

Brainstorming and the Suggestion Circle



People like to help people. Providing opportunities for adults to help each other can be a crucial component to effective group discussions.

Two effective techniques of collecting information from a large group are the brainstorm technique and the suggestion circle.

Source: 'Who, Me Lead a Group?' Jean Illsley Clark, Parenting Press Inc., (1998), Pg. 45-46.

Brainstorming

When the person requesting help seems to be asking for a wide variety of creative, horizon-expanding options, use the brainstorm technique to invite a large number of options and stimulate the creativity of the group.

1. Ask the person to state one problem in a clear, concise way.
2. Ask the group to close their eyes and imagine they are in a time and place where this problem is solved, then to open their eyes and think about possible solutions for the problem.
3. Ask each person to write down five or six possible solutions.
4. Write the first suggestion from one person's list on chalkboard or newsprint. Ask everyone in the room to brainstorm off that idea – to give every idea that she thinks of without evaluating its possibility or practicality.
5. Repeat the first idea from each person's list and as many more as the person requesting ideas wants or as the group wishes to take time for.
6. Give the lists to the listener for evaluation. If she wants help with the evaluation and the group agrees to help:
 - a. Ask the listener to set guidelines and ask the group to evaluate each idea in turn. Or,
 - b. Group ideas into categories, and select the two or three most valuable ideas from each category.

A brainstorm session takes from five minutes to several hours to complete.

Suggestion Circle

When the person asking for help seems to be seeking information about alternative solutions to a specific problem, use the suggestion circle to activate clear thinking and tap the wisdom of the group.

1. Contract with the person to be a listener, to accept each suggestion with no more than a "thank you" response.
2. Ask that person to state one problem in a clear, concise way.
3. Ask someone else to make a written list of the suggestions so the listener can give full attention to listening.
4. Ask the people in the suggestion circle to center their bodies, think carefully for a moment about their possible solutions to the problem, and to each give one high-quality, concise "You could..." or "I would..." suggestion.
5. When the suggestions have been given, remind the listener to take the suggestions home and decide which to use.

A suggestion circle of twelve people takes from three to five minutes to complete.

