

# Emergency Services Outreach Guidelines

Australian Red Cross

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# Emergency Services Outreach Guidelines

Australian Red Cross

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# Introduction

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These guidelines are designed for use by Red Cross Emergency Services people to guide and assist them when conducting Outreach. They were developed in consultation with all state Emergency Services teams, as well as the National Preparedness, Response and Recovery Coordinators and staff. Sections 9 and 10 'Self harm' and 'Suicide' were developed in collaboration with the Australian Psychological Society. All Red Cross people should familiarise themselves with these guidelines prior to undertaking Outreach and should carry a copy with them on Outreach to refer to if needed.

The aim of Outreach is to provide Psychological First Aid (PFA) to individuals, families and households affected by emergencies. Whilst each of the situations outlined in these guidelines can be difficult or challenging, it is important to remember that Outreach is a rewarding experience and that difficult or challenging situations are uncommon. It is important that Red Cross people are aware of what support is available to them and practise self-care.

During Outreach, Red Cross people hold many different position titles depending on the state or territory, or whether Outreach is being conducted in an activation context or not. Throughout this guideline document the following terms are used:

**Outreach Team Member**

Red Cross person conducting Outreach

**Outreach Coordinator**

Red Cross person managing a particular Outreach event (also called a Team Leader during activation)

**Line Manager**

A Red Cross person's direct manager



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## Section One

# Safety

The safety and well-being of Red Cross people always comes first when conducting outreach. Under no circumstances should Red Cross people compromise their own safety for the sake of visiting residents. When conducting Outreach you may encounter some hazards that you may not be familiar with, the following hazards should be specifically considered before undertaking Outreach.

### Hazards

- After an emergency there can be increased environmental or infrastructural hazards in the area, such as:
  - Structurally unsound buildings or structures that may fall
  - Burnt or partially burnt trees that may fall
  - Flood-water or contaminated water
  - Storm debris such as broken glass, corrugated iron, wire etc.
  - Fallen power lines
- You should be aware of these possible hazards and keep safe from them at all times

### Roads and driving

- Road surfaces can be damaged by floods and storms or emergencies may have caused trees or other debris to block roads, extra caution

should be shown when driving through affected areas as road conditions may have been affected

- At times Outreach can involve driving long distances, always drive appropriate to conditions and ensure that you follow the Red Cross vehicle policy (available from your Outreach Coordinator)
- Do not drive on dirt roads after dark, if driving through rural or regional areas, be particularly careful driving at dawn or dusk as there can be increased wildlife (kangaroos, rabbits etc.) on the road

### Weather

- Outreach can be undertaken in all weather conditions, including extreme heat and cold, make sure you dress appropriately to stay cool or warm and protected from the sun (you will be provided with weather appropriate Personal Protective Equipment)
- Stay hydrated, drink plenty of water
- Mosquitoes can breed quickly in stagnant water after a flood or a storm, keep skin covered and wear mosquito repellent
- Wear comfortable shoes as you may be required to walk significant distances

## Section Two

# Privacy, information gathering

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The primary aim of Outreach is to provide Psychological First Aid (PFA) to individuals, families and households affected by emergencies. Secondary aims such as making needs assessments, gathering or providing information should never be undertaken at the expense of providing PFA and should never compromise PFA principles.

During Outreach, Red Cross people must explain to everyone they visit the purpose of the Outreach visit, what information they will be recording and how this will be used. They must ensure each resident they speak to understands this and is happy for Red Cross to gather and pass on relevant information.

- The purpose of the Outreach includes:
  - To deliver Psychological First Aid (PFA)
  - To contribute to a general needs assessment of the area to pass onto relevant agencies
  - To provide information to affected people
  - To make referrals where required
  - Any other outcomes as agreed to between Red Cross and partner agencies
- It is important to explain that when making a general needs assessment, no identifying or personal details will be recorded (name, address etc.)
- Personal and identifying details will only be recorded if making a referral, in which case the affected resident must read, understand and sign a full privacy statement to give their consent (please see specific referral guidelines)
- Below is an example script. This script is a guide only and is not intended to be followed word for word, as long as you make sure that the three points above are made clear.

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“My name is ... and I am from Red Cross. We are in the area today to see how you are after the recent (name emergency).”

Based on the conversation we have with you and with others in the area, views, opinions and concerns may be included in a report we write for local agencies so that we can make sure the needs of the community are being met. Any personal information we collect is for administrative purposes only and will not be included in the report.”

