

A Guide to Setting up a Social Group for Adults on the Autistic Spectrum



THE BOROUGH COUNCIL OF CALDERDALE &
THE NATIONAL AUTISTIC SOCIETY

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Background

So you're thinking of setting up a new social group in your area...

Social Groups can be an excellent way to provide people with Autism with a variety of social and community based opportunities. In addition, social groups help people to develop friendships, relationships and networks with other likeminded people and create a forum for people to share their interests through a variety of methods. Social groups can come in all shapes and sizes and can appeal to almost anyone! Anyone can set up a social group within their community and it is hoped that this guide will provide you with some useful tips and hints to aid you along the way in developing a successful social group for people with Autism!

Getting Started...

So you're ready to start up a new social group at this point and there are several factors that you should consider which may help you in the early stages of your project...

1) Who is going to help you?

Before you set up anything, you should think about who is going to help you to do this.

You may have friends or family who may be willing to help you along the way or may want to get involved. You might also want to think about other people in the community

that might want to get involved and how you are going to go about finding these people.

There might be social and support groups already set up in the community who you can contact to ask for advice and information and they might even have people who want to get involved in a new project!



So how are you going to contact people to get them involved?

- You could think about setting up a social networking page to advertise what you are thinking about doing
- You could think about advertising this opportunity in a local newspaper
- You could contact local services such as carers groups, schools and employment agencies and ask them to pass information on to people they come across that may be interested
- You could create a flyer or advert and ask your local library and shops to advertise it in their windows
- Spread the word! Get talking to people and get them talking to as many people as they can until as many people as possible know!



Remember, not everyone will use the same methods of communication so you may have to try a few of these suggestions to increase the number of people who want to get involved.

2) What is everyone going to do?

You have found people that want to get involved in setting up a new social group but you now need to think about the roles that people are going to take on in the development and delivery of the group.

You need to make sure that this is done equally and that everyone has the opportunity to play a part in the process.

Firstly you will need to think about what those roles are going to be, here are a couple of ideas....

- **Group leader:** This might be the person who provides leadership within the social group and sets the aims and objectives for the group. The group leader might be the person who ideas are shared with before activities and things are organised.
- **Group facilitators:** These might be the people who facilitate the running of sessions. They might help set activities up and organise the venue so that the group is accessible for people.
- **Administrator:** This will probably be the person who sends out lists of activities and events run by the social group. They will probably be the person that people will contact to gain more information about the social group.
- **Advertiser:** This might be the person who advertises your social group. They might be responsible for creating a blog, a newsletter or



running a social networking page to keep people up to date with what's going on in the group.

You might want to think about people who aren't as confident or do not want to take on a key role in the development of the social group and how you will take their ideas on board too!

3) Who does your group appeal to?

Next, you need to think about who might access your group and who this group is most likely going to benefit...

You'll need to think about things like...

- Is the group specifically for people with Autism or will it be opened up to other people too?
- Is your group going to be aimed at a specific age range?
- Is your group going to focus on specialist interests of certain people or will it be a generic group where people can just go to socialise?
- Is your group for people living in the local community or will it be extended out to people living further away too?

Once you have answered these questions you will have more or an idea about '**what kind of social group**' yours is going to be...

4) Where and when are you going to run your social group?

So by this point you should have a good idea about who is going to be helping to run the social group and who might want to access it so now you need to think about where you are going to hold your social group...

Location is going to be an important aspect of whether the group is successful as depending on where you decide this is going to be will probably have an impact on how many people attend.

You should think about...

- Where the venue you are going to hire will be (will this be at a central location to attract people from several areas or will it be at a more specific location to attract people from a particular area?)
- What kind of venue you are going to hire (think about whether you are going to hire a larger or a smaller venue)
- How much the venue is going to cost to hire and how you are going to pay for it (Some venues in the community may be free to hire so it may be doing some research to find out. If not, can you ask each member of the social group to make a contribution to pay for the venue or is there funding you can apply for through your local authority?)



You will need to think about when the social group is going to run to, so you need to consider...

- What the best day to run the group will be (Are more people going to attend on a weekday or a weekend?)
- What the best time to run the group will be (Are more people going to attend during the day or in an evening?)
- How long the group will run for (Will this be for a couple of hours or more?)
- How often the group will run (will the group meet up on a weekly or a monthly basis?)



5) What will be the social group be doing?

So you have found a venue, you know when your social group is going to be running and how much it's going to cost, so now you need to think about what the group will be doing when they meet...

You need to think about how you can provide everybody with the opportunity to input their ideas about what activities and sessions can be run.

You could do this through...

- A social networking page e.g. Facebook
- A 'suggestions box' (this may be better for



people who are not confident in speaking out as part of a group)

- A group discussion at your first meeting

Once you have decided upon the activities you want to run, you will need to find a way to distribute times, dates and any costs to activities to people so that everyone in the group is aware.

You will need to think about ways that you can do this...

- A social networking page e.g. Facebook
- An email list
- Letter's to peoples homes (think, this will likely be costly!)
- Assign five minutes at the end of each social group meeting to discuss events coming up at the next couple of sessions.



You may have to combine a few of these methods as not everyone will have or choose to have access to social networking, email etc.

6) Managing Risk

It is going to be important that you keep the members of your social group safe and free from risk at all times...

This will need to be thought about when...

- **Introducing new people to the group:** Once your group has been set up and people have started to get to know each other, introducing new people may upset the group dynamic. It is important that any new group members are 'assessed' to determine if they are compatible with the rest of the group and to establish if they pose a risk to the group. Think about ways that you can keep people safe and make sure that new members meet the criteria of the social group.
- You should also have a system in place which allows people to communicate when they feel they are at risk, uncomfortable or unsafe to ensure that issues are addressed appropriately and sensitively.
- You will also need to think about how the confidentiality of the group will be maintained, this is important to ensure that peoples personal details remain confidential and that group activity has restricted access to group members only e.g. through a secure 'members only' Facebook page.

7) The future of your social group

All your hard work has paid off and you have a successfully running social group in your local community!

You now need to think about how you are going to review and monitor activity in your social group to ensure that it is sustainable over the long term...

You will want to keep your group members happy and interested for as long as the group is running so you need to decide on a way you can do this

Think about developing a system for obtaining feedback from people, this could be...

- **A questionnaire:** You could ask people about what they enjoy about attending the social group and what they think could be improved.



You might want to ask other social groups how they have done this to get some more ideas of how you can do it too.

You might also want to have a 'board members' meeting regularly, this will give people who are involved in running the group the opportunity to discuss ideas or concerns about the group. This could also be a great opportunity to invite along people who may be funding your group to keep them updated about what the group has been doing.