

# **Group Exercises For Enhancing Social Skills and Self-Esteem**

**(Volume 2)**

SiriNam S. Khalsa



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# FOREWORD

What a delight to come across a solid, well-written, and easily understood book that guides the human resources worker through the pitfalls of the social world. SiriNam Khalsa's book, *Group Exercises for Enhancing Social Skills and Self-Esteem (Volume 2)*, is a gem of a book written in a style that is accessible to the professional and the layperson alike. It charts the territory that every child, adolescent, and young adult must map in his or her own journey to maturity and responsibility in the modern world.

The goals SiriNam Khalsa outlines from the very beginning let the reader know the scope and content of this book. The approach is a clear, cognitive-behavioral one in which the gradual exploration of the outer social world with its many ups and downs are mirrored in the inner world of self-esteem, self-image, and all the shifting matrices of an emerging identity. The goals are simple and clearly written. Being successful in that simplicity is the bedrock of how we prosper and thrive in the world of relationships with others, our society, our family, and ourselves.

For the beginner in this area there are clearly articulated roles and skills for the group leader on many projects. For the professional there are new and supplemental ideas to round out a program already in place. It is workable for the inpatient and the outpatient setting, and most definitely a reliable guide to the endless demands placed upon the skilled human services worker.

I found clear sections on working with mild depression, with issues of self-esteem, and that internal critic that holds the young person back from emerging into the full positive light of his or her own identity. Each exercise has not only a discussion, but also a direct application. The worker who uses it will not get lost in the details. In this way it is both a highly structured guide, and at the same time, one that offers flexibility to adopt to one's particular circumstances.

Because of his success with the first book of exercises, the author developed 60 new items for Volume 2. Detailed exercises on teaching the person in need of social skills the nuts and bolts of *how* to ask for help, of *how* to deal with peer pressure, and how to recognize the *real* stress embedded in new social situations is a strong pillar of the book. While some guides offer behavioral changes and others offer psychological understanding, this little gem of a book adds *both* to the mix in a clear, workable approach.

If you are a human services worker looking for a source book for group skills learning or a professional seeking additional techniques for your job, SiriNam Khalsa's book will find a welcome place on your bookshelf.

*Edward Bruce Bynum, PhD, ABPP*  
*Director of Behavioral Medicine*  
*University of Massachusetts Health Services*  
*Author of The African Unconscious and*  
*Families and the Interpretation of Dreams*  
*September 1999*

# PREFACE

It is with enthusiastic support that I write the "Preface" for the second volume of *Group Exercises for Enhancing Social Skills and Self-Esteem*.

As educators, counselors, and people in the helping profession, we have a tremendous responsibility to reach and teach all people who are in need of a healthy self-esteem. SiriNam Khalsa has once again developed a creative collection of group exercises which enhance the foundation for self-esteem growth and social skills awareness.

Today's educators and counselors carry added responsibilities because significant social changes have had an impact on human relationships. Family constellations have shifted toward an increasing amount of single parenting as well as a loosening of family ties. Young people are exposed to influences that tend to foster aggressive behavior and messages that lack guidance based in values that support personal well-being. Consequently, stresses in many families and classrooms are often high.

SiriNam has read the signposts and once again has responded with a practical series of activities designed to aid the experienced as well as beginning group leader in giving help to those in need. I believe this book can assist any professional who works with groups in a variety of settings with the admirable and essential job of helping others gain a greater understanding of themselves and, therefore, others.

*Jack Canfield*  
*President of the Foundation for Self-Esteem*  
*Culver City, California*  
*Seminar Leader, Co-Author of the Bestselling*  
*Chicken Soup for the Soul series and*  
*Self-Esteem in the Classroom*  
*September 1999*





# INTRODUCTION

When I decided to compile and publish the activities and therapeutic exercises in my first book, *Group Exercises for Enhancing Social Skills and Self-Esteem*, my goal was to share successful strategies that have been used with a diverse population of children and young adults of various ages who have the basic need of learning and then internalizing appropriate ways to behave around others. The goals of these exercises are to give group members the ability to control a situation by actively participating in and contributing to the social outcome. I understand the need for a flexible, ready-to-use activities program that will support all professionals who work toward actively teaching these goals. The overwhelmingly positive response to my first book inspired me to compile an additional 60 exercises that will continue to assist psychologists, teachers, occupational and recreational therapists, and other group leaders to be more creative and effective in their group work.

