

"Discovering Community": Parent Café Style



SS, a 28-year-old mother of three

When SS, a 28-year-old mother of three, joined a Parent Café hosted by the Early Childhood Resource Center in collaboration with the Autism Society of Greater Akron (ASGA), it marked the first time she truly felt seen—validated and understood on a level she hadn’t experienced before. Surrounded by parents who intimately recognized the exhaustion, the struggles, the boundless love, the frustrations, and the persistent hope that come with her journey, she found deep, authentic connection.

In that judgment-free space, SS was able to breathe a little easier, comforted by shared experiences and silent nods that spoke volumes. Words of encouragement exchanged between parents held a power that resonated far beyond the moment.

This experience became more than just a gathering; it evolved into a genuine community. She and others formed lasting bonds with people navigating similar paths. What began as a chance to seek advice transformed into something far more meaningful—a source of support they hadn’t realized was missing.

Jyesse, Parent Engagement Coordinator / Parent Café Facilitator

“SS’s heartfelt story about her experience at one of our Parent Cafés beautifully illustrates the essence of these gatherings. As a facilitator, my hope is that every parent who walks through our doors feels a sense of comfort, as if they’ve just stepped into a space where they can breathe, be themselves, and know they are not alone. Parenting can be incredibly rewarding, but it can also be overwhelming, isolating, and uncertain, especially when navigating unique challenges. That’s why Parent Cafés exist. Yes, we share resources and parenting strategies, but more importantly, we create connections. SS’s words serve as a beautiful reminder of this mission. She didn’t just find

information; she found understanding. She encountered people who didn't need everything explained because they already understood the weight of what she was carrying. At that moment, something changed for her. She could breathe. She felt seen.

That's what makes these cafés so special. They're not about being perfect or having all the answers. They're about showing up, sharing the difficult parts of parenting, and realizing that someone else's quiet nod of agreement can help you feel just a little less alone. I'm so grateful for stories like SS's and for every parent who has chosen to show up and share a piece of their heart. When we come together in open dialogue, rooted in empathy and understanding, true community becomes not just possible, but powerful."

