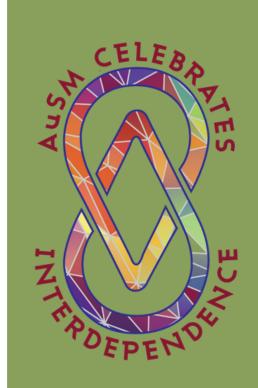# WHAT IS POD MAPPING?

Pod mapping helps you identify who you can rely on for chronic or acute needs. This is your "pod:" the people you turn to for support and who, in turn, rely on you.

Pod mapping is the process of identifying the people in your pod, defining the resources they have, and brainstorming what you can offer to them.

One note before we jump in to the process itself: you can have more than one pod. You may have one pod that is based in your neighborhood, another that is based online and focused on your specific disability, and another that consists of people who rely on you. Be open to mapping out multiple pods.

AuSM CELEBRATES INTERDEPENDENCE

Huge thanks to Rebel Sidney Black and Mia Mingus for articulating the concept of pod mapping. Pod mapping originated with the Bay Area Transformative Justice Collective as a tool for transformative justice, especially as it pertains to child sexual abuse. Here, we discuss it as it relates to disability and autism specifically.

For history on pod mapping, read Mia Mingus' original description.

"POD" CLARIFICATION

The word "pod" was coined as a way to be more specific than simply saying "community." It's more concrete and helps folks to organize, whether to achieve goals with others, provide support to each other, or share resources. When you're identifying who is in your pod, you aren't simply identifying your friends or people you like. You're identifying people who can provide mutual support.

- You may have more than one pod. Choose what kind of pod you're planning before you get started to help you narrow down the people you select. It might be your neighborhood, people from school, or an internet community.

- Ask before you add someone to your pod. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez provides scripts to invite your neighbors to a pod in multiple languages in her guide to mutual aid. You can also have a more informal conversation if you prefer.

- The people in your pod may not be people with whom you have close relationships. A pod is a resource, so an important thing to consider is the skills that the people in your pod have. You also may want to think about the capacity they have to contribute, or their physical proximity to the rest of the pod. Ideally, you'll have a pod in which everyone has some capacity to contribute, and a wide variety of skills are covered.

- Your pod may change over time, with some people becoming unavailable or new people coming into your life. You don't have to create something perfect; just something that helps right now.

WHY SHOULD I POD MAP?

Pod mapping is one way to organize mutual aid. As we mentioned in our introduction to mutual aid, many autistics and their families/support people don't feel they have adequate supports. As a community, our needs are often outside of the structures that currently exist. Mutual aid is one way that we can support each other in meeting our needs while also pushing the current systems to provide more. Many have found that connecting with other people who have similar lived experiences provides more effective strategies, more compassion, and shared understandings. Pod mapping is one structure to help you identify the people who can support you, as well as what kinds of supports they can offer.

By mapping out your pods, you have a chance to be more explicit with these people about when you may need to ask them for support, and how you can support them in turn. You also have a clearly outlined list of those who can support you so that when you are in crisis or have a need, you can easily find out who will help you. Doing this work in advance means you won't have to keep recreating it, and it means that you can do it when you feel reasonably stable, comfortable, and calm rather than when you're in crisis.

Don't be afraid to make your pod what you need: as formal or informal, as weird or creative, as large or as small as you need.

Let's Get Started

How to map out your pod

1 Identify Pod Members

This is the biggest piece of pod mapping. Other writers have created resources to help you identify your pod members. The most straightforward option is Rebel Sidney Black's piece, which you can find here. If you struggle to find names to add to your pod, there is no need to feel embarrassed or ashamed. As someone with a disability, there are many societal barriers to making the connections you need. This exercise helps you to identify the resources you do have and may give you some insight into who you can approach to deepen your relationship. The more you intentionally reach out to others, the more your pod will grow.

2 Share Your Skills and Resources

Once you have identified your pod members, it's helpful to identify who is bringing what. You can initiate by sharing with people what you feel comfortable contributing. Then you can ask others what they might bring. As you have these conversations, add notes to your map about what each person's skills are. Again, nothing is set in stone here. People may offer certain skills when you start, and over time realize that they prefer to contribute in different areas or that they're burning out. It's always a good idea to keep checking in with your pod over time. Check the next page for ideas of things you can ask for or contributions people can bring.

3 Communicate

To make your pod effective, consider how you'll communicate. Different groups may have different preferences about how to communicate, so talk to your pod to find out what they like (e.g., a spreadsheet in Google Drive or a Facebook group or text). Feel free to mix and match! What's important is that you use it: if you don't communicate with your pod for two months and then you have a need, how likely are you to reach out? Not all of your communication has to be explicitly about mutual aid either. You can just chat! Check the next page for suggestions of what to think about when planning your communication.

4 Make Plans and Do

Now that you've got your pod organized, what do you actually do? This is where you can start talking to your pod about what they hope to accomplish. Are there people who have current needs? Can you help meet them? Are there local issues that you would like to take on? You can start small, maybe focusing on helping the people in your pod. Or you can take on a larger project like running a food drive or doing political advocacy. You also can share resources with each other, get feedback or support, and help each other learn.

Examples and Specifics

Communication

When you're working on the communication section of your pod mapping, you may want some ideas of what to think about. Here are some recommendations for what you may want to discuss with your pod as you're getting set up.

- **Privacy:** If you're going to ask someone to drive you to a medical appointment, do you want them to keep that between the two of you? How much confidentiality do you expect from the members of your pod? How much do they expect?
- **Work balance:** How much does each person expect to do? What is too much for each person?
- **Communication boundaries:** Are there certain ways or times each person does not want to communicate? For example, I hate talking on the phone, so I would set a boundary that people shouldn't call me. Other people may not want to communicate before or after certain times of day.
- **Topics or content warnings:** Some people may have specific topics that are off limits. Maybe they are uncomfortable discussing suicide or domestic abuse. It should be easy for people to make that clear. You also may want to talk with your pod about content warnings: Are there any topics that need a heads up before they get discussed so that people can opt in or out of the conversation?
- **Changes:** If someone needs to make a change to how they participate in the group, whether that's leaving the group, doing less with the group, taking on more, changing how they communicate, or anything else, there should be a clear way to do this.
- **Check-ins:** Choose how often you'll check in with your pod to see if everything is working or if changes need to be made.

What types of things can your pod help with?

- Grocery shopping and/or delivery
- Picking up meds
- Cleaning
- Child care
- Emotional support
- Financial support
- Gardening
- Cooking or ordering food
- Transportation help
- Organization/planning (e.g., budgeting, organizing communication within the pod, etc.)
- Helping others navigate healthcare systems or appointments
- Making phone calls
- Sharing resources
- Internet access
- Language translation/support
- Technology support