

HELPFUL HANDOUTS



Finding Resources through 211: Basics

As a volunteer, you may have wondered where to turn when a family or another volunteer asks about needed resources, such as shelter, food banks, preschool, or health clinics. We wanted to share a useful tool to start searching and learning about resources nearby. As always, our Area Coordinators are available to offer ideas about resources and tips, too.

What is 211, and who should use it?

211 is a free, confidential one-stop line for information on community resources, such as food banks, shelters, low-cost health care, utility assistance, veterans programs, counseling, and a wide range of other services. **If there's a free resource you're looking for, it doesn't hurt to dial 2-1-1.**

There are 211 lines all over the country but they are managed locally. These lines are run by real people (often volunteers), not an automated system, and they update the directory of resources regularly.

Anyone may contact 211. A Family Companion or other volunteer can call on behalf of another person or call just to learn more. A family seeking resources can also call for themselves, or you can call together.

How to access 211

There are a few different ways to connect with 211. They offer the same information.

1. **Dial 2-1-1** on any phone, which will connect you live to a resource specialist. There is sometimes access to translators or a TTY line for people who are Deaf/Hard of Hearing.
2. **Search the online directory** at www.resourcehouse.info/win211/index

Hours of availability vary by county, and some offer other ways to connect, such as e-mail. You can find information for your county by visiting the website above and hovering over "Contact Us" at the top of the page.

A note about searching the online directory: The website search tool is a little different from Google and other search engines and pulls up very specific key words. As you start typing, a drop-down of keywords appears; click on one that fits the most, for the best results. If you're not finding what you need from the search box, it can be helpful to browse through the list of popular categories instead, found at the site above.

On Page 2, find some information on what to expect when calling ➡

Whether you are looking for handy reference sheets or discussion topics for your volunteers, we hope these Helpful Handouts are useful to you.

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Finding Resources through 211: More Tips

If you're calling on behalf of someone else, especially if you don't know them well, it is important as always to show patience and compassion. For many families, sharing about a difficult time in their lives and asking for help (with a familiar companion, or with a faceless voice on the phone), can often be exhausting, emotional, frustrating or scary. It might also feel like a great relief. It can take a long time for the person to share, and there may be parts of a person's story you don't hear at first. The faith-filled steps you take to walk with families are important, and you are making a meaningful move by learning more.

Tips on what to expect when calling

1. **Take notes:** Have a piece of paper handy for some notes!
2. **Describe what you're looking for:** The specialist on the line will need some information about the situation and what you're looking for. Here are some things you might share:
 - ⇒ **You might ask about a specific resource** and need some more details, such as, "Who can help with gas vouchers?" or "What is the closest family shelter?"
 - ⇒ **You can also give an overview** of the person's story and situation, if you're not sure what to ask about specifically. They'll listen and may think of a resource idea you didn't know exists!
 - ⇒ They will ask for the person's **zip code**. This helps to find things closeby. Some services base eligibility on zip code (such as food banks). For people without a stable home, this can seem complicated, but specialists are typically familiar with navigating this if you communicate it.
 - ⇒ Some resources focus on a certain **gender, age or family situation**. Mention that you're calling on behalf of a family, teen or young adult, couple, pregnant woman, veteran, etc.
 - ⇒ Some resources have **cultural** and **language** specialties for people identifying with an ethnic minority group, including Native American and Black/African American. Even if the person is not an immigrant or doesn't need translation, sharing this may help find more culturally relevant and affirming services, or get the specialist thinking about more organizations to recommend.
3. **Get matches:** After some follow-up questions, 211 will give you information about hours and contact information for services that match. In most cases, 211 does not make appointments directly.
4. **Check details with the organization directly:** If you have questions the specialist can't answer, or if you want to confirm the information is updated, you can call organizations directly. **It can help people feel more comfortable if they know what to expect before they go to a new place.** For instance, you might call to ask if there's anything someone needs to bring to a first appointment (such as ID or other documents), or you might ask a shelter to describe their check-in procedures.

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