

NEW JERSEY SELF-HELP GROUP CLEARINGHOUSE

1-800-367-6274 or 973-989-1122 * www.selfhelpgroups.org * 375 E. McFarlan St., Dover, NJ 07801

101 Ideas for Improving Your Self-Help Group

If you are seeking a few suggestions for improving the operation of your self-help group, enclosed are some that demand different levels of energy. We hope that any, that your group acts on, will prove helpful. If you have any feedback or questions about any of them, please let us know. Remember too that we are available to help you with additional suggestions for addressing any difficult issue your group may be facing. We also would credit you and/or your group for any new ideas you may care to offer, that we might add to this list for the benefit of other groups.

1. **Learn about the needs of your new (and old) group members** by simply asking them, and remembering the specific need that brought them to your group. Joyce Venis, who started one of the first post-partum depression support groups in the country that still serves Mercer County, always asks people to introduce themselves and briefly say why they came to the meeting. Joyce explains how remembering why individuals have come to your meeting can help members to meet their specific need. The question can also be asked by a group greeter or a phone contact person of a new member: "What do you hope to get out of our group?" If the question is asked at meetings of all the members, the answers are often different each time.
2. **If you have any group co-facilitators at your meeting**, be sure to meet with them briefly after the meeting to get everyone's perspective on how the meeting went, to compliment them for good actions they took, and to examine what might have been done differently at that meeting to improve future meetings. - Joyce Venis,
3. Help **publicize your group**, or your interest in starting a group **online**, by occasionally posting a notice on **Craigslist** under their "**Groups**" section for your area of NJ, e.g., north jersey <http://newjersey.craigslist.org/grp/>, or choose "central NJ," "south jersey," and/or "jersey shore" boards.
4. If you have **any member who tends to dominate the discussion** by commenting on what everyone says, at the beginning of the meeting give everyone a few pennies. During the discussion, each time a member speaks they put a penny in a can in the center of the floor or table. When their pennies run out, they can't talk any more.
5. To **determine in which order members will speak**, consider having a sign-in sheet. For each meeting, have a lined piece of paper and number each line going down, from 1 at the top line to say 15 at the bottom. As people go into the meeting, have them sign in at the number in which they want to speak during the meeting (e.g., if someone really needs to talk, they will sign in at number 2 or 3; if someone has nothing urgent to say, they might sign in at 11 or 12). During the group discussion, people will speak according to the order of whatever number they signed in on.
6. For **mutual phone support between meetings**, invite members to put their name and phone number on a piece of paper and collect them in a can. At the end of the meeting as people leave, if they put their name in the can, they take out a name of another member. The members will then call the person, whose name they pulled from the can, some time before the next meeting. That way, each member will have at least two support calls in-between meetings. One to the person whose name they selected out of the can, and another from the person who selected their name out of the can.
7. **Confidentiality** is so vital for self-help groups but people have different definitions of what confidentiality means. Have a group discussion on what confidentiality means to your members and according to what they believe, write up a definition that all your members can agree on to abide by.
8. **To make easier for any member to chair a meeting**, create a meeting script. It will encourage members to take on the group facilitation roles. Just write a script for the meeting, beginning with the start of the meeting to end, e.g., "Hello, my name is _____ and I will be your facilitator tonight. _____ has agreed to read the ground rules for us now. Tonight's topic is _____. Who would like to begin?"
9. If you have trouble recruiting other members to take on roles, **give everyone who helps the title of "Vice President"** for what they do. For example, if you need members to help publicize the group and get new members, assign someone as "Vice President of Publicity." That way, the person feels really good that they have a title, yet it isn't as frightening as being "President."

