



D1: Offering MS Support

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If your group handles money and provides services and activities, you may decide to offer **MS Support** as an optional additional service.

We know that having access to **MS Support** delivered locally has a positive impact on people affected by MS, and we encourage our groups to provide this service.

MS Support volunteer roles

Your **MS Support** service must only be provided by volunteers in these roles, who have completed **Support Volunteer Training** and hold a current disclosure check:

- [Lead Support Volunteer](#)
- [Support Volunteer](#)

When we use the term **Lead/Support Volunteers**, we mean both roles.



See [C1: Volunteering with us](#) for guidance on recruiting, supporting and recognising your volunteers.

This section gives an overview of our **MS Support** priorities, our ways of working, and how we help our groups to offer a local **MS Support** service.

It is not intended to replace [Support Volunteer Training](#), which all [Lead/Support Volunteers](#) must complete before offering one to one support.



See [Supporting People](#) on the volunteer website for our full range of [MS Support](#) guidance and resources.

1. What is MS Support?

With the right support and understanding, people with MS can live independent lives and take advantage of the same opportunities as everyone else.

[MS Support](#) is a key service delivered locally by our groups to help people affected by MS to access support when they want it, to make informed choices that meet their needs.

We want [MS Support](#) to be available to everyone who needs it, wherever they are in the UK. By offering an [MS Support](#) service, your group will help us meet this goal.

1.1. Our priorities

We have identified four priorities we want all local [MS Support](#) services to meet. Your [MS Support](#) service must meet these priorities:

- Offering emotional support
- Giving information
- Signposting to specialist advice
- Help to access financial support

1.2. Meeting our requirements

Our [MS Support](#) requirements are the same as those for other services and activities your group may provide. Throughout this section, you'll find information about our group requirements as they specifically apply to your [MS Support](#) service.



See [A2: Requirements, support, tools and resources](#) for an overview of our group requirements.

2. Offering emotional support

Emotional support means [Lead/Support Volunteers](#) offering a listening ear and empathy in response to feelings expressed by a person affected by MS.

Emotional support may happen:

- By phone
- By email
- At a group activity or social event
- Face to face at a pre-arranged meeting

2.1. Being easy to contact

Being easy to contact is a requirement for all groups that handle money and provide services and activities.

If your group offers **MS Support**, we expect you to do the following:

- Have agreed **MS Support** service contact details with a named volunteer responsible for monitoring each contact method.
- Have a named contact and contact details for the **MS Support** activities your group provides.

This will ensure that people who contact your group for **MS Support** are dealt with by a **Lead/Support Volunteer** trained to provide emotional support.

Phone

People expect to be able to contact your **MS Support** service by phone. We want you to agree set hours when a **Lead/Support Volunteer** will be available to take calls.

We recommend that your **Coordinating Team** purchases a dedicated landline or mobile phone for making and receiving **MS Support** calls on our behalf.

Email

Being easy to contact by email has become an important way to support people affected by MS.

If you offer **MS Support**, you must use your group's dedicated 'support@mssociety.org.uk' **MS Society email** address to send and receive emails on our behalf.



See [B1: Availability, contact and communication](#) for our guidance on setting up a dedicated phone line and using **MS Society email**.

Keeping your personal information safe

We strongly recommend that you do not share your personal information – including home addresses, email addresses and phone numbers – anywhere in print, online, or in email communications.

This ensures your safety and security, both during and after your time volunteering with us. It also makes it easier to transfer responsibility for a contact method if someone is away, or steps down.

2.2. Supporting people to attend activities and events

We want people affected by MS to be able to live their lives, strengthened by a community that ensures no one has to face MS alone.

We are committed to equality, diversity and inclusion. We expect our groups to include all people affected by MS and not discriminate against anyone when providing services.

Access to MS Society services

We provide information, support and services for all people affected by MS. A person does not have to be an MS Society member to access our services, nor does membership give any greater entitlement to our support.

Our [Lead/Support Volunteers](#) encourage people to access group activities and social events. This could involve reassuring the person that a named volunteer will be there with them, the first time they come along.

[Lead/Support Volunteers](#) may also take responsibility for ensuring the activities and events your group provides address the needs of your local MS community.



