

Social Support Groups and Self-Disclosures

A guide



Social Support Group

A social support network is made up of friends, family, and **peers**.

Support groups bring together people who **are** going through or **have** gone through **similar experiences**.

For example, our group's common ground is being 2S-LGBTQ+ older adults.

Support groups are not the same as group therapy sessions. Group therapy is a specific type of mental health treatment that brings together several people with similar conditions under the guidance of a **licensed mental health care provider**.

Group Norms

Because people in groups come together for a specific purpose, they develop **shared norms** to help them achieve their goals.

Even with a goal in place, **random interaction does not define a group**. Group interaction is generally **guided by norms a group has established for acceptable behavior**.

Norms are essentially **expectations of the group members** that are **established by the group** and can be **conscious and formal**, or **unconscious and informal**.

Our Group Norms

The norms that our group have agreed on are:

1. Be respectful of people's time

- We agree to show up at group meeting times and stay until the end.
- We agree to share the air by making sure everyone has an opportunity to speak and **allowing space for everyone.**
- We agree to begin and end our meetings on time.

2. This is a safe space.

- We agree to be **honest** about our feelings and thoughts.
- We agree to use **"I" statements** and to express our feelings or opinions.

Our Group Norms

(continued)

2. This is a safe space.

- We agree to **speak to our own experiences** and talk about what is present to us now, rather than what life was like for us in the past. *Remember that everyone else is doing the same.*
- We agree to **acknowledge any privilege we may hold.**
- We agree to create a welcoming environment where **everyone feels included.**

Our Group Norms

(continued)

2. This is a safe space.

- If the conversation goes to a vulnerable or difficult place, we agree to commit to not only **remaining physically present**, but also **mentally and emotionally**. This includes when there are struggles between the participants or differences of opinion that can feel tough to find solutions for.
- We agree that if something isn't working for us, then we need to **speak up and address it**. If we need help or need to discuss a difficult issue with the group, **it's up to us to ask for time to do so**.

Our Group Norms

(continued)

3. Respect confidentiality.

- We agree that whatever happens in a conversation or meeting **stays with the participants**, unless the owner(s) of what was shared **explicitly consents** to sharing. These can include sensitive issues relating to a personal, health or financial matter.
- **We do not discuss group members who are not present.**

4. Listen generously

- We agree to **avoid interrupting** to hear what people are saying.

Our Group Norms

(continued)

4. Listen generously

- We agree to try to use the **“raise hand”** feature in virtual gatherings to indicate we would like to speak once the current person sharing is finished.
- We agree to try to **keep our mics muted** when someone is sharing to reduce any background noises.
- We agree to be present in the moment. We commit to showing up with our **full presence**.
- We agree to avoid any **side conversations**.

Our Group Norms

(continued)

5. Take care of yourself!

- We agree to ask for what we need from the group - **nobody is a mind reader.**
- We agree to **mind our energy** - sit, stand, and take washroom breaks as needed.
- We agree to **learn to laugh.** Embrace spontaneity, playfulness, joy, and lightheartedness.

6. Demonstrate respect for cultural differences and diversity of views

- We agree that **no one is better than another** - all are equal with different perspectives.

Our Group Norms

(continued)

6. Demonstrate respect for cultural differences and diversity of views

- We agree to speak respectfully, **without blaming, shaming** or the need to fix issues.
- We agree that there is **no tolerance for hate speech, discrimination, racism or any form of verbal/physical violence** towards each other.
- We agree to **always assume good intentions** - some of the topics may be difficult and controversial to participate in. We explore these with good intent and assume good intent from others.
- We agree to always ask permission before offering feedback or advice.

Our Group Norms

(continued)

7. We each share the responsibility for making this group work

- We share our thoughts and emotions in context and **take responsibility for our feelings** as belonging to us, without expecting others will feel the same.
- We identify what we are feeling in the moment and expressing that emotion is our commitment to our peers in an ongoing effort to create more **connective authentic relationships**.
- We have the right to **ask questions** and the right to **refuse to answer**.

Our Group Norms

(continued)

8. Commit to your work

- If (a) group member(s) commits to doing something for the group by a particular date, **keep your promise.**

Note: Even though our goal is to support each person, *this particular group may not meet your needs.* Before deciding this group is not for you, we hope you will attend at least two meetings.

Self-Disclosure

Self-disclosure is the process of passing on information about yourself to someone else. There are two types of self-disclosure: **verbal** and **nonverbal**.



Verbal

We self-disclose verbally when we tell others about our thoughts, feelings, preferences, ambitions, hopes, and fears.



Nonverbal

And we disclose nonverbally through our body language, clothes, tattoos, jewelry, and any other clues we might give about our personalities and lives.

Self-Disclosure

There are many decisions that go into the process of self-disclosure.

