

Begin a New Life

Full Description of Support Group Meetings and How They Work

Start and end time

Each *BNL* support group meeting has a start time and an end time, and it's divided into several parts. Meetings run for one hour unless otherwise determined by the group.

Opening Prayer

The meeting begins with a spontaneous prayer offered by the group leader, a member of the group, or several people creating an "additive" prayer. (An additive prayer is one in which each person adds a sentence or two to what others have said before them, and it ends when the group leader says "Amen.")

Check-in

The opening prayer is followed by a time for *Check-in*. *Check-in* is a time for hearing from each member of the group. People state their name and share one highlight from their day or week or an opening comment (*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 group leader). The leader and other attendees acknowledge each person's contribution with the words "Thank you" before moving on to the next person.

Group business

Following *Check-in* is *Group Business*. *Group Business* is a time for any announcements or group decisions that need to be made. If there are no announcements or decisions, this part of the meeting is skipped. As with *Check-in*, *Group Business* moves quickly.

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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 Support Group* model. 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 awareness and in their daily lives. Sharing can focus on any of the four main steps of 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 doing this step of the process?" Prior to the meeting, a member of the group decides which step the group will focus on. This responsibility is assumed on a volunteer, rotational, or assigned basis. The person announces his or her decision at the start of *Group Sharing*.
 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. This responsibility is assumed on a volunteer, rotational, or assigned basis. 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 the group might be interested in discussing. One available resource is *90 Topics for Sharing and Discussion* on the *Start or Join a Support Group* page of the *BNL* website.)
 3. **A *Process* meeting** asks group members to go through the entire *BNL* process in advance of the meeting using a fresh set of worksheets, then 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 entire *BNL* process?"
- These three meeting types happen in any order or rotation as desired by the group. For example, a group may alternate between a *Step* meeting and a *Topic* meeting every other time, with a *Process* meeting happening biannually or four times a year. 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.

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“Leading Edge” or “Personal Time”

Following *Group Sharing* is *Leading Edge* or *Personal Time*. This requires some explanation:

- People who use the *BNL* process on a regular basis often enjoy a wealth of “leading edge” or “cutting edge” experiences, insights, personal revelations, or “Aha moments.” *Leading Edge* is a time for each person briefly to share *one* of these with the group, if they’ve recently had one.
- Alternatively, *Leading Edge* can be replaced by *Personal time*. *Personal time* is available to any member of the group upon request. It’s a time when any one individual can share with the group a personal struggle that he or she is facing, and gain the group’s support in dealing with it. The person who requests *Personal Time* describes his or her struggle and seeks the group’s support.

Closure

The final part of the meeting is *Closure*. The total time for this part of the meeting doesn’t exceed 15 minutes. There are four parts of *Closure* as follows:

- **Leader for the next meeting**
If the support group will have multiple leaders, a decision is made for who will lead the next meeting. This responsibility is assumed on a volunteer, rotational, or requested basis.
- **Person responsible for choosing the next meeting's *Step* or *Topic***
If the next meeting will be a *Step* or *Topic* meeting, a decision is made as to who will choose the *Step* or *Topic*. This responsibility is assumed on a volunteer, rotational, or assigned basis. If the meeting is already scheduled to be a *Process* meeting, the group leader announces this.
- **Closing comments**
Closing Comments is a time for hearing a final, brief comment from each member of the group. It allows people to remain actively engaged to the end and “check out” of the meeting. People who prefer to listen and not speak may “pass” when it’s their turn. If the group is larger than eight people, consider breaking into groups of four to eight.
Closing Comments happens fairly quickly, with each person saying just one or two sentences. There’s no cross talk or conversation during *Closing Comments*. The group leader and other attendees acknowledge each person’s contribution with the words, “Thank you,” before moving on to the next person. The total time for *Closing Comments* doesn’t exceed 10 minutes.
- **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.