See [A3: Our values and how we deal with problems](#) for how we put our equality, diversity and inclusion policies into practice.

Organising an event

Organising an event is a great way to bring people together and offer support to your MS community.

For everything you need to plan, deliver and follow up an event, see [Organising an event](#) on our volunteer website.

Personal care

People with MS must be able to use our services and activities knowing that they will be treated with dignity and respect, and that they will have access to the personal care they need.

In most cases, personal care should be provided by a person's own carer, who may be a family member or a paid carer.

However, if your group organises an activity that aims to give primary carers a break, you must supply contracted care assistants to provide personal care.



Learn about your responsibilities under our [Personal Care Policy](#) on the volunteer website, or ask your [Local Networks Officer](#) (LNO) for help.

2.3. Face to face support

Your [MS Support](#) service may offer pre-arranged meetings for people affected by MS in public places, hospitals or residential care settings.

We don't expect your [MS Support](#) service to offer regular ongoing visits, and you must not provide any of these services on our behalf:

- Shopping
- Gardening
- Meal preparation
- Personal care
- Replacement care
- Companionship/friendship

Home visits

You may be asked to make home visits for people that are isolated. If home visiting is the only possible way to meet with someone, you must ensure that at least two people visit together.



See [A5: Health, safety and wellbeing](#) for our Lone Volunteering Policy and guidance.

2.4. Emotional support - boundaries

We provide training and ongoing support to enable your group to offer an **MS Support** service that is safe, accessible and impactful. This includes understanding and holding the boundaries we have in place to protect everyone.

We don't expect your **MS Support** service to provide the following types of emotional support, and you must not do so on our behalf:

- Counselling
- Befriending
- Complex problem solving
- Dealing with safeguarding concerns
- High end emotional support for strong feelings of anger, sadness, happiness, worry, anxiety, depression and suicidal ideation

MS Helpline

We recognise that **Lead/Support Volunteers** may experience emotional situations that go beyond the boundaries of **MS Support**. When this happens, we want you to signpost the person to an appropriate specialist service, such as our **MS Helpline**, The Samaritans or local counselling.

Our **MS Helpline** offers emotional support, information and benefits advice to anyone affected by MS in the UK. You can ask them for help with individual enquiries and share the **MS Helpline** contact details with anyone you think could benefit.

MS Helpline

helpline@mssociety.org.uk

Freephone: 0808 800 8000

2.5. Safeguarding

Safeguarding means making sure that people at risk in contact with the MS Society are protected from abuse. Although encountering abuse is rare, it is important that it is never ignored.



See [A5: Health, safety and wellbeing](#) for our Safeguarding Policy and guidance.

You may become aware of abuse if you:

- Witness a form of abuse
- Suspect someone is being abused
- Are told about abuse by a person with MS or someone they know

Reporting safeguarding concerns

We don't expect your **MS Support** service to deal with safeguarding concerns and you must not do so on our behalf.

If you become aware of abuse, or suspected abuse, report your concerns to the **Safeguarding Responders Group** by email as soon as possible, or by calling your MS Society national office.

Safeguarding Responders Group

safeguarding@mssociety.org.uk

Tel: Via your national office



See [Appendix 2: Sources of support](#) for national office contact details.

3. Giving information

We offer information to support and enable people to take control and make choices for themselves. This means that it is up to the person to decide what works best for them, based on the information available, or knowing where to go to find out more.

If your group handles money and provides services and activities, we expect you to ensure that information about MS and MS Society services and activities is available to everyone in your community.



See [B3: Giving information](#) for support to meet this requirement.

Lead/Support Volunteers receive training and ongoing support to enhance your group's information giving. This enables your **MS Support** service to:

- Ask the right questions to understand what people want to know, or need support with.
- Have expert knowledge of our resources, and support people to access those that are relevant to their situation.

- Receive all new and revised MS Society publications as they are released.
- Give relevant and up to date information.
- Know where people can get information and support locally about other specialist services.
- Help people pull everything together to make informed choices that meet their needs, in ways that suit them.
- Keep us informed about the types of enquiries your group receives to help us improve services and resources.

3.1. Handling data

We are all responsible for protecting the privacy of individuals and their right to control the ways we use their personal information. Our obligations apply to personal data held in any form, both electronic and on paper.



