

A watercolor illustration of a city street scene. In the foreground, five diverse women are walking towards the viewer. They are dressed in simple, everyday clothing. The woman on the far left has her hair in a braid. The woman next to her is wearing a light-colored dress. The woman in the center is wearing a light-colored top and dark pants. The woman to her right is wearing a light-colored dress. The woman on the far right is wearing a dark dress and has her arms raised. In the background, there are several tall buildings with many windows, some trees, and a smaller house with a chimney. The overall style is simple and illustrative, using watercolor washes for shading and black outlines for the figures and buildings.

**COMING TOGETHER:**  
Support groups for  
immigrant women.  
**A USER'S GUIDE**

**Judith McCallum**



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# USERS GUIDE

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**1**  
**Background  
of the Kit**

Children's Place, a multicultural Parent-Child centre, opened in Toronto in 1983. I took part in the creation of Children's Place and worked at the centre in its early years.

Because of the isolation and discrimination immigrant women experience, we had a vision of support groups.

In 1988 Children's Place received funds from different levels of government and private foundations to run groups for immigrant women and develop a resource kit. I returned to Children's Place to coordinate this project.

We held groups in three languages—Cantonese, Portuguese and English. All three group leaders and I met regularly as a Working Group to develop and test ideas for the sessions.

We developed a Popular Education model for the groups over a two year period, 1988 to 1989. The Kit is based on this model.

**2**  
**Language  
of the Kit**

The Kit is written mainly in English but there are some sections in Cantonese and Portuguese.

I tried to make the language simple and easy to read, especially for those who are not fluent in English. I hope I succeeded.

**3**  
**How the Kit  
Is Organized**

The Group Leader's Guide booklet is in the left hand side of the Kit. The Guide explains the purpose and background of the Kit. It also suggests ways to use the Kit.

The right-hand pocket of the Kit contains the following loose leaf sections:

- (1) Plans for Sessions 1-12,
- (2) Exercises and other materials for the Group leader to hand out to group members, and
- (3) Resources.

The Session Plans, the Hand-outs and the Resources sections are different colours so you may easily find the one you want.

The hand-outs are in three different languages. They are in English, Cantonese and Portuguese. Each language section is in a different colour.



4

**Who Is the Kit For?**

The Kit is for women and groups who work with immigrant women. It is especially for the immigrant woman who leads support groups or wants to lead support groups for other immigrant women.

5

**Who Are the Groups For?**

Some groups are multicultural. The women come from many different places and speak different languages. The multicultural group uses English (or French).

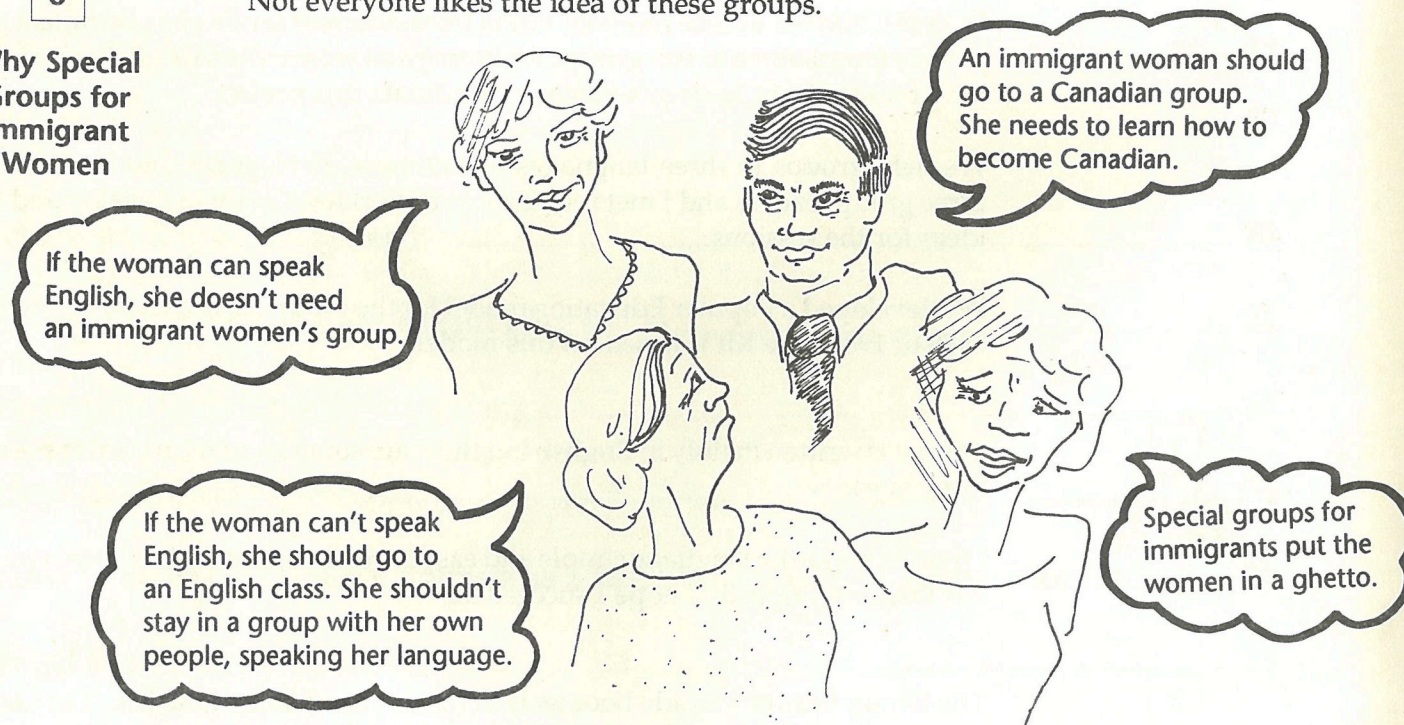
Some groups are for women who speak the same language, even though they come from different countries. For example, group members come from different countries in Latin-America, as well as Spain. Their group uses Spanish.

Some groups are for women who share the same heritage although they come from different places and speak different languages or dialects. For example, a group for Black women. Members come from the Caribbean, Africa and North America. This group uses English.

6

**Why Special Groups for Immigrant Women**

Not everyone likes the idea of these groups.



I don't agree with these people. The Kit and the books I recommended will show you my reasons.

