



Southeastern Wisconsin Autism Navigators

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

For Parents and Caregivers

1. Q: How old does an individual need to be to attend a SWAN Adult Support Group, Social Group, or Event?

A: The individual should be at least 18 years old. Our group currently has participants from 18 to 60+ years of age.

2. Q: Can parents or caregivers attend the SWAN group with their adult child?

A: No. Our group is intended for post-high school adults on the spectrum who can self-regulate and independently participate in activities without the assistance of a dedicated caregiver. Parents and caregivers are asked to drop off participants and not be/stay in the building with group. Our meeting location is near Mayfair Mall, and not far from the Wauwatosa Public Library. Some parents choose to take advantage of this personal time during SWAN. The Autism Society of Southeastern Wisconsin has a monthly support group for parents of adults, as well as a private Facebook group for parents of adults where you will find a welcoming community.

3. Q: My (son/daughter/other) doesn't like group activities, doesn't usually stay with a group, and does not want to sit and talk. Can I still bring them to SWAN?

A: Sometimes parents and guardians want their adult children to participate in activities that do not interest them. This rarely works out well. We do not want anyone to feel forced to attend our group. In our experience, it has a negative effect not only on the person who is coerced into attending, but the entire group. This is a social group; we want it to be fun.

Expectations for participants:

- a. Be able to sit down and attend to a task or verbal conversation.
- b. Be able to follow verbal instructions.
- c. Be comfortable engaging with other adult peers.
- d. Be respectful of the environment, facilitators, and other participants.
- e. Be able to self-regulate (know when to take a break or use tools to keep body calm).

4. Q: My son/daughter is a flight risk and must be monitored constantly for their safety. Can you provide this level of support?

A: SWAN is not appropriate for an individual who requires this level of support. Our participants are free to come and go as they please. Participants who choose to leave the building are not followed or restrained in any way.

5. Q: My (son/daughter/other) has always been included with typical peers and I don't know how I feel about a segregated group just for people with Autism. Why is this group not inclusive?

A: Our group is a space for Autistic adults to be free to be who they are, among people they do not have to explain themselves to. This doesn't mean that we don't want more inclusive opportunities, just that sometimes it is good to be with people who are like you and accept you just the way you are. This is a space where Autistic leadership can be nurtured.

6. Q: Can parents and caregivers get reports on how their adult (son/daughter/other) participated or get other information from the facilitator about how things are going?

A: No. Group participants are adults and have an expectation of confidentiality regarding group discussion.

7. Q: How does the group communicate about changes in schedule, special events, or cancellation due to snow emergencies?

A: The group has a private Facebook page, and most information about upcoming events is transmitted through this page: ASSEW Autistic Navigators Support Group (SWAN). Membership in this Facebook group is limited to people who attend, so parents/caregivers cannot join, but if you are providing transportation, it might be a good idea to ask your (son/daughter/other) to check Facebook if you have a concern. They or you can reach out to the SWAN Facilitators at 414-988-1276 or swan@assew.org or at the general helpline at 414-988-1260 and someone will answer or get back to you. Please understand that immediate contact with the facilitator is often not possible, and it may be a day or two before you hear back.

In case of severe weather, the Autism Society will be closed and will cancel our programs if the Wauwatosa School district cancels school and after-school activities. This information is broadcast on many TV stations. Please use your best judgement and don't drive in weather that you feel is unsafe.

8. Q: Are there specific conduct guidelines?

A: The Autism Society of Southeastern Wisconsin is committed to welcoming all individuals, regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, or gender identification. Participants at SWAN events are expected to act respectfully toward other participants and group facilitators. The information discussed in adult support groups should be considered private and confidential and should not be shared outside of the support group. The SWAN facilitators may ask individuals to leave an event if they are unable to act respectfully toward fellow group members or event participants.

Rules of Conduct (see below) are reviewed at the beginning of every meeting. We are committed to working with our group members when problems arise. If you have any questions about the code of conduct, please contact swan@assew.org.

SWAN Rules of Conduct

1. Remember the purpose of the group:

- a. Connect adults living with Autism.
- b. Share experiences and learn from others.
- c. Have an accepting group to help you celebrate life's milestones and support you when things are tough.

2. Be welcoming & respectful of different perspectives and opinions.

- a. Use "Ouch!" to communicate when someone else says something disrespectful.
- b. Use "Oops!" to communicate when you said something disrespectful.
- c. Speak from your own experience, in order to avoid making assumptions about others. For example, "My experience has been..."

3. What Happens in Group Stays in Group! Respect others' confidentiality.

4. Ask for permission from one another before contacting other members outside of group. If a member does not wish to be contacted outside of group, respect their wishes.

Facilitators Role

The facilitator's role in the group is to guide the conversation and make sure the environment is a safe and healthy one for everyone. If an attendee of the group is not respecting this space and the intent of the group, the facilitator will implement the following procedure:

1. First, a verbal warning will be given.
2. Second, the attendee will need to leave the group for the remainder of the session. Afterwards, the attendee needs to have a conversation with both the facilitator and a member of the Autism Society staff before attending another group.
3. Ongoing disregard of the rules of conduct may result in a temporary or permanent break from the group. The length of the break is determined on a case-by-case basis.
4. Any physical altercation will result in immediate removal from the group.

