Social skills and Healthier self-Esteem

Facilitating Social Learning Circles on Self Esteem

A Guide for Facilitators and Teachers

Promoter SYNTHESIS CENTER FOR RESEARCH AND EDUCATION
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FACILITATING SOCIAL LEARNING CIRCLES ON SELF ESTEEM

Guide for facilitators and teachers

The guide is designed to assist group facilitators and teachers to set-up and run social learning circles on self-esteem for groups at risk of social exclusion. It can also be used to integrate self-esteem principles and methods into other courses working with such groups. The Guide has been developed through practical work with women's groups in a Socrates Grundtvig Project: "Social skills and Healthier self Esteem" (SHE).

A full version of the Guide (including exercises and tools) can be downloaded from the internet http://www.eushe.org.

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Information about this project is available on the internet http://www.eushe.org

Other products : CD-ROM

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The content of this Guide reflects the author’s views and the Commission is not liable for any use that maybe made of the information contained herein.

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FOREWORD

In a world where we lack self-esteem, we are more apt to blame others for the troubled spots we find ourselves in, rather than take responsibility for our actions. We do not give credit where it is due, out of fear of our "inadequacy," and take comments from partners, friends, co-workers, the "wrong way."

Due to the lack of self-esteem, the opinions others have about us become the determining factor of how we live our lives, of how we define ourselves. If others like us, we like ourselves. If others reject us, we reject ourselves. Furthermore, we are not willing to do the things we want to do, and worse we do things that we are not proud of because we are afraid to say "no". Sadly, millions of people have lived and live their lives this way. Millions of us live our lives pretending to be someone else other than ourselves, having no idea of who we really are.

The repercussions of lack of a healthy self esteem extend far beyond the personal barrier to society at large. Lack of self-esteem is cited as one of the main causes of many of our social problems-violence, abuse, racism to name a few. Developing self-esteem becomes key in building healthier communities and societies. Only when we develop a healthy self-esteem, can we relate comfortably across lines of ethnicity, race and gender and become active citizens. Once we accept ourselves, we will no longer need to have everyone else be like us.

There are many definitions of what self-esteem is about. In essence, however, developing self- esteem is about getting in touch with our true selves, where our potential can truly be evident.

This Guide, and the project "Social skills and Healthier self Esteem" (SHE) out of which this material is born, is in its very core about that-about facilitating people to get in touch with their true selves and acknowledge their potential.

Thanks are due to Norman Duncan for writing the material, to the facilitators who ran the first SHE social learning circles, Irene Skoutari, Ruth Smith, and Sofia Moreno, as well as to the partners of the partnership who have contributed in the material and the project: Sara Bourke, Calliope Mastora, Savvas Katsikides, Mary Christou, and Petroula Mavrikiou.

Thanks are also due to the people whose lives have inspired me to write the SHE project in the first place.

George Isaias
Director
Synthesis Center for Research and Education

Author's Introduction

Whilst self-esteem is an issue for a wide range of the population, the SHE project was developed with women over 40 who for a range of personal, social, or educational reasons were identified as having low self esteem.

The project was built on three major pillars:

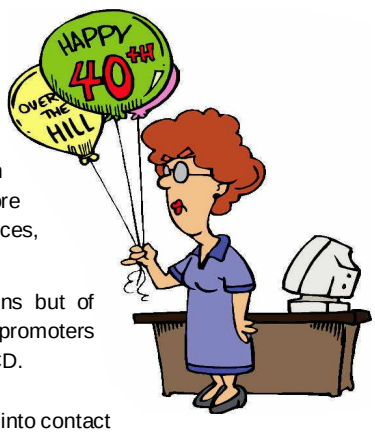
Self esteem determines the ability of a person to live a fulfilling and productive life;

Humans are social beings that have the need to belong to and who also grow within a group;

Certain human qualities (such as empathy, active listening, positive regard, etc) can have a transformational effect on people with low self-esteem.

The project aimed to strengthen the participants' self-esteem through their participation in facilitated social learning circles. The SHE programme was run in three countries (Cyprus, Spain and Ireland) over 80 hours during 2004-5, and the Guide has been developed through the practical work with these women's groups.

The main Guide covers general issues relating to facilitating self -esteem for any target group and consists of two sections and a set of annexes:



The first section focuses on the facilitator, their identification and selection and offers a range of tools and support for facilitators who already have skill in running personal development groups.

The second focuses on setting up, running, and evaluating the self esteem group. It gives some structure for the research and needs analysis before setting up such a group, and then goes on to detail possible phases, resources, exercises and examples that can be followed in running the group.

Annexes covering additional material not included in the two sections but of relevance to the facilitator i.e. exercises, tables, SHE project structure and promoters etc are available on the website http://www.eushe.org and on the attached CD.

Facilitating any kind of 'Personal Development' such as self-esteem is entering into contact with the 'infinite'. People can come with an infinite number of 'histories', 'difficulties', blocks, rhythms and styles of learning, kinds of facilitator, 'moments in the learning process', and so on. It is therefore impossible to seriously propose 'a method' or a set of simple steps and exercises that will lead to self-esteem.

Moreover, there can be no promise at the start, that the process is going to be easy or that the facilitator will 'take away all the problems'. For self esteem to develop, learners have to begin to take responsibility, within their groups, for their own learning cycles. This reflection on their own experience is always going to have some uncomfortable moments. The facilitator must be able to accompany the learners in their personal Socratic exploration, through new, sometimes dark or painful experiences and also in difficult moments of reflection. There can be no pre determined learning plans for learners. The role of teacher changes from "transmitter" to "facilitator", so empowering the learner. The facilitator must be able to open their own learning process, showing how to 'be lost' and re-find themselves.

Keys to the training model explored in the guide are:

The human skills and experience of the facilitator and their use of support and supervision

The social learning environment and the development of a "social-peer group" as a the base for learning and support

A four-phase experiential action-reflection learning model.

Norman Duncan
El Arte de Ser Persona

Self Esteem for women and men over 40

Mid life is a time of major change for all people. This change offers both a challenge and an opportunity. When we are younger our energy and illusion tend to help us overcome crises and difficult moments. As we age, both our vital energy and illusion decrease.

Midlife can be time of mourning because it is a time of loss. Both men and women begin to slow down and show evidence of physical decline. But what often has more effect on our self-esteem is that many of the 'images' we had in our youth about how our lives would develop, begin to seem impossible. The habits that we often fantasised about 'giving up' have now become long term habits: smoking, overeating, drinking, slouching in front of the TV. With these, go other emotional habits such as continual criticism and blame of the self and others. Youth is going, and for women especially, that brings with it fears of losing beauty and attractiveness.

Women experience many hormonal changes also, which impact strongly on their self-perception. As those we have close contacts with change (dependent children becoming independent adults; partners facing their own mid-life crisis etc), we begin to feel we will not have satisfactory and fulfilling relationships. Our job may not be what we hoped for. Opportunities to advance further in our careers may be reducing. We may feel time is running out and that we are under pressure to do all the things we had hoped to do.

On the other hand, mid life can present a series of opportunities. For many women especially, it can mark the end of the child rearing phase of their lives and leave them with more time for themselves and the potential to do what they want to do, rather than follow the agenda of others. This can be a frightening time, as they struggle to reassert their identity, often against the wishes of other family members who have become comfortable in being "cared for." Developing healthy self esteem after a long period of caring is the first step to a new and differently fulfilling life. It can give people the courage to change.

Men also tend to be losing some of their vital energy. The physical changes that occur at mid-life are not that great and certainly not enough to restrict a healthy man's activities, but they may frighten him. If they continue to measure themselves against their younger fellows then they will lose self-esteem. One of the advantages of the midlife crisis for men is that it can enable him to break out from under the prohibitions of the masculine roles that demand so much of him: having to continually compete and prove himself, not showing emotions, not showing any weakness. He can now develop the other, previously ignored, half of himself.

Whilst respecting the rhythm of the participants, all these issues must be addressed specifically and openly for any real change to happen.

Recognising our ageing is usually a painful period for most, but out of that pain can come growth and a healthy change in values, behaviour and interests. Emotional pain provides the opportunity for growth because it proclaims that one's usual behaviour is not working and may have to be changed. Ageing, pain, disillusion and illness are no different in providing this opportunity. But the pain has to be faced if it is to encourage growth. If it is denied the chances are that we will have more problems later on. This is where we have to begin in our development of self-esteem. Our 'experiential learning cycle' is of great help here. We need to have clear and realistic data about what happened. We need to fully analyse all of it. Then we can plan actions for change that will work for us.