These exercises are designed to help a wide range of individuals, including those who display hyperactivity or attention deficit disorder (ADD or ADHD), depression, personality or adjustment disorders, developmental and learning disabilities, and general social skills deficits, to become aware of acceptable social behaviors and develop proficiencies in improving their social skills. These exercises have also been successfully used with regular and special needs middle school-aged children.

The exercises in Volume 2 of *Group Exercises for Enhancing Social Skills and Self-Esteem* encourage the development of the types of prosocial skills that ultimately enhance feelings of well-being, self-empowerment, and ultimately positive self-esteem. These exercises are equally applicable for use in both inpatient and outpatient settings, including mental health facilities, residential and day treatment programs, schools, vocational and life-skill training programs, rehabilitation and chronic care facilities, and so on.

## ABOUT THIS BOOK

All of the exercises in this book are designed to stimulate group members to think creatively, expand their minds, explore their values and beliefs, and safely consider change where change is needed for personal growth. The skills that group members can acquire through these exercises should serve them well in their real day-to-day social environment. These basic social skills are the foundation building blocks for healthy human interactions in all settings. The acquisition of these skills can also be very empowering and beneficial to the self-esteem of all group participants.

The exercises in this book will help group leaders accomplish several important tasks with the group participants:

1. Guide participants in *acquiring an awareness* of what is acceptable social behavior. Each exercise includes a discussion of the importance of the concepts presented. These active discussions will aid in helping participants increase their knowledge and understanding of appropriate behaviors in a prosocial fashion.
2. Provide participants with opportunities for hands-on *practice* of new social skills in a nonthreatening environment.

Based on many years experience leading social skills training groups, I have found that in order for individuals to actually consider changing their behaviors, they need both the *awareness* of appropriate social behaviors and opportunities to *practice* new behavioral alternatives. Only when both elements are present will they learn to *use* their new skills in a personally satisfying and socially appropriate manner. Intellectual understanding of appropriate behaviors is not sufficient; individuals must also practice performing the new behaviors until they find a behavioral style that is comfortable and rewarding (both personally and socially).

Therefore, one of the tasks for the group leader is the active and deliberate teaching of desirable behaviors on both cognitive and behavioral levels. The leader will also find that these exercises will help group members develop a sense of group connectedness and cooperation. Less verbally expressive members of the group will also be motivated to more actively participate in the group process and will begin to feel more competent and positive as a result of their participation.

## ENHANCING SELF-ESTEEM

As will be described below, a primary goal for therapists, teachers, and group leaders is to increase the self-esteem of group participants. This book presents direct, uncomplicated, and nonthreatening exercises to advance that goal.

### WHAT IS SELF-ESTEEM?

Before we can identify low self-esteem, we need to understand what self-esteem is. We hear the word a lot these days, but what is it really? How is self-esteem enhanced or eroded in school, at work, in a family system, and during social interactions in the community? What is the relationship between self-esteem and antisocial behavior? What is the role of self-esteem in assisting group members to become what Abraham Maslow called the "self-actualized person" and the "fully human person"? (Maslow, 1962).

Self-esteem affects virtually every facet of our life. Self-esteem refers to how highly we value ourselves. It comes from collective thoughts, feelings, and experiences we have had and continue to have about ourselves throughout life. Self-esteem has been defined by the National Association for Self-Esteem as follows: "*Self-esteem is the experience of being capable of managing life's challenges and being worthy of happiness*" (1995). People who feel good about themselves usually express their feelings in their behavior as well as in an openness to learn and grow from life's lessons. They are more able to meet and solve the problems, stresses, and responsibilities of life with confidence.