Immigrant women have many experiences which are the same, even when they live in different cities, like Calgary, Toronto, Montreal or Vancouver.

Listen to the voices of some immigrant women:

Without English, Bach-Mai, who is from Vietnam, feels:

lost always or feel bad as someone who is foolish<sup>1</sup>

1 Catherine E. Warren. *Vignettes of Life Experiences and Self Perceptions of New Canadian Women*, p.12

Ling, also from Viet Nam, says:

I am never respected because I can't speak English properly. The shopkeeper thinks I am a fool because I make mistakes speaking to him in English, but that is not at all true, you see<sup>2</sup>

Mary, from Yugoslavia, feels:

less important here in this country - that's how I feel as an immigrant. Canadians feel immigrants are less important than they are. They are always correcting our language and our accent ... Immigrants can improve their language ... by further studies ... But you know what? I still think that even if I learned good accents it might not still be enough for Canadians to accept me.<sup>3</sup>

Ziddah, from Palestine, also speaks of her experience of discrimination:

It was so disappointing. I went around and made all those applications and no one called. I felt so badly because they hired Canadians after me - that I was too dark.<sup>4</sup>

And both Bach-Mai and Ziddah speak of their isolation. Bach-Mai says:

I feel so sad ... totally isolated ... People are not always friendly; my next door neighbour does not know me. Sometime I want to talk, but who do I talk to? Is this happiness? Happiness for what?<sup>5</sup>

What Ziddah misses most is

just the closeness of people, although sometimes it is too much ... Here you have such freedom to do what you want, to go out without people saying "Look at her!" But here you could stay in your house for a year and no one would know. If you got sick here, nobody would know, but there they would.<sup>6</sup>

Afro-Caribbean or West Indian women often come to Canada on work permits and wait for immigrant status. They speak of their loneliness and isolation. These are women who have left behind their own children and boyfriends or husbands. They come to Canada for economic reasons. For Myrtle

It's really hard ... working for somebody and looking after their children, because every day it's a reminder of your own children ... But I couldn't stay home and see my children suffer.<sup>7</sup>

2 Vignettes, pp.34-35

3 Vignettes, p.14

4 Vignettes, p.14

5 Vignettes, pp.12-13

6 Vignettes, p.48

7 Makeda Silvera. *Silenced: Talks with Working Class Caribbean Women about Their Lives and Struggles as Domestic Workers in Canada*, p.83



Molly hadn't seen her boyfriend and three children in nine years. Her youngest child was only 9 months when she first left home. Molly wishes she could have her family here with her because

loneliness ... makes you feel so helpless, so vulnerable, so ashamed. It's almost like a crime.<sup>8</sup>

These things are the same for many immigrant women:

- the importance of language for feeling good about themselves
- loss of community and isolation
- discrimination and racism

These experiences cause immigrant women to lose confidence in themselves. Sometimes these experiences even make them sick, because of the stress they feel.

Immigrant women need a 'safe' place to share their feelings about these experiences. It will be easier for them to talk, if the other women and the leader are immigrants also. These women understand what being an immigrant is like. In this way, a sensitive group leader can lead immigrant women to talk openly about "they/us" feelings, which show how they feel left out or not important in relationship to 'Canadians'.

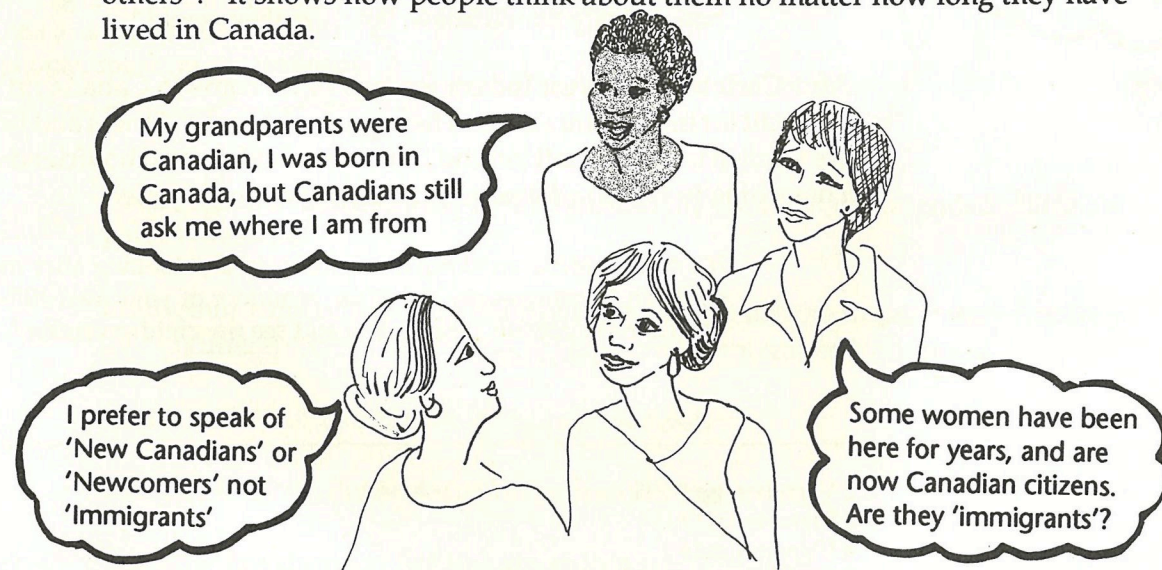
Sometimes immigrant women also need to meet and talk to other women from their own ethno-cultural background, before they can feel comfortable to attend a 'multicultural' group held in English.

In the group women see that many of their experiences are the same. They stop feeling all alone and stop blaming themselves. They begin to help each other and become stronger.

7

**Who is an Immigrant Woman?**

The words 'Immigrant women' describe "women who are seen as immigrants by others".<sup>9</sup> It shows how people think about them no matter how long they have lived in Canada.



8 Silenced, p.71

9 Ng, Roxana. "Constituting Ethnic Phenomena: An Account from the Perspective of the Immigrant Women" in *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, 13, 1, 1981, p.98

In Canada, 'ethnic' and 'immigrant' often mean the same thing. Immigrant doesn't mean legal immigrant status. It describes how many Canadians see others, especially if they come from Asia, Africa or the West Indies.

For example: Immigrant women would include West Indian women, whether they are here on work permits or are now Canadian citizens.

