

The Autism Society of MN support groups are peer-led support groups. Most of our facilitators are neurodivergent individuals who have specialized autism training and group facilitation experience. Facilitators in this role are not acting as mental health providers.

AuSM believes that all autistic people have a right to access services and support equally, respectfully, and safely. In our support groups, we work to protect these fundamental rights of people of color, LGBTQ+ people, and other marginalized groups. We also aim to create a space that is anti-ableist and anti-racist. You are always welcome and invited to show up as your authentically autistic self to groups: fidget, stim, and drop your mask as you need.

### **AuSM support groups are not group therapy.**

While we aim to maintain a safe space for all participants, the primary role of facilitators is to maintain flow and reinforce group rules. Each individual is responsible for their own emotions in the space, including their reactions to topics and discussions. Facilitators are available to provide guidance or clarification about expectations of appropriate language, topics, and behavior during groups.

Each facilitator will review these rules on a regular basis. It is their job to create the safest space possible in these groups, which may mean reminding someone of the rules. Please remember that if you are reminded of rules it is not a personal attack. Our facilitators work to make these reminders as politely as possible while keeping the group flowing.

Group members may also at times want to point out deviations from the rules. Please use an “I” statement format such as “I am feeling that we need to stick to the structure for this group” or “I felt that statement sounded judgmental even if you did not mean it that way.” These rules are not in place to allow group members to attack each other but rather to provide everyone with a safer space. If you are not comfortable speaking up in the moment, you can also speak with your facilitator before or after a group if you feel someone has deviated from the rules.

AuSM may update these rules or the formats of support groups to better meet the needs of the community.

### **Guidelines for All Groups**

- Group will focus on supporting one another through current life stressors. Any topics are allowed, however we ask participants not to give medical advice, promote political positions, or proselytize their religion.
- Participants are expected to interact in a respectful manner with other attendees and AuSM facilitators, which includes addressing people by their identified name and pronouns, respecting boundaries indicated, and obtaining consent for any physical or private contact.
- Any harassment is not tolerated. Harassment includes, but is not limited to:
  - Physical assault
  - Offensive verbal comments
  - Inappropriate physical contact
  - Unwelcome physical attention
  - Intimidation
  - Stalking
  - Display of hateful iconography (for example swastikas)
  - Photographing or recording someone without their permission

## Guidelines for All Groups

- Be mindful of personal space (including mobility and accessibility devices and service animals) and ask permission before touching anyone, including their animals or devices.
- Whenever possible, use "I" statements. Focus on sharing your own thoughts and feelings and avoid making judgmental comments about others' experience or their choice to share it with the group. It is always okay to pass if you don't feel you have anything supportive to say.
  - Some examples of judgmental comments might : "that's unreasonable," "that doesn't make sense," "that will never work," or "what does that have to do with anything?"
  - Some examples of alternatives statements to the above would be "I'm not sure I understand how that would work, can you explain more?", "I'm not following you," "that's one option, here are my concerns," and "I don't understand the connection you just made."
- If you are emotionally triggered by another person's sharing and feel you can't keep listening it is a good choice to temporarily leave the room. If you need help from a facilitator you can private message them in Zoom indicating that you are overwhelmed (for virtual groups) or step out of the room for in person groups.
- Facilitators will try to manage time to give everyone a chance to talk. It is important for as many people as possible to have a chance to share. Please try to be aware of your allotted time and not go over it.
- The goal of social support groups is to connect with other people, however we ask that you offer your information to someone else rather than ask for theirs so they have the opportunity to decide what level of contact they want. This also includes private messaging in the chat feature. Please ask permission first.

## Guidelines for Attending In Person

- AuSM strongly recommends wearing a face covering when attending in person events.
- Support group will revert to online only if the community transmission rate reaches "high" level as defined by Minnesota Department of Health.
- Please do not attend group if you are sick or have symptoms such as cough, fever, sore throat, or loss of taste/smell.
- You will need to RSVP as we will only be allowing a limited number of attendees in person.
- Please report to AuSM if you test positive within 5 days of attending a support group.
- In the case of inclement weather, staffing challenges, or other unexpected events, AuSM may announce Virtual-Only sessions.
- Please do not interrupt the person sharing.
- Refrain from cross talk as it can be picked up by the microphone.
- Please wipe down your seating space at the end of group.
- Refrain from bring snacks or eating during group.

## Guidelines for Attending Virtually

- Please be mindful of background noise and mute yourself when you are not speaking.
- If there are no attendees the virtual group will close after 30 minutes.
- Please do not interrupt the person sharing- if you have thoughts to add you are welcome to do so in the chat area.