

Begin a New Life

Ongoing Support Group Meeting Description

Introduction

Each meeting of a *BNL Ongoing Support Group* has a start time and an end time. Frequency and length of meetings is determined by the group. Quiet music can be played as people arrive and/or during the first two activities—*Opening Prayer* and *Reading*.

Opening Prayer

The meeting begins with an opening prayer offered by the group leader, or by another member of the group.

Reading

The *Opening Prayer* is followed by an inspirational reading from the Bible—often from the book of Psalms. The reading is selected ahead of time and read out loud either by the group leader, or by another member of the group.

Check-in

Following the *Reading* is *Check-in*. *Check-in* is a time for hearing from each member of the group. People share one highlight from their day or week, or an opening thought (*one* of these things, not both). *Check-in* gives each person a chance to start actively engaging in the meeting's activities. People who prefer to listen and not speak may "pass" on their turn. If the group is larger than eight people, consider breaking into groups of four to eight.

The key to *Check-in* is keeping it brief. Each person says just one, two, or a few sentences. There is typically no cross talk or conversation during *Check-in*, though this can be at the discretion of the leader. The group leader (and others within the group) acknowledge each person's contribution with the words "Thank you" before moving on to the next person. The total time of *Opening Prayer*, *Reading*, and *Check-in* doesn't exceed fifteen minutes.

Group Business

Following *Check-in* is *Group Business*. *Group Business* is a time for any announcements or group decisions that need to be made. *Group Business* happens quickly.

Cont.

Group Sharing

Following *Group Business*, the bulk of the meeting is given over to *Group Sharing*. This requires some explanation:

- **Three meeting types**

There are three different meeting types that have been developed around the *BNL* process. They're known as a *Step* meeting, a *Topic* meeting, and a *Process* meeting:

1. **A *Step* meeting** is one in which *Group Sharing* is devoted to people's experience of one particular step in the *BNL* process. The purpose of *Step* meetings is to help people stay focused on the steps of the process in their thinking and in their daily lives. Which step the group focuses on in a *Step* meeting is decided by a group member, either in advance of the meeting or at the start of it. Sharing can focus on any of the four main steps in the *BNL* process, or on one of its sub-steps (for example, Step 2.1, Step 4.1, etc.). Sharing is initiated by the group leader posing a question: "What is your experience of living this step of the process?"
 2. **A *Topic* meeting** is one in which group sharing is devoted to a particular topic of discussion. The topic is determined ahead of time by one of the members of the group. If possible, the topic is communicated to the group in advance of the meeting. This gives people time to think about the topic ahead of time. The topic can be something related to life change and spiritual transformation, or it can be anything else that the group might wish to discuss. (One available resource is *90 Topics for Sharing and Discussion* on the *Ongoing Support Group* page of the *BNL* website.)
 3. **A *Process* meeting** asks group members to go through the *BNL* process ahead of time using a new sets of worksheets, then to come to the meeting ready to share their experience of doing so. Sharing is initiated by the group leader posing a question: "What was your experience of going through the full *BNL* process?"
- These three meeting types happen in any order or rotation as desired by the group. As an example, the original *BNL* support group alternates between a *Step* meeting and a *Topic* meeting every other time, with a *Process* meeting happening four times a year—the first week of January, April, July, and October. A group that wants to focus more on the *steps* of the process will increase the ratio of *Step* meetings to *Topic* meetings. A group that wants to focus more on the *overall process* will increase the number of *Process* meetings in a year. And so on.

Leading Edge or Personal Time

Following *Group Sharing* is *Leading Edge*. *Leading Edge* requires some explanation, as follows:

- People who utilize the *BNL* process on a regular basis often enjoy a wealth of "leading edge" experiences, insights, and personal revelations. *Leading Edge* is a time for each person briefly to share *one* of these with the group.

- Alternatively, *Leading Edge* can be replaced by *Personal time*. *Personal time* is available on request to any member of the group. It's a time when one individual can share with the group a personal struggle that he or she is facing, and gain the groups support in facing it. The person who requests *Personal Time* describes his or her struggle, how he or she is utilizing the *BNL* process in addressing it, how the process is working, etc.

Closure

The last part of the meeting is *Closure*. There are four parts to *Closure*, as follows. The total time of *Closure* doesn't exceed 10 minutes.

- **Closing Thoughts**

The first part of *Closure* is *Closing Thoughts*. *Closing Thoughts* is a time for hearing a final, brief thought from each member of the group. It allows people to remain actively engaged to the end of the meeting and to "check out". People who prefer to listen and not speak may "pass" on their turn. If the group is larger than eight people, consider breaking into groups of four to eight.

Closing Thoughts happens fairly quickly, with each person saying just one or two sentences. There is no cross talk or conversation during *Closing Thoughts*. The group leader (and others within the group) acknowledge each person's contribution with the words "Thank you" before moving on to the next person.

- **Leader for the next meeting**

Following *Closing Thoughts*, the group chooses a leader for the next meeting. This responsibility may be assumed on a volunteer or rotational basis.

- **Person responsible for choosing the next meeting's *Step* or *Topic***

After a leader has been chosen for the next meeting, a decision is made for who will choose the *Step* or *Topic* for that meeting. This responsibility may also be assumed on a volunteer or rotational basis. If the meeting is already scheduled as a *Process* meeting, that fact is announced to the group.

- **The Lord's Prayer**

The meeting ends with *The Lord's Prayer*. Group members stand, hold hands, and say the prayer together. Those who prefer to listen may do so.