People also expect immigrants to work in low-paying jobs that Canadians don't want.

8

**How Immigrants See Themselves**

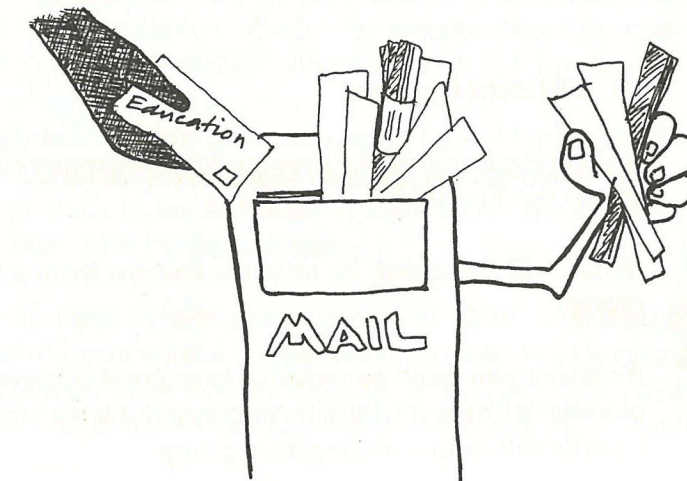
Some people, including immigrants, prefer to say 'New Canadians'. Other immigrants are proud to call themselves 'immigrants'. They don't feel 'new'. They believe it is important to say that they bring a culture and history with them to Canada.

9

**Philosophy of the Kit POPULAR EDUCATION**

Popular Education uses the ideas and methods of Paolo Freire. He taught peasants in Brazil.

Traditionally, many people think of education like a 'banking system'. Paolo Freire used this example. People put money in the bank or put letters in the mailbox. In the same way, the traditional teacher puts information and knowledge in the mind of the student.



Popular education is not like the 'banking system'. The teacher is not the expert. In Popular Education both the teacher and students learn together. They begin with the experience and concerns of the students.

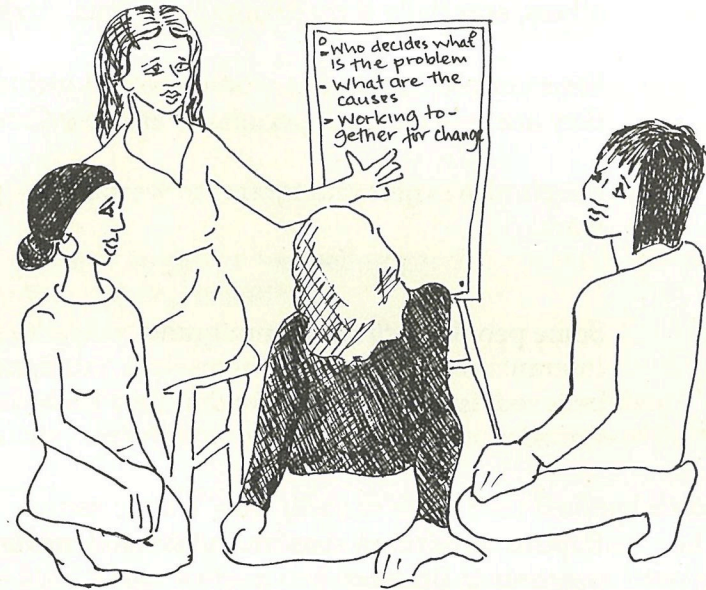
Popular Education leads people to act for social change.

Our group model used the ideas and methods of Popular Education. The support groups gave immigrant women a place to think about their own experiences:

- in the family
- at work
- in the community
- in their homeland
- and in Canada.



Group members could compare their experiences, see what was the same, analyse the causes, and exchange ideas to solve problems.



We also used ideas and methods from Cooperative Problem-Solving Groups. Hogue Wyckoff developed Cooperative Problem-Solving groups. (See "How the Group Works" pp. 22-25) The purpose of the group was to strengthen the ability of immigrant women to organize themselves; to take action to change difficult situations, both in their personal lives and in the larger society.

10

### Things to Think About When You Start a Group

#### (a) Different Cultures

(i) Will the group be for immigrants from many cultural backgrounds? Will the group use English?

(ii) Or will the group be only for women from a particular language or ethnic group?

As leader you must be sensitive to cultural differences within the group. This is obvious with the multicultural group but it is also true for the group which is for a particular ethnic or language group.

For example: a group of Portuguese speaking women may include women from many different places. Some may be from Mainland Portugal. Others from the Azores. And others from Brazil or Mozambique. Some may be from rural areas. Others from the city. Some may be of European origin, others of African origin. They might have many different ideas and culture. They might even speak different dialects of Portuguese.

You must be aware of differences in culture but you shouldn't stereotype: you shouldn't think everyone is the same because they come from the same cultural background. Each woman has her own experiences which influence how she understands life.

#### (b) Outreach\*

Many immigrant women don't understand the idea of Support or Self-Help Groups. Their traditional way of getting support has been from family, neighbours and friends. You or another staff person or volunteer may have to spend a number of hours introducing the women to the idea of structured Support Groups.

Don't be discouraged if only two or three women show up for the first session even after you spend a lot of time telling people in the community about the program. If few women attend, it doesn't mean there is no interest or need for Support Groups. It just means that you will have to increase your efforts to reach the women.

Both project coordinator and leaders spent many hours doing outreach before each set of groups. Our activities included:

- flyers and visits to community agencies;
- flyers to Heritage Language students in school to take home to their mothers;
- visits to adult E.S.L. (English as a Second Language) classes to speak to the women themselves;
- announcements to different community newspapers;
- radio and T.V. interviews (Portuguese and Chinese media);
- speaking to the women who attend Children's Place drop-in centre;
- phone calls to women who used to attend the drop-in centre;
- pasting up and handing out flyers in Chinatown.

The Immigrant Women's Health Centre has a Mobile Health Clinic which visits factories to speak to immigrant women. We gave the Mobile Health Clinic our flyers to give out in the factories. We also asked the Garment Workers Union to give out our flyers in the factories.

In spite of these efforts attendance was slow in some groups. In the first Portuguese Group we did not have enough women to form a group until the fifth meeting. Attendance was slow in our second English-speaking Group. We had to stop the English Group and do more outreach before continuing.

