



Mutual Aid Disaster Relief

CODE OF CONDUCT

Disaster sites have the potential to be inherently unsafe. They may contain physical threats to health and body, emotional traumas, and strained or fragmented social relationships. We ask everyone involved in Mutual Aid Disaster Relief (MAD Relief) projects—local and non-local volunteers, coordinators, and participating community members-- to be proactive in creating a supportive atmosphere where both the physical and emotional safety of others is ensured and validated.

Consent

Mutual Aid Disaster Relief volunteers and community participants work together on the basis of mutual, active consent. We are resisting disaster capitalism and those responsible for climate chaos in large part because it acts without accountability to or consent from the people it rules over. We cannot replicate the domination and abuse that we're claiming to oppose. In the volatile, high-stress context of disaster, where people meet outside normal social relationships, it is easy to misunderstand each other. Therefore, it is essential to be *more explicit and more careful* in assuring all of our relationships are consensual.

Mutual Aid Disaster Relief works in communities that invite and participate in Mutual Aid Disaster Relief, according to impartial need, not religion, race, gender, political affiliation, or any other basis.

- Individual participation in MAD Relief projects is up to whatever extent of each community members' desire and abilities. No person is required to nor should be pressured to accept or participate in MAD Relief support.

All volunteers and community participants must respect the physical and sexual boundaries of other people.

- Ask for explicit verbal consent before touching someone. Consent includes asking, listening, and respecting; it does not include coercion, expectations, or assumptions.
- Never assume consent, especially if drug/alcohol use is involved. Highly intoxicated people are always considered non-consenting.

MAD Relief is survivor centric and survivor oriented, and violence, abuse, sexual assault and discrimination will not be tolerated.

- Perpetrators of sexual violence and harassment are not welcome in MAD Relief spaces and activities and will be asked to leave MAD Relief spaces and activities. Sexual violence by a volunteer is grounds for immediately ending the volunteer's relationship with MAD Relief.
- A perpetrators' presence should not hinder survivors' participation in MAD Relief activities. MAD Relief invites survivors to contact MAD Relief Advocates Stephen Ostrow at (727) 452 5710 or Ellen Zitani at (646) 600 1039 to discuss how we can support you.

**Sexual Assault - any non-consensual sexual interaction. Sexual assault happens, and it happens in activist and radical communities as much as anywhere else. Sexual assault is a tool of domination, of taking power, and can rob someone of their self-respect, self-worth, and autonomy. Silence, passivity, and coerced acquiescence do not qualify as consent, nor do body movements or non-verbal responses necessarily constitute consent. Further, if someone is intoxicated, they may not be in a position to give you consent. Consent includes asking, listening, and respecting; it does not include coercion, expectations, or assumptions.*

*** Sexual Harassment - Sexual harassment is unwanted comments, gestures, and/or actions forced on a person without their consent and is directed at them because of their actual or perceived sex, gender, gender expression, or sexual orientation. Harassment includes unwanted whistling, leering, sexist, homophobic or transphobic slurs, persistent requests for someone's name, number or destination after they've said no, sexual names, comments and demands, following, and flashing. Sexual harassment is an interaction that makes one feel sexualized, intimidated, embarrassed, objectified, violated, attacked, or unsafe. It is an interaction that restricts one's movement or makes one modify their behavior in an attempt to avoid the possibility of being verbally and/or physically harassed. No form of harassment is ever okay; everyone should be treated with respect, dignity, and empathy.*

Relationships

It is the unfortunate reality of being impacted by a disaster alone that might separate a Mutual Aid Disaster Relief volunteer from a community member. Disaster survivors constitute an eclectic mix of human beings who have endured different experiences, and there is no reason why their status as a disaster survivor should determine what kind of relationship you have and how close you get to a given individual. However, it can be unwise to get involved in a sexual relationship with someone who has just endured a particularly traumatic experience. Mutual Aid Disaster Relief participants do need to be acutely aware of the myriad reasons why relationships might develop. Aside from genuine attraction, this might be triggered by grief (of dead, missing or missed relatives or partners); an irrational sense of awe for those who show kindness in an otherwise hostile environment; the perception that MAD Relief participants are a passport out of misery, etc. With these factors taken into consideration, volunteers need to be cautious about what kind of responsibility and power they might have over a person and act accordingly.

Drugs and Alcohol

We know people self-medicate in different ways, but recreational drugs and alcohol have the potential to cause harm to the organization's reputation and increase the risk of sexual violence. Especially at a location offered to us by people of faith, be mindful of behavior that you might find normal in your everyday life back at home, but could burn bridges for Mutual Aid Disaster Relief if you engage in it in this setting. Please respect our hosts and do not use recreational drugs and alcohol at Mutual Aid Disaster Relief spaces.

Inclusion

Mutual Aid Disaster Relief spaces are community centers. People come in for the first time very often. We know you will probably be very busy with very important work in these spaces. We ask that if you are at a mutual aid disaster relief space, please make an effort to extend warm greetings to people who come through the doors or look like they may need assistance. Our model is more effective because it is participatory and inclusive. But it depends on everybody to keep that inclusive spirit and extend it outward. Often times people expect aid that comes with stigmatizing, and bureaucratic hangups. It's up to all of us to carve out an alternative, truly liberatory space.

Cross-cultural respect

We acknowledge the difference in choice and power between someone impacted by a disaster and the volunteers and organizations that respond with assistance.

