

## UNDERSTANDING THE STAGES GROUPS GO THROUGH

Like all groups, self-help groups start, grow, and change. Knowing what stage your group is at can help you understand what's happening in the group.

(modified from both Tuckman and Hill versions, see leadership material at the Self-Help Connection).

**Forming** — In this first stage of group development, members are meeting for the first time and some may be feeling anxious or uncertain of what is to be expected. They may wonder: What can I expect? What is the group for? What will I get out of it? The group is very much dependent on its leader at this stage.

**Key tasks for this stage are:**

- Use icebreakers so that members develop relationships based on mutual respect and shared goals.
- Define the purpose of the group.
- Establish guidelines for the operation of the group.



**Storming** — A key issue for teams is to effectively manage conflict while avoiding group think (i.e. where everyone blindly follows along and no one asks any questions). Too much conflict can delay the groups' progress but too little conflict (group think) can stagnate creativity. Groups may also lack unity and cliques may form.

**Key tasks for this stage are:**

- Develop ways of identifying problems with the group.
- Develop processes to overcome group think.
- Learn to control disruptive behaviour.
- Learn how to resolve conflict in the group.

**Norming** — The group is now becoming more harmonious. Members are more trusting and more accepting of one another's ideas and opinions, less dependent on the leader, more focused on each other, and take more responsibility for controlling the group.



**Key tasks for this stage are:**

- Look for signs that the group is bonding, becoming an entity.
- Continue to delegate tasks so the members are more independent.
- Develop a plan for the sharing/succession of the leadership.
- Evaluate the group's activities and guidelines to see how you are doing.
- Take pride in your accomplishments and congratulate yourselves on a job well done.
- Allow the group to change structure and guidelines for participation

**Performing** — Commitment and loyalty are strong in this stage. The group takes responsibility for program and process. People try out new strengths because they know they have been accepted. Everyone participates, creativity is high, and any remaining dependency on the leader is replaced by trust in one another.

**Key tasks for this stage are:**

- Develop activities to help both individual members and the group grow.
- Evaluate what is and is not working and set new goals.
- Encourage and allow members to take on more roles/tasks and responsibilities for running the group.



**Adjourning** — This occurs when either the leader or a group member leaves, or the group ends or disbands. If the group has been a good one, this is probably a time of strong feelings. The group can disband on a positive note.



**Key tasks for this stage are:**

- Be prepared to discuss how members feel when a member drops out.
- Be prepared to discuss the strong feelings of dependency the group may have on the leader.
- Be prepared for feelings of abandonment or animosity if you do not have a plan for leaving.
- Put your succession/leaving plan in place.
- Put into place your plan for the group to continue under new leadership.
- Have a closure plan for your last day (e.g., special refreshments, good-bye exercise, and so on).

**There are deep, changeless connections inside of us that help us to manage change. Part of our inner self-care involves remembering those very loving people who will always inspire us with their values and courage.**

— Steve Brunkhorst