10. When your group has bonded, spend part of one meeting, simply **having each member write something nice about each other member**. You can give each member a list of members' names and they can write down something they like or admire about each member. Then the sheets are collected and the expressions are noted for each person. Another way is to write the name of each member on a piece of paper. These papers are passed around among the members, and each (except for the person whose name is at the top) will write something they like or admire about the member whose name is at top. In this case, at the end, each member can get their paper with their name on it as a keepsake.
11. If you have **someone in your group who likes to have side conversations**, sit next to them (or have a co-facilitator sit next to them.) In this way, someone is right there to discourage any side conversations.
12. If you have **someone who continually breaks the ground rules** (e.g., using a swear word), keep a can in the middle of the room. Whenever a member breaks a ground rule (e.g., swears), they must put a quarter into the can. This money can be used for a social activity for the group.
13. **If a group member is stuck on a problem**, help them problem solve by role playing the situation. The member can either role play him/herself or the other person that he/she is having a problem with, or both.
14. **If several members are stuck on problems**, toward the end of the meeting, have the group members set one personal goal to achieve before the next meeting (e.g., "I will lose two pounds," or "I will write in my journal three times." At the beginning of the next meeting, have members talk about whether or not they achieved their personal goals. If they didn't, help brainstorm barriers and solutions.
15. **If your group continually has a problem** (e.g., side conversations) use it as a group discussion topic. For example, you can pose the question, "How does it make you feel when you are talking and someone else is having a side conversation?" Some of the answers may include, "I feel like I'm really unimportant." or "It makes me feel invisible." Those who have side conversations will then have the opportunity to learn how their bad behaviors affect the other members.
16. If you have **a member who tends to monopolize the conversation**, develop hand signals that you can use to help the person know when it is time to share the group time. These can include holding up two fingers indicating that they have two minutes left to speak.
17. If, during group discussion, a new topic is brought up that is of interest to the members but you **don't have time to address it, put the topic in a "parking lot."** This just means writing the topic on a piece of paper as a "Parking Lot List" of subjects that is saved – so the topic will be addressed at another time.
18. **Conduct an evaluation** of the group with all the members. What is working well? What is not working? What has contributed to best meetings and worst meetings? Brainstorm on what can be done to improve the group.
19. Spend part of a meeting reviewing what **"active listening skills"** are, and then have members break into pairs to briefly take turns **practicing those skills**.
20. Obtain from the Clearinghouse (or download from the Internet) **icebreakers**, which are structured activities that can warm up, acquaint and energize the group.
21. Brainstorm or just select topics related to the **concerns of the group**, write down each one on a piece of paper and place them in an envelope. Pick one at each meeting for discussion that meeting or the next.
22. If you don't already have one, **develop a mission and/or a vision statement for your group** and read it aloud at the opening of your next meeting for member feedback.
23. Have each member read **one group ground rule out loud** at each meeting and state why it is important that the rule is observed.
24. To avoid a "pity party," whenever anyone talks about a problem, do not go on to the next person until some **possible action toward a solution** for that first person's problem has been discussed.
25. Consider having a **positive "Check-in" question**, that starts the group off on the right foot (and helps avoid any potential "pity party" meeting), e.g., by asking members to introduce themselves and then briefly describe a good experience (a "joyful moment" or "feeling of happiness") which they have had since the last meeting.

