



Breakout

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Living the New Spirituality

By Alyse A. Rynor
New Spirituality Groups Coordinator

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INTRODUCTION

There is excitement building around HUMANITY'S TEAM and New Spirituality Emotional Support Groups are part of it. These groups are peer support groups, taking the concepts in the New Spirituality and bringing them into real life experience. Participation in a New Spirituality Emotional Support Group encourages each one of us to "Be the change we wish to see happen in the world." (Mahatma Gandhi). And because of your energy, these wonderful groups are forming around the world right now. Your choice to play a part in this movement is important.

In reading this guidebook, you will find some helpful information for setting up and running a New Spirituality Emotional Support Group in your community. The question and answer format was used throughout to make it easy for you to locate the information that will be most helpful to you.

Please note that the information provided in this booklet is offered to you only as a guide. The material within these pages contains suggestions from my professional work with groups and first hand experience with spiritual support groups. Please, don't hesitate to use your own unique creative spark in this process. Pull from this material those ideas that resonate best with Who You Are and leave the rest. As a part of Humanity's Team, we encourage you to create your peer support group in a fashion that best fits you & the other members of your group.

Please be aware that the Conversations with God Foundation does not sanction nor oversee any of the New Spirituality Emotional Support Groups or New Spirituality Study Groups. Each is independently run in your own location and under your own direction. However, should you have technical questions around beginning and/or maintaining your group, you may contact Alyse Rynor, New Spirituality Groups Coordinator. Complete contact information appears on page 18.

WHAT IS A NEW SPIRITUALITY EMOTIONAL SUPPORT GROUP?

New Spirituality Emotional Support Groups are peer support groups. They are being formed to support each individual as you move through the changes that will occur when you begin to adopt the concepts of the New Spirituality into your life. Each group will be made up of several members with the purpose of providing a powerful format for process, exploration and support towards the application of new possibilities for living. In addition, a New Spirituality Emotional Support Group provides a wonderful opportunity for those involved in your local Humanity's Team to come together on a more intimate basis. Holding weekly meetings of this type can create an atmosphere conducive to the bonding of members on a very powerful level. When people feel this type of connection amongst themselves and between one another, a sense of Oneness develops and they tend to work more effectively as a team. Therefore creating & facilitating an on-going New Spirituality Emotional Support Group can be an important component of Humanity's Team – bringing people together & changing our world, one week at a time.

WHAT ARE SUPPORT GROUPS?

Support groups are groups that offer a facilitative approach for emphasizing the collective experience of its members around a particular topic. For those who are ready to live a New Spirituality, this support group fosters growth through the interactions of members with one another. In general, support groups provide a safe place for members to share experiences, receive encouragement, gain self-understanding, and bring about change. A New Spirituality Emotional Support Group is a peer support group, for the members themselves run it. A group such as this can become a powerful means of supporting others in 'walking their talk'.

AREN'T ALL GROUPS ALIKE?

A SUPPORT GROUP is different from other types of groups such as Psychotherapy, Task Focused, Educational, or even Book Study groups. Psychotherapy groups are run by professionals for the purpose of fostering psychological growth and change through group work and insight. Task Groups focus on policy or community issues and hold that as their common purpose. Educational groups have the goal of teaching members new skills. And finally, a Book Study group, with which some of you may already have had experience, provides a space for people to take an in-depth look at, and hold discussions around, concepts found in particular readings.

Ultimately, the primary goal of a peer support group is to offer support and mutual aid, fostering growth and change in each member through the use of process rather than content. The group is formed around a common experience.

New Spirituality Emotional Support Groups are formed around a desire for members to become a living example of the concepts studied in New Thought Spirituality. The use of group process offers the open sharing of thoughts, feelings and experiences between members, by its members.

The goal of the group then, is to provide honest and open feedback to one another. This dynamic provides a safe place to return each week as members share their experiences of the concepts they are incorporating into their lives.

WHY IS THIS CALLED A PEER SUPPORT GROUP?

What makes this a peer support group is that the support offered to one another comes from the sharing of mutual experience by its members rather than from a professionally trained facilitator. Therefore all members hold an equal place in the group. The process and support offered are most often around collective experience rather than advice giving. It can be quite affirming for members to hear of another's struggles and resolution around a particular topic. It is from one another's experiences that members receive their support.