See [A6: Handling data](#) for our rules when dealing with personal information.

We don't expect [Lead/Support Volunteers](#) to hold personal information about people using your [MS Support](#) service, or make case notes about enquiries you have taken, and you must not do so.

Using the Portal

As a [Lead Support Volunteer](#) or [Support Volunteer](#), you can use our [Portal](#) to access to contact information about members who have agreed to be contacted by us.

We will ask you to complete [Data Protection for GDPR eLearning](#) before you use the [Portal](#) for the first time.



To request access to the [Portal](#), log in or get support, see [Using the Portal](#) on our volunteer website, or ask the [Supporter Care Team](#) for help.

When you do handle personal information, we expect you to be discreet at all times, and maintain confidentiality where necessary. You must ask permission from a person before sharing information about them with another [Lead/Support Volunteer](#). You must only use the information they share for the purpose/s they have agreed to.

If you are concerned that your **MS Support** service or an individual volunteer may have breached our data requirements, you must contact our **Data Governance Team** immediately for advice.

Safeguarding, emergencies and data protection

You must report all abuse or suspected abuse to the **Safeguarding Responders Group**, even if you have not been able to obtain permission.

If someone's life is in immediate danger, data protection laws do not prevent you from acting immediately to share information with the emergency services, health professionals or other authorities.

However, if your group is approached by the Police or any other authority asking for information about a person in anything other than a life or death situation, you must always refer them to our **Data Governance Team**.

Data Governance Team
datagovernance@mssociety.org.uk
Tel: 0203 872 8735



See our [Safeguarding Policy](#) and guidance on the volunteer website, or contact the **Safeguarding Responders Group** for help.

4. Signposting to specialist advice

We define specialist advice as, "a person or organisation regarded as knowledgeable or authoritative making recommendations concerning future action."

Specialist advice includes these activities:

- Benefits advice
- Other financial advice
- Advice on how to apply for health and social care services
- Care navigation or case work
- Recommending services such as clinical or therapeutic services that are not regulated

We don't expect your **MS Support** service to offer specialist advice and you must not do so on our behalf. If a person needs specialist advice, we want you to signpost to a suitable service provider, or contact our **MS Helpline** for support.

4.1. Signposting resources

We want all groups that handle money and deliver services and activities to maintain a list of local MS services to signpost to when dealing with information enquiries. We've developed a [Local Contacts Template](#) to help you do this.

If your group offers **MS Support**, your **Lead/Support Volunteers** also have access to the list of UK-wide and nation-specific organisations that our **MS Helpline** signposts to.



For our **Local Contacts Template** and **MS Helpline Signposting List**, see [Signposting To Specialist Advice](#) on the volunteer website, or ask your **Local Networks Officer** for help.

Our signposting criteria

Trustworthy

Is their advice objective and information based?

Accurate

Are they evidence based and specialists in their field?

Up to date

Are review dates available on their website?

Relevant

Do they offer what is needed?

Professional

Is their information accessible and easy to use?

4.2. Organisations we signpost to

We only signpost to organisations that meet our signposting criteria:

- The NHS, including NHS Choices and the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE)
- Government agencies and departments, such as the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP)
- Governing bodies, such as the British Medical Association (BMA)

- Legislative bodies, including UK Parliament, Scottish Parliament, Northern Ireland Assembly and Welsh Assembly
- National charities and other not-for-profit organisations like us, and trade unions
- Well known, authoritative organisations seen as a trusted source of information and guidance, such as the BBC

4.3. Advice partnerships

Some groups develop a partnership with a local organisation that provides specialist advice to meet local need.

An 'advice partnership' usually involves an MS Society group funding a qualified Citizens Advice Bureau worker (or similar) to provide specialist advice for an agreed number of hours or days per week or month. This enables people affected by MS to access the support they need quickly and at a location that is accessible to them.

Your group may decide to develop an advice partnership instead of, or as well as offering **MS Support**. This decision should always be based on what is needed locally and your available resources.

5. Help to access financial support

People with MS may have additional needs as a result of their MS, and may need financial support to meet them. We help people to access this support in a number of ways.

5.1. Information about MS Society grants

We provide financial grants to people affected by MS for things they feel will make a positive impact on their lives.