26. Make up a **quiz on the issue that your group deals** with to give out at health fairs, speaking engagements, etc. to help attract new members, educate the public, etc.
27. Have members bring in any cartoons, funny stories, etc. dealing with your group's issue (disabilities, health, parenting, etc) or related issues and make a **humorous booklet**. If it's really good, make copies to share.
28. Consider **adding value to your group's flyer or brochure** or a separate handout, by including several helpline phone numbers, local agency numbers, and/or helpful websites. This added value can give a professional or potential member an added reason to hold on to, or post, your flyer/brochure.
29. **Develop a Speaker's Bureau** by asking members if any would be willing to both tell their story and talk about the value of your group before a group of professionals and/or at schools, church or other community groups. In some cases, following a presentation, community service organizations like Kiwanis, etc., may be willing to support your group with a donation or other support. Be sure to mention the availability of your Speaker's Bureau in any group brochure, or at the bottom of a group flyer
30. If you have any worthy news about your group, or if your group might deal with an issue that has hit the news, simply write down why an article on your group would be helpful to people. Then pick up the phone and **call the editor of your local weekly newspaper** (be sure you have his or her name before you do), ask if they have a minute, and if they do, make your best one minute case for their doing an article on your group.
31. If there is a Spanish-speaking community in the area that your group serves, identify any members of your group who speak Spanish, translate your group brochure/flyer into Spanish, and have any Spanish-speaking members available to help **make your support group meetings bilingual**. Since NJ is so ethnically rich, if your community includes another culture, consider doing the same for that language and population.
32. If you don't already have a **logo/symbol for your group**, or from your national organization, consider brainstorming possible ones. Check to see if any members are, or know of any graphic designers who would contribute their services pro bono.
33. Improve your group's community outreach and knowledge of the most helpful books available, approach your local **public library** and ask if they would kindly consider a **display of books and literature related to your group** and the issue it addresses. Try and coordinate it with any special month dedicated to your group's issue, or if none, to January as "Self-Help Group Awareness" month.
34. Consider having a **guest speaker or film presentation** that would be open to, and of interest to, the public. As appropriate, plan to promote it as being sponsored by your group.
35. Consider writing a potential **journal article** on the history, challenges, and benefits of your group. Contact the Clearinghouse for names of journals that now accept "First Person" accounts. Distribute reprints to professionals.
36. See if one or two group members would volunteer to lead a **relaxation exercise**, as part of a meeting.
37. See if one or two group members would volunteer to lead a **visualization exercise**, as part of a meeting.
38. Have a "**Show & Tell**," where each group member brings in something from home that is special to them and discusses why it is so important to them.
39. Have different **members sign up to plan and arrange future programs** of special interest to them, and to help co-facilitate meetings.
40. Consider always having a **wish list of any equipment** or items that your group is in need of which might be donated to your group, e.g., used computer, printer, answering machine, etc. Include this list in any newsletter, at bottom of flyers, etc.
41. Consider compiling a **wish list for any professional help** your group needs. Register your group (often doable online) with your local volunteer center (you can also list with online volunteer recruitment sites like www.volunteermatch.org, www.idealists.org etc.) and request a local or online volunteer to help with publicity, fundraising, or other special need or project your group has. Your request will appear in their listings and can

be renewed each year. While the probability of an immediate response is not high, it can be wonderfully rewarding if a helpful professional responds to your ad and volunteers to help you.