WHO FACILITATES THIS TYPE OF GROUP

Anyone who is interested in participating in a New Spirituality Emotional Support Group may start one. You may be the person who is considering setting up such a group for your local Humanity's Team. In doing that, there are a number of logistical arrangements you will need to make; such as finding a suitable location, recruiting members, choosing a date and time, and developing a routine. A facilitator can certainly accept the responsibility of seeing that the group stays on focus and knows about meetings, etc. However, in a peer support group, it is important that the facilitator not feel he or she is expected to be in the role of solving members' emotional issues.

In your New Spirituality Emotional Support Group, you may wish to rotate facilitators so that everyone has a chance to take responsibility for the meeting at some point. Rotations can happen monthly or weekly, depending upon your group's comfort level and mutual agreement. Please note that if one person sits in the role of facilitator for too long, they may unknowingly become viewed as the 'emotional helper' or 'problem solver'. When this happens it can affect the balance of the group by creating a break in the feeling of safety, power struggles and dependency of members on the facilitator. Ultimately, it takes away from an equal group process and shifts it too heavily onto the responsibility of one person. The group then may tend to look outside of themselves & towards one person for 'the answers'.

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF A FACILITATOR?

The role of a facilitator is to take charge of the group meeting. The facilitator sees to it that the meeting flows well in the time allotted. He/she may even be required to mediate situations as the need arises.

Time management is a large part of seeing to it that the meeting flows. It's important for a facilitator to see that the group begins and ends on time, for that creates a safe and predictable space for open sharing. In addition, it shows value and respect for the members.

Another role of the facilitator is moderating discussion and sharing by taking steps towards preventing any one person from dominating the group. To prevent or correct a situation of that type, a facilitator may choose to gently encourage the speaker to move to the point of their sharing, thus keeping a good pace to the group and a high quality of interaction.

Lastly, the facilitator may be the person who arranges the room before the group arrives, collects any moneys involved, and provides other logistical information to members as needed.

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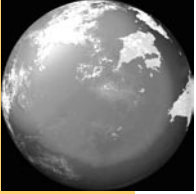
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WHAT ARE THE STEPS TO SETTING UP THIS TYPE OF GROUP?



You can start organizing this group as you would any other.

You will need to:

Choose a date & time
locate a suitable space

Advertise

Choosing A Date & Time

Pick a date that might be convenient to many interested in attending. This is often a weeknight, yet some groups prefer a Saturday or Sunday. You can certainly choose a date yourself or simply take a poll of the members in your local Humanity's Team to determine the most popular date. A workable time frame for groups seems to be 1 ½ to 2 hours maximum. It is enough time to be able to get through the format suggested on the following pages and short enough to prevent people from leaving before its completion.

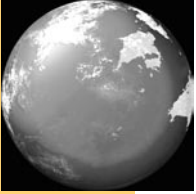
Locating a Suitable Space

A very important part of setting up your New Spirituality Emotional Support Group is locating a space that has privacy. Even though a living room in your home may be fine for a book study group, if someone else lives in your home, you may want to find a room which has a door that can be closed to avoid the possibility of someone's personal sharing being overheard. When searching for a space, consider the number of people you can seat, ease of access, and in some locations you may even need to consider availability of parking. If you are going to pay rent for an office or a room in a church or community center, think about collecting a weekly donation to go towards this expense.

Advertising Your Group

A very important piece of putting together a group or any event is making sure that people know about it. You will see the results of your advertising efforts in your responses. Since this group will be a part of your local Humanity's Team, you may find making an announcement or creating a few flyers an easy & cost effective method of advertising. Please note that recruiting people for a more personal type group, such as a New Spirituality Emotional Support Group, may require several weeks of repeated announcements. Keep flyers posted at various locations around your city or town. Also, don't hesitate to ask your local library, health food store, holistic practitioner and new thought churches to allow you to place a stack of flyers in their public areas.

Have patience! Experience shows that people tend to take a lot more time deciding to join a group in which there will be an inward focus than other types of groups. Give yourself enough time to advertise before the starting date of your group. You may find it helpful to stress that this group is not only about applying the concepts of a New Spirituality in one person's everyday life, but is also working on a larger scale, bringing *new* behaviors & changes out into a world that is hungry for a different way to live. Support groups work best in a small group setting, usually consisting of 7 – 10 people. This number allows the maximum amount of time per individual for sharing, discussion & support. A group of 10 to 20 people is possible, however a larger number may not guarantee adequate time for each member during meetings. As you create the format for your own group (discussed on the next pages), you can decide on a number that you feel will best serve you (which may change as you gain experience).



IS THIS AN 'OPEN' OR 'CLOSED' GROUP?

