

FAQ Sheet – How to Use Support Groups



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PA Department of Human Services

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autism-related resources and information.

877-231-4244

There are many types of support groups for individuals with autism, family members, siblings, and caregivers. You may need to visit more than one type of group before you find one that meets your needs. When you find a group that works for you, you can benefit from the group in many ways. Here are a few:

Emotional Support

Parents of children with autism typically feel a large amount of stress that is not understood by the majority of people in their everyday lives. Taking the time to meet with other parents who understand the stress of raising a child with autism can give parents a feeling of belonging and a break from the isolation some experience. Support group meetings give parents an opportunity to share practical advice with each other that they have learned through their own experience creating “pot luck” of knowledge. You just might make some life-long friendships while you’re at it!

Information/Learning

Many support groups will regularly host informational speakers giving attendees an opportunity to learn about their child's diagnosis and treatment options. While attending trainings and conferences is highly recommended for parents of children with autism, it can be expensive and it can be difficult to travel very far from home for them especially if your child's behaviors fluctuate day-to-day. Speakers at support group meetings are typically sponsored by the group and everyone understands if your child is having a “difficult day”.

Personal References

When in search of a professional to provide services to your child, without a reference from a Developmental Pediatrician, Psychiatrist, Psychologist, Neurologist, etc... calling your insurance company and/or medical assistance Special Needs Unit (SNU) should be your first step. The insurance company will give you a list of options. This list may include some providers that are not necessarily knowledgeable about autism. While attending a support group, other parents may be able to give you feedback about their experience with some of the providers.

Networking

Services and supports for children with autism can be disjointed and difficult to navigate. This makes it difficult for parents to be aware of all the treatment options, supports, and programs available to them. Many times parents “don't know what they don't know”. Regularly attending support group meetings gives parents the opportunity to network with professionals who may be their guest speaker. Network, network, network!

Recreation

Many support groups host autism-friendly, family-fun activities in house and in the community. These activities are a great way to get out, give your child an opportunity to experience new environments, and socialize in a comfortable atmosphere.

This Frequently Asked Questions Sheet was developed by the Autism Services, Education, Resources, and Training Collaborative (ASERT) to address one of the questions our Resource Specialists receive most often. If you have additional questions, please contact ASERT at 877-231-4244 or info@PAautism.org.