We found that a good way to do outreach is by home visits. In some cases we went door-to-door in the neighbourhood. However, if your organization does not have too much money, going door-to-door will not work since it takes a lot of staff time.

\*Outreach - activities taken to advertise or let others know about the program.



**(c) What is the ideal number for a Group?**

A good number for a Small Group is 8 to 10 women. Twelve should be the maximum.

For many reasons, it is difficult for immigrant women to go to a group. Often you will have 4 or 5 women attending the group regularly. What if very few women attend? Can you consider 2 or 3 women a group?

The answer often depends on your employers or sponsoring organization. Will they allow you to lead the group with 2 or 3 women until the numbers increase? Will they let you have more time to advertise the group?

You may have to stop the group after a few meetings if the numbers do not increase. You might spend more time on outreach. Then you could start the group again.

**(d) Where the Group is Held — the Setting**

These are some of the questions you need to ask yourself:

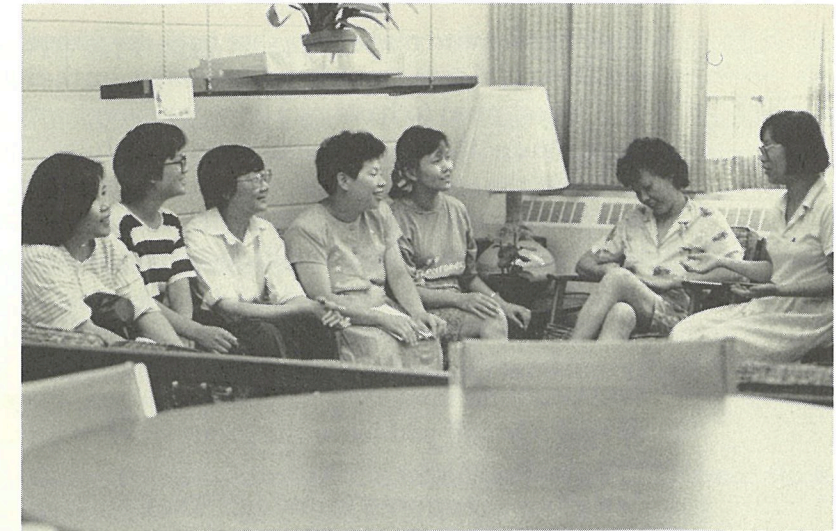
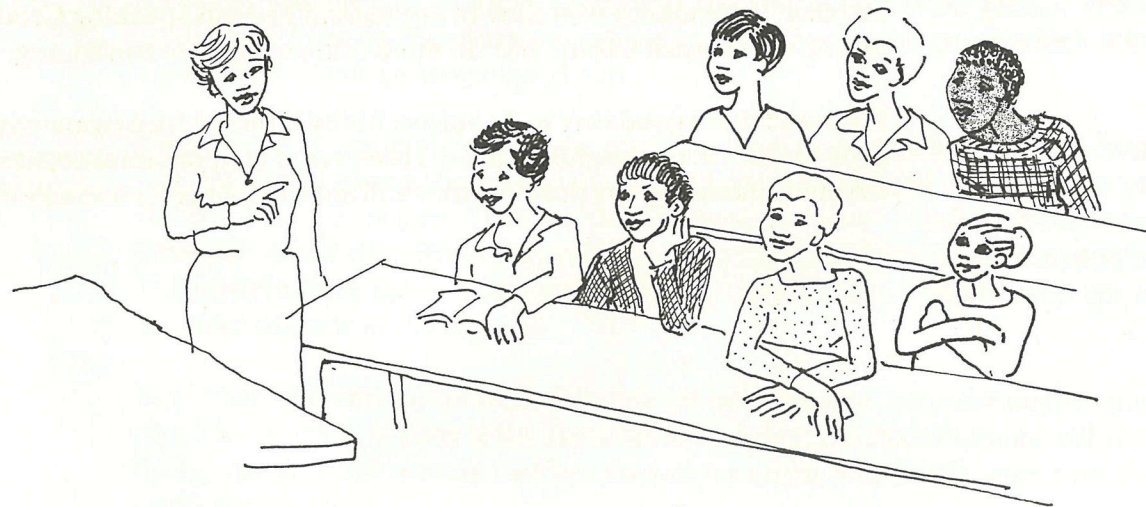
Can the women easily use public transportation to reach the location? Can older women or those with a disability get to the room easily?

Is the room welcoming? Will the women feel comfortable and at ease in the room?

Is the temperature of the room right - warm in winter, cool in summer?

What kind of seating arrangements will you have?

How you set up the room will affect what happens in the group. If each woman sits behind a desk and the leader stands in front - then you will have a class not a Support Group.



I suggest that you sit in a circle or semi-circle. Both group members and leader should be able to see each other as they speak. This encourages women to share their feelings. If the leader and members sit together it will also remind the group that both leader and members learn from each other.

Some people like sitting around a table. Some prefer sitting on chairs or a sofa. Others like sitting on a rug or cushions on the floor.

If you use cushions, provide a few chairs for those women who cannot sit low on the floor.

You might also need mats for Relaxation Exercises.

**(e) Child Care**

The women in the Support Groups should always have the choice of child care while the group is going on. This is true even if the group is in the evenings. We should not think, without asking the women that child care will not be wanted because the group takes place between 7 p.m. and 9 p.m.





It is important to make sure that both the women and children feel comfortable with the child care provided. Depending on the number and ages of the children, you might need to have two or more caregivers. The children should be taken care of in another room, but close to the adults. The room should be bright, clean and safe, the activities interesting and right for their ages. The caregivers should be friendly and capable. It is helpful if the caregiver comes from the same background as the children, if the group is all from the same culture.

#### **(f) Age of Group Members**

Will you limit the group to a particular age range? For example, 18 to 25 years of age? Or will you leave the group open to anyone of any age?

Our groups were open to any age. The Chinese group was almost evenly divided between "grandmothers" and young women. Sometimes, the "grandmothers" talked among themselves, rather than take part in the group.

#### **(g) Smaller Group Within the Larger Group**

You will always have to be aware of age and other differences in the group, which might lead the group to divide into smaller groups.

You will have to work to bring the smaller groups together. For example, in the Chinese Group, the leader led a discussion on in-laws. This subject was interesting to both age-groups, because each member was either a mother-in-law or daughter-in-law.

