

SOS ALBUQUERQUE – GUIDE TO ONLINE SUPPORT GROUP MEETINGS

SOS has started conducting our support group meetings online, using the Zoom conferencing system. Meetings are held at the same times as the regular scheduled meetings – 1st and 3rd Mondays at 7 PM; 2nd and 4th Saturdays at 1 PM. The meetings are limited to 1 hour and the online format imposes some restrictions on how members interact.

WHAT YOU NEED TO ATTEND AN ONLINE MEETING

The best way to attend a meeting is using a laptop or desktop computer equipped with a microphone, speakers, and a webcam. This allows you to see and hear other meeting participants and for them to see and hear you. The computer screen is large enough to show several members at one time with a larger image of the person talking.

You can also attend using a smart phone with the Zoom mobile app. The smaller display does limit how much you can see at any one time, but it is still an effective way to attend if you do not have a computer available.

Finally, you can attend by calling in from a regular telephone. You will be able to hear all discussions and participate, but the lack of visual display may be confusing since you will not be able to see who is speaking.

HOW TO REGISTER FOR ONLINE MEETINGS

The online meetings will be announced through the regular SOS email notification process. A few days prior to a meeting, we will send an email to every person listed in the lists for both the Saturday and Monday groups. If you are listed in both groups, you will receive 2 announcements. You must reply to an announcement to register for the online meetings. Once you register the first time, you do not need to register again. We require this registration to protect the privacy of our online meetings and maintain confidentiality. One or two days before a scheduled online group meeting, all registered members will receive a second email containing the meeting ID and password, along with a link to sign in.

SIGNING INTO THE MEETING

The email you receive provides a link to the meeting along with the meeting ID and password. Click the link to the Zoom website and follow the instructions to sign in. You do not need a Zoom account to attend a meeting, but you will need to download the Zoom application the first time you sign in. The website will prompt you to do this and guide you through the steps.

Once you are on the Zoom website, you select the option to join the meeting with your computer audio. If you have a webcam or are on a smart phone, the video from it is enabled when you join. The screen has several controls in the lower left corner that select your speakers, microphone, and camera. This area is also where you start and stop your video or mute/unmute your microphone during the meeting.

If you are signing in from a regular telephone, dial the teleconferencing number listed in the meeting invitation email, then enter the meeting ID, followed by # and the password, followed by #.

HOW TO PARTICIPATE AND SUGGESTED TIPS

The first order of business is to find a quiet spot with decent lighting where there are no distractions. You will be able to see and hear others and we will be able to see and hear you. A private area protects the confidential discussions that take place – remember that we are all responsible to one another to maintain a confidential environment.

One other thing to consider is the name displayed for you during the meeting. Your picture on the screen has your name at the bottom and your name also appears in the “Chat” list. The best option is to have your actual name displayed – first name or full name is your choice. It isn’t so great if it shows “Grandma’s I-pad” or “Dad’s phone” – that may mean something in your house but we want to call you Mary or Doug so that it feels like a real conversation. You can change the name shown for you during the meeting when you first sign-in to Zoom.

The meeting facilitator controls discussion by allowing access to “the floor” – that is, who is speaking. The lower left corner of the screen has a “mute” control button that turns your microphone on and off. There is a “mute” indicator on your image when your microphone is turned off. We ask that you mute yourself whenever you are not given the floor by the facilitator. Several people talking at one time leads to a chaotic, confusing meeting. The facilitator controls who has the floor in an orderly fashion, giving each participant a chance to speak in turn. If you wish to be given a turn – maybe to reply to something said by another person – you can raise your hand so that the facilitator sees that you want to speak. Alternatively, you can use the “Chat” function described below to send a request to the facilitator or a comment directly to another person.

On a computer screen, you have three options for seeing other participants:

- Gallery mode displays a grid of small “thumbnail” video boxes all participants
- Speaker mode displays the video of the active speaker only
- Thumbnail mode displays a large image of the person speaking with a small panel of some other participant thumbnail videos at the side or across the bottom. This panel can only show a small number of videos, so most of the other people will be hidden. The panel can be scrolled to see other thumbnail videos.

There are control buttons on the screen to select the viewing mode. In Speaker or Thumbnail mode, the Zoom system selects the image displayed as the main image based on the person that is speaking. In Gallery mode, the video box of the active speaker is highlighted with a different color border.

There is a button at the bottom of the screen for the “Chat” function. Clicking on that button brings up a chat box on your screen. The chat box lists the name of all meeting participants and has an option to chat to “everyone”. We ask that you not send messages to everyone – the online meeting environment is confusing unless there is some control over how much information is flying around. Please send chat messages to one other person or the facilitator.

WHEN SOMETHING GOES WRONG

Please note that this section says “when” not “if” something goes wrong. The web-based meeting environment has been around for quite a while but there are still enough things that can happen. Most of our participants are new to using the system as are many of the SOS facilitators. Please be patient and understanding when problems arise. We will do our best to deal with them and improve the meeting experience. You can contact us for help:

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