



TRAIL VOLUNTEER PROGRAM GUIDELINES

Welcome

Welcome to TRAIL's volunteer program! Our volunteers are key partners in our organization. You are vital to our mission of helping older adults in Johnson County live and age safely and comfortably in their own homes. We are grateful for your service.

This document is intended to assist you in carrying out your volunteer assignments safely, confidently and with minimum effort. It consists of four sections: Volunteer Expectations, Communication, Self-Care and Moving On. Please read carefully and let us know if you have any questions.

We thank you again for contributing your time and talents, and hope you find your work with TRAIL and its members to be rewarding and enjoyable.

1. Volunteer Expectations

Treat our members with sensitivity, dignity and courtesy.

Courtesy and communication

Greet members pleasantly, using the member's name as it was given to you by TRAIL. Always introduce yourself and offer to be of assistance. For example: "Good morning, Mrs. Jones, my name is Sara and I will be taking you to your doctor's appointment today. Do you need help getting into the car?"

Please give the member your full attention, taking the time to listen. Take your cues from the member as to what he or she would like to talk about. Let the member lead any discussion and set the tone. Avoid discussing controversial subjects, such as politics or religion.

If the member does not appear at the agreed-upon pick-up place and time, please ring the doorbell. If there is no response, call the member. If there is no answer, call TRAIL at 319-800-9003 and report the issue.

Personal appearance

As a volunteer, you represent TRAIL. Members will have more confidence in you and TRAIL if you set a positive and professional atmosphere. Please wear clothing that is neat, clean and well fitting.

We ask that you do not wear perfume or cologne. Do not carry weapons, illegal drugs or alcohol. Always treat members, their possessions and concerns with utmost care.

Self determination

TRAIL members are individuals with their own value systems and decision-making processes. While volunteers are involved in the lives of members as an additional support, members are still independent individuals capable of making their own decisions.

Every person has the right to make bad decisions. Often, mistakes are some of the greatest opportunities for learning and growth to occur. While TRAIL volunteers may feel conflicted or disagree with a member's decisions, we must understand that a member's decision is their own to make. The role of a volunteer is not to make decisions for a member. Volunteers must be aware of the beliefs and values that influence their own decisions. These beliefs and values should not be imposed on members.

If you are concerned with a member's decision or his/her decision-making ability, seek guidance from the TRAIL staff.

Managing complaints

If members express dissatisfaction with TRAIL's services, do not be defensive. Ask if there is anything you can do to rectify the situation. If you are unable to resolve the issue, suggest the member speak directly to the Executive Director. Please provide the telephone number (319-800-9003) and report the member's dissatisfaction to the Executive Director immediately following your assignment.

Ensure our members' right to privacy

All member information is considered protected and private and should be held in the strictest confidence. Never refer to or discuss a member's identity, personal information, services they request, receive or any information you may acquire as your time as a volunteer with anyone other than the Executive Director.

TRAIL maintains a "need to know" philosophy. This means members' information is not accessed or shared with anyone, unless that person legitimately needs it to fulfill his or her assignments. Volunteers can be a wonderful source of comfort to members. While we meet their needs, members may share intimate details about themselves. Members must know that they can trust you to keep conversations confidential.

Your assignments and schedule changes

TRAIL will handle all volunteer assignments and changes. Please call TRAIL to make any changes to your schedule.

As a volunteer, once you have accepted an assignment, TRAIL and our members depend on you to follow through. We ask that you be committed to your schedule. If, for any reason, you are unable to complete the assignment, it is your responsibility to notify TRAIL in a timely manner so that a replacement can be identified. If an illness or emergency arises, please notify TRAIL as soon as possible so that alternate arrangements can be made.

2. Communication

Communication is the foundation of a TRAIL volunteer/member relationship. It is how we comfort, empathize and establish trust. Here are some techniques for developing positive communication skills and practices:

Listening and communication principles

- Provide short and clear instructions
- Use easy-to-understand directions
- Provide directions one at a time
- Allow extra time for the member to respond
- Listen to the member
- Be patient
- Ask questions
- Remain calm and enjoy the conversation

Techniques that encourage communication

Active listening

- Use verbal and nonverbal cues to show that you are listening to the member.
- Examples of verbal cues are “Uh-huh.” “Hmm.” “Ah.” “Yes.”
- Slightly leaning in towards the speaker, head nodding or making eye contact are examples of nonverbal cues.

