

Volunteer Support Guide

Equipping community helpers with the skills,
grounding, and confidence to support others
after a disaster.



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01

Purpose of This Guide

This guide provides volunteers with clear steps, emotional safety practices, and practical tools for supporting individuals and families in crisis. It focuses on **calm presence, compassionate communication, basic stabilization, and referral to appropriate services**.

No clinical background is required—just willingness, respect, and steady support.

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Volunteer Role Overview

As a Bahali volunteer, you provide:

- **Emotional first aid**
- **Comfort, grounding, and reassurance**
- **Accurate information & safe direction**
- **Support with basic needs**
- **Connection to services and referral pathways**

You are **not** expected to “fix” everything or provide therapy.
Your presence, tone, and steadiness are the intervention.

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Core Values of Bahali Volunteers

Compassion

Approach every person with gentleness, warmth, and patience.

Cultural Respect

Honor spiritual practices, family structures, and community norms.

Steadiness

Speak slowly, stay grounded, and avoid rushing decisions.

Boundaries

Support without overextending yourself or making promises you can't keep.

Dignity & Choice

Always ask permission, offer options, and let survivors set the pace.

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Your Volunteer Toolkit

Each volunteer should be equipped with:

- Water and tissues
- Charged phone + power bank
- Local resource list
- Notepad + pen
- Copy of quick grounding tools
- Snacks (granola bar, crackers)
- Sanitizer + wipes
- Calm body / grounding exercises
- Safety contacts

Optional:

- Small comfort items (stress ball, fidget tool)
- Extra masks, small first-aid basics

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Safety First: Your Non-Negotiables

Before offering emotional support:

1. **Check the environment.** Is it safe? Stable? Do you feel secure?
2. **Check the person.** Are they at risk of harm? Dehydrated? Injured?
3. **Know the protocol.** When in doubt: alert a supervisor or professional.
4. **Never work alone in high-stress zones.** Volunteers should work in pairs.

If at any point you feel unsafe or overwhelmed, step back and alert a lead.

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First Contact Guide (What to Say & Do)

Step 1: Introduce Yourself

“Hi, my name is _____. I’m a Bahali volunteer. I’m here to check how people are coping.”

Step 2: Ask Permission

“Is it okay if we talk for a minute?”

Step 3: Gentle Check-In

“How have you been managing since everything happened?”

“What do you need right now—water, rest, a quiet moment?”

Step 4: Provide Reassurance

“You’re not alone. We’ll take this step by step.”

Step 5: Offer a Grounding Tool

- Slow breathing
- 5-4-3-2-1 grounding
- Hand on heart
- Orienting statement (“You’re safe enough right now.”)

Step 6: Connect to Support

“I can help you find the shelter/medical tent/information desk.”

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Recognizing Distress & When to Get Help

Signs of Overwhelming Distress

- Unable to stop crying or shaking
- Panic attacks
- Disorientation
- Talking about giving up or harming themselves
- Not eating/drinking for days
- Children who are silent, frozen, or unusually withdrawn

Your Action

- Stay with them
- Use grounding tools
- Move to quieter space
- Notify crisis staff or lead responders
- Do not leave until a safe hand-off is complete

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Communication That Heals

Helpful Phrases

- “I’m here with you.”
- “It makes sense you feel this way.”
- “You’re doing your best.”
- “Let’s take a breath together.”

Avoid

- “Calm down.”
- “At least it wasn’t worse.”
- “You should be grateful.”
- “Other people have it harder.”

Listening Skills

- Let the person speak at their pace
- Use gentle eye contact
- Lean forward slightly
- Keep voice warm and steady
- Allow silence—it helps them process

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Supporting Children & Families

For Children

- Get on their eye-level
- Use simple language
- Offer reassurance: “You’re safe here.”
- Provide comfort items if available
- Stay near the caregiver whenever possible

For Parents & Caregivers

- Validate their stress
- Offer small steps: “Focus on one thing at a time.”
- Help reunite families as needed
- Share child-friendly coping strategies

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Volunteer Self-Care & Boundaries

Before Outreach

- Eat something
- Hydrate
- Take 3 grounding breaths
- Set intention: “I will show up with steadiness.”

During Outreach

- Take short breaks
- Tag in another volunteer if you feel overwhelmed
- Remember: you cannot fix everything

After Outreach (Debrief)

- What went well today?
- What was hard?
- Who needs follow-up?
- Do you need support or rest?

Your wellbeing matters. Healthy volunteers make healing possible.

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Referral Pathways

Volunteers should know where to send survivors for:

- Medical care
- Crisis stabilization
- Medication replacement
- Shelter
- Food/water lines
- Psychological First Aid
- Missing persons support
- Children & youth services
- Senior support centers

Provide **clear directions**, walk with them if needed, and ensure a hand-off.

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Quick Tools to Use Anytime

a. The 1-Minute Breath

In for a count of 4... Out for a count of 5... repeat 3 times.

b. 5-4-3-2-1 Grounding

Name 5 things you see... 4 you can touch... etc.

c. Orienting Statement

“You are safe enough right now. I’m here.”

d. Hand-on-Heart Reset

Warmth + slow breath = instant grounding.

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Cultural & Community Considerations (Caribbean Context)

- Honor spiritual practices (prayer, scripture, hymns)
- Understand pride & independence—don't force help
- Show respect to elders before asking questions
- Recognize community grief responses: music, silence, humor, storytelling
- Build on strengths: neighbors checking on neighbors, food sharing, group activity

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Closing Message for Volunteers

You are part of a circle of care.

Your presence, patience, and steadiness help create safety after chaos.

Every conversation, every breath you guide, every act of kindness contributes to emotional recovery.

Thank you for being part of this work.