical to this perspective is acknowledgment of the interplay between the personal and the social, a link that traditional mental health approaches often seem to ignore.

Our approach to group process and facilitation draws on the work feminists have done on empowering people through a group process. The role of the facilitator is limited. The facilitator facilitates, she does not lead. People do not feel stronger when they are told what to do, how to do it, and what they should feel. Popular education techniques also draw on this approach, seeing facilitators and participants as equal and stressing the interactive, dynamic nature of learning.

The Women’s Self-Help Network on Vancouver Island has produced an extensive manual, *Working Together for Change*. We recommend this to any facilitators interested in our material as it includes in-depth descriptions of popular educational techniques, the self-help method, and an extensive section on training facilitators.

We also highly recommend the Center for Conflict Resolution's *A Manual for Group Facilitators*. This concise and easily readable manual has descriptions of all aspects of group facilitation including what facilitation is, setting up groups, group dynamics, group problems and evaluation. Because of this resource, we have limited our own writing in these areas. Both of these resources complement our own work and are listed in the bibliography.

The first workshop, *Self-Esteem* (formerly *Exploring Feelings*), focuses on exploring different facets of women's emotional experiences and connecting them to social attitudes directed towards women. Participants will explore and expand their awareness of feelings and learn to distinguish thoughts from feelings. The workshop examines both positive feelings and feelings perceived as problematic. Although specific areas are covered, the workshops are designed to be adaptable to the needs or interests of specific groups.

The second workshop, *Stress* (formerly *Dealing with Stress*), builds naturally on the first, as unexpressed and unresolved feelings are major sources of stress. As our awareness of feelings develops, so does awareness of our stress patterns. The workshop explores the links between emotion and stress and the relationship of stress to the external environment. To deal with stress means not only to learn to relax, but to learn to respond to and change the sources of stress, whatever they may be.

Once our awareness of feelings and stress patterns has been heightened, we have a better idea of which changes we would like to make in our lives and relationships. *Assertiveness* (formerly *Assertiveness Training*) is offered last, because it is a

behavioral tool that helps turn personal insights and learnings into action in the social arena. The workshop focuses on utilizing increased self-esteem and self-awareness to produce a changed response to problems faced. Assertive techniques are practiced using situations relevant to the group members' lives. Assertiveness is dealt with realistically as one tool that can help women move in appropriate directions, though assertiveness in itself does not provide the direction.

The workshops — *Self-Esteem*, *Stress*, and *Assertiveness* — are designed to be cumulative and ideally should be delivered as a package; however, each workshop may be presented independently. When the workshops are presented independently, facilitators can borrow from the other workshops to create a well-rounded session.

The material on *Self-Esteem* is far more extensive than that on *Stress* and *Assertiveness*. We limited the latter sections because many excellent resources are available elsewhere. The bibliography at the end of each section lists some of the books we have found particularly helpful.

Section One

An Orientation to Group Facilitation

An Orientation to Group Facilitation

To facilitate means to *make easy, promote, help forward*. To facilitate means to empower others, to enable them to explore, identify and utilize their own knowledge, experience and skills. You are a facilitator, not a leader.

To facilitate well, you must let go of any perceptions of yourself as leader. It is not enough simply to think to yourself that you want to facilitate, but not lead. You have to look within yourself for your own hidden motives and needs for power or control. You need to be very honest with yourself. If your self-esteem and self-worth are tied up with being an effective facilitator, you may be unwilling to accept criticism from your groups. You may find ways of showing that you are right, or of trying to cover up your mistakes. Are you unwilling to admit that an exercise failed? Are you out of touch with the group's needs? Do you avoid issues in the group that you are uncomfortable with? Do you find yourself ignoring someone in the group? Answering yes to any of these questions may indicate that you are setting yourself up as an expert and others as students.

Most of us are saddled with cultural conditioning that stresses individualism, competition and self-preservation. If you present yourself as working on these issues, as struggling towards a model of group facilitation that encourages democratic participation and shared learning, your group will trust you and work with you rather than for you or against you.

The goal of a facilitator is always to encourage both personal and collective power. Personal power comes from an enabling process whereby workshop participants see that they have something to offer, that they are taken seriously and that they count.

They begin to understand that they can be powerful without taking power away from another. It is critical that the facilitator role-models this process, and is an example of personal power not based on control over others.

If you are successful, your group will develop a sense of collective power. Collective power comes from the realization that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. By working together, group members learn to create something new and change becomes possible. It is an exhilarating process to see group members begin to support and help each other and to see isolation barriers crumble. Your role as facilitator is to nurture this sense of collective power, facilitate its expression, and encourage the group to take the experience beyond the workshop into their daily lives.

Facilitation Tools

This section includes an explanation of some tools that can be used to organize and facilitate a group. Many of these tools are used throughout the workshop material and are explained in more detail when appropriate.

1. Size of group

The size of the group will determine the level of individual participation. It is important to have a group large enough to ensure diversity of experience and opinions, yet small enough to provide opportunity for everyone to be heard. A group of twelve to sixteen is ideal, and the maximum should be twenty.

If the group is too large, individuals will have fewer opportunities to communicate their opinions and ideas, and more vocal participants may dominate. Some women may feel threatened in a larger group, and trust is harder to build.

There are also drawbacks if the group is too small. Quieter members may feel pressured to speak more than they are comfortable doing, and discussions will not have the same degree of differing opinions and perspectives.

2. Room set-up and seating

It is important to be involved as much as possible in determining what kind of room is used for the workshops. The comfort level of participants will contribute to their ability to remain focused on workshop content. Be certain the room is large enough to facilitate movement from large group to small group activities.

The set-up of the room is an important factor in determining the tone of the group. Participants can be involved in setting up the

chairs. Desks or tables on which to write are useful but can tend to act as barriers to group interaction. Usually a horseshoe shape or circle is recommended. This allows participants to have visual access to the flip chart and the facilitator, as well as eye contact with each other.

Participants tend to become attached to initial seating positions. It is useful to ask participants to change seats to encourage a variety of interactions. This is best done after a break. When dividing the group into smaller groups, it is useful to encourage — and if necessary, structure — the division to allow for flexibility in the seating arrangements. This will also facilitate more interaction among the group as a whole.

3. Introductory exercises

Always begin your workshop with a warm-up, ice breaker or get acquainted activity. Such exercises facilitate the building of trust within the group, and introduce participants to each other in a way that stimulates interaction among them. They also enable participants to get to know each other and generally set the tone for the workshops. (See *Introductory Exercises* at the beginning of *Self-Esteem* workshop content.)

4. Small group discussion

This tool allows for greater individual participation by facilitating discussion among group members.

The facilitator can, depending on the size of the group, break the group into smaller groups of twos, threes, fours, etc. The smaller the group, the greater the intensity of sharing. Groups of five or six, however, allow participants to experience a greater diversity of feelings and opinions.

Small group discussions enable those participants who are uncomfortable sharing in the larger group to contribute to discussions in a less threatening environment. Some exercises in the training manual require the small groups to appoint a recorder to record the decisions or points made by the group. These points are then shared with the group as a whole at the end of the exercise. The facilitator can use the information sharing, feedback or general discussion in the whole group to integrate the different points raised. When exercises do not call for information sharing or discussion, it is useful for the facilitator to summarize the purpose of the exercise after reconvening the group.

5. Flip chart

A flip chart is a useful tool. It allows a facilitator to maintain eye contact with the group while she records information for all participants to see. All ideas arising from a brainstorming process can be written on the flip chart. Key discussion points can be written out ahead of time on the flip chart. This gives the participants a focus and enables the facilitator to continue to face the group and maintain eye contact. Relevant information recorded on flip charts and posted around the room enables the facilitator to provide continuity and keep the group focused. At the end of the workshop the flip chart sheets can be collected and the information transcribed for filing or distribution.

A blank sheet can be posted for issues to be addressed at a later time. This allows participants to identify issues without interrupting the flow of the workshop.

6. Time-keeping

A participant can be appointed as time-keeper when appropriate. In small group discussions or role-play situations, each group can appoint a time-keeper to allow equal time for each participant. Time-keepers can also contribute to maintaining the day's structure. They can inform the group when it is time for coffee breaks or lunch breaks, and help the group keep to agenda timelines. If an exercise is taking longer than expected, or the group wants to discuss a different topic, then the group as a whole can negotiate for more time. Sharing responsibility in this way is encouraging for both facilitator and participants.

7. Brainstorming

This tool allows for as many ideas as possible to surface without judgment or criticism. Participants raise ideas which are recorded on a flip chart. None of the ideas are discussed until the end of the brainstorming process. Delaying discussions allows participants to suspend a normal desire to respond to every point. It permits a greater range of possibilities to emerge. If the group is unresponsive, the group leader can facilitate the process by raising and recording some relevant ideas to break the ice. Set a time limit for the brainstorming sessions. When time is up, discussion of the ideas takes place.

8. Rounds

This technique facilitates the sharing of information, ideas or feelings in the group as a whole. Each participant takes a turn to express her opinions or feelings with regard to an assigned task or question. This allows everyone to speak, including the facilitator. No comments or discussion of points raised takes place until the end of the round. Turns can take place in the order of

seating, or the facilitator can ask for a volunteer to start the process and the sharing then takes place at random. Going around the group in a specific order can help a tense group relax as it removes the tension of wondering who is going to speak up when. Those who habitually wait till the end or who are hesitant to speak at all learn to participate more fully. Those who habitually speak first learn to wait.

9. Check-ins

Check-ins serve to get participants involved in the group. They are most often used at the beginning of a workshop and take the form of a round. Check-ins enable participants to become present, and act as an indicator to the rest of the group as to how a participant is feeling. Again, this is not a time for discussion or questions. If someone begins to get in touch with feelings and wants to deal with an issue in more depth, the participant can be encouraged to get support from other group members during the breaks. If necessary, the participant can ask the group for some time to discuss the issue right then. The group must agree in order to avoid resentments later.

Check-ins could include group members sharing such things as:

- How they feel right now
- How they feel about the workshop or the last session
- One thing they did to reduce stress since the last session
- One way in which they were assertive since the last session

10. Drawing

Drawing is a creative and alternative way for a group to communicate ideas and feelings. Drawings can be used in a variety of ways and are especially useful in facilitating the sharing of feelings in a group. It is important to make it clear to participants that there is no expectation to produce art as such, but that it is an alternative channel for self-expression. The facilitator should also participate in the process. After drawing, participants can share their pictures and talk about what arises out of them.

Samples of how drawing is used is included in the section on *Self-Esteem*.

11. Relaxation techniques

This technique is used before a visualization and in more depth as a stress coping tool. It is a structured process for enabling participants to relax the body by focusing the mind. Participants are asked to participate as fully as they feel comfortable. The facilitator can ask the participants to take a few deep breaths. This can be done at any time in the workshop, especially if there is tension in the group.

12. Visualization and guided fantasy

Visualization and guided fantasy are powerful techniques. They are methods of using the imagination to change negative or outdated self-concepts to positive ones. This is done by creating images or mental pictures while in a relaxed state. Other modes of expression are incorporated into the process, such as the mental creation of sounds, smells, and sensations. It is important to point out to participants that strong feelings may arise

during a visualization and that there will be time allotted to share the experience after the visualization session.

It is important to explain the purpose of the exercise and what is going to happen. Encourage those participants who cannot or do not feel comfortable being involved in the process to take the time to relax. Participants should be sitting comfortably or lying down with their eyes closed. Again, if participants are not comfortable closing their eyes, the facilitator encourages them to participate in whatever way they find comfortable.

Do not rush through a visualization. Allow for pauses and periods of silence to give participants time to visualize. After having read the visualization, allow time for participants to come back slowly. Allow time for those who want to share their experiences to do so; accept that some participants may not want to.

Examples of visualizations are included throughout the manual. Visualization scripts may be read by the facilitator, or the audio-tape version can be played if it is available.

13. Role-playing

This technique is outlined in the section on workshop material for *Assertiveness*.

Role-playing is a way of practicing desired behaviors and can be used for many different purposes. It can be used as a discussion tool. Portraying or role-playing a situation helps to stimulate discussion and generates ideas. It is a technique that enables participants to gain insights into their own thoughts, feelings and behaviors. It also energizes the group and can build self-confidence. Role-playing can take place in a small group or in the group as a whole.

Videotaping role-playing is a useful tool. This allows participants to actually see themselves and therefore increases their awareness of their interactions and communication styles. It also gives concrete images of what it means to change behaviors. A role-play can take place in front of the group, and can be videotaped at the same time. The videotape is then played back to the group, followed by discussion and feedback. If appropriate, the role-play can be videotaped a second time to give the participant an opportunity to integrate the feedback.

14. Energizers

Energizers are exercises that aim to revive energy and refresh the mind and body. This includes physical exercises and group activities. If the group's energy is low, a physical exercise can be introduced. Each person can share in a round, a stretch, or do an exercise they know. The facilitator can also initiate a physical activity. This can take five to fifteen minutes, depending on the energy level of the group.

Exercises that can lift the spirits of a group also serve to raise energy. They should be short and pleasurable. They are especially useful when there is tension in the group or when the group is bored.

Examples include the group singing a favorite song, performing an action song or charades. Treats or prizes can be distributed. Three minute stretch breaks can be taken. Jokes could be told or cartoons shown on the overhead projector.

15. Appreciations

Appreciations function to improve participants' perceptions of themselves and to build closeness in the group. They allow participants to experience how positive feedback feels. Very often, participants realize how little they receive appreciations and how they tend to discount it when they do. Participants are asked to give appreciations to other participants as part of a closing exercise. Appreciations take the form of a recognition or compliment. For example, someone might say *I appreciate how you supported me in that exercise*. The person receiving the appreciation then thanks the sender and is to say nothing that minimizes or deflects the appreciation. Appreciations do not happen as rounds. They take place at random and should be stated only if sincerely felt. The facilitator can participate in the process.

16. Closing rounds

It is important to end a workshop in a positive way. Closing rounds utilize the structure described in the section on rounds. Participants can be asked to share a positive thing about themselves, or something they learned from the workshop or how they felt about the workshop.

17. Evaluation

The purpose of evaluation is to enable the facilitator to learn what worked and what did not in the workshop. This results in concrete ideas about changes and improvements needed for next time. It is important to explain the purpose of the evaluation to the participants, emphasizing that it will help to improve future sessions.

There are various methods of evaluating a workshop. An evaluation form can be distributed at the end of the workshop. Participants can put their name on the form if they choose. The forms can be left by the door as the participants leave. It is important to design the form to elicit as much feedback as possible. It is also helpful if the form is related to the content area. (See **Evaluation Forms**)

Another method of evaluation is to draw a line down the middle of the flip chart. On the left hand side write *what was good* about the workshop and on the right hand side write *what could be improved*. Beginning with what was good, participants are asked to brainstorm ideas. Again, it is important to stress that this is not a time for comments or discussion. After allowing enough time, move to the other side and ask for improvements. The facilitator must not comment on the points raised.

18. Group dynamics

Group dynamics is the term used to describe the process or interaction that takes place among group members. When problems in group dynamics occur, it is very difficult to accomplish the goals of the workshop. For example, a few people might dominate the group, which may cause tension and a lack of trust. How a group is facilitated will affect the dynamics in the group. The most effective learning tool for a facilitator is to practice and receive feedback.

For a more detailed description of group dynamics, see *A Manual for Group Facilitators* by Brian Auvine from the Center for Conflict Resolution.

Section Two

Exercises to Improve Facilitation Skills

Exercises to Improve Facilitation Skills

The following exercises can be utilized in sessions designed to improve facilitation skills.

Exercise A: Group Facilitation

Purpose: To identify qualities of a good facilitator
To allow participants to reflect on their own strengths and weaknesses

Time: 15 minutes

Materials: Flip chart and pens or chalk and chalkboard

Procedure:

1. The facilitator initiates the exercise by asking for brainstorming on the qualities of a good facilitator. The group is reminded that brainstorming means listing the qualities and not discussing them. The facilitator writes down all the qualities mentioned. (If participants find the list useful, suggest that a volunteer type up the list and duplicate it.)
2. Have a discussion period. Focus on what each participant considers her strengths and her areas of weakness. Both can be discussed. The facilitator can keep track of these and adapt the workshop agenda to the self-defined needs of the group.

Exercise B: Values Clarification

Purpose: To identify and analyze values and judgments, and how these biases affect the role of the facilitator

Time: 45 – 60 minutes

Materials: Four signs posted in each corner of the room

Procedure:

1. The facilitator introduces the exercise and explains its purpose. It is important to point out that making decisions or assumptions regarding someone's behavior reflects our own values. Our pre-determined attitudes, judgments or biases are determined by our values, and influence how we feel about persons we interact with in a workshop. Our biases and assumptions can distort our view of someone's behavior and can interfere with the listening and interacting process. This exercise aims first to identify values, and second, to enable us to be aware of how these values determine our reactions as facilitators.
2. The facilitator reads out the following categories or posts them as signs but does not comment or explain.
 - a) *I am not a feminist, but ...*
 - b) *I am a radical feminist.*
 - c) *I am a feminist but ...*
 - d) *I am a feminist.*
3. Participants are asked to go to the corner of the room that best indicates the values they hold with regard to the concept of feminism.

4. When participants have chosen a corner, ask them to discuss with each other the meaning each assigns to their category. Set a time limit.
5. One recorder is appointed in each group to record the points raised.
6. The whole group then comes back together, and the recorders share the summaries from each group.
7. Divide into discussion groups of four. Each group should include representation from each of the four categories.
8. On a flip chart write the discussion question: *How did you feel and what were your judgments about those in the other corners of the room?*
9. The participants return to the group as a whole and discuss how it felt to make and express judgments.
10. The group brainstorms a lot of judgments that might arise in a group situation — racial, anti-Semitic, etc.
11. The group discusses how pre-judgments can interfere with a facilitator's interaction with group participants. It is helpful for the facilitator to give examples, e.g. a facilitator has a pre-judgment that all radical feminists are man-haters. This leads her to make assumptions about and subsequently avoid a participant who describes herself as a radical feminist.
12. The facilitator should allow time for an evaluation of the exercise.

Exercise C: Group Difficulties

Purpose: To identify common difficulties that arise in groups and to share responses to these difficulties

Time: 1 hour

Procedure:

1. The group is asked to brainstorm problems that could arise in groups. These could be problems they have experienced or problems they are afraid of experiencing. Ask the group to think about situations that would create anxiety for them, and types of behavior that would be hard for them to confront constructively. A volunteer records the problems on the flip chart.
2. The group is divided into two or three smaller groups. Each group picks a couple of problems and discusses ways of resolving them.
3. Each group designates a spokesperson who summarizes its findings for the larger group.
4. A brief discussion in the whole group can follow. Keep the discussion brief as it is important to move into an experiential mode and give participants an opportunity to practice dealing with difficulties.

Exercise D: Group Techniques

Purpose: To practice techniques to affect on individual and group dynamics within a workshop setting

Time: 2 hours +

Procedure:

1. Use areas of concern identified in previous exercises, or the facilitator can use examples of her own.
2. Divide group into two groups of six. (Alternative: The group can remain together with six members volunteering to be a group. The remaining members of the workshop can then act as observers.)
3. One person in each group is the facilitator. The remaining five people are members of the group, who each will take on a role from the list identified by the participants or from each of the following:
 - a) someone who dominates group discussions;
 - b) someone who keeps leaving the room;
 - c) someone who interrupts;
 - d) someone who is side-talking;
 - e) someone who keeps asking questions that do not relate to the topic but to personal needs;
 - f) someone who does not want to participate in an exercise.
4. The facilitator leads a discussion in the group or an exercise from the content areas (e.g. an opening round).

5. One person in the group then acts out her role.
6. After the discussion or exercise is completed and the facilitator has responded to the behavior of the individual, the role play could stop and feedback be given. Feedback from group members and from observers is essential to the success of the role play. (Videotaping is an excellent feedback tool.)
7. The facilitator then summarizes points raised.
8. The small group can reconvene with a new facilitator and a different exercise or discussion.

Note: The focus of the exercise is on the facilitator's skills in affecting on an individual's behavior in the group. For this reason, if a content exercise is used or discussed, the focus should not be drawn to the facilitator's skills at leading discussions or implementing the exercise.

Section Three

Workshop Evaluation Forms

Title of Workshop: _____

1. Overall, how useful was the session to you?

<i>Not very</i>			<i>Somewhat</i>				<i>Very</i>		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

2. How appropriate was the level of the content?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

3. Did the workshop focus on issues that are relevant to you?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

4. Which aspect of the workshop was most useful to you?

5. What would you suggest we add or emphasize if we run the course again?

6. How would you evaluate the facilitator?

☐ Excellent ☐ Good ☐ Adequate ☐ Don't Use Again

7. Were the facilities adequate? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Were the handouts useful? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Was the content well organized? ☐ Yes ☐ No

8. Any further comments? (*Use reverse if necessary*)

Name _____ Organization _____

Title of Workshop: _____

1. What do you consider to have been the most valuable experience gained from the seminar? Why?

2. What aspects of the program could have been strengthened? How?

3. In relation to what you expected to learn from the sessions, you were:

<i>Dissatisfied</i>										<i>Very satisfied</i>	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		

4. How would you rate the facilitator?

<i>Name</i>	<i>Unsatisfactory</i>				<i>Satisfactory</i>				<i>Excellent</i>			
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		

5. How would you rate the materials for the sessions?

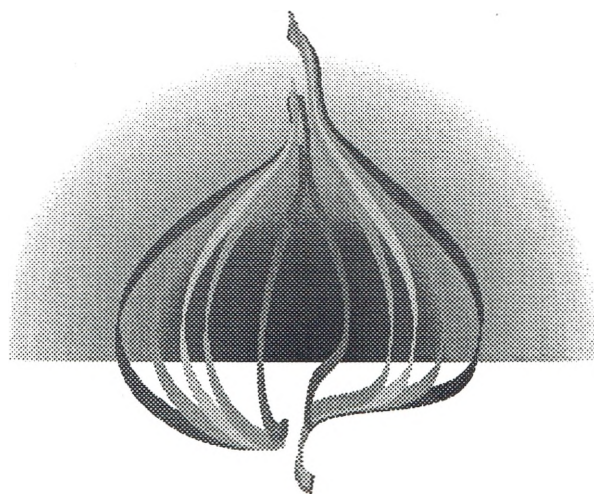
<i>Subject</i>	<i>Unsatisfactory</i>				<i>Satisfactory</i>				<i>Excellent</i>			
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		
A. _____												
B. _____												
C. _____												

6. What would have made the sessions more effective?

7. Other comments. (Use reverse if necessary)

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*Personal and Life
Management Skills
for Women*

Self-Esteem



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A Facilitator's Manual

Personal and Life Management Skills for Women:

A Facilitator's Manual

Self-Esteem

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Self-Esteem

Introduction

Self-esteem is directly related to feelings. This workshop aims to explore some of the basic emotional realities of women's experience. It affords women with a chance to learn more about feelings and to understand feelings in the context of the life-experiences of women. Through increased understanding, women are able to increase their self-esteem.

In our culture there is little emphasis on feelings. Not many of us were encouraged to express feelings. In fact we were often given the message that we are good if we do not show anger, do not cry, are not too loudly happy. In our attempts to conform to these expectations, we hold down our natural expressiveness. In doing this, we often suppress our awareness of our feelings. If we are considered bad when we show anger, then we try not to be angry, which means denying ourselves when we are angry. If we are called a baby for crying, we try not to cry. We try to forget that we are sad. This denial of feelings can have negative effects.

Different families have different ways of relating to feelings. In some it is acceptable to be angry and fight, but to show vulnerability is scorned. Some families deny all feelings. Some families allow tears only when members are physically ill or hurt. Many families allow different feelings to be expressed by each gender. Most of us have had childhood experiences of holding back feelings. It could be a death that we were not helped to grieve, feelings of abandonment because a parent left, loneliness from being an only child, love that we were unable to

express, and so on. We may not have had sufficient guidance for dealing with feelings through the complicated process of growing through adolescence and puberty into adulthood, and yet as adults are expected to display emotional maturity.

The intent of this workshop is to take some time to look at feelings, what they are, how they get constructed and how we can live with them. It is divided into sections that focus on different facets of women's emotional life: a generalized overview of feelings and women, how feelings connect to the life-cycle, depression, feelings of anger, and feelings in relationships. The section on self-esteem draws out and encourages positive feelings towards the self. In addition, the sections on introductions and closure provide ways of framing the workshop. The introduction moves the group gently towards a safe environment for talking about feelings. The section on closure offers ways to integrate the workshop experience into women's lives.

