



Southeastern Wisconsin Autism Navigators

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

For Autistic Participants

1. Q: Do I need to have a formal diagnosis to attend the SWAN Adult Support Group?

A: No. The Autism Society of Southeastern Wisconsin does not require that an individual receive a formal diagnosis in order to attend our adult support groups, social events, or explore our services. If you suspect that you are on the spectrum, our services, support groups, and social events may be helpful to you.

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

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

3. Q: Can Neurotypical people attend the SWAN Group?

A: Not usually. Sometimes we invite special speakers, who may be neurotypical. Parents, Caregivers, and spouses who are neurotypical are asked not to participate to facilitate free discussion. Usually at least one of the facilitators is neurotypical.

4. Q: What happens in your group?

A: A typical group includes introductions, a review of our rules of conduct, discussion which might include sharing of interests or a topic the group has asked to have a presentation about. Sometimes we have birthday and holiday celebrations. The group runs for 2 hours, with a break in the middle. For your first visit plan to arrive 30 minutes early and the facilitator will give you a tour and talk to you about what to expect.

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)

5. Q: I have Asperger Syndrome and I am uncomfortable around people who are too obviously Autistic. Am I too high functioning for your group?

A: We do not turn anyone away based on their IQ or label, though we do request that adult participants meet the expectations outlined above in question #4. You may be uncomfortable around some people in our group, but please come anyway. The feelings you have are called “ableism” and are very common in our society. One goal of the Autism Society is to increase acceptance and decrease stigma surrounding people on the spectrum, and this means recognizing ableism, in ourselves and others.

6. Q: Can parents and caregivers get reports on how I’m doing in group?

A: No. Our group activities are confidential. We do not report on what you say or how you act to anyone, unless we have a specific safety concern, such as a threat of self-harm.

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 group. You can always reach out to the facilitator, Becky, via FACEBOOK, at 414-988-1276, or through email at swan@assew.org and Becky will get back to you within a day or two.

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 judgment 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.

