

Dancing with Norms
Annual General Meeting Workshop
March 1, 2008
Healthy Congregations Team

Steps to creating healthy norms for group work.

1. At the outset check to see that those present are committed to being in the group and to being in positive relationship with each other.
2. Brainstorm norms of communication and behavior that will enhance the effectiveness and the enjoyment of working together in a way that includes the participation of all persons present. Record on a flip chart and keep available while the group is doing its work.
3. Agree to abide with these norms. Agree that if behaviors and communication styles come up that are not consistent with the stated norms, work will stop long enough to remind ourselves of our agreement to stay with the norms.
4. Often this is enough to keep a group or congregation functioning smoothly.
5. Sometimes a group that is keeping to agreed-upon norms will stumble into difficulties not covered by those norms. The difficulties may happen repeatedly before someone calls a halt for a group process check.
6. Identify the specific behavior that is not working. Until the group decides to do something about it, it is functioning as an unconscious norm.
7. With the group determine how that difficult behavior could be stated as a positive norm.
8. With the agreement of the group, add that norm to the list of norms, again committing to stop group process when it comes up, long enough to remind us to stay with the norms.
9. Steps 5 through 8 should be repeated as often as needed to maintain the healthy operation of the group.

Approach this process with lightness of spirit and good humor. When you call another member of the group on failing to stick to a norm, try to do so in a way that is affirmative, that doesn't belittle or embarrass them. Or establish a ritual way of raising the awareness in moments when norms are not met within the group.