The material is divided into sections to illustrate the key areas that need to be addressed. Each section includes an introduction that details the reason for its inclusion. With the exception of introductions and closure, facilitators can organize the material as they wish, being sure to include something from each section. The interests of both the facilitator and the group will determine the emphasis given. However, it is important to include at least a brief discussion or a simple exercise from the sections that are not covered in depth. Each section includes an introduction that details the reason for its inclusion.

A sample agenda for a Self-Esteem Workshop follows.

Sample Agenda

Self-Esteem Workshop

- *Discussion:* Housekeeping Information and Agenda
- *Introduction:* Facilitators and Participants
- *Exercise 1.2* Getting Acquainted: Two Questions
- *Exercise 1.3* Introducing Feelings
- *Exercise 1.4* Introducing Feelings Circle
- *Overview To Workshop:*
Discussion on women and feelings; women and depression
- *Exercise 1.12* Self-Esteem Highs and Lows

Break

- *Discussion:* The Rescue Triangle
- *Exercise 1.35* The Rescue Triangle
- *Exercise 1.13* What I Like About Myself

Lunch

- *Exercise 1.22* Self-Image Tree
- *Discussion:* Women and Dependency
- *Exercise 1.10* Exploring Dependency Needs
- *Discussion:* Women and Anger
- *Exercise 1.28* Anger in the Family of Origin
- *Exercise 1.29* Fear of Anger
- *Exercise 1.34* Releasing Anger – Part II
- *Exercise 1.17* Introducing Affirmations

Break

- *Exercise 1.19* Using Affirmations – Part II
- *Exercise 1.36* Closure: Visualization
- *Exercise 1.37* Closure: Goal-setting
- *Exercise 1.38* Closure: Moving Outwards
- *Appreciations*
- *Written Evaluations*

Section One

Introductions and Trust Building

Introductions and Trust Building

It is critical to define the parameters of the workshop and create an environment in which women feel comfortable and safe.

Introductions should include an overview of the structure and the content of the workshop, and background information on facilitators as well as information about each participant. Introductions and trust building should take about an hour and will set the stage for the rest of the workshop.

The experiential portion of the workshop has several purposes. It enables women to realize quickly that the process will involve them, and that they are the authorities on their own feelings and experiences; no one is going to stand before them with a flip chart and tell them how or what they should feel. This is extremely important as many women who come to these workshops will have had prior experiences of having their feelings invalidated and discounted by both professionals and intimates.

The exercises allow women to make contact with each other in a way that increases exploration of feelings and establishes a sense of mutual trust. They also provide an initial focus and language for talking about feelings in a gentle and non-threatening way, and allow women to pay attention to what they already know about their feelings, to expand their ideas about what feelings are, and to bring out positive feelings. The latter is crucial as it lets women know that this process focuses on both positive and negative feelings.

The following guidelines will help in establishing trust:

1. Give the group information about the physical facilities.
2. Give the group a sense of how the workshop time will be organized.
3. Provide an outline of the day so they know what to expect.
4. Include a very brief introduction to what feelings are and women's relationship to them.
5. Ask participants what they wish to get out of the workshop. Be prepared to modify or adapt the material accordingly.
6. Stress that participation in the exercises will assist them to maximize what they can gain from the workshop, but that participation is VOLUNTARY.
7. Self-disclose: Give your background, why you do this work, what you have in common with group participants. Talk about YOUR expectations of the day.
8. Keep opening comments brief.
9. Take the time to do initial trust building exercises. These encourage women to participate in comfortable and safe ways and are crucial in setting the tone for the day.
10. Establish agreements on how you will handle issues of confidentiality, honesty, equal time, etc.

Script for a Sample Introduction

This workshop is a chance for you to explore your feelings. Your feelings, not your husband's or your lover's or your neighbor's or your mother's. Just yours. And the reason that we are giving this workshop is that talking about feelings is not really an easy thing to do. Mostly, as women, we do not understand our feelings; often we do not even know what they are. The ones we are aware of having, we criticize ourselves for and feel guilty about.

We may say things like: *I'm very selfish, No matter what happens, I always cry and then I feel terrible, I get angry, and then I hate myself.*

Sometimes, we pretend that we do not have any feeling. For example: *Feelings just don't help you get things done; I just take things as they come; There's no point getting upset, or I'm not an angry person.*

Most of us spend a great deal of time trying to figure out what other people are feeling and what other people are needing.

Many professionals believe that this focus on others' feelings and the denial of our own is learned in childhood. We will talk about that as the day goes on. For now, we would just like to say that the way girl children are socialized teaches care-taking of others at the expense of the self. Nurturing behavior is reinforced and acted out through games girls are encouraged to play (dolls, houses, etc.). Girls are encouraged to be *good* which so often means *put others first; don't be selfish.*

So, what we want to give you today is a chance to pay attention to yourself, your feelings, your needs. We would like you to pay

attention to the feelings that come up for you as you do this. Is your attention drawn to the experiences of others or are you able to stay focused on your own? Do you have a sense that your feelings do not quite count or do they seem far away? Do you feel guilty giving yourself all this attention or does it feel like a relief, something you have needed?

We would like you to give yourself permission today to be as open as you can to learning about your own feelings. And that means not to pressure yourself that you *should* be doing things a certain way. All the *shoulds* that go on in our heads are just another way to keep ourselves removed from feelings.

Exercise 1.1 Getting Acquainted: Introduction Pairs

Purpose: To stimulate interaction between group members

Time: 10 – 15 minutes

Materials: None

Procedure:

1. Ask each participant to partner with the person next to her.
2. Each woman in the pair is to ask the other her name, what she would like to get out of the day and something about herself that she would be comfortable sharing.
3. Each woman then introduces her partner to the group, saying the things that she has been told.

Exercise 1.2 Getting Acquainted: Two Questions

Purpose: To allow participants to get to know each other
 To begin to establish trust

Time: 15 minutes

Materials: Flip chart and pens

Procedure:

1. Introduce the exercise by explaining that when we come into a new group there are always questions we would like to ask other participants. If we can ask these questions and have them answered, we become more comfortable.
2. Brainstorm with the group and record on the flip chart all the questions they would like to have answered by other members of the group.
3. Divide the group into pairs. After talking for a few minutes, each group member introduces her partner to the group by stating:
 - a) her name, and
 - b) her answer to two of the questions from the flip chart.

Note: If more time is available, the number of questions can be increased.

Exercise 1.3 Introducing Feelings

Purpose: To practice expressing feelings in a non-threatening way

Time: 15 minutes

Materials: Individual cards containing a variety of positive and negative feeling words

Procedure:

1. Participants pair up and each pair receives four cards, each with a different feeling word written on it.
2. Each participant identifies:
 - a) When she last had that feeling, and
 - b) What were the circumstances.Pairs who complete the task before others can be given more cards.
3. The exercise can be extended and more cards given to the whole group.

Note: The facilitator can make up the cards from the list of feeling words. Give blank cards to those who may want to identify their own feeling words.

*Exercise 1.3***Feeling Words**

Write onto 3 x 5 cards or photocopy cut and paste words onto 3 x 5 cards. Multiple copies of each word may be necessary.

Love	Joy	Rejected
Hate	Fear	Sad
Anxiety	Calm	Nervous
Silly	Pride	Trust
Relaxed	Anger	Worry
Happy	Envy	Tense
Crazy	Grief	Despair

Exercise 1.4 Introducing Feelings Circle

Purpose: To encourage interaction
To increase participants' familiarity
with each other
To increase participants' comfort in
talking about feelings

Time: 20 minutes

Materials: None

Procedure:

1. Divide the group in half and form two circles, an inner and outer circle facing each other.
2. Each inner/outer pair is to talk for one minute each on a particular subject. The subject could be sharing how you feel about being in the workshops, an experience that you handled well, sharing an experience of sadness, talking about a time you felt your feelings were understood, or a time when you felt misunderstood.
3. After two minutes, the outer circle moves to the right, creating new pairs.
4. Keep strict time, informing participants as each minute passes.
5. Debrief activity by asking how it felt to talk about feelings with others.

Exercise 1.5 Pleasant Feelings

Purpose: To build trust among group participants
To dispel any fears that this workshop will bring
up only painful or negative feelings

Time: 10 minutes

Materials: None

Procedure:

1. Ask participants to form pairs.
2. Each person is to talk for a couple of minutes about an experience she had in which she felt pleasure or happiness. This experience could be recent or far in the past.
3. Debrief by asking how it felt to talk about pleasant feelings.

Exercise 1.6 Recent Feelings

Purpose: To expand participants' awareness of the range and variety of feelings

Time: 10 minutes

Material: Handout: **List of Feeling Words**

Procedure:

1. With a new partner, talk about a feeling you have experienced in the past week. Participants can use the list of feeling words to enhance this exercise. Encourage women to give only a minimum of detail about the events that went with these feelings.
2. Encourage the listener to ask if there are any other feelings, and not to ask questions or get into a discussion about the situation brought up.

Variation:

Ask the participants, *Of the five basic feelings of love, joy, fear, anger, and pain, how often have you experienced each in the last week?*

Exercise 1.6

List of Feeling Words

abandoned	deceitful	glad	miserable	scared
adequate	defeated	grateful	mystified	settled
affectionate	delighted	greedy	naughty	shocked
ambivalent	despairing	guilty	neglected	silly
angry	destructive	happy	nervous	skeptical
annoyed	determined	hateful	nutty	smug
anxious	different	heavenly	obnoxious	sneaky
ashamed	distracted	helpless	obsessed	solemn
astounded	disturbed	high	panicked	sorrowful
awed	dominated	homesick	peaceful	spiteful
beautiful	divided	honored	pleased	startled
betrayed	doubtful	horrified	odd	stingy
bewildered	ecstatic	hurt	outraged	stupid
bitter	electrified	hysterical	overjoyed	stunned
bold	empty	impressed	overwhelmed	suffering
bored	enchanted	infuriated	pained	sympathetic
brave	energetic	inspired	pressured	tempted
burdened	envious	intimidated	pretty	tense
calm	excited	isolated	proud	threatened
capable	evil	jealous	quarrelsome	tired
challenged	exhausted	joyous	raging	trapped
charmed	fascinated	jumpy	refreshed	troubled
cheerful	fearful	kind	rejected	ugly
childish	flustered	lazy	relaxed	uneasy
clever	foolish	left out	relieved	unsettled
competitive	frantic	lonely	remorseful	wicked
confused	free	longing	restless	wonderful
conspicuous	friendly	loved	reverent	worried
contented	frustrated	loving	rewarded	
contrite	frightened	mean	righteous	
crushed	furious	melancholy	satisfied	

Exercise 1.7 Expressing Feelings Non-Verbally

Purpose: To enable group members to express feelings in a non-verbal way

Time: 15 minutes

Materials: A list of questions, and cleared space in which group members can move around

Procedure:

1. Introduce the exercise and explain that the expression of feelings is difficult, especially with strangers. This exercise allows participants to identify and express feelings non-verbally.
2. Explain that each exercise will require participants to move to one end of the room or the other. Their movement will be their answer to the question. Begin by asking the first question and asking participants to go to the left if their answer is *no* and the right if *yes*.
 - a) Did you feel anxious coming to this group?
 - b) Did you feel excited coming to the group?
 - c) Are you comfortable right now?
 - d) Did you feel angry today?
 - e) Did you feel happy today?

Note: At any point, or between questions, the facilitator can change the position for *yes* and *no* answers to encourage more movement in the room.

Exercise 1.8 Identifying Feelings

Purpose: To practice identifying feelings in one word

Time: 15 minutes

Materials: None

Procedure:

1. Ask participants to form a circle.
2. Direct them to answer the following questions with one word. Each question is answered by all participants before the next question is asked. The answers should be a feeling word, and each question will begin a fast round.
 - What feeling did you experience most strongly today?
 - Which of these feelings have you experienced most strongly this week: sadness, grief, anger, joy, pleasure, love?
 - When you think about tomorrow, what do you feel?
 - When you think of Elvis Presley, what do you feel?
3. Add your own questions, or ask participants to ask questions of the group. Trivial questions, like the Elvis Presley one, can be interspersed with more serious questions in order to lighten a tense atmosphere.

Exercise 1.9 Communicating Feelings

Purpose: To discover a variety of ways of getting in touch with and expressing our feelings

Time: 15 minutes

Materials: Flip chart, felt pens, pictures of people in various emotional states*

Procedure:

1. Introduce the exercise by explaining that when we communicate we may send unclear messages about our feelings. This tends to confuse others and can contribute to blocking communication. This exercise aims to help us communicate more clearly what we are feeling.
2. Form groups of three or four. Distribute to each group three or four pictures of people with different expressions and in different situations. Ask participants to identify as many different emotions, as they can, that the people in the pictures might be experiencing.
3. Share the emotions identified in the whole group and record on the flip chart.
4. Form different groups of three or four. Hand out different pictures. Ask participants to identify the feelings they experience when looking at the pictures.

***Note:** Cut pictures from magazines. Try to have a variety of expressions, ages, sizes, and ethnic representations.
If you laminate the pictures, they can be reused many times.

Section Two

An Overview of Women's Emotional Experiences

An Overview of Women's Emotional Experiences

It is important to develop an overview of how women's emotional experiences are constructed. Because this is such a broad topic, we suggest focusing on two specific areas:

1. *Life-cycle issues*: This includes childhood, adolescence, marriage, career, pregnancy, motherhood, children, menopause, aging, etc.
2. *Dependency needs*: The intent of this section is to assist women to begin to understand that how they deal with feelings at this point in their life is connected to prior experiences. The intent is also to enable women to become aware of which life-cycle issues have been problematic for them in the past or present. It is important for women to realize that they are not alone in their feelings and conflicts. As isolation breaks down and conflicts begin to make sense, support and change become possibilities.

Life-cycle issues

One way of introducing women's emotional realities is by exploring the life-cycle of women and the feelings, conflicts and solutions that connect to each part. This could include:

1. *Information about male / female socialization*: Dress and behavior codes, gender-reinforced emotional responses; messages from our parents about how women are supposed to behave; what girls learn from school about the female role, and so on.

2. *Adolescence*: Conflicts and confusion over sexuality; what puberty means for girls and boys (how it differs); dependence-independence conflicts; conflicts over expectations when school is finished, such as career *vs.* family.
3. *Early adulthood*: Conflicts about life choices made, feelings about choices still to be made, such as whether or not to have children, begin a career, etc.
4. *Maturity and old age*: Feelings about aging, loss of physical attractiveness; feelings about children leaving home, end of child bearing years; fears of loneliness.

This approach emphasizes a social context. Women see that there are social patterns overriding their conflicts and choices. An overview of social and personal issues breaks down individual patterns of self-blame and encourages learning from our commonality.

Dependency needs

We have all heard about how women are dependent and how dependency is a negative state. How does that leave us feeling about ourselves? The issue of dependency goes to the very heart of women's emotional experiences. Because women often feel very dependent and bad about feeling dependent, it is important to spend time exploring these feelings. The following is a simple explanation of how dependency needs are constructed.

Girls may be taught to act dependent. As children, they may be expected not to show too much initiative or to be too active, nor be expected or taught to fix things or to be self-reliant.

When such little girls grow up, they are called *dependent* women. They are told by sociologists that they have *learned helplessness*. Learned helplessness is a simple concept: it means a person has learned to be dependent and is unable to look after herself. Learned helplessness is a theory used to explain everything from women's economic dependence on men to why women stay in battering relationships. The inevitable next step is that women believe in their own helplessness and hate themselves for it. Women agree that they are dependent and consequently not very worthy. They do not have good feelings about themselves and are afraid of doing things differently.

All of this is a distorted picture of what really goes on. On another level, girls are not allowed to be dependent. They grow up never really believing that anyone will look after them; they are thrown back on whatever emotional resources and reserves they can contact, for the outside world will not nurture them. All the fix-it favors that may be done by men for women in no way compensate for a deeper sense of emotional deprivation. We agree with Luise Eichenbaum and Susie Orbach (*What Do Women Want*) that everyone — male or female — has dependency needs. Everyone needs to depend on someone.

Child development studies show that the children who grow into the most autonomous, independent adults are the children whose dependency needs were most fully met in childhood. In other words, in order for independent behavior to develop, a child must feel secure and safe. Only from this base of safety can a child function positively outside of the family environment.

Women's dependency needs are not usually met in childhood, nor in adolescence, nor in adulthood. Eichenbaum and Orbach

argue that men's dependency needs are more fully met throughout life and, therefore, they are able to present themselves as independent. In reality, they are constantly being cared for by women: mothers and wives. Although men are more looked after on one level, this is not to suggest that they, any more than women, develop a truly autonomous sense of self.

We need to acknowledge that there is a difference between acting dependent and the very real need for dependency. All of us need to depend on others, to trust that others will be there for us and take care of us when we need it. We are social beings woven into a life web of interdependency that involves every living creature and plant on this planet. We need to acknowledge our interdependency and to learn how that can make us individually stronger.

Note: Because of the centrality of the theme of dependency to women's lives, we stress that reading *What Do Women Want: Exploding the Myth of Dependency* (Eichenbaum and Orbach) is a central part of preparing to lead these workshops. We also recommend reading *Understanding Women*, by the same authors, which takes up issues of dependency and mother/daughter relationships and puts them in a counselling context. *The Cinderella Complex* (Dowling), which espouses a different view of female dependency, is another useful resource. Any training groups should involve a discussion of these three books.

Exercise 1.10 Exploring Dependency Needs

Purpose: To explore dependency needs

To encourage a belief that dependency needs can be met

Time: 20 minutes

Materials: None

Procedure:

1. Have participants sit in a comfortable position, close their eyes and relax by beginning to pay attention to their breathing. In their imagination, ask them to go back to a time in their own past and let an image of their own child self emerge. This image could be a child of any age. (Remind women that if at any time they contact frightening images, they can let those fade and replace them with another.) Encourage participants to pay attention to this little girl.
 - What is she like?
 - What does she look like?
 - Who takes care of her?
 - Who looks after her?
 - Is she adequately nurtured?
 - Is she lonely and afraid?

Ask the little girl how she feels, and notice how you feel toward her. If you make judgments of her, let them drift by and look at her with compassion. Ask her what kind of

nurturing she would like. It might be a hug, or holding hands, or someone asking her how she feels, or taking her to the park. It could be anything.

Now imagine that you have the power to meet her needs. Imagine yourself as you are now, taking her out of the situation she is in and giving her what she needs to feel contented and happy. Or, you can imagine a nurturing person from your past doing this. It does not matter who it is, it only matters that this little girl be treated with compassion and love. Notice all the feelings that arise in you as you do this.

Now find a way to say good-bye to her, that is good-bye for now. Tell her that you are glad to meet her and will visit her again, that you will not forget about her. Tell her that her needs are important, that she is an important and worthy child. Take a couple of minutes to end this experience and then return to the room and open your eyes.

2. Form small groups for participants to share their experiences.
3. Debrief in the large group. Some women may need reassurance about their experiences. Probably a number of women will have questions about what happened. Simply let them know that they have contacted a part of themselves. They need to pay attention to this and all other parts of themselves.

The Mother/Daughter Relationship

This relationship is central to the emotional scripting of women. Mothers who are deprived in terms of their own dependency needs cannot help but pass along to their girl children their own ambivalence about being female. Many women have learned from their mothers what they should expect from life, whether it be much or little.

In addition, mothers can be extremely needy and often turn to daughters to get their own needs met. This is particularly evident in the eldest daughter who often acts as mother's confidant, helper and supporter. She gets attention by looking after her mother.

On the other hand, women have learned many survival skills. Daughters are often unaware of the strengths passed onto them by their mothers. The following exercise allows participants to become more aware of what they learned from their own mothers.

Exercise 1.11 The Mother/Daughter Relationship

Purpose: To explore the mother/daughter relationship

Time: 20 minutes

Materials: Pen and paper

Procedure:

1. Introduce the mother/daughter relationship as presented on the previous page.
2. Ask participants to spend a few minutes writing down the basic messages they learned from their mothers about feelings, women, life, and men. Suggest that these messages could have been transmitted in either verbal or non-verbal modes. Disclose some of the messages you received in order to create trust and get the energy moving. For example, *Men will never make you happy, Sex is painful, I sacrificed myself for the children, Women are strong.* Stress that the messages can be either positive or negative.
3. Form small groups for participants to share their messages.
4. The exercise can be extended by asking women in the small groups to share how they feel toward their mothers.
 - Do they have a close relationship?
 - Are they angry at her?
 - What did they feel their mothers gave them as children?
 - What do they see as their mothers' strengths?

Suggested Readings on the Theme of Mother/Daughter Relationships

A. Fiction

- Broner, E.M. *Her Mothers*. New York: Berkley Publishing, 1965.
- Broner, E.M. *A Weave of Women*. New York: Berkley Publishing, 1965.
- Brown, Rita Mae. *Six of One*. New York: Harper and Row, 1978.
- Clausen, Jan. *Mother, Sister, Daughter, Lover*. Trumansburg, New York: Crossing Press, 1980.
- *Common Ground Stories by Women*. Vancouver: Press Gang, 1980.
- Laurence, Margaret. *A Jest of God*. Toronto, Ont.: McClelland and Stewart, 1988.
- Roy, Gabrielle. "My Almighty Grandmother" in *The Road Past Altamont*. Translated by Joyce Marshall. Toronto, Ont.: McClelland and Stewart, 1976.
- Thomas, Audrey. *Real Mothers: Short Stories*. Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1981.
- Weldon, Fay. *Down Among the Women*. London: Heinemann, 1976.
- Weldon, Fay. *Praxis*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1978.

B. Non-Fiction

- Arcana, Judith. *Our Mother's Daughters*, Berkley: Shameless Hussy Press, 1979.
- Barrett, Michele and Mary McIntosh. *The Anti-Social Family*. London: N.L.B., 1982.
- Chernin, Kim. *In My Mother's House*. New Haven: Ticknor & Fields, 1983.
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Section Three

Building Self-Esteem

Building Self-Esteem

This section focuses on methods for building self-worth. The process involves experiential participation in exercises designed to improve self-esteem. This includes an introduction to the concept of affirmations and exercises that facilitate the expression of positive feelings. This component is essential to any workshop for women. It involves explanations of how we often do not feel good about ourselves and why it is important to change that.

There needs to be an emphasis on the commonality of women's experiences and how women share feelings of low self-worth. An examination is needed of how women's focus on the needs of others influences low self-esteem and how feeling good about ourselves or giving to ourselves is experienced as selfish or bad. It is necessary for the facilitator to share her experiences with low self-worth and how she deals with them to counter any tendency of group members to see the group facilitator as being outside of this pattern. It also emphasizes the commonality of women's experience in relation to the issue of self-esteem.

All of the self-esteem exercises are grouped together. However, they are best used by dispersing them throughout the three workshops: *Self-Esteem*, *Stress*, and *Assertiveness*.

Exercise 1.12 Self-Esteem Highs and Lows

Purpose: To increase awareness of high and low experiences of self-worth

Time: 60 minutes

Materials: Pen and paper, or crayons and paper

Procedure:

1. Ask each participant to take a piece of paper and instruct her to draw a line which reflects periods of high and low self-worth in her life. Age and participant's circumstances are recorded by each high and low period. If crayons are used, the instructions can be simply to draw a line that represents high and low periods using as many colors as are wished. (This allows a non-verbal form of expression)
2. In small groups, participants share their lifelines. Each group then has a discussion based on the following questions:
 - What did you learn about yourself?
 - What factors affected your highs and lows?
 - In what ways have you contributed to the highs in your life?
 - What can you do to increase the highs in your life?
3. Participants can also be asked to consider what they left out of their lifelines and why. Ask them to share this information only if they are comfortable doing so.

Exercise 1.13 What I Like About Myself

Purpose: To encourage self-esteem by practicing saying positive things about the self

Time: 15 – 20 minutes

Materials: None

Procedure:

1. Ask each participant to think of three positive things she likes about herself.
2. Ask her to share these positive statements with the group. Each statement begins with *What I like about myself is ...*. The facilitator can begin the round since her self-disclosure can help break the ice.

A variation is to have three rounds instead of one, with each woman sharing one positive statement at a time.

