

Sue's Newcomer Story – A Big Cushion

The closest thing to an argument I ever saw at Suppers was the time we discussed best ways to welcome newcomers. Looking back, it seems silly we got so exercised, but at the time it was clearly a hot topic. So hot, in fact, the facilitator asked us to share our thoughts going once around the table, each person sharing their view in turn with no refuting, arguing or in any way judging what somebody else had said. Just about everybody had arrived at the program in some kind of pain, and most of us had strong feelings about our vulnerabilities as newcomers.

One member said that she was so depressed and desperate when she first came, she got overwhelmed by all the activity and almost didn't come back. She needed some one-on-one contact. Another had never cut up vegetables and was overwhelmed when somebody asked her to chop carrots as soon as she walked in the door; she just wanted to watch. One agreed that she didn't want any special attention called to her at all and recommended we just let people come and blend in quietly. Another said he felt stupid a month into the program because he'd unwittingly broken a rule by telling somebody what he thought they should do. He wished we'd given him a guide to the rules of play. But then another said she was so sick of programs with their do's and don'ts that if we'd welcomed her with a list of rules, she would never have come back.

By the end of the meeting it was pretty clear that there was no perfect way to welcome people. So we put a big cushion around ourselves and just accepted that we won't get this right every time. Suppers is a very flexible program. There are really only three non-negotiables:

1. Our only dietary bias is that in favor of whole food.
2. Suppers tolerates no commercial messages and does not promote any particular diet, product or service.
3. We actively practice non-judgment for our own sakes and for the sake of group health.