A group in which new members may enter at any time is called an *open* group. Open groups allow new people to drop in at any meeting without making a commitment towards regular attendance. These groups usually require continuous advertising to keep the public aware of their existence. Making your New Spirituality Emotional Support Group an open group is a wonderful way to attract new members who may be interested in joining Humanity's Team.

Unlike the open group, one that keeps the same members through out the term of the group is called a *closed* group.

It is important, in a *closed* group to speak with members in advance about their interest & fully discuss their willingness to commit to regular attendance. Regular attendance is important. For when the same people participate each week, a bond forms between members building feelings of safety, intimacy, and trust. Therefore, frequent absences may result in a breaking down of these important traits, which could result in a decrease in sharing & even possibly a loss of members.

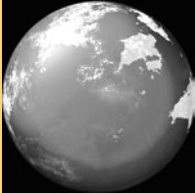
For example, a group may be meeting for 12 weeks. During that time the same members will attend each group session. At the end of the 12 weeks there may be a decision to start the group up once again or at a later date. At that time the group will open up. Previous members may choose to leave and new ones may join. A possible scenario may be that most members wish to remain and you may only have room for a few new people. You may even wish to consider starting a second group.

HOW LONG DOES THE SUPPORT GROUP RUN?

How long your Emotional Support Group runs will be determined by the type of group you choose. You may choose an *on-going* group or a *time-limited* group.

An *on-going* group is one that meets at regularly intervals, such as weekly with no pre-determined ending date.

Time-limited groups have a start and end date. They can have a term of 6, 10, 12 or even 16 weeks. Some time-limited groups choose to run for six months. The term of the group can be decided upon depending on your goal or even the time of year, such as a group meeting during the summer. It may be helpful to note that people are often more willing to make a commitment to regularly attend a group that is shorter in length. Remember, both *on-going* and *time-limited* groups can be either *open* or *closed*.



IS THERE A SUGGESTED FORMAT?

Yes, a suggested format, which has previously been used, is offered here. Feel free to modify it in anyway.

A format for a New Spirituality Emotional Support Group meeting may look like this:

- Beginning with an OPENING
- Having time for GROUP BUSINESS
- Providing a CHECK IN time
- Offering a SHORT MEDITATION
- Announcing the NEW SPIRITUALITY TOPIC of the week
- DEFINING & DISCUSSING the topic
- Encouraging PERSONAL SHARING on the topic
- Facilitating the GROUP PROCESS
- Ending with a CLOSING

The following is a more detailed explanation of the above format which you may find useful for running your peer support group.

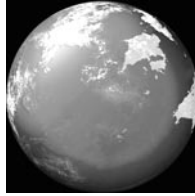
Opening

Openings are important to people as they signify the beginning of a special moment in time. When it is time to begin your group, you may wish to acknowledge this with a particular opening gesture. This gesture or ritual may be the ringing of a bell or chime, a prayer, a moment of silence or any number of things. Using a ritual of this nature can help the members to shift their energies away from the outside world and into the room.

Group Business

It's helpful to set aside a few minutes for the facilitator to share anything related to the workings of the group. This can be referred to as Group Business time. A review of the guidelines and/or any other information pertaining to the group, such as changes in meeting dates, times, etc... can be explained during these few moments.

At the beginning of each group it is very important to have a list of guidelines, agreements, or rules that the facilitator can read aloud to the group. These agreements help in establishing an understanding about acceptable behaviors within the group. Again, creating safety in a group allows members to feel free to open up and share. Therefore, reading these guidelines at the beginning of each meeting can be a very helpful tool in making your group work well for everyone.



Suggested guidelines for support groups are:

1. Confidentiality is to be respected. All sharing that takes place in the room will remain in the room after each meeting ends. People's personal stories are not to be discussed outside of the meeting room at anytime.
2. Members, when sharing, should speak from "I" statements and not in the format of "you", telling another what they need to do. It is helpful for members to share about themselves, rather than to lecture to others.
3. Use transparency in your discussions. Be as honest and truthful about yourself as you can be. Don't place judgment when listening to another's story
4. There is no need to 'fix' someone else. Recognize that everyone in the group is on their own unique path, that everyone is perfect and that members are coming together to share and grow at their own pace.
5. If there is emotional release, such as crying, it is important to provide a safe place for this to happen. It is therefore helpful to ask members to refrain from the initial urge to touch and comfort the person. This may be the first time someone is allowing themselves to have full expression; and often times, a well meaning touch can stop this healing process.
6. When one person is sharing, everyone else is quiet. There is no interrupting. Feedback time will be provided.
7. This is a support group and not an encounter group. Should someone feel a need to confront another, it is best to pass that desire through the facilitator.