3. Have the group discuss the feelings that came up for them as they made the positive statements.

Exercise 1.14 Self-Esteem Triggers

Purpose: To increase awareness of the changing nature of self-esteem

To increase awareness of high and low periods of self-esteem

To identify the triggers which tend to bring on moods of high or low self-esteem

Time: 45 – 60 minutes

Materials: Pen and worksheet: **Self-Esteem Triggers**

Procedure:

1. Explain that self-esteem changes over time within each person. This exercise aims to identify these experiences and to explore ways in which we can begin to gain control over them. Explain that paying attention to our moods and to what triggers them increases our ability to have control over our self-esteem.
2. Using the worksheet, ask each participant to write on one side of the page how she feels, thinks, and acts when she feels good about herself. On the other side, write how she feels, thinks and acts when she is not feeling good about herself. Encourage participants to take as much time as they need to do this.
3. Next, participants write what types of situations, experiences, events or people trigger good feelings about themselves and which trigger negative feelings about themselves. Answers are written in the appropriate columns.

4. Divide the group into threes and ask them to share first the column that indicates the low mood, and then the column that indicates the positive feelings. They are asked to share all they have written in each column.

(Adapted from *Teaching People to Love Themselves* by Dr. Lou Peretz, New York: Elkins Growth Associates, 1983)

Exercise 1.14

Self-Esteem Triggers

When I feel good about myself:

When I don't feel good about myself:

Triggers for positive feelings:

Triggers for negative feelings:

Exercise 1.15 Self-Esteem Influences

Purpose: To increase awareness of the different influences on our self-esteem

Time: 30 minutes

Materials: Pen and paper, flip chart and felt pens
Handout: **Self Esteem: Influences - Discussion Questions**

Procedure:

1. Participants are divided into groups of three or four and one member of each group is asked to be a recorder. Discussion questions are handed out to each group.
2. Each group is asked to record its answers to the questions on a flip chart, in order to share them with the group as a whole.
3. Ask each group's recorder to share the findings of the group. You might record the answers to the question of what participants can do to increase self-esteem. The answers to this question give a positive focus.

Exercise 1.15

**Self-Esteem Influences
Discussion Questions**

1. What seems to increase your feelings of well-being?
2. What seems to lower your feelings of well-being?
3. Which outside factors contribute to how you feel about yourself?
4. Which personal factors contribute to how you feel about yourself?
5. What can you do to increase your feelings of self-worth?
6. What do you do to increase your feelings of self-worth?

Exercise 1.16 Self-Esteem Fantasy

- Purpose:** To provide an experience of relaxation and pleasure
To center oneself through use of fantasy
To nurture positive feelings towards the self

Time: 20 minutes

Materials: Relaxation/Fantasy Script

Procedure:

1. Dim the lights and ask participants to make themselves comfortable and close their eyes.
2. Read the following relaxation/fantasy exercise out loud, slowly. As you become more familiar and comfortable with it you may edit, change or expand it in any way you like. Spend the first few minutes encouraging relaxation either by systematically relaxing the body parts or by focusing on breathing. The Stress material gives an example of body relaxation. Proceed as follows:

Relaxation/Fantasy Script

(... indicates a pause)

Imagine that you have roots ... and that these roots go deep into the ground ... imagine these roots going all the way to the center of the earth ... and as you breathe out, send all the stress and tension and discomfort in your body out through these roots. Just breathe out all the discomfort that you hold in your body ... and as you breathe in, imagine that you are breathing in a very calming and

healing energy ... a calming and healing energy from the very center of the earth ... imagine that energy coming all the way into your body and replacing the discomfort that was there ... so with each breath, you breathe out discomfort and you breathe in calmness, centeredness, a feeling of groundedness that can only come from deep within the earth ... and with every breath you feel your body relaxing, increasing in comfort ...

Just take a few moments now to focus on any part of your body that is particularly tense ... and imagine sending your breath directly to that part of the body ... softening, loosening, dislodging that tension and then sending it out through your roots deep into the ground ... and bringing up a warm healing energy into those very same places within you ... notice that now there is room for the healing energy to enter ... and now your body is relaxed, very relaxed ... notice how comfortable you feel ...

Let your awareness enter your mind, noticing any thoughts that are there ... don't try to stop those thoughts, just notice them ... notice them like you would notice the clouds drifting through the sky on a sunny day ... imagine that your thoughts are like clouds ... they come and they go ... they drift off over the horizon ... just pay attention, not trying to stop them, not trying to hold onto them, just letting them drift on by ... and as you do this, you begin to feel an expansiveness in your mind, an openness ... perhaps you can visualize your mind itself opening to the horizon, opening beyond its usual limits, and that the energy from the sky comes into your mind creating a sense of openness and expansiveness that is beyond the

usual boundaries of the mind. ... Just feel the sense of mental peace and relaxation that comes with this openness ... let that sky energy come into you and mingle with the earth energy that is already there ... feeling how much more in touch with yourself you are and how nice that feels. ... Now imagine you are in a place that is special just to you ... it could be a place you know or a place you make up, it could be indoors or outdoors ... it is important that it is your place and only yours ... let yourself notice the smells ... the surroundings ... pay attention to all the details ... and if something is not just how you would like it ... just change anything you want, until this place is totally comfortable and safe for you ...

Now imagine yourself relaxing in this special place ... right here, right now, there is no one you need to look after but yourself. There is nothing else you need to do, no one you need to take care of, no one to look after ... this place and this time is just for you and you can use it in whatever way you like ... always this place will be healing for you and will bring you peace and comfort ... just let yourself really feel what it is like to be so secure and relaxed by yourself ... just notice how in touch with yourself you are.

I'm going to give you a few minutes to just enjoy this place ... if you like, you can listen to my voice and repeat silently to yourself the affirmations that I say. ... If you would rather, you can just drift off on some pleasant journey of your own, reminding yourself that you will return to the sound of my voice when it is time to end this experience ...

- I return to this safe and secure place of mine whenever I have the need or desire.
- My feelings are an important part of me and I listen to my feelings with respect.
- I trust my own feelings.
- I am strong and centered in the midst of change.
- I am my own best friend.

Add other affirmations on your own ... affirm any part of yourself that you would like ...

Now it is time to leave this special place and return to reality ... just remember you can return to this place whenever you wish. ... Right now you bring with you all the positive and pleasant feelings you have been experiencing. ... I am going to count slowly from one to five, and at the count of five you will find yourself relaxed, awake, and fully present ... one ... two ... three ... four ... five ...

(acknowledgments to Margo Adair for the basic concepts.)

Exercise 1.17 Introducing Affirmations

Purpose: To explain the concept of affirmation
To explore the value of affirmations as a tool in improving self-esteem and self-worth

Time: 30 minutes

Materials: Pens and paper

Procedure:

1. Give this definition of affirmations:
 - An affirmation is a brief positive statement that affirms and re-states our personal power and self-worth.
 - An affirmation is repeated again and again to have greater impact.
 - An affirmation is something participants believe to be true about themselves or it is something they want to be true about themselves, **stated as if it is already true.**
2. Ask participants to write one negative statement or belief they hold about themselves. For example: *I'm so stupid* or *I'm always depressed*. They then write the reverse of this statement, such as, *I am an intelligent woman* or *I'm aware of the positive feelings I have within me*. Stress the importance of phrasing these statements in the present. If it is phrased in the future it will be less powerful. Using the future tense is a way of postponing the affirmation. Affirmations do not include any negative words such as *not*, *never*, *no*, etc.

3. Have each participant write the affirmation with her name in it. For example, *I, Susan, am an intelligent woman.* Participants are to repeat the affirmations to themselves several times and write them out.
4. As they repeat the affirmations, ask them to pay attention to any negative or self-defeating thoughts or images that arise, and to make a note of these points. Have them continue to repeat the affirmation ten times.
5. Form small groups of three or four. Ask participants to share their affirmations and their notes about their resistance to the affirmations.
6. Re-convene the group as a whole. Use the following questions as guidelines for discussion:
 - What happened to you in this exercise?
 - How did it feel to say the affirmations?
 - What kind of resistance did you experience?
 - How does it affect us if we transform negative messages into positive thoughts?
 - Why are we so comfortable with negative thoughts about ourselves?
 - What can we gain from a positive self-image?

Exercise 1.18 Using Affirmations - Part I

Purpose: To use affirmations to focus on positive statements about oneself

Time: 30 or more minutes

Materials: Pens and paper

Procedure:

1. Hand out a list of affirmations. Use the list given with the next exercise as a guide.
2. Participants choose one statement and write it down three times, in the following manner:
 - a) *I, Susan, love myself more every day.*
 - b) *You, Susan, love yourself more every day.*
 - c) *She, Susan, loves herself more every day.*

As they do this, they record the thoughts, feelings and resistances that arise for them. Point out that negative messages and beliefs about ourselves are learned from others. The exercise counters negative beliefs by affirming the variety of ways in which we can receive positive statements.

2. In small groups of three or four, ask participants to share verbally both their affirmations and their thoughts, feelings and resistances.
3. In the large group, discuss how participants felt writing the affirmations, and what they learned about themselves.

Variation:

In groups of three, have participants verbally restate the affirmations three times.

Exercise 1.19 Using Affirmations - Part II

Purpose: To practice using affirmations to change negative thoughts about oneself into positive statements

Time: 30 minutes

Materials: Pens and paper
Handout: **Affirmations for Building Self-Esteem**

Procedure:

1. Hand out the list of affirmations.
2. Have participants choose one affirmation from the list to work on, one that has particular meaning for them.
3. Have participants divide a piece of paper in half by drawing a line down the center of the page. On one side of the page, they write the chosen affirmation, and on the other side write all their negative thoughts that counter the affirmation. After each different negative thought is recorded, the affirmation is written again.
4. This continues until no more negative thoughts come to mind. The affirmation is then written ten times.

Note: It helps if the facilitator explains the method by illustrating it on a flip chart or blackboard, using an example from her own experience. This gives the participants a clear example of the method. In addition, by sharing her own negative thoughts, the facilitator creates an atmosphere in which participants may be more willing to share their own. This exercise can be used as homework and can be used with any relevant affirmations.

*Exercise 1.19***Affirmations for Building Self-Esteem**

1. I, _____, am a valuable and important person.
2. I, _____, am worthy of the respect of others.
3. I, _____, bounce back quickly from temporary setbacks.
4. I, _____, accept compliments easily.
5. I, _____, share my successes with others who have contributed to them.
6. I, _____, feel warm and loving toward myself.
7. I, _____, am a unique and precious being.
8. I, _____, am actively in charge of my life.
9. I, _____, am my own authority.
10. I, _____, am not affected by negative opinions or attitudes of others.
11. I, _____, am an active person.
12. I, _____, do first things first and one thing at a time.
13. I, _____, attract into my life only positive people.
14. I, _____, deserve to be happy.
15. I, _____, have the ability to rejoice in the happiness of others.
16. I, _____, am highly pleasing to myself.
17. I, _____, am learning to love myself more every day.
18. I, _____, have positive self-esteem.
19. I, _____, am a total success.
20. I, _____, am a responsible person who is happy and free with or without a mate.

Section Four

Experiential Learning

Experiential Learning

This workshop makes use of a variety of learning methods, such as visualization, guided fantasy, and drawing. Because people learn in a variety of ways, we attempt to balance the use of these different experiential learning techniques.

The use of visualization and guided fantasy provides creative ways of getting in touch with the self. This method allows participants to go beyond the conscious mind and get in touch with feelings or images that have not surfaced to daily consciousness. It expands learning by involving the participant directly and actively in the process.

Similarly, drawing bypasses the rational mind and allows information to emerge in a different context. Sometimes a new reflection of ourselves can stimulate a change process by breaking a rigid perception of ourselves and our lives.

The following exercises provide a few examples of experiential learning. To expand your ideas, refer to *In Our Own Words: A Woman's Book of Self-Help Therapy* (Sheila Ernst and Lucy Goodison), *Awareness: Exploring, Experimenting, Experiencing* (John Stevens) or other books listed in the bibliography.

Exercise 1.20 Stating Feelings

Purpose: To encourage participants to notice feelings
To create an atmosphere in which it is accepted
to say how you feel

Time: 10 minutes

Materials: Handout: **List of Feelings Words**
(Refer to *Exercise 1.6 Handout*)

Procedure:

1. Explain that it is a good idea to begin sessions by saying how we feel. This way, if we are cranky or irritable we can just say so, and others will not think that the crankiness they might see is directed towards them. Or, if someone states she is tired, other women are saved from wondering if she is bored. This is also a way for us to pay attention to ourselves and notice how we feel and what we are bringing with us to the group.
2. Distribute the **List of Feeling Words** handout and have participants circle or check the feelings that apply to them. Say it is okay to have more than one feeling, even to have many.
3. Ask participants to state the feelings, e.g. *I feel really tired today, and I'm also angry about something that happened at work*, without providing details as to why they are feeling that way.

Exercise 1.21 Experiencing Feelings Non-Verbally

Purpose: To identify and experience several non-verbal ways of expressing our feelings.

Time: 30 minutes

Materials: Flip chart and felt pens

Procedure:

1. As a group, brainstorm on the flip chart several different things we do with our bodies that indicate how we are feeling.
2. Break into groups of four. Each person takes a turn at expressing a particular feeling using only non-verbal clues. The remaining three members will try to guess what feelings were being expressed.
3. In the small groups use the following question as a guideline for discussion:
 - When you express your feelings, what differences are there between what you say and what you communicate in non-verbal ways?

Exercise 1.22 Self-Image Tree

Purpose: To explore self-image through drawing

Time: 30 minutes

Materials: Large sheets of paper and crayons or felt pens

Procedure:

1. Ask participants to imagine themselves as a tree and to draw that tree. Alternatively, they could be instructed to draw a tree that represents their life or a tree that represents their feelings right now. Give plenty of time for the drawing and reassure participants that anyone can do this. Often people will say they cannot draw, so it helps to point out that this is not an art class.
2. Have participants form a circle. In turn, each shows her drawing to the group and explains what it means to her. Participants can also be asked to say what they feel as they look at the picture. Give permission for other group members to ask questions of the person showing her drawing, but do not allow members to interpret someone else's picture.

Variations

1. Have participants draw their names and anything else they want on their paper.
2. Use something (plate, compass, etc.) to draw a circle on paper and ask participants to draw anything they want in

that space. (Even from such generalized suggestions, a wealth of material emerges, and women often contact emotions as they give their reactions to their own drawing.)

3. Ask participants to pick three colors they feel most drawn to today, and to draw what they want on a piece of paper.
4. Ask participants simply to draw what they are feeling.

Exercise 1.23 Tree Fantasy

Purpose: To explore self-image by use of fantasy

Time: 30 minutes

Materials: None

Procedure:

1. Spend a few minutes doing basic relaxation.
2. Suggest to all participants that they imagine themselves as a tree. Give suggestions to enable them to imagine the tree fully. What kind of a tree? How big? What are your roots like? What are your branches like? What is it like around you? What is the weather? Are you old, young, exposed or sheltered? Are there any other trees around? And so on. Give about five minutes for them to explore themselves as a tree.
3. After five minutes, bring everyone back to a circle and have each person in turn describe what her tree was like. The richness of imagery and individuals' ability to take the tree as a metaphor for their self-image is best shared by the entire group. The facilitator then has the advantage of learning a great deal about each person's self-image. This can be useful in the direction and development of the workshop.

Exercise 1.24 Experiencing Feelings - Part I

Purpose: To explore feelings by use of fantasy

Time: 20 – 30 minutes

Materials: None

Procedure:

1. Have participants sit or lie in a comfortable position; dim the lights, if possible. Suggest that people who are tired sit up to help stay awake. Do a basic brief relaxation; a few minutes will suffice.
2. Direct participants to imagine that they are so tiny that they could go inside their own mouths. Ask them to imagine that this tiny person, this miniature self was going to go inside their body and explore. Direct this person to the heart and have them go inside their own heart. Give them five minutes simply to explore what they find.
3. Have them leave the heart, emerge and return to their normal size. Afterwards, suggest that you will count from one to five, and at the count of five they will be alert, relaxed and fully present in the room. Allow time for discussion. Although the fantasy takes no more than ten minutes, it can bring up a wealth of material, and it may take time for people to talk about their experiences. This could be in dyads, in small groups or in the group as a whole if it is not too large.

Exercise 1.25 Experiencing Feelings - Part II

Purpose: To explore feelings by use of fantasy

Time: 20 – 30 minutes

Materials: None

Procedure:

1. Have participants sit or lie in a comfortable position; dim the lights, if possible. Suggest that people who are tired sit up to help stay awake. Do a basic brief relaxation; a few minutes will suffice.
2. Ask participants to descend a stairway. As they slowly do this, they become aware of a door, at the bottom of the stairs. As they move closer to the door, they realize that on it is written *My Heart and Its Connections*. Give them five minutes simply to explore what they find. When they are ready, they move through the door. Have them come back through the door and up the stairs.
3. Afterwards, suggest that you will count from one to five, and at the count of five they will be alert, relaxed and fully present in the room. Allow time for discussion. Although the fantasy takes no more than ten minutes, it can bring up a wealth of material, and it may take time for people to talk about their experiences. This could be in dyads, in small groups or in the group as a whole if it is not too large.

Section Five

Depression, and Drug and Alcohol Use

Depression, and Drug and Alcohol Use

Depression is a part of many women's emotional experience.

Women need to understand what depression is, to recognize the symptoms of depression, and to realize that they do not have to remain locked in a depressed state for the rest of their lives. It is crucial that women receive information on drugs commonly prescribed by doctors for depression. It is also important to give out basic information about the effects of non-prescription drugs and alcohol, as these are often perceived as the only relief available.

Women who are depressed need to be handled gently. It can be harmful to overwhelm a person with changes she might make when it might have been an enormous effort for her just to get herself to the group. Beware of encouraging her to set goals that she may not be able to meet. Start small, encouraging her to talk, and to work slowly on building her self-esteem. Be aware that participants who appear not to be actively involved with the process may still get much out of it.

In studies conducted on the incidents of depression, women appear two to six times more likely than men to be diagnosed as suffering from depression. One study in the late 1960s indicated that seventy per cent of antidepressant drugs dispensed were prescribed for women, and more recent studies continue to support those findings. Although labelling women as depressed and prescribing antidepressants is an expedient way to ignore the underlying problems women face, the fact remains that many women *are* depressed.

Depression can be characterized as a literal depression of our selves: a depression of physical, mental and emotional energies. It can also be described as a state of emotional paralysis or

frozenness. This state binds up a lot of energy needed to function in the world. The depressed woman has serious problems coping with life, finding the energy to make changes, and engaging in activities which enhance self-esteem. While in a depressed state, it is often difficult to try anything new; it is often a cycle whereby the ensuing feelings of failure and decreased self-esteem increase the sense of depression. The depressed person often feels helpless, self-hating, guilty, anxious, and apathetic. Depression is often a defense or a safety valve against feelings of conflict, anger or pain.

Maggie Scarf (*Unfinished Business*) hypothesizes that depression in women has a great deal to do with loss. She points to the differences in the literature on depression aimed at the male and female markets. Literature aimed at men is overwhelmingly focused around adventure and the mastery of obstacles. Literature for women is focused on issues relating to loss or the threat of loss. Examples include the loss or threat of loss of relationships, the loss of children leaving the home, the loss of attractiveness to men, the loss of sexual identity, and the loss of weight. These feelings of loss are not only painful, but may be threatening to one's identity. As such, they are often submerged, beneath a depressive veneer. Women begin to experience the loss associated with depression at a very early age. We are trained to act dependent, and we are also trained to be supports to others. The female identity is tied up with being there for others, with caring and nurturing others, and not with nurturing a sense of self. The self in many cases is lost at a very early age. **In a way, depression can be seen as a refusal to go on with life without the lost parts of self.** To emerge from depression means identifying what has been submerged and integrating it into one's life.

Drug and alcohol use

It is important to mention briefly drug and alcohol issues. This provides information and support to the women in the group who may have difficulties in these areas. Familiarize yourself with knowledge of antidepressant prescription drugs and their side effects. Familiarize yourself with drug and alcohol counselling facilities in your area. Acquire basic knowledge of Alcoholics Anonymous and Al-Anon and information about meeting places. Let women know that the workshop on stress will include looking at how drugs and alcohol are used as stress reducers and problem solvers. *It Will Never Happen To Me!* (Claudia Black) is an excellent book on the experience and repercussions of growing up in an alcoholic family. *It's Just Your Nerves: A Resource on Women's Use of Minor Tranquilizers and Alcohol*. (Minister of National Health and Welfare, Health Services and Promotion Branch) is a good resource for describing drug and alcohol issues and presents ways to discuss them in a group context. If time permits or if the issues seem prevalent in the group, bring in a substance abuse counsellor to provide information.

Exercise 1.26 Exploring Depression - Part I

Purpose: To examine points of conflict in women's lives
To explore how unresolved feelings relate to
feelings of depression

Time: 40 minutes

Materials: None

Procedure:

1. Provide an introduction that defines and explores the concept of depression. The introduction to this section can be a guideline.
2. Ask participants to close their eyes and imagine a calendar with the current year written on it. Ask them to imagine the calendar pages flipping backwards through the years. As the calendar changes, ask them to notice the dates that stand out for them as times when they were depressed. What was happening in their lives at that time?
3. In pairs, have them share with their partner the memories this brought up.
4. In the large group, discuss the following questions:
 - Are there specific times of difficulty in women's lives?
 - What are the conflicts that create the difficulty?
 - What have you done to resolve some of these conflicts?

Notes to facilitator:

A richness of material will emerge that can be connected to different stages of women's life cycles. Your role is not to outline these stages, but to facilitate group participants to see the interconnectedness of their experiences.

Caution:

Be careful with this exercise. Women who are severely depressed may find it frightening. Other women may feel that there were no times in their lives when they were not depressed. You can build in safeguards by reminding women that participation is voluntary; by suggesting that the calendar dates recede again into the past, leaving each person in the same emotional state they were in when they began this exercise; or by ending with a focus on pleasant experiences or memories.

Exercise 1.27 Exploring Depression - Part II

Purpose: To increase awareness of when and why depression occurred in our lives

Time: 60 minutes

Materials: Pens and paper

Procedure:

1. Ask participants to draw a lifeline indicating the times of depression in their lives. At the points of depression, ask them to write down what was happening in their lives at that time.
2. Have participants share responses in groups of two or three.
3. Have a group discussion based on the following questions:
 - What does depression mean to you?
 - How do you know when you are depressed?
 - Is there a pattern to your depression?
 - Is there a pattern to women's lives and their experiences of depression?
 - What have you learned from depression?

Section Six

Anger

Anger

Anger is a basic human emotion just like grief, love and joy. It is a legitimate feeling. To deny angry feelings is to limit the full range of emotional expression. Anger is neither good nor bad. Like our other feelings, however, it can be dealt with in a variety of ways. Some of these are powerful and constructive agents of change, some are negative, and result in destructive activity.

Those women who have experienced anger as only negative, destructive, or violent often deny their angry feelings in order to avoid participating in hurtful behavior. This is particularly true of women who have been victimized by the angry behavior of others. In addition, women are often socialized to put the feelings of others before their own feelings. One result of this is that they become conditioned to holding back negative feelings and feel guilty when they experience those feelings.

Everyone has angry feelings. This is natural. There is much that goes on in our lives and in the world that can bring up feelings of resentment, hostility and even rage. Because these angry feelings are often the feelings that create the most difficulty for women, we think it is important to single out this feeling for special attention in a workshop on exploring feelings. Understanding and accepting angry feelings opens the door to expressing and resolving these feelings in constructive ways.

What happens when anger isn't expressed?

Unexpressed anger does not go away. It becomes internalized or acts turned inwards on oneself rather than outwards at the source of the anger. For many women, the consequence is self-hatred. They become angry at themselves for having such feelings. They blame themselves for the things that do not go right in their lives; and, they see themselves as worthless and undeserving.

Besides creating a poor self-image, this anger stores itself in the body in different ways. It can be covered up with depression or tiredness or exhaustion. It can be hidden by using tranquilizers or alcohol. Some women go through life with a high degree of fear and anxiety about what would happen if the anger burst through. The anger can literally make them sick. Any of these ways of avoidance have the added consequence of cutting off access to other feelings. It is not possible to deny one feeling without also suppressing others. *To deny anger limits joy.*

Over a period of time it becomes more and more difficult to deny feelings. They accumulate inside until they must find a way to emerge. One day a woman might find that she is beginning to resent people she thought she loved unconditionally. She starts persecuting (see **Rescue Triangle** in *Section Seven*), or attempts to control others' behavior. Another woman might withhold her affection, or become sexually withdrawn. Another might scream at her children and justify that this is okay. Someone else might pick a fight with someone after drinking. All of these responses are substitutes for confronting a person or issue directly. It is also common to project anger onto others and accuse them of being angry. All of these responses to angry feelings are damaging to ourselves and to those around us.