42. To increase members' own sense of responsibility, service, and value to their group, always look for volunteer jobs or "niches of responsibility" that members can assume. There are often at least several national organizations, institutes, professional associations, local agencies, etc. whose work & news would be beneficial to your group. So have different members serve as **your group's liaison** to those different organizations, reporting back to the group on the latest news from their newsletters and activities. As with all other group volunteers, be sure to give these members thanks and recognition as frequently as possible.
43. Before **newcomers** leave the meeting, provide a sign-up sheet, asking if they would provide a first name, phone number and/or e-mail address to be advised if a future meeting is cancelled because of inclement weather or any other reason, as well as to receive information on the next meeting, etc.
44. Soon after **someone new comes to your meeting**, have a volunteer make a follow-up phone call to that person to find out: whether they had anything they wanted to bring up or ask, but didn't; learn if the meeting was what they expected, determine if they have any questions; and to remind them of the next meeting and ask if they think they would be attending.
45. As appropriate, recruit a **volunteer medical advisor** by asking a health professional if they would kindly be available, to advise your group on particular medical questions that may arise which they are able to answer.
46. Consider developing a **group library** of reprints of best newspaper and magazine articles, as well as brochures, books, DVDs, recordings of presentations by guest speakers that might be made available at meetings. Have a can marked for "donations" to cover copying costs. Have one or two group librarians to compile, copy, and set out materials at meetings.
47. When you get newspaper publicity, possibly use it to get **additional media coverage** by having any willing new member(s) who found your group through it, write a letter-to-the-editor thanking the paper for coverage and indicating their initial response to the group.
48. Have interested members review and present on **books or book chapters** for group discussion. Best to have more than one reviewer. Keep alert to new books that come out on your group's issues.
49. To help pay for basic group expenses, a group can always "pass the hat" for donations at the end of a meeting. If additional **donations** are needed, the simplest of all fundraisers to run at any meeting is the 50/50 raffle. Just purchase a circular roll of raffle tickets from a local party supply (making sure this is the type that has two matching tickets – one for purchaser, other for the container). Tickets could be available for something like \$2 each, and 3 for \$5. The winner of the drawing at the end of the meeting gets 50% of the total, with the other 50% going to group expenses.
50. If you are seeking funds for a particularly worthy purchase, consider asking by letter (in person preferred if you have any contact) if any of your local community service organizations (Kiwanis, Junior League, Rotary, etc.), might consider helping your group by their possibly running a **fundraising event** for your group.
51. The longer your group has been meeting, the more you will have a core group of "old" members who will help move discussion along nicely discussion along, while also letting other members know of the group's ground rules. However, be aware of the fact that newcomers are frequently quite "turned off" by the appearance of cliquishness within a group. So, always **avoid the appearance of a favored clique**.
52. Always seek to **start and end** your meetings **on time**, to cut down on latecomers, and to allow members to attend to any responsibilities afterwards.
53. Always have members keep their eyes out for local newspaper, area magazines, or online websites that provide **free listings of support group meetings**, so your group can be included.
54. Some **radio stations**, particularly ones in smaller towns in NJ, will announce meetings and events for local service groups. See that your group is listed.
55. It takes a very special person to reach beyond their own personal or health problems to help others. You will probably already find that you gain even more than you give. The good feeling associated with helping others

is sometimes referred to as the “**helpers high.**” Remember not to be selfish and do all the helping yourself, but permit others within your mutual help group to experience those same good feelings you have by creating opportunities for them to serve and help others in the group.

56. As a leader to whom many turn to, be careful you **do not fall into the trap of becoming seen as “the expert.”** Recognize and remind members that it’s when they pool their experiences and insights that the group actually produces a form of experiential expertise or collective wisdom. That’s why it’s called a support group and not a support person.
57. As more people have an email address, consider generating a **list of members’ email addresses.** Increasingly groups are using email to send quick reminders about meetings and updates on group plans and activities.
58. To develop an **email discussion group for your group,** and also have a website with group files, helpful website links, etc, consider creating a free Yahoo e-mail discussion group for your group members with Internet access. To learn how to do this, go to www.mentalhelp.net/selfhelp/selfhelp.php?id=863 and scroll down to "To Start a Free Online E-mail Discussion Group at Yahoo."
59. Develop a computerized **mailing list of interested professionals** in your area who work with your issues, to whom you can send meeting information and updates. If they permit their e-mail address to be used instead, send information by email to reduce postage costs.
60. First impressions 1 – Have **telephone and/or e-mail contact people** for your group, who are patient and good listeners/readers, reliable at responding to contacts, able to convey how s/he is just one person and how coming to a meeting is where the newcomer tap the collective experiences and knowledge of the group, as well as be able to speak with others who truly understand because they too “have been there” and contribute their own experiences, insights, and hopes.
61. First impressions 2 - **Provide especially good travel directions to your meeting place.** While an increasing number of people have GPS navigation devices, most still depend on the travel directions you give them. Give distances between points, e.g. "Go 0.6 miles and then make a left turn onto..." And add references to landmarks (landmarks assure people that they are not lost), e.g., "After you pass the ball field on your right. People will arrive at the meeting in a better frame of mind and with more confidence in your group, when these little things are done well.
62. First impressions 3 - Next to having co-facilitators for your group, it's important to **have one, hopefully two greeters,** whose job it is to be just outside or by the door to assure newcomers they have the right place, welcome them warmly to the meeting and your community, give them an idea of how the meeting will go, learn what they most want from the group, determine how they learned of your group, and introduce them to members who have similar experiences.
63. **Learn how new members are referred,** while having members keep an eye out for new community and online bulletin boards where information about your group can be posted. Suggest that members might consider keeping a couple of flyers in their car at all times, so they will always be ready to post or hand.
64. **Always thank professionals** who make referrals to your group. Consider recognizing those who provide the most support by having something like a “Professional of the Year Award” which would involve the presentation of an engraved plaque (a newsworthy event too). The presentation might be arranged at meeting of their local professional association or at their agency before an audience.
65. Think about having a **special discussion topic** for meetings. People are more likely to be drawn to your meeting by a specific topic than by a general notice of a support group meeting.
66. **Volunteer as a group.** To build group spirit and increase awareness of you’re your group, consider planning a group volunteer event, e.g., at a local soup kitchen, or helping as a group at a related social service agency (a newsworthy event). Mental health groups and centers can contact the Clearinghouse for a handout with ideas and contacts, “Volunteer Service – A Guide for Mental Health Self-Help Groups & Centers.”
67. **Share a meal.** During the year, consider going out for lunch, dinner, or plan a potluck as a group.