Recognition and acceptance of what is

The thoughts "I am a no good failure", "I don't have any problems, I'm fine", "I'm going to give up drinking and overeating and start going to the gym next week ... then I'll find the perfect job and partner,... " and similar are

untrue fantasies which maintain us in trapped behaviour. In the group participants must begin to explore and value the actual lives they have, their struggles and difficulties. The actual achievements they have made in just living those lives are of supreme value. All the activities in the Start Up and Trust Building Phase are very important here. Plenty of time must be given to establish a space where participants can tell their stories and hear each story with 'love and respect'. To provoke and support this disclosure, we can use stories or videos of other over 40's, who are having similar challenges. It is usually appropriate for the facilitator to also make the occasional personal disclosure about their own struggles and 'failures', without using the group for their own needs.

Responsibility without blame

Responsibility is essential for real change to take place. But so often, as we get older, responsibility then becomes associated with blame and then powerlessness. This tends to happen because we make quick and absolute judgements - for example, "I didn't get the job ... so I am no good and will never get one". When the person sees that they did not get the job, say, because they did not value and put all their own experience clearly on the application form, and that they talked negatively about themselves in the interview, or just that it was not right for them at that time - then this becomes more manageable. Yes, we (and our parents, children, others,) are responsible for what we do, but no more than this. And we all do the best we can in each moment. This does not mean we can't do better. We can all learn, change and improve, when we know the full picture. In the group we can draw a 'fuller picture' using exercises with the arts, personal maps and the lifeline. The facilitator and group can help each person by asking respectful questions and giving accurate feedback so building more clarity and reality in the personal analysis.

Plan and carry out actions for change

Very often our lack of full information and our fantasy about what is possible lead us to act in ways that are destined to 'fail'. But with long term habits and behaviours established, and without the youthful enthusiasm and energy, this can be difficult. Many of our social circles (family, work, friends) contribute to maintaining us in our situation. When the participant has explored an issue clearly then clear actions for change begin to emerge. We propose the regular use of the SMART exercise and the use of 'personal contracts' within the group to support actions for change. The participant will present their story and planned actions to the group. The group will engage to help the person ensure that what they plan is realistic, achievable and has the support required. This joint discussion develops into a contract with the group who take an ongoing and supportive interest in the process of each participant.

Conclusion

For women over 40, developing self esteem and social networks which are not family and child oriented is vital to development. Men over 40 can begin to let go of competing and not have to prove their manliness any more. Men's and women's groups such as SHE gives the opportunity to explore, accept and possibly change themselves in a safe space. Every woman and man should have a 'SHE / HE group'.

Section A

Facilitator and Facilitation Skills
This section focuses on the facilitator and offers :

- a set of skills, criteria and ideas for selecting the right person

- an explanation on the use and structure of support and supervision

- an experiential learning tool to structure the facilitator's learning

Section A - Facilitator and Facilitation Skills

Selection of Facilitator - Criteria and Process

Selecting the 'right' facilitator is very important for the success of a learning circle for personal development. From our experience with other such groups, we have valued the personal and professional qualities and skills discussed below, above what might seem to be the relevant academic qualifications of the candidate.

We drew up tables (annex 1) from these key skills for facilitating self-esteem, which formed the basis for selection and then remained part of the ongoing learning and supervision of the facilitator.

Personal Qualities

As a general characteristic, we felt that the facilitator should be **close to the target group** in terms of life experience, possibly having come through similar situations themselves. In our case, this meant being a woman over 40 herself.

Since it was clear that our project did not have the time or resources to fully train facilitators, it was also essential that the facilitator had a background in group work / personal development, demonstrating experience in facilitating personal growth and some formal or informal group work. For individuals with the required personal qualities, but without the group work experience, we suggest working initially with a more mainstream group under supervision.

"I have made many previous journeys, so I am able to signal possible dangers to them. I cannot make the journey for them since the 'journey' and the experience are 100% subjective, I cannot know what exercises will be right for them. All I can do to help them is 'Be in my Place', me as I am, and accompany them from empathy. I can simply accompany them knowing how to get lost, how to fall, and how to get up again. When I try to 'push' the silent or slow learners then they just get blocked. This frightens the whole group. If I lose contact with their fears, body, emotions, needs or rhythms then they let me know by getting stuck somehow. These crises guide me to be able to return to myself. I breath deeply, feeling "what I need in that moment", and this usually brings me back into contact with their process".

The facilitator should possess the often named 'Soft Human Skills' of listening, empathy and patience. These are the personal skills that are the basis of the relationship between the facilitators and the group members. The facilitator should

Possess strong, positive listening skills, and an ability to draw people out, and encourage them to speak openly about themselves

Have the ability to work with the "whole person", which means including body, emotion and spirit as well as mind. For self-esteem, this particularly means "learning to love the parts and emotions we feel are bad or ugly".

Be non judgmental and able to show unconditional positive regard (love) to participants. This includes empathy with the individuals in the target group

Be inspiring and empowering, believing that individuals hold the key to their own development

Have the ability to confront and deal with difficult issues of relevance, for example domestic violence, substance abuse, depression, etc

The project recognises and supports the personal style of each facilitator to work spontaneously with the needs and rhythm of their group. This is part of the "art" of personal development work, which is not academic, but follows the dynamic between the group and the facilitator. It cannot be programmed in detail. However the general phases, the content of those phases and "possible optional exercises" that might be used in those phases can be specified. We propose that facilitators explore and 'dip into' the guide rather that follow it strictly.

Professional Qualities

The facilitator must have the ability to reflect on and learn from experience, and use supervision as a constructive process. The facilitator will explore their own interventions with their group. This evaluation will cover all the key skills of facilitation and will be shared regularly with their supervisor. We propose, later, a four phase model to explore, record, reflect on, evaluate and learn from personal experience. This model is applicable to empower both facilitators and the participants.

If we propose to the learner that reflecting on and sharing our difficulties is helpful, then the facilitator who "doesn't need" supervision transmits arrogance and incongruence to the learners who will feel this and so will only engage in a shallow level of process.

The facilitator should be process -oriented not task or theory - oriented. Often, personal development group facilitators find themselves investing lots of time in preparing exercises and activities for their participants. At other moments they can resort to their theories to understand what is happening for participants and plan interventions. Clearly both of these actions are essential.

Being process, rather than task-oriented, implies patience and trusting that each person holds the key to their own 'process of development'. They do not necessarily fit into our rhythms, theories or exercises. It is best for theorising to take place outside of the group since attachment to exercises or theories interrupts the ability of the facilitator to 'be fully present' with and follow the participants in 'their process'. This 'being fully present' with the process of the participants transmits confidence. It also helps the facilitator to really experience what is happening for the participants. It is this experience which will best inform theories for analysis and planning - following our experiential learning cycle. **The facilitator should recognise, set and maintain "boundaries".** The maintenance of boundaries is essential in creating a safe and structured environment, in which the participants can openly explore and disclose aspects of their lives. The needs of the participants will often push to cross these limits, modelling how they let others break their limits. When the facilitator models the maintenance of personal and professional boundaries this is learned by the participants.

The facilitator must define, operate within and maintain the limits of the course: hours, aims, and methods. This means understanding the limits of the course in terms of what can be achieved with the time and resources available.

The facilitator must have the understanding that an educational programme to boost self esteem is not therapy and must operate within the aims and methods of the course. This will include knowledge of, and contact with, outside specialists for possibilities for referral when needed.

The facilitator must be aware of his/her own limits and boundaries, not entering into complicated relationships with their participants (sexual, friendships, financial, emotional, etc) which would interfere with their ability to facilitate. In recognising her own limits, the facilitator will look for counselling, supervision and support, when needed.

Support and Supervision

"Over the months that I didn't record my experiences leading the group, and had no supervision, the group began to get confused. They seemed to feel the incongruence between what I was asking them to do and what I was doing myself. When I returned to reflect and get an experienced external view on my experience, then the group confidence grew again."

What is supervision? Purposes, functions,... Why is it important in our work?

Within a facilitation context, the purpose of supervision is twofold;

the professional development of the facilitator and
the welfare of his/her learners.

Supervisors enable supervisees to find their own way of understanding difficult issues in their practice and so to develop their own professional style. Supervision is essential in all personal development work because as facilitators, we are all human with our own skills, fears, biases, values, limitations, favourites and, dislikes etc. In the teaching of personal development, many difficult and emotive issues arise that will implicate the facilitator. However, much of our behaviour is unconscious, leading to us subtly taking one side or another, not noticing issues that are difficult for us and influencing or blocking the learning one way or another. No one is exempt from their unconscious fears and impulses. Being 'unconscious' it is fairly impossible for us to see them, let alone deal with their effect, on the others. This highlights the need for qualified supervision to help the facilitator become aware of their limitations and unconscious influences on their learners and to learn from this.

What knowledge and skills are required by a supervisor?