Facilitators may have their own areas of unresolved anger, which can affect performance. If a facilitator is angry at a group member, and unwilling to acknowledge that to herself, she might ignore that person, unconsciously side with other group members against her, label her as impossible or difficult, or discount her experience. If a group member is angry at a facilitator and the facilitator is unwilling to acknowledge this, she might call it the group member's problem, tell her (directly or indirectly) that she has a problem with anger, invalidate her perceptions and be closed to what she herself might learn from the interchange. If a facilitator is clear about her own anger and comfortable with anger of others, she will be better able to give an appropriate response.

The following points can help facilitators find a way to safely explore issues of anger in a workshop setting:

1. You can only take others as far as you have gone. In other words, if you are uneasy and uncomfortable with your own anger, you can expect others to pick up on that. Working through the exercises yourself will help you become more comfortable and show you where you have unresolved issues.
2. It is sometimes useful to disclose some of your own experiences with anger. This helps people feel safe and more willing to open up.
3. Expect resistance. The ways women are trained to deny anger are deep and strong. Some may object strenuously and may say they are not angry, that it is not an issue, that anger is bad, and so on. Allow time for discussion but notice when discussion is not useful. You can remind

women that participation in any exercise is voluntary and that they can sit out. You can suggest that they participate in the exercises and say you will allow time for discussion at the end. That way, those who object will hear from others that it was a positive experience for them. It is more positive to hear of the usefulness of the exercise from other group members than to have a facilitator attempt to convince them.

4. Some women may be reluctant to participate in the exercises designed to release tension because of fears of appearing silly. However, once the exercises are underway, women generally become very involved with them. To break the ice, find a volunteer to work with you to demonstrate the exercise, and throw your own energy into it.

Exercises

The exercises are designed to explore the following aspects or stages of anger: awareness, experiencing, expressing, understanding and communicating.

The exercises included here are designed to explore primarily awareness, experience and expression. Awareness of feelings is necessary before action is possible. Once the feelings are known and identified, a process of decision making can assist in deciding what to do and how to do it. This will be covered in more detail in the *Stress* and *Assertiveness* workshops.

After completing the exercises, allow time for discussion and resolution. Speak to the fears women may have about the feelings that emerged for them in the process.

Exercise 1.28 Anger in Family of Origin

Purpose: To explore what was learned about anger from your family of origin and how that affects the present

Time: 15 – 25 minutes

Materials: Optional – 3 x 5 Post-It notes

Procedure:

1. Form dyads. Each person in the dyad has five minutes to talk about the role anger played in her family of origin. The following questions can be used as guides:
 - Who in your family expressed anger and who did not?
 - Was it okay for some people to be angry and others not?
 - What were the consequences of expressing anger?
 - Were you aware of being angry?
 - How did you learn to deal with your own anger?
 - Did you sense when people were angry even if no anger was expressed overtly?

One person talks and the other listens. If anyone seems to have difficulty remembering, the facilitator can suggest that they use their time to sit quietly and see what images emerge. After five minutes the listener and the talker switch roles.

2. After each woman has had an opportunity to talk, have the partners repeat the exercise talking about how they deal with anger now, focusing on what is similar to their childhood experiences, and what is different.

Variations:

1. After step two, have two dyads form a group of four and share what they learned about anger in their families of origin that affects them now. Allow 10 minutes for this activity.
2. After step two, have individuals write on a large Post-It what was significant about this activity for them. Give them two minutes to think and write. Collect and post comments.

Exercise 1.29 Fear of Anger

Purpose: To identify fears around the expression of anger

Time: 10 minutes

Materials: None

Procedure:

1. Participants sit in a circle. One by one, going around the circle, each woman finishes the sentence that starts: *If I express my anger ...* by voicing her biggest fear of what would happen.
2. Allow a few minutes for discussion afterwards. A lot can emerge from this exercise, e.g. fear of losing control, going crazy, losing love, hitting one's children. Women discover they are not alone in their fears, and it is a good opportunity to discuss how these fears are created.
3. Close this activity by acknowledging that we have the power to control our actions and that there are non-destructive ways to alleviate anger.

Exercise 1.30 I'm Angry at ...

Purpose: To become aware of what produces angry feelings within us

Time: 10 minutes

Materials: None

Procedure:

1. In dyads, participants face each other. Each completes the sentence, *I'm angry at ...*. Partners take turns completing the sentence until the facilitator ends the activity. Make it clear that the sentence completion should be simple. There is no need to explore the situation; it does not matter whether or not the partner knows the background information. Suggest that the sentence completion could be something from the past or the present, something personal or something more general. Continue the activity until you sense the energy beginning to drop.
2. At this point, ask partners to share how they felt doing the exercise. It is important to emphasize that this is an opportunity to explore outward anger. Statements of anger towards the self are not allowed. For women who can contact only self-anger, this is a chance to shift perspective.

Variation:

Bring participants back into a circle instead of having them discuss their reactions. Repeat the same exercise with the whole group. Move around the circle at a rapid pace, each person finishing the sentence *I'm angry at ...*. The work in dyads provides initial energy and then participants begin to spark off

each other. This exercise can be done on its own without preceding it with dyads. Provide a few minutes for responses at the end.

Exercise 1.31 Anger Hurts

Purpose: To become aware of how we experience the negative impact of anger

Time: 10 – 15 minutes

Materials: None

Procedure:

1. Form dyads. Have the participants talk about the ways in which other people's anger has been hurtful to them and the ways in which they responded.
2. In the large group debrief by asking:
 - *What are the common experiences?*
 - *What are some of the differences?*

Exercise 1.32 Bodies Feel Anger

Purpose: To experience what anger feels like in our bodies

Time: 20 minutes

Materials: None

Procedure:

1. Ask each participant to make herself comfortable and close her eyes. Ask her to recall an experience in which she felt angry or irritated. Reassure her that she will not be asked to share this experience. Suggest that she allow herself to re-experience this incident fully. Suggest she relive it in her mind step by step, and that she attempt to get back into that incident as if it were happening right now. Ask her to recall how she felt, and to let that feeling emerge in her body. Ask how her body feels. Have her pay attention particularly to her head, neck, stomach, arms, back and legs.

Next, suggest that she let these feelings subside, and then disappear. Tell her that the incident has gone back into the past. Suggest that the feelings will go away so completely that she will feel more relaxed after this exercise than she did before.

2. In a round have participants share the feelings that came up for them. You can ask them what their body feelings would *do*, if translated into an action.
3. Give time for discussion of the relationship of body feelings to anger. This is important because women can use their physical awareness as a cue to possible feelings of anger or resentment.

Note: It is crucial to give the suggestions that permit the sensations and memories to recede. Otherwise participants may find themselves caught in uncomfortable memories and intense feelings.

Exercise 1.33 Releasing Anger - Part I

Purpose: To release body tension and energize the group
To provide a safe discharge of any angry feelings
that might have built up in the previous exercises

Time: 15 minutes

Materials: A large open space, preferably carpeted

Procedure:

1. Have two participants sit back to back on the floor with their backs touching. Have them lean their backs against each other and see how it feels. Suggest that they get acquainted through their backs.
2. Next have them attempt to push their partner across the room. Remind them to breathe. Give them permission to make noises if they want.
3. After a few minutes, allow time for partners to talk about the experience.
4. If some group members have much more energy than others, give them a second chance and partner them with each other while less involved women watch. For some women there is as much or more learning in watching others express anger as there is in expressing their own. Encourage those who do not want to participate to explore how they feel as they watch.

Exercise 1.34 Releasing Anger - Part II (Physical Release)

Purpose: To release body tension and energize the group
To provide a safe discharge of angry feelings that
might have built up in the previous exercises

Time: 15 minutes

Materials: A large open space, preferably carpeted
Prepared chart of questions

Procedure:

1. Ask participants to pick a partner and stand facing her. With arms forward, have palms touching partner's palms at shoulder height. One of the partners is to say *yes* and the other *no* as they attempt to push each other across the room. They are at all times to maintain eye contact. Encourage them to verbalize loudly.
2. After a couple of minutes have them switch saying *yes* and *no*.
3. Allow time for discussion between the partners. Use the following questions as guidelines:
 - Were you more comfortable saying *yes* or *no*?
 - In which position did you feel most powerful?
 - Was it difficult to maintain eye contact?
 - Did you have trouble taking it seriously?
 - Did you laugh or want to laugh?
 - How did you perceive your partner?

- In which position did you perceive her as being more powerful?
4. After the partners have discussed the questions, it can be helpful to reconvene as a group and have participants share their reactions and feelings. Invariably, participants learn something new about themselves in this exercise.

Section Seven

Feelings and Relationships

Feelings and Relationships

This section offers a basic introduction to the interplay between emotional experiences and methods of operating / communicating / perceiving in the world. The concept of the rescue triangle (p. 105) is the most effective tool we know to enable women to conceptualize these interrelationships and to understand what goes on between themselves and others in their daily lives. For that reason, we include only this concept in this section. The following description of the rescue triangle is designed to be used as a workshop handout. Facilitators need to be very familiar with the concept in order to explain it adequately. Refer to *Solving Women's Problems* (Hogie Wycoff) or *Scripts People Live By* (Claude Steiner) for more detailed explanations.

Note: Once you are familiar with the **Rescue Triangle** material, it can be very useful in exploring your relationship to group facilitation. Think about how the rescue triangle operates in groups. For example, if the group is not doing what you want, do you feel victimized? If you are trying to help but people refuse to be helped, do you get frustrated?

Exercise 1.35 The Rescue Triangle

Purpose: To explain the rescue triangle
To explore its relevance to our lives

Time: 60 minutes

Materials: Flip chart and felt pens or chalkboard and chalk

Procedure:

1. Draw a triangle on the board and fill in the three positions. Explain each one and the feelings that go along with it.
2. Use examples to illustrate how people can move from one position to another since they are not static. Here are a few examples.
 - a) Linda is dissatisfied with her sexual relationship but is unable to say so. Her husband appears to be satisfied. When she finally tries to tell him how she feels, he does not listen. She feels victimized and hopeless and thinks she has to do what he wants. He colludes in her being the victim because he tells her there is something wrong with her for not having orgasms. Finally she cannot endure sex anymore and takes a women's sexuality class and learns to achieve orgasm on her own. When she tells her husband, he becomes very angry and refuses to have sex with her. She tries to step out of the victim role and indeed does so. Her husband, however, tries to return to the status quo by finding another way to keep her powerless.

- b) Cathy is a sixteen year old girl. Her father (the Persecutor) screams at her that she is stupid, lazy and never does anything right. Her mother (the Rescuer) tries to help Cathy by doing things for her and by trying to keep her away from her father. Cathy is obviously the Victim. She feels victimized by both her parents because neither one is willing to see her as a real person. She runs away from home and gets into minor difficulty with the police. She enjoys seeing how all of this upsets her parents. She becomes the Persecutor and her parents the Victims.
- c) Joanne is agoraphobic, afraid to go out of the house. She has been this way for years and her husband has to do many things for her. She finally enters treatment and overcomes her phobia. Her husband begins to drink heavily and she has to stay home to look after him. Initially she is the Victim, rescued by her husband. Then he becomes the Victim and she has to rescue him. Joanne's agoraphobia returns and her husband stops drinking. This time they go for counselling together and learn how they have been depending on each other to fill these roles. Each begins to learn how to function more independently and their relationship improves.
3. In pairs, ask participants to explore their family of origin in terms of these roles.
- Were roles exchanged in the family?
 - What role did the participant adopt?

4. In the same pairs, participants explore their current families, relationships or friendships.
 - What role do they take?
 - Is it the same as when they were children?
 - Do they take on different roles with different people?
 - Why do they think they do so?
5. In the large group ask participants to share anything they feel like sharing: what they have learned: how they feel now: how this is useful to them.
6. Have a discussion on the ways participants might break the rescue triangle and stand outside of it in equal relationships.

Exercise 1.35

The Rescue Triangle

RESCUER (Mother)
Feeling: Guilt,
sometimes fear
*I'm not OK, you're not
OK.
I'm not OK, you're
OK.*

PERSECUTOR (Father)
Feeling: Anger
I'm OK, you're not OK.

VICTIM (Child)
Feeling: Helpless, ashamed
*I'm not OK, you're OK.
I'm not OK, you're not OK.*

The Rescuer:

- Does things for other people because she does not believe they can help themselves.
- Does not tell other people exactly how she feels and thinks, since she believes other people are not strong enough to hear the truth.
- Believes others' feelings are more important than her own. Does not think about her own feelings.
- Often thinks she is superior to the person she is rescuing.
- Is often, but not always, a woman (Women are often taught to look after other people and to see others' needs as more important than their own).
- Often gets angry and starts to persecute because others do not appreciate her efforts.

The Persecutor:

- Is usually in a position of authority, such as husband, police or official.
- Is often physically violent.
- Tells people what to do, gives orders, puts others down, calls people names.
- Believes her feelings and ideas are more important than anyone else's.
- May have been a rescuer who has become angry.
- Has a lot of unresolved anger and takes it out on the victim.

The Victim:

- Finds it easy to let others take over and has trouble figuring out for herself what she wants. Feels powerless. The behavior of the persecutor and rescuer helps reinforce this feeling.
- Often feels resentful of how she is being treated but does not feel she can do anything to change that treatment. Thinks she is one-down, and then blames others.
- Does not take responsibility for her own life.

Note: There is a difference between taking a victim role (acting like a victim) and being a real victim. A real victim is a person who is in difficulty or is being attacked or is oppressed by others in a way for which she is not responsible. For example, a child who is sexually assaulted is a real victim. If that child grows into a woman who is unable to ask for what she wants sexually, and expects and tolerates bad treatment from men, she is taking on a victim role.

How not to be a rescuer:

- Do no more than fifty per cent of the work in any relationship.
- Believe in others' ability to help themselves.
- Help others to change their feelings of helplessness by encouraging them to do things for themselves. Give them information and show them more life possibilities.

How not to be a victim:

- Find ways to help yourself.
- Believe that you are capable and worthy.
- Learn new skills such as assertiveness and communication.
- Seek out people who will support the positive side of yourself.
- Break out of your isolation and find other people working on similar problems.
- Change the things that hold you in a victim position.

How not to be a persecutor:

- Learn to identify feelings of anger.
- Prevent angry feelings from building up.
- Use communication and assertion skills to deal with situations before they get out of control.
- Believe that other people deserve as much respect and equal treatment as you do.

Section Eight
Endings and Closure

Endings and Closure

How a workshop ends is critical. Closure should provide an opportunity to review and evaluate the workshop experience; it should focus on positive learnings and encourage participants to move forward in positive directions. Closure should enable each woman to acknowledge the group sharing that has occurred and to return to a separate place within herself. Rounds can be used. Women can be asked to share what they have learned from the workshop, something they have learned about themselves, or the ways in which the workshop material is relevant to their lives.

Evaluation can be written or verbal. Written evaluation forms are enclosed at the end of the *Introduction* section.

A positive feeling can be enhanced by the use of visualization or relaxation. These techniques can be adapted to help each woman focus on her own learnings. Moving forward comes from practical goal setting exercises. Moving the workshop learnings into the world also includes giving out reading lists, discussing community resources and exploring ways in which group members can support and help each other outside of the group.

The ending of the workshop is a time to restate the object of the entire series of workshops. Now that the section on self-esteem has been completed, the facilitator can give more information about the stress and assertiveness training workshops, and explain how they can build on this session.

A very enjoyable way to end is to have group members express appreciations both of themselves and of each other. An explanation of this is given in the section on group skills.

Exercise 1.36 Closure: Visualization

Purpose: To use relaxation/fantasy techniques to affirm the learnings of the workshop and to enable participants to separate.

Time: 10 minutes

Procedure:

Ask women to sit in a circle and hold hands. Eyes are closed. *As you sit here in the circle just pay attention to yourself ... let yourself notice your breathing ... etc.*

Now let yourself pay attention to all that has happened for you in this workshop ... if even one insight, one awareness, one little spark of understanding has come to you, let yourself look at that now ... let that little seed of learning take root inside you ... nurture it ... promise that you will not forget that learning ... and if there have been many learnings and experiences, let them all just drift through your consciousness ... just let yourself relax and take this one last moment to turn inwards and explore what is there ... now let yourself bring to mind the people that you have shared with today ... one by one let them drift across your consciousness ... being aware of how it has felt to share yourself with others ... being aware of what you have noticed you have in common with others, without negating your own uniqueness ... just let yourself really notice for this last moment these people you have shared with ...

And now let your hands separate and come to rest in your lap ... notice how it feels to be a separate individual and yet connected to all these others ... this is who we are — separate and yet interdependent ... just sit quietly with yourself for a

few moments, paying attention to your breathing, allowing any images that are present to emerge ... and when you are ready, bring yourself back to the room.

Exercise 1.37 Closure: Goal Setting

Purpose: To identify and work on a particular goal
To provide participants with a sense of direction at the workshop's end

Time: 20 minutes

Materials: Pens and paper
Handout: **Goal Setting**

Procedure:

1. Explain the use of the goal setting process. When we have something to work towards, our motivation increases. It is important to set goals that can be accomplished, and not to set ourselves up for failure. Goals give direction and movement.
2. Hand out **Goal Setting** worksheets. Suggest that participants review mentally the content of the workshop, and that they focus on one area where they can identify something to change or work on. Participants choose a goal and fill out the goal setting handout.
3. Work is shared in groups of two or three.

Exercise 1.37
Goal Setting

- My goal will be ...
- This goal will be accomplished by ...
- How important is it to me to reach this goal?
- What would happen if I reached my goal?
- What would happen if I didn't reach this goal?
- What personal strengths and resources do I have that will help me reach my goal?

Exercise 1.38 Closure: Moving Outwards

Purpose: To bring closure to the workshop by focusing on resources available in the community
To build on learnings begun in the workshop

Time: 15 minutes

Materials: Handout: **Local Community Resources**
(Created locally by facilitator)
Other handouts created or collected by the facilitator

Procedure:

This closure can consist of several parts:

1. Brainstorm solutions to individual problems women might present.
2. Hand out a resource list compiled by the facilitator that reflects resources in her community. Discuss the resources on the list and ask participants what they could add.
3. Hand out a reading list plus information on where to obtain the books. Give a brief overview of the books.
4. Remind participants that this is one in a series of three workshops, and that the following workshops deal with practical ways of dealing with feelings and situations.

Exercise 1.39 Closure: Community Resources

Purpose: To expand awareness and knowledge of
community resources.

Time: 15 – 20 minutes

Materials: Handout: **Local Community Resources**
(Created locally by facilitator)

Procedure:

1. Begin by handing out the list of local community resources. Point out the importance of reaching out and making contact with community resources that can provide support and assistance in dealing with personal issues. Being involved with an organization can also help direct feelings into productive channels. For example, working with a women's center to organize a family drop-in center goes a long way toward alleviating the feelings that result from being isolated with small children.

Note: The handout should include:

- a) Alcoholics Anonymous meeting times and places
- b) Al-Anon meeting times and places
- c) Local counselling services
- d) School board and community center courses especially relevant to women
- e) Women's centers and other local women's organizations
- f) Transition houses and rape relief centers
- g) Women's studies courses at community colleges
- h) Family places and other services of help to parents with small children

Exercise 1.40 Closure: Self-Evaluation

Purpose: To encourage self-evaluation
To allow learning from other's perceptions

Time: At least 10 minutes per person

Materials: Handout: **Questions for Self-Evaluation**

Procedure:

1. Hand out the questions for self-evaluation and ask people to work through them. Explain that there will be a group evaluation process.
2. Explain the process by stating that each person will have a turn to hear feedback. After someone volunteers, she will sit quietly and listen, without responding, to what the other group members say. Suggest that people not repeat what has already been said. After those who wish to speak have done so, she can respond. She is to respond by saying how it felt to listen and then to compare the feedback she received with the self-evaluation she did.

3. Write on the board or flip chart guidelines for giving feedback. These could be:

- Contributions made to the workshop
- Strengths and areas that need work
- Any changes observed during the workshop

These guidelines help feedback to take a constructive format. As it is often difficult to give feedback, giving specific instructions helps the group relax. See page 43 in *Assertiveness* for more detail.

4. After everyone has had a turn, ask group members to evaluate the process.

Exercise 1.40

Questions for Self-Evaluation

1. What did I learn?
2. What did I learn about myself?
3. What areas need to be worked on?
4. What goals can I set for myself as a result of participating in this workshop?
5. What can I do to work toward the goals I have set?
6. How do I feel about my participation in this workshop?

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A Facilitator's Manual

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Stress

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Stress

Introduction

Most people understand stress intuitively

It can be described as an emotional discomfort accompanied by feelings of not being able to cope; that things are falling apart; that one is not in control; or just a general uneasy feeling that all is not well, without any particular apparent cause.

Stress is a normal part of life

Our bodies are equipped with specific biological mechanisms for dealing with stress. Stress is a physiological response to messages received by the brain. When the brain receives a stimulus, the *fight or flight* reflex is triggered. This includes body changes such as the heart speeding up, hurried or held breath, increased adrenaline production which results in increased sugar being released for muscles to use. If there is no resolution to the *flight or fight* reflex, the muscles stay fixed, unproductive and tense. Over time, this unresolved tension can accelerate the body's rate of wear and tear and result in many different disorders. At the physical level it includes loss of appetite, sleeplessness, ulcers and other illnesses of varying degrees. At the psychological level, it includes an inability to concentrate, loss of confidence, difficulty in making decisions, worry and anxiety. *It is not only what happens to a person, but how that person responds to it that constitutes stress.* Stressors are the multitude of daily occurrences that require you to react.

Stress is not a result of an individual's inadequacy

Traditional stress management blames the stress victim by implying that if only she managed her life more efficiently, she

would not have stress. Taking up aerobics, improving nutrition, and meditating are held out as solutions. Certainly it is important that people learn coping strategies for dealing with life stresses; however, there are other aspects of the stress experience that need to be addressed. The common feeling of exhaustion often leaves people unable to deal with the sources of stress in the complex personal, social and political environment in which we live. Coping strategies help break this cycle and help us regain some of our energy. As we regain energy, it becomes possible to look at what kinds of change are needed. As we become stronger, we begin to do what we need to do to change the conditions that produce stress.

This manual will begin with identifying the symptoms of stress. This includes the physical, emotional, mental, behavioral, political and spiritual aspects of the effects of stress. Next, the sources of stress will be examined through identifying individual and social aspects of stress. The last part of the manual provides practice activities to develop positive coping strategies.

Sample Agenda

Stress Management Workshop

- *Discussion:* Housekeeping Information and Agenda
- *Introduction:* Facilitators and Participants
- Review and Discussion Regarding Self-Esteem
- Introduction to Stress
- Introduction to Symptoms of Stress
- *Exercise 2.2* Symptoms of Stress
- *Exercise 2.3* Stress Experiences

Break

- Introduction to Sources of Stress
- *Exercise 2.4* Sources of Stress
- *Discussion* Belief Systems, Conflict and Guilt
- *Exercise 2.8* Identifying Values
- *Exercise 2.7* Stereotype Influences
- *Exercise 2.12* Sorting Stressors

Lunch

- Introduction to Coping Skills
- *Exercise 2.13* Coping with Stress
- *Exercise 2.17* Creative Imagery
- *Exercise 2.19* Boxed In

Break

- *Exercise 2.20* Hypothetical Situations
- *Exercise 2.16* Unwinding
- *Exercise 1.37* Goal Setting (from *Self-Esteem* section)
- *Appreciations*
- *Written Evaluations*

Section One

Identifying Stress

Identifying Stress

The accelerated wear and tear caused by chronic stress contributes to the development of physical and emotional difficulties. It has been estimated that from fifty to eighty percent of all disease has stress related origins. The list is long and includes bronchial asthma, hay fever, ulcers, colitis, skin disorders, heart disorders, alcoholism, drug addiction and a whole range of psychological problems.

However, it is important to remember that not all disease is attributed to stress. We can go too far in psychosomatic theories. Disease is also a result of complex environmental, biological, and health care factors. It would be helpful for the facilitator to give examples of health problems that have been called stress problems, but have really resulted from environmental factors. For instance, a secretary goes to her doctor and complains of tiredness and headaches. He tells her she is simply under stress and gives her pills to help her relax. Indeed, she is under stress, but no one realizes it has a concrete source: the fluorescent lighting she sits under and the video display terminal she works on.

It is important to define the symptoms of stress not only in a physical context. The impact of stress affects all areas of a person's life. It is for this reason that the exercises in this section include the identification of stress symptoms in all areas of life.