Open questions vs. closed questions

- Open questions give people permission to say more about what they are thinking and feeling. Examples of open questions are “What else can you tell me about...”, “Can you tell me more about...” or “What are some of the things you want to talk about today?”
- Closed questions focus on specific problems and elicit limited responses, often just a one-word answer. Closed questions rarely elicit a lot of additional information but they are appropriate when specific information is needed quickly. “Have you reviewed the doctor’s discharge orders?” “What day is your next appointment?” are examples of closed questions.

It can be very difficult to start a conversation or get detailed information from a closed question. If you find yourself getting stuck on certain topics when communicating with members, consult with TRAIL staff or other volunteers to get ideas.

Repetition

Repetition involves repeating one or two key words from the person’s last sentence, which indicates one is listening. This encourages others to keep talking and enhances their sense of being heard.

An example of using repetition is as follows:

- Member - "I was too tired to get out of bed yesterday."
- Volunteer - "You were too tired to get out of bed?"

Repetition does not mean that one agrees with the other; it only means the person is listening. Repetition is an important skill, but it should be mixed with other techniques to avoid sounding like a parrot.

Paraphrasing and reflecting

Paraphrasing is when the listener repeats the person's statement in their own words to ensure that the message is understood.

The following is an example of paraphrasing

- Member - "I don't want to get into a living situation where I won't be able to make choices on my own."
- Volunteer - "So what I hear you saying is that maintaining your independence is very important to you?"

Clarifying responses

Clarifying responses help the listener understand the facts and the other person's feelings and attitudes.

- An example of clarification is "Is it possible that you feel...?" "Can you give me an example of what you are talking about?"

Clarifying responses also help people think about what they have just said, examine their choices, and look at their life patterns.

Difficult topics

Gently exploring uncomfortable subjects can be important in creating an open and honest relationship. Volunteers should always approach uncomfortable topics with compassion and empathy. Seek guidance from the TRAIL staff and other volunteers in preparation for these discussions.

- **Timing:** You must have a relationship built upon trust before you can approach difficult subjects.
- **Delivery:** Remember that communication is not just about saying something but relies on how you deliver it. The examples below can be said in many different ways and elicit various reactions. Practice with compassion and empathy in your approach.

The following are examples of timing and delivery with understanding.

- “Last week you said that you would call your doctor, is there a reason you have not contacted her?”
- “I hear anger in your voice...”
- “You sound sad today, is something troubling you?”

Integrating and summarizing

- At the end of a topical or completed discussion, organize your thoughts and ensure that you and the member are on the same page by integrating and summarizing what you discussed.
- Integrating and summarizing helps ensure that the main concerns are understood.
- For some members, it may be important to write down the summary, particularly any action points.

Communicating in special circumstances

Communicating with a member who has hearing loss

If the member has a hearing loss, communicating may present a challenge. Below are suggestions that can minimize the impact of the hearing loss on communication.

- When speaking with a member with hearing loss, it is helpful to face the member when you are speaking to alert the member that you are speaking to him or her. This also allows for lip reading.
- Speaking in a lower pitched voice can also facilitate understanding.
- Be sure to use short, succinct phrases and rephrase statements for clarification, if needed.
- Do not have the person with a hearing loss face bright light sources such as window, lamps, etc. while talking to them.
- Please refrain from yelling at the member as people with hearing loss often have more difficulty understanding a shouting voice.

Assisting a member who has vision impairment

If the member you are assisting has visual impairment it is important for you to recognize that your sudden movements may startle the member. Therefore it is a good idea to verbally explain what you are doing.

When providing transportation, always try to have the member enter and exit the car away from traffic. If the member requires a physical guide, stand one half-step ahead of the member and let the member grasp hold of your arm. Verbally provide the member with the directions. If the member uses a cane or have a guide dog, you should stand on the opposite side of the cane or guide dog.

