



How to Brainstorm

Brainstorming is an essential part of good thinking, and it is also an essential part of coming to good decisions. How does brainstorming help you think better and make better decisions?

First, it helps you *get out* good ideas and information.

Second, it fosters creativity; it encourages people to see possibilities. Brainstorming causes you to *stretch*—to not stop at the first thing that comes to your mind but to keep thinking.

Third, it encourages everyone in a group to participate.

Fourth, brainstorming is fun, and causes us to get caught up with thinking in a way that makes us want to think some more.

Brainstorming is a part of many Exploring activities, like developing your year's program of activities. This how-to section offers some suggestions to help make brainstorming happen. We'll look at some suggestions to apply to yourself, and at some guidelines to apply to a group brainstorming together.

Individual Suggestions

The following are some suggestions to help you get in the mind-set to brainstorm.

- Relax. Let pictures freely come to your mind.
- Concentrate on what you're brainstorming about. Try to get everything else off your mind and focus on the subject at hand.
- Don't criticize or judge your own ideas internally. If you do, you'll start hesitating and being too careful.
- Take creative risks; think in terms of no limits.
- Believe in and use your own experiences as a springboard for ideas. Each person has all the experiences he or she needs for brainstorming.

Group Guidelines

Now *you're* ready. The next step is to help create the right kind of environment for the group to brainstorm together. You contribute to this kind of environment when you

- Encourage as many ideas as possible.
- Don't judge ideas (as good or bad) during brainstorming.
- Don't look ahead to making decisions; stay totally in the brainstorming mind-set.

- Build on one another's ideas.
- Encourage participation from everyone in the group.
- Don't worry about the words you're using to express an idea. Simply try to describe the picture you're seeing.
- List the ideas that your group comes up with so that you don't lose them.

When you engage in brainstorming, think about the two words that make up this word. Once you experience brainstorming, you'll realize that it is like a *storm in the brain*. Ideas begin to flow that you never knew you had—and one idea breeds another idea, and that idea breeds yet another.

Brainstorming often surprises people. It *blows off* the thoughts that lie on top and exposes ideas we are often unaware are inside of us. We begin to appreciate more fully what we are capable of and how creative we are. By causing us to stretch beyond our usual way of thinking, brainstorming makes it hard for us to snap back to where we were before, because we've grown.