



SUPPORT GROUP HANDBOOK

The focus of this handbook is to provide clear guidelines on how our support groups are structured, operates and the responsibilities maintained by both our organisation and each member.

TABLE OF CONTENT

- Welcome Message
- Our Company
- Support Group Role
- Our Support Group
- How We Operate
- Member Participation
- In Closing



WELCOME MESSAGE



Audrey Bart

Founder and Support Group Leader

Functional Neurological Disorder is a debilitating neurological condition that significantly impacts daily functioning, presenting with a myriad of physical symptoms without a known medical cause. It affects people from all walks of life and across all age groups. If you're reading this and you are diagnosed with FND, or know of someone who has FND - You are not alone anymore.

A warm welcome to our support group. As one of our newest members, we hope you'll find comfort, support, and healing in our meetings. Feel free to share at a pace that's most comfortable for you - we value your participation.

Our group is built on understanding, respect, and shared experiences. Together, we create a safe space where questions are welcomed, emotions are honored, and every step forward is celebrated, no matter how small. Remember, your journey is unique, and we're here to walk alongside you.

You've already shown tremendous courage by taking this step. We look forward to getting to know you and being part of your support network.

With warmth and understanding,

Audrey





OUR COMPANY

FND - What Now? is a registered non-profit and patient-led company (NPC) in South Africa (SA). We are dedicated to addressing Functional Neurological Disorder (FND), a debilitating neurological condition. FND significantly impacts daily functioning, and presents with a myriad of physical symptoms. There is no known medical cause to date. Our focus is to raise awareness and debunk myths about FND, and support each person on their healing journey. Furthermore, we support research to better understand this complex disorder.

Our Mission

Our mission is to deliver vital public benefits and social services to individuals with Functional Neurological Disorder (FND) and related conditions in South Africa (SA). We strive to create meaningful social impact by:

- Empowering patients on their healing journey, regardless of their socioeconomic background.
- Connecting individuals to trusted healthcare professionals to enhance their care experience.
- Reducing stigma associated with FND through education and advocacy.

Our Vision

Our vision is to improve the quality of life of people in both urban and rural areas across South Africa (SA) who suffer from FND and FND related symptoms.

THE ROLE OF A SUPPORT GROUP

Support Groups serve as a safe and supportive community where people with first-hand lived experiences can connect and support one another without fear of judgement. They provide an invaluable platform for individuals facing challenging experiences and chronic health conditions like Functional Neurological Disorder (FND) and other mental health conditions. Through shared experiences, these groups create a space where members feel understood, respected, and believed.

Benefits of a Support Group:

- Access to educational resources and professional referrals that facilitate healing and provide stability.
- A confidential environment for sharing difficult experiences and emotions.
- Opportunities for personal growth, resilience building, and skills development.
- Meaningful connections that help reduce feelings of anxiety, loneliness, and isolation.
- Participation in research studies that advance understanding of conditions like FND.

The Power of Group Dynamics:

Support Groups thrive on collective strength, which is essential for both group longevity and building resilient communities. This manifests through:

- Advocacy for improved healthcare policies and resource access.
- Development of leadership skills among members.
- Recognition and utilisation of members' diverse talents and experiences.
- Peer-to-peer support and knowledge sharing.
- Building awareness and understanding in the broader community.

Important Note: While support groups offer valuable peer support, they complement but do not replace professional medical treatment, therapy, or other healthcare interventions. Members are encouraged to maintain their existing medical care while participating in the group.

OUR FND SUPPORT GROUP

The need for a support group became evident as Audrey Bart searched for resources during her own healing journey with Functional Neurological Disorder (FND). Drawing from her medical background as a medical technologist and her love of learning, Audrey gained a wealth of knowledge and insights through extensive research of books, papers, and other FND and mental health resources. This led her to establish FND - What Now? support group, which launched in November 2022, with the assistance of The South African Depression and Anxiety Group (SADAG).

SADAG, established in 1994, is a non-profit organisation and registered Section 21 Company. Their board includes psychiatrists, psychologists, general practitioners, and patients. The organisation serves as an advocacy and support group network for thousands of South Africans living with Mental Health Issues. SADAG's mission is to eliminate discrimination and stigma in Mental Health while supporting, educating, and assisting the public, patients, and their families regarding available resources and treatment options that lead to recovery. They coordinate a network of close to 200 Support Groups throughout South Africa (SA).

The FND - What Now? support group was therefore created to provide aftercare and bridge the vital gap between professional medical treatment and therapy, and the ongoing need for supplementary support in South Africa (SA).





