

Connections.....with Steve Becker

Putting the "C-A-R-E" in Extra-Care Needed

Congregants who need "extra-care" require additional respect and patience. Facilitators must create an inclusive environment for all. How can we do this? Here are some suggestions:

Come in mentality

- ⤴ Develop and keep a policy that everyone is welcome. When new people inquire about your program, ask what aspects most interest them. This often leads to an exchange about what the prospective member is seeking from such a group.
- ⤴ Watch for red flags: people who have trouble accepting the model or group premises, people who seek a different type of group, such as those needing therapy, people seeking to use the group to meet unrelated needs (like finding a girlfriend), etc.
- ⤴ Offer individual orientations before joining a group to determine the person's needs.
- ⤴ Discuss potential problems with your minister.
- ⤴ Keep and respect the "empty chair." Do not close groups.

Attitude

- ⤴ Positive attitudes offer warmth, acceptance, and willingness. Facilitators should be willing to accept a wide variety of sharing and opinions, maintain a caring attitude even in the face of challenging behaviors, and know when to get help.

Respect

- ⤴ Aretha Franklin was right. Even the most cranky, difficult, complaining person deserves to be shown respect. How to do this with extra-care?
- ⤴ Pay attention to the person. Look at them. Listen actively. Let them know you understand what they are trying to say.
- ⤴ Rephrase what they are asking for in your own words to assure the person you "get" what they are saying.
- ⤴ Avoid "exclusive" language like:
 - o "We always do it this way."
 - o "Our members in the Thursday group have been together a long time."
 - o "We are all good friends."
 - o We don't see a need to change things."

Expect "living by the covenant"

- ⤴ When challenged, facilitators should use the covenant as a reminder to everyone how they have all agreed to treat each other. You may need to discuss what an item means, give examples, ask others to share their interpretations, and be blatantly clear about how they are expected to act in the group. An effective facilitator can ask a challenging member how willing they are to "live" by their covenant, and, if not, offer them other resources to meet their needs. If this strategy does not work, the facilitator should ask the minister to talk to the person, and, if needed, explain that they cannot participate.

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