

Parent Support Network (PSN)

Welcome to Louisiana Mental Health Association's Parent Support Network Support Groups.

We are excited to provide opportunities for parents to share experiences and support for families managing mental health challenges. We will provide a **safe space for open** discussion and encouraging support. The goal is for each member to actively engage and benefit from sharing. Please review the following guidelines and help create meaningful experiences for all parties.

Our groups recognize and affirm differences, including neurodivergence and varying symptomology. For safety, individuals who are not safe emotionally or physically and/or who are not actively engaged in the mental health support of all members may be asked to leave. In that event, our PSN Facilitators will refer these members to appropriate groups and/or services.

■ **What is shared in the group stays in the group.**

We take privacy seriously. If joining the group virtually, please wear headphones, if possible to help keep the identity of other participants confidential. If you see someone from the group publicly, keep their identity and personal information private. Additionally, when sharing a story that involves someone else, please do not use identifying information like their name or location details. The only exception for breaking confidentiality is if there is any reasonable indication that you or someone else is at imminent risk of harm or danger; in that case, we'll take steps to access help.

■ **This is not therapy or any other clinical service.**

This is a peer-to-peer community support group. While some of our facilitators may be mental health professionals, and all facilitators have received adequate training, a health care professional must address immediate clinical concerns—not during the group. Facilitators are happy to provide resources, or you can call LAMHA.

If you are experiencing a crisis, please call or text 988.

■ **Share the air and be fair.**

We listen not to be heard but to hear. We listen intently to each person without interruption or comment. The chat feature should only be used to ask or answer questions related to current conversations. Please do not interrupt the facilitator during the presentations, and do not take it personally if facilitators ask for brief or less sharing to consider time for additional sharing from others.



- **We offer each other respect and non-judgmental responses and extend compassion to each other.**

We all have different values, lifestyles, experiences, and preferences. We agree to use this time to share our thoughts and feelings and not to debate or convince others to accept our views. Derogatory remarks related to identity, such as race, gender, religion, beliefs, or other factors such as culture, language, appearance, or ability, are considered violations and will not be tolerated. A difference of opinion is OK.

- **Use "I" statements and speak from your own experience.**

Although it can be common, advice can often be received as implying judgment or criticism. Our primary goal is to be empathetic; to share our own firsthand experience, and to discuss options without prescribing things for other people. Practice not advising others by using "I" statements. If someone wants advice, they may ask for it explicitly.

- **Feel your feelings. Emotions are welcome.**

Laughter *and* tears are welcome here. We trust every person's ability to navigate their feelings. Feelings are neither right nor wrong - we acknowledge, accept, and explore them all. If you feel strong or intense emotions, breathe and take your time. The facilitator will ensure intense emotions do not interfere with the group's safety.

- **Take care of yourself first.**

While we strive to keep the space emotionally safe, some people may occasionally need to step away to process it individually. If you need to leave the room or move around briefly, please do so. If participating virtually, turn off your video or audio until you can join again. If participating in person, please let the facilitator know you must be excused and step away. You know what is best for you and are responsible for your well-being during and after the group. It is OK not to share. Much can be gained by just listening.

- **It's okay to reach out for additional support when you need it.**

We recognize that people are joining us from various stages in their mental health journey and have different needs. Please contact us at parentsupportnetwork@louisianamha.org, or (225-929-7674) with any questions, feedback, or concerns.

- **Reaching out to others outside of the group.**

If you reach out to participants during your time outside of the group, our recommendation is to offer your personal information rather than request someone else's information. As we respect boundaries within the group, please be aware that not everyone will look for outside contact and may politely decline. Participants accept full responsibility for navigating outside contact, including frequency of contact, content, privacy, safety, and termination of the relationship if desired.

Louisiana Mental Health Association (LAMHA) does not monitor participants' communication or actions outside of the group.

Outside Observation Policy

Support groups at the Louisiana Mental Health Association are intended for public members with lived experience in mental and behavioral health. We provide a space to give or receive support. All groups follow guidelines that preserve the intention and safety of the space, including preventing individuals who do not meet the above eligibility from joining.

Our goal is to balance the benefits of helping future mental health professionals gain experience in group dynamics while honoring the space's integrity and mutual consent. Facilitators are asked to communicate with group members about the potential for observations and decide collectively whether their group is open to them.

When attending a group as an outside observer, we ask that students review and adhere to the following guidelines.

■ **Introduce yourself to the group as an observer, not a group member.**

This allows participants to make an informed choice about what and with whom they share. It also helps our facilitators to know whether you are intentionally being quiet in the group or if you are a new group member who may need some encouragement to feel comfortable participating.

■ **Observe the facilitators, not the participants.**

Focus your notes and observations on the facilitators' technique and approach and the group's overall dynamic.

■ **Practice de-centering yourself from the conversation.**

Practice humility in yielding the space to participants and their needs. Refrain from inputting your personal or professional opinion into the conversation unless you are attending as a participant seeking personal support. Regardless of role, everyone in a support group is asked to be respectful and seek to understand differences.

■ **Confidentiality is a must.**

Our confidentiality guidelines, shared at the beginning of every group, apply to everyone. Be conscious of dual relationships, avoid disclosing attendance information to those outside of the group, and do not use identifying information or personal details in any reflections after the group.

We appreciate your understanding and cooperation in maintaining these support groups as low-barrier, authentic spaces for individuals who are looking for genuine community in their journey with mental health. If you have questions about what would be appropriate and available to you as an observer, contact us at parentsupportnetwork@louisianamha.org or 225-929-7674