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### Needs assessment form

- Needs assessment forms are aimed at gathering information to provide a generalised needs analysis to local council or relevant service agencies and to advocate for relevant and appropriate services and support for affected communities
- Needs assessment may include practical, physical and psychosocial information
- Includes specific recovery questions for Red Cross and other agencies to gather information regarding community strengths, recovery needs and concerns
- Needs assessment forms are not aimed at providing specific, property or personal information to council or service agencies. If this is required, a full referral form must be completed and signed

### How needs assessment forms are used

- These forms remain the property of Red Cross and are not provided to any other agency
- Information gathered is collated into an Outreach report that is provided to local council, other relevant service agencies, Red Cross donor organisations and stakeholders, staff and volunteers
- On completion of the Outreach report, individual needs assessment forms are destroyed
- Outreach reports are available upon request to residents



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### Section Three

# Referrals

A referral happens when a resident requests Red Cross to make contact with another agency or service provider on their behalf. The residents details are taken and passed on to the relevant agency by Red Cross. Red Cross then follows up with the resident and the agency to ensure contact has been made.

- A referral should be taken as a last resort only. Red Cross people should encourage residents to contact the required service agency themselves, thereby promoting self-efficacy
- A referral is required in order to provide any agency with specific personal or property details, no matter what service is required – i.e.; removing unsafe trees/financial advice /counselling services
- A referral form includes the full privacy statement which must be understood and signed by the resident
- When taking a referral, Red Cross people must also leave a copy of the privacy statement with the resident for future reference
- After passing on referral forms to the appropriate agency, Red Cross will follow up with the resident to ensure they have been contacted
- Red Cross will destroy or de-identify referral forms as soon as the resident for whom the referral is for has been contacted to confirm that they have been contacted by the relevant service agency
- Referral forms must be kept secure and viewed only by appropriate Red Cross people until they are passed onto the relevant agency

## Section Four

# Entering a Property

In most cases during Outreach, Red Cross arrives at properties unannounced and without an invitation from the resident. Many properties, particularly rural properties may have 'do not enter', 'private property' or 'keep out' signs. This can increase after an emergency as people wish to keep the media or 'emergency tourists' out of their property. Many roads may be closed 'except for local traffic' also for this purpose. In this situation, Red Cross people should:

- Respect resident's privacy. If someone has a 'do not enter' or 'keep out' sign, respect this and do not enter. If it is appropriate, leave a card in the letterbox or on the gate

- Always look out for their own safety first. If they feel uneasy or uncomfortable entering a property, do not enter
- Always ensure they are in a Red Cross marked car and wearing uniform and an identification badge to identify themselves quickly and easily as Red Cross
- Call their Outreach Coordinator if they have any concerns

Some properties may have aggressive looking dogs, 'beware of the dog' signs or may appear unsafe for another reason. Outreach Team Members should use their own discretion when deciding whether to enter these properties or not. Red Cross People should never put themselves in a situation in which they feel unsafe, if in doubt, do not enter.



Australian Red Cross / Stephen McInverna



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## Section Five

# Child Protection

Australian Red Cross is a child safe organisation. All Red Cross people involved in Outreach activities must have signed the updated Red Cross Child Protection Policy and be provided with a copy of the Red Cross Child Protection Handbook. Red Cross people who have not signed the Red Cross Child Protection Policy are not able to undertake Outreach activities.

For these purposes, child abuse is defined as:

- Physical abuse
  - Sexual abuse
  - Emotional abuse
  - Neglect
  - Exploitation
- If, during Outreach activities, a Red Cross person witnesses, suspects or has child abuse disclosed to them, they must report it to their Outreach Coordinator immediately
  - Support or advice during this process can be obtained from Red Cross Child Safe Contact Officers. Contact details for Child Safe Contact Officers in your state or territory can be obtained from your Outreach Coordinator

- If a Red Cross person suspects a child is in immediate danger, they should call 000.

### Children home alone

While conducting Outreach activities, Red Cross people may encounter children at home without an adult present. In this circumstance people should:

- Ensure the immediate safety of the child. If the child is in immediate danger, call 000
- Do not engage the child in in-depth conversation. Do not attempt to complete a needs assessment, provide general or specific information
- Leave a calling card for the appropriate adult/s and leave the property.
- Do not enter the house
- If the child appears distressed about being left alone, call your Outreach Coordinator for further advice

*For more information please refer to the Red Cross Child Protection Policy and Child Protection Handbook*

## Section Six

# Family Violence

Family violence includes violence or abuse against a partner, child (including an adult child), sibling or other close relative or someone within a shared household or domestic relationship. For these purposes, family violence is defined as:

- physical abuse
  - sexual abuse
  - emotional abuse
  - financial abuse
  - threats of violence or abuse
  - exploitation
- If, during Outreach activities, a Red Cross person witnesses, suspects or has family violence disclosed to them, they must report it to their Outreach Coordinator immediately
  - Outreach Coordinators are to pass the report onto a Red Cross Staff Member who will inform the relevant State Manager, Emergency Services
  - If a Red Cross person suspects someone is in immediate danger, call 000



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## Section Seven

# Illegal Activity

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If a Red Cross person witnesses illegal activity at a home or property whilst conducting Outreach (other than child abuse), they are not obliged to report it. The reputation of Red Cross in the community as an impartial organisation and being welcomed into homes and communities may be threatened if residents feel that Red Cross people are looking out for, and reporting illegal activity.