Supervision is a formal professional arrangement that is built on trust and respect between the two parties, and, as such, it is best for supervisees to choose their own supervisor, with advice from their manager. It is important to choose a supervisor carefully, ensuring that the supervisor understands the boundaries of the supervisee and programmes. An experienced supervisor can usually be found through counselling organisations. It is important to understand that supervision as described here is not related to line management or administration. Good trainers, counsellors or managers do not necessarily make good supervisors. But experience and skills in all these areas are required. Whilst there are differing models of supervision they are all in agreement about the need for the supervisor: to have many years of practising as a facilitator (life coach, counsellor, etc), to have undergone supervision themselves over their professional career and, to have undergone their own long term personal development process. Without these basic skills they will not be able to help the facilitator untangle some of the difficult, emotive and unconscious elements of their practice, and indeed they may further complicate issues.

What is done during supervision time?

The facilitator will record, in their learning log, important moments from their practice, both positive and negative. Issues that may be part of the content of supervision will be: facilitation skills, emotional awareness, gender, ethnicity and cultural awareness, ability to 'conceptualise' their practice, ethical and professional role, and evaluation of their practice.

In their own time, they will have reflected upon, evaluated and contrasted these moments with the theories and experience within their reach. The four phase learning cycle and facilitator evaluation tables in Annex 1 are tools to help with this. This reflection is presented to the supervisor. Sessions are usually about 1 hour of supervision to every 5 hours of group contact, depending on experience.

The supervisor must use the same style as in the learning group, firstly 'listen', ask questions and get to know their supervisee. The 'right' questions arise from the long experience of the supervisor. The purpose of this is to further 'get to know' and to lead the facilitator to reflect on their experience in ways that they have not previously done. Rapid or theoretical solutions are of no use in this kind of learning. Only after this listening and reflective facilitation of the supervisee, then the supervisor may suggest exercises, solutions, readings or other actions. This style of supervision is congruent with our training model in empowering the learning to come from the experience of the learner.

Where it becomes clear in supervision that some personal, emotional or other issue is influencing the practice of the facilitator, she should seek professional 'counselling' to deal with this. Whilst some counselling may be part of the supervision, it should not become converted into counselling sessions. The facilitators own personal development will be fed back into the supervision and evaluated, in as much as it affects the difficult issues that have been identified in their practice with their learners.

Empowerment - A Four Phase Experiential Learning Cycle

This is a more complete tool for reflective learning and is intended first for the use of the facilitator in their own learning. Once they have experienced the value of this structure then they will be able to explain and use it with appropriate groups.

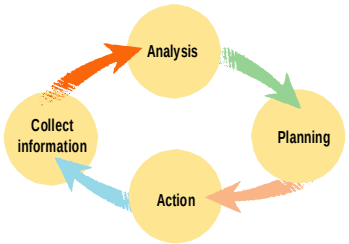
Learning cycles (Kolb, Heron) are simple experiential cycles that help the learner structure their work in a natural way. Like day - night, eat - digest, summer - winter, so also action - reflection is another cycle that we follow naturally. Giving this some structure for the learners' personal empowerment, we can name four phases of a learning cycle:

ñ Act (Experience)

ñ Collect information about the experience ñ

Analyse the information

ñ Plan - and act again.



This is experiential learning.

Through consciously following a cycle in their learning process the learner must, in their own words and images:

Explore and collect information about their own experience, from their own lives.
Analyse the information and experience, using reflection, using others points of view, using theories, ...
Planning simple, realistic, achievable actions to change situations in their own lives
Carry out the planned actions. .... gathering real information to return and learn from the experience.

Method - The learner might use the following table to focus their self-evaluation and gathering of evidence (examples in Annexes). The information, comments, observations, photographs, etc generated in this experiential cycle are recorded in the personal log of the learner.

Collect information	Analyse the information	Plan	Act
What are my skills, needs and difficulties? What do I want? Which options are available? Gather data (evidence) about my experience: video, tape, colleagues statements, my personal learning log and reflections, ...	Find out details, evaluate and cross check them. Define and select. Why was it so? Analyse my experience (data, analysis, plans, actions) with different theories, to see why I got this result	Specify a plan of action including methods of evaluation. Agree this with peers and trainer, including time scales and resources. Make a new and better-informed plan for new actions.	Carry out my action plan

Further rounds of the cycle imply collecting information in the table about how the action was carried out; analysing (evaluating) it and proposing further plans of action. Having a simple record of each cycle then allows both learner and other evaluators to see why an action might (or not) have been achieved. It becomes clearer (empowering) for the learner when they see that it was not their performance that "failed" but rather, for example, they did not have accurate data information to start with.
Self-esteem is developed when learners evaluate, understand and accept 'who they are' in each phase of the cycle. When they have realistic data they can make a realistic analysis and plan realistic actions. This builds self confidence and esteem by re-programming the brain to follow these steps to realistic and effective action in other moments. It is useful to record this process in a "**personal learning log or diary**", both for facilitators and their learners.

"As my group began to take responsibility for their own learning cycles, they reflected seriously on their own experience. I simply had to accompany them in this exploration, sometimes through new, dark or painful experiences. The learning plan for each learner evolved out of this joint reflection. My role changed from "transmitter of information" to "facilitator of self-esteem". It was an exciting process for us all".

Section B

Setting up and Running the Self-Esteem Circle

In this section you will find information about: Setting up the Circle, - defining the location, target group, organisations with which to collaborate, networking, agreeing and setting up the project, contacting and selecting participants

Running the Circle, - building trust, developing the main activity of the group in self-esteem,

Closing the Circle - ensuring that participants are prepared for the ending of the group and evaluation of progress.

Section B - Setting up and Running the Self-Esteem Circle

"Even though we have participated in many groups ourselves, understanding the importance of maintaining boundaries and using supervision ... we found ourselves taking on a learner who was not ready for the level of work in the group. This created tensions and misunderstandings between the people involved in the project... and led to a painful decision to have to direct the learner towards other support, outside of the group."

In Ireland, the SHE group was promoted as one of a number of programmes available in Knockanrawley Resource Centre, including return to work course, computer courses, womens groups etc. Over 50 women were interviewed and their needs assessed and the optimum programme suggested to them. When potential SHE participants were identified, the facilitator made individual contact with them to further discuss their participation. Of the final SHE participants, approximately half came through this process and the remainder through direct targeting.

"The half hour first (selection) interviews were fundamental in creating a trusting relationship between me and the possible group members, for them to feel able to come along to the group. The nature of these interviews was very personal and in the style of 'running the self esteem group'. I spoke about the work and listened to them respectfully. Several interviewees opened up here, some even cried. In this way they had 'an experience' of working with me, and all the accepted participants from these interviews came along to the group. The 'reality' of this interview also helped to clarify if the person was ready for the group."

Planning and Preparation

This phase deals with the preparation needed before we begin to run a group for the development of self-esteem. Firstly we must clarify the following aspects:

Define target group: For example, will the group be confined to women, mothers, women of a certain age, race etc. Why? What are the pros and cons of having a homogeneous or heterogeneous group?

If you do not have direct contact with the target group then identify organisations that do. You can then work with that organisation. A municipality or community resource centre is a good point to start as they are usually in contact with the groups of possible beneficiaries where this programme is appropriate. They can be also helpful in advertising it through their own publications and network.

Present your proposal and try to build a trusting relationship. Do not underestimate the time required to build this relationship. Agree: **1)** a strategy/process to contact potential users, **2)** level of involvement of this organisation - planning, outreach, evaluation etc.

Needs Analysis

While there are many generic factors which are common to people experiencing low self esteem, the situational and cultural milieu in every setting will differ. Because of this, it is important to carry out comprehensive research into the needs of potential participants. Members of the target group may be difficult to reach, and when reached may not necessarily be able to articulate their needs. Therefore, it is useful to carry out an initial needs analysis with a representative group of people who are similar to the target group you are trying to reach and who have already participated in some kind of personal development programme.

Use structured interviews, guided by the questionnaire (Annex 2) to elicit their relevant personal, situational, cultural, and educational needs before joining a group, how the group supported them, and their current position. This will give you a snapshot of the types of issues which must be dealt with, from which you can make a draft programme. This draft programme will then be used when in discussions with actual participants.

Outreach, Contact, Selection

To recruit participants for the group and tailor the programme to meet their expressed needs you may need to.

- Identify potential users by working with a host organisation, by outreach, advertising, etc.
- Meet with potential users and interview them using a semi-structured questionnaire (Annex 2). Interview, build trust, listen to them, identify their interests and what will engage them with the process.
- Identify barriers to their participation and explore ways to overcome these. Barriers could include literacy, childcare, eldercare, transport etc.

ñ The selection interview should check for difficult pathologies. Are they ready for this group? Will they be able to work constructively with other group members? Is this the most appropriate way to meet their needs? Might they be better supported in another environment?
ñ Clearly state to the potential participants the objectives and methods of the circle so they can decide if they truly want to join.
Then select participants in conjunction with the supervisor, manager and host organisation. It is important that every individual interviewed be offered a path to enrichment, either through this group or an alternative route, if that is more appropriate. There should be no 'failure' - other outcomes must be agreed in advance with host organisations.