### SIGNS OF LOW SELF-ESTEEM

People can manifest low self-esteem in many ways. They may not even be aware that they do not feel good about themselves, though they know something is wrong.

A pioneer in self-esteem research, Nathaniel Branden (1969), explains it this way:

Consider that if an individual felt inadequate to face the challenges of life, if an individual lacked fundamental self-trust, confidence in his or her mind, we would recognize the presence of a self-esteem deficiency, no matter what other assets he or she possessed. Or if an individual lacked a basic sense of self-respect, or felt undeserving of love, unentitled to happiness, fearful of asserting thoughts, feelings or needs—again we would recognize a self-esteem deficiency, no matter what other positive attributes he or she exhibited. (p. 22)

Some common signs of low self-esteem are whining, needing to win, cheating in games, perfectionism, and exaggerated bragging; resorting to numerous attention-getting behaviors such as clowning, acting overly silly, teasing, complaining, and exhibiting both verbal and physical aggression; being self-critical, overpleasing, criticism avoidant, withdrawn, blaming, always apologizing, and fearful of success and new experiences; over- and underreacting, being unable to make choices or solve problems; expressing a narrow range of emotions and feelings, demeaning one's own talents, avoiding anxiety-provoking situations, and exhibiting antisocial behaviors.

Dealing directly with group members' self-esteem to promote healthy, socially accepted behaviors as opposed to using external punishers and reinforcers is analogous to curing illness by treating the cause rather than providing temporary relief by treating the symptoms. The exercises in this book can assist the group leader as well as empower group participants to directly promote self-esteem and prosocial skills. In a controlled study in three school districts (Reasoner, 1992), the use of a self-esteem program based on systematic training was found to significantly reduce the incidence of antisocial behavior in schools.

When people exhibit poor social skills and low self-esteem, the process of regaining their self-confidence to change behaviors and attitudes takes time. With consistent focus, the group leader can create opportunities for all group members to get in touch with their own potency and feel comfortable in their group environment as well as in themselves. The second volume of *Group Exercises for Enhancing Social Skills and Self-Esteem* can help people give up negative self-messages and develop positive ones.

## GENERAL GUIDELINES

This book provides the group leader with a series of structured exercises that promote dynamic positive group interactions and learning experiences. Most exercises are accompanied by an activity sheet which will serve as the catalyst for group discussions and interactions. Step-by-step instructions for the group are also included with each exercise. This format enables the group leader to "teach to the objective" in a way that is not only easier and more efficient in terms of effort and time, but also fulfills prevailing clinical and educational needs for accountability.

The following suggestions should be considered when using these exercises:

1. Before beginning each group session, identify your goals for that session, select appropriate exercises to further those goals, and review the instructions for those exercises. Make sure you have sufficient quantities of all required materials to conduct the exercises; the necessary materials are listed at the beginning of each exercise.
2. State the purpose of each exercise before it begins. This will focus both the leader and the group on the goals for the session and will help participants understand the benefits of active participation. If group members regard an exercise as meaningful in their lives, they are far more likely to be active participants who learn from the experience.

3. The description of each exercise acts as a basic road map that will assist the leader in “teaching to the objective.” Each group discussion description provides in-depth directions on how the leader can promote verbal interaction, skill enhancement, and group cooperation.
4. The leader may periodically want to modify an exercise to insure that it more effectively addresses the needs of group members. Many of the exercises include suggestions for possible variations and adaptations.
5. In my experience, understanding and acceptance of the concept of diversity can best be accomplished by forming groups in which group members represent a wide range of abilities, interests, aptitudes, and backgrounds. Such heterogeneous grouping is preferred while simultaneously attempting to form a homogeneous group with respect to shared social skill deficits.
6. Participants learn best when they have an emotional investment in what is being taught. For that reason, many of the exercises in this book are “open ended” in a way that permits the leader to encourage participants to attach personal experiences, thoughts, and emotions to them.