If your group handles money and provides services and activities, we expect you to ensure that information about our national grants programme is available to all people affected by MS within your community.



See [National Grant Funds](#) on our volunteer website, or ask the **Supporter Care Team** for help.

5.2. Support to fill in grant application forms

People may ask for help to fill in MS Society grant application forms. Only **Lead/Support Volunteers** who have completed **Support Volunteer Training** can offer this level of support.

Our **Supporter Care Team** is available to help grant applicants in areas where we don't offer a local **MS Support** service.

Handling grant application paperwork

Grant application forms must be kept in a locked drawer, filing cabinet or cupboard at all times when they are not being used. Access to the key or combination lock must be limited only to volunteers in roles that are allowed to use MS Society personal data. You must not allow members of your family to access personal data you hold.



See [A6: Handling data](#) for our personal data storage rules.

Awarding grants

Your group may decide to award MS Society grants locally as an optional additional service. You may set up a local grants service instead of, or as well as offering **MS Support**. This decision should always be based on what is needed locally and your team's capacity.

Lead/Support Volunteers who have supported a person to complete an MS Society grant application form must not be involved in the decision about whether to award it.



See [A2: Requirements, support, tools and resources](#) for an overview of optional additional services your group may decide to offer.

5.3. Accessing wider financial support

Groups that offer **MS Support** help people affected by MS to access information and services to enable them to make decisions about wider financial matters.

We provide **Lead/Support Volunteers** with training and ongoing support that enables your **MS Support** service to:

- Ask the right questions to help people affected by MS to establish whether financial support will meet their needs.
- Know where people can get local information and support from specialist financial services.
- Support people to apply for financial support from local and national grant making organisations.

5.4. Financial support - boundaries

We don't expect your **MS Support** service to provide the following types of financial support, and you must not do so on our behalf:

- Completing benefits or health and social care assessment forms on a person's behalf.
- Giving advice about what to include on benefits or health and social care assessment forms.
- Making decisions about an MS Society grant application you have helped with.

6. Informing our work

Keeping us informed of your activities is a requirement for all MS Society groups.

We expect your **Coordinating Team** to do this in two ways:

- Have regular contact with your **Local Networks Officer**
- If your group handles money and delivers services and activities, use the **Portal** to maintain a record of what you provide



See [A7: Keeping in touch](#) for the ways we support your group to do this.

MS Support on the Portal

The **Portal** is our record of all services and activities delivered by MS Society groups. If your group offers **MS Support**, we want you to record it on the Portal under the 'services and activities' tab.

We will use this information to promote your services on our website and confirm that the appropriate level of risk management has been completed.



To request access to the [Portal](#), log in or get support, see [Using the Portal](#) on our volunteer website, or ask the [Supporter Care Team](#) for help.

6.1. Telling us about your MS Support service

Keeping us informed about your [MS Support](#) service is another way to help us understand our impact on the lives of people affected by MS.

We want all [Lead/Support Volunteers](#) to use our [MS Support monthly enquiry tally sheet](#) to record:

- How many queries you take in a month
- How many hours you spend delivering [MS Support](#) in a month
- How many new contacts you make in a month
- What your three key queries have been in the month

Each month, we will send a link to a short online survey to all [Lead/Support Volunteers](#) to ask for your group's totals. We will never ask you to share personal information about the people you support.



Download our [MS Support Monthly Enquiry Tally Sheet](#) on the volunteer website, or ask the [Supporter Care Team](#) to send you a printed copy.

7. Setting up an MS Support service

7.1. Understanding local need

Before your group decides which [MS Support](#) activities to deliver, we want you to find out what is needed locally. Local staff, our members, MS professionals and your wider MS community can help you understand local need.



See [B6: Planning and delivering quality services and activities](#) for guidance on how to identify local need.

7.2. Planning your MS Support service

Once you understand what **MS Support** is needed locally, we want your **Coordinating Team** to consider these questions:

- How will the activities we want to offer meet the four **MS Support** priorities?
- How do we plan to cover the costs of offering **MS Support**?
- What methods will we use to promote our **MS Support** service?
- Do we have trained **Lead/Support Volunteers** in place to provide an **MS Support** service?



See [C3: Your Coordinating Team](#) for guidance on how your group should operate.