Running the Self-Esteem Circle

The programme is based on extensive research demonstrating that there are two essential elements of Self-Esteem: a) perception of self and others and b) life-management skills. These determine how effectively people deal with life and its challenges.
We extend these basic elements into Course Objectives which are likely to include the following: ñ To explore perceptions of personal capabilities, significance, value and influence on others. ñ To acknowledge their personal potential.

ñ To become more aware of their own true strengths and weaknesses

ñ To gain clarity into their own personal identities.

ñ To learn and practice interpersonal and communication skills

ñ To have fun, relax and enjoy interactions with other participants, (have a social outlet)

"We started advertising the group as being for "Women who were at risk of exclusion , a group on self esteem, etc." We found that women would not join the group or were very secretive about their participation. They did not want to be identified in this way (clearly this did not help their self-esteem). Once we began to focus the publicity and outreach on the positive and creative aspects to be learned, then we had no trouble raising our group. The language used with the partner organisations and towards the participants themselves had to be adapted to each. However, the positive language had to be continued throughout the project as some of the women were not ready to be identified with terms like low self esteem."

ñ To learn to reflect on and learn from their own experience, using the intrapersonal skills of analysis, judgement and planning

ñ To learn skills for nurturing and maintaining their own self-esteem, as well as the self- esteem of others.

ñ To be inspired and develop their character, resiliency, behavioural health, maturity and self-sufficiency. Resiliency has been identified as a critical factor in resistance to and recovery from a wide range of diseases and behavioural health problems. This is a person's ability to thrive in the face of challenges and adversity.

ñ To learn Systemic Skills - understanding that their feelings, experiences and self-image are closely related to those of other key people in their lives: parents, partners, children & colleagues.

The qualitative and quantitative criteria for each skill are largely subjective. As people acquire strength in each of these areas, they become less "at risk" to a wide range of problems.

The facilitator must:
1. Follow his/her local group circle's needs and pace
2. Follow his/her own style, skills and limitations
Only then should he/she use or adapt exercises in this or other guides.

Basic Tools and Exercises - "Self - Esteem in Action"

Basic Tools and Exercises - "self-esteem in action"

The learning circle – *working in a circle where each learner is recognised and has a place of equal value. The power lies with the circle, not with the facilitator or her exercises.*

The here and now – *using the questions: what is happening between you and me (in the group) now?, what do I feel now?, what do I need right now? ... these affirm the 'self' and whatever is real here and now.*

The breath – *is basic to life, to nourishing the self, bringing oxygen, cleaning toxins out of the body, ... as an element of many paths of prayer or meditation, the breath brings contact with the self, feelings and 'inspiration'. Good to use this in moments of difficulty & to help awareness, relaxation and reflection.*

The journey – *is a 'metaphor' for the personal process of each: 'Imagine you are now boarding a train / climbing a mountain / on a boat ....' to a destination with some objective ....., with other travellers, stops on the way, possible threats, ...*

A 'map and compass' for the journey– *The facilitator offers holistic human maps on which ALL the feelings and experiences of the learners can find a place. This will include: body, mind, emotions, relationships, spiritual aspects, ... and also trauma, violence, hurt, ... strengths, skills, ... blame, fears, limitations .... The circle, 'here and now' and breath give 'direction' and motivation to 'move' and learn.* ***The personal contract –*** *as learners explore their experiences, the circle listens, respects and values this, helping each to place themselves on 'the map' in their 'journey'. The group helps each member to take responsibility (contract) to take specific, small, realistic & achievable movements in their life.*

The personal log – *this gives value to the personal experience, feelings, 'contracts', struggles, ... and is where the learner develops their own 'map and compass' for life.*

Whilst we emphasise the importance of the experience and presence of the facilitator beyond any exercises, there are also some basic activities which we recommend. These are self-esteem in action rather than exercises to develop self-esteem. These topics are dealt with in more detail in Annex 3.

The exercises in the guide are not a "set international curriculum" for self-esteem. Facilitators should choose not do exercises that they do not understand well, or that they feel are not appropriate for the needs of their specific group or culture at that moment. These actions would be more likely to lose the confidence of the participants and even injure their self-esteem.

We have identified four phases in the actual running the self-esteem groups:
a) Start up, (b) Main Working, (c) Closure, (d) Evaluation of progress

Each of these overlapping phases requires specific attention and interventions by the facilitator, which are dealt with below. The work in the circle is likely to include a range of: facilitator presentations, discussions, role-plays, exercises, demonstrations and home assignments. Group participants may be asked to do outside reading and specific one-to-one and group self-esteem interactions on the job or at home. Details of some exercises we have used in each phase are suggested below. The phases and exercises are broad and general.

In the interview and local analysis stages you might find it useful to identify a 'focus activity' which can be used to build group cohesion. This could be a specific educational activity programme, or area of interest, e.g., art, creativity, drama, cooking, gardening, etc. This activity helps to take attention away from just looking at the 'self' which can be too intensive for many participants. It also, however, provides a real social environment in which self-esteem can be developed and tried out.

A - Start up phase

Trust building

This start-up phase is, in a sense, more important than later phases. Without trust, shared rules and responsibilities, and some basic listening and reflective skills, then no real development or other effective work will take place. It is essential that trust be built in the group to enable individuals to disclose personal information about themselves without fear and to relax and enjoy themselves. It is important to review it and deepen the trust as appropriate throughout the life of the group. This phase helps participants to value, believe in and 'own' the group.

"I have used games and activities so the participants come closer physically, build trust, open up verbally (to share emotions, thoughts, desires, etc) and be able to communicate. One of the exercises which I used was ***"fall and trust".***

The objectives of this phase are:

- To help participants get into the group and begin to get to know each other and bond together
- To build trust, explore the self and the others, set the scene for personal development work.
- To increase the safety within the group and support individuals who need confidence in group work

There is a particular emphasis on these at the start of group development. However it is also vital to deal with breaches of trust as speedily as possible, as a loss of trust can lead to a loss of the group.

In this stage, the membership of the group is not fixed, and in fact all three circles in the SHE project experienced changes in membership in the early phase, with members leaving, and in some cases rejoining and others joining in the early weeks. It is a characteristic of women with low self esteem that they may find it hard to commit to the group for some time. In the SHE project we found that this phase needed at least 7 weeks for the group to really stabilise in membership and to begin to feel the trust to do deeper work, though some very deep work was also done during this phase, the main focus has to be in getting the group well formed.

Trust building starts with the relationship of the facilitator with the group. When a facilitator exhibits the characteristics described in Section A of the guide, their behaviour then acts as a role model for the group to follow. Principles of equality, non judgementality, positive listening, constructive feedback and confidentiality are essential. Each participant must be treated equally and with respect, their contributions listened to and recognised. It is vital to work with the pace of the group, and the growth of trust may be slow and initially best mediated through non threatening activities e.g Community Art.

Specific trust building exercises can also be used. It is most important to ensure that these are culturally appropriate and that while people are actively encouraged to participate, they are not forced to do so, and are free to opt out at any time. Trust building exercises generally involve communication and getting to know each other better. This starts on a superficial level of name games, can grow through sharing hopes and fears to increasingly personal information. Some of these are described in Annex 3. Trust building can also be through physical activity with exercises like leading a blindfolded person through a room or falling backwards into another person's arms.

Depending on the culture, facilitator and group, some exercises like massage and laughing can possibly be left until the 3rd to 5th session as they get comfortable with each other. In Spain, for example, people are very tactile and like these exercises even in a first meeting.

At the beginning of the learning circle, unbeknown to the facilitator, there may be participants who know each other and have negative history between them, like Anne and Ellen. Before trust was built and the circle was forming, the participants tended to be polite and on their best behaviour so it was hard for the facilitator to understand the energy and insinuations that were unmistakably, but subtlety, occurring. As the circle developed, Ellen became more obvious in her disruptive remarks and negativity every time Anne spoke. This behaviour was challenged gently by the facilitator trying to deal with the growing issue. By enquiring as to what Ellen meant by the remarks she was making, the facilitator was allowing Ellen to safely face the fact that her behaviour was noticed and not acceptable. If honesty, safety and trust are to be established, there is no place for indirectness. A lot of people work on this level, not wanting to cause conflict yet having the power to destroy a group. Ellen also met the facilitator on her own. She was asked if there was a problem and was given the space to tell her story. The facilitator began to build up a picture of the situation and, although aware of the dynamics, continued to gel the group, confronting only immediate destructive remarks, in a non-threatening manner. Ellen continued with the group for a while, co-operating and engaging, before her job change meant that she could no longer attend. Anne continued and is a valued member of the circle.

