



## The 13 Guiding Principles of Escalator Support Groups:

1- Escalator Support Groups should be non-confrontational. Despite what some may think, confrontation is actually often more for the benefit of the confronter than the confronted. People rarely walk away after being confronted saying to themselves “Wow, I am glad that you told me off like that, I think I’ll change now”. In reality, confrontation more often leads to defensiveness, hurt feelings, retaliation, resentment or all of the above. Close friends can at times confront other close friends because they have earned that right, but even then, confrontation needs to be used sparingly and tactfully for a friendship to last. People in general do not want to go to a group where they feel that others, some of whom they may barely know, will be “calling them out” on their flaws and weaknesses. Instead, the time and energy that would have been focused on confrontation in a group is much better channeled toward more valuable qualities such as *empathy, compassion, support and genuine concern*. That is what keeps people coming back. Confrontation pushes people away so avoid it as a general rule.

2- Escalator Support Groups need to be neutral – Support groups are not a good place for pushing a personal agenda. While people should feel free to openly discuss their personal views and beliefs, the group setting is not a place for argument or debate. It is better to focus on understanding those we do not see eye to eye with as opposed to judging them or feeling the need to prove them wrong.

3- People that are obviously intoxicated should not attend. Realistically, sooner or later any group focused on substance use issues is going to face the situation where someone who used substances recently, comes to the group. The key word in this principle is *obvious*. If someone who may be intoxicated can quietly hide their use then it is not the group’s role to interrogate one another to make sure that no one is high. However, if someone is obviously visibly intoxicated in group, it is a distraction to others. Trying to focus on the positive change process in full view of someone who is either stumbling, slurring, rambling or nodding can be both frustrating and discouraging

4- Counting clean time is not necessary – The Escalator emphasizes *quality over quantity*. Counting clean time can be encouraging for some however it can also produce a false hierarchy where those who proclaim more clean time have a superior position to others with less time. Counting clean time discriminates against those using medication assisted treatment and those who are making progress in the right direction but are not yet abstinent. Counting clean time should not be discouraged by those who choose to do so but it is also not to be required, requested or compared.

5- There should be no collections – Personal generosity and caring is much more to be valued than community collections. No one should feel any obligation to contribute to a collection plate if they do not want to. There really is no good reason for it and someone who does not want to give or who does not have the means to give should not feel pressured by the process of publicly passing around a donation basket. Those who have the sincere personal desire and the means to do something nice for the group on occasion should share equally with all present if and when this occurs. Truthfully however, coffee and snacks are not nearly as important or enjoyable than the genuine warmth and concern that can be provided by those in the group at no cost to anyone. Individuals, making a sincere effort to be encouraging and up-building with one another can draw people back to the group significantly better than a box of donuts can.



6-Group is more for advice seeking than advice giving - If someone wants advice, let them ask for it. Some good advice can be like a cool drink of water on a hot day if delivered the right way, but only to someone who is thirsty for it. Really we should get a person's permission before giving them unsolicited advice. The balance of the group can be upset if advice-giving dominates over genuine support and empathy. The power of a listening ear cannot be underestimated. Also, please silence and put away your electronic devices.

7- No group prayer – Prayer is a wonderful and powerful tool for those who engage in it with sincere hope and faith. However the Escalator is truly inclusive of those who do not know what they believe and of those with a wide range of beliefs. Prayer can be discussed as a personal coping skill but repetitive, pre-determined group prayers (which over time often lose their meaning when recited verbatim) can do more to alienate individuals than unify the group in this case.

8 – Rituals should be avoided – An enjoyable, effective group should be dynamic and be free to change with the ever-changing needs of its members as opposed to being strapped down by empty rituals and mindless repetition and tradition. Meaningful group rules are necessary such as *be respectful, one person talks at a time* and *what is said in group stays in group*, however beyond that, empty, repetitious rituals can waste time. Furthermore, doing something simply because it is tradition can stagnate the growth of the group. Group activities should have a purpose

9-Share the time – It is courteous, thoughtful and caring to share the group time with others as opposed to dominating group time with your own issues regardless of how serious they may seem at the time. Group time is valuable so share it and group members should be courteous by keeping comments short and meaningful instead of repetitive, overlong and drawn out. People can be turned off to participating when certain individuals repeatedly dominate the use of group time. Group time should be shared like a good meal.

10-Focus on the overall positive purpose of empathy, encouragement and support instead of “telling it like it is” It is an excellent quality to be “real” and to be considered to be a person who can speak sincerely and candidly. However, a group can get lost in a sea of opposing war stories and “keeping it real” if everyone is preoccupied with telling their personal tale of woe. What is going on that is positive and uplifting today can be of much more value than the negativity of yesterday. For example, someone who is inexperienced yet encouraging and supportive can be of greater value to the group than someone who has “seen and heard it all” whose primary contribution is an ongoing series of intense or shocking personal experiences.

11-All meetings open and voluntary, with all relevant types of substances/behaviors welcome – Breaking off into subgroups based on substances used or other problematic behaviors is less helpful than it may seem. The true principles of the upward change process can be beneficial to all including those who have used drugs, alcohol or have other similar problematic issues. Closed groups for “addicts only” contradict the inclusive and non-judgmental nature of the Escalator. The same holds true for mandated group attendees. A support group is much less supportive when people are coerced or legally required to attend against their will. Therefore, there never should be any form of card signing, sign in sheet, or other means for others to obtain “proof” of attendance. Meetings can and should be *recommended* but not *required* by outside entities, individuals and organizations.



12- There is no status for being more “hard core” – Someone who has been to jail or overdosed or lost everything and lived on the street is no more valuable to the group than the wealthy housewife who drinks too much wine on the weekends in her large home in the suburbs, for example. Therefore no one should be treated as better or worse based on their personal history or level of experience in life. Your level of personal experience with negative consequences does not automatically make you more qualified to teach others. “What do you know, have you ever been to jail?” or “I lost everything, what have you ever done?” should not be statements made in Escalator Support Groups, for example. By the same token of course, those who have seen hard times such as incarceration or homelessness, for example, should in no way be looked down upon by those who have not as well. Unity and equality should be the guiding principles regardless of background and experience in either direction.

13- Dating is ill advised – A group focused on changing substance use and coexisting issues is not a good place to meet a relationship partner. People may do it anyway but it’s really just not a good idea. You can’t police others on this issue but if you so choose you should police yourself by trying to make better choices for yourself with regard to whom you get involved with. This principle is similar to dating co-workers which is ill-advised but people still do it. Too often in-group dating leads to more problems than its worth in the long run. People may still try it but the suggestion here is to avoid it.

***Watch a brief video outlining these key points – Click:***

**[The 13 Principles of Escalator Support Groups – On YouTube](#)**

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