

Member Participation Guidelines

Social Anxiety West Self-Help Groups

Please read these guidelines carefully and follow them during our group sessions. They may cover issues you had not thought of and will help everyone benefit as much as possible from the group. They are intended to help us all make best use of the time available while minimising embarrassment.

- 1. Time keeping:** We understand that due to other commitments or personal issues it is difficult for some members to arrive on time. Aside from times when it is impossible to do so, please be sure to arrive 5 minutes before the start of the session so we can start on time. When many members arrive late valuable session time is lost or members are continually distracted while taking part in the opening round. Please keep in mind that this can make the activity even harder for them, especially when they are sharing sensitive issues.
- 2. Noise and disruption:** As you know, it can be very difficult to talk in front of the group. Be careful not to make it any harder by causing other distractions such as talking, whispering, rustling bags or leaving the room. Please instead wait for an appropriate gap or transition point. Please also switch off your mobile phone or put it in silent mode.
- 3. Space for others to contribute:** It can often take a lot of courage for quieter or newer members to join in with a discussion. They may need time to build up this courage before speaking. Please be sure to always leave sufficient gaps and opportunities for them to contribute during conversations.
- 4. Respect the right to pass:** Please never put pressure on a member to contribute or participate, even if you think it will be beneficial for them to do so. Remember that members need to learn how to motivate themselves to take steps forward and that it is better they attend and not participate than end up not attending at all. Focus instead on giving them opportunities to speak.
- 5. Conflict considerations:** With such a diverse range of individuals attending sessions it is only natural that occasionally opinions will differ. At the same time, many people attending sessions have very strong fears of conflict and heated discussions can trigger a lot of anxiety for them even when they are not directly involved. Being around such disagreements could easily cause them to cease attending if they end up feeling like the group is not an emotionally safe place for them. Because of this, please remember that it is often better to agree to disagree rather than continue to stress a point. It can be embarrassing and uncomfortable for everyone if the facilitator has to end a discussion for you.
- 6. Valuing session time:** The time we have available in each session is very limited. Remember that some members travel considerable distances to attend sessions and for others it may be the only time during the week they connect with other people. Please do not use up a lot of session time talking about topics that have little or no relevance to the subject of social anxiety and other members. Instead, stick to topics that are likely to be inclusive of everyone when in a group and make sure that talking time is shared out as evenly as possible. Please leave engaging in other discussions that interest you until after the session.

7. **Smoking:** If you are a smoker, please smoke outside away from entrances and do not leave cigarette ends on the premises. As stated in our rules, anyone is free to excuse themselves from any activity, but please be considerate about smoking when you have been assigned to a group or within a pair. Make sure there is sufficient group left for group discussions or that your pair partner is not left stranded.
8. **Security:** Always keep outside doors shut at all times to prevent unauthorised entry. This keeps the group safe, prevents theft and also protects the people who may be working throughout the night in the buildings we use.
9. **Cleaning up:** Please be sure to dispose of your litter carefully and wash up any cups that you have used. We always appreciate your help when it comes to packing away at the end of the session.
10. **Respect confidentiality:** Always keep everything said within the group or your sub-group or pair confidential. Everything said within the group is said in confidence and it is impossible to fully know what another person does or doesn't mind you sharing. Information such as who attended what session and if someone is a member of the group or not should also be kept confidential. Keep in mind that even revealing insignificant details may prevent someone from opening up about something more important because they may fear that those details will also be exposed.
11. **Public questioning:** Most of our members find having everyone's attention put on them very uncomfortable, especially when they might have got something wrong. Please avoid questioning them on their opinions and beliefs in front of the group. Especially when they appear to be uncomfortable with it.
12. **Unintentional insults:** Please be careful not to make negative sweeping generalisations about certain types of job, social class, men, women, tastes, culture or other things. You could unknowingly be insulting one or more of the people within your group leaving them feeling rejected, unwelcome and hesitant about attending again.
13. **Bad mouthing:** Do not put down or speak badly of a group member while speaking to another group member. If you do so then you risk the person you are speaking to losing trust in you to not speak badly of them as well. It also breaks down a sense of trust and emotional safety within the group.
14. **Advice:** When talking about their issues, most people just want to feel understood and cared about. Please remember to ask if someone wants help or advice before giving it.
15. **Explicit language:** Remember that some members may find certain language and topics offensive or very uncomfortable. Please keep swearing and topics of a vulgar or graphic nature to a minimum during session time.
16. **Be understanding:** Some of our members may have had very limited social experience or may be very socially isolated. They may be finding it hard to know what is and is not appropriate in social situations. Please do your best to be understanding of their mistakes and do not always expect them to be perfect. Additionally, certain things that are acceptable within ordinary social settings can become unacceptable within a mental health support group. Please give people time to adjust. We all attend the group to learn from each other and grow as individuals. Remember that this often means getting things wrong from time to time.