7.3. Our MS Support volunteer roles

Support Volunteer

To offer an **MS Support** service, you must have a minimum of one **Support Volunteer** who has completed **Support Volunteer Training** and holds a current disclosure check.

This enables your group to offer:

- Emotional support
- Enhanced information giving
- Signposting to specialist advice
- Help to complete grant applications and access financial support



See our [Support Volunteer](#) role page on the volunteer website, or ask your LNO for help.

Team benefits

Offering **MS Support** through a team of **Support Volunteers** may make it easier to provide a quality service.

This enables your group to:

- Share enquiries and tasks between a number of volunteers
- Divide your **MS Support** service geographically

- Operate a rota and increase your availability
- Utilise specialist skills an individual may have
- Organise peer support within your team
- Cover when volunteers are unavailable or need to take a break

Lead Support Volunteer

If your group decides to set up an **MS Support** team, we recommend that you appoint a **Lead Support Volunteer** to coordinate your **MS Support** activities. They take additional responsibility for:

- Assisting your **Group Coordinator** to recruit **Support Volunteers**
- Coordinating and supporting your **Support Volunteers**
- Delegating tasks within the team
- Planning rotas
- Reporting on your **MS Support** service at **Coordinating Team** meetings



See our [Lead Support Volunteer](#) role page on the volunteer website, or ask your LNO for help.

7.4. Recruiting Support Volunteers

Your **Group Coordinator** has overall responsibility for recruiting, selecting and inducting group volunteers. However, they may choose to share this task with others.

If your group offers an **MS Support** service, you may have a **Lead Support Volunteer** who coordinates **Support Volunteer** recruitment.

Recruitment resources

We recruit all group roles with our agreed recruitment process, using **Online Recruitment** or our paper **Volunteer Application Form**, and our role descriptions and recruitment guidance.

We make our selection based on whether a role meets an applicant's aspirations, is within their capabilities, and suits the time they want to give us.



For our role descriptions and recruitment guidance, see [Volunteering With Us](#) on the volunteer website, or ask the **Supporter Care Team** for help.

Online Recruitment

Online Recruitment enables your group to manage the entire recruitment process online, from tailoring your advertisement and promoting your vacancy, to confirming a successful candidate in a role.



To request your **Online Recruitment** account, log in or get support, see [Using Online Recruitment](#) on our volunteer website, or ask the **Volunteering Team** for help.

Support Volunteer tasks

Each of our volunteer role descriptions includes a list of tasks. To offer an **MS Support** service, all the tasks listed on our **Support Volunteer** role description must be covered, by one or more **Support Volunteers**.

Your **Group Coordinator** (or **Lead Support Volunteer**) is responsible for ensuring that all **MS Support** tasks are covered by someone, and that each **Support Volunteer's** wellbeing is considered before they take on additional responsibilities.

All volunteers that carry out **Support Volunteer** tasks must complete **Support Volunteer Training** and hold a current disclosure check.

7.5. Disclosure checks

As part of our wider commitment to safeguarding, people in particular volunteer roles at the MS Society are required to have a disclosure check as part of their recruitment process.

All potential **Lead/Support Volunteers** must complete a disclosure check before being allowed to offer any new or existing MS Support activity.

Keeping us informed

Whenever you recruit a new **Lead/Support Volunteer**, or an existing volunteer changes role, you must contact our **Supporter Care Team** to update our central volunteer database and commence the disclosure process.



See [C2: Disclosure checks](#) for your [Coordinating Team's](#) responsibilities and our nation-specific disclosure processes.

8. Induction, 'must do' training and ongoing support

We need to ensure our groups are able to offer [MS Support](#) services that are safe, accessible and impactful.

We do this by providing [Lead/Support Volunteers](#) with:

- A thorough induction programme
- 'Must do' [Support Volunteer Training](#)
- Ongoing face to face, phone and email support

8.1. Induction

We want all volunteers who are new to a role to know what to do and who can help, right from the start. During your induction, we will help you find about what we do and what volunteering with us is like.

Welcome Booklet

Our [Welcome Booklet](#) is for all volunteers newly joining us. It includes information about:

- Who we are and how we work
- Our commitments to you and our expectations
- Our approach to learning and development

Welcome and Induction Checklists

We provide all volunteers who are new to a role with a role specific [Welcome and Induction Checklist](#) to help you settle in.