Communicating when there is resistance

TRAIL volunteers might be surprised or frustrated if a member appears to be ambivalent about or refuses the offer of support. In order to properly respond to refusals, it is helpful to have some understanding of why people tend to refuse the kindness of others.

- There are a number of societal factors that contribute to resistance to accept care and support. For many, independence and individualism are primary, if not ultimate values of American society.
- For example, in a recent survey by the National Council on Aging, 92% of adults over 65 say health is a problem for people over 65, but only 42% say it is a problem for themselves. Similarly, 84% say loneliness is a very or somewhat serious problem for adults over 65, but only 21% of those over 65 say it is for themselves. These data may not be surprising if we consider how we see ourselves with respect to our own age. We seldom think or feel that we are as old as we are.
- Pride may inhibit a person from accepting care.
- Embarrassment about one's circumstance or feeling ashamed in some way may add to resistance to accept care.
- Feeling the loss of control and independence may reinforce resistance to care.
- Polite people tend to be reluctant to make others uncomfortable.
- People are reluctant to bother, impose, disrupt, burden or intrude on others.
- People may not have learned how to ask for or accept assistance.
- People may minimize or underestimate a desire or willingness of others to assist.
- Accepting help may carry a social stigma that one is not independent or self-sufficient.

Volunteers can utilize several strategies to overcome resistance. In addition to maintaining healthy boundaries of self-determination, the volunteer should keep the following tips in mind:

- Initial and subsequent conversations with members should highlight how the member is adding value to the volunteer's life.
- Gently and sensitively point out to members how much control over their circumstances, increased self-determination, self-esteem, dignity and enjoyment they have gained since using the services of TRAIL. Do not suggest that TRAIL has brought these gains about; rather highlight the achievement of the member. **It is their comfort that we desire, not our comfort.**
- Care is a way of relating to someone that develops over time. It is not so much a series of concrete acts of service. It is being engaged in a nurturing relationship that engenders growth among the parties as mutual confidence and commitment deepen.
- Care is a process of sustaining one another while outcomes develop. Assisting with tasks is a means to an end of a deepened relationship that honors the dignity and value of another. The relationship with the member is always paramount; other tasks will be completed through a trusting relationship.

- **What is good for another should be defined by that person, not imposed upon him or her by well-meaning, good-hearted volunteers.**

A member's resistance to accept care from a volunteer may prompt the volunteer to think that the member does not need support or that the volunteer should serve others who are more accepting and appreciative. It is often the case, however, that the most resistant member is the one with the greatest need for socialization and support.

A member may reject the volunteer totally, despite sensitive approaches and refusals ought to be accepted without anger toward a member. Volunteers should always seek support and direction from TRAIL staff and other volunteers.

3. Self-Care

What is a boundary?

A boundary is another word for line, edge, limit, border, margin or frontier. It is quite clear when a fence boundary is crossed. It is a very different matter when the word boundary refers to an emotional limit or line. We live our lives in relationships. Every relationship has its boundaries.

Boundaries in relationships

In any relationship between two people, boundaries will exist within each individual. How does a person know his or her personal boundaries?

- If someone asks you to do a task, and you are able to calmly say no without feeling guilty, then you know what your own boundaries are and you are capable of articulating them.
- If someone asks you to do a task and you cannot say no, even when you feel uncomfortable about the request, then you may have boundaries in place, but be unable to maintain them.
- If it is difficult for you to stop thinking about the problems of others and you feel obligated to solve these problems, then you may not have healthy boundaries in place.

Boundaries are necessary

Boundaries are necessary for a relationship to grow. Boundaries ensure that both parties feel comfortable in the relationship. Within the context of TRAIL, boundary-setting is vitally important for the emotional well-being of both the volunteer and the member.

- Some members may be coping with a chronic illness or disability. They may be less able to tend to all their daily needs because of age or overwhelming duties of caring for a family member at home. It may be easy for a TRAIL volunteer to become overly involved in a member's life. Compassion is a natural and appropriate response as long as it does not lead the volunteer into inappropriate efforts to solve all of the member's problems.
- If emotional boundaries are not set in a relationship, the danger exists that one or both of the people may find themselves in situations that he or she finds uncomfortable and in which

one may not want to be involved or cannot resolve. This may result in one or both parties quitting the relationship.

