

# **Bikur Cholim Volunteer Handbook**



**TEN YAD**  
O F O T T A W A

## **Mission Statement**

Ten Yad of Ottawa is a charitable, volunteer-run organization dedicated to providing assistance to individuals and families facing acute care situations.

## **About Ten Yad**

Ten Yad of Ottawa provides and/or coordinates kosher meals over a short period for families and individuals facing an acute change in circumstances. It can be the result of a birth or other major life-cycle event that dramatically alters the family routine. In addition, Ten Yad of Ottawa has a Bikur Cholim division (hospital visitations) that includes contact with individuals who are otherwise isolated. This service can include transportation assistance for family members or caregivers, a hospital-based Kosher Pantry and in some cases, coordination of errands and shopping for the individual. For a full description of Ten Yad programs, please visit [www.tenyad.ca](http://www.tenyad.ca).

### **Confidentiality — "A Sacred Trust" — Re-emphasized**

The Ten Yad Bikur Cholim visitor is obligated to always protect a patient's privacy. All communications and the activities of Bikur Cholim are to be kept confidential. An important distinction must be drawn, however, between tale-bearing and helpful reporting. You must be alert to situations that might call for professional intervention.

Although not legally binding, Ten Yad of Ottawa holds this important ethical tenet of confidentiality as a sacred trust that we all agree to: respecting the confidentiality between visitor and the person being visited. If there's a reason for concern or an issue that needs discussion you should contact your Ten Yad Bikur Cholim coordinator.

# **What is Bikur Cholim?**

Bikur cholim, the Hebrew term for "visiting the sick", is a term that encompasses a wide range of activities performed by an individual or a group to provide comfort and support to people who are ill, homebound, isolated and/or otherwise in distress. Bikur cholim also includes such activities as: visiting patients in a hospital, rehabilitation center or nursing home; visiting people who are restricted to their home because of physical or psychological impairment or social isolation; running errands when necessary; and, providing telephone contact and reassurance to those who are ill or homebound.

## **Why is Bikur Cholim Important?**

- ◆ Because people need to feel connected to the community, especially when they are ill or homebound.
- ◆ Because bringing the community to the bedside of the sick lifts the spirits of those who may feel forgotten.
- ◆ Because studies have shown that social contact and support positively affect those who need comfort.
- ◆ Because visiting and caring activities help build community and character.
- ◆ Because by visiting we offer family members and caregivers some welcome respite.

## **What Activities are Ten Yad Bikur Cholim Volunteers Involved in?**

Ten Yad Bikur Cholim provides services to individuals or families for a short period of time. Volunteers can help in manifold ways — either as an individual, or as part of a coordinated team effort. There are so many ways one can help.

Caring gestures include:

- ◆ Visiting a patient in the hospital or nursing home and visiting the homebound upon request of a family member or the individual him/herself.
- ◆ Driving a family member or caregiver to the hospital to visit a loved one.
- ◆ Assistance with childcare under certain conditions of illness.
- ◆ Being part of the Ten Yad Chevrei Tehillim Team who recite the entire book of Psalms for an individual undergoing a critical procedure.
- ◆ Grocery shopping and running errands.
- ◆ For more information about other Ten Yad services please visit [www.tenyad.ca](http://www.tenyad.ca).

## **Tasks and Responsibilities of a Ten Yad Bikur Cholim Volunteer**

- ◆ Be punctual.
- ◆ Before the visit, refrain from wearing any perfumes or other strong scents.
- ◆ If you are not feeling well or must cancel a visit for any reason, please advise your Bikur Cholim coordinator as soon as possible so that a replacement can be arranged.
- ◆ After the visit:
  - Report any important information regarding the client to your Bikur Cholim coordinator, ie. any challenges, problems, requests from the client, unusual circumstances, etc. Fill out a reimbursement form for either a tax receipt or full

reimbursement for parking fees and mail it to the Ten Yad Office.

## **Visiting Etiquette for Bikur Cholim Visitors in Hospitals**

### **DO's: (The very important first 2 minutes)**

- ◆ For the benefit of the patients, observe the hospital's visiting schedule.
- ◆ It is imperative that one use the hand sanitizer prior to entering each and every patient's room. (See brochure on hand cleansing.)
- ◆ Knock on the patient's door before entering. Do not enter suddenly.
- ◆ Ask if the patient would like to receive a visit. This gives some control back to the patient.
- ◆ If you do not know the patient personally, introduce yourself by name and tell the patient that you are a volunteer with Ten Yad of Ottawa.
- ◆ Ask if you may sit down. Sit on a chair, not on the bed, so that you are at eye level with the person you are visiting.
- ◆ Say hello to the other patients in the room.
- ◆ If the patient has other visitors, simply introduce yourself, wish him or her well, and leave shortly thereafter.

### **DON'Ts:**

- ◆ Don't shake hands - this is for everyone's health benefit.
- ◆ Don't awake a sleeping patient. Instead, leave a note.
- ◆ Don't stay if the patient appears sleepy or excessively irritable.
- ◆ Don't ask a patient why he/she is in the hospital.

- ◆ Don't stare at the patient's disfigurements, scars, bandages or at equipment in the room.
- ◆ Don't fear using humour, if appropriate, but be sensitive to the person's situation.
- ◆ Don't interrupt if the patient is with the doctor. Leave a note or card and, if possible, return at a different time.
- ◆ Don't offer medical advice, nor question the doctor's judgment. Resist the temptation to give advice or criticize the staff. Redirect questions more appropriate for the medical or social worker with a statement such as, "That would be a good question to ask the nurse/doctor/social worker."
- ◆ Don't bring sad news.
- ◆ Don't tell a patient about someone else's sickness or about your own ailments.
- ◆ Don't shift a patient in bed, move a patient in or out of bed or from a chair to a bed. You may harm the patient.
- ◆ Don't offer a patient any food or drinks. The patient may be waiting for tests or be on a special diet.
- ◆ Before helping a patient put on tefillin, check with the nurse to make sure you will not be affecting nursing care.
- ◆ Don't answer religious questions. Refer these to the hospital chaplain or the patient's own rabbi.

