

WINTER 2024 SUPPORT GROUP GUIDELINES

Welcome to MHAOhio Support Groups! We are passionate about the importance of providing space for people to talk about shared experiences and find support for their mental health. **It is everyone's responsibility to create a sense of safety in this group.** Please review and uphold the following participant conduct guidelines.

Our groups recognize and affirm neurodivergence, difference, and varying symptomology. For safety, individuals who are escalated, and/or individuals who are not genuinely in the group for mental health support, may be asked to step out. In that case, our Support Groups Manager will reach out to determine next steps together.

■ What is shared here, stays here.

We take privacy seriously. Please wear headphones if you are around others during group, and keep the identity of other participants confidential. If you see someone from group in public, keep their identity and personal information private. Additionally, when sharing a story that involves someone else, please do not use identifying information like their name. One exception to confidentiality is if a facilitator has reasonable indication that you or someone else is at imminent risk of harm; in that case, we'll take steps to access help.

■ This is not professional group therapy.

This is a peer-to-peer community support group. While many of our facilitators are mental health professionals, and all facilitators have received adequate training, immediate clinical concerns must be addressed by a health care professional - not during group. Facilitators are happy to provide resources, or you can call our Get Connected line at 614-242-4357.

If you are experiencing a crisis, please call 614-276-2273, or text or call 988.

■ We listen without interruption, but share the air.

We listen quietly to each person without interruption or comment. For online groups, the chat should be used only to ask or answer questions related to the current conversation. Please do not interrupt the facilitator while they are reading guidelines or leading Sixty Seconds to Settle, and do not take it personally if facilitators ask you to wrap up so others have a chance to speak as well. Silences are okay! They give us time to process, build up the nerve to speak, and unmute ourselves.

■ **We give each other respect, non-judgement, and compassion.**

We each have different values, lifestyles, experiences, and preferences. We agree to use this time to share our own thoughts and feelings and not to debate or convince others to take our point of view. Deragatory remarks related to identity (such as race, gender, or religion), beliefs, or other factors (i.e., culture, language, appearance, or ability) are considered violations of this guideline. We respect others' boundaries (ex. choosing not to disclose something or staying off camera unless otherwise noted by the facilitators) and unique needs.

■ **Use "I" statements and speak from your own experience.**

Although well-meaning, advice can often be received as implying judgement or criticism. Our primary goal is to be empathetic; to share our own firsthand experience; and to discuss options without prescribing things for other people. Practice not giving advice by using "I" statements. If someone really wants advice, they may ask for it explicitly.

■ **All emotions are welcome.**

Laughter *and* tears are welcome here. We trust every person's ability to navigate their feelings. Feelings are neither right or wrong - we acknowledge, accept, and explore them all. If you feel strong or intense emotions, breathe and take your time. The facilitator will ensure that intense emotions do not interfere with the safety of the group.

■ **Take care of yourself while you're in a group.**

While we strive to keep the space emotionally safe, some people may occasionally find that they need to step away for a moment to process individually. If you need to leave the room or move around for a moment, consider turning off your video or audio until you're ready again. We all know what is best for our own selves, and carry the primary responsibility for our wellbeing during and after the group.

■ **Reach out for additional support when you need it.**

We recognize that people are joining us from various stages in their mental health journey and have a wide spectrum of needs. Please feel free to contact the Support Groups Manager, Erica, at eduncan@mhaohio.org (614-257-7122) with any questions, feedback, or concerns. MHAOhio abides by the Client Rights and Client Grievance procedure, available on our website at mhaohio.org/client-rights-policy/.

■ **Statement on Outside Contact**

It is okay, and encouraged, to reach out to people outside of the group if you'd like to talk further. Our recommendation is to offer your contact information or event information rather than request someone else's information. Just as we respect boundaries within the group, please be aware that not everyone will be looking for outside contact and may politely decline. Participants accept full responsibility for navigating outside contact including frequency of contact, content, privacy, safety, and termination of the relationship if desired. Mental Health America of Ohio does not monitor participants' communication or actions outside of the group.