

## Ground Rules for Groups

Welcome to MaineTransNet Groups! Our groups are peer-to-peer, mutual self-help groups, and not therapy groups. They are **not** a substitute for professional counseling. The purpose of the groups is to provide emotional and moral support for each other. Everyone is encouraged to participate to the extent with which they are comfortable. The following guidelines are established to facilitate the development of a safe welcoming environment where people can share their thoughts, feelings, and experiences. Please keep these guidelines in mind as you participate in our groups.

1. Because confidentiality is key to the success of any support group, it is expected that group participants will respect and maintain the confidentiality of the group. What goes on in the group, stays in the group.
2. We are here to share our own experiences and feelings, and try not to give unsolicited advice. We don't tell others what they "should" or "need" to do, and we don't tell them "what their problem is." If we want to offer advice, we should ask whether it is welcome first.
  - a. **Good Example:** "Jane, it sounds like you're having a tough time figuring out how to dress for your brother's wedding. Would you mind if I made a suggestion?" (This way, Jane learns that you might have some useful information and she can decide whether she wants to hear it.)
  - b. **Bad Example:** "If you're having trouble figuring out what to wear to your brother's wedding, you should just do [insert unsolicited advice here]"
  - c. **Good Example:** "**I** experienced a similar situation once and this is what **I** did."
  - d. **Bad Example:** "Whenever something like that happens, you should do [insert unsolicited advice here]"
3. Avoid cross-talk, side discussions, or interrupting. One person speaks at a time. If we must interrupt, we do it respectfully and then turn the discussion back over to the person who was talking first. If we must have a side discussion, politely leave the group and take it outside.
4. Everyone is welcome at MaineTransNet. We accept and respect everyone, just as they are, and avoid making judgments. Be aware of sighing, snickering, side comments, talking under your breath, body language, and eye-rolling.
5. Avoid making sweeping generalizations. Speak from your own experience and use "I" statements. Remember that we all have different experiences and ideas about things. Our viewpoint is just one of many, and there is not right or wrong way to be, act, think, or feel.
  - a. **Bad example:** "People who wear purple look foolish." (The implication here is that ALL people look foolish in purple or that ALL purple looks foolish on people.)
  - b. **Good example:** "I cannot wear purple: it looks dreadful with my skin tone." (This is a good example of an "I" statement, and says nothing about others and their choice to wear purple.)
6. Avoid discussing group members who are not present.
7. Everyone participates in his or her own way. We have the right to ask questions and we have the right to refuse to answer questions. **Its OK to just listen.**
  - a. **Bad example:**

Jen: "Jane, is your partner leaving you?"  
Jane: "I would rather not talk about that here."  
Jen: "Oh c'mon Jane! You can tell us! What, is it some kind of big secret?"  
(Jen asked a question and when Jane politely refused to answer, Jen continued to push her)
  - b. **Good Example:**

Jim: "John, is your partner leaving you?"  
John: "I would rather not talk about that here."  
Jim: "That's OK John, I didn't mean to pry."  
(Jim politely asked a question, John respectfully refused to answer it, and Jim respected John's response.)"
8. We try to give everyone the opportunity to share. No one person dominates the conversation. Earn the privilege of talking by listening first.
9. Trans people are often victims/survivors of trauma, and we understand that certain words and behaviors can be triggers that evoke fear and anxiety. Because of this, we will not tolerate any direct or indirect threats of harm, violence, or intimidation in the group: regardless of intent. Even joking can cause someone to be afraid; therefore, it will not be tolerated.

**Note:** Our goal is to be supportive of everyone who comes to our meetings AND we understand that not every group is right for everyone. Before deciding the group is not for you, please consider attending at least two or three meetings before deciding not to return.