

Information Sheet:

Starting your own Support Group

This resource is to assist families and Autistic people to start up a support group or network. These suggestions are based on the experiences of existing groups.

Support groups can be an invaluable resource for parents, partners, and Autistic people. They can provide a friendly space to talk with others in similar situations. Support groups can also work on other levels such as helping to create a sense of community and lessen feelings of isolation.

In a practical sense, support groups can provide important information on local services and supports, such as personal experience of local schools, knowledge of local therapists or services. Sometimes support groups can advocate on issues that affect that whole group.

The name

Keep your name as short as possible. You may like to consider an abbreviation or a catchy acronym.

The purpose

We recommend that you write out two or three brief statements describing your purpose. You can discuss and decide on your purpose as a group in order to ensure that everyone is involved and agrees.

For example: *The group's purpose is to provide mutual support, information and activities to Autistic women in Point Cook.*

How will it operate?

For example:

- List of group/network members and contact details
- Names and roles of key people
- Meetings – where, when, frequency, and format
- Costs – how much per annum, how and when fees are paid, and how is the money used
- Newsletters and notices – when are they issued and how are they circulated?
- Types of activities to be held
- Online presence – some groups have a Facebook page, email newsletter, or website

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Key roles

Whilst you may not wish to have the formality of titles, it is important that key roles are defined and the various tasks are shared around.

You may wish to consider having a meeting convener (chairperson), someone with financial oversight (treasurer), and someone who takes minutes of meetings (secretary).



Funding

It may be possible to access some funding for your support group through your local council. The title of the person you need to speak to may change from council to council, but is usually something like "Community Inclusion Development Officer".

It's a good idea to work out some basic guidelines, so that all participants have a clear understanding of who does what and there are no unrealistic expectations or false hopes created.

All new people in contact with the group could receive a copy of the guidelines.

What is already out there?

You can search for a peer support group near you, or view online peer support groups, by visiting Autism Connect: Search and scrolling down to the Local Search. Once there, you can filter your search by your location and select the category of Peer Support Groups.

We also have a page on our website about support groups that you can visit to find further resources.

Remember, once you have your group set up, we'd love to list it to help you find new members!

And finally...

Remember a support group is really what you make it. Some support groups are very active in setting up social skills groups, guest speakers, whilst others have more modest goals.

Remember that it may take time to build up these sorts of activities and you have to start somewhere!

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