#### **(h) "Open" or "Closed" Groups; Continuing Group or Limited Number of Sessions**

You will also have to consider the following questions: Will the group run for a limited number of sessions? Or will it continue from week to week? Will new members be able to come each week or will there be a date, after which no new members can attend the group?

Our groups ran for 12 sessions. We wanted to close the group to new members after the first or second session. We wanted the members to get to know and trust each other. If new members came each week then they might continue to feel strange with each other.

It was not possible to keep to this plan in all the groups, because the number of women attending each group differed. For instance, during the first set of groups, twelve women attended the first session of the Chinese Group, eleven women attended the English Group, but only one woman came to the Portuguese Group. Outreach activities continued for the Portuguese Group until Session 5, when 6 women attended. So we couldn't 'close' the Portuguese Group till then.

As a rule, groups that have a start and finish date should be closed after the first or second meeting. But I also believe in asking the women themselves whether they want the group to be 'open' or 'closed'. If the group will be 'closed', ask the members when they want it closed.

#### **(i) How To Set Up the Group**

You will also have to think about how to set up the group. To ask yourself what structure will be most useful for your group. You might have to change your plans to fit what your group really wants.

In some groups the leaders do not direct the groups at all. They believe group members learn best when they direct the group themselves.

We didn't think this would work, since for many immigrant women this would be the first time they attended a group.

Other leaders try to control all the activities. We didn't want these kinds of leaders.

From the beginning we wanted the women to be the ones who decide what the groups do and talk about.

The group leader used exercises and discussion to encourage women to talk about what was important to them.

Sometimes, when members take control of the process it is not always in the way we wish or expect. For instance, one of the Chinese groups wanted more talks by visiting speakers and fewer exercises and discussion. We had to change our plans to meet that group's wishes.

#### **(j) How to Use Resource Persons**

I suggest that three guest speakers are enough for a group that runs for 12 sessions. The group members need time on their own to get to know and support each other.

After Stage I, our group leaders decided that it was best to invite guest speakers in for a definite time in the middle of the session. This gives time for members to talk freely among themselves before the guest arrives. The resource person leaves after the talk and discussion. Then group members can evaluate the presentation.

Before guest speakers visit the group, the leader asks the group to think of questions they want to ask the speaker. In the session before the visit the group prepares the questions they would like to ask.

This emphasizes our right to get information, to ask questions and to be critical, if necessary.



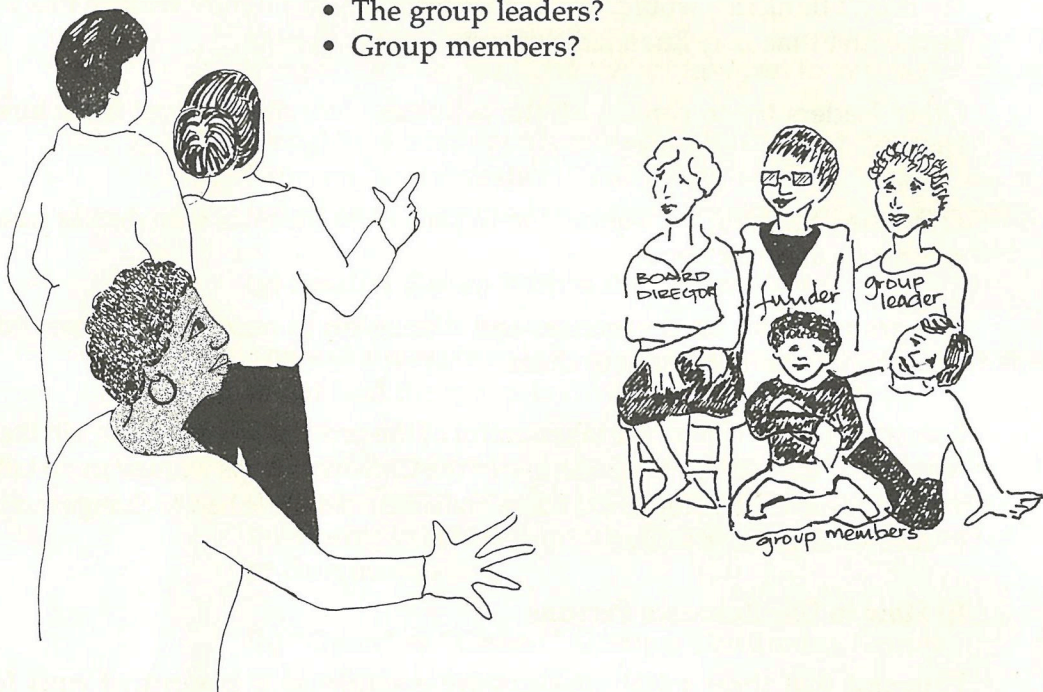
### (k) How To Evaluate\* the Group

You need to decide right from the beginning how you will evaluate the group.

You need to ask yourself:

(i) Who is the evaluation for?

- The funders?
- The board of directors of the organization?
- The group leaders?
- Group members?



If it is for the funders or board of directors, then you should keep a record of the number of women who attended the group. At the end of the program you will need to evaluate whether the group reached its objectives or what it set out to do.

If the evaluation is for leaders and members then you should have continuous feedback\*\* from the group.

Our evaluation was for the funders and board of directors, as well as the staff and group members.

At the beginning, we hired an evaluator. She met with the board of directors, group leaders and coordinator and the advisory committee. She got our ideas and designed the evaluation. The evaluator wrote an evaluation report after the first groups ended, and after the second set of groups.

\* Evaluate: To judge or decide what worked or didn't work well for the group.

Source: Adapted from Opportunity for Advancement: Action on Health Barriers Health Promotion with Low Income Women, Toronto, 1988.

\*\* See *What We Mean By These Words*.

We involved members in the planning and evaluation of the group from the start. Members chose the topics they wanted to discuss. At each session, leaders asked members how they felt about the activities or talks. Halfway through the groups, they asked members to evaluate the first six sessions. Leaders asked members to decide what they wanted to happen in the second half of the program.

We wanted members to know that feedback from them was a necessary part of the evaluation procedure.

(ii) What are you evaluating?

Some goals or objectives can be 'measured' or shown in numbers. e.g. A group begins for overweight women to lose weight. Before the group begins, you weigh each member and record her weight. You weigh members at regular intervals and at the end of the program. You compare their weight at the end with their weight before the program.