- If a Red Cross person feels uncomfortable, they should remove themselves from the situation or leave the property
- If a Red Cross person feels comfortable and confident continuing with the visit, they should do so
- If, in consultation with the Outreach Coordinator, a Red Cross person wishes to make a formal report of the illegal activity that was witnessed, then a report should be made to the Outreach Coordinator's Line Manager who will ensure that Red Cross processes are followed.

## Section Eight

# Aggressive Behaviour

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### Distress

In conducting Outreach Red Cross people may come across people that are very distressed or upset, or who become distressed or upset whilst talking. This can be a difficult situation to manage.

- If the resident is highly distressed or distraught, Red Cross people should use their PFA skills to assist them to calm down
- It is the role of Red Cross people to listen and to link these people with services or organisations that may assist them rather than trying to solve peoples' problems for them or to offer advice

### Anger / Frustration

- If the anger is directed at the situation, at a government agency or organisation or at Red Cross, people should use PFA techniques to try to assist them to calm down
- If anger is directed at a Red Cross person, they should remove themselves from the situation
- If at any time a Red Cross person feels uncomfortable or unsafe, they should remove themselves from the situation
- If a Red Cross person believes anyone is in immediate danger, they should call 000



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## Section Nine

# Self Harm

Written with the support of the  
Australian Psychological Society

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Self harm can be described as repeated, self-inflicted shallow yet painful injuries to the body such as scratching, burning, cutting, banging, hitting or interfering with wound healing. The most common purpose of self-harm is to try to reduce difficult emotions such as anxiety, tension and/or to cope with an interpersonal difficulty when other strategies don't seem to be working<sup>1</sup>.

If, during Outreach a Red Cross person witnesses, suspects or has self-harm disclosed to them they should use their PFA skills to listen to the needs and concerns of the person

- Listen to the resident if they want to talk about how they are feeling
- Be understanding, don't judge
- Let the resident know that it is OK to talk about things that may be painful

- Encourage the resident to talk to their friends and family- people they feel safe and comfortable talking to
- Use PFA skills to encourage the resident to seek help such as a GP or counselling
- If the resident has injured themselves and needs medical assistance, help them to access the help they need
- If it is clear that the resident is unable to seek support or assistance themselves, offer to assist them with a referral for a counselling or similar service
- If a Red Cross person believes someone is in immediate danger, call 000

<sup>1</sup>American psychiatric association (2013) diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders (5th ed.), Arlington va, american psychiatric publishing.

## Section Ten

# Suicide

Written with the support of the Australian Psychological Society

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Suicidal behaviour results from a complex range of personal, social and situational issues affecting a person. Often it may appear that a particular incident has ‘caused’ the suicide, however, when considered more closely there is usually a combination of issues or a pattern of earlier difficulties that are present<sup>2</sup>.

When conducting Outreach Red Cross people should listen for verbal signs that someone may be considering suicide. Comments that may be concerning include:

- Indirect comments such as “it would all be easier if I was not here”, “sometimes I would like to just end it all”
- Jokes or casual threats to kill themselves
- Idolisation or envy of others who have suicided
- Direct statements or threats of suicide: “I think I will just kill myself”

Other indirect signs that a resident might be not doing so well are changes in behaviour that may have been noticed, such as withdrawing from family and friends, etc.

In this instance a Red Cross person should:

- Use their PFA skills to listen to the resident and link them with the appropriate support
- Stay calm, listen and acknowledge that the persons concerns are real
- Asks directly if the resident is considering or has thought about suicide
- Acknowledge that the resident is going through a very difficult time but remove suicide as a solution
- Encourage the resident to talk to their friends or family
- Encourage the resident to talk to their GP to access more specialist support. Ask them to call their GP to make an appointment whilst you are still with them.

If a Red Cross person believes that the situation is life threatening, call 000.

Red Cross people conducting Outreach should never ignore, make light of or laugh off any threat of suicide, even if it is couched as a joke. A Red Cross person should let the person know that they feel concerned about the seriousness of what they have been told, and will contact their Outreach Coordinator. Below is a suggested script for Red Cross people conducting Outreach to use if they think a resident is considering suicide.

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**“As I’ve been listening to you I’ve been hearing how very distressed you are, and that you’ve even been thinking of hurting yourself. That’s pretty serious. I think it would be good for you to speak to someone who can help you with these feelings. I’m just letting you know that I’m going to call my supervisor and let them know, and see if we can get some extra support for you.”**

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### **Outreach Coordinator guide:**

- If you believe the situation is life threatening, call 000
- If (in an activation situation) Lifeline or another mental health service is involved in the response, call that service for assistance
- If it is not an activation situation, call Lifeline (13 11 14) or Kids Helpline for people under 25 (1800 55 1800) for further assistance and advice
- These events can be distressing for Red Cross people involved. Ensure appropriate support is made available

The ultimate aim of a suicide intervention is that the resident is left safe and linked with a service that they can access in an ongoing way. This may include support network such as family or friends or a more formal support such as their GP or counselling service.



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