68. In handling **any disagreement** among members, understand that it is easier to address potential conflict before it escalates too far. Allow attendees to disagree, but ask that they do it respectfully. If someone says something that comes across the wrong way, either ask them if they can kindly re-state it or re-state it yourself in a friendlier way.
69. Consider making available a **buddy system** to provide members (especially new members or those in need) with support in between meetings.
70. **Lessons Learned.** Have members share one thing they learned through their most difficult experience.
71. Always be in touch with **your members' specific needs and special interests**. Monitor the expressed needs of new members. Ask members to think about and come to the next meeting with at least one idea of what type of discussion or speaker they would like to have. You can always ask members individually.
72. In seeking out a **good guest speaker**, first tap the contact your members have, since their experience is a good reference and their existing relationship makes it more probable that the person will respond.
73. Instead of a guest speaker, consider a **recorded** or "**canned speaker**," i.e., playing a tape of a good radio interview or program (less than 25 minutes long), conference presentation, portion of a TV program, or a presentation downloaded from the Internet.
74. In asking for a guest speaker or other support from a local hospital, medical center, or other corporation, consider **starting at the top** by sending a letter to the executive director or CEO mentioning the type of speaker or help your group seeks, and if at all possible complementing the official for any other community service which the group has received from the staff.
75. If your group is not incorporated as a non-profit organization, donors cannot receive a **tax credit for donations to your group**. However, you can take advantage of alternative arrangements that would permit donors to receive credit if you find a non-profit fiscal sponsor to receive any major donations for your group, or your group is affiliated with any national non-profit organization.
76. Encourage **experienced members** of your group to remain active with your group in the many ways that they can help newer members while indeed helping themselves, e.g., as positive role models; providing understanding, comfort and hope, that only those who "have been there" can provide; having been helped, remaining to "give back" and help others; and for other similar reasons that thousands of volunteers serve.
77. If your group becomes **too large**, break into smaller group meetings in the same location – if possible by any major distinguishing differences, e.g., patients and family members, divorced and widowed single parents, etc.
78. Groups that exist for years often find they have lost their "**history**" after original founding members have left. To help preserve your group's sense of history and celebrate the group's successes over time, consider having an album or file with flyers, letter or e-mails celebrating successes, copies of any newspaper articles on the group, etc.
79. Members' sharing their experiences, insights, strengths, and hopes has been at the very heart of what mutual aid self-help groups do best. Remember to provide some time for **group discussion** and feedback. Even at meetings where you have a guest speaker, try to permit some time for group discussion of the points made.
80. Always leave some time for informal mixing and **socialization after the meeting** for those members who are interested. This often provides members with an additional opportunity to ask questions, express a concern, or just get to know other members. If the facility is closing at the end of your meeting, some groups "adjourn" to a coffee shop or diner. Be sure to invite newcomers to any such after-meeting gathering.
81. As appropriate to your group, be alert to any **group advocacy** needs that your group should identify and address. Many groups help individual members to learn and practice individual self-advocacy skills. But when the source of the problem rests in the community or society, outside the ability of what the group can address, the group may need to focus upon advocacy or educational efforts of its own to try to correct the problem be in the need for specialized treatment services, public and/or professional education, needed legislation, etc. .