You can measure weight loss and see if the group succeeded. But some other objectives cannot be measured in the same way. You can only show the results by describing the experience. For example:

Your objective is:

"To increase the assertiveness of members." You will have to consider what behaviour shows assertiveness.

You can measure assertiveness, by asking:

- Does she talk about her feelings and concerns in the group?
- Does she ask for what she wants?
- Can she say good things about herself?
- Does she use services in the community that she needs?

You can see some of this behaviour. But you will have to depend on her to describe her behaviour outside the group. She has to tell you whether there has been a change in her behaviour. Is she more assertive now than before the group?

(iii) What methods will you use?

#### Questionnaire

A questionnaire is a form with a series of questions to get feedback from group members.

Questions can be 'open-ended', e.g. 'What did you think about \_\_\_\_\_?' or 'closed', e.g. Answer 'yes' or 'no' to the following questions.

Usually each member completes the questionnaire on her own.



## Interview

An interview allows you to get more personal information. It can be more 'anecdotal' - sometimes the person describes an incident or tells a story from her life.

The interviewer asks each member the same questions to see if the group met its objectives. The questions are open-ended. The interviewer guides the women to answer the question fully.

What will you use? Questionnaires or interviews? Or a combination of both?

In our program, group members did not complete a questionnaire. We felt a written questionnaire would frighten some people. At the end (session 12) we had an evaluation. The leaders asked members a series of questions within the group. A visitor to the group wrote down the answers on the flip chart.

(iv) What resources will you need?

- Will you hire an evaluator?
- If you ask the evaluation questions within the group, will you need to hire someone to record their answers?
- If you use questionnaires, do you need to translate them into another language?
- If you have interviews, who will do the interviews? The evaluator? What will you do if the evaluator only speaks English and your group is in another language?
- Do you need to hire an interviewer who speaks the same language as the women?
- Will you need interpreters?

You need to think what resources you will need for the evaluation. Be sure to include these costs in your budget.

11

### Suggestions on how to Use the Materials

#### a) GROUP LEADER'S GUIDE BOOKLET

A good place to begin is with the booklet on the left hand side of the Kit.

You don't have to start at page 1 of the booklet and read through to the end. Look at the Contents, see which sections interest you most and begin there.

**The following sections are important for both leader and group members:**

- Group goals or what we would like to do
- Pattern of sessions
- How the group works
- What we mean by these words

The Pattern of Sessions is a guide for the leader and members. You don't have to follow it exactly.

At the beginning, it might be better to show how 'Check-in' and 'Problem-Solving' work, by doing it. Then later on, give members a copy of "How the Group Works".

You may want to give the meaning of each word, as you use it. Then later give members "What We Mean By These Words". As group leader, you will have an idea of when it's suitable to give and discuss the materials with members.

#### b) SESSIONS/EXERCISES

Each of the sessions is a unit in itself. The sessions do not have to follow a set order. Some of the topics and exercises might not be suitable for your group. Be flexible, choose the sessions that you believe meet the needs and concerns of your group.

As group leader you need to be aware of how fast you can move along with your group. Perhaps the Kit tried to cover too much in one session. If you find that you are hurrying the group along in order to complete the entire session, STOP. Sometimes you will know that you are going too fast by your own tension and anxiety. Pause. Breathe in ... Breathe out. Leave out the exercise or discussion that you were forcing into the session. If necessary, do it in another session. Or leave it out altogether. Relax and listen to the women in the group. It is more important to give them time to talk about their feelings.

Perhaps you think Session 2 is too early to talk about the problems in the 'Dear Consuela' letters. Or you think the women might be frightened by role-plays. Trust your feelings. Both you and the members might need more time to get to know each other before you try a 'risky' exercise.

I tried to think of situations which were common to many women, mothers and immigrants, when writing. For example, see:

- Problem Letters (Session 2)
- When Are You Nervous? (Session 5)
- Which Parent Sounds Most Like You (Session 9)
- Conflicts with Your Teenager (Session 9)

However, I am an immigrant woman from Jamaica, and my life experience and culture will affect how I write. Please change any exercise to make it more suitable to your cultural group.

Be aware of how many women read and write in your group. If you have group members who cannot read and write, *don't* use exercises that require reading and writing. If possible, adapt the exercise. For example, in Session 2 you could make a tape of a few of the problem letters and ask each pair of women to choose one problem to answer. They would answer orally.

You could also ask members to draw or paint pictures of dreams and feelings, instead of writing. At first, members might feel shy about drawing. You can help



the group realize that it's not a contest, but a chance to be creative and have fun. By drawing or painting they can also learn more about themselves.

### c) RESOURCES

This section includes a list of:

- Books and other materials that you might find useful
- Shelters
- Legal Clinics
- Employment Centres
- Training Programs.

The list of programs and organizations are only those located in Metro Toronto.

I have also included a sheet for you to list resource people known to you. These should be caring people that you know could help the women you work with.

It will take time and effort to make up this list, if you don't already know people. Maybe you worked with some of the people. If not, you may have to visit agencies and interview people there to find other resources. People you know and trust may be able to recommend others with special skills.

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### The Role of the Group Leader