Exercise 2.1 Identifying Stress

Purpose: To introduce the concept of stress
To identify physical symptoms of stress
To identify individual coping techniques

Time: 15 minutes

Materials: None

Procedure:

1. Ask participants to recall two situations that they found stressful in the last week.
2. In twos, participants are asked to:
 - a) Share how their bodies told them they were experiencing stress.
 - b) Identify one thing they did to relieve this stress.
3. Debrief by asking for comments on the activity and/or insights gained.

Variations:

1. This could be done in a round with the group as a whole. One minute per participant would be needed.
2. Groups of three or four could record situations, symptoms and coping techniques on flip charts for whole group debriefing.

Exercise 2.2 Symptoms of Stress

Purpose: To explore the symptoms of stress

Time: 30 minutes

Materials: Flip chart and felt pens, or chalkboard and chalk

Procedure:

1. Use two flip charts or divide a sheet in half. Label one *Emotional Symptoms* and the other *Physical Symptoms*.
2. Use the brainstorming technique to have participants share their own symptoms of stress, while the facilitator records in the appropriate category.
3. After brainstorming, focus the discussion on which symptoms are most common to women and which to men. Encourage the group to try to figure out why there is a difference. (Women are generally more visible in their stress patterns. They tend to show emotions, seek help and use medications. Men are sometimes called *repressors*. They are more prone to heart and digestive problems).
4. Discussion can also be centered around the interplay of emotional and physical factors, e.g. emotional stress results in physical problems. Do group members think this makes sense in terms of their lives? Do not negate the very real outside factors that cause illness: occupational problems, noise, cancer causing agents and so on.

Sample stress symptom list from one workshop

Emotional symptoms:

- Insomnia, nightmare, loss of appetite, overeating, depression, constant crying.
- Medication use, drinking too much, taking prescription drugs, taking too many pain relievers, smoking.

Physical symptoms:

- High blood pressure, heart disease, chest pains, ulcers, digestive problems, diarrhea, vomiting, skin problems, shortness of breath, susceptibility to colds and flu.

Exercise 2.3 Stress Experiences

Purpose: To identify the different ways individuals experience the symptoms of stress

Time: 15 – 20 minutes

Materials: Flip chart and felt pens
Handout: **Stress Symptoms**

Procedure:

1. Explain that stress takes a toll on all aspects of life. We are likely to experience symptoms not only in our bodies, but also in our emotional reactions, our mental state, our relationships with others, our work world and our spiritual life.
2. Distribute the handout and ask participants to check any symptoms they have noticed lately, and to add any of their own symptoms that are not on the list. It is important to point out that there may be other causes of the symptoms listed, but suggest that the list represents common stress-related complaints.
3. When the list is complete, ask the participants to underline which symptoms they are most concerned about.
4. Ask participants if they recognize any patterns in their stress symptoms.
 - Are they more concerned about physical symptoms than spiritual ones?
 - Perhaps the mind works well, but the body is sick?
 - Are any areas symptom-free?

Participants can make notes in response to these questions.

5. Break into groups of three or four. Ask participants to share the symptoms that cause them most concern and the issues they want to work on. Each group can brainstorm coping skills for each issue identified.

Variation:

The last stage can be replaced by a large group brainstorm using a flip chart to record ideas.

Exercise 2.3

Stress Symptoms

Check the symptoms of stress you have noticed lately in yourself.

Physical	Emotional	Spiritual	Mental	Relational
<input type="checkbox"/> appetite change	<input type="checkbox"/> anxiety	<input type="checkbox"/> emptiness	<input type="checkbox"/> forgetfulness	<input type="checkbox"/> isolation
<input type="checkbox"/> headaches	<input type="checkbox"/> frustration	<input type="checkbox"/> loss of meaning	<input type="checkbox"/> dull senses	<input type="checkbox"/> intolerance
<input type="checkbox"/> tension	<input type="checkbox"/> "the blues"	<input type="checkbox"/> doubt	<input type="checkbox"/> poor concentration	<input type="checkbox"/> resentment
<input type="checkbox"/> fatigue	<input type="checkbox"/> mood swings	<input type="checkbox"/> unforgiving	<input type="checkbox"/> low productivity	<input type="checkbox"/> loneliness
<input type="checkbox"/> insomnia	<input type="checkbox"/> bad temper	<input type="checkbox"/> martyrdom	<input type="checkbox"/> negative attitude	<input type="checkbox"/> lashing out
<input type="checkbox"/> weight change	<input type="checkbox"/> nightmares	<input type="checkbox"/> looking for magic	<input type="checkbox"/> confusion	<input type="checkbox"/> hiding
<input type="checkbox"/> colds	<input type="checkbox"/> crying spells	<input type="checkbox"/> loss of direction	<input type="checkbox"/> lethargy	<input type="checkbox"/> clamming up
<input type="checkbox"/> muscle aches	<input type="checkbox"/> irritability	<input type="checkbox"/> needing to prove	<input type="checkbox"/> whirling mind	<input type="checkbox"/> lowered sex drive
<input type="checkbox"/> digestive upsets	<input type="checkbox"/> feeling that no	<input type="checkbox"/> self	<input type="checkbox"/> no new ideas	<input type="checkbox"/> nagging
<input type="checkbox"/> pounding heart	<input type="checkbox"/> one cares	<input type="checkbox"/> cynicism	<input type="checkbox"/> boredom	<input type="checkbox"/> distrust
<input type="checkbox"/> accident prone	<input type="checkbox"/> depression	<input type="checkbox"/> apathy	<input type="checkbox"/> spacing out	<input type="checkbox"/> fewer contacts
<input type="checkbox"/> teeth grinding	<input type="checkbox"/> nervous laugh		<input type="checkbox"/> negative self-talk	<input type="checkbox"/> with friends
<input type="checkbox"/> skin rash	<input type="checkbox"/> worrying			<input type="checkbox"/> lack of intimacy
<input type="checkbox"/> restlessness	<input type="checkbox"/> easily discouraged			<input type="checkbox"/> using people
<input type="checkbox"/> foot tapping	<input type="checkbox"/> little joy			
<input type="checkbox"/> finger drumming	<input type="checkbox"/> sadness			
<input type="checkbox"/> increased alcohol, drug, or tobacco use				

Section Two

Sources of Stress

Sources of Stress

This section is designed to enable women to increase their awareness of the many sources of stress. Too often, women blame themselves for their feelings of stress and imagine that if only they were different, they would not feel the way they do. This denies the reality that stress comes from *somewhere*. Stress comes from a multitude of sources: life crises, difficulties in relationships, physical illnesses or disabilities, environmental pollution, unhealthy work environments and unemployment, to name a few. We want to encourage women to learn for themselves, through mutual exploration, what creates their stress. The role of the facilitator is simply to encourage a wide view of the sources of stress.

Women might feel overwhelmed as they begin to understand the complexity of stress. Reassure them that there will be adequate time to develop change and coping strategies. Often, however, there will be a collective sigh of relief as women begin to understand where their stress originates. As they begin to develop concrete knowledge that can help them choose directions, any sense of confusion and self-blame starts to dissipate.

Belief systems, conflict and guilt

Children receive many messages from within the family and from the wider world about who they should be and how they are supposed to behave. These messages have a longlasting effect. In fact, when children become adults, they often forget where these messages were learned and simply hold them as beliefs about themselves and their lives. The messages tend to operate as *shoulds* inside the head. This is called an internalized belief system.

As people become aware of these internalized *shoulds*, they often hear them as voices which appear to be not their own. Often, by beginning to pay attention to the voice, it can become clear whose voice it is. For example, a woman finds herself demanding at the dinner table that her daughter behave in a certain way. The child looks confused as this expectation had not been made of her before. The mother feels confused too, wondering to herself why this behavior was suddenly so important. She then realizes that it was her mother's voice that had emerged and her mother's dinner table expectations. As she realizes this, she is able to distance herself, and take a moment to decide whether she really cares about this issue. (She does not.)

Many people have the experience of hearing something emerging from their mouths that seems to have come from nowhere. Even if these internalized voices can be identified, they can still cause trouble and stress. They create a conflict between what a person has been told she should be and who she is. Often, people are so riddled with the *shoulds* that they are not able to step back and look clearly at what is really important to them, or how they think or feel about something. It is important, however, to increase one's awareness of what the messages are in order to better understand some of the sources of stress. Only then is it possible to have the distance to decide if the beliefs/messages are current or out of date.

Examples of stress causing beliefs

1. A woman is raised to believe that motherhood is a natural instinct and that taking care of a baby is natural and easy. When she finds she cannot cope with her colicky baby, her stress level is increased because she spends a lot of time feeling guilty about how she is not a *natural* mother,

- and about how she should be able to do this without feeling so awful.
2. The anorexic woman might believe that she must live up to a certain image and is constantly struggling to be thinner and thinner. This is in conflict with her body's need for nourishment, and her natural weight level. She may feel guilty about eating because it is in conflict with her need to be thin.
 3. A woman believes that abortion is murder. She is pregnant and in a situation in which it is impossible for her to have a child without incurring drastic and negative changes in her life. Her belief system about abortion is in conflict with her need to care for herself in the most positive way. This produces tremendous stress.
 4. A professional woman was raised to believe that women should marry and have children. This woman, although happily married, does not want to have children and yet feels a tremendous internal conflict. She thinks she should have children to please her family members, and because they keep telling her that nothing else could possibly be so fulfilling.

Exercise 2.4 Sources of Stress

Purpose: To expand awareness of the sources of stress

Time: 20 minutes

Materials: Flip chart and felt pens, or chalkboard and chalk

Procedure:

1. Explain the concept of brainstorming where participants throw out as many ideas as they can without discussion.
2. Explain that together we are going to brainstorm about the sources of stress.
3. Write down all of the suggestions that are produced. The facilitator is primarily listener and recorder, allowing participants to explore their own experiences and ideas.
4. In order to allow as broad a concept of stress as possible to emerge, categories could be suggested. General headings of this sort might include:
 - Stress at work
 - Stress at home
 - Nutritional deficiencies
 - Relationships
 - The world around us
 - Belief systems
5. After brainstorming, allow time for discussion.

Exercise 2.5 Personal Sources of Stress

Purpose: To identify sources of stress in participants' lives

Time: 20 minutes

Materials: Pen and paper for each participant

Handout: **Sample List of Stress Sources**

Procedure:

1. Give participants about five minutes to write down a list of the sources of stress in their own lives. The lists from the previous exercise can be used as a resource. A sample list of stress sources is also included to generate ideas.
2. Break into dyads or small groups. Ask participants to share their lists and talk about any feelings that came up for them as they did the exercise, and about any insights they had.
3. As a guide to their discussions, these questions can be used:
 - Of the sources on their list, how many are rooted in the past?
 - How many are ongoing?
 - How many relate to conflicts in their belief systems?

Variations:

The discussion questions can be posed to the large group.

*Exercise 2.5***Sample List of Stress Sources**

- Excess of sugar in diet
- Heavy smoker
- Night shift worker
- Boring and repetitive work
- Lack of adequate rest periods at work
- Sexual harassment by co-worker
- Increased automation and speed-up on the job
- Unventilated building at work
- Noisy neighbors downstairs
- Living beyond income
- Bad credit rating
- Air pollution
- Traffic noises
- Fear on the streets on the way to work at midnight
- Hot and crowded public transit
- Breakup of a five year relationship
- Lots of anger
- Difficulty in communicating feelings/shyness
- Chronic pain from a whiplash injury
- Fear of job loss
- A very sick grandmother

Add your stress sources:

Exercise 2.6 Past Messages

Purpose: To increase awareness of past messages
To expand awareness of how past messages affect belief systems
To recognize the relationship between belief systems and stress

Time: 30 minutes

Materials: Handout: **Past Messages Discussion Questions** – one for each group

Procedure:

Part One

1. Introduce the exercise by pointing out the connection between past messages, belief systems, and stress. The section **Belief systems, conflict and guilt** can be used as a guideline.
2. Explain that it is important for each of us to examine what messages we have received, for example, what we were taught about how girls should behave. We can begin to untangle our expectations by remembering what was said in our families about girls and boys and by remembering the role models to whom we were exposed.
3. Divide into groups of four and discuss the questions on the handout.

Part Two

4. Ask the participants to consider how conflicts in their belief systems have caused them stress. The facilitator can read all or some of **Examples of stress causing beliefs**, to enable participants to think of personal situations.
5. Participants are asked to come up with two examples.
6. Break the groups of four into dyads. The participants can then share their examples.
7. The participants return to the larger group and a general discussion can take place focusing on what the exercise raised for each individual.

*Exercise 2.6***Past Messages
Discussion Questions**

1. What were we taught to expect from life?
2. What were we taught to expect from life as girls?
3. Who influenced us besides our parents?
4. Who were we supposed to be when we grew up?
5. What did we learn from our relatives?
6. What did we learn from our church or religion?
7. What did we learn from the education system?
8. What memories do we have of questioning any of these learnings?
9. How was our need to question dampened?

Exercise 2.7 Stereotype Influences

Purpose: To increase awareness of attitudes and beliefs learned while growing up

To show relationships between stereotyped attitudes and beliefs and sources of stress

Time: 45 – 90 minutes

Materials: Flip chart and felt pens

Handouts: **Stereotype Influences: Sentence Completions** and **Influences of Stereotypes: Discussion Questions**

Procedure:

1. Explain that we have been raised with many stereotypical notions. We get these messages from many people while growing up. Many of these messages are reinforced within our political, social, spiritual and cultural system. It is important to become aware of these notions and to realize that we do not have to hold onto them. Holding onto or rejecting stereotyped notions often brings us into conflict with others. This conflict can be a major source of stress.
2. Hand out **Stereotype Influences: Sentence Completions** and ask participants to complete the sentences with the first thoughts that come to mind.
3. Break group into dyads and ask participants to share their lists.

4. Put participants into groups of four or five.
5. Hand out **Influences of Stereotypes: Discussion Questions**. Give the groups twenty to thirty minutes to discuss the questions.
6. In the full group, brainstorm the coping tools that will enable participants to gain insight into how to cope with stereotype conflicts. Record responses on flip chart.

*Exercise 2.7***Stereotype Influences: Sentence Completions**

Complete these sentences with the first thoughts that come to mind:

1. I learned that little girls should be _____

2. I learned that little girls should be _____

3. I learned that little girls should be _____

4. I learned that little girls should be _____

5. I learned that little girls should be _____

1. I learned that little boys should be _____

2. I learned that little boys should be _____

3. I learned that little boys should be _____

4. I learned that little boys should be _____

5. I learned that little boys should be _____

1. Women should be _____

2. Women should be _____

3. Women should be _____

4. Women should be _____

5. Women should be _____

Complete these sentences with the first thoughts that come to mind:

1. Men should be _____
2. Men should be _____
3. Men should be _____
4. Men should be _____
5. Men should be _____

1. Housewives are _____
2. Single women are _____
3. Successful women are _____
4. Married women are _____
5. Women in business are _____
6. Divorced women are _____
7. Women and education are _____
8. Women managers are _____

*Exercise 2.7***Stereotype Influences: Sentence Completions**

Complete these sentences with the first thoughts that come to mind:

1. Househusbands are _____

2. Single men are _____

3. Successful men are _____

4. Married men are _____

5. Men in business are _____

6. Divorced men are _____

7. Male managers are _____

1. It's advantageous to be a man because _____

2. It's advantageous to be a man because _____

3. It's advantageous to be a man because _____

1. It's advantageous to be a woman because _____

2. It's advantageous to be a woman because _____

3. It's advantageous to be a woman because _____

*Exercise 2.7***Stereotype Influences: Sentence Completions** *(optional)*

Complete these sentences with the first thoughts that come to mind:

1. Jews are _____
2. Religion is _____
3. Native Indians are _____
4. Catholics are _____
5. Handicapped people are _____
6. Black people are _____
7. East Indians are _____
8. Politics is _____
9. The church is _____
10. Members of Parliament are _____
11. Racism is _____
12. Equality is _____
13. Immigrants are _____
14. Unions are _____

Exercise 2.7

**Influences of Stereotypes
Discussion Questions**

1. How did you learn these stereotypes?
2. How much of your self-image has been shaped by these stereotyped notions and roles?
3. How satisfied or frustrated are you with the current gender standards as they relate to your home and/or work?
4. Which aspects of male or female stereotypes would you want to accept?
5. What and where have you experienced conflicts with stereotyped notions?
6. How did you deal with these situations?

Exercise 2.8 Identifying Values

Purpose: To identify personal values
To clarify how values contribute to sources of stress

Time: 30 minutes

Materials: Flip chart and felt pens
Handout: **Tracing Values Through My Life**

Procedure:

1. Point out how important it is to be aware of what we value in order to understand why situations affect us in stressful ways.
2. Pass out the handout on **Tracing Values Through My Life** and go through the procedure.
3. On a flip chart write down the discussion questions:
 - a) How do you express your values in your actions?
 - b) Which value conflicts do you experience?
4. Break into groups of two or three. Ask the participants to discuss the questions in relation to the values they have identified in the handout.

Note: It is important for the facilitator to give examples that relate to the group for each of the discussion questions. It is also important to point out that value conflicts are a major source of stress.

For example:

- a) If you hold health and physical well-being as an important value, then perhaps you express that value in your actions by being involved in sports or other physical activity.
- b) If you believe the expression of feelings is an important value, you might experience a value conflict if your husband does not share his feelings.

Other examples include the changing role of women in our society and the value conflicts that result when you challenge existing patriarchal views.

Exercise 2.8

Tracing Values Through My Life

Below is a list of common value areas. Remember and record what you learned and were told as a young person that was important about each of these values, e.g. education: *I was told that I would never get anywhere without a college degree. I learned to value education to get what I wanted.*

Next, indicate whether this early value is still important (**I**) or not important (**NI**). Lastly, look through the list as a whole, and rank the areas 1–16 in importance to you today.

Value area	Learned/was told as a child	I/NI	Ranking
Education	_____	_____	_____
Health/ physical well-being	_____	_____	_____
Money	_____	_____	_____
Possessions	_____	_____	_____
Love/affection	_____	_____	_____
Religion	_____	_____	_____
Morals	_____	_____	_____
Recognition	_____	_____	_____

Value area	Learned/was told as a child	I/NI	Ranking
Helping others	_____	_____	_____
Power	_____	_____	_____
Control	_____	_____	_____
Competing with others	_____	_____	_____
Security	_____	_____	_____
Creativity	_____	_____	_____
Expressing feelings	_____	_____	_____
Pleasure	_____	_____	_____

Exercise 2.9 Clarifying Values

Purpose: To clarify values

Time: 30 minutes

Materials: None

Procedure:

1. Point out that each day of our lives we make choices between two or more things. The choices we make and how we make them tells us something about ourselves. Values often determine which choices we make. Knowing what your values are can give you more control over your life and therefore reduce stress.
2. Explain that you are going to tell a story that has five characters. Participants are asked to listen so that after hearing the story they will be able to rank the characters in order from best to worst.
3. Read the story:

Janet has to cross a bridge every day to get to work. One day while she is at work, a storm comes up and wipes out the bridge. Janet is very anxious to get home to her husband and kids. She wanders along the river bank and comes across John who has a boat. She asks him to take her across the river. He replies that he would on condition that she have sex with him first. She does not like the deal, so she continues to wander the riverbank until she comes to her friend Mary's house. Janet tells her the whole story including John's offer, but her friend tells her she can see no way of helping her. It's getting late and Janet goes back

to John, hoping she can persuade him to accept something else as payment. He is polite but firm on his offer. She decides to accept the deal, to have sex with him, and get home. When she arrives home, she tells Mark, her husband, what a terrible day she's had with the bridge washing out; having a hard time finding a way home; how anxious she was and finally what price she paid to get home. Mark is furious with her and kicks her out of the house. Janet begins to walk down the road crying when she meets her brother, Tom. She tells him about her terrible day and about Mark kicking her out. Tom gets angry, goes to Mark's house and beats Mark up.

4. Ask participants to rank the characters, with #1 being the best and #5 being the worst. They could add one or two adjectives to describe each character.
5. Break into groups of four.
6. Have each group reach a consensus on their rankings.
7. Have each group share its decision and rationale with the whole group. Assure participants there are no *right* answers.
8. Point out that choices made reflect values. It is important to think about values and to be sure you recognize which values you are expressing.
9. In the full group discuss the following questions:
 - a) Is it hard to stand up for what you believe?
 - b) How did it feel when you had a different opinion from the others in your group?

- c) Did you change any answers? Does that mean you are flexible or that you are easily persuaded?
- d) Did you keep to your original decision? Does that mean you are bull-headed or that you are strong in your beliefs?
- e) Were you willing to listen to others' ideas?
- f) Were you able to accept others' opinions as valid, though different?

Variations:

1. This last part can be done by breaking the group into the smaller discussion groups, i.e. in their previous foursome.
2. This last part can also be done by having the questions listed as a handout, on which participants reflect and answer the questions, and then share their answers in the small discussion group.

Exercise 2.10 Interpretation and Stress

Purpose: To identify how interpretation of a situation influences the stress experience

Time: 20 minutes

Materials: Flip chart and felt pens
Handout: **Reframing Stressors**

Procedure:

1. How we perceive a situation depends on our prior experiences and our values. These combine to give us a perception of a situation as being stressful when others might not find it stressful. For example, a person who was hit a lot and cuddled little as a child learned to perceive physical contact as threatening. Later, as an adult, this person might withdraw whenever another approaches, even if that other person is coming with a hug or some other expression of friendship. Another example focusing on value systems is a person to whom work has the most value. Her definition of herself as a person is exclusively associated with having a good job and doing well in it. Threatened with cut-backs and layoffs, this person will experience more stress than a person who defines her self-worth in a different way.
2. Ask participants to identify two or three stressors, and to put them on the **Reframing Stressors** handout. (The number they will work on depends on time available.)
3. Explain that even after stress has occurred through interpreting a situation as threatening, the stress can still be

reduced by reframing the situation. You can reframe your experience into a more positive interpretation. Ask participants to look over their examples and identify a positive meaning to each of them.

For example:

Stressor Hurt my foot running

Interpretation Have to stay in bed/
Depression and boredom

Value Threatened .. Physical activity/independence

Reframed A chance to pay attention to myself

Note: There may be some situations participants cannot reframe, such as physical danger. It is hard to see the positive consequences of an automobile accident. If participants are unable to reframe, suggest they seek another example. If they are repeatedly unable to reframe situations, it may be helpful to have them listen to how other people have reframed their stressors.

4. In pairs or small groups, have participants share what they have written.

Exercise 2.10

Reframing Stressors

1. What are some of the stressors in your life that give you the most trouble right now?
List a few of them after the examples.
2. How do you interpret each of these stressors?
3. When you say something is stressful, you are automatically saying that something important to you is threatened. What value in your life is threatened by each of the stressors on your list?

Stressor Too much work to do

Interpretation Can't go away Saturday/
I'm failing at my job/No time for play

Value Threatened .. Self-esteem/Job security

Reframed I can prioritize my work and do my best

Stressor Threat of nuclear war

Interpretation My children may never grow up/
Why do anything if there's no future?

Value Threatened .. Survival/Belief in a future/Motivation

Reframed No one can predict the future

Stressor

Interpretation

Value Threatened

Reframed

Stressor

Interpretation

Value Threatened

Reframed

Stressor

Interpretation

Value Threatened

Reframed

Stressor

Interpretation

Value Threatened

Reframed

Stressor

Interpretation

Value Threatened

Reframed

Exercise 2.11 Anxiety and Stress

Purpose: To identify ways we experience anxiety
To examine the connection between anxiety
and stress

Time: 30 minutes

Materials: Flip chart and felt pens

Procedure:

1. Explain that you will ask the group to do something that may cause some anxiety. Each participant is then asked to share one positive thing about herself with the group. This sharing will take place in the form of a round. The group leader can begin, in order to break the ice.
2. Divide the group into fours. On the flip chart write the following discussion questions:
 - a) Did this situation make you anxious?
 - b) How do you act when you are anxious?
 - c) How does your body feel when you are anxious?
3. After the groups have discussed the questions, bring the participants back together as a whole group. On the flip chart brainstorm how to reduce anxiety. Ask participants to share their own anxiety reducers. As a conclusion, you might ask the participants which anxiety reducers seem healthy and which seem likely to produce more stress.

