



# MS Together Private Community Groups Policy

**Date Ratified:** 05/11/2023

**Last Reviewed:** 12/03/2026

**Approved By:** CEO & Board of Trustees

## 1. Purpose

MS Together's private community groups (including WhatsApp, Facebook, and other online platforms) provide safe, inclusive spaces for young adults (18–35) living with MS to connect, share experiences, and offer peer support.

These groups are peer-led spaces, not a replacement for medical, legal, or professional advice.

This policy sets out:

- Expected behaviour
- Safeguarding and privacy measures
- Consent requirements
- Membership eligibility
- Reporting and enforcement procedures

## 2. Scope

Applies to all:



- Members
- Volunteers
- Moderators (who are volunteers of MS Together) ensuring the communities remain safe and supportive
- Staff participating in any MS Together private community support group

This includes WhatsApp, private Facebook groups, and any other online platforms used for peer support.

### 3. Eligibility

To join a group, you must:

- Be aged 18–35
- Self-identify as living with multiple sclerosis (MS)
- Consent to your phone number being visible in WhatsApp or profile information being visible in Facebook groups

Membership is conditional on agreeing to this policy and the Code of Conduct.

### 4. Joining and Consent

Explicit consent is required to join our private **WhatsApp** community groups:

- New members complete a joining form confirming:
  - They have MS
  - Their age (18–35)
  - Their location
  - Their phone number (WhatsApp) will be visible to other members
  - They understand the group is peer support, not medical advice



- They agree to follow the Community Guidelines / Code of Conduct as outlined in this policy

Existing members will be asked to reconfirm consent. Non-responders may be removed but can rejoin at any time.

All members may withdraw consent or leave a group at any time by emailing [hello@mstogether.org](mailto:hello@mstogether.org).

### **Facebook Groups**

By requesting to join our private Facebook group, members consent to engaging in a peer support community hosted on Facebook. Members acknowledge that Facebook has its own privacy policies and settings, and that they are responsible for reviewing and managing their individual privacy preferences within the platform. Members can adjust their privacy settings or leave the group at any time.

## **5. Community Guidelines and Code of Conduct**

### **5.1 Be Kind, Respectful, and Inclusive**

- Treat everyone with empathy, respect, and curiosity
- Welcome diverse experiences and perspectives
- Express disagreements respectfully - critique ideas, not people

### **5.2 No Hate, Bullying, or Harassment**

- Hate speech, discrimination, harassment, or exclusionary behaviour is strictly prohibited
- Comments that may harm others are taken seriously including comments that are presented as jokes or sarcasm



- Sexist, homophobic, transphobic, or other discriminatory behaviour may result in immediate removal

### **5.3 Respect Privacy and Confidentiality**

- Do not share other members' messages or personal information without explicit permission
- Screenshots or forwarding personal information outside the group is prohibited
- Admins and staff may keep a record of messages if required for safeguarding or moderation

### **5.4 No Promotions, Fundraising Requests, or Spam**

- Unsolicited advertising, commercial activity, or spam is prohibited
- Members may share any personal fundraisers, but direct requests for donations are not allowed
- Resources should be MS-related and supportive, not for personal profit

### **5.5 Online Behaviour and Platform Considerations**

- Do not contact other members via other platforms without explicit consent, and do not send unsolicited private messages
- If you receive an unsolicited private message that makes you feel uncomfortable, report this to a moderator
- Platform-specific note:
  - WhatsApp: phone numbers visible to members
  - Facebook: profile names and photos visible to members
  - The rules and Code of Conduct apply equally across all platforms



## 5.6 Respecting Boundaries

- Staff members and volunteers are here to support the community, but they are not available for personal contact, private assistance outside official channels, or discussions that become abusive, repetitive, or intrusive.
- To protect staff and volunteer wellbeing, moderators may close threads and sub-groups, and decline further responses. They may remove posts that target staff personally, demand individual attention, or attempt to bypass agreed support processes.
- Please keep interactions respectful, topic-focused, and within the forum's stated purpose.

## 6. Safeguarding and Escalation

### 6.1 Staff and Admin Responsibilities

- Monitor groups for safety and guideline breaches
- Contact members privately if concerns arise
- Escalate serious issues to senior staff / safeguarding lead

### 6.2 Step-by-Step Escalation

If a member's wellbeing or safety appears at risk, moderators and staff will follow a clear escalation process: acknowledge the concern, signpost the member to appropriate support (e.g., GP, MS nurse, crisis services), and escalate to senior staff or the safeguarding lead if needed. All actions are recorded and reviewed to ensure the member receives appropriate support.

Our Safeguarding Policy can be viewed here: [Safeguarding Policy](#)



**Important:** Groups are not monitored 24/7. Immediate risks should be referred to professionals.

## 7. Privacy and Data Protection

- WhatsApp and Facebook are **third-party platforms**; MS Together does not control them
- Admins may **download or store group conversations securely** to:
  - Identify common topics
  - Inform resources
  - Monitor usage
- No identifying information is published outside staff/admins
- Any data stored will be in line with MS Together's [Data Protection Policy](#).

## 8. Enforcement

- Breaches of this policy may result in the below, in line with [MS Together's Removal and Suspension policy](#):
  - Post removal
  - Member warnings
  - Member muting or removal
  - Group closure if needed
- Serious breaches (hate speech, harassment, repeated violations) will result in immediate removal
- Enforcement is based on content and impact, not intention
- Members are treated equally, regardless of relationships or history with MS Together
- Decisions by staff or trustees are final; formal complaints must follow MS Together's [Complaints Policy](#)



## 9. Commitment to a Safe Space

By joining, all members agree to:

- Follow this policy and the Code of Conduct
- Respect other members' privacy and wellbeing
- Maintain a welcoming, inclusive, and supportive environment

## 10. Support & Contacts

- Admin contact: [hello@mstogether.org](mailto:hello@mstogether.org)
- Crisis support:
  - Samaritans: 116 123
  - Emergency services if immediate risk
- MS Together Safeguarding Lead: [safeguarding@mstogether.org](mailto:safeguarding@mstogether.org)

Thank you for helping us maintain a safe, supportive community for everyone living with MS.

Version	Date Ratified	Approved By	Next Review Date	Notes
1.0	05/11/2023	Board of Trustees	05/11/2025	Initial ratification
1.1	26/11/2025	Board of Trustees	26/11/2026	Latest review
1.2	15/01/2026	Board of Trustees	15/01/2027	Updated following risk assessment
1.3	12/03/2026	Board of Trustees	12/03/2027	Updated following internal review