*"Over the first few weeks participants were nervous and reluctant to speak about themselves. Knowing that this first phase of opening up safely determines how the group can develop, I used **"The journey"** exercise regularly, as a metaphor, to help the group centre in what we were doing. Using this along with **"the breath"** exercises and **"The here and now"** questions: where is your train going? where does it come from?, what might you need on the way?, where might you stop?, what threats can you imagine along the journey? gave participants the opportunity to feel that they were in a process that was useful and safe for each of them. Then after these creative exercises we always came back to "The learning circle" – ensuring that each learner had time to reflect, talk and feel their personal experience of equal value."*

One important element in the success of the programme is the physical environment. Is it one where the group are comfortable and feel welcomed? Is it set up as an open circle with no tables or barriers between participants? Are there refreshments? It is important that the environment does not include barriers like desks so learners do

In Cyprus, the physical environment was set up as a house's living room. Refreshments (coffee, tea, orange juice, water) were made available at all times. This model was based on the writing of Prof. Constantine Fotinas who wrote on the need of a neighbourhood Café-School as a place where learners would feel comfortable and at ease and where learning would then become a natural process.

not correlate the new learning experience with memories of the traditional school class.
Key features of trust building are the development of a group contract or ground rules which will act as a framework for resolving potential conflict. Within this process, the group must take on joint responsibility with the facilitator to ensure that every member has an equal chance to participate and have their needs met as appropriate within the group boundaries. It is also important that group members understand that they have the right not to participate in an activity which makes them feel uncomfortable. Building group agreements and contract are discussed in depth later.

Trust can be built or destroyed at times of high emotion - laughter or tears. It needs to be frequently reinforced, and any breach or deepening of trust, recognised as soon as possible. Regular group **checkins** are essential to do this and to maintain trust.

The challenge is to simultaneously build trust and maintain safe boundaries. When there is a high level of trust, and therefore a potentially high level of personal disclosure, it is important that the facilitator can mirror that trust in their responses, and act appropriately. The facilitator's main responsibility is to the group as a whole, and it is

Phil had experienced domestic violence and found it very hard to trust others. In particular she was not comfortable to close her eyes. When Phil refused to be blindfolded for an exercise some of the group laughed at her. The facilitator reinforced Phil's right to opt out, and highlighted to the group the many different fears which people can have. This built trust in the group and also built Phil's self esteem and her right to say NO.

important to be able to identify if an issue can or can not be dealt with in the group.
To build trust within the whole group, it is important to avoid sub grouping and to encourage everything to be "put into the group". In some cases, external support may be required to ensure that one person's crisis does not end up dominating the group. Facilitation supervision is an opportunity to discuss these issues on an ongoing basis.

*"The level of fear, expectation and self-judgement in the participants often blocked them or led them into abstraction. I regularly used a four element **"map and compass"** where they could safely include all their experience: body, mind, emotions, relationships, spiritual aspects, ... and also trauma, violence, hurt, ... strengths, skills, ... blame, fears, limitations .... In simply drawing or painting this map of their experience, the participants already began to value it and were more 'present' and so able to talk directly about it. Learners explored their experiences, listening and respecting each person. The feeling of "ownership" of the group developed in the **"learning circle"** so that the group began to take responsibility to help each member to take small and realistic movements both within the group and in their life.*
*The group engaged with each participant, sometimes confronting and at other times encouraging the person to commit to **"a personal contract"** to carry out some specific and achievable action for their self-esteem. The group then followed this up over the following weeks."*

At this stage, facilitators will begin to use some of the **'Self-perception and Self-disclosure, Group Learning Contract, Confidentiality '** exercises that they feel most comfortable with from the **"Main Working phase"**. This is to develop communication and some basic ways of working.

ñ "Who am I and what are my 'fears', 'needs', 'hopes' and 'wants'?

ñ Talking about these. Disclosure in the group builds trust and brings members together.

The facilitator will dedicate as much time to these issues as the group needs, and is likely to come back to these basic themes when the group or individual members have difficulties.

Throughout the life of the group, the original group contract should be reviewed on a regular basis during evaluation, and people asked directly if they feel trusted and safe in the group.

The use of community arts for self-esteem

We know that it is difficult for people to explore and express themselves especially in difficult moments. Evaluating the self or others, giving feedback to others, standing ones ground with self-esteem, in a peer group often requires first being in contact with and then expressing difficult emotions. The use of images, metaphors, creativity and games can help learners in this self-exploration and expression.

"I used stories with images of women: Snow White, Cinderella, Beauty and the Beast (and others) where the participants could identify with aspects of the characters. Exploring the stories and characters helped them safely to explore aspects from their own lives."

The use of the arts allows people to interact in a very equal and enjoyable way. It takes the spotlight off the individual while surprising them with their own developing skills. The activity of art can temporarily relieve the group of continual focus and introspection. Quite often it results in solid evidence of skill and a huge sense of achievement, as the participant has a piece of art to take out from the group. It also builds co-operation, teamwork and individual/group self-esteem. For these reasons the arts are likely to be used throughout the life of the group, not only in the first phase.

Mary (late 50s) was a reluctant participant who was very outspoken around her negativity and doubts around any new exercise she encountered. Through relaxations, check-ins, doing exercises at beginning of session that created safety and relaxed atmosphere, Mary was able to let her fear be voiced. She then received subtle support in the task eg facilitator sits next to her to work on her own piece of art. Checkins at the end helped Mary to see that everyone was at varying abilities and confidence levels and she was not on her own.

Objectives:
- To encourage trust-building in the group
- To allow the group to work together in a non-threatening way with a variety of art forms
- To build self-esteem in a subtle manner
- To develop creativity and left-brain thinking

Exercises involving metaphoric expression (games, images, role play, etc) allow participants a safe distance from direct expression, helping any difficult issues to be fully explored in a secure way. People who find it difficult to verbalise their issues, may be able to explore them through creative methods. It is empowering to be able to express ones self-evaluation or feelings in a safe way.

Empowerment happens here through finding a symbol that can safely express some issue that the learner would otherwise possibly not even be conscious of. The fact that they maintain control over that symbol and what it expresses adds to both the safety and the empowerment.

To enable a group to safely explore conflictive issues that they may be experiencing the trainer can use the abstract metaphor of a story (videos of popular television soap operas) where conflicts arise. The participants can explore and evaluate the issues, emotions and appropriate actions using the abstraction of the story ('it is the person in the story that has the problem - not me'). When they are safely ready (without any force from the

Wendy was an enthusiastic but inexperienced facilitator. When a guest artist joined the group for a specific session, Wendy would throw herself into the work alongside the group, and concentrate on learning the art form. This blurred the boundaries between the group and herself, having an obvious negative impact on safety, and affected the group dynamics. Her supervisor did work with her on reasserting her boundaries, Wendy did this through end of session checkins, housekeeping and taking more responsibility for the group. She realised that in her eagerness to share the group's experience, she had relinquished her role as facilitator. Six months on Wendy has maintained her boundaries from this learning experience and the group is flourishing.

Deborah (resident facilitator) had worked previously with community art groups and was looking forward to joining the group in learning a new art form, in this case pottery. However, the guest artist was unable to convey enthusiasm for the new skill, being content to allow participants to experiment without direction. Almost without knowing it, Deborah sat back and found herself not participating at the level she thought she would. She preferred to concentrate on minor housekeeping matters than sit at the table working with the group. This had a detrimental effect on the group and their enthusiasm waned. At evaluation, Deborah shared her experience with the group and found some participants had felt the same. The learning is that the facilitator has more power than they sometimes realise, and must be careful how it is exercised.

"I used various inspiring stories. One was the story of a frog which decided to participate in a race to a big mountain. During the race, other frogs have tried to persuade him to give up, telling him how difficult it was, and that he would never achieve it. One after the other, the other frogs which were also participating in the race were listening to those calls and were giving up. This particular frog, however, was continuing. Until all alone, he reached the top of the mountain. There was a lot of interest to learn how did he did it. So the journalists gathered around him asking him questions. Only to discover that he couldn't hear them. He was deaf."

facilitator) they will begin to make the conscious connections to their own current situation. But this work is just as valuable when it stays in the metaphor (when learners do not say directly 'this is what happened in our class yesterday' for example). When participants engage seriously in metaphoric exploration and evaluation, they are learning about themselves.

When using 'guest arts facilitators', a challenge can be around finding one with both the arts expertise and also who is able to gain the confidence of the group with enough of our previously mentioned facilitation skills. Therefore it is a good idea to restrict the choice of art forms to those for which proven facilitators are available. If you know of a facilitator, but are unsure of their skills (or your own) it may be better to try them out in a less fragile group. The emphasis must be on working collectively for self-esteem, not on nurturing individual arts talents.

