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Strengthening Organizations, Strengthening Communities

SUGGESTIONS ON LOCATING A MEETING PLACE

Used with permission from NJ & American Self-Help Group Clearinghouses, www.selfhelpgroups.org

The most obvious place to have a small meeting, especially a first meeting of your core group, is in someone's house. If you expect more people than such a space can hold, or if you do not wish to open your home to people who are (initially) strangers, consider the possibilities listed below:

- 1. Churches and synagogues are the most common public meeting place for self-help groups. They seem the most cooperative. Contact your local pastor, rabbi or parish priest and request a room for your meeting.
2. Your local YMCA/YWCA also provides meeting space for self-help groups. Contact the community relations staff person at the "Y."
3. Community organizations or agencies such as Community Mental Health Centers, Red Cross, Salvation Army, Rotary, Lions, Kiwanis, or Senior Citizens centers will often provide space free of charge for self-help group meetings.
4. Your local library, bank, municipal town hall, or community college are other facilities where self-help groups have held meetings.
5. Hospitals are another option, especially if your group is health related. Contact the community relations staff person or the social services department to arrange for a meeting space.

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The room should be large enough to hold 15 to 20 people. Availability of a kitchen or at least a sink with running water is desirable for making coffee or other refreshments. It is helpful to place chairs in a circle or around a table, or several tables pushed together. In this way, members may face each other and the atmosphere is friendlier and more supportive. A table can serve to display books, pamphlets, articles, announcements, and other printed materials. A small amount of storage space can also be helpful for storing supplies, books, etc.

When inquiring about a meeting place for your group, be sure to communicate the fact that your group is a voluntary non-profit organization that intends to provide a service to the public free of charge. Be clear on when your meetings will take place, how long they will be, and who will be responsible for opening and closing the facility. Such attention to detail will serve you and your group well.