Check In Time

During the first meeting, check in can be used for individual introductions and group goal setting. Thereafter, the check in time serves a very important function in the session as it provides time for follow up from the previous meeting. For example, it is during the check in that people can share their experience of something related to the previous week's discussion and how it may have impacted their lives, etc. As important as the check-in time is, the facilitator will make sure that this portion of sharing does not take up the entire session. It is important to leave room for the new topic of the week to be introduced and discussed.

Introducing the Topic

The weekly topic is the main portion of the support group. The topic can be chosen from a book, tape or other source of spiritual material. It is this weekly topic that is introduced for members to incorporate into their life experience.

Experience has shown that introducing the topic at the meeting each week, rather than in advance on a syllabus, is most effective. Members become quite enthusiastic about finding out what you will announce. The downfall to providing a list of topics in advance is that people will often skip meetings on topics they feel they have no interest in or believe they already apply in their lives. However, members often discover that they've received new insights into familiar topics through their participation in the group session.

You can choose topics from Conversations with God, from tapes, angel cards, CwG ReMinder cards, or any other New Thought material you enjoy. Some examples of possible topics are:

- There is no such thing as right and wrong
- Living Abundantly
- Hell does not exist
- Love gives freedom
- Would you rather be right or would you rather be happy?
- See the Oneness.

As you can see, the choices are unlimited.

For clarity of understanding, it is important to provide a definition of your topic. This may mean reading about the concept from a book, playing a section of a tape, watching a short excerpt from a video or some other method. Always take a few moments together to be sure that everyone holds a clear understanding of the concept.

Personal Sharing

Now you have reached the heart of the meeting - a time when each member is given time to speak. The focus should be on the weekly topic and his or her personal thoughts and/or experiences around it. The facilitator may need to bring someone back to the topic of the week, should they drift off too far.

MEDITATION

After the announcement and clarification of the weekly topic, it is a nice segue into sharing to provide some quiet meditation time. This allows people to go within and reflect on what the topic/concept means to them in their lives. You may wish to have a CD or tape player set up in your group room to provide background music during the meditation. In addition to music, dimming the lights may also help to create ease of going within. This meditation time can become a very powerful time in the group.

HOW SHOULD I ORGANIZE THE SHARING TIME?

Coming out of the quiet of meditation, you may wish to consider using one of these methods to enter into the personal sharing section of the group time.

Personal sharing can be done in one of two styles:

1. The Talking Stick method. This style uses a tangible object that is passed around to the person who is speaking. When a member has the item – whether it is a stick, crystal, or stuffed animal, for example – they have the floor and the undivided attention of all. No one else may interrupt. When the person finishes, they may pass the item to the next person or place it down in a central location, where it can be picked up by whoever feels moved to speak next.
2. The Rotation method. This method ensures all will get a turn to share by choosing a person to begin and then moving on to the person seated next to them.

A facilitator may decide upon a maximum amount of time for each person to have the floor. This prevents one person from dominating the group. At this point the facilitator may take the role of a timekeeper. Again, when group members know there is enough time for each person to share, the experience becomes a 'safe' one for all involved.

Feedback and Discussion

After all of the group members have had time for personal sharing it is time for group feedback and support. Depending upon the size and dynamics of your group, you may offer feedback immediately or wait until everyone has spoken.

With immediate feedback, responses are given while thought and emotions are high. However, delayed feedback offers the time and space for unlimited discussion without interruption, to move onto the next sharing. Choose the method that fits the best for your support group experience.

Closing the meeting

As it was helpful to create an opening ritual, it can be just as important in marking the end of the group session to offer some type of closing. A closing can be offered by the facilitator or there can be a rotation, giving group members a chance to come prepared to lead a closing the following week. Closing rituals can be a prayer, a reading, weekly goal setting, a group chant, etc....

WHAT ABOUT ... ?

...MONEY ?

You may not want to think about money. Yet, it is certainly an option for any group. Remember, it is okay to ask for money for spiritual work. If you wish to collect money to put towards rent, for use by the group, to donate to an organization of your choice, or to give to the person facilitating that week, even if it is yourself, you certainly may do that. Are you uncomfortable around asking for money and wish to avoid it? What a wonderful opportunity this may be for you to take a look at your own relationship to it.

...CHALLENGING SITUATIONS ?

