Welcome to this Practice Week session

Please be considerate to others - we want this to be a safe, open and reflective space to learn and share thoughts and ideas.

You can turn on live captions on by clicking on the 3 dots at the top of your screen if you need this.

Please be aware that some of these sessions are being recorded. Your presenter will let you know at the start of the session. If you do not wish to appear on the recording, just keep your camera off.

Thank you!

Feeling Safe and Secure in an Autistic Peer Group

Sue Lambert Trust

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Presented by:

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What we will cover in this presentation today

- Who is Sue Lambert Trust
- The Beginning and Setting up our Autistic Peer Group
- Neurodiversity and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs
- Learning opportunities
- Back to the beginning
- Continued feeling of safety and security
- Feedback

Who is Sue Lambert Trust

Norfolk's leading charity supporting survivors of sexual abuse or violence. Anyone living in Norfolk of any gender, aged 18 or above, can self-refer to Sue Lambert Trust.

We have 3 phases:

Groundworks

Practical and emotional support – benefits, trauma stabilisation, wellbeing and housing etc

Therapy and Counselling

Up to 52 sessions with trained counsellors

Looking to change how trauma affects daily life

Re-build their lives and begin to heal.

Who is Sue Lambert Trust

Groups/Outreach Work

Delivering a range of sessions for young people and community groups covering topics:

Aid understanding of Sexual violence and the impact of trauma

Learn what constitutes a healthy or unhealthy relationship

Respect, consent and boundaries

How to seek help and support

Our Groups

A safe and kind space to talk

All groups are open to clients for as long as needed

A variety of groups – Crafting, Online, Client Voice, In-person

The Beginning

We sent out a survey to clients who had been previously interested in joining an Autistic Peer Group.

<u>What kind of support group would you like to attend?</u>

One with activities and peer support
Structured sessions to learn more about improving autistic wellbeing
Peer support - it is quite common for autistic people to be socially isolated
I would find it good to be with like-minded people and those who understand our ways.

The Beginning...continued

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What support would you find useful within a group setting ?

Really clear details of what is going to happen and when.
As much information about the session prior to it including a photo of the room, an idea of how many people will be there.
Friendliness and patience
Have info and photos of the leaders before. Be able to contact someone before by email who I can meet at the door and walk in with.
No pressure to talk
An autistic facilitator would be helpful

Our Autistic Peer Group – set up

We initially set up 2 co-designing sessions prior to launching the group



<u>What do we mean by co-designing?</u>

Ensuring we have lived experience at the heart
Ensuring we are all equal participants in the planning / decision making
Ensuring we are inclusive and meeting the needs of the members in the group
Ensuring we are listening to ideas from experts by experience

Setting up 1st Co-design session





Invitation email sent out – visual information

Asking whether any reasonable adjustments needed to be made prior to attending the session

Our 1st session

This 1st initial co-design session looked at how the members would like this group to run:

Members – a maximum of 6 members (+2 facilitators)

Timings – running from 10.30am – 12pm (10-minute buffer)

Break – flexibility of 10 minutes (ideally between 11am - 11.20am)

Wellbeing – set of cards (red, amber, green) – facilitator to divert conversation

Group reminder – To be sent via email and a text message

Our 1st session - cont

This 1st initial co-design session looked at how the members would like this group to run:

Structure – 1st half – check in (what has gone well this week, something you are looking forward to next week, anything that is difficult for you). Have a break, then 2nd half - free time/share resources

Ideas for free time – card games, board games, arts and crafts, learn someone else's skill

Group being cancelled – giving 1-2 days notice, ideally not on the day, however understand this can happen. Group to continue to run if facilitator is on holiday/sick but 1 must be a regular facilitator.

Other ideas – Suggestion box to add ideas

Our 2nd session

The 2nd initial co-design session looked at the group set up in more detail, reflecting on the previous week's ideas:

Updated the members from previous co-design session – start date of group, text messaging option, milk alternatives

Group discussion – Room layout (no table to keep it informal), biscuits options (allergies/vegan options), change of start time to 11am

Feedback about breaks – for facilitators to be aware of times

Resources shared – access card website

Did our members feel safe in the beginning?

‘I still felt incredibly anxious and did not feel safe to begin with, I still wanted to try and was willing to give it a go but the nerves were still very much present.’

‘Overtime, with the development of the group, getting to know others who were attending and those that run it the feeling of security and safety has developed.’

‘Knowing that everyone had been through Sue Lambert Trust took the shame away’

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs



Relating the group to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs in a neurodivergent way.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs



This journey for neurodivergent individuals can be uniquely challenging. However. when provided with the right support, opportunities and an encouraging environment our members have joined other groups, incorporated physical activity into their week, have taken part in volunteering, and inspired others to also reach their own self actualisation.



