



# Tip Sheet: Providing Shelter Client Dignity

Disaster Cycle Services Job Tools  
Response/Sheltering

Red Cross clients have many cultural backgrounds and value systems, with varying levels of concern about modesty, decency, and privacy. Clients in shelters can lose some dignity due to the disaster and communal living in congregate sheltering. Shelter workers must seek to help clients maintain a sense of dignity and self-respect. Client First Sheltering means we are focused on the needs of each individual client. They need our support and guidance to help them acclimate to their new surroundings.

Empathy and communication are fundamental elements in protecting the dignity of clients. Listen carefully to client concerns and suggestions regarding personal dignity and accommodate them as much as possible.

## Facility Concerns

- Create dressing areas by using privacy screens or small rooms adjacent to the dormitory.
- Obtain shower curtains and tension rods for use in shower areas when necessary from Logistics by filling in [Disaster Requisition Form 6409](#).
- Provide a private infant changing area.
- Provide a breastfeeding room or screened area. Breastfeeding in public is legal in all states and permitted in Red Cross shelters, but some clients prefer the privacy and quiet these areas provide.
- Provide private areas for individual health, mental health and spiritual care discussions, along with those for any other private/confidential issues.
- Provide blue rooms (or sensory kits) for autistic clients and those suffering from dementia if possible. Request guidance from Disability Integration, Disaster Health Services and Disaster Mental Health.
- Provide a space where families with infants can be separate from others if they wish. The space protects unvaccinated infants and reduces embarrassment when babies/toddlers make noise.

## Service Concerns

- Establish a private area where personal or sensitive discussions with clients can take place and respect their privacy when sharing information.
- Provide bags for clients to discreetly carry feminine hygiene, incontinence, and other personal products distributed in the shelter.
- Set up privacy screens or curtains when providing personal hygiene assistance or medical aid to clients if no separate room is available.
- Introduce yourself and your role when interacting with clients. Always wear Red Cross ID.
- Address clients by their formal name or a polite greeting, like “Good Morning, Sir/Ma’am” -- unless invited to do otherwise.
- Do not move or inspect client’s personal possessions without their permission.
- Provide opportunities for clients to make as many choices and decisions on their own as possible. Ask clients whether and how they would like to receive help.

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*Sheltering Tip Sheets provide pointers for handling issues within the guidance outlined in Sheltering Standards and Procedures and other Red Cross doctrine. Please send feedback to [sheltering@redcross.org](mailto:sheltering@redcross.org).*