We have many types of information we can disclose, but we have to decide whether or not we will by considering the

situation

and

potential risks

Then we must decide

when

where

and

how

to disclose. Since all these decisions will affect our relationships, we will examine each one separately.

Self-Disclosure

Four main categories for disclosure include

observations

thoughts

feelings

needs

We usually **begin** disclosure with observations and thoughts **and then** move onto feelings and needs as the relationship progresses and we become closer.

Observations

Observations include **what we have done** and **experienced**.

For example, I could tell you that I moved to an apartment in Sudbury. **This is something I did and experienced.**

Thoughts

If I told you that I think my move from the South to the North was a good decision, I would be sharing my thoughts, because **I included a judgment about my experiences.**

Feelings

Sharing feelings includes **expressing an emotion**—for example, “**I’m happy** to wake up every morning and look out at the rocks. **I feel lucky.**”

Needs

Last, we may communicate needs or wants by saying something like “My best friend is looking for a job, and I **really want** them to move here, too.”

Reasons

Whether it is online or face-to-face, there are other reasons for disclosing or not, including

self-focused

other-focused

interpersonal

situational

reasons.

Self-focused

Self-focused reasons for disclosure include **having a sense of relief, clarifying or correcting information, or seeking support.**

We **may** disclose to get something off our chest **in hopes of finding relief**, or we **may not** disclose out of **fear** that the other person may react negatively.



I've been having a difficult time lately and really need help.

Other-focused

Other-focused reasons for disclosure include **a sense of responsibility to inform or educate.**

Other-focused reasons for **not** disclosing include feeling like the other person will not protect the information.

For example, perhaps a friend needs help fixing a guitar and you're really good at fixing guitars. You contemplate telling them you could help, but you might hold back because if you tell them this, they might tell others and suddenly you'll be fixing everyone's guitars



I can help... you

Interpersonal

Interpersonal reasons for disclosure involve **desires to maintain a trusting and intimate relationship.**

Interpersonal reasons for **not** disclosing include **fear of losing the relationship** or **the information is irrelevant to the particular relationship.**

For example, **sharing** with your partner that you had an affair **because you want to work things out with them**, or **keeping that information to yourself** out of **fear of them leaving you** would be based on interpersonal reasons.



**I want to
make this
work**

Situational

Situational reasons may be **the other person being available, directly asking a question, or being directly involved in or affected by the information being disclosed.**

Situational reasons for **not** disclosing include **the person being unavailable, a lack of time** to fully discuss the information, or **the lack of a suitable (i.e., quiet, private) place to talk.**



Can we talk
somewhere
privately?

For example, finding yourself in **a quiet place** where **neither person is busy** could lead to disclosure, while **a house full of company** may not.

Timing

As far as timing goes, you should consider whether to disclose the information **early**, **in the middle**, or **late** in a conversation.

It may seem unimportant, but deciding to disclose and then doing it at an awkward time in a conversation could lead to negative results.



**I went out for
dinner on the
weekend!**



**That's nice,
but we're
talking about
cats now**

Things to consider:

If you get something off your chest **early** in a conversation, it could be helpful because there's plenty of time to discuss the issue and you can't chicken out of doing it.

If you wait until the **middle** of the conversation, you have some time to feel out the other person's mood and set up the tone for your disclosure.

You may choose to disclose **late** in a conversation if you're worried about the person's reaction. However, if the person doesn't have a negative reaction, they could still become upset because they don't have time to discuss the disclosure with you.

T.H.I.N.K

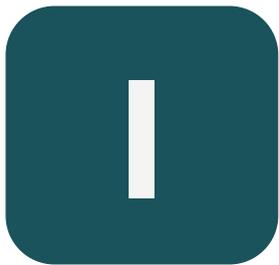
Is what I'm about to say



rue and Timely



elpful



nspiring



ecessary



ind

T rue

Is it true? Whether or not it is a **full-blown lie** or only the **partial truth**, this can indicate to the group that the person sharing is **untrustworthy**.

T imely

Is it timely? Sharing at an **inappropriate time** can give undesired results. Maybe the other person isn't in the right frame of mind to receive feedback or a disclosure.



helpful

Is it helpful? Sometimes just because things are true doesn't mean that they are helpful to the other person. Giving **unhelpful advice** can **lead the other person astray** and potentially **waste their time**.



inspiring

Is it inspiring? Not everything you say needs to be inspirational, but **it shouldn't be demotivating**.

This does not mean you cannot critique someone or give them feedback; however, comments should be considered from the lens of "**will this better them?**"



necessary

Is it necessary? Will what you say benefit or harm others? Necessary means something that you feel **the person must hear**, that will **add value** to the person's life, and that will **further the conversation** in a good way.



kind

Is it kind? Being kind with our words does not only involve **what** we say, but **how** we say it. What **tone** do you use when you address others? Considering our **own attitude** while speaking is another useful approach to evaluating our speech.

References

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