Your New Spirituality Emotional Support Group is a peer group and is there for the purpose of sharing experiences and working towards applying spiritual principles in the participants' lives. Yet, on occasion there may be a member who displays great amounts of emotion, such as deep-seated anger, uncontrollable crying, or even threats of suicide.

It is important that you and your support group recognize that no one is responsible for solving anyone else's problems. Being present in a supportive way means holding the space for tears and/or some manageable anger with the understanding that no harm be done to property or to any member of the group. It is always helpful to go to the Yellow Pages in advance and look up the phone numbers of various Crisis Support Hotlines. Give copies of these numbers out to group members in advance. People at Crisis Lines are specially trained to handle many difficult emotional situations. If a person appears seriously distressed, suggest that he or she seek help – or make the call yourself, if you feel a need for support in dealing with a situation at that moment. Above all else, if anyone should act in a manner that you believe to be dangerous to themselves or to the group, please don't hesitate to contact 9-1-1. Safety always needs to be a number one priority.

In many situations, you may encounter people who get in touch with some painful feelings. It is helpful for the person expressing these emotions to have a safe place to let them out. Many times the most helpful thing you can do is to be present with them and let them know they are being heard. A silent presence can be a very powerful experience. Keep your focus on the person so they know you are there for them. Many times there is nothing that needs to be said aloud. Body language & eye contact can say a lot.

You may encounter an individual who becomes angry in your emotional support group. They may begin expressing it verbally. However, if they seem to be sitting on a lot of angry energy, you may wish to give them a stack of telephone books or some throw pillows to pound on. Oftentimes this can be a wonderful way to release negative emotion. It may be handy to have these items available in your group room.

Remember, that any uncomfortable situation can be discussed in the support group. Never hesitate to clear the air around something that may have taken place at that moment or in a prior group meeting. You may even find you need to use an entire group session to discuss something that feels unresolved. It will be well worth the time and effort. It's a wonderful example of transparency and is useful in applying the concepts you are working with right there in the room.

HOW IS A SACRED SPACE CREATED ?

When you are deciding upon your meeting location, consider the look and feel of the room you will use. Does it have windows? Is it noisy? Will it offer some privacy?

Creating sacred space can help people to leave their everyday life energy at the door. A good way to do this is to ask the group members to remove their shoes before entering the room. You may also wish to burn sage and smudge the room or one another before starting your group. If you enjoy music, maybe having New Age type music playing quietly in the background as people arrive can set a mood for transition into the group session. You may wish to purchase a small gurgling fountain and/or bring in pillows and sit on the floor if possible. Group members may begin to bring things to contribute to your sacred room as well.

These types of sights, sounds, and smells seem to offer members an opportunity towards an ease of transition into the sacred work of a New Spirituality Emotional Support Group session.

IN CONCLUSION

Creating and experiencing your New Spirituality Emotional Support Group can be a phenomenal experience. It is through this group that spiritual concepts may be transformed into life experience.

As you begin your peer support group:

Know that you will find a natural flow that works well for your group.

Enjoy your Emotional Support Group.

Take delight in watching one another begin living the New Spirituality concepts.

Feel the connections you are creating through your participation and support.

AND

Know that you are making a difference in the world
every day by

Who You Are Choosing to BE in each and every moment.

For ongoing support or questions regarding your Humanity's Team group, you may contact ALYSE RYNOR online at www.humanitysteam.com or by phone in the evenings at (847) 328-8477.

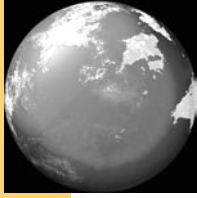
You may also write to:

Alyse Rynor c/o The CwG Foundation

PMB 1150, 1257 Siskiyou Blvd.

Ashland, Oregon, 97520, USA.





AUTHOR'S NOTE

For many of you, this booklet on starting and running a New Spirituality Emotional Support Group may make it seem as though starting and running a group requires a lot of detail. However, the booklet was written in detail to provide support for you around any of the particular topics on these pages. Everything in here is merely offered as a suggestion. You are always free to create and use your own methods for running your group.

To create a simple group that works, you may choose to use the suggestions from the CHECK IN time making that the major focus of your group. Or, you may choose to introduce a topic at the beginning of the meeting & hold sharing and discussion through- out the entire time together. Or use any other method you prefer.

Feel free to pick and choose from the information in this booklet. It is here as your resource as you create your peer support group as a part of Humanity's Team.

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the written permission of the author.

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