Exercise 2.12 Sorting Stressors

Purpose: To identify the sources of stress we have control over and those we do not

Time: 25 minutes

Materials: Flip chart and felt pens

Procedure:

1. Explain that we need to distinguish between stressful situations that we can change and those we have no power to change. Being aware of the difference enables us to utilize coping tools to deal effectively with the sources of stress that we can change.
2. On a flip chart, draw a line down the middle of the page. On one side, brainstorm situations that individuals feel produce stress and that they think they can control. On the other side, brainstorm those situations where they think they can have little or no control. (Write down whatever the participants come up with. The issue here is what *they* think they do or do not have control over.)
3. In small groups, discuss the results of the brainstorming. Have a recorder in each group write down the groups' opinions on how stressful situations in both columns might be altered.
4. Each small group reports back to the whole group.

5. Pose these questions to guide a short discussion:
 - a) How do you react when you think you have no choices?
 - b) When you think that you do?
 - c) Is there a difference?

Encourage participants to expand their perceptions of what they *really do* have control over.

6. Summarize and reinforce the concepts.

Section Three

Coping with Stress

Exercise 2.14 Fantasy Experience

Purpose: To prepare participants for the learning session
To experience tension-reducing techniques that can be used in anxiety provoking situations
To expose participants to the potency of fantasy and visualization

Time: 10 – 15 minutes

Materials: **Guided Fantasy Script**

Procedure:

1. Make a few comments about our incredibly active minds and the difficulty most people have shifting focus. We hold onto the concerns, worries and feelings of one situation even while we are already launched into the next. Explain that this brief fantasy exercise can help participants let go of some of their mental preoccupations so they can be fully present in the learning situation.
2. Instruct participants to find a comfortable position with feet on the floor and eyes closed. Ask them to relax, take a deep breath and turn their attention inward.

Caution: There are those who have an aversion to guided fantasy and visualization. Acknowledge any reluctance and ask those who do not wish to participate fully, simply to relax and be silent during the exercise.

3. After a few collective deep breaths, slowly read the **Guided Fantasy Script**.

4. **Note:** The facilitator will need to personalize the script, inserting her own examples and the parameters of the specific learning situation. Slow yourself down, too! Read slowly and pause at the marks (...) to allow the participants to experience their images, or play the audiotape version of the script.
5. As participants return their attention to the room, ask for comments, observations, insights. Most people are surprised that they have the power to decide not to worry for a time. You may want to raise questions like, *What was your box like? What did you put in it? When would this technique be especially helpful to you?*

Variations:

1. After the fantasy experience, participants could divide into small groups to process the fantasy. Add 10 – 15 minutes to the time frame.
2. If you do not have the taped version, you could tape or have someone else tape the **Guided Fantasy Script**. Using an audio tape would allow you to observe and record individual responses to the exercise.
3. Have participants use a journal to write about their thoughts, feelings and experiences in the guided fantasy. It is a powerful way to assist their learning and processing skills.

Guided Fantasy Script

(... indicates a pause)

Take a few minutes to focus on the various concerns, preoccupations, or worries that you have brought with you today (to this class, workshop, etc.). ... There may be any number of things on your mind ... whether you remembered to unplug the coffee pot before you left the house this morning, ... the unfinished conversation that you had with someone ... the errands that you need to run when you leave here ... the project at (work/school) that is due tomorrow ... plans you're making for the weekend. ... So take a moment to really focus on what concerns you have ... develop a mental list

To the extent that these concerns are occupying your thoughts and making claims on your attention ... you are not able to be FULLY PRESENT, here and now for this experience. ... There is probably nothing that you can do during the next (_____ minutes/hours) about these concerns, ... except to worry ... and that worry will distract you from what you can be learning here So let's put those worries away for a while. ...

I'd like you to create in your mind a box with a lid on it and a lock and a key. ... Your box can be any size and shape but it needs to be large enough and strong enough to hold all the concerns you've identified. ... So take a moment to visualize this box as clearly as you can Your personal box is before you now, with the lid open. ...

Now I'd like you to put each of your concerns in the box, one-by-one ... put them all in the box ... and as you are doing this, tell yourself, ... there is nothing I can do about this for now ... and so I'm going to put this concern away in a safe and secure box ...

for now ... while I'm here ... I know I can come back later, and
reclaim all of my concerns ... when I am ready for them. ...

Now when you've put all your preoccupations and concerns in
the box, I'd like you to close the lid and lock it with your key. ...
Now I'd like you to put your key in your pocket or someplace else
for safekeeping ... and I'd like to remind you that at the end of
this session, you can unlock your box and reclaim your concerns
... when you're ready, I'd like you to slowly open your eyes
and be here. ...

Exercise 2.15 Body Relaxation

Purpose: To experience deep breathing for body relaxation

Time: 30 minutes

Materials: Mats or blankets and pillows, **Relaxation Script**
Optional: Tape or CD player and soothing music

Procedure:

1. Explain that you are going to read a relaxation script that will guide them through an experience of total body relaxation.

Note: It is important to point out that participants will be fully in control, and that they do not have to follow the instructions if they are not comfortable.

2. Instruct participants to find a comfortable posture, lying on the floor before you begin. They ought to remove eyeglasses and jewelry. Have them loosen any belts or tight clothing. Many may be more comfortable with a pillow under the knees, particularly if they have back problems or are pregnant.
3. Turn down the lights. Slowly, read the **Relaxation Script** (or play the tape).
4. At the end of the script allow plenty of time for people to *return* to the room.
5. Once everyone is *back*, ask for comments or observations about the experience.

Variations:

1. After the fantasy experience, participants could divide into small groups to process the fantasy. Add ten to fifteen minutes to the time frame.
2. You could tape or have someone else tape the **Guided Fantasy Script** or use the prerecorded version of the script. Using an audio tape would allow you to observe and record individual responses to the exercise.
3. Have participants write about their thoughts, feelings and experiences in the guided fantasy as another powerful way to assist their learning and processing skills.
4. The exercise could be done in the sitting position. Adjust the **Relaxation Script** accordingly.

Relaxation Script

(... indicates a pause)

We are going to begin. ... Close your eyes. ... Become aware of your body. ... Notice any tension in your body. ... Adjust your position to become more comfortable. ... Now become aware of your breathing. Inhale slowly through your nose. ... Exhale even more slowly through your mouth. ... Inhale slowly. ... Exhale slowly. ... Find your own pace. ... Let your breathing regulate itself. ... Let yourself pause as long as is comfortable between breaths. ... Inhale. ... Exhale. ...

Become aware of all the thoughts going through your head right now. ... Picture a blackboard and imagine that all your thoughts are written on the blackboard. ... See yourself taking an imaginary eraser and slowly erasing the blackboard. ... Continue to slowly ... inhale, ... exhale. ...

Now focus on your body. ... Place your hands on your abdomen ... breathe deeply from the abdomen. ... Your abdomen should inflate like a balloon as you inhale and deflate as you exhale. ... Inhale slowly through your nose, inflating your abdomen. ... Exhale more slowly through your mouth, letting your abdomen relax. ... Inhale. ... Exhale. ... Inhale. ... Exhale. ... As you think of releasing all the tension from your body. ... Inhale. ... Exhale. ... Let all the tension disappear. ...

Now continue your rhythmic breathing. ... Remove your hands from your abdomen and place them on the floor. ... Make sure you are comfortable. ... Keep this position throughout the rest of the exercise. ...

Now, tense your body slightly except for your neck and face. Hold your breath and clench your fists. ... Contract your muscles. ... Feel the tension in your shoulders, your arms, your

hands, your chest, your back ... abdomen ... pelvis ... buttocks
... thighs ... calves ... feet ... and toes ... tense all your muscles.
... Your back is arched. Your limbs are tensed. ... Now, exhale
... let go of all the tension and RELAX. ... Breathe deeply from
the abdomen. ... Slowly exhale. ... Breathe again and ... exhale.

Now, breathe in. ... Hold your breath and tense your muscles
again This time, tense them harder with a medium level of
tension ... Clench your fists. ... Contract all your muscles. ...
Feel the tension in your shoulders ... your arms ... your hands,
... your chest, your back ... your abdomen ... your pelvis ... your
buttocks, ... your thighs, your feet and toes. ... All your muscles
feel tense. Your body is tight ... Hold it. ... Now, exhale and
relax all your muscles. ... Let go and let the tension flow out. ...

Breathe deeply from the abdomen. ... Inhale and ... exhale ...
Inhale. ... Exhale. ... Let all the tension leave your body. ...

Now inhale. ... Hold your breath and contract your muscles as
tightly as you can. Clench your fists hard. ... Feel the tension in
your shoulders ... your arms ... your hands ... your chest ... your
back. ... Feel the tension in your abdomen, your pelvis ... your
buttocks, ... your thighs, ... your calves, ... your feet and toes. ...
Tense all your muscles as tightly as you can. ... Your body is
trembling with the tension. ... Now exhale. ... Release your
muscles and RELAX. ...

Inhale fully, inflating the abdomen ... and ... exhale. ... Inhale.
... Exhale. ... All the tension is leaving your body. ... Inhale. ...
Exhale ... Feel the tension flowing from your body each time you
breathe Inhale. ... Exhale. ... Inhale. ... Exhale. ... Let all
distracting thoughts leave your mind. ... Just concentrate on
your body. ... Continue your abdominal breathing. ... Now
focus your attention on your head. Be aware of the top of your

head ... feel all the tension flowing out of your head and forehead ... relax the upper part of your head ... let your head become completely relaxed. ...

Become aware of your jaw ... let it go slack ... all the tension is leaving your jaw ... your whole head ... your eyes ... your face ... are relaxed. ... Be aware of the relaxed feeling. ... Your head is totally tension free. ... (*Pause — silently count to ten.*) Now concentrate on your neck. ... Focus on it and let it relax ... Continue to breathe deeply ... continue to relax. ... Now focus your attention on your shoulders. ... Feel your shoulders relax. ... They don't have to support anything ... let all the tension flow out of them ... let your shoulders relax completely. ... Continue to inhale ... and exhale. ... Concentrate now on your arms. ... Be aware of their position and of all the tension flowing out of them ... let your arms relax. ... All the tension is flowing down your arms through your hands and your fingers ... right out through your finger tips. ... Feel your arms, ... your hands, and your fingers become totally relaxed. ... Continue to breathe deeply. ... Inhale. ... Exhale. ... Inhale. ... Exhale. ...

Now become aware of your back. ... The floor is providing total support for your back ... your back can relax completely. ... Let all the tension flow out of your back. ... Now focus your attention on your chest ... let your chest and your rib cage relax totally. ... Be aware of the relaxed feeling in your chest ... it is totally without tension. ... Be aware of your back being relaxed and free. ... Continue to breathe in and exhale. ... The whole upper part of your body is totally without tension. ... Enjoy being aware of the relaxation of your upper body. ... It is completely free of tension ... it is relaxed. ...

Concentrate now on your lower back and your buttocks. ... Let

them relax. ... All the tension is flowing out. ... Relax your lower back right to the bottom of your spinal column. ... Relax your buttocks. ... Continue to breathe deeply. ... Inhale. ... Exhale. ...

Become aware of your pelvis and your genitals. ... Focus your attention on your pelvis. Let your pelvis relax. ... All the tension is leaving. ...

Now focus on your thighs ... feel them relaxing ... all the tension is leaving your thighs. ... Now, your knees and calves. ... Your knees feel suspended ... they are totally without pressure ... relax your calves ... let them be totally at rest ... the tension is flowing out of your knees and your calves. ... Your legs are totally relaxed. ...

Focus on your ankles ... your ankles are without strain ... let them totally relax. ... Continue to breathe deeply. ... All the tension is gone from your legs and your ankles. ... Continue to breathe deeply. ... Inhale. ... Exhale. ... Inhale. ... Exhale. ...

Now become aware of your feet. Much of the day your feet bear the weight of your body. ... Now they are without pressure ... be aware of your arches ... of the balls of your feet. ... Your feet are relaxed ... let them float free. ... Be aware of your toes ... the last bit of tension in your body is flowing out through your toes. ... Let your toes relax completely. ... Continue to breathe evenly ... slowly ... and deeply. ...

Your whole body is completely relaxed. ... Be aware of the feeling of peace and relaxation ... total relaxation. ... Enjoy the sensation of total relaxation ... total concentration on yourself. ... Continue to breathe deeply. ... Inhale. ... Exhale. ... Inhale. ... Exhale. ... Let yourself float. ... (*Long pause.*)

When you feel like it, stretch, and slowly sit up.

Exercise 2.16 Unwinding

Purpose: To explore the relationship between stress and relaxation

To experience a state of profound relaxation

Time: 20 – 30 minutes

Materials: **Unwinding Script**; tape player and music optional

Procedure:

1. Introduce the concept of systematic relaxation as a natural antidote to stress. The stress response is a marvelous mind/body mechanism that gears us up to meet dangerous situations. Unfortunately, most of us run up the danger flag too often and are left with the residual side effects of chronic stress: unresolved muscle tension, elevated blood pressure, increased heart beat and general arousal. Eventually this tension, arousal and tightness begin to seem normal. Chronic tension has been found to breed chronic health problems. Knotted muscles, headache, joint and back problems, digestive disturbances, ulcers, and sleep disturbance are but a few.

Systematic relaxation reverses the physiological effects of the emergency stress response by regulating breathing and reducing unconscious muscular tension. We cannot experience both stress and relaxation at the same time. So, if we relax in a potentially stressful situation, we can prevent the stress response. If we have already stressed ourselves, relaxation can reverse the process.

Many of our negative coping habits are attempts to induce relaxation (e.g. cigarettes, alcohol, tranquilizers, eating). Unwinding without chemicals is a much healthier option. Relaxation is a skill we were born with and have unlearned over the years. Anyone can relearn it. As with learning any skill, the process takes practice and persistence. At first it takes more time, seems awkward, uncomfortable, and ineffective. It is tempting to discard the whole idea as *taking too much time* or *being silly*. Yet with practice, the body will relax in seconds — on command. Use this skill whenever you need to reduce your stress level, to take time out or simply to revitalize yourself.

2. Describe the variety of techniques people use to relax — yoga, exercise, stretching, breathing, meditation, progressive relaxation, autogenics, tai chi, visualization, etc. This exercise uses a generic *allowing* process for letting go of tension combined with autogenic suggestions.
3. Put a *Do Not Disturb* sign on the door if interruptions are possible. Invite participants to find a comfortable posture, settle back and prepare to experience a refreshing relaxation break.

Note: You may want to dim the lights and/or turn on some soothing background music such as Pachelbel's Canon in D, a flute solo or one of the Golden Voyage tapes.

4. Read the **Unwinding Script**.

Note: Read the script very slowly, pausing at the markings and stretching out the words. At the end of the script allow plenty of time for people to *return* to the room before turning up the lights or intruding with loud sounds.

5. At the end, you may ask for comments or observations from the group.

Unwinding Script

This exercise will help you learn the skill of deep relaxation which is so important for stress reduction, stress management and overall health and well-being. Find a relaxed position and allow yourself to concentrate fully on these instructions.

(... indicates a pause)

Take a deep breath in through your nose ... and as you let it out through your mouth ... allow your eyes to close slowly and comfortably. ... Let your body begin to relax and unwind. ... Take another deep breath ... and as you exhale ... let it carry all the tension out of your body ... allow a feeling of peacefulness to descend over you, ... a pleasant and enjoyable sensation of being comfortable and at ease. ... Now turn your attention to your body and begin to pay close attention to the sensations you experience. ... Notice the signals your body is sending you. ... Find the place in your body that seems most tense. ... Begin to let all your muscles ... all over your body ... give up their hold and go limp. ... Now is the time to let go of whatever tension you have been holding onto. ... Focus again on your breathing, filling yourself up as you breathe in ... and letting that tension go when you breathe out. ...

Now direct your attention to the top of your head. ... Allow a feeling of relaxation to begin there. ... Let that feeling of relaxation spread downward through your body. ... Let the small muscles of your scalp relax. ... allow all the muscles of your forehead to relax and let go. ... Pay special attention to your forehead, ... let yourself really feel the muscle there giving up its hold. ... Feel your eyebrows sagging down ... let your eyelids become very heavy ... let all the muscles around the sides and back of your head relax fully and completely. ... Imagine that

your ears are drooping under their own weight. ... Now allow your cheek and face muscles to relax and let go ... let your jaw muscles relax ... allowing your jaw to drop slightly ... allow the muscles of your lips and chin to relax and grow limp. ... Now all the muscles of your head and face have let go ... and are smooth and relaxed. ...

Next, let the muscles of your neck relax slightly, tensing them only enough to hold your head upright and balanced easily in position. ... Let the feeling of relaxation spread into your throat ... and down the sides of your neck ... into your shoulders. ... Allow your shoulders to become heavy and sag downward as you relax all your neck ... and throat ... and shoulder muscles. ...

Now, allow the feeling of relaxation you're experiencing to spread downward to the muscles of your chest and upper back. ... Feel the relaxation there as the muscles release their hold. ... Feel the relaxation. ... Now, let your shoulder muscles go completely limp ... and allow your arms to rest heavily ... with your hands in your lap or on your thighs. ... Feel your arms growing very heavy ... and relax all the muscles of your forearms, hands and fingers. ... Let the tension flow right out of your fingertips. ... You are feeling very calm ... and relaxed ... and comfortable throughout your upper body. ...

Pay attention to your breathing for a few seconds. ... Notice how regular it has become. ... Let that feeling of deep relaxation spread fully through your chest ... down through the muscles of your back ... and down into your arms. ... As you do so allow your stomach muscles to relax completely and totally. ... Your stomach will probably sag a bit as the muscles release their hold. ... Allow that sagging to occur ... and relax the muscles of your sides ... the muscles of your shoulder blades ... and the small of

your back. ... Let all the muscles of your spine relax. ... Allow all of the muscles of your stomach ... and sides ... and back ... to experience a sensation of warmth and heaviness ... relaxing more and more deeply. ...

Now, relax the large muscles of your thighs ... and let them go completely limp. ... Feel all of your muscles so relaxed that they feel as though they're turning to jelly. ... Your whole body is becoming profoundly relaxed. ... Feel that relaxation and enjoy it. ... Now, focus on the muscles of your buttocks ... and the muscles underneath your thighs ... and allow these muscles to relax. ... Let the muscles of your calves relax ... and let that relaxation spread into the front of your lower legs ... into your shin muscles ... into your ankles ... allowing your ankles to feel free and loose. ... Now, wiggle your toes once or twice ... and let all of the muscles of your feet give up their hold ... completely. ... Your whole body is extremely relaxed and comfortable. ...

Simply enjoy these sensations of profound relaxation throughout your body. ... Notice that you can feel even more relaxed as you become aware of the warmth in your arms and hands. ... Feel this warmth and allow it to increase. ... Allow your arms to feel extremely heavy and completely limp. ... Feel this growing sensation of warmth spreading right out to your fingertips. ... Concentrate closely on your hands and your arms ... and allow the feeling of pleasant heaviness and warmth to increase by itself. ... Simply observe the process and encourage it. ...

Now allow those same feelings of heaviness and warmth to spread throughout your legs. ... Concentrate closely on the sensations in your legs ... and let them become very, very heavy ... very heavy and warm. ... Your arms and legs are so heavy and so warm. ... Your entire body now is profoundly relaxed ...

and you feel a pleasant overall sensation of heaviness ... warmth ... and peace. ...

Without interfering with your breathing in any way ... feel the slow, peaceful rise and fall of your stomach ... as your breath flows slowly in ... and slowly out of your body. ... Don't try to hurry your breathing ... or slow it down. ... Just notice your breathing ... and observe its slow ... steady process. ... Imagine that you've just discovered the steady rising ... and falling of your stomach ... and that you're observing it with curiosity and respect. ... Wait patiently for each breath to arrive ... and notice its passing. ... Notice, too, the brief periods of quiet ... after one breath passes ... and before the next one arrives. ... Now, continue to observe this breathing process ... and begin to count your breaths as they arrive. ...

As the first one comes, ... watch it closely and hear yourself mentally say, ... "one". ... Wait patiently for the next one ... and count, ... "two". ... Continue until you've counted 25 breaths ... not allowing any other thoughts to distract you. ...

Note: Pause here long enough to count 25 or 30 breaths and then gently continue the narration allowing your voice to become progressively stronger and more definite.

Now you're deeply relaxed ... and you can return to this peaceful state ... whenever you want to. ... Take a few moments now to pay close attention to this relaxed feeling all over your body ... memorize it as carefully as you can. ... Store the entire feeling of your relaxed body in your memory so that later you can retrieve it and relax yourself at will. ... When you feel ready ... direct your awareness outward and return to this place ... allow yourself all the time you need to bring your body back to its usual

level of alertness and responsiveness. ... Wiggle your fingers and toes ... move your arms and legs a little bit ... shrug your shoulders ... turn your head but keep your eyes closed for a few seconds longer. ... Then, when you're ready, take a nice deep breath ... and open your eyes. ... Allow your body to feel fully alive and flowing with plenty of energy. ...

Exercise 2.17 Creative Imagery

Purpose: To use creative imagery for problem solving and stress reduction

Time: 15 minutes

Materials: None

Procedure:

1. Do a basic relaxation exercise for a few minutes and then ask participants to imagine themselves five years in the future. Have them develop a fantasy of what they would be like, and what they would be doing if sources of stress were eliminated. Let this picture develop fully. Ask them to imagine being involved in their community, working, taking care of themselves, feeling active and healthy. If people have difficulty with images, ask them to just pretend, to make anything up.
2. Ask them to characterize this image with a symbol — a shape, color, picture, etc. Let them then ask the symbol for advice about what they can do to move closer to this image in their daily lives. Let the symbol dissolve.
3. Spend a few minutes on affirmations:
 - I am relaxed and centered in a stressful world.
 - I am relaxed and alert.
 - My stress symptoms are reminders of the need to make changes in my life.
 - I am involved on a personal and community level to affect positive change.

4. Have participants share their experience either in the large group or in small groups.

Variation:

Ask participants to record their experience in a journal, providing as much detail as possible.

Exercise 2.18 Dissolving Problems

Purpose: To use creative imagery for problem solving

Time: 15 minutes

Materials: None

Procedure:

1. Have participants get into a relaxed state. Use a deep breathing exercise.
2. Direct participants to imagine a specific problem or stressor in their lives. Have them form a complete picture. (Pause for 15 to 20 seconds while they form their pictures.)
3. Tell the participants to imagine their picture dissolving, steadily fading away. When the picture is dissolved, an image will emerge of what their life would be like without that problem or stress. Take enough time for participants to form a complete picture of their lives without their problem.
4. Debrief with a discussion about how often problems are not singular or isolated, but connected to other problems. Ask if any one imagined more than one problem and acknowledge that they can dissolve several problems within the one exercise.

Exercise 2.19 Boxed In

Purpose: To recognize and label the sources of stress in participants' lives
To decide what to do about the situations that *Box In*

Time: 60 – 90 minutes

Materials: **My Box Script**, pens, pencils, pencil crayons or color felts, rulers
Handouts: **My Personal Box** and **Understanding My Box**

Procedure:

Part One

1. Introduce the theme that all people are *boxed in* by some things that limit them and cause them stress. The sources of these *boxes* can be internal or external, physical or mental, spiritual or social. Some of the most common *boxes* people experience include:
 - a) *Expectations and beliefs* — the *I shoulds* of life;
 - b) *Habits* — smoking, overeating, drinking, relationships;
 - c) *Employment issues* — work expectations, no job, financial pressures;
 - d) *Health* — illness, pain, medication.Many are beyond our control and we are faced with the challenge of learning how to live with them in ways that minimize the distress we experience. In this exercise we will identify those chronic stresses in your life that box you in, examine them and determine what you want to do with them.

2. Hand out **My Personal Box** worksheets. Have pens, pencils, pencil crayons or color felts, and rulers in easy reach of each participant.
3. Read **My Box Script** guided fantasy. Tell the group that they will be taken on a mental adventure. Encourage them to get comfortable, close their eyes, and begin relaxing. Read the script slowly with ample pauses that allow participants time to image what you have suggested. Take ten minutes at least to read this.

Part Two

4. After everyone has completed their drawings, proceed to ask a series of questions to help participants understand their boxes. Ask participants to make brief notes of their responses below their pictures.
 - a) What was the size of the box compared to your size?
Small and cramped? Big and roomy?
 - b) How did you feel when you were inside your box? List two or three feeling words. Some of you may have felt panicky and wanted out fast. Others may have felt relaxed and quiet, comforted, protected.
 - c) How did you escape? Did the lid just open easily? Or did it lock? Did you get out easily or have to smash your way out?
 - d) How did you feel after you got out of the box? When you saw daylight again? When you knew you were still on your path? When you walked around it?
 - e) How did you feel when you had to say *good-bye* to the box and leave it there as you moved on down the path? Did you miss it at all?