82. Clearinghouse research shows that the most helpful resource for self-help group leaders are other self-help group leaders. Meetings of such leaders, at a statewide coalition meeting or a national conference, is like indeed like having “**a self-help group for self-help group leaders.**” You learn what has worked well in other groups which your group could try. As one group leaders put it, “You learn what things you need to worry about, and what not to worry about.” If you don’t have such support, consider just contacting another similar self-help group to exchange ideas and perspectives.
83. Reach out to other **similar self-help groups** in your surrounding areas to possibly speak at each other’s meetings, to visit and learn from each other’s successes, to identify outstanding speakers, alternately share table at local health fairs, and to possibly join together to sponsor a great speakers together at one common one site.
84. Consider creating a **poster** or mini-poster to help publicize your group. Try contacting a high school or college art department to explore any help available or possibly even conduct an art contest among students.
85. Consider a **business card** to hand out to potential members, professionals, post on bulletin boards, piggyback with any other relevant organization’s mailing, etc. Nancy Conn-Levin, a brain tumor survivor, and co-founder and co-facilitator of the Monmouth & Ocean County Brain Tumor Group **printed** basic info on her group, to include future meeting dates, **on business cards** she made. She created a layout on MS Word, and then had the cards printed on card stock and cut. It was cheaper than paying for business cards, and “very effective” in helping members to remember meeting dates, and in getting referrals. Members posted and gave them out in small quantities to doctors and other health professionals. There are a number of printing companies that offer **free business cards online**, e.g., www.vistaprint.com/free-business-cards.aspx where you pay only the shipping. Some also place digital copies of these cards on their website, e.g., <http://www.rofbucks.net/contact.htm>
86. To **avoid burnout**, consistently strive to delegate group responsibilities from the start. Realize that the work may not be done as well as you feel you could do it, but you belong to a mutual aid group where responsibilities must be shared. Try to pair people together to accomplish particular tasks. Regularly mention to your group that that the responsibilities for running the group must be shared and simply cannot be on the shoulders of just one or two people.
87. If your group is in need of some resources that cost money, remember that it’s sometimes easier to seek the **donation of such products or services** instead by approaching businesses, agencies and professionals to solicit such donated resources, e.g., copying, printing, posting of mail, meeting space, etc.
88. **Explore and tap the Internet.** Encourage your members who are online, to seek out message boards, websites, and online listings – especially those dealing with NJ and your county/area, where information and announcements on your group can be posted.
89. **Ask any supportive professionals** if they would kindly speak to their colleagues, e.g., at a staff meeting, agency coalition meeting, or in informal conversations, about the availability and benefits of your group. Ask if they might write a brief news item in any local professional newsletter about your group. As appropriate volunteer to be available for any training events where a panel of community support group reps may be helpful. Ask if they have any suggestion as to how your group may be better known to professionals.
90. Using a home computer and stock colored paper, print out and cut **your own bookmarks** that can be used to publicize information on your group. Provide copies to members who frequent local public libraries, so they may insert them into current books that deal with your group’s issue (a few groups have been known to practice this same outreach technique in local commercial book stores).
91. **Practice silence.** So, often people are rushing from work or dinner in order to make a meeting. Perhaps a trial run of having a group silence for about 2 or 3 minutes before the meeting begins. This gives folks a chance to “dump at the door,” and bring themselves fully to the meeting.
92. Seek out help in **growing new leadership** within your group by having potential leaders attend group facilitation training workshops provided free here in NJ by our NJ Self-Help Group Clearinghouse, or by any national group or coalition with which your group is affiliated.
93. With the increasing cost of meeting space in the community, it’s still possible to find **some no-cost meeting space** in public libraries, hospitals, and supportive social service agencies. If your group is facing increased costs that it cannot afford, call the Clearinghouse for assistance in identifying alternative free meeting space.