*\*\* REMEMBER- the person you are visiting is a human being who thinks of him or herself as a complex person, not just as a patient. Be aware that for most people it is difficult to be sick and to be a patient in a hospital. A patient's mood may change from day to day, from being friendly to uncommunicative or even angry. Observe, listen, don't talk too much and don't overstay your welcome.*

# Some Tips and Guidelines on Active Listening

Listening skills communicate empathy and understanding and can help facilitate a conversation.

## 1. Important Body Language in Active Listening

- ◆ Be Fully Present and Assume Active Listening Posture:
  - Sit up straight. Lean forward slightly and relax.
  - Avoid fidgeting or making impatient gestures like watching the clock.
  - Relax your arms and hands. Don't cross your arms, play with your hair, jewelry or a pen.
  - Rest your feet on the floor and avoid nervous leg movements.
  
- ◆ Maintain Good Eye Contact:
  - Sit at eye level, if possible.
  - Avoid staring or looking with a fixed gaze.
  
- ◆ Make Active Listening Facial Expressions:
  - Use natural facial expressions, the ones you have when paying attention.
  - Don't chew gum.
  
- ◆ Make Non-Verbal Encouragements
  - Nod or smile while maintaining eye contact.

2. Remember to keep an open mind. Be aware of your own values, beliefs and prejudices. You are participating in another person's world, not judging it.
  
3. Don't be afraid to clarify or gently explore what you are hearing. When a person is willing, you may ask questions to get to the heart of the matter.
  
4. Show that you have heard by paraphrasing and reflecting the emotion or feeling behind what you think was said. Example: "No one really

- cares about me.” Visitor: “You feel no one is especially looking out for you?”
5. Compassionate listening means taking an interest in what the person is sharing and being sensitive in taking your cue from them. Follow their lead.
  6. There was a professor who focused an entire lesson in a university social work course on how to say “oh”. Think about it. Oh? Oh! Oh!!! You can use simple words like “oh” to get the other person to say more, to explain, to think, or to share. Sometimes an “oh” is all you need.
  7. Try not to mind-read and finish another person’s sentence. Let the person you’re listening to talk- even if you could do it better/quicker/more eloquently. When you truly listen actively, you may be surprised by where the person was actually going with his/her thought.
  8. The visitor should not minimize or laugh off fears expressed by patients, even when they seem exaggerated.
  9. Don’t patronize. Avoid these responses: “*There, there, everything will be alright...*”, “*Don’t worry...*”, “*If I were you...*”. Using these phrases just says to a person that you are not listening. Talking about a problem is not the same as finding a solution for it. For some things, there are no solutions; for others you’re not the one who finds the solutions. Your job is to be present, to bring healing that may come from sharing or voicing challenges.
  10. Never say, “I know how you feel.” We all experience pain differently. Even people who suffer the same ailments experience them differently. You can say, “It sounds like you think /feel ...or are sad/mad/glad.”
  11. If necessary, look around the room for cues to begin a conversation. Ask about photographs, drawings, or other objects.
  12. Become comfortable with silence. Allow the person time to think and react. This will also convey an acceptance of what is being communicated without judgment.

# Conversation Essentials

Visiting is an investment of time and requires attention, patience, perceptive listening, sincere concern, openness, and communication skills. As in all verbal communication, tone of voice is very important and can change the meaning behind a question. Below are techniques to help facilitate communication when visiting or talking with a person on the phone:

## 1. Ask Open-Ended Questions:

Use questions that elicit an in-depth response, one that cannot be answered with a “yes” or “no”. For example:

- Are you feeling upset right now? (Closed question)
- How do you feel right now? (Open)
- Do you like to read? (Closed)
- What are some activities that you enjoy doing? (Open)

## 2. Help the person expand on a statement

- “Tell me more...”
- “Tell me about it...”
- “You seem upset...”

## 3. Ask questions to better understand

- “I’m not sure I really know what you mean when you say...”
- “Would you please say that one more time?”

## 4. Review past and present efforts at problem solving

- “Have you talked with anyone about this?”

- “What have you done about this so far?”
- “What choices do you feel you might have?”

## **How to End a Visit Naturally**

- ◆ Don’t make your visit too long as it may cause fatigue. Be aware of the time. The average length of a visit should be 15 minutes to half an hour.
- ◆ Tell the patient that you enjoyed the visit and explain why you have to leave (dinner, homework, errand).
- ◆ Don’t promise to visit again because you cannot be sure to return while the patient is still in the hospital. If you don’t come when expected the patient may feel disappointed and abandoned. If you accidentally said you would visit but cannot make it, phone and let the patient know you care.
- ◆ Wish the patient a speedy and complete recovery.
- ◆ Always, always thank the patient for letting you visit. The patient has shared his/her time and energy with you. Express your appreciation for this.

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*These are the precepts, the fruits of which a person enjoys in this world, while the principal reward remains in the World to Come  
...visiting the sick.*

From the daily morning prayer  
Talmud: Shabbat 127a

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# Notes



*To Ten Yod and its leadership,  
Kol Hakavod!*

*The Ben-Choreen Family*