Part Three

5. Ask participants to focus on the meaning of their guided box fantasy, using the script below as a guideline. Look again at your box and consider its meaning. Every person experiences factors in life that hold them back, that put restrictions on their life, squeeze them, control them, and limit them.
 - a) What are some of the factors in your life right now that you know are boxing you in? List a few. List whatever images come to your mind.
 - b) Look these over. Are there any common themes? Circle one that you would like to focus on for the rest of this experience. Now let your box stand for this chronic stressor.

Part Four

6. Distribute the **Understanding My Box** worksheet and ask the following questions. Ask one question at a time and allow time for participants to write their answers before moving to the next one.

Question #1 — *What are the positive rewards you receive by staying locked in your box?* Every box offers some positive reward in addition to its pain. (Offer several examples.)

- Good financial rewards make a high stress job worth doing.
- Eating too much offers a sedative for reducing tension.
- Being sick forces you to get needed rest. Others may reach out and take care of you.

Question #2 — *What do you avoid by staying in your box?*

Every box also offers protection, since it offers you a chance to avoid other fearful situations. (Cite two or three examples.)

- Staying in a difficult relationship offers the comfort that you do not have to be on your own right now.
- Circumstance limitations (i.e. children, transportation, health, money) may be *an excuse with honor* to avoid making changes.
- Perfectionist expectations (*If I can't do it perfectly, I won't do it at all. I'll wait until I can go to school full time.*) allow you to avoid even trying.

Question #3 — *When you consider leaving your box, what*

do you fear? Every box, no matter how awful and painful, offers the comfort of the known instead of the fear of the unknown. For example, remaining chronically disappointed in a relationship may be better than taking a chance on finding another relationship, and then discovering that it was not what you wanted after all.

7. Following the completion of these questions, have participants summarize their mixed feelings about their box by completing the list of reasons for and reasons against making a change.

Part Five

8. Finally, the facilitator directs participants to write a summary of the changes they would like to make in themselves and/or in their box.

Note: Remind the participants that they may want to redesign or reshape their box in a way that minimizes the

chronic pain while maintaining some of the rewards. Encourage participants to be as specific as possible.

Part Six

Small and Large Group Sharing (15 – 20 minutes)

9. Break into groups of four and give participants 10 to 15 minutes to summarize their insights and desired changes.
10. Reconvene the full group and ask participants to share their observations, insights and specific examples. As part of the discussion, you may want to highlight some or all of the following points.
 - Our *boxes* always bring a mixture of pain we would like to avoid as well as rewards and comforts we would like to keep.
 - We seldom totally rid ourselves of chronic problems. They are labelled chronic because they recur. If you have tried to rid yourself of a problem month after month, and year after year, and it has not budged, perhaps it is here to stay.
 - The North American dream of a perfect, pain-free life is an illusion. Everyone must live with limitations, chronic disappointments and nagging stressors that we call *boxes*. You can learn to get on with your life even while coping with chronic problems.
 - Many great figures in history have been great because they learned how to live with and rise above their personal boxes — not because they figured out how to live problem-free lives.
 - Instead of trying to rid yourself of all your chronic stressors,

you might ask, *Given all these difficult and disappointing limitations in my life, what must I do to take better care of myself?* There is always something you can do to nurture yourself. Spend less time trying to get rid of all problems and more time simply taking better care of yourself.

- You can learn something from every problem. The thorn in your side can deepen your understanding of life, enhance your compassion, and/or expand your faith. Ask yourself, *What can I learn about life from this?* Be certain to listen to the answer.
- You and your problems are not one and the same. Your identity as a person is separate from your pain.
- No matter what limitations entrap you, no matter what disappointments box you in, you are still lovable. Nothing is ever so bad that it makes you worthless. Others will love you if you will only accept it. You can still love yourself if you are willing. You do not have to be perfect to be loved.

Note: Do not rush this activity. Some may feel overwhelmed by the degree of self-reflection required. They will need sufficient time to process the insights and feelings.

Variations:

More or less time can be taken by extending the small and large group discussions or eliminating one or more of the activities.

My Box Script

(... indicates a pause)

Take a deep breath. ... Breathe in through your nose ... and blow out through your mouth. ... Again ... in through your nose ... and out through your mouth. ... Become quiet and relaxed. ... Listen to your inner sounds. ... Relax and concentrate on the steady ... deep ... rhythm of your breathing. ... When you breathe in ... fill your insides with air ... expand ... blowing yourself up like a balloon. ... When you breathe out ... let yourself deflate ... like a balloon ... with all the air ... going out. ...

Imagine you are walking ... on a beautiful path ... with green grass ... and rolling hills. ... The view all around you is breathtaking. ... As you walk along the path ... you notice your favorite flowers ... along the side. ... You feel the warm breeze on your face. ... You are happy ... and at peace ... with yourself ... and the world. ... You continue your walk ... happy and at peace. ... As you are walking ... the path divides. ... One path goes to the right ... one path goes to the left. ... One path is rocky and edged with grass ... the other is wide ... and smooth. ...

You take one of the paths ... and continue your walk. ... As you are walking ... you notice that you are approaching a wooded area. ... As you get closer ... you notice the trees. ... You continue to walk ... and you enter the forest. ... As you walk along ... the forest grows thicker and thicker. ... The light gets dimmer and dimmer. ... The greenery of the forest is thick ... and rich ... and dark. ... The air is cool ... but comfortable. ... As you are walking ... you notice a box ... on the side of the path. ...

You stop ... and you carefully examine the box. ... You notice all the details of the box. ... You notice its size. ... its shape ... its color. ... You walk slowly around the box ... noticing how it is made. ...

Then ... just for fun ... you decide to climb into the box. ... You notice the colors ... the shapes ... the smells ... inside the box. ... You try shutting the lid of the box. ... You shut it slowly ... so the light fades ... slowly. ... You close the lid completely ... seeing the sliver of light ... slowly fade ... and disappear ... as the lid closes completely. ...

You are now inside the box. ... It is dark ... and you notice how you feel. ... You notice the size of the box ... and whether you want to sit quietly ... or move around. ... You decide to sit quietly ... or to explore the corners of the box. ... You notice how quiet it is ... in the box. ... You are aware of your feelings. ... Soon ... you are ready to leave the box. ... It is now time to get out. ... Pay attention to how you get out. ... What do you try first? ... Where do you push? ... How hard? ... With what part of your body? ... How long does it take? ...

Now you are out of the box. ... You notice your feelings. ... You think back ... recalling the effort it took ... to leave the box. ... You remember what you did ... to get out. ... Now you are outside of the box. ... You are in the dim light of the forest. ... It seems brighter than it was before you got in the box. ... You notice the sounds ... and the feelings. ... You walk around the box ... noticing everything about the box ... so you can remember all the details. ... Is the box in the same position as before you got into it? ... Or, has it moved? ... Is it still whole and undamaged? ... Or, have the sides been broken out? ... You notice

every detail. ... You decide to leave the box ... to say good-bye ... to the box. ... It is time to move on ... but you keep a clear picture of the box in your mind. ... You remember your experience ... with the box. ... You walk away from the box ... remembering. ...

You walk down the path ... just a short distance ... to the edge of the forest. ... You leave the forest ... and enter the bright sunlight of the day. ... You come to the end of your journey ... back to this room. ... You have a clear memory of your box ... and your experience ... with it. ... Slowly ... you return to this room. ... You notice your breathing. ... You notice the sounds around you. ... As you come back ... take your worksheet and draw a picture ... of your box. ... Recall all of the details ... the size ... the color or colors ... the shape ... how it was constructed. ... Note how the box was when you first saw it ... and how it was when you left it. ... Recall how you felt ... on the outside ... and on the inside. ... Put down all the details that you can. ...

Exercise 2.19

My Personal Box

Draw your box in any way you wish.

Exercise 2.19

Understanding My Box

1. Positive rewards for staying in my box:

a) _____

b) _____

c) _____

2. Things I avoid by being in my box:

a) _____

b) _____

c) _____

3. What I fear about changing my box:

a) _____

b) _____

c) _____

4. Should I make a change?

Yes, because ...

No, because ...

5. The change I would like to make in me is:

6. The change I would like to make in my box is:

Exercise 2.20 Hypothetical Situations

Purpose: To explore alternatives in coping with stress
To practice applying coping techniques in related hypothetical situations

Time: 30 minutes

Materials: Handout: **Stress Scenarios**

Procedure:

1. Summarize the techniques introduced through the previous exercises, and emphasize the coping techniques already utilized by the group.
2. It is important to draw the group's attention to both individual and communal coping techniques.
3. Form groups of four or five participants and distribute the **Stress Scenarios** handout.
4. Instruct each group to choose one scenario. The group is to generate ideas to cope effectively with the chosen scenario. Have each group record their ideas to be brought back to the large group. Give them ten minutes.
5. Reconvene the large group and have each small group report its recommendations.

Variations:

If time permits, form small groups and have participants choose a situation from one of the group members' lives. Apply the same process to generating effective coping techniques.

Exercise 2.20
Stress Scenarios

Relationships

1. Your partner's job takes her/him away from home several times a month. You have noticed that the first night she/he comes home after an absence, you often argue or act in hurtful ways to one another. You are starting to dread her/his coming home after a trip. What could you do?
2. You are working and enjoy your job, but find it difficult to manage the job and home responsibilities. Every night when you come home you prepare dinner, help the children with their homework, and generally work for another three to four hours. Your husband usually relaxes in front of the TV when he comes home. You are beginning to resent him and there are a lot of arguments between you, mostly about unimportant things. What could you do?
3. You are unemployed and feel depressed most of the time. You do not seem to have the energy for anything. Most of your friends are working and you find it uncomfortable to go out with them because you do not have much money. You have been staying home a lot and getting more depressed. What could you do?
4. You are a single parent with two children in high school. Recently the older one has been neglecting chores and continually bothering the younger one. Tonight she/he has been complaining about dinner. There was an argument about whose turn it was to do the dishes, and doors were slammed when you mentioned homework. You are beginning to find yourself more wound up and constantly snapping at the children. What could you do?
5. You are married and have one child. You have a part-time job and your husband works shifts. You have begun to notice that whenever your husband comes home he appears to have been drinking. There have been a couple of nights recently when he was so drunk, he could not make it up the stairs. You have tried to talk to him about it, but he just gets angry and tells you to mind your own business. What could you do?

Work Situations

6. After five years with the company, you have recently been appointed to a new position. Although it is not a promotion, it will give you an opportunity to gain new experiences and potentially move up. After one week on the job, it becomes obvious to you that your duties are not what you had expected, and what is expected of you does not match your job description. You are losing sleep over the situation. What could you do?
7. A co-worker with a special-needs child is constantly behind in her work and asks you to help her catch up. You agree to help. After a few days, you are behind in your work while she is on time. Your supervisor gives you a warning about your decreased efficiency. What could you do?
8. You are overweight and as you walk to the cafeteria, you hear whispered comments about your size. You are hurt and embarrassed. You stop going to the cafeteria and eat at your work station. Your boss tells you to take a proper break at lunch and join the others in the cafeteria. What could you do?
9. While you were talking to your boss about another matter, you learned that a colleague had gone to him and complained that you were not a team player. Without discussing the situation with you, he files a negative report in your personnel file. You tell him that you thought he ought to have discussed it with you, or at least investigated the complaint rather than putting a negative report in your file based solely on this person's complaint. He tells you that he felt he did the right thing and if he had it to do over, he would do the same thing. Unfortunately, the boss does not work directly with this person and considers this person to be an excellent employee. This person is uncooperative, does not share information and (for good reason) is not trusted by other colleagues. You no longer feel that you can respect or trust your boss. What could you do?

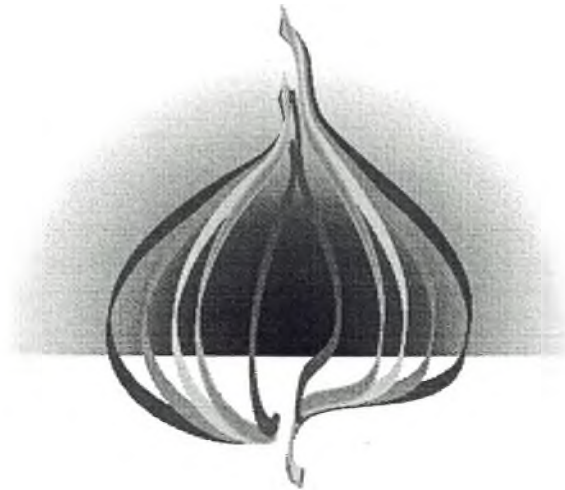
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for Women*

Assertiveness

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Assertiveness

Introduction

Assertiveness training is a behavioral tool to help people make their way more effectively through the world. It is a technique designed to give access to specific communication skills and to present information on ways of relating to the environment. It is NOT a solution to problems. It is a way of working towards the changes individuals want and need.

Taking assertiveness training does not mean that a person will get everything she wants. It does mean she will probably feel much better about how she deals with certain situations. She will increase her feelings of self-confidence, thereby increasing the likelihood of change around her. Simply, it increases the possibility of getting at least some of what one wants and needs.

In situations where there is no real possibility of change, a woman can at least know that she has done her best, spoken out, stood up for herself or others. She is stopping a game, changing a dynamic, creating new rules. Often others will respond in kind and work to create new rules with her; some may dig in and stick fiercely to the old game.

To be effective, assertiveness training needs to explore beliefs behind patterns of behavior, develop a belief system that encourages action in the world, and improve self-esteem.

Assertiveness training must start from the assumption that women are strong, rather than weak. Assertiveness training must enable each woman to get in touch with the ways in which she is strong and can act for herself. Furthermore, she needs to

understand that women's difficulties with being assertive are often based in social gender relations.

Assertiveness training is often offered as a personal solution to problems that are not personal. Too often assertiveness training is offered as a personal solution to problems that are essentially social. Assertiveness training is not a substitute for developing community support and action, although it is useful in doing these things. Assertiveness training can increase a woman's sense of personal power, but it can only go so far. Collective assertiveness knows no bounds. Women need to work together, build bridges between their differences, talk with each other, and not simply go home hoping this new skill will solve their problems.

This module includes exercises that could be used in a one-day **Assertiveness Training** workshop. There are two sections. Section One includes a variety of exercises designed to illustrate several important aspects of assertiveness. Section Two focuses on role playing as a method of practicing assertive techniques. The bibliography includes a number of books which contain more detailed approaches to Assertiveness Training.

Note:

1. In teaching assertiveness training, it is important to stress that being assertive does not magically change everything. Women need to know that others may respond in a variety of ways. The woman's options in responding are increased, but it is useful to remember that the option of silence and withdrawal from a situation is sometimes necessary. It can at times be more assertive to leave a situation than to confront it.

2. Make sure examples are used from women's lives and common problems. Avoid the error of using examples that locate women only as consumers, as professionals, or as middle-class.

Sample Agenda

Assertiveness Workshop

- Introductions
- Review and Discussion of Previous Sessions on *Self-Esteem* and *Stress*.
- Introduction to Assertiveness Communication
- *Exercise 3.1* Juggling Roles
- *Exercise 3.2* Influence of Gender Stereotypes
- *Exercise 3.5* Bill of Rights

Break

- Definition of Assertive, Passive and Aggressive Communication Styles
- *Exercise 3.8* Assertive Communication
- *Exercise 3.9* Non-Verbal Assertive Communication

Lunch

- Introduction to Role-Playing and Giving Feedback
- *Exercise 3.11* Saying 'No'

Break

- *Exercise 3.13* Making Requests Practice
- *Exercise 1.18* Using Affirmations - Part I
(From *Self-Esteem* Section)
- *Exercise 1.38* Closure: Moving Outwards
(From *Self-Esteem* Section)
- Appreciations
- Written Evaluations

Section One

Aspects of Assertiveness

Exercise 3.1 Juggling Roles

Purpose: To explore the various roles that women play in their lives

Time: 30 minutes

Materials: Flip chart, felt pens
Handout: **Juggling Roles**

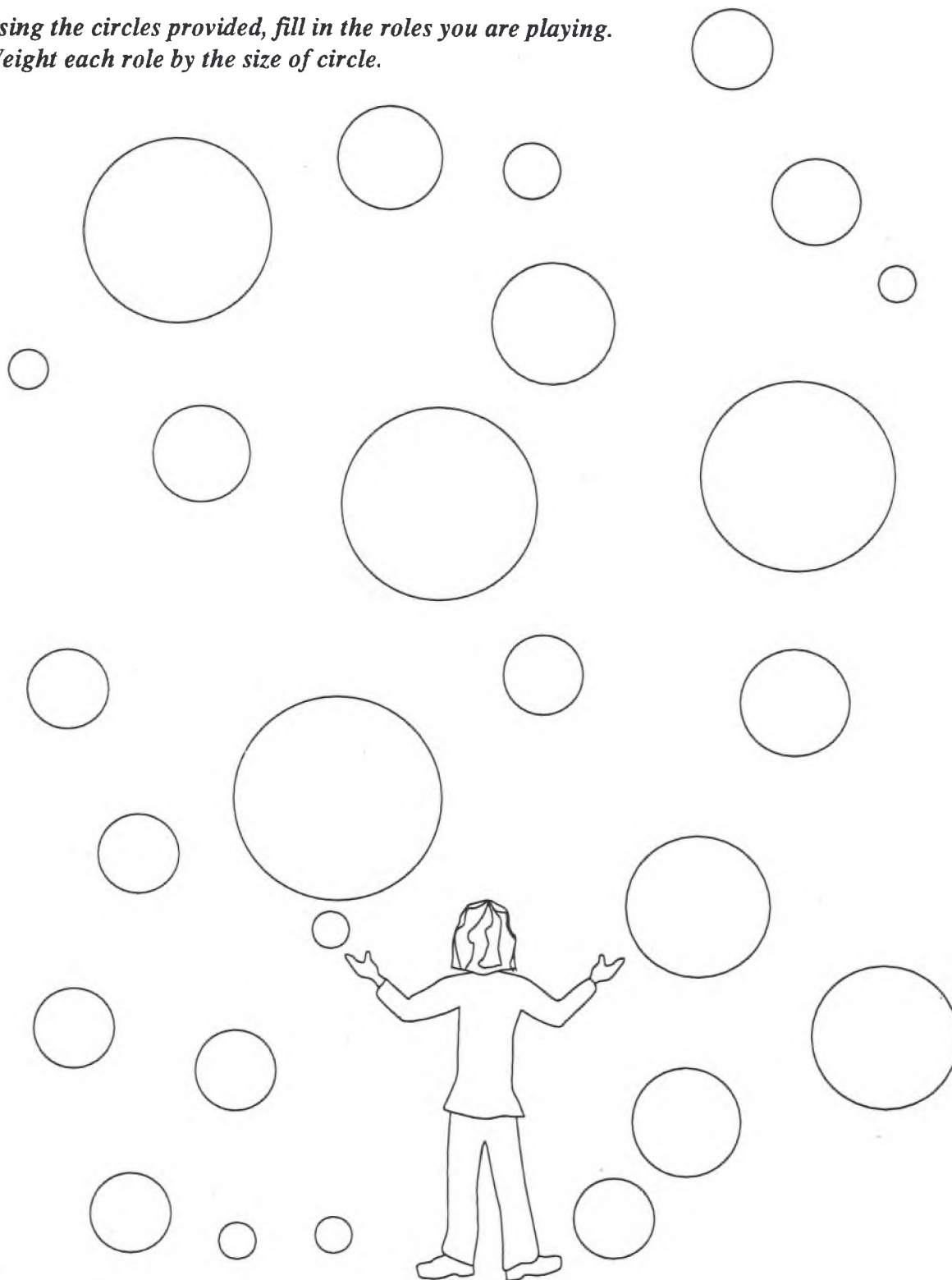
Procedure:

1. Explain that as women we fill many roles in our lives, both in the home and in the work place. These roles are varied and require our time and energy. We often find that we are filling roles that are out of date or no longer where we want to put our energy. It is important to take a step back and examine these roles. Explain that we will be looking at these ideas as a juggling act.
2. On flip chart draw a replica of the handout.
3. Ask the group to brainstorm the roles that women fill. Explain that many roles are broken up into other roles, for example, a housewife is also a cook, house cleaner, shopper, etc. It is useful to identify the multitude of roles under the heading housewife or mother. Point out what an incredible juggling act is going on.
4. Distribute handout **Juggling Roles**.
5. Ask each participant to identify her own roles.
6. Form groups of four.

7. Write discussion questions on flip chart.
 - a) How do you feel about the number of roles you are juggling?
 - b) Are there any roles you would like to give up or share? Why?
 - c) Are there any new roles you would like to take on?
 - d) Do you have the right to give up or take on new roles?

*Exercise 3.1***Juggling Roles**

*Using the circles provided, fill in the roles you are playing.
Weight each role by the size of circle.*



Exercise 3.2 Influence of Gender Stereotypes

Purpose: To identify stereotyped notions as they relate to male and female roles and communication patterns

To assist participants to decide whether they want to continue to operate from these notions or to change them

Time: 30 minutes

Materials: Flip chart and felt pens

Handout: **Influence of Gender Stereotypes**

Discussion Questions

Procedure:

1. On a flip chart, brainstorm a list of *shoulds* for women. Stimulate the group by adding examples to the list, e.g. women *should* be mothers, women *should* be soft-spoken, etc.
2. Point out some of the contradictions in the list of *shoulds*, e.g. women should be sexy, but women should be virgins, etc.
3. After the list is completed, break into discussion groups of four or five.
4. Hand out discussion questions.
5. Brainstorm on flip chart (or discuss in the group) ideas or methods for coping with and countering the stereotyped notions about women's roles.

6. End the exercise by pointing out that we do have choices and that those choices are often restricted by the stereotyped notions of women in our culture. We can, however, decide whether we want to operate from those *shoulds* or challenge them. In challenging them, we need the support of other women. It is a long hard struggle to change stereotypes.

Exercise 3.2

**Influence of Gender Stereotypes
Discussion Questions**

1. How much of your self-image has been shaped by these stereotyped notions and roles?

2. Share how you learned what a woman or man was supposed to want and be.

3. How satisfied or frustrated are you with the current gender standards as they relate to your work place or home?

4. Which aspects of male or female stereotypes would you want to challenge?

5. What situations have you experienced where you came into conflict with stereotyped notions? What happened and how did you deal with it?

Exercise 3.3 Issue of Rights

Purpose: To help participants think critically about the issue of rights

Time: 30 minutes

Materials: Flip chart and felt pens

Procedure:

1. Brainstorm on flip chart:
 - a) Who seems to have more rights in this society?
 - b) Who seems to have fewer?
2. Have a general discussion about the previous questions.
3. Do a round of what the term *rights* means to participants.
4. Brainstorm on the flip chart the group's list of rights. For example, the right to express feelings, right to be respected, etc.
5. Break into discussion groups of four or five.
6. On flip chart write questions to be discussed.
 - a) How does the lack of awareness of our rights affect our behavior?
 - b) How can we change this?
7. Have each small group report back to the larger group.

Exercise 3.4 Speaking Up for Your Rights

Purpose: To introduce members to the concept of rights as part of everyone's daily life.

Time: 30 – 40 minutes

Materials: Handout: **Speaking Up For Your Rights Scenarios**

Procedure:

1. Break into groups of four or five. Identify one recorder for each group.
2. Distribute the handouts.
3. The group identifies the rights involved in each situation.
4. Each recorder reads to the whole group the findings of the small group.

*Exercise 3.4***Speaking Up for Your Rights Scenarios**

1. A friend has borrowed a skirt of yours. When she returns it, you find a new stain on it. She has not mentioned this to you.

2. You have been waiting for 45 minutes in an open-backed examination gown in your doctor's office. You are very cold and angry by the time the doctor comes into the room.

3. Your supervisor asks you to stay and work late that day. You have made arrangements with a friend to go to a movie.

4. Your husband wants to go out dancing, and you feel tired.

5. Your child is sick, and you and your husband have to be at work that day. Your husband prepares to leave the house.

Exercise 3.5 Bill of Rights

Purpose: To identify personal rights

To increase awareness of values and how they
influence awareness of what we want

Time: 20 – 30 minutes

Material: Flip chart and felt pens
Handout: **Bill of Rights**

Procedure:

1. Emphasize the importance of recognizing what we want before expecting to get what we want. If we are unclear of what we want, we will communicate this to others. Women traditionally have been much more in tune with the needs of others than with their own needs. It is important to recognize that we have a right to our desires and a right to ask for them to be met.
2. Break into groups of five or six.
3. Explain that rights reflect what is important to us, and are codes we would like to live by. It will be useful to give examples, e.g. the right to be listened to, the right to say no and not feel guilty, the right to work where we want, etc. Encourage the groups to come up with at least five rights.
4. Ask each group to appoint a recorder.
5. Each group is to brainstorm and record on a flip chart a *Bill of Rights* for their group.