- We ask MAD Relief volunteers to commit to centering the needs, experience, and cultural values of people in communities in which we are invited to work. Respect people's opinions, beliefs, experiences and differing points of view.
- We encourage all volunteers to educate themselves on local histories and cultures, on post-traumatic stress, and on the privileges they bring with them as part of their work.

Healing spaces

While ultimately our goal is to support collective responses to build diverse, connected community, MAD Relief acknowledges the need and right, at times, to define exclusionary healing spaces and decision-making bodies to center, elevate, and protect the voices and experiences of particularly vulnerable people aligned around identities of race, gender, sexuality, faith, ability, relationship to disaster or place (i.e. disaster survivors or local volunteers), parent/guardian status, or other need.

Property Destruction

We recognize autonomy, decentralization, and the necessity of direct action to support disaster survivors, and we respect people's choices to determine the tactics that they believe are most likely to strengthen our movements for collective liberation. *However, people and groups do not engage in property destruction under the name Mutual Aid Disaster Relief.*

Etc.

MAD Relief volunteers must not practice, condone, facilitate, or collaborate with any form of fraud, harassment, discrimination, physical or verbal violence, intimidation, favoritism, or exploitation of community members or each other.

MAD Relief volunteers may not accept money, gifts, services, sexual relationships, or any other form of coercion or exploitation in exchange for assistance.

Free association

Failure to respect these guidelines and other egregious violations of volunteer or community safety may result in "free dissociation" of the violating person from all MAD Relief spaces, activities, and resources.

- Volunteers and community members have the right to leave situations where they feel threatened. MAD Relief will work with people to try to find alternatives in which they feel safe, if possible.
- Violators of this Code of Conduct may be asked to temporarily or permanently leave MAD Relief spaces, including volunteer housing, distribution points, work sites, or other operating spaces.
- When possible, MAD Relief seeks to resolve conflicts through de-escalation and mediation, including seeking alternative spaces or roles for people, especially disaster-impacted community members, who have violated MAD Relief guidelines.
- In extreme cases, MAD Relief may refuse support to people whose behavior harms or threatens harm to others.

Building a culture of compassion and respect

Although this code of conduct is critically important to our work and ensuring the wellbeing of all participants, it is just a stepping stone. We don't want to simply avoid disasters, whether personal or collective. We want to prefigure the world that we know is possible and are attempting to create. This applies to how we relate to each other interpersonally as well. We are all in this together with the same good intentions of making the world a better place and creating safe and inclusive environments for patrons, donors, volunteers, and any others who find themselves participants.

But the dominant culture teaches us to use violence, coercion, competition, individualism, and commodification to minimize the potential for collective action. It also conditions us to believe that individual greed will somehow lead to a fair and efficient system. It teaches us to vote our preference without considering the whole, not to expect good decisions, and to focus on rules and mechanical procedures instead of spirit and attitudes. Developing open and honest communication through

patience and collaboration is essential to unlearning those patterns and creating new and alternative ways of working collectively. Practice the following tips as much as you are able in order to build an organizational culture of compassion and respect. Remember, we don't have to wait until after the revolution to embody and exemplify the type of society we want to create, we can imagine it into being in the shadows of this one.

- Don't build up resentment. Please talk with the appropriate participant(s) before anything gets out of hand. When you do critique, critique inappropriate behaviors, not the person. If you see a behavior that is inappropriate, intervene. Don't wait for someone else to address it – especially around issues of oppression. Be open to critique or challenges of ideas, patterns, or behaviors and attempt to avoid defensiveness. None of us are perfect, and we need each other to become who we dream we could be.
- In addition to “calling out” when necessary, consider “calling in” and challenging oppressive behavior in a way that helps people grow. Ngọc Loan Trần on [Black Girl Dangerous](#) describes calling in as *“a practice of pulling folks back in who have strayed from us. It means extending to ourselves the reality that we will and do fuck up, we stray, and there will always be a chance for us to return. Calling in as a practice of loving each other enough to allow each other to make mistakes, a practice of loving ourselves enough to know that what we’re trying to do here is a radical unlearning of everything we have been configured to believe is normal.”*
- Be aware of the collective vibe. Notice who is angry or uncomfortable and address it early on. Allow for all voices to be heard. Make it a point to involve people who are less vocal and find alternative ways for those who want to add to the conversation to do so. If you traditionally remain quiet or struggle to articulate yourself, be courageous and try to trust your fellow participants. Alternatively, if you know yourself to be more outgoing and verbal, take time to consider how your participation may silence others.
- Each person has experiences and information to share, each person has a piece of the truth, and each person can learn, especially when we compassionately listen to each other. This may mean taking an hour, a day, or a week to really think through and ask questions of the other or others in the conversation. This also means taking into account cues from people in the communities you are working with both when you are interacting with them and when you are not.
- Pay attention to language, especially your own use of profanity and its impact on those around you. Be aware that others might not understand your acronyms and could feel alienated by too much activist jargon that they don't understand. Don't use alcohol, drugs or weapons in places where they can endanger people, but instead be mindful of appropriate times to use alcohol or drugs.
- Be respectful of the value of others' time, keep confidentiality when appropriate, and be aware of the effects of your actions on others and communities around you.
- Respect the work and ability of others. A note of encouragement or complimenting somebody on a job well done can brighten up their day and make the stress and heartache we may experience more bearable.