<u>The Autism Society of Colorado Guidelines for Online Groups and Meetings</u>

Mission: To provide a space for participants with autism or a connection with autism opportunities to network and connect with others; share experiences, resources, and news to discuss life issues regarding autism and/or intellectual or developmental disabilities.

These guidelines are recommended best practices when attending online groups and meetings. It is to ensure a comfortable space to share and feel supported within the community. Please read and acknowledge the guidelines when participating in the Autism Society of Colorado Online Groups or Meetings.

1. **Respect, kindness, and empathy**: Treat all participants and facilitators with respect, kindness, and empathy regardless of their perspectives, experiences, or communication styles.
   a. Listen actively and attentively when others are speaking, and avoid interrupting or talking over others.
   b. Embrace and respect diversity within the group, including different experiences, perspectives, backgrounds, and encourage to learn from each other's differences.

2. **Confidentiality:** Maintain the privacy and confidentiality of any personal information shared within the group, unless explicit consent is given.
   a. No photos, screenshots, or recordings without everyone's permission.
   b. Please be careful with what you share in the chat features, it can be read by everyone in the group.

3. **Attend meetings and groups with good intentions**: Join the space with a genuine interest in support and learning from others. Assume positive intent; although at times we may not know how to express or communicate, we should not assume what we say is in a malicious way or as an attack.
   a. Avoid disruptive behavior, trolling, or any actions that may hinder the positive atmosphere of the group.

4. **No personal attacks, harassment, or judgment:** Avoid personal attacks, harassment, or bullying. The online space is a judgment-free zone.
   a. Disagreements should be handled respectfully and constructively, with the goal of understanding and learning from each other.

5. **Inclusive and respectful language:** Use inclusive and first-person language when referring to individuals.
   a. Avoid profanity, sexually explicit, derogatory terms, or offensive language.
   b. Be mindful of language and tone.

c. Use "I" statements: When sharing personal experiences or perspectives, use "I" statements to express your thoughts and feelings, rather than assuming universal experiences or speaking for others.

d. Please keep in mind some individuals will have baggage or trauma and may get triggered, and we must be respectful by expressing the boundaries by stating "I feel triggered" or "I feel uncomfortable".

e. Participants can leave or remove themselves from the group at any time.

6. **Active listening:** Practice active listening by giving others the opportunity to express themselves without interruption. Avoid dominating the conversation and allow everyone to have their turn to speak.
   a. Feel free to use the "raise hand" reaction or raise your hand in front of your camera when you want to contribute.

7. **Sensory considerations:** Be mindful of sensory sensitivities and avoid using excessive background noise, bright lighting, or any other elements that may cause discomfort for participants.
   a. Use headphones or adjust your microphone volume to minimize distractions.

8. **Seek professional advice:** Remind participants that the group is not a substitute for professional advice. Encourage individuals to seek professional guidance when needed and provide them with appropriate resources.

9. **Embrace a solution-oriented approach:** Encourage participants to offer constructive suggestions and solutions when discussing challenges or problems. Focus on finding practical ways to address issues and support each other.

10. **Active participation:**
    a. Having your video **on** for at least part of the meeting is encouraged if you feel up to it so that we know who we're talking to and can feel a human connection. *This is not a requirement, just a suggestion for active participation.*
    b. We understand some participants are shy and quiet, however, we encourage participants to communicate at their comfort level to foster social connections and opportunities to make friends (that is what these groups are for).
       i. Sometimes having small-group discussions or breakout rooms to foster deeper conversations.
    c. If you do not feel comfortable talking, you may utilize the chat features. Please note that direct messaging is turned off to prevent any miscommunication or misperceptions of conversations. If you are wanting a participant's information, please ask for their consent to share or the facilitator.

11. **Provide relevant resources and information:** Share reputable and up-to-date resources related to topics, such as articles, books, websites, and videos.