There will always be one or two participants who at the beginning are resistant and scared of the idea of art, generally because of past experience of formal art education. The job of the main facilitator who will know the individuals well is to support and gently encourage them. Once the fear has left, and a product has been produced, the feeling of success and achievement is immeasurable.
Sometimes it can be difficult to get a suitable room and to have adequate materials to hand, so that the session is a freeing experience unconstrained by resource issues.

Inspirational stories and images

Inspiration can have a transformational effect on people. Real stories of people who have achieved things in their life (reach a goal, overcome illness, etc) or metaphor stories can help participants identify with them. Quotes can also be used as successful tools for inspiration.
There are more exercises described in Annex 3.
This form of self esteem building, when done well, is a vital way of gelling the group, building trust, creating fun and improving confidence.
Collective achievement can banish isolation and create real participation in the group

"I used a table game (Robert Najemy "Game of Love and Communication"). This simple board game is played with a dice. Some of the questions are "Say three positive things about yourself, " "What do you do when you get angry." "If you were to move , what would be the three things you would take with you." This game helped the participants to open up and discover things about themselves which they haven't thought of. And, they had fun with it!"

Group Learning Contract and Confidentiality

These exercises help to work towards an explicit group learning contract that participants value, believe in and 'own'. This contract is essential for a deeper level of exchange to develop in the group 'working' phase. We describe a comprehensive process here - adapt and simplify it to your group and needs.

Group Learning Contract - A 'Contract' is like 'agreed rules' to make the learning group work for everyone. There are three components to a learning contract. These are questions we already asked in the selection interview, so they should not come as a surprise:

1. 'What do participants need from each other',
2. 'What do participants need from the facilitator'
3. 'What does the facilitator need from the participants'.

If the group does the whole process here then their sense of ownership, empowerment and self-esteem is greater. The process of negotiation and argument here is more important than the result. The group process here is a model for acting socially and valuing the self and others.

Describe the idea of the group contract and its three components. Ask the group to think individually what is needed to make the group safe and comfortable for them. Give each person 3 pieces of paper each - one for each of the contract components: 1. 'What participants need from each other', 2. 'What participants need from the facilitator' and 3. 'What the facilitator needs from the participants'. Participants write a few needs on each piece of paper. If the group seems stuck, give examples: confidentiality, punctuality, respect, etc

Divide the group into small groups of 3-4. Each group with 3 large sheets of paper, one for each component of the contract. Give each group 20 mins to share, discuss, explore and agree needs for each or the components. Record the themes, needs and 'rules' on the large sheets of paper. Using her previous experience in working with groups and from the initial interviews and sessions, the facilitator might foresee problems that could come up in the group (as racism, exclusion, aggression, etc.) and suggest themes to be included in their rules exploration.

Each group takes it in turn to feed back to the main group. All the proposed agreements are recorded on three sheets of a flip chart, one for each component. Further discussion takes place so that all the proposed 'rules' agreements from each sub group can be simplified. Give plenty of time so that they can be clear to and agreed by everyone. The group is responsible for negotiating and adapting the rules when disagreements occur. Where serious disagreement arises, it can be worked on with arts methods, in small groups and even over several weeks.

The facilitator works with participants to ensure that what they agree is manageable and realistic. Sometimes participants can be very idealistic making their rules and guidelines unworkable, which is not very useful. See the comments below in the 'Working' phase exercises on 'dealing with difficult group issues' to ensure that possible problematic questions are addressed and included in the learning contract. This is especially important in components 2 and 3, 'what the group needs from the facilitator' and 'what the facilitator needs' since those include her relationship with the group. The Facilitator should negotiate and argue her case here - as a model for self-esteem - to be sure that the group doesn't expect the facilitator to solve the participants' problems.

The group then sign their own rules, which are now hung up on the wall.

The contract can be revisited at times, especially if conflict emerges. It is a support tool for the group. It can also be revised and changed using this same procedure. All these steps model how to act in everyday life with a higher self-esteem.

Conclusion

The end of this first phase will have been reached when

Membership of the group is fairly stable

Participants are relaxed, and beginning to own the circle.

Security and trust are established through the group contract.

A safe place is set up for the circle both emotionally and physical

Conditions of acceptance, understanding, mutual support, confidentiality and nurturing are created.

B - Working phase

This is where participants, having developed some confidence in the facilitator with her/his tools and in the support from the group, begin work on specific, real and more significant aspects of their lives. They can now explore and evaluate personal situations, practice communication skills, plan realistic actions for themselves, carry these out and evaluate the results (to plan further more effective actions) - following the four phase cycle. In all this phase, one key important element is that the participant tells her story. Again details of exercises are to be found in Annex 3.

Group methods for Self-esteem: Self - perception and Self-disclosure, Communication

To move into the deeper working phase of learning the group need to begin to value and use certain skills like 'self-disclosure', 'active listening' and 'giving and receiving feedback'. This means that people can experience giving and receiving true attention. These skills are essential not only for good group work, but also, for managing communication and relationships effectively in daily life. They can be used with almost all other exercises described in this guide. Each of them needs to be practised, named, valued and understood. These skills are to be repeated and developed throughout the life of the group. They can be given to participants as a handout.

"I spoke to the participants about active listening and illustrated it. Then we practised it during the course through concentrating on the person speaking, expressing that we are indeed listening through body movement, not interrupting, and by asking questions once the person had finished. The questions were two types: "what emotions did you have..." and "what do you think…"

Personal Diary or Learning Log

The personal learning log is, first, personal. It is a record of the personal issues (metaphors, ideas, feelings, ...) that arise from the learning. It helps the diarist (learner) to have personal 'raw material' recorded for their own reflection, to evaluate and to compare with other moments, people or ideas, as a resource for their own learning. It is recorded in a personal style (not to please the facilitator). This is empowering for several reasons.

Firstly, the simple process of reflection required in deciding what to record and how to record it helps the diarist to give some structure to their personal experience or situation.

Secondly, the record of a personal experience becomes like a mirror - the diarist is suddenly able to see some aspects of the self that they would not usually be able to see.

"I suggested to the participants to keep a personal journal where they would write thoughts or daily events that were of importance to them. Whoever wanted to, could share this with us. However, this was on a volunteer basis. In writing in their journal about themselves, they wrote "in third person." For example Irene would write "Irene got angry today when…" Using that format enabled them to be observers of themselves."

Finally, taking some distance from the experience and the first record of it in the log, the diarist can come back to see the experience from other perspectives, either alone or with others, to add more understanding of the experience.

The diarist simply records **the important moments for them,** not for the assessor: difficult, surprising, new ideas, realisations, conflicts etc. There may be days or weeks with nothing recorded, and others that run to many pages just to describe one moment.

"When I assess someone's learning log, what I am looking for is his or her own use of the log as a personal mirror (for self-evaluation). I do this together with the learner who shows and explains to me some of the meaningful personal images and reflections, demonstrating their own use of the log for self-evaluation. I give learners exercises to do or they agree a 'personal contract' with the group to carry out at home or at work. They then record the results in their log and share bits of it with us over the next weeks."

The Learning log is kept in a personal style and may contain images, scribbled notes of discussions, mini poems, photographs, diagrams, and indeed anything that helps the diarist to express what they have experienced.

As a personal record of important moments and issues, the log later can provide a source of material for group reflections, for a more formal self-evaluation, for plans of action. However, the diary is personal to the participant and they are not obliged to share its contents with either participant or facilitator. It is important to bear in mind that some participants may have low literacy skills. Therefore a variety of formats are acceptable.

Realistic maps of the self in the world

A 'mental map' is simply a structure for organising information so as to make best use of that information. This is to have an idea of "Who am I and where am I going?"

We all have inner maps and models of the self in the world. I am this xxx kind of person, I like yyyy but don't like zzzz. At parties I tend to kkkkkk, ... and so on. These maps tend to be limited, often to a simple two directional "road" - this way "good", that way "bad", or These people "good", those people "bad". Simplified maps are useful in certain situations like crises, but are of limited value or even dangerous in most other situations.

We need to learn to develop our maps of the self in the world, to integrate as many elements and dimensions as we can manage. A good map is an accurate though symbolic approximation (evaluation) of the terrain to cross and so is empowering. A more complex map helps its owner to work out, evaluate and explain what is going on, why things have gone as they have, and what can be done about it. The symbols in the map always contain much more (unconscious) information than the learner is able to explain verbally. It allows them to see aspects that otherwise they might not have seen. In this way it becomes a support to "see and express more of the self".

Annex 3 contains further information regarding 'Mental Maps' and the 'Lifeline'.

"I continually used the idea of each being on her own journey. Asking the questions: where have you come from? Where are you going? What is around you now? ... helped the participants to define their own personal journey in life. I gave them a basic 'map and compass' to help them begin to answer their questions. Using a four 'direction' model we explored: body, mind, emotions and spirit over the first weeks. Then later when we got 'lost', we were able to use the compass: 'what is the body saying now?, what do the emotions tell us about this situation? Is there a difference between what the mind and the spirit are saying? The women painted, discussed, imagined and applied their maps and compasses to many difficult situations.

