

North Dorset Parent and Carer Peer Support Group Zoom discussion Feedback Summary

Parents and carers spoke with Autism Wessex about the proposal for a North Dorset parent and carer peer support group.

From the feedback we gathered, we identified that the vision and mission for the group will be *to help parents and carers empower each other through sharing knowledge and peer support.*

The group will offer:

- A safe and friendly space where members can share the realities of parenting and caring for individuals with an autism diagnosis
- Peer and emotional support and focus on wellbeing and reducing stress
- Opportunities to make connections with other parents, carers and families
- Opportunities to raise awareness of autism locally
- An opportunity for discussions re. setting up autism friendly sessions and events locally (e.g. Autism friendly hour at leisure centre or swimming group)
- A WhatsApp group so that members can keep in touch using a mobile phone.

Who can join?

Any parents or carers who have an experience of autism (with or without a diagnosis) or related conditions are welcome to join the group. The group will be an inclusive proactive network of parents and carers who understand what it's like to have a child with additional needs. Whilst this is a space for parents, we want to ensure everyone is able to attend, especially those who may not have access to childcare.

How will we organise and when will we get together?

The group will be informal in nature and led by its members. Feedback suggests that we initially hold a monthly meeting on a week day evening. A schedule for meeting dates, hosting/ leading the group and speakers members would like to invite will be drawn up at the initial meeting, as well as discussion on what the group would like to be called.

Where?

Accessible North Dorset Community venue with:

- Safe and accessible parking
- A welcoming and comfortable environment that allows for privacy
- Access for people with disabilities
- Evening or after-hours access
- Access to accessible toilets and kitchen

Ground Rules?

- Confidentiality; It's important to foster an atmosphere of trust and make members feel comfortable sharing experiences
- Willingness to listen to others
- Respecting people's differences