94. **Don't be disheartened with the occasional decline** in meeting attendance numbers – it's normal. Attendance often ebbs and flows in self-help groups. Realize that your goal is to help and support others in their lives, and that can be accomplished well within a small group of three or four.
95. **"People Bring People"** - the most frequent way that a group gets new members is by "word of mouth." So regularly encourage your members to "spread the word," whether it's speaking to a friend or neighbor, or an impromptu discussion with another person in a waiting room.
96. Many professionals simply don't know how helpful and empowering support groups can be for members because they haven't been educated about them in their professional or continuing education. Your members are again in the best spot to actually **educate professionals** - simply by telling professionals who deal with your issue (be that person a doctor, therapist, clergy person, funeral director, or other) their own story of how they have been helped through the group. If the professional provides referrals to the group, they can be thanked. If they don't, they can learn be encouraged by the member to consider letting both other clients and their professional colleagues know.
97. **In seeking volunteers for group tasks**, you and other group leaders need to ask personally. Some people lack confidence that they can do a particular job. So, whenever you ask anyone to volunteer, be sure to point out the talent or ability you've seen in them to do that task, e.g., "We've seen how you're an especially warm and caring person in your helping others here."
98. To help group members better assist other members in problem solving, consider having using a specific **technique for collaborative problem-solving** in your group, e.g., one technique is the: 1) The member describes their PROBLEM and briefly what PRIOR ACTIONS they already have taken to try to resolve it; 2) Other members, speaking from their own experience and knowledge of resources, brainstorm possible OPTIONS as to what might help; and the member then picks then picks the best option or GOAL s/he will try before the next meeting.
99. Always remember to **consistently voice appreciation for the work and efforts** of your members and supporters – not only at meetings, but through thank-you notes, emails, inclusion of their names (as appropriate) in newsletter articles and any press release, including them in photographs., and even your local volunteer agency award nominations.
100. Try to get at **least one newspaper to do a good article on your group** – a newspaper article both tells your story and helps to legitimize your group (the latter showing that at least a reporter has checked out your group). A good article has value well after the time it's published. You can make copies any time you want, and include them in your outreach efforts and along with correspondence to give people an overview of your group. Before calling a newspaper to ask if they would consider a story, first make a list of the different reasons why your group is newsworthy. If possible and appropriate for your group, consider asking a supportive professional, who is knowledgeable about both your group's issue and the value of your group, if s/he is willing to speak to a reporter about your group and the issue your group focuses upon (it can even be a professional or researcher at a state or national office). Then when calling the newspaper (begin by just picking up the phone and calling to ask for the editor – begin with a local weekly paper), briefly mention your points and the fact that the professional is also available for an interview.
101. Finally, here's an idea suggested by Bonnie Rosenthal, founder of the Succasunna Depression & Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA) support group. A helpful technique for both outreach, and even fundraising too, is to consider approaching **local supermarkets to ask permission to provide information on your group at the entrance**. Often you can set up a card table, have literature available, and even have a jar for donations. Bonnie described how, "We had so many people who just wanted to talk to those of us who volunteered, and we grossed over \$700 by sitting outside 3 stores on 3 separate Saturdays."

Looking for more ideas? Call us at the Clearinghouse at **1-800-367-6274**.

Have an idea you would like to share? E-mail us at ed@selfhelpgroups.org Or phone us at all us at the Clearinghouse at **1-800-367-6274**. If we add your idea, we'll credit you and/or your group.