"I used here the example of the unfinished painting. The women visualised themselves as a half finished painting. We do not reject the painting because it is unfinished. We observe it, we accept it, so we can move to its completion. The idea behind is to accept ourselves as it is while on the other hand knowing that we can improve it."

Dealing with difficult issues

From personal interviews and the work in the group, the facilitator will may become aware of some difficult issues in the group, which either individuals or the whole group are not able to address. These are likely to be of three types:

ñ "personal issues" like abuse, alcoholism, depression, individual emotional issues, ...

ñ "group issues" like racism, sexism, exclusion of members, subtle bullying of members, emotional issues between members, ..., and

ñ common "issues with the facilitator" like over idealisation, rejection of, anger with, jealousy of, feeling rejected or not valued by the facilitator and similar.

Clearly, these issues have to be addressed by the facilitator so as to maintain group safety and cohesion. In all these difficult issues, the impartiality of the facilitator is paramount. However, as facilitators, we are all human with our own fears, biases, values, favourites, dislikes and etc. We all have unconscious aspects which will affect our behaviour, leading to us subtly taking one side or another and influencing the group. No one is exempt from their unconscious fears and impulses. Being 'unconscious', it is fairly impossible for us to see them, let alone deal with their effect on the others. This highlights the need for qualified supervision of facilitators. See the section on facilitator supervision.

Addressing the difficult personal issues

It is very likely that aspects such as: abuse, alcoholism, depression, individual emotional issues and similar will arise explicitly. Where the facilitator has less emotional experience, it is probable that these issues will not be mentioned openly but will remain strong influences in the background. In most self esteem groups (specifically in the SHE groups) it is not the place for individual therapy. Nor is it recommended that the facilitator spend extra time with any of the participants on individual issues out of the group meetings. It is best for these issues to be dealt with in the group and where there is a deeper personal need then the individual should be referred to an appropriate practitioner.

The approach here is to support the individual to feel able to disclose what is happening for herself in the group. The issue can be addressed in an abstract way in the whole group using case examples, press cuttings, videos or stories - for example: 'Lets explore violence in gender relationships', 'What is acceptable and what is not physically, psychologically, emotionally?', 'What might the woman be experiencing, feeling, thinking, ... in specific situations?' 'What actions are available to the women in these situations?' Time spent on these questions in the group, around any difficult issue for one person, will find the other group members mentioning some of their own personal experience. This enables the more vulnerable participant to disclose WHAT SHE IS ABLE TO IN THAT MOMENT. It is not appropriate to put any specific focus on the vulnerable person. If she does not speak about her situation in detail, it is OK. The group work will have its effect over time and it is likely that she will speak more explicitly in a later group. Respect the rhythm and process of each member.

Time might be made in the group sessions for 'individual tutorials' with the facilitator. This can happen over a few weeks, whilst the rest of the group are carrying out small group exercises. Participants can use this tutorial space to express how they feel they are getting on, what they need, what they don't like. If they do not mention their difficult personal issue, the facilitator should consider asking about it in this more private space. Alternatively 1:1 mentoring sessions can be set up for each participant with the facilitator a couple of times during the year. These can build on the initial interview to discuss personal learning plans and diary.

Addressing the difficult group issues

It is often possible that racism, sexism, exclusion of members, subtle bullying of members, emotional issues between members, and similar issues might emerge within the group. Here it is more important that the facilitator picks up these issues immediately. Letting something 'pass' creates an 'implicit rule' that the behaviour is acceptable.

When one of these issues occurs, the facilitator would be advised to:

take note of the specific details of the interaction as it is happening

stop the group and address the issue at the first appropriate time. (In some cases it may be best to wait until after the work that is taking place has finished. For example if someone is in the middle of an important moment for them and not too much harm has been done by the intervention in question.) First explore it in a general way, referring to the group learning contract and agreement.

refer to the 'behaviour' from the details of the interaction noted, rather than the persons involved, asking the group to discuss the actions in relation to their learning contract. This might need to be done first in small groups. If necessary the group learning contract can be re-defined here

discuss the reasons why a person might have a certain difficult behaviour (racist, sexist, abusive, violent, rejection, ...). It is important not to allow a 'blaming' atmosphere to develop here, but to support the self-exploration of the participants. The experienced group facilitator will have the required understanding of 'psychological projection', which is a key concept for working with self esteem.

"An issue came up with two women participants. Sally and Kate knew each other before they joined the circle. At one point, they had an argument outside the circle. This "conflict" was brought into the circle. When Sally complained about her life situation, Kate spoke to her abruptly. I immediately took control stating that this behaviour is unacceptable, and pointed to the process of active listening. Their prior conflict emerged, but they were also helped to better understand the others' point of view."

Excellent and easily understandable descriptions of the mechanisms involved in projection and how to work with them can be found in books on Transactional Analysis based on the work by Berne & Harris (Games People Play, I'm OK - You're OK).

It will often be evident to the facilitator, in the interviews and 'Start-up' phase, that a specific issue might arise in the group process: because of an ethnic mix, because of psychological difficulties or some other aspect. The facilitator can be proactive to the potential conflict by addressing it in the Group Learning Contract, in the Start-up Phase. This helps

these issues to be explicit and dealt with as prevention rather than allowed to arise later. This also gives a good basis to use the learning contract in facilitating the resolution of group difficulties.

Similarly, for example, to enable a group to safely explore conflictive issues that they may be experiencing (racism, sexism, drugs, violence), the trainer can use the abstract metaphor of a story (videos of popular television soap operas) where conflicts arise. The participants can explore and evaluate the issues, emotions and appropriate actions using the abstraction of the story ('it is the person in the story that has the problem - not me'). When they are safely ready (without any force from the facilitator), they will begin to make the conscious connections to their own current situation. But this work is just as valuable when it stays in the metaphor (when learners do not say directly 'this is what happened in our group yesterday' for example). When participants engage seriously in metaphoric exploration and evaluation, they are learning about themselves. See the arts exercises above.

Differences may arise simply because of differing value systems and interpretations of 'rights and responsibilities', as in the rest of society. In this mini-society of the learning circle, these conflicts are an opportunity for participants to learn to debate the issues, with all the emotions (Fear, anger, sadness, joy, love, ..) without anyone being 'destroyed or violated', which is often their underlying fear here. Common agreed basic values, rights and responsibilities can be established that take into account some of the differences. This is what the group learning contract is about. Participants can learn here to manage their own fear of differences by establishing that the basic values, rights and responsibilities will be upheld. All of this builds self-esteem.

Projection

Projection is "seeing in other people some hidden aspects of ourselves which we do not accept" . We imagine that the other has a capacity or characteristic that we deny in ourselves. These projected aspects can be both positive or negative. For example and specifically in our case of self-esteem we might say:
ñ "Others are more attractive than I am" - when rejecting our own attractive aspects ñ "the facilitator is so strong and loving" - whilst denying those capacities in ourselves ñ "others in the group don't like me" - when actually I don't like others in the group
ñ "my husband is always angry with me" - when I don't accept that I am angry with him

Development of self-esteem requires the learner to:
ñ begin to see what they 'project' onto others and how this maintains their powerlessness,
ñ name the roles of the self and the other in their personal projective model ñ begin to identify moments and situations where this occurs both in the learning circle and in their daily life.
Changing this behaviour is often a very long process, the content of long term therapy, so we cannot expect great changes in, say, a year long self-esteem group. However, since these are key elements that maintain low self-esteem, the facilitator should begin to address them as they arise. Again, the use of stories, metaphors and videos of popular television soap operas helps to understand these issues – seeing them occurring between other people in similar circumstances.

"When a crisis emerged, after posting a photo of the group on the projects' website (even after all the participants gave their consent), I felt disappointment, hurt, anger, sadness for the unfairness of some participants accusations. I realised that behind those feelings, it was hidden my own belief that my own value depends on the opinion others have about me, and that I needed the participants to like me. Bringing this awareness into surface, I was able to proceed with the course without seeking positive feelings and the approval of the participants."

Addressing the difficult issues with the facilitator

In any facilitated learning group we find issues arising between learners and the facilitator such as over idealisation, rejection, anger with, jealousy of, feeling rejected or not valued by the facilitator. These are often more evident in personal development groups where participants 'regress' in some way to re-learn aspects mis-learned in their childhood. They then 'project' feelings from their childhood onto the facilitator, placing them in roles such as, for example, 'saviour' (good parent), 'judge', 'unable' (bad parent).
This projection tends to occur especially with those people they see as figures of authority. It keeps them in an infantile 'powerless' position and 'justifies' maintaining infantile behaviour. In low self-esteem, this is often manifest in looking for approval, recognition and permission from others. In the group this might also be expressed as direct power struggles with the facilitator, or severe pushing of personal and group boundaries.

