

CHILLING ON THE SPECTRUM

AUTISM SUPPORT + SOCIAL GROUP

Introduction:

Welcome to *Chilling on the Spectrum*, an autism support and social group by Dori Zener & Associates. We're so glad to have you join our weekly Zoom sessions to discuss issues of importance to young adults on the spectrum and have some fun while we're at it. Our vision is to foster a safe place for autistic individuals to meet new people, share ideas, and learn from each other.

Please read this document in its entirety, as it will answer many of the questions you may have.

Group Outline:

Chilling on the Spectrum is both a support and social group, so our sessions will include both formats. The eight weeks will consist of five support sessions and three social sessions, in which we have structured discussions on areas of mutual interest, and two social group sessions where we'll play games and get to know each other a bit more casually.

Facilitators:

Co-facilitators Daniel Share-Strom and Sherri Liska will guide and participate in discussions. Their main role is to help the group stay on-schedule and on-topic, and to ensure the group is a safe space by upholding the below group policies, norms, and online etiquette. They will moderate the discussion and help people to stay within their allotted speaking times. You can email them outside of group hours with any questions or concerns about the group.

[Daniel](#) is a Registered Social Worker and motivational speaker with Honours degrees in Communication and Social Work. Daniel is also a writer who enjoys playing video games and hanging out with his three dogs and three cats.

[Sherri](#) is one of Dori Zener & Associates' peer supporters. She is a neurodiversity consultant who helps families and organisations better understand autistic experiences and disability justice. In her spare time, she enjoys fostering cats, playing video games, and watching terrible (hilarious) movies.

Daniel and Sherri are both autistic self-advocates.

Group Schedule:

The 8 sessions will take place from 7:00 to 9:00PM weekly. There are 5 support sessions and 3 social (game) sessions.

- Week 1 - Support Session and introductions
- Week 2 - Support Session
- Week 3 - Social Group Session
- Week 4 - Support Session
- Week 5 - Support Session
- Week 6 - Social Group Session
- Week 7 - Support Session
- Week 8 - Social Group Session, anonymous feedback survey, and wrap-up

Support Session Structure:

These sessions are devoted to supportive group discussion on a given topic. You will be emailed the weekly discussion questions in advance, one day before each session.

During discussion time, each person will be given three minutes to share their thoughts and ideas. Everyone gets the same amount of time to share. Facilitators will advise when your three minutes of speaking time is up. You don't have to use all of your time, and if you don't feel like speaking when your turn comes, simply say 'pass' or ask us to come back to you at the end.

After everyone has had a turn to share their thoughts, there may be additional time at the end for free discussion. Feel free to keep discussing that week's topic or to chat about your interests, new developments in your life, etc.!

Social Group Session Structure:

Social group sessions will be less formal, but will still follow a certain pattern. At some point before the meeting, we'll select some online games we'd all enjoy playing together as a group. Depending on the game in question, we may all be playing together or we may split into multiple smaller groups, with the facilitators checking in periodically with each one.

While we can discuss topics of interest without a specific time limit for talking, we'll respect the group norms, policies, and online etiquette detailed below, including valuing the contributions of other group members by giving them time to speak as well.

Agenda:

These timelines are approximate estimates.

7:00-7:05pm Welcome, group purpose and norms (week 1), session overview (weekly) - Daniel

7:05- 7:20pm Introductions (first session only)/Check-in (weekly) - Sherri

Introduction questions: What's your name? Favourite animal, book, or TV show? What do you hope to get out of the group?

Check-in: How are you today? Rate how you are feeling on a scale from 1-10. What are your lows and highs for the week?

7:20 - 8:30pm Peer Support Group Discussion (Weeks 1, 2, 4, 5)

Social Group (Weeks 3, 6)

8:30 - 8:50pm Free discussion

8:50 - 9:00pm Planning next week's group

Group Norms:

To ensure our participants have a fair and comfortable experience at *Chilling on the Spectrum*, we have created the following group norms. These norms apply to our Zoom meetings and any other online interactions we may have with the facilitators and with other participants. If we work together, we can make this a fun and rewarding experience for everyone.

- **We support one another.** Our job as a group is to make one another feel heard and like our feelings are valid. We show we care by trying our best to listen attentively and be present when others are talking.
- **We attend to our individual needs.** Some people listen best while they are looking at the screen. Other people listen best while they are looking away, fidgeting, or knitting. Some people might need to take a break and go for a walk during the session. All of these are okay! By attending to our needs, we improve our well-being and equip ourselves to support others.
- **This is a safe space.** We respect and accept one another's different ethnicities, gender identities, sexual orientations, political leanings, spirituality, and religion. Discriminatory language or actions will not be tolerated.
- **We respect one another.** It's likely that we may disagree on some things, and that's okay. We will speak without attacking one another, interrupting, raising our voices, using profanity, or threatening others.

- **We arrive on time and ready to participate.** We'll be at our screens and in our private environments five minutes before the start of the meeting. The facilitators will let everyone into the Zoom meeting and start at 7:00 pm.
- **Our meetings are confidential.** Part of making everyone feel safe and comfortable sharing is the knowledge that what we say is for the group to hear only. We won't discuss specifics of other people's contributions or identifying information with family, friends, or the wider community. You are welcome to share about the topics we discussed and your experience with people outside of the group in general, anonymized terms.
- **We're mindful of our language.** To the best of our ability, we'll avoid using profanity, insults, or other derogatory terms.
- **Give each other the benefit of the doubt.** We assume the best intentions in other group members.
- **Try to be adaptable to the group process.** We try to keep to a predictable schedule, but sometimes unexpected things can happen. For example, sometimes we may be forced to start or end a few minutes later than normal, or we might decide to try a new format if something isn't working for everyone. We'll give as much notice as possible for any changes.

Online Etiquette:

- **Avoid cross talk, phone calls, etc.** Everyone deserves to be treated with respect when it's their turn to speak, so we'll focus our attention on them when it's their turn. If we must take a phone call or speak to someone outside the group, such as a family member or support person, we'll mute our microphones and turn off our cameras to do so. The facilitators will turn off the private Zoom chat function to ensure we stay focused.
- **Confidentiality at home.** As this is a virtual group, we need to ensure that others in our homes cannot see or hear our Zoom conversations, so we'll either wear headphones or ensure no-one else is around during our meetings.
- **Avoid distracting other participants.** We'll turn our devices to silent to prevent noise from disrupting the session. If we need to fidget or stim to pay better attention, we'll do our best to pick quiet activities that don't interrupt the speaker (e.g., doodling, knitting, squeezing stress balls, etc.) If we need to eat during the session, we'll mute our microphones and turn off our cameras while chewing.

Policies:

The following are policies we will follow while participating in *Chilling on the Spectrum*.

- **No use of recreational drugs and alcohol.** To make this a safe space for everyone where we all are fully present, using drugs or alcohol during meetings or arriving under the influence is prohibited.
- **Maintaining a safe space:** The facilitators are unable to offer individual support as they need to facilitate the entire group, so we'll use our own self-calming strategies or take an intentional break if we are feeling too upset at the moment. The facilitators will ask group members to take a break if they deem it necessary. Facilitators will do a safety check-in with the group member after the group by phone or email.
- **Expressing concerns about the group:** If we have strong concerns over the behaviour or words of another group member, we'll voice them privately to the facilitators by email.
- **No soliciting.** The sole purpose of Chilling on the Spectrum is to support autistic young adults, and so solicitation of a product or service during our meetings or other communications is inappropriate. Members found to be doing this will be asked to stop.