

Introduction to Discovery Programme

Welcome to Thriving Autistics Discovery Programme. We're really glad you're here.

Our Discovery Programme is a space for recently identified autistic adults that includes people with a formal identification and people who are self-identified, and those of you who may still be exploring what this all really means for you.

This is a neuro-affirming space, and that means that we don't see being autistic as something to fix or overcome. We understand being autistic is shaped by our sensory system, our bodies, our environments, relationships, culture, and the ableist systems that we live in.

Our focus is on building a deeper understanding of what being autistic means for you, developing your understanding of yourself, and the kinds of support that may help you to thrive.

We recognise that later in life, identification can be really, really difficult and overwhelming for some people, and for others, it can come as a great relief. Finding your own path can feel confusing at times. You may be wondering if you are autistic enough to belong here.

We want to reassure you that there is a space for all of us, wherever we are in our journey.

We are embracing of upholding a neuro-affirming safe space. This means that we respect all different ways of thinking, communicating, and ways of being. It recognises that struggles often come from the misfit between systems and environments, not from autistic people ourselves.

We value lived experience alongside professional and academic knowledge, and we embrace the neurodiversity paradigm and all the different ways people experience life.

We know that there are many intersections and privileges that may shape each of our lives—our race, ethnicity, culture, age, gender, as well as maybe co-occurring neurodivergences or other disabilities.

Everyone is welcome here, and we encourage everyone to be kind and open to the differences that we all have.

This programme has been developed by and is led by autistic people. We all get it, and we're still on this journey of discovering what it means to be autistic together.

You don't need to perform or be here in any particular way.

We want you to be as comfortable as possible so that you can feel safe to share if you want, or just listen and reflect. We want to create a safe, low-pressure, low-demand space for you to show up as you are.

Participation is flexible. Cameras on or off are completely okay. Speaking is always optional. Text chat is as valid as mouth speech. Silence, listening, or stepping away briefly are all valid ways to be present.

Here, you are free to stim, move, take care of your body, have a drink or a snack whenever you need. There is never an expectation for you to share personal information.

You will never be called upon to speak or share, and we invite you only to share what feels comfortable for you.

So for this reason, please respect the space. Don't share any screenshots or take recordings. We request no AI note-takers during the sessions, and for all personal information to be kept confidential.

If something feels difficult or triggers you, you're welcome, of course, to pause, step back, or reach out to any of the facilitators.

We hope that through our Discovery Programme you'll discover a deeper understanding of yourself, and may be able to begin to reframe some of the deficit narratives around being autistic that might have impacted your self-identity.

Our hope is that you gain clarification about your ways of being, your strengths and challenges, feel more empowered, and become better able to advocate for your own needs.

Later-in-life identification reflects how many of our systems so often fail people and how misunderstood being autistic still is in our society. Things are changing through community spaces like this, where we get to share our stories and feel validated.

Our Discovery Programme is about exploration—being curious, open to listening to others, finding language for experiences that you may never have had words for before, and creating a shared understanding and a sense of community belonging.

We invite you to take what helps you and to leave behind what doesn't feel right at the moment.

The programme will provide a foundation for exploring your identity in more depth. We will be covering the following topics: imposter phenomenon, intersectionality, masking, burnout, our sensory systems, monotropism and our attention styles, relationships, the double empathy problem, internalised ableism, and advocacy.

We also have more modules and resources covering topics that we don't have time to explore live on the six-week programme, and you're welcome to dip into these whenever feels right for you.

We hope you find the programme valuable, and we're delighted that you've chosen to start your discovery journey with Thriving Autistic.

We always welcome feedback, and if you have any questions, please do reach out to us at hello@thrivingautistic.org.

Bye for now.