Members of the group had experienced negativity due to their neurodiversity – the pressures of the neurotypical world.
'Most of the people here are late diagnosed and we're all "high functioning" full of masks and often try to keep our struggles invisible. This creates understanding between us and is incredibly validating which facilitates the safety within the group'.



Over the last 6 months – we have seen friendships form; members have felt part of an inclusive community.
'The people made me come back every week'.



Anxiety can be prevalent amongst individuals with Autism and ADHD – we ensured the group was structured and the environment was predictable
'Seeing fidget toys being provided communicated to me, safety that my sensory needs could be met and I could move around'.
'I felt welcomed'.



We know some autistic people may have sensitivities that might complicate meeting their physiological needs. We identified dietary requirements and allergies. Ensured we had vegan biscuits, milk alternatives. Information was shared in a visual format.

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Learning opportunities

Scenario - When new members are invited to join the group

What happened - Since the initial group was set up, we have invited 2 additional members to the group. Both of whom decided that they would no longer take part in the group.

What have we learnt – Ensuring that information is communicated to them about the group – how it runs, structure, timings, topics of conversation, etc. This has been communicated through phone calls/emails.

Learning opportunities

Scenario – The groups at Sue Lambert Trust are usually facilitated by 2 qualified counsellors

What happened – This was the 1st group to have 2 facilitators – 1 qualified counsellor and 1 non-clinical member of staff

What have we learnt – This is the feedback from the counsellor co-facilitating:
"My experience with co-facilitating a peer support group with two differing roles is the feeling that we bring differing perspectives, whilst able to collaborate, which creates both a feeling of safety and a pro-activeness for the attendees. I believe that this leads to an environment of respect, autonomy and a sense of feeling held for all group members."
We have now rolled this out in our Crafting group too.

Learning opportunities

Scenario - Sensitive topics of conversation

What happened – In our check in space – we have had in-depth conversations occasionally which have had an impact on other members

What have we learnt – We initially had the cards (green, amber and red), however these have not been used and the feedback has been that they did not want to 'out' themselves as not being comfortable with someone else's experience. We spoke openly about this in the group and members agreed that they would feel more comfortable taking some time out and returning once the conversation had moved on. There is also the option of one of the facilitators to check in with them as well during or after the group.

Group progress 6 months on

We continue to run weekly – have been running the group since March 2026

We have had to move to another venue on occasions – this was planned with the group and information sent out visually – everyone attended

The group have shared various resources and members have come along to events – Now that's what I call Autism, Pilling Park Wellbeing event

Group progress 6 months on

We now have arranged to meet outside of the Sue Lambert building and spend our session at Waterloo Park once month.

This information was sent in a visual format in advance:









Feedback about the group 6 months on……

‘It is an opportunity that still isn’t out there, there are groups, but they are online or you have to pay which is a barrier’.

‘I feel safe and secure now because it is run by Sue lambert so there is already an understanding of mental health and trauma’.

‘This is demonstrated by the fact that all of us have come along even on days that we are really struggling but we know that it will help to make us feel better or at least feel seen because it’s such a safe and supportive group’.

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Going back to the beginning

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You Said	We Did
A group with activities and peer support	The structure of the group includes a check-in, peer support has grown as the group has developed. Activities have included: Board games, crafts, walking at Waterloo Park, decorating our charity Christmas tree
Really clear details of what is going to happen and when	We email the group every week with reminders of what was discussed. If there are changes we ensure that notice is given. We send photos of new places.
An autistic facilitator would be helpful	Although this was not possible to do, both facilitators have experience of neurodivergence in both a professional and personal way.

Going back to the beginning

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You Said

We Did

You Said	We Did
Have info and photos of the leaders before	In our invite to the co-design sessions, we ensured that there was a photos of both facilitators and a couple of facts about them.
No pressure to talk	At every session we will always remind members that they do not need to take part in the check-in if the do not want to.
Structured sessions to learn more about improving autistic wellbeing	We recently invited a member our team (qualified counsellor) who had recently been diagnosed with Autism to talk about their experience and ways in which they have looked after themselves. This also gave an opportunity for members to ask them questions.

What other are clients are telling us about our groups

‘I love the group and the people that run it its the best I've never had anything like it in my life’

‘Thank you for providing such a valuable service. Craft group has been invaluable to me over the past few years’

‘Overall, I appreciate the support the group provides and the consistency of having a safe space each week’

‘Its just amazing, its got me through and continues to get me through the hardest times of my life’

‘Just THANK YOU!!!!!!!!!! 😊’

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Our hopes for the future

We would love to see our groups co-facilitated with members of the group – look at peer facilitator roles/training

Continue to ensure that we co-design our groups at the very beginning of setting up a new group

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Any Questions?



Our referrals are open on the 1st of every month.
You can self refer via our website: www.suelamberttrust.org

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Feedback

Please provide some feedback - it only takes a minute!