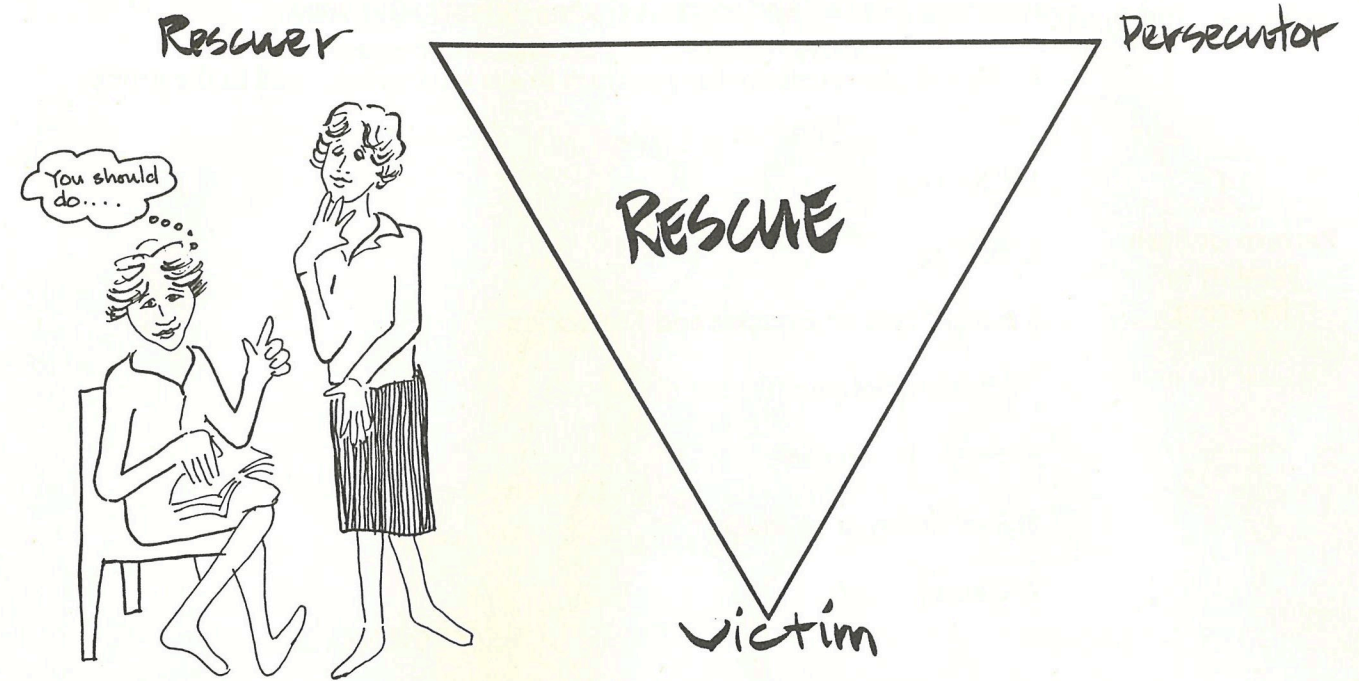
In one of our groups a woman said, the leader

"encouraged us all to be co-leaders of the group."

This is a good way to describe the leader of a Support Group that uses the ideas of Popular Education.

- She is *not* an expert with all the answers, but she directs and encourages women to take more control of the program.
- She is sensitive and respects different values and practices.
- She works to make group members feel safe when they:
  - question the leader's role
  - evaluate the group process
  - share their experiences
  - express their feelings
- She is truthful in sharing her feelings and giving feedback\*
- She is warm and caring, and allows herself to feel and show pain and anger at women's oppression.
- She is a good listener.
- She believes in the women's stories - of abuse, of racism, of exploitation at the workplace.
- She provides information on outside resources, about legal help; housing; Immigration; Shelters; Daycare.
- She encourages women to support each other by listening and giving helpful feedback.
- She does *not* rescue\* women by providing her solutions for their lives.

\*See "What We Mean By These Words" at end of Guide.



- She makes sure that other women do not rescue each other or make comments which hurt each other.
- She encourages women to test out new assertive\* behaviours and to take action outside the group.
- She must have hope and believe that women can take control of their lives.

But the group leader is not a wonder woman who is always strong and energetic. At times she also feels discouraged. However, as women share their experiences and tell of new steps taken by them, new energy is released in the group. And the leader too becomes more alive and powerful.

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### Group Goals or What We Would Like to Do

1. Sometimes immigrant women feel all alone without family or friends to help them. In the groups, we can meet women who have the same feelings.
2. We can feel safe to talk to each other about our concerns. We can respect the different ways of each culture and help each other.
3. We will decide what we will do and talk about. The leader will find information on the topics we choose.
4. We can talk about how it feels to be a woman and an immigrant. We can see what experiences we have in common.
5. We can look at the roles of different people in our family, both in our homeland and in Canada. We can talk about whether we want to make changes in our lives.

\*See "What We Mean By These Words" at end of Guide.



6. In the group we can try out new ways of dealing with our problems. Outside the group, we can also work to change difficult situations.

7. We will also evaluate the program to see what works well in the group.

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### Pattern of Each Session or Meeting

1. Check-In
2. Re-Cap
3. Main Topic or Exercise and Discussion
4. Problem-Solving (if time requested)
5. Break (10 minutes)
6. Evaluation of Meeting
7. Closing

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### How the Group Works

#### 1. CHECK-IN

You say how you are feeling at the moment. For example, "I have a headache"; "I feel tired"; "I feel great".

You can say anything about your week or day which affects how you feel now.

**Check-in** is also the time to talk about feelings left over from the last session. Maybe these feelings are connected to something the leader or another member said.

#### a) HOW WE CHECK IN

Group members and leader take turns saying how we are feeling. This should not take more than 5 to 10 minutes. After we all have a turn, the leader asks if anyone wants more time to work on her problem.

If yes, then we decide together how much time each person gets. We decide whether to work on problems immediately or whether to set a time later on in the meeting.

#### b) WHY WE CHECK-IN

Sometimes we ignore our feelings. We do not pay attention to what our bodies tell us about ourselves.

For example: My stomach hurts - I feel anxious or nervous.

When we check in, it helps us to listen to our bodies and to pay attention to our feelings.

It also helps us to understand that our *own* feelings can affect how we take part in the group and how we behave to other members. By talking about our concerns and listening to others, we begin to care more for the group. We learn to support and help each other solve problems.



#### 2. RE-CAP

The leader asks:

- What do you remember from the last session or meeting?
- Are there any points that are not clear?
- Anything you wish to discuss further?

The leader or a group member goes over the last session. We talk about points that are not clear or which the group wants to discuss more.

#### 3. MAIN TOPIC OR PROBLEM-SOLVING

The leader or guest speaker talks about or leads a discussion on the topic for that meeting.

If many women are in crisis or want to work on problems, we can use this time for problem-solving instead.

#### 4. PROBLEM-SOLVING

Each woman asks for the time she needs to work on her problem. The group decides how much time to give each person. The leader or one of the members reminds us when the time is up for each person. If we have very little time, then we give first choice to the woman or women in crisis.

The woman describes her problem. The leader or other members ask questions to be clear on what the woman wants to happen in the situation.

What does she want to change?



We ask her if she wants us to give her **feedback**.

**To give feedback** is to say what we think is happening, and to make suggestions on how she can change her situation.

She may make a **contract**.

