

Volunteering: How can I help responsibly?

Many people who are part of the relief efforts and who want to help or go to the North hoping to make themselves useful. However, sometimes people are poorly prepared or they are unsure of how to respond to people in distress.

Kenji is driving up North this weekend to see if he can help, **he is not quite sure how**. He signs up with a volunteer organization and soon is sent to help clean up mud from houses. An older woman whose house he will be working on seems tearful. **“Don’t worry”** he says, **“I know how you feel, your house will be rebuilt in no time”**. He stops by one of the shelters and starts **handing out candy to children** and **takes pictures with them**. When he starts work, he snaps pictures of the destruction that he sees to **post on his facebook page, along with stories** that he hears so that his family and friends know what it was like. He works hard all week and **does not sleep very much**, he also is becoming increasingly sad about what he sees every day and starts **smoking twice as much** as usual.

They ask themselves what they should say or not say and they may take the suffering that they see home with them. Others forget about confidentiality and privacy issues and start taking pictures or they pass on deeply personal or private stories to others. It is important to be prepared, to know how to be supportive, and to do no harm to yourself or to others.

Should Kenji have done anything differently? Read on to find out....

There are many things to consider as a volunteer, the following are some common do’s and don’ts

Do: Be Prepared	Don’t...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Prepare by learning about the situation and joining existing relief efforts ✓ Know your role and the limits of your role 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Go to affected areas without knowing who is doing what and which group or organization you will volunteer with ✗ Be unsure of what is expected of you (what you should do and also what you should not do)
Do: Protect Privacy and Confidentiality	Don’t...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Respect privacy ✓ Keep the peoples stories confidential 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Enter people’s private living spaces (including halls and sections in shelters) without permission of people living there ✗ Take pictures of people (unless they invite you do so) ✗ Share people’s stories publicly (e.g. on blogs, facebook, web, media, or with other people)
Do: Treat people with dignity and respect	Don’t...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Introduce yourself (e.g. state your name, organization you volunteer with, and task you are assigned) ✓ Maintain a non-judgmental and supportive attitude ✓ Treat people with respect and according to their cultural and social norms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Start doing things or talking to people without them knowing who you are ✗ Judge the person for their actions or feelings (e.g. don’t say “you should not be anxious”). ✗ Don’t judge what they have or haven’t done, or how they are feeling. (e.g. Don’t say: “You shouldn’t feel that way,” or “You should feel lucky you survived.”) ✗ Behave inappropriately by considering the ✗ person’s culture, age and gender (e.g. do not touch people if this is not appropriate including children; do not assume that someone has the same religious beliefs you have)

<p>Do: Treat people with dignity and respect-cont</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Respect people's right to make their own decisions ✓ Respect parents in their role as caregivers 	<p>Don't...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Don't force help on people, and don't be intrusive or pushy. ✗ Make decisions for people affected by disaster or speak on their behalf when they are able to do so ✗ Approach or touch children without parental permission, give items to children without parental involvement (better to give items for children to parents which strengthens their role as caregivers)
<p>Do: Give Accurate Information</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Provide accurate information ✓ Be honest about your skills and knowledge 	<p>Don't...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Give false information ✗ Make up things you don't know ✗ Give false promises or false ✗ Reassurances (e.g. your house will be rebuilt soon) ✗ Exaggerate your skills.
<p>Do: Support people in helping themselves</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Ask for the input and guidance of affected people ✓ Involve affected people as much as possible in relief and recovery efforts 	<p>Don't...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Assume that you know what people want or need ✗ Do everything yourself (doing things for people that they can do for themselves can be disempowering)
<p>Do: Listen</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Be able to listen in a supportive way (e.g. nod, reflect back what they said to you <u>without</u> asking questions or adding your own interpretation) ✓ Be patient and calm ✓ Acknowledge the person's strengths and how they have helped themselves 	<p>Don't...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Don't pressure people to tell you their story. ✗ Don't ask people details of what happened to them (just listen if they choose to talk to you) ✗ Don't tell them someone else's story. ✗ Loose your temper or become agitated ✗ Don't think and act as if you must solve all the person's problems for them. ✗ Don't take away the person's strength and sense of being able to care for themselves.
<p>Do: Use and encourage positive coping</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Prevent burn-out by practicing good self care ✓ Get enough rest ✓ Eat as regularly as possible, and drink water ✓ Talk and spend time with family and friends ✓ Discuss problems with someone you trust. ✓ Do activities that help you relax (walk, sing, pray, play) ✓ Find safe ways to help others in the crisis and get involved in community activities 	<p>Don't...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Work so much that you get tired, irritated, anxious and cannot effectively and compassionately help others ✗ Take drugs, smoke or drink too much alcohol ✗ Work all the time without any rest or relaxation. ✗ Isolate yourself from friends and loved ones ✗ Neglect basic personal hygiene ✗ Behave in an irritated or angry way

How can I learn more?

International Medical Corps has partnered with TELL (Tokyo English Life Line) to offer training in helping responsibly through learning about principles of Psychological First Aid (PFA) to various organizations that are serving people affected by the disaster including: International and local organizations and staff working in affected areas and phone counselors working for TELL as well as those working for other organizations.

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