

Guidelines for Participants

Roots of Change Study Circle

The following guidelines are intended to help you make the most of your study group. Although some of the suggestions may seem obvious--particularly if you have already had experience with other discussion groups--the points will be a valuable reminder to even the most experienced participant.

- **Make an effort to attend all meetings.** The comfort level of the group depends on familiarity among the participants, not just as acquaintances or friends, but as peers in a particular group with its own special history.
- **Ask for clarification.** If there is something you don't understand, say so. Chances are, you are not alone.
- **Help keep the discussion on track.** Make sure your remarks are relevant; if necessary, explain how your points are related to the discussion. Try to make your points while they are pertinent.
- **Address your remarks to the group rather than the co-ordinator.** Feel free to address your remarks to a particular participant, especially one who has not been heard from or whom you think may have special insight. Don't hesitate to question other participants to learn more about their ideas.
- **Listen carefully to others.** Make sure you are giving everyone a chance to speak. Jotting down your thoughts may help you to listen more attentively since you won't be concerned about forgetting the point you want to make.
- **Don't monopolise the discussion.** If you tend to talk a lot in groups, leave room for quieter people. Be aware that some people may want to speak but are intimidated by more assertive people.

- **Don't withdraw from the discussion.** Your responsibility goes beyond merely listening. Everyone in the group, including you, has unique knowledge and experience; this variety makes the discussion an interesting learning experience for all. Failing to speak means robbing the group of your wisdom.
- **Engage in friendly disagreement.** Differences can invigorate the discussion, especially when the group is relatively homogeneous on the surface. Don't hesitate to challenge ideas you disagree with. Don't be afraid to play devil's advocate, but don't go overboard. If the discussion becomes heated, don't continue. Keep in mind that it is better to understand differences than to obliterate them.
- **Retain your sense of humor.** Remember that humor and a pleasant manner can go far in helping you make your point, while a belligerent attitude may prevent acceptance of what you say. Be aware of how your body language can close you off from the group.
- **Maintain an open mind.** You don't score points by rigidly sticking to your prior statements. Feel free to explore ideas that you have rejected or failed to consider in the past. This is a sign of growth and maturity.
- **Use your critical faculties.** Feel free to question the assertions made in the readings or by other participants. Think about whether statements are consistent with your perceptions; decide whether assertions are based on observation or inference, assumptions or evidence; be on the lookout for faulty reasoning and vague generalisations.
- **Try to understand the position of those who disagree with you.** Your own knowledge is not complete until you understand other points of view. Others have reasons for their beliefs which make sense to them. You should be able to make a good case for positions you disagree with. This level of comprehension and empathy will make you a much better advocate for your own position.

* These guidelines have been adapted from materials developed by Study Circles Resources Center, Pomfret, CT.