



# POWER TOOLS

## WAYS TO BUILD A SELF-HELP GROUP

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"Self-help is barn raising revisited."

-- Len Borman, founder,  
Illinois Self-Help Center

In the old days when neighbors came together to build a barn, they not only accomplished a task but also enjoyed themselves and gave and received emotional support. This tradition continues today as people gather in self-help groups to help each other deal with shared concerns.

### ? What is a self-help group?

The term *self-help group* refers to more than two people who come together to deal with a shared concern or problem. Such groups exist all over the world; they are sometimes called *mutual aid* or *support groups*. Since these gatherings are run by and for the members, professional "experts" sometimes serve as consultants, but they are not there to be in charge.

### ? Do I need special training to start a self-help group?

No. It just takes motivation, common sense, and a willingness to work and share your feelings and experiences with others.

### ? Would I have to do all the work?

You may be tempted to think that as a founder of a self-help group you would be responsible for organizing every project and making sure that everything is perfect. Not so!

The most effective founders identify suitable leaders, bring them together, and join with them in launching the group. Although some founders choose to continue as leaders after the group begins to meet, others decide to take on a less active role.

### ? Where do I begin?

Many self-help group founders are so enthusiastic that they can't wait to hold their first meeting. Remember, however, that a group that functions well is usually the result of good behind-the-scenes planning.

There are many right ways to form a self-help group. The basic tools that appear on the following pages have been helpful to founders and leaders over the years in organizing and starting to run their groups. As you read each section, think about your own group needs. Consider how you might want to adapt the suggestions to fit your particular circumstances.

Remember to enjoy yourself as you organize the group. Many founders of self-help groups find the organizing experience itself to be supportive and healing.