FREE FND ONLINE SUPPORT GROUP

Call Us
Living
with FND?
You're not
alone



FND
WHAT NOW

OUR PROCESS

- ✓ Adults, aged 18yrs+
- ✓ MS Teams video call screen for all new members
- ✓ Complete a membership intake form
- ✓ Receive our link upon confirmation

MAIN GROUP (Mostly Women)

Tuesdays, weekly @ 7pm SAST

MEN'S GROUP

Every 1st Thursday @ 7pm SAST

Join our supportive community where we come together to understand, share, and grow.

Unique theme-based meetings offer a fresh perspective on living with FND.

We support each other through reflection and discovery, as we experience our individual healing journeys.

We operate in partnership with **SADAG**.

HOW WE OPERATE

In partnership with the South African Depression and Anxiety Group (SADAG), we offer free online support group sessions. These live, interactive meetings provide a safe space for real-time connection and support.

How We Operate:

- When:
 - MAIN GROUP:** Tuesdays, weekly | 7:00–8:20 PM (SAST)
 - MEN'S GROUP:** 1st Thursday of each month | 7:00–8:00PM (SAST)
- Platform: MicroSoft Teams.
- A new, secure link is shared weekly — please do not share it publicly.
- Sessions are not recorded to protect your privacy.
- All meetings are conducted in English.

If you need support outside of group hours, please contact Audrey privately:

Cell: +27 (0)76 291 3442

Email: fndwhatnow@gmail.com

We aim to respond within 24 hours.

24/7 Counselling support is also available through the South African Depression and Anxiety Group (see contact details on Page 8).

How We Support You:

- Content is thoughtfully curated to support healing and recovery.
- Meetings are theme-based, exploring the complexities of FND.
- Sessions may include presentations, creative exercises, guest speakers, and open sharing.
- We support one another through active listening and shared moments of solidarity.
- Members are encouraged to ask questions and reflect on progress.
- Resources are shared to deepen understanding of FND and related topics.
- You are always welcome to express your needs and the kind of support you're seeking.

Our Leadership

Our FND support groups are led by trained volunteers who facilitate safe, inclusive spaces where individuals can connect and find mutual support. Drawing on lived experience (patient-led) and/or specialised training, our leaders understand the realities of FND. They create an environment where members feel seen, heard, and supported in sharing their unique symptoms, challenges, and victories.

HOW WE OPERATE

Our Engagement Guidelines:

- We uphold strict confidentiality. Each member's privacy and dignity are respected – what is shared in the group stays in the group.
- Members are encouraged to participate respectfully, mindfully, and at a pace that feels comfortable for them.
- We do not allow vulgar, condescending, or discouraging language, tone, or behaviour.
- Your well-being, and that of others, is a priority. Members must attend sessions sober. Please do not join if you are under the influence of alcohol, substances, or medication that may impair your awareness.

WhatsApp Group Chat:

- We also offer an optional WhatsApp group chat where members can share resources and support one another.
- Participation is completely optional.
- Operating hours: Monday to Saturday, 08:00 AM – 5:00 PM.
- Consent to join is obtained during support group meetings or via email.
- New members are encouraged to introduce themselves upon joining.
- Please review the group rules in the chat description.
- Members are welcome to connect privately and build friendships beyond the group chat, always with respect for personal boundaries and in alignment with the values of FND – What Now? Non-profit *Company*.
- To manage notifications, you can mute the chat or customise your alert settings within WhatsApp.

Supporting You Through Difficult Times:

We understand that living with FND can feel overwhelming at times, and you may experience moments of deep distress or hopelessness. Your well-being matters to us. While our support group offers a caring community, there are times when additional, professional support is important.

If you are struggling, please remember you are not alone – trained professionals are available to support you, day or night:

South African Depression and Anxiety Group (SADAG):

- Support Line: 0800 567 567 (24/7)
- WhatsApp Support Line: 076 882 2775 (24/7)
- Emergency Services: 10177 (landline) or 112 (cell phone)

HOW DO WE OPERATE

Supporting You Through Difficult Times:

We encourage you to:

- Reach out to these dedicated support services.
- Connect with your healthcare provider.
- Visit your nearest emergency center.
- Share your feelings with someone you trust.

Your journey and your life are precious. While our group provides peer support, we'll always guide you toward professional help during times of crisis. Remember, reaching out is a sign of strength, not weakness.



Becoming a Support Group Leader:

Our support group operates under in partnership with the South African Depression and Anxiety Group (SADAG). SADAG offers a **free Mental Health Support Group Leader training** for anyone interested in **starting a support group in their community**. Click "Support Groups" on their website: www.sadag.org to learn more.

