

Support Group Member Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

MS Canada Support Group Program

What are Peer Support Groups?

Peer support groups are an informal way to link people who share common concerns or experiences. All peer support groups have the same goals: to give and receive emotional support and to share practical ideas in working through common problems. Groups are based on the idea that no one knows more about a problem than those living with it. Each person is an expert because of their own experiences.

What are the requirements for joining a Support Group?

Our Support Groups are for members living with MS, an allied disease (NMOSD, ADEM, & TM), or for those who are connected to them (caregiver/family member/spouse, etc.). Support Group Members must be 18 years of age or older and live in Canada.

We offer a variety of groups to meet the diverse needs of the MS Community, some groups may be open to people awaiting a diagnosis of MS or have additional requirements to join. Please refer to our [Support Group listings](#) or contact one of our MS Navigators to learn more!

What can I expect from my peer support group experience?

In a peer support group, people share their problems and successes. Sharing and talking with others who have had relatable experiences helps people discover they're not alone and there are others who understand what they are going through. Peer support groups may not solve all problems, but they offer realistic support, encouragement and hope and are one of the most valued services we offer.

What is the difference between Peer Support & Counselling?

Counsellors usually have graduate-level training in counselling or psychotherapy. They usually work in more formal environments, with specific therapeutic skills and goals to work with clients.

Peer Supporters can be trained in a wide range of skills. These include active listening and helping skills. They often work in less formal, more community-based settings. Peer Supporters often focus more on sharing their own lived experiences. They do this to promote mutually helpful conversations with others.

Are Support Groups volunteer led?

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Yes! All of our groups are led by volunteers who participated in our training and screening process. Our volunteers receive training around active listening, privacy & confidentiality, referrals, boundary setting, communication skills, and the programs & services we offer. Our volunteers are people in the MS community offering a listening ear and sharing their lived experience. They are not trained counsellors and cannot provide medical and/or mental health advice or address/support crisis issues.

Can Group Facilitators support mental health concerns and or crises?

No, volunteers are not trained to support mental health concerns or crises and will refer you to other support. If you require immediate support, please contact your healthcare team, call 911, 988 or connect with a mental health/distress helpline. If you need significant mental health support, this may not be the appropriate program for you. Please contact the program coordinator if you have questions.

Do you offer different types of Support Groups?

Yes! We offer a variety of groups to meet the diverse needs of the MS Community. Here are some of examples of the groups we offer:

- Informal coffee/lunch/dinner groups
- Virtual and in-person social groups
- Structured groups with topics and presenters
- Activity groups
- Newly Diagnosed
- Caregiver support groups
- Facebook groups

Some of our groups are National (open to anyone living in Canada), some are Provincial (open to people in a specific province and/or territory), and some are more Local (open to people in a specific city/town). Support groups can be offered in person, online or hybrid (a combination of in person & virtual meetings).

How are the meetings structured and where do they take place?

Each Support Group is unique, and our volunteer facilitators determine their own focus and structure of their group and meetings. Each group has at least one facilitator who we have

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screened and trained, group meeting locations vary and are accessible and safe for all members. Our virtual Support Groups connect either via Zoom and/or Facebook.

For more information on Peer Support Groups, please contact our MS Navigators at 1-844-859-6789 [or msnavigators@mscanada.ca](mailto:msnavigators@mscanada.ca).

How do I join a Support Group?

Community members interested in joining a support group should connect with an [MS Navigator](#) to see which support group may be a good fit. You can also see most of our groups on our website: [MS Support Groups | MS Canada](#).

MS Navigators are available Monday to Friday to anyone in Canada from 8:00 am to 8:00 pm ET. And can be reached by Phone: 1-844-859-6789 Email: msnavigators@mscanada.ca and or live chat online at mscanada.ca.

Once you have found a group you're interested in joining, our MS Navigator's contact the facilitator to add the new community member to their group. From there you will be added to a group email list which will provide you with the meeting details and other important information about the support group.

What are the benefits of Support Groups?

Some potential benefits of Support Groups may include:

- **Increased Social Connections:** Support groups provide an opportunity to connect with others facing similar challenges, reducing feelings of isolation.
- **Safe, Non-judgmental Space:** Participants can speak honestly about their feelings and experiences without fear of judgment.
- **Increased Resilience:** Sharing experiences and coping strategies can help build resilience in dealing with MS.
- **Empowerment and Hope:** Hearing others' stories of coping and progress can instill a sense of empowerment and hope.
- **Improved Understanding:** Gain a better understanding of MS and how it affects people differently.
- **Treatment Options and Community Resources:** Learn about others experiences with different treatment options and share knowledge of community resources.

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- **Connection to the MS Community:** Feel a stronger connection to the broader MS community.

While support groups offer many benefits, they may not be suitable for everyone. Some may prefer one-on-one support or seek other forms of community support, like wellness programs or educational resources. Members have the right to leave a support group at any time and are encouraged to contact us at supportgroups@mscanada.ca if any issues and or concerns arise during a group meeting.

Are there any guidelines I am expected to follow as a member of a Support Group?

Yes, Support Groups like any community, relies on a few shared values to ensure it remains a welcoming, friendly, safe, supportive and enjoyable space for all. Each Support Group may have their own additional guidelines, but all groups must adhere to the following guidelines: confidentiality, kindness & support, courtesy, referrals, no medical advice, no Solicitation, and creating a safe meeting environment.

Will information discussed in the group be shared?

Confidentiality is a key component of all peer support groups. Group members may not discuss anything outside of the group about the discussion or its members. To do so violates each member's right to confidentiality and undermines the usefulness of the group support system.

Please be aware that confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in the support group, therefore use discretion in deciding what and how much you share in the group.

Can I bring a support person (caregiver, family member, health care aide etc.) to meetings?

Yes, attendants (support people) are welcome to join Peer Support Group meetings where appropriate. Attendants are people who help a person with MS as a paid/unpaid assistant. Attendants are a valuable resource to people living with MS and they play an important role in assisting them to and from venues and programs. Program participants may need the help of an attendant but may choose to participate in the program with or without their attendant. For self-help or support groups, all attendants are bound by the same confidentiality policy as the other group members.

People with service animals are welcome at all our events and functions. We are committed to welcoming people with disabilities who are accompanied by a service animal on the parts of our premises that are open to the public and other third parties. We will also ensure that

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all staff, volunteers and others dealing with the public are properly trained in how to interact with people with disabilities accompanied by a service animal.

How do I become a facilitator or start a peer support group in my community?

Anyone interested in becoming a facilitator must go through our screening process and facilitator training. Please email volunteer@mscanada.ca for more information on becoming a facilitator or starting a group. You can also apply online.

I'm not comfortable with a group setting, are there alternatives to support groups?

Some people prefer one to one support. Our [1:1 Peer Support Program](#) offers telephone/internet peer support for people living with MS. Volunteers from across Canada are provided with extensive training to ensure they have the skills to best support you, whether you are newly diagnosed, have specific question about MS or just want to connect with someone who understands what you might be going through.

We also have [We Talk MS](#), which is a mentoring program, community forum, safe space, and supportive environment all rolled into one. Our aim is to create a place where peers in our MS community can connect with each other informally, share information, and support one another.

Where do I find more information on MS Canada programs and services?

The best way to access up-to-date information is to contact our Knowledge Network. MS Navigators are available Monday to Friday to anyone in Canada, from 8:00 am to 8:00 pm ET. You can reach out to an MS Navigator if you have questions about multiple sclerosis. Phone: 1-844-859-6789 Email: msnavigators@mscanada.ca. Or visit us online at MSCanada.ca.