## A FEW WORDS ABOUT COOPERATIVE LEARNING

Dishon and Wilson O’Leary (1994) present a *cooperative learning* model that increases the effectiveness of the learning environment when teaching academic and social skills, as well as democratic values.

The therapeutic exercises presented in this book adhere to the basic principles of *cooperative learning models*:

1. *Heterogeneous Grouping*. The most effective groups are varied in terms of social background, cognitive skill levels, gender, and physical capabilities. The group is randomly formed or selected by the group leader to insure heterogeneity.
2. *Social Skills Acquisition*. Social skills or the ability to work cooperatively are learned skills that can be directly taught. As group participants practice the skill-building exercises, discuss the process, and observe the group interactions, they learn cooperative social skills.

Although group leaders can effectively use the exercises in this book without extensive training in group process or the concepts of cooperative learning, references are included for those readers who may want to learn more about the principles and implementation of cooperative group strategies.

## YOUR ROLE AS GROUP LEADER

The group leader needs to:

1. Diagnose and understand the needs of group members including their social skill deficits and dimensions of their self-esteem.
2. Introduce exercises and facilitate meaningful group activities and discussion. It is essential that the leader be adequately prepared for each group session. This includes thoughtful consideration of the goals for the session, needs of group mem-

bers, and how to teach to the objective, as well as preparation for leading the group in the specific exercises chosen for the session.

3. Know when to observe and when to guide the group process.
4. Facilitate discussion with both large and small groups.
5. Adapt the content and process of each session and each exercise to the specific needs of the group and the members of the group.
6. Introduce each exercise in a way that “sets the stage” for the participants and prepares them for the task that follows. It is critically important that all group members understand what they are being asked to do. If some members don’t understand, the leader might encourage other group members to help increase their understanding. Such mentoring by group members increases group cohesiveness, cooperation, and the group learning process.
7. Expect to see an increased awareness among group members of their attitudes, beliefs, and feelings. The effective group leader learns to tap into this awareness to help group members increase their self-awareness, sense of self (including self-esteem), and positive behaviors.

Here are some additional thoughts and suggestions for the novice group leader:

1. Choose the setting for the group carefully. When participants are in a comfortable and relaxed environment, they will typically behave in a more relaxed fashion and will be more comfortable in expressing themselves. Consider having group members sit in a circle, because this arrangement promotes eye contact, interaction, and cohesiveness.
2. In general, restrain your urge to fill silence with questions or recounting of personal experiences. It sometimes takes time and a little silent support for group members to collect their thoughts, recall personal experiences, convey their feelings, and think about what they want to say. Be patient.
3. Encourage all group members to participate by making the group a safe and supportive place for all members to express themselves. Establish a climate within the group where all members always have the freedom to respond, or not respond, without fear of judgment, sanction, or pressure from others.
4. Trust is an essential ingredient for furthering human relationships. In order for the group to progress in pursuing the goals and reaching the objectives of these exercises, the group leader must foster the development of a climate of trust in which group members feel genuine caring and empathy.

## USING THE EXPRESSIVE ARTS

The exercises in this book rely heavily upon the expressive mediums of writing, drawing, and role playing to facilitate changes in social skills and self-concept. There is a saying: “If you want to know something, read it; if you want to learn something, write it; and if you want to master something, experience and teach it.” Teaching social skills and enhancing self-esteem is a process that can be greatly enhanced by encouraging participation in these nonthreatening exercises which promote critical thinking through the expressive mediums of reading and writing, and mastering through role playing and experiencing.

Abraham Maslow identified “learning one’s identity” as an essential ingredient for personal change. He stressed that psychoeducation that incorporates the expressive arts

“can be a glimpse into one’s ultimate values” (Maslow, 1962). In my experience, integrating the use of the expressive arts into social skills training provides nonthreatening modalities for helping group members discover their hidden abilities and increase their sense of self-worth.