6. Bring the groups back together and have each small group share its *Bill of Rights*.
7. Distribute the **Bill of Rights** list compiled from other groups.

Exercise 3.5
Bill of Rights

Examples from other groups

1. The right to be treated with respect.
2. The right to have and express our own feelings and opinions.
3. The right to be listened to and taken seriously.
4. The right to set our own priorities.
5. The right to say yes or no without feeling guilty.
6. The right to ask for what we want.
7. The right to get what we pay for.
8. The right to ask for information from professionals.
9. The right to make mistakes.
10. The right to choose not to assert ourselves.
11. The right to make mistakes, and to be responsible for them.
12. The right to change one's mind.
13. The right to be ourselves.
14. The right to be aggressive.
15. The right to defend ourselves.
16. The right to equality in professions and sports.
17. The right to do as we please as long as it does not hurt anyone.
18. The right to our own lifestyle.
19. The right to make our own decisions.

Exercise 3.6 'I' Messages

Purpose: To explore and practice the use of 'I' messages as an assertiveness tool

Time: 30 minutes

Materials: Handout: **'I' Messages**

Procedure:

1. Explain the importance of the 'I' message when communicating assertively. When communicating passively, we tend to avoid 'I' messages and use 'You' more often. This prevents direct and open communication. It is risky to use 'I' messages as we must then take ownership and responsibility for what we are saying.
2. Give out **'I' Messages** exercise sheet.
3. Ask participants to rewrite each statement using 'I' messages.
4. As an example, the facilitator could do the first question with the group.
5. After the group has completed the exercise, go through the questions, asking group members to give their answers.

Exercise 3.6
'I' Messages

Rewrite the following unclear statements (passive/aggressive) into clear direct statements (using 'I' messages).

1. It was frustrating when you could not hear the music.

2. You make me so angry when you are late.

3. Whatever you want will be alright with me.

4. She made me so sad.

5. They are really annoying me.

6. You make me feel good when we are together.

7. If it were not for you, I would move to Toronto.

8. You make me feel unhappy.

9. I guess I will go with you to the pictures.

10. Nobody else will, why should I?

11. We did not really want to go to the movies.

12. My lover does not want me to go out tonight.

13. Marg says I look awful in blue, so I guess I will give away my blue clothes.

14. I should read more books.

Exercise 3.7 Admitting Responsibility

Purpose: To explore the concept of responsibility

Time: 20 minutes

Material: Handout: **Admitting Responsibility**

Procedure:

- 1 Form partners and have each participant complete the sentences in Part A. Ask the participants to use the same three examples identified in completing the sentences.
 - *Three things I have to do ...*
 - Next, each woman finishes the sentence
(using the same three examples)
Three things I choose to do ...
 - This is repeated with:
Three things I choose to do because ...
2. The same procedure is used with Part B:
Three things I cannot do ...
Three things I will not do ...
Three things I will not do because ...
3. Debrief this activity by having the participants talk about how they felt when they moved from the first to the third sentences.

Exercise 3.7

Admitting Responsibility

Part A

Three things I have to do:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Three things I choose to do:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Three things I choose to do because:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Part B

Three things I cannot do:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Three things I will not do:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Three things I will not do because:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Exercise 3.8 Assertive Communication

Purpose: To identify the differences between assertive, aggressive and passive responses through a physical exercise

Time: 25 minutes

Materials: Handout: **Verbal and Non-Verbal Components of Behaviors**

Procedure:

1. Precede this exercise with a verbal explanation of the differences between the three communication styles. (Refer to handout).
2. Ask participants to stand up and if necessary push chairs away to clear a space.
3. Ask each participant to find a partner and stand facing her.
4. Ask partners to put their hands together with palms touching, take a step back, and find a position of perfect balance. This is described as an assertive communication stance.
5. Instruct participants to decide who will be A and who will be B in their pairs, and have the participants return to the stance.
6. Instruct the A's to push as aggressively as possible against the B's. This is explained as aggressive communication.

7. The B's are then instructed to do the same to the A's.
8. Participants are then asked to get back into a balanced position. The A's are instructed to pull away suddenly when the B's least expect it.
9. The B's are then given the opportunity to do the same. This is explained as passive/aggressive communications.
10. Participants are asked to sit down again and discuss what each stance felt like.
11. It might be necessary to expand on the descriptions and differences in the communication styles. Use examples to illustrate the differences further.

Exercise 3.8

Verbal and Non-Verbal Components of Behaviors

VERBAL		
Non-Assertive	Assertive	Aggressive
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apologetic words • Veiled meanings • Hedging: failure to come to the point • Rambling: disconnected • At a loss for words • Failure to say what you really mean 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statement of wants • Honest statements of feelings • Objective words • Direct statements which say what you mean 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Loaded</i> words • Accusations • Descriptive, subjective words • Imperious, superior words • 'You' messages that blame or label

NON-VERBAL (General)

Non-Assertive	Assertive	Aggressive
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actions, instead of words, hoping someone will guess what you want. • Looking as if you do not mean what you say 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attentive listening behavior • General assured manner • Communicating caring and strength 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exaggerated show of strength • Flippant, sarcastic style • Air of superiority

NON-VERBAL (Specific)

Non-Assertive	Assertive	Aggressive
1. Voice		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weak, hesitant, soft, sometimes wavering 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Firm, warm, well-modulated, relaxed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tense, shrill, loud, cold, <i>deadly quiet</i>, demanding
2. Eyes		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Averted, downcast, teary, pleading 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open, frank • Direct eye contact, but not <i>staring</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expressionless, narrowed, cold, staring, not really seeing you
3. Stance & Posture		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lean for support, stooped, excessive head nodding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Well balanced, straight-on, upright, relaxed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hands on hips, feet apart, stiff and rigid, rude, imperious
4. Hands		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fidgety, fluttery, clammy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relaxed motions, natural movements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clenched, abrupt gestures, finger-pointing, fist pounding

Exercise 3.9 Non-Verbal Assertive Communication

Purpose: To identify the importance of non-verbal communication when being assertive

Time: 20 minutes

Materials: Flip chart and felt pens

Handout: **Verbal and Non-Verbal Components of Behaviors** (from *Exercise 3.8*)

Procedure:

1. Explain the importance of non-verbal communication in the communication process. It has been estimated that as much as sixty per cent of our communication is non-verbal in its impact. It is therefore important to make sure that our verbal and non-verbal communication is synchronized. Demonstrate this by making an assertive statement with contradictory non-verbal messages. Non-verbal includes all aspects of how we communicate with our bodies: what we do with our hands, eyes, shoulders, head, etc.
2. On a flip chart, brainstorm with the group a number of non-verbal gestures used in communication.
3. In pairs, have participants practice making statements with the non-verbal communication contradicting the verbal statements.

For example:

Verbal I am feeling much more relaxed.

Non-verbal Speaker sits biting her nails.

Verbal I'm really interested in what you're saying.

Non-verbal Speaker plays with her rings and stares off into the distance.

4. Break into discussion groups of four or five.
5. Post the following questions for discussion.
 - a) How does it feel to send different messages with our bodies and our words?
 - b) How does it feel to receive a non-verbal message that contradicts the verbal message?
6. In the larger group discuss and describe assertive body language. If necessary, the facilitator can role-play assertive non-verbal techniques.
8. Re-form the pairs to discuss how they aim to synchronize verbal and non-verbal communication.

Optional:

9. Have a general discussion in the large group about the reactions to the practice.

Section Two

Practice / Role-Playing

Practice / Role-Playing

Many people have a negative response to role-playing. They may feel that they will look foolish, or be tricked. Role-playing is simply an opportunity to practice the skills one wants to acquire, and skill acquisition is not possible without practice. If there is a sense of resistance to role-playing, use the term practice.

Practicing could be called the heart of assertiveness training. It provides opportunities for each participant to practice new behaviors and to get feedback from others on how they present themselves. Although role-playing is often difficult at the beginning, group members invariably find it a useful process and learn much about themselves.

Practice/role-playing needs to be done in a supportive environment and each woman reassured that this is a learning process; there are no judgments attached to her behavior or personality. Assure participants that no one will be set up or tricked.

1. Practice/role-playing is action-oriented. It gets participants active and involved. Role-playing needs constant repetition and practice. If sessions are broken up, do some in each one.
2. There are three basic parts to practicing assertiveness:
 - a) *Saying 'No'*,
 - b) *Making Requests*, and
 - c) *Requesting Changes*.

It is usually easiest to start with *Saying 'No'*, proceeding to *Making Requests* and ending with *Requesting Changes*. *Requesting Changes* is usually perceived as the most difficult.

3. The facilitator can model examples of passive, aggressive and assertive modes. It is helpful to ask participants to practice an example using all three modes. This way they become familiar with all three and are able to identify the places where they traditionally have felt more comfortable. Later, they can practice only the assertive stance.
4. It is often helpful to start with made-up examples. Participants may pick examples that are very difficult, for example, their relationships with their fathers. If they pick examples, suggest they start with very simple issues. A good procedure is to ask them to practice the imaginary examples in groups of three, and then ask a group to volunteer role-playing in the large group. After this, move on to real situations.
5. When participants are practicing in small groups, one chooses an example, the second plays the person in her example, and the third is the observer. The role of this third person is to watch closely. She can intervene if the other two are having difficulty. It might be appropriate to ask the partner to take a harder line, or to be not quite so difficult. The observer can also remind the two players to stay focused on the three behavior modes.
6. The observer gives feedback to both partners, making sure to include what is positive.
7. Finally, each of the two active partners gives feedback on what the role-play was like. This could also be done after each section, i.e. the passive, aggressive and assertive stances. Make sure each person has a turn in each role.

*Section 2***Guidelines for Practicing Assertiveness****1. State your goal**

Specify the change you want in your own or the other person's behavior:

- a) *What am I trying to achieve?*
- b) *Does it solve the problem?*
- c) *Is it realistic?*
- d) *What is my fall-back position?*

2. Look at the possible strategies

Evaluate by asking:

- a) *If I say what I am thinking of saying, how is the other person likely to react?*
- b) *When?*
- c) *Where?*
- d) *How?*

3. Select optimum strategy**4. Suggested tactics**

- a) Describe the problem to the other person
- b) Express the points you want to make directly and concisely
- c) Say how you feel by using 'I' messages and owning the situation or problem
 - *I feel ...*
 - *I think ...*
- d) Show you hear and understand by using empathy
 - *I can see you are ...*
 - *I can understand ...*

- e) Say what you want:
 - *I want ...*
 - *I would like ...*
- f) Negotiate for a workable compromise:
 - *If I give X will you give Y?*
 - *This is what I want. If I give this, what are you prepared to offer?*
- g) Use congruent body language.

*Section 2***Guidelines for Giving Feedback**

Start with the strengths of the performance. Specify exactly which behaviors were positive.

1. Verbal Behaviors

- a) Were 'I' statements rather than 'you' statements used?
- b) Were the statements direct and to the point?
- c) Were the statements firm but not hostile?
- d) Did the statements show some consideration, respect, or recognition of the other person?
- e) Did the statements accurately reflect the speaker's goals?
- f) If the statements included explanations, were they short rather than a series of excuses?
- g) Did the statements include sarcasm, pleading, or whining?
- h) Did the statements blame the other person for the speaker's feelings?

2. Nonverbal Behaviors

- a) Was eye contact made?
- b) Was the speaker's voice level appropriate?
- c) Did the statements contain appropriate pauses?
- d) Did the speaker look confident, or were nervous gestures or inappropriate laughter present?
- e) Were the statements flat or expressive?

After all positive feedback has been given, offer suggestions. Describe the behavior, rather than labelling it. Be objective rather than judgmental. Offer a possible way to improve. This needs to be expressed in a tentative rather than absolute manner. Do not impose an improvement. Ask the group member for a reaction to the suggestions, allowing the member to accept, refuse, or modify the suggestion.

Exercise 3.10 Making and Refusing Requests

Purpose: To explore the ways in which participants make and refuse requests

Time: 15 – 20 minutes

Procedure:

1. Have participants find a partner and decide who is A and who is B. A is to imagine that B has something that A really wants. If A wants, she can tell B what it is. B is to refuse to give it to her. A's line is *I want it*. B's line is *You can't have it*. They are to continue the dialogue for a few minutes. Suggest that participants stand and use their bodies in any way that does not involve physical contact. For example, the person who is withholding could turn away, move to a different part of the room. The person who is asking then has to decide what to do. After a few minutes have partners change roles. Give partners time to exchange their feelings about the exercise.

Note: This exercise is very revealing of individuals' styles of asking and refusing. Some may raise their voice, some may act wheedling or whiny or manipulative, some may assume an aggressive stance, some will say they do not really want it. Some will have difficulty refusing and others will become gleeful and controlling. Participants learn a lot about their style of interaction.

2. In the group discuss:
 - a) How did you feel in each role?
 - b) Which was more comfortable for you?
 - c) Was your partner convincing? etc.

Exercise 3.11 Saying 'No'

Purpose: To practice saying 'No'

Time: 30 – 40 minutes

Materials: Flip chart and felt pens

Handouts: **Saying 'No' Discussion Questions**,
Saying 'No' Scenarios, and **Saying 'No'**
Guidelines

Procedure:

1. Have group members think of times when they have had difficulty saying no.
2. The facilitator might at this point need to come up with suggestions if participants are unable to do so themselves, e.g. you are asked to go on a date and you want to say no, or someone wants to borrow something of yours.
3. Break into groups of two. Each participant practices saying no assertively. Then each partner gives the other feedback regarding verbal and non-verbal messages.
4. Form groups of four and give out **Saying 'No' Discussion Questions**.
5. On a flip chart, brainstorm specific guidelines that reinforce and are important when saying no assertively.
6. Give out handout **Saying 'No' Scenarios**. Group members return to their original partners and practice saying no to one or two scenarios from the handout using any new ideas or insights gained. Partners give feedback where appropriate.

7. Give out handout **Saying 'No' Guidelines**. The facilitator might want to summarize the major points that strengthen saying 'no' assertively.

Exercise 3.11

Saying 'No'
Discussion Questions

1. How do you feel when you say no?
2. What happens when you do not say no?
3. What happens when you say no?
4. What does not work for you when you say no?
5. What helps you when you say no?

Exercise 3.11

Saying 'No' Scenarios

1. You are at a social event and are stuck talking to a person you find boring. You want to talk to someone else.
2. A man you have dated once calls. Your first date was not much fun and you do not want to go out with him again, but here he is on the phone asking for another date.
3. You have been asked for the third year to organize collecting money from your co-workers for the company's charity. You feel it is someone else's turn this time.
4. You are at a party. Practically everyone is high on alcohol and you are a non-drinker. Someone at the party starts to hassle you and keeps offering to bring you a beer.
5. You are out shopping. There are two shirts you like, but one is far more expensive and you do not want to buy it. The salesperson is pressuring you and saying how much better the expensive one looks on you.
6. Your friend phones and asks you to look after her three-year-old daughter while she goes to the doctor. You are just about to go out to meet another friend for coffee.
7. A friend wants to borrow a sweater. She has borrowed clothes before and returned them with stains and in an unwashed state. You are unwilling to lend her anything again.
8. You work in an office and your day ends at 4:30 p.m. At 4:00 p.m. your boss comes in with a report to be typed and asks you to work overtime. This would mean you would get home at 6:30 p.m. at the earliest and you do not want to do it.

9. You work in a factory and the foreman is making advances. He has already asked you for a date twice and you have refused; now he implies that he has the power to get you fired if you do not go out with him.
10. An old friend from high school has moved into town. You have had little contact with her for years. She wants to stay with you for two weeks or until she finds a place to live. You have problems of your own at the moment and feel it would be impossible to share your cramped apartment for that long.
11. You have just got a job as a sign person on a highways crew. The first day a co-worker (male) asked you to go across the street and get him a coffee when you get yours. You do not mind and comply for the first two days, but the third time he asks, you feel angry and used.
12. You are about to go to the store for groceries. Your neighbour sees you and comes running down with a list of things she would like you to pick up for her. You could not possibly carry her groceries and yours, and you do not have a car.

*Exercise 3.11***Saying 'No' Guidelines**

1. Be sure where you stand first, i.e. whether you want to say yes or no. If not sure, say you need time to think it over and let the person know when you will have an answer.
2. Ask for clarification if you do not understand fully what is requested of you.
3. As briefly as possible, give a legitimate reason for your refusal but avoid long elaborate explanations and justifications. Such excuses may be used by other persons to argue you out of your 'no'.
4. Actually use the word 'no' when declining. 'No' has more power and is less ambiguous than, *Well, I just don't think so ...*
5. Make sure your nonverbal gestures match your verbal messages. Shake your head when saying 'no'. Often people unknowingly nod their heads and smile when they are attempting to decline or refuse.
6. Use the words *I won't* or *I've decided not to* rather than *I can't* or *I shouldn't*. This emphasizes that you have made a choice.
7. You may have to decline several times before the person hears you. It is not necessary to come up with a new explanation each time, just repeat your 'no' and your original reason for declining.
8. If the person persists even after you have repeated your 'no' several times, use silence (easier on the phone) or change the topic of conversation. You also have a right to end the conversation.
9. You may want to acknowledge any feelings another has about your refusal. *I know this will be a disappointment to you, but I won't...* However, you don't need to say *I'm sorry* in most situations to apologize for your refusal. Saying *I'm sorry* tends to compromise your basic right to say 'no'.

10. Avoid feeling guilty. It is not up to you to solve others' problems or make them happy.
11. If you do not want to agree to the person's original request but still desire to help him/her out, offer a compromise: *I won't baby-sit the whole afternoon, but I could sit for two hours.*
12. You can change your mind and say 'no' to a request you originally said 'yes' to. All the above applies to your change of mind.

Requesting Changes

Making requests is a way of asking for changes that minimizes a hostile response and demands that the one asking be clear about why she is asking and what she is asking for.

It has four parts:

1. Learning to be clear about what specifically in another's behavior bothers you. In order to do this, you need to focus on what you observed and not on your opinions about that person.
2. Learning to define how you feel about the observed behavior. Learning to distinguish between thoughts and feelings. Telling the other person how you feel can help him/her understand why you are talking to them.
3. Learning to be clear about the changes you want.
4. Being able to articulate why what you are asking is important.

This method of asking for change is very powerful and goes a long way towards improving communication. Like any other communication tool, it depends on mutual good will and commitment. Some people will respond in a positive manner and some will not.

It can be frightening to tell someone how we feel about what they are doing. This kind of directness is neither taught nor encouraged in our society. Rather, we are silent, or sarcastic and hurtful, or we will gossip behind another's back. For this method to be effective, we must also be direct and honest with ourselves. If we are doing this to hurt another person, we will be no further

ahead. It is very important to let the other person know that you are doing this because you care about them and want to continue your relationship.

Note: To do justice to this section it requires a minimum of two hours, though three hours are preferable. Before practicing making requests, participants should work through the different parts of the outline. The facilitator could read out the examples and have the group decide whether they are thoughts or feelings, etc. If there is no time to cover the material at all, it can still be useful to hand out the **Requesting Changes** outline with a brief explanation.

Exercise 3.12 Making Requests for Change

Purpose: To practice making requests of another person in a clear and constructive fashion

Time: 45 minutes

Materials: Pen and paper
Handout: **Requesting Changes**

Procedure:

1. Using the **Requesting Changes** handout, have each participant write a request for change based on a real situation in her own life. Allow adequate time. Participants are to write the requests in the format outlined in the **Requesting Changes** handout.
2. In the large group, participants read out their request one by one. The facilitator and other group members assist by commenting on clarity and suggesting ways clarity could be improved.

Note: The value of doing this in the large group is that participants hear many different requests and thus gain increased familiarity with the concept.

Variation:

Before writing the request, participants write down in two or three sentences the basic situation they are having trouble with. This allows the group a clear idea of what each person is attempting to communicate.

*Exercise 3.12***Requesting Changes**

The approach outline below:

- Helps you make assertive requests of others for a change in behavior
- Builds on assertiveness skills we have already practiced
- Is a way of explaining what the other person does that bothers you
- Does not give you all you want, but makes you clearer about what you want
- Is a way of starting a discussion, and requires cooperation
- Can be used with friends, relations, equals, someone who is important to you, political groups, etc.
- Is not for use with bosses, or those with power over you, although it can be useful in helping you understand more of what is going on

1. *Have good intentions:*

- Why are you doing this?
- What do you want to get out of it?
- Are you doing it for satisfaction or revenge, or for understanding and to further relationships?

2. *Ask permission to have the discussion:*

- Is now okay? If not, when would it be convenient?
- Set an appropriate time and place

3. *Know what bothers you. What are you reacting to?*

- Distinguish between observations (what a person said or did or did not do) and judgments (what you think about what they said or did)

For example:

Observation You were very quiet during the group yesterday.

Judgments You were tired/bored/depressed.

You grew angry at what we were doing.

Observation You did not close the door.

Judgments You always forget to close the door.

You're so rude.

Observation You interrupted me three times this afternoon.

Judgment You never listen.

Observation When I came here to visit with my kid, you told her three times to go outside.

Judgment You hate kids.

Observation You did not phone me last night after 8 o'clock as you said you would at lunchtime.

Judgment You do not care about me.

You are irresponsible.

How to make an observation

- Be specific
- Be concrete
- Stick to what the person said or did, not what they did not say or do
- Avoid general words like *never*, *always*
- If a person has done a lot of things, stick to the most recent specific examples

4. How do you feel about it?

- *Feelings* are what we feel, our emotional reaction; feeling words are used to express feelings (see *Self-Esteem* section for a list of feeling words).
- *Thoughts* are what we think and are often judgments or assumptions about a person's behavior and/or about how we think they feel. When *I feel* is followed by a *that* phrase, the statement often expresses a thought, not a feeling.

Note the difference between thoughts and feelings:

Thoughts.... I feel (that) you are ignoring me.

I feel that you are smarter than me.

I feel as though you are being unfair.

Feelings..... I'm angry.

I feel hurt.

I really am irritated about what happened yesterday.

Thought..... I feel misunderstood (*misunderstood is a blame word*)

Feeling I feel frustrated because I think you misunderstood me.

How to express feelings

- Start sentences with 'I', not 'you'
- Stick to your own feelings, not the other person's feelings

This is hard. Often we do not know how we feel. Doing this helps us understand ourselves and lets the other person know how their behavior makes us feel.

5. What changes do you want?

- These are wants, not demands
- What do you want the person to do?
- Who do you want to do it? (*important in group*)
- Avoid negatives and be concrete and specific

Note some differences between clear and unclear statements:

Not Clear I wish people would stop interrupting everyone all the time.

Clear Susan, I want you to wait until I'm finished talking before you make a comment.

I want you to phone me if you are going to be more than 15 minutes home late from work.

Not Clear I want you to be more supportive.

Clear I would like to be able to telephone you when I am upset.
I would like you to look after my son for two hours while I go to the doctor.

Not Clear I want you to listen when I talk.

Clear I want you to lend me your red sweater for a job interview on Wednesday.

Not Clear I want you to feel better about yourself.

Clear I want you to hear compliments without answering with a negative comment.

Not Clear I want you to stop being so disorganized.

Clear I want you to be on time for the next meeting.

Exercise 3.13 Making Requests Practice

Purpose: To practice making requests for changes in behavior

Time: 45 – 60 minutes

Procedure:

1. Using the requests worked on in the previous exercise, practice in groups of three, with one person as observer, one making the request, and one receiving the request.
2. Have each person bring forth another situation. Switch roles. The group helps each person define her request, using the same format as in the previous exercise. Role-play those new requests.

Variation:

Role-play the requests in a passive and aggressive manner before the request is made assertively.

Exercise 3.14 Receiving Criticism

Purpose: To practice hearing ourselves being asked to change a behavior

Time: 15 minutes

Materials: Pen and paper

Procedure:

1. With pen and paper write down two criticisms of yourself. One of these criticisms is to be realistic, something that might be said to you that you think has truth. The other is to be a preposterous criticism that you feel is totally unfair and untrue.
2. In dyads, exchange criticisms. Have your partner read out to you the two criticisms you wrote. Practice responding assertively and without defensiveness.

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