

## **What you can expect from our in-person meetings**

### **Video transcript**

**Kate:** Hi everyone it's Kate and Lizzie. We are here to tell you about our in-person support group meeting so that you have a little bit of a better idea of what to expect from the meeting. So Lizzie, can you tell me a bit about how the meetings are run?

**Lizzie:** Well, we have a lovely setting for the meeting, the Quaker Meeting House in Bedminster, a lovely, big, bright, airy hall, which has a really nice, relaxed atmosphere.

People arrive, I greet them and we all settle ourselves in. I give everyone a name badge, so we know who is who. There's often new people who come every week and some familiar faces as well. It's not at all cliquey, it's an ever-changing group of people and it's never the same each week. So it's a good opportunity to get to know new people.

So we introduce ourselves, we give a little bit of a background about where we're at on our autism journey, our children and their main needs. It's just quick five minute introduction so we all got a bit of background. Out of that often comes what we will discuss for the rest of the meeting. It could be to do with education, problems attending school or EHCPs. Sometimes it's more to do with routine at home or sensory toys and sensory aids to help children play, keep calm and sleep. We discuss many, many different topics. I also make sure to ask people if they have an urgent support need, something very specific they want to discuss, so we've got time to do that.

From there the conversation just sort of flows naturally. I lead the discussions, make sure anyone who wants to talk gets a chance to talk. Some people prefer to listen more than talk and that's fine. You'll never be made to talk if you don't want to. Some people just like to take it in and listen to other people's stories.

So it's all very relaxed. It lasts about an hour. And then, at the end, often we finish with a positive chat about something nice about the kids or something else, which is a nice way to finish. So that's basically how the meeting is run.

**Kate:** It really is quite a casual meeting. It's very, very comfortable. There's nothing formal about it. We are all just parents and we know that sometimes people come in and they're just really downtrodden and we can see it in their face that they're really struggling with what's going on with their child.

And just after 15 or 20 minutes of talking to other parents and sharing their story, they're transformed. They leave differently with their heads held high and they are smiling. So it really is quite powerful what can happen if you can come to a meeting and talk to us. And we know, don't, we Lizzie that we've all cried, and it's totally normal to cry at a meeting. We always have tissues and nobody thinks a thing of it if anyone cries. We are here for everyone who comes and there's no judgment at all.

**Lizzie:** People are always very understanding when that happens. We give you time and space. Sometimes it happens that when you cry, you just want a bit of a pause and some time to reflect so we can move on and someone else can talk, let you gather yourself and carry on. It's always handled very sensitively.

**Kate:** Exactly. And it's also important to note that if you just want to come along and not talk, you can just tell Lizzie, 'hey, I'm just here to sort of be an observer', which is perfectly fine. Or put your hand up so that you make it clear that you don't want to talk or you're not ready to talk.

We really hope that you'll come along because what we know is that magic happens when parents come together in person. We do run zoom meetings, we run lots of things online. But we know that when people come together and see each other face to face, that is where real connections happen and lifelong friendships – like Lizzie's and mine - can begin.

And you'll meet other people who are like you. I guarantee you'll feel better for coming to a meeting.

**Lizzie:** I think people really appreciate just being in a room with other people who get it. Often it's not a case of needing to solve something or find something out. Although there's plenty of opportunity to do that.

Sometimes it's just being heard and being around understanding and supportive people who totally get where you are.

**Kate:** That's a really, really good point because sometimes our lives are just so weird. Sometimes we feel so, so different from other people who have typical children, and to come into a room and talk about what's going on for you and find a group of people who completely understand your challenges and why life can be hard as well - it's a really comforting thing.

So we really hope that you will come along. See you soon.