**A contract** is an agreement between two or more people to do or not to do something.

When a group member makes a contract, she makes a short statement about what she wants to do.

For example:

a) I will stop blaming myself

or

b) I will say good things about myself.

The leader and members agree to help the woman keep her contract.

You help by giving her encouragement. By recognizing and telling her when she makes positive changes.

You can also let her know if she breaks her contract.

## 5. BREAK

The time for **break** can change from week to week. It depends on what the group wants. One member can be responsible to remind us of the time for **break**.

## 6. EVALUATION

This is the time on the agenda when we say what we think of the meeting and how we would like the group to work.

The leader might ask some of these questions:

- Were you comfortable with the discussion or exercise?
- Did anything make you feel uncomfortable?
- What did you like most? What did you like least?
- Is there anything you'd like more information on?
- Would you like more time to talk about different topics?
- Would you prefer to spend more time working on your own problems?

If there isn't enough time to evaluate the meeting on that day, we might have to evaluate it at the beginning of the next meeting after check-in.

## 7. CLOSING

At the end we need to prepare ourselves to leave the group till the following week.

It is a good idea to end with a quiet time of Relaxation. If there are any 'left-over' feelings, such as conflicts between group members, it is probably better to leave it till check-in at the next session.

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### How to Help the Group Continue as a Self-Help Group or Prepare for Ending

At the beginning, twelve sessions seem like a long time. By the last session, group members usually want the group to continue. It is hard to separate because the women have come to know and support each other. There is also a bond between the group leader and the group members.

As leader, you need to prepare for the ending of the group right from the start. Your job is made easier if the group is set up to allow women to be responsible for what happens from day 1.

Here are some of the ways I suggest to prepare women to continue on their own.

**Group Goals:** You give out the organization's goals for the group. You stress that members have the right to direct and evaluate the program.

**Group Rights/Group Rules:** You and group members discuss group rights and make up group rules.

**Selecting Topics:** Members brainstorm\* and select topics for future discussion.

**Course Outline:** You prepare and give out course outline only after members have selected topics.

**Check-in:** Check-in is set in place by Session 2. This gives women a time in each session to talk about their feelings and to ask for group feedback\*.

**Re-cap:** You share responsibilities by inviting group members to re-cap previous session.

**Volunteer Time-keeper:** You ask for a volunteer to be the time-keeper for:

- Break
- the end of exercises
- the end of sessions
- for the end of each person's problem-solving time

**Feedback and Individual Problem-Solving:** You encourage women to ask for feedback and time for individual problem-solving. You are careful not to rush in with your comments or suggestions before other women can speak.

\*See "What We Mean By These Words".



**Rescue\*:** You explain that women are not allowed to 'rescue' each other.

**Problem-Solving Exercise:** You divide group into pairs to select problem letters and let them come up with solutions.

**Pattern of Sessions:** By Session 2 you have in place a pattern of each session. Early on you inform the group that there will be a midway evaluation at Session 6.

**How The Group Works & What Do We Mean By These Words:** These materials can help the women to understand how to set up the group for themselves.

**Evaluation\*:** At Session 6 you review the Pattern of Sessions. You ask whether women want:

- more structure
- less structure
- more time for personal problem-solving and less discussion of topics, or
- more talks or presentations and less personal problem-solving time.

**Closure & Group Plans:** You remind group of the final evaluation and lead women to consider the ending of the group. You ask:

Do they want to continue as a Self Help Group?

Would they like to have a celebration at the last session?

**Individual Plans:** Session on Dream and Action Plan helps women set individual goals and plan action steps to reach goals.

**Hand-outs & Resource List:** Materials handed out help women hold on to what they gained from the group.

**Self-Help:** At the final session, you remind women they can continue as a Self-Help Group. If they are interested, you set a date for a reunion meeting.

**Changing From a Group With a Leader to a Self-Help Group:** The organization that held the group should provide some support to the new Self-Help Group.

For example:

- space for group meetings;
- space for childcare;
- Group leader to visit first two or three meetings to help set up the Self Help; the name of someone the group can call if they need help in the future.

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\*See "What We Mean By These Words".

These groups will give information to women who want to set up Self-Help Groups:

Women's Counselling Referral  
and Education Centre  
525 Bloor St. W.  
Toronto, Ont.  
M5S 1Y4  
(416) 534-7501

Self Help Clearing House of  
Metropolitan Toronto  
40 Orchard View Blvd.  
Toronto, Ont.  
M4R 1B9  
(416) 487-4355

There aren't many examples of a group with a leader which changed into a Self-Help Group.

The women who were in our Cantonese group want to continue as a Self-Help Group. Perhaps we can learn better how to help groups make this change by seeing what happens in the Cantonese group.



## What We Mean by these Words

**Assertive:** An assertive person believes she has rights and also respects the rights of others. She says what she wants without putting the other person down.

**Brainstorm:** You say or write down whatever ideas come to your mind on a topic. You *don't* stop to discuss or think whether the ideas are good or bad.

After the brainstorm, then you evaluate your ideas and decide which ideas are helpful.

**Contract:** A contract is an agreement between two or more people to do or not to do something.

When a group member makes a contract, she makes a short statement about what she wants to do.

For example:

- 1) I will stop blaming myself
- 2) I will practise making phone calls to find out about jobs, etc.
- 3) I will start talking more in the group

The leader and members agree to help the woman keep her contract. You help by giving her encouragement. It helps to tell her when you see her making positive changes. You can also let her know if she breaks her contract.

**Cooperate:** To work together for everyone's good, including your own.

**Evaluate:** (noun Evaluation) To judge or decide what worked well in the program, as well as what did not work well.

**Feedback:** To give feedback is to tell others how you feel about what they say or do. You make suggestions if they want help.

**Non-judgemental:** To accept someone's way of doing something even if it's different from yours. You don't say "That's good" or "bad". You help the person so she can do what's best for her.

**Rescue:** When you 'rescue' someone, you are doing something for her that she can do herself. If you do too much for someone, you take away her power or her ability to act for herself. And if the person does not accept your help or advice, you feel resentful.

**Roleplay:** You pretend to play the part of someone in a scene. You play the scene as you imagine it would take place. Or you change the situation to what you would like to happen.

In Assertiveness Training: You roleplay or practise being assertive in situations you find difficult.