- When boundaries are breached and a volunteer becomes overly involved in the member's life, problems may arise that may be detrimental to the relationship.
- Boundary-setting is both a volunteer's and a member's responsibility.
- If a TRAIL volunteer becomes concerned that he or she is overstepping a healthy boundary or that a member is infringing on the established boundaries, the volunteer should seek consultation from TRAIL staff or other volunteers.
- TRAIL volunteers must maintain boundaries with their member that are consistent with the roles described in this manual.

How to create healthy boundaries

So how and when does one set healthy boundaries? Here are some tips.

- Know exactly how much time you are willing and able to offer.
- Know what and how much you are willing to do.
- Use clear and simple communication such as, "Hello, Mrs. X, this is _____ from TRAIL. I will be coming by at 10:00 today, but we must finish by 11:30."
- If a member makes a request and the volunteer is not sure if it falls within the boundaries of a healthy relationship, the volunteer should consult with TRAIL staff for guidance. The volunteer should be sure to report back to the member with his/her decision promptly.
- Be consistent. Don't waiver when a boundary has been set.
- Be prepared to follow through on consequences, if certain behaviors or demands persist.
- Be prepared for a reaction if you make it clear to the member that a boundary has been crossed.
- Always treat the member with dignity, respect and empathy. Do not raise your voice or display other negative body language.

Setting and maintaining healthy boundaries allows volunteers to maintain their role separate from the member, while being supportive and involved in a member's life. When boundaries are breached, volunteers should discuss these issues with the TRAIL staff as needed.

Burnout

What is burnout?

Burnout is the gradual process by which a person, in response to prolonged stress and physical, mental and emotional strain, detaches from work and other meaningful relationships – including longstanding volunteer assignments.

Signs of burnout

PHYSICAL SIGNS	EMOTIONAL SIGNS	BEHAVIORAL SIGNS
Changes in appetite	Feeling of self-doubt	Social withdrawal
Problems sleeping	Persistent frustration	Irritability
Lack of energy and/or motivation	Loss of focus and/or concentration	Procrastination
Frequent unexplained headaches	Increasingly cynical negative attitude	Reduction in amount or quality of work

Tips for handling burnout

- Recognize the symptoms of burnout.
- Learn to ask for help.
- Be aware of limitations of your family, your personal life and yourself.
- Maintain discipline in daily responsibilities and duties.
- Take time out if you feel overwhelmed.
- Organize your time so you can concentrate on vital tasks.
- If too much time is being taken away from the satisfying aspect of your life by TRAIL, seek support from the TRAIL staff or other volunteers.

Ways to prevent burnout

- Be informed of and confident in the expectations and scope of your responsibilities as a volunteer.
- Be protective of your personal time and do not allow volunteer activities to deter you from maintaining this time for yourself. Set limits for yourself, and maintain these boundaries in your relationship with your TRAIL member.
- Do not feel guilty for maintaining an established personal boundary that promotes your own self-care.
- Find your own decompression techniques that relieve tension and put you into a more relaxed state.

Self-Care Solutions

It is important to take care of yourself throughout your TRAIL volunteer experience.

Pace yourself

- It is important not to over extend yourself.

Set goals

- Many volunteers find it helpful to set goals with their members.

Delegate and collaborate

- Some volunteer roles can feel isolating. Do not hesitate to use the variety of resources that are around you, e.g., collaborate with fellow volunteers.
- Empower others to work with you on tasks by asking for help.

Give yourself permission

- Give yourself permission to ask for help and advice, to make mistakes and to acknowledge both your learning opportunities and your achievements.
- Permission to make mistakes and to acknowledge these mistakes is critical to helping establishing your role.

4. Moving On

We wish you the best in your new assignment. TRAIL is strongly committed to the success of our volunteer program, and we are eager to hear your feedback regarding any issue. Please feel free to contact TRAIL at any time. Thank you for your service!