Our [Support Volunteer Welcome and Induction Checklist](#) includes an online presentation to introduce you to your role, and links to key resources that will support you.

Our [Lead Support Volunteer Welcome and Induction Checklist](#) expands on the [Support Volunteer](#) checklist, and includes guidance on the additional responsibilities of this coordinating role.

We expect your [Group Coordinator](#) or existing [Lead Support Volunteer](#) to meet with new [Lead/Support Volunteers](#) to talk through the [Welcome and Induction Checklist](#).



For our [Welcome Booklet](#) and links to all [Welcome and Induction Checklists](#), see [Welcome to the MS Society](#) on the volunteer website or ask the [Supporter Care Team](#) for help.

8.2. Support Volunteer Training

During induction, we expect all [Lead/Support Volunteers](#) to complete our 'must do' [Support Volunteer Training](#) that consists of four modules:

1. Choice and control

- Barriers people affected by MS may face
- The importance of having choice and control
- Skills, qualities and good practice when offering [MS Support](#)

2. Emotional support

- Principles and boundaries of offering emotional support
- Common responses and questions about MS
- The impact of diagnosis on everyone it affects

3. Information matters

- Confidentiality and safeguarding awareness
- Providing appropriate and quality information
- Signposting to local and national specialist advice services

4. Money matters

- Financial issues people affected by MS may face
- Access to money, work and benefits information and support services
- Supporting people to apply for MS Society and external grants



For online and face-to-face [MS Support Training](#) dates, see [Events](#) on the volunteer website or ask the [Supporter Care Team](#) for help.

New and existing MS Support services

If your group sets up a *new* [MS Support](#) service, you must ensure that all [Lead/Support Volunteers](#) complete [Support Volunteer Training](#) before starting.

New **Lead/Support Volunteers** joining an *existing* MS Support service can assist current **Lead/Support Volunteers** to provide activities, but must not offer one to one support until **Support Volunteer Training** is completed.

8.3. Ongoing support

If your group offers an **MS Support** service, you have access to a range of ongoing support, including:

- Practical support to organise your service
- Peer support to develop your network of contacts
- Emotional support to manage the effects of helping others
- Signposting support to access specialist advice
- Regular updates to keep your knowledge current

Your Local Networks Officer

Your LNO works with groups to develop quality services and activities for people affected by MS. Your LNO has regular contact with your **Coordinating Team**, and quarterly face to face meetings with your **Group Coordinator** and/or **Finance Volunteer**.

We want you to involve your LNO in planning your **MS Support** service, reviewing your progress, and dealing with any concerns.



For contact details for your LNO, see **Local Networks Team** on our volunteer website, or ask the **Supporter Care Team** for help.

Support and Wellbeing Team

Our **Support and Wellbeing Team** is here to offer telephone and email support to volunteers whose role may involve dealing with difficult or distressing situations.

If you are a **Group Coordinator**, **Lead Support Volunteer** or **Support Volunteer**, we will invite you to join our regular telephone sessions to talk confidentially about your role, raise any concerns, and share experiences with others who offer a similar service.

Support and Wellbeing Team
supportwellbeing@mssociety.org.uk
Tel: 0300 500 8084



For more information, see [Support and Wellbeing Team](#) on the volunteer website or ask the Supporter Care Team for help.

MS Support forums

We organise dedicated **MS Support** forums throughout the UK for **Lead/Support Volunteers** to come together, share ideas and support each other.

We also use forums to share updates and consult you on **MS Support** matters to inform our future work.



Look out for an invitation from your LNO, or see [Volunteer Events](#) on our volunteer website to book your place at our next round of **MS Support** forums.

MS Helpline

Our **MS Helpline** offers emotional support, information and benefits advice to anyone affected by MS in the UK.

The **MS Helpline** maintains a list of external specialist organisations we signpost to, locally, nationally and throughout the UK. Your group can ask them for help with individual enquiries, and share the **MS Helpline** contact details with anyone you think could benefit.

Our **MS Helpline** is also available to all volunteers for emotional support to manage the effects of helping others on your own wellbeing.

- Freephone helpline: 0808 800 8000
- Helpline email service: helpline@mssociety.org.uk

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