MEMBER PARTICIPATION

Being part of our FND support groups means joining a community where your experience matters. Whether you share, support others, or simply listen, your presence is valuable.

Living with FND brings unique challenges, and together we create a space of understanding, connection, and hope – where every journey is respected and supported.

What You Need To Know:

- You must be 18 years or older.
- You must reside in South Africa (SA).
- You must have an FND diagnosis from a registered, qualified neurologist.
- All prospective members are screened via a MS Teams video call, followed by the completion of a membership intake form.
This helps us understand your needs and ensure the group is the right fit.
- Completion of the intake form is required for administrative purposes.
- **Please note:** Your privacy matters to us. Personal information is kept confidential and will not be shared with any third parties without your written consent.

Time Management:

To ensure our sessions are comfortable and supportive for everyone, we've set up some gentle timing guidelines. These apply to all members.

- We'll start at 7pm and keep the first 5 minutes open for everyone to join in.
- If you know ahead of time you can't make it, leave a message by 6:00pm on our WhatsApp group chat or privately to the number 076 291 3442.
- Not feeling well? Your health comes first – please rest and take care of yourself first. We assure you, you're not missing out on anything.
- To keep our discussions flowing smoothly, we kindly ask that you do not join after 7:20pm.

MEMBER PARTICIPATION

Meeting Access Instructions:

- You will receive a meeting link via email on Mondays.
- Click the link a few minutes before the scheduled time.
- Ensure your microphone and camera are working.
- Minimise background noise by using earphones/headphones.
- Sit in a comfortable and calm space.
- For the MS Teams connection - use the app or web browser to log in.
- Use the "raise hand" feature to indicate when you wish to speak.

Growth and Advancement Opportunities:

As members progress in their healing journey, we encourage growth beyond regular group participation. We offer voluntary roles (either as a volunteer or elected Board member) within our organisation based on:

- Individual healing progress
- Personal readiness
- Skills and interests
- Available time and energy
- Physical capabilities
- Access to a computer or laptop
- Stable internet connection

Note: While support group membership isn't intended to be lifelong, we accommodate longer-term participation based on individual needs and organisational capacity.

Healthcare Referral List:

We are compiling a resource list of healthcare practitioners who support people with FND. If you know of such practitioners and would like to share that with us, you can contact Audrey directly. All candidates are closely vetted before we include and share their services.

You matter to us! We want you to know that we support you wholeheartedly through your healing journey, whatever that may look like. Each person has a different story to tell.

MEMBER PARTICIPATION

Friendships Beyond The Support Group:

We love seeing supportive friendships develop between members! While we encourage these connections, here's what you should know.

When connecting outside our official support platforms:

- Meet and interact with mutual respect, understanding and at your own comfort level.
- Trust your instincts and maintain personal boundaries.
- Remember that these friendships are your personal choice.

As a support organisation, We:

- Can't oversee private friendships or resolve personal conflicts.
- Don't manage private interactions between members.
- Won't be involved in any personal arrangements or agreements.

Keep it friendly, keep it respectful, and stay safe! If you ever feel unsafe or experience harassment, please contact the appropriate authorities.

Leaving The Support Group:

We understand that circumstances change and members may need to leave the group. If you wish to leave:

- Notify the group leader via email or private message.
- Contact Audrey Bart - Cell: +27 (0)76 291 3442, Email: fndwhatnow@gmail.com
- Complete a brief exit survey (optional but appreciated).
- Remove yourself from the WhatsApp group chat.
- Your information will be kept confidential per our privacy policy.
- You are welcome to rejoin in the future through the standard intake process.

IN CLOSING

INSPIRING QUOTES

"Sometimes the strength within you is not a big fiery flame for all to see, it's just a tiny spark that whispers softly 'you got this, keep going.'" - Unknown

"Vulnerability sounds like truth and feels like courage." - Brené Brown

Your presence in our FND support groups matters. Every step in your healing journey, no matter how small, is significant. Living with FND can be challenging, but you don't have to face it alone.

Together, we create a circle of understanding, hope, and support. Whether you're new to FND or have lived with it for years, this group walks alongside you. Here, your experience is valued, your voice is heard, and your journey is respected.

With warmth and understanding,
The FND - What Now? Team





FND
WHAT NOW



+27 76 291 3442



fndwhatnow@gmail.com



www.fndwhatnow.com



@fndwhatnow



Cape Town, South Africa

Version: 4 - April 2026

Transformation through Understanding

Registration No: 2024/319828/08