

What to Expect on the Job: First-Time Congregate Shelter Service Worker Tasks

Taking care of people affected by disaster is the primary activity of the American Red Cross during a disaster response. We are happy to have you come help the Red Cross by serving people staying in a shelter, our “clients.”

A “congregate shelter” is a group shelter located in a school, community center, church, or other suitable location where people affected by disaster stay as part of an evacuation or as they begin their recovery. People staying in a shelter come from all walks of life, with differing ages, income levels, health issues, cultures, and/or dietary requirements. Some may have experienced life challenges prior to this disaster, like domestic violence, precarious housing situations, or being on parole.

No matter the circumstance, the Red Cross is committed to treating everyone with dignity and respect and meeting individual needs while in the shelter. During your work in the shelter, please interact with everyone staying in the shelter with equal compassion and kindness.

Shelter workers carry out many tasks. This job tool gives some basic information about these tasks to get you started. Your supervisor is here to give directions and answer questions.

PREPARE FOR YOUR SHIFT

Before heading out for your shift, please review the following checklist to make sure you are ready:

- Log into Volunteer Connection and watch the *Everyone is Welcome* (45 min) training video if you did not view it as part of your training.
- Bring personal identification.
- Wear close-toed comfortable shoes and dress appropriately for conditions. (You may be walking a lot through the facility and many congregate shelters can be relatively cold so bring a sweater.) Do not wear shirts with slogans or large branding logos on them.
- If you are not feeling well such as a sore throat, temperature or exhaustion please contact staff health to determine whether you should report to your shift.
- Consider bringing your own mask, pen, pad of paper, smart phone, and charger.
- Bring any medications that you will need during your shift.
- Red Cross is committed to providing a safe and welcoming environment.
 - Harassment, threats, or violence of any kind is not tolerated.
 - One of our core values is *neutrality*. Please be respectful of religious, political, and other beliefs that clients and fellow workers may hold. Avoid discussing these sensitive topics.
 - The Red Cross must be respectful of the confidentiality of the people we serve. For this reason, do not post images or comments on social media.

LIST OF TASKS

Shelter workers do all tasks necessary to take care of clients. Your supervisor will direct you to perform tasks during your shift. See the Task Details section below for more information about common tasks.











- Welcome clients
- Support collection of client registration information
- Guide clients to their cots
- Direct clients to locations in shelter
- Talk with clients
- Provide information about Red Cross services
- Assess client and refer them to Red Cross services
- Help serve meals and prepare snack table
- Practice and ensure COVID19 safety requirements are followed
- Provide information about community resources
- Support data entry of client information
- Clean the shelter
- Receive delivery of supplies

TASK DETAILS

Task	Task Detail	Tips and Expectations
Welcome clients --- Support client registration --- Assess clients and refer them to Red Cross services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smile and be friendly • Provide the “welcome letter” • Be comfortable communicating and interacting with all clients • Identify immediate needs • Keep client information secure and confidential • Ensure accuracy when filling out a form on paper and/or electronically • Maintain confidentiality and sensitivity when having delicate conversations • Share what Red Cross services are available for referral, including Disaster Health Services, Disability Integration, Disaster Spiritual Care, and Disaster Mental Health 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guide clients to their cots and point out locations of restrooms and feeding • Refer clients for other services using the method provided by your supervisor • Show patience, grace, and respect to all clients. Clients may show a wide range of emotions. Remember: They are stressed and worried about the impact of the disaster on their lives. • People affected by the disaster but not wanting shelter may seek services. Contact your supervisor for direction. • When in doubt, contact your supervisor.
Provide information about community resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide and/or post standardized community resource information fliers • Share information with clients on how to access information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inform clients of available resources that may help them in their recovery • Provide each client the same list of resources that have been verified by the Red Cross

Task	Task Detail	Tips and Expectations
Follow and support safety requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand safety protocols • Communicate Red Cross rules for safety • Escalate concerns immediately to your supervisor • Monitor supply of face coverings and other items to issue to clients as needed, and inform supervisor when re-ordering is necessary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practice safety requirements • Remind clients to wear their face coverings and regularly wash their hands
Talk with clients	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As you move about the shelter, say hello to clients • Ask clients if they need anything; report needs to supervisor • If you have a few minutes, sit and talk with clients about general topics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be friendly and accessible • Help the clients feel comfortable in the shelter • Let them know you care about their well-being
Clean the shelter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pick up trash • Empty trash cans • Mop spilled liquids • Clean tables and surfaces with disinfectant wipes • Use disinfectant wipes on high-touch areas including doorknobs, elevator buttons • Pick up paper in restrooms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Always wear appropriate PPE and follow directions on product packaging and from your supervisor
Provide information about Red Cross services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document questions received and answers provided • Understand basic range of services provided by Red Cross. If you do not know the answer to a question, call your supervisor. • Be familiar with current “talking points” • Direct clients and public to appropriate information sources • Work to calm tense and frustrated clients 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you do not know if a service is available from the Red Cross, contact your supervisor
Help serve meals and prepare snack table	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow directions of the Feeding Supervisor • Serve or set out the amounts of foods directed • Serve anyone wanting meals including staff, partners working in the shelter, and first responders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wear mask, gloves, and hairnet or hat • Never touch food; use tongs, serving spoons or other utensils
Receive delivery of supplies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document deliveries received as directed • Notify supervisor when items are received • Maintain professionalism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Store as directed in a secure space to receive • Keep all receipts and documentation and provide to your supervisor

CLIENT COMMUNICATION TIPS

<p>Greet people</p> 	<p>Say hello, good morning, or whatever is appropriate for the time of day</p>
<p>Introduce yourself</p> 	<p>Take time to introduce yourself. Share a bit about your role. For example, “I’m Nigel. I’m here as a Shelter Worker to welcome you and help get you settled in.”</p>
<p>Respond positively</p> 	<p>If someone has a request, say something like “I’m happy to help” rather than a simple “yes.” When someone thanks you, say something like “I’m glad I could help” instead of “no problem.” If you can’t solve it, tell them you will take it to someone who can. Then do it.</p>
<p>Be careful with word choice</p> 	<p>Don’t use slang or anything that is potentially offensive. If you interact with people with disabilities, use people-first language. This means putting the person before the disability. For example, you would refer to an individual as someone who uses a wheelchair, rather than as a wheelchair-bound man or woman.</p>
<p>Smile</p> 	<p>A smile is a universal display of friendliness and happiness. Smiles transcend all cultures and language barriers, and even when people are in troubled situations, a smile can help them feel better. So when you greet and interact with people, smile!</p>
<p>Make eye contact</p> 	<p>Make eye contact with people as you communicate with them. Also consider your body language.</p>
<p>Be yourself!</p> 	<p>Be friendly and natural. Tone of voice and gestures are important, but don’t force a conversation or try to be more outgoing than you naturally are. Be yourself and engage with the other person in a way that puts you both at ease.</p>
<p>Be present in the conversation</p> 	<p>Listen to what each person is saying. Don’t look at your phone or text/ email/ check Facebook while you’re talking. Ask meaningful questions.</p>
<p>Personalize</p> 	<p>Personalize your interactions with people by using names. Ask questions that enable you to assist them or improve their experience. For example, you might ask if they received the information they needed or if you can help improve their stay in any way.</p>
<p>Show vs. give</p> 	<p>When people ask you how to find a location in our building, if at all possible, show them the way rather than giving directions. This can show that you want to help and are happy to take the time to be sure they get where they need to go with ease. It also gives you a chance to talk and discover any other questions they have or ways you can make their experience better.</p>