The director of the New England Art Therapy Institute, Dale Schwartz, believes that using art as an expressive medium can provide people of all ages and learning styles with concrete images that help them reflect and find the power to change. She also stated that “the use of the expressive arts helps us express feelings and ideas for which we might not have words. It also gives us a safe way to express ourselves” (D. Schwartz, 1995, New England Art Therapy Institute).

When introducing these exercises, remind participants that artistic talent is not important; instead, stress that what is important is the willingness of all group members to freely express themselves. The group leader should also emphasize the noncompetitive and nonjudgmental nature of these exercises and insure compliance with that mandate. Edith Kramer emphasized that “when self-esteem is low, competition does not act as a stimulus; it leads to despair” (1971).

## **SELECTING EXERCISES**

The list below suggests exercises that might be most helpful for the various stages in the group process. It also includes the types and ages of participants that might benefit most from each exercise.

### **Exercises especially effective for groups in their early stages of development**

Exercises 1, 10, 16, 22, 35, 36, 58

### **Exercises especially effective for groups in their later stages of development**

Exercises 2, 3, 5, 7, 13, 14, 17, 19, 23, 24, 27, 30, 31, 32, 34, 39, 40, 42, 45, 46, 47, 49, 50, 52, 53, 54, 59

### **Exercises especially effective for groups in any stage of development**

Exercises 1, 4, 6, 8, 9, 11, 12, 15, 18, 20, 21, 25, 26, 28, 29, 31, 33, 37, 41, 43, 44, 48, 51, 55, 56, 57, 60

### **Exercises especially effective for groups with participants displaying Hyperactive or Attention Deficit Disorders (ADD or ADHD)**

Exercises 4, 5, 6, 10, 11, 15, 17, 18, 20, 21, 22, 26, 31, 32, 35, 37, 38, 44, 51, 58

### **Exercises especially effective for younger-aged group participants**

Exercises 9, 12, 14, 15, 16, 22, 25, 32, 33, 45

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## EXERCISE 1

# Being a Good Listener

### Purpose:

1. To develop an understanding of careful listening skills.
2. To define what it takes to be a good listener.

### Materials:

One copy of "Being a Good Listener" activity sheet for each member; newsprint or chalkboard; writing materials.

### Description:

- A. The group leader asks a few questions pertaining to things people enjoy listening to.
- B. Each participant is asked the question, "Why is it important to be a good listener?" As the group generates reasons statements, all responses, including the leader's, are written on a chalkboard or newsprint.
- C. The responses are reviewed by reading each response and discussing its importance.
- D. Each participant is asked to pair up with a partner and answer the questions asked on the activity sheet.
- E. Members are asked to voluntarily share their answers with the group.

### Group Discussion:

- The group leader can ask questions such as: "What are some things people like listening to? A favorite song? Musical instrument? A humorous radio disc jockey? The voice of a close friend calling you on the telephone? The sound of your dog barking welcoming you when you come home? The cheering of fans at a sporting event? There are a lot of things we like to listen to."
- The group leader then explains the importance of being both a good listener and a good speaker to experience social success, but this activity will focus on *how to be a good listener*.
- Reasons for why it's important to listen to other people should include the following:
  - ✓ People want to talk about what is on their mind.
  - ✓ It makes people feel important to be listened to.
  - ✓ You can learn things from others by really listening to what they have to say.
- When discussing the group's answers, members can offer personal examples.
- This exercise can be used with a variety of age groups at all stages of development.

## EXERCISE 1 ACTIVITY SHEET

# Being a Good Listener

**Directions:** After reading or having your partner read the story below, fill in the answers to the sentences.

People listen to other people for many reasons. Would you listen to a friend if he or she had a problem? People often want to talk about what is on their mind. It helps if they know someone is really listening. It shows that you really care.

It feels really good when you know someone stops talking to listen to what you have to say. People feel important when you take the time to listen to what they have to say. While you are listening, you may also learn a lot. There are so many interesting things you can learn by really listening. If someone is teaching you something or giving you directions, you have to listen to learn. Have you ever gotten lost because you didn't follow someone's directions? Listening not only can be fun but can save time as well!