"Over the last months, some of the participants got angry with me: 'I have learned nothing in this group', 'You are not helping me to feel better' were some of their comments. They got into some very stuck situations in the group. This was difficult for me – I want to help then and feel that my work has been useful. I often felt that I had done a bad job with the group and was tempted here to try to 'save them from themselves'. In supervision I realised that this often happens where an ending is looming. It was important that I did not feel dependent on their approval and try to make it easy for them by simply giving them 'nice experiences' without addressing the emotional needs in taking responsibility. As I took care of my needs in supervision, they also began to organise themselves and take care of and responsibility for their own needs."

C - Closure phase

This is the phase that will sum up the experience and prepare participants for when the group ends. This is also the moment for the facilitator and learners to explore together future steps in their development.

As participants see the looming end of the support of the regular facilitated group, there is usually a struggle between:

trying to give responsibility to the facilitator for their process, learning and well-being, or

trying to take responsibility for their own learning and lives.

As the group nears the end there is often a regression to the kind of behaviour they had at the start of the group: negating themselves and hoping for someone else (the facilitator) to solve their issues. Participants could blame, plead and manipulate the facilitator to try and escape from taking responsibility 'as an adult' - or maintaining the powerless (infantile) behaviour. In addition, the prospect of closure brings with it a sense of loss, perhaps of a rare place of safety and comfort. This can, in turn, bring up other losses from the past and have an emotional effect far beyond what is warranted on the surface.

This is often a serious challenge for facilitators. They feel drawn to trying to solve issues and rescue the learners. They can often feel much of the work they have done was of no use.

This is a very important phase where indeed much of the learning can be negated or reversed. "I knew at the start that this would be of no use", "My problems are too big for any group or facilitator" are some of the kind of 'manipulative' postures that learners can use to try and get the facilitator to take responsibility for their issues. For these reasons the closure needs to be taken into consideration and made conscious for participants about three months from the ending - bit by bit addressing the questions below. This gives time to go fully through the struggles of taking responsibility.

Here we identify some questions to be addressed. The facilitator, using any of the other exercises, should simply keep asking these questions over the ending weeks:

ñ What have I learned? ... and .... How can I tell the world what I have learned? This might lead to some kind of display, performance, exhibition of work and learning (all consolidating self-esteem)
ñ How do I feel now the group is ending? ... and so What do I need now? .... What will I need after the group ends? ... be as specific as possible

ñ How can I carry on after the group? This leads to making plans for follow -up actions. What resources & support are available? Do I want another SHE style course, or another learning opportunity?

ñ Celebrate the individual and group achievements as often as possible.

In Ireland the circle closed for the Christmas holiday with a general evaluation and a lunch. This was non threatening. For one woman it was the first time she had been out to lunch without family members. In the summer, the group chose to go to a holistic health centre where they enjoyed massage, reiki and reflexology. Though nervous, because of the circle development in the past months, the group supported each other in this new experience.

D - Evaluation of progress

Evaluation can be carried out for a range of reasons. It can be used by facilitators and participants to assess how they are progressing against their stated aims / hopes / fears at the start of the course. It can be use by the facilitator to assess their own contribution to the group. It can be used by course organisers or external bodies to assess the effectiveness of the programme. It is always a learning tool to enable all involved to take stock of what has been done, identify areas for improvement and plan for the future.

Actually, we and the participants continually evaluate ourselves and others much of the time. We are simply unconscious of it. It is this ongoing internal evaluation that is linked to participants self-perception of 'low value'; leading to their low self-esteem. In the unconscious evaluation of others we may place them as more powerful or important than ourselves in certain situations, then only to rubbish them in other moments.

Verbalising these 'inner evaluations' is a key part of the work we develop in the exercises above for building self-esteem; 'Group methods for Self-esteem: Self-perception and Self-disclosure' and in the 'language of self-esteem'. Almost all of the exercises in those sections prepare the participants for a more formal evaluation and also give them tools for making this evaluation both realistic and useful.

Traditional methods such as questionnaires leave much to be desired in projects for self-esteem, empowerment and self-determination. It is not enough to know that a learner thinks their self-esteem has improved - it may have or not. It can be shown that they not only disempower the subjects (participants) but that they leave room for many inaccuracies in the evaluation:

- participants find themselves back 'in school' with an exam determined by others

- participants often become stressed and so are less able to understand the questions

- participants often give answers to try and please or punish the facilitator (examiner)

- the process is often opposite to what they are being taught, so confusing

There are a variety of evaluation methods available, and ideally a range of methods should be used, to produce both quantitative and qualitative results. Empowerment evaluation is fundamentally a democratic process. The entire group—not a single individual, not the external evaluator or an internal manager—is responsible for conducting the evaluation. The group thus can serve as a check on its own members, moderating the various biases and agendas of individual members. The evaluator is a co-equal in this endeavour, not a superior and not a servant; as a critical friend, the evaluator can question shared biases or "group think".

The methods used for evaluation should reflect the usual methods of the group. For example, if the group are comfortable with painting and collage, that could be a medium for evaluation. As the group matures it can also be important to have a confidential / external element to the evaluation so that participants can make honest comments without fear of hurting feelings. In general, the evaluative information you wish to collect will remain constant, but the methods will change with the needs of the group. To allow detailed review, it can be important to have a permanent record of the evaluation. This can be in forms including written questionnaires, interview notes, audio, video, collage etc.

It is good practice to close sessions with a short evaluation or verbal checkin. The facilitator may also log their experiences in their supervision tables for discussion. It is useful to have three 'formal' evaluations over a year course. One is towards the end of the start-up phase where participants begin to understand the language and criteria so are able to make an accurate evaluation. The second is midway through the course and the last one towards the end. Not only the facilitators and their supervisor should be involved here in evaluation of the

Some evaluators may be surprised at the suggestion of including diverse stakeholders, such government departments, clients, and family members as evaluators. Co-operative or Empowerment Evaluation removes evaluation from the exclusive domain of the `expert' evaluator and reframes it as a guided, negotiated enterprise to be undertaken by a variety of stakeholders. We see this as both practically and ideologically desirable. Each of these parties has interests in ensuring that outcomes are achieved and that any evaluation is thorough. No longer is it acceptable for providers and research investigators to select outcomes according to convenience and their own interests. Professionals need to be aware that outcomes are embedded in a political process that must accommodate multiple audiences.

facilitation and the support, the participants will be able to contribute an essential element of this evaluation from which we can all learn.
We specify three aspects to be evaluated in a parallel manner:

ñ The group: We have already evaluated the participants in the selection interviews. Now we can allow the participants to take more ownership of the process. Thus we are empowering them to evaluate self & others in a more realistic way, so boosting their self esteem in the process whilst considering and respecting their needs, culture, style, fears and pace.

ñ The facilitator: How was the facilitator able to carry out her objectives? How was she able to use the criteria for facilitation and supervision, defined in the section on facilitation? Whilst considering and respecting her own style, talents, limitations.

ñ The structure: the phases, programme and schedule of exercises, course & guide. The room and resources available, local political support or constraints will all have an influence here. Finally, since this is deeply human and emotional learning, the quality of the supervision must also be evaluated.

Judgement of the self and others is a fundamental cause of low self-esteem, so here the credibility of the evaluation is key to the building of self-esteem. This credibility is achieved by linking the evaluation of the person to evidence from exercises carried out in the group setting. In this way there can be a triangulation of evaluation between self-peers-facilitator. Data and evidence collected and presented must be credible, to participants, their colleagues and those they present it to. When peers and facilitator say, for example, 'We saw you keep your ground in exercise xxx and repeat your rights without justifying them'. This credibility in evaluation is itself empowering and develops self-esteem.

Finally, evaluation is only useful if it is used constructively by all involved, participants, facilitator, supervisor, organisers. Well designed and well used it is a powerful tool for continuous improvement.

Conclusion

The benefits and experiences of the circles are best expressed in the words of the participants and facilitators themselves.

I enjoyed the experience and hope to keep the friends I have made and find ways, with support of the group, of getting concrete plans in sight for my life.

Really enjoyed the course, wish it could go on!

I was very taken by the group, their friendliness.

The programme helped in various problems that happen to my daily life to face them simpler.

The programme helped me to love myself and appreciate myself, for this I want it to continue. I

would like for the programme to continue. I miss it very much.

The programme was very good. We were waiting for the day to come to meet to express our own opinions and exchange things that bother us.

The course helped me through a difficult part of my life. I welcomed the support from the group, enjoyed most of the activities and looked forward to every Thursday.

I wish the programme could continue.

I learned things that helped me appreciate and trust my abilities.

The programme helped me to love myself.

This a programme that is so much needed in Cyprus. I am very proud I have facilitated this programme.

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