

Bulletin Board and Chat Room Policies

As a public service to the NF community The Children's Tumor Foundation hosts Bulletin Boards and Chat Rooms at www.ctf.org. While we encourage all participants to become members of the Foundation, there is no requirement to do so, nor are there any other costs or solicitations to the users, and registration information is protected by our privacy policy.

These forums bring together people from around the world. While they share a connection to NF, people hold many different opinions about religion, politics, music... virtually everything. This is a good thing, and makes for interesting conversations and sharing of views.

To make these exchanges work, they require the same thing that face-to-face conversations require – respect and courtesy. Disagreements happen, and that's OK. We're human beings, and we often disagree with positions that do not match ours. Feel free to agree to disagree with people. But you must let people have their opinion and allow them to state it without attacking them personally.

This includes opinions about those two most arguable topics in the world...religion and politics.

Religion is an important part of the healing process for many people here, and it is important that people be given the chance to integrate their religious beliefs and spiritual expressions into our online communities. This goes for any religion, naturally. People are free to express themselves spiritually in any forum here. At the same time, people who are expressing their religious beliefs have to be aware that not everyone will share those beliefs. People should tolerate each other's beliefs in a non-judgmental manner. Naturally this means that any kind of blatantly excessive religious posting or attempts to convince other people that their religion (or lack thereof) is wrong simply cannot be allowed. Such posts damage the community at large because they can be disruptive.

These forums are full of diverse people with different beliefs, and people have to respect that diversity. For the sake of everyone and their own personal beliefs, people should not make large numbers of posts of a purely religious nature on non-religious threads. At the same time, if people see threads that involve individuals praying with each other to help each other deal with a difficult medical situation, please remember that people who choose to share their religious feelings in the context of providing support for NF should be given that opportunity (as long as it is not intentionally disruptive to other non-religious threads). If you don't agree with their beliefs, then simply don't participate.

Some communities solve this "religious tolerance" issue the easy way. They simply ban all cases of religious expression. While we could do this also, it flies in the face of what we are trying to provide here – an open forum for all kinds of dialogue, information and support.

Rather, we are simply asking for tolerance from everyone, and to remember that these communities exist for people to find support while dealing with serious neurological illnesses. This isn't a place for trying to win arguments or debates (neither religious nor scientific), but it is a place for us all to learn more about tolerance and to practice it to the best of our ability.

The real purpose of these forums is to extend knowledge and support to people affected by NF in a warm and caring environment. One where people feel safe to come and talk about their problems. Sometimes this takes the form of discussing information on treatments or specific conditions. Sometimes it takes the form of "What's your favorite "song", "food", "color", "memory" etc. (insert one). Other times it takes the form of a sharing support and caring, often with a faith based message. The only way we can continue this support is if we follow the path of tolerance for all beliefs, be they spiritual or simple matters of opinion. Without tolerance and acceptance, there will never be any support for anyone.

And if someone sounds irrationally angry and a bit argumentative, remember that they are most likely dealing with a serious medical issue, and try to understand the real medical reasons they might be angry.

The Foundation supports free speech, but this speech has limits. To paraphrase Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, "free speech does not give a person the right to falsely yell "Fire" in crowded theater". The use of profanity and sexual innuendo is the equivalent of shouting "Fire". Others use profanity conversationally, and mean no harm by it, but do not understand the impact it has on others. We want to provide a warm and welcoming environment, and the use of profanity is inconsistent with this.

Abusive posts, attacks, "slamming," sexual innuendo, obscenities (irrelevant of context or cultural attachments) have no place here. Nor do commercial posts selling products.

This is a place to come and seek or give help. It is not meant to be a battleground or a free-for-all debating society. Kindness and helping should be our watchwords. Our good manners, decency, and civility are welcome and needed here more than anything else.

The Bulletin Boards are moderated by volunteers (Thank you Vandaar!), but the Chat Rooms are not. We do not have the resources for real time moderation, and frankly even if we did I would prefer to spend the money on NF research. We need to trust the users to read and adhere to these guidelines.

Thanks for taking the time to read this. I hope we can all move ahead, agreeing to disagree whenever appropriate, and allowing everyone to express him/herself. Regardless of our own individual beliefs, we can still help each other. And that's the whole point of these forums.

Sincerely,
John W. Risner, President

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