### WHAT ARE SOME REASONS TO BE A GOOD LISTENER?

1. People talk for many reasons. They want to \_\_\_\_\_ about what's on their mind.
2. When you listen to someone, it shows that you really \_\_\_\_\_.
3. People feel \_\_\_\_\_ when you listen to them.
4. While you listen to someone, you can also \_\_\_\_\_ about a lot of interesting things.
5. If someone is teaching you something, you must listen to \_\_\_\_\_.
6. Listening can be fun and also save \_\_\_\_\_.

## EXERCISE 2

# Who's a Good Listener?

### **Purpose:**

1. To gain greater awareness of what entails being a good listener.
2. To develop group connectiveness around a focused objective.

### **Materials:**

Copies of the activity sheet "Who's a Good Listener?" for each participant; chalkboard.

### **Description:**

- A. The group leader introduces the activity by telling the group members that they will be asked to first listen to a story about four friends talking and "listening" to each other. Then the members will identify which characters in the story were the good listeners.
- B. After reading the story, the leader will pass out activity sheets to four volunteers who will take a character role and read it out loud while the rest of the group listens again.
- C. The volunteers are then asked to role play the story as if they were really talking to each other. The activity sheet can be used as a guide.
- D. Members are then asked to form small groups of four and take turns answering the discussion questions. After 5-10 minutes the leader will facilitate a discussion of their answers.

### **Group Discussion:**

- When discussing the responses to the discussion questions, the leader explains that it is through the mode of listening that we can learn a lot about people we are interacting with. It's important to state that it may not always be easy—in fact, often difficult—to be quiet and to really concentrate on what someone is saying. But this skill is well worth developing.
- When participants give their responses to the questions asked on the activity sheet, the group leader asks them to find evidence in the story that supports their answer.
- It can be helpful to write down on a chalkboard the answers to the question, "How could Jose's listening have helped Ananda?" Responses can include: Let Ananda get her feelings out, and/or help do some problem solving.
- This exercise is most effective with groups that are beyond the early stage of development and have established some interpersonal communication skills.

## EXERCISE 2 ACTIVITY SHEET

# Who's a Good Listener?

**Directions:** After reading and role playing this conversation, discuss the questions below.

### ROLE-PLAY 1

**Characters:** José, David, Ananda, and Tanya—four friends

**Setting:** Waiting in line at a movie

**Goal:** Identify the good listener(s)

- David:** José, Tanya, you guys are late. Where's Ananda?
- José:** Yeah, I had to wait to get a ride from my sister, and then Tanya wasn't ready when we got to her house!
- Tanya:** I told you I was on the phone with Ananda and, oh here she comes. Hey, Ananda, what's up? We were wondering if you were going to make it.
- Ananda:** (*Sadly*) Yeah, I know. My father is having trouble getting around and needs help with stuff like walking up the stairs and putting his coat on. He thinks he might need another operation and that means I'd have to take care of my little brother.
- David:** (*Sympathetically*) Wow, that sounds like a real drag.
- Ananda:** It is, and I think. . . .
- Tanya:** My little sister is a real pain. I can't wait until she gets her own room.
- David:** Why does your father need an operation?
- Ananda:** He hurt his back at work and it's not getting any better—
- José:** My father is always complaining about his health. He smokes a pack of cigarettes a day! Does anyone have a smoke?
- Tanya:** José, you don't smoke.
- José:** Just kidding (*turns to Ananda*). Will your father be able to drive us to the party this Saturday?
- Ananda:** Well, I don't know . . . it depends if—
- José:** Hey, there's Steve! Let's let him get in line with us (*begins waving his hand to get Steve's attention*).

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Who do you think were good listeners?
2. Why?
3. How could you tell that José wasn't interested in listening to Ananda?
4. How about Tanya? Did she show good listening skills?
5. What was bothering Ananda? How could her friends' listening have helped her?
6. If you were Ananda, what would you have done in this situation?

