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**RULES OF ONLINE FRIEND ACTIVITIES FOR VOLUNTEERS**

# Doable with the skills of ordinary people

Online friends can use ordinary skills and do not require professional qualifications. Online friends are present, listen and offer support as needed. Simply giving your time to another person is enough. The interaction between the parties must not include consultation that requires professional skills, such as features of work with clients carried out by social or health services. A friendship client may be referred to a supporting service, if necessary.

# Unpaid

The volunteer online friends do not get paid to participate, and nor is monetary compensation collected from the friendship clients.

# Voluntary service

You should always remember that you are a volunteer. A volunteer online friend should take part in the activities because they want to help others and do something useful. The activities should feel meaningful, and the volunteer should be committed to them. The volunteer is entitled to choose the meeting times and activities that are suitable to them, and refuse any activities that feel unsuitable or inappropriate.

# Trustworthiness

A volunteer online friend is trustworthy. Even though participation is voluntary, a volunteer should be committed to do what has been promised. The volunteers must adhere to the agreed assignments, schedules and meeting times. However, they must also look after themselves and not promise to do more than they can deliver. If a volunteer needs to quit their role, they must notify the relevant people.

# Secrecy and confidentiality

A volunteer online friend is bound by confidentiality. The operations are confidential for both the volunteer online friends and friendship clients, and neither are allowed to disclose the other’s personal affairs to outsiders without the person’s consent. However, if problems occur, a volunteer is entitled and required to discuss the matter with an online friend support person or the person in charge of the voluntary friend activities. If confidentiality must be breached, the friendship client must be notified in advance. Any worries that have arisen due to online voluntary friend activities should not and must not be borne alone.

# Neutrality

A volunteer online friend is neutral. The online voluntary friend activities are based on the seven fundamental principles of the Red Cross, of which the principle of neutrality dictates that help is offered to those who need it the most, regardless of their ideology, religion, language or skin colour. The organisation does not comment on religion or politics. A volunteer online friend must not take sides or get too involved in disagreements between other people, but rather aim to operate at all times in good cooperation with all parties. In a difficult situation, you can discuss alternative solutions impartially with your friendship client.

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## Equality

Volunteering is about interaction between people, and mutual respect and equality should be at its core. A volunteer online friend is no better than their friendship client or their rescuer. Instead, both parties are equal. In the online voluntary friend activities, everyone is valued and respected for who they are, and everyone’s thoughts are heard.

## Defined by the ones in need

Help is provided on the terms of the person in need, while respecting your own boundaries. A volunteer online friend must honour the friendship client’s independence and right to self-determination. A volunteer may not make decisions for the other person, but must stay by their friendship client’s side and listen. A volunteer must also look after their own capacity and make sure that the role does not become too stressful. Agreeing on clear boundaries and maintaining them will help.

## Joy from activities

Voluntary activities bring joy and happiness. The activities are shared, voluntary and positive in nature, so their foundations should also be positive. You should not have to force yourself to take part in the activities; rather, the activities should bring joy to all participants. A volunteer has a right to stop serving as a volunteer.

## Safety

In online voluntary friend activities, we do not usually meet our friendship clients face-to-face and cannot be completely sure of their identity. The volunteers must remember that a friend may be pretending, faking their identity or even aiming to cause harm. Face-to-face meetings between an online friend and a friendship client must always begin at Red Cross premises or in some other safe and public place with other people present.

If you encounter behaviour that you feel is inappropriate, please contact the voluntary friend service in order for the matter to be resolved.

You can also submit anonymous feedback on the Finnish Red Cross’s operation regarding misconduct, breach of guidelines, unethical behaviour or harassment. Here is a link to an anonymous form: [Reporting suspected misconduct](https://www.firstwhistle.fi/spr#)

The online friend services’ email address is: [verkkoystava@redcross.fi](mailto:verkkoystava@redcross.fi).

REMEMBER:

* YOU ONLY NEED THE SKILLS OF AN ORDINARY PERSON. YOU ARE ENTITLED TO SUPPORT AND CAN REFER YOUR FRIENDSHIP CLIENT TO OTHER SERVICES, AS NECESSARY.
* YOU MUST REMAIN TRUSTWORTHY AND MAINTAIN CONFIDENTIALITY. KEEP YOUR PROMISES AND DO NOT SHARE INFORMATION ABOUT YOUR FRIENDSHIP CLIENT, EXCEPT IN SPECIFIED SITUATIONS.
* ENSURE YOUR OWN SAFETY.



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