

15 Guiding Principles of MISS Foundation Volunteerism

For volunteers of the MISS Foundation when working with our bereaved families

1. We believe that grief resulting from the death of a child presents one of the most traumatic and painful circumstances for individuals and families.
2. We believe that our community known as the MISS Foundation, helps create a safe environment in which individuals and families are better able to be with, surrender to, and eventually take compassionate action in the grief journey; We believe it is our sacred duty *as leaders* to protect members within our community and ensure to the best of our abilities that support groups and other MISS Foundation related functions remain a safe space for all bereaved parents, grandparents, siblings, and others.
3. Part of the community process is building deeply intimate relationships based on civic love and compassion with our families. We accept others as they are, we are always kind first even when someone is unkind to us; we strive to be long-suffering in response to stress; we practice our own deepening of self-awareness and compassion; we do our best not judge others; if we cannot help someone, we do our best to help them find such support; we do our best not react in fury or frustration, rather we do our best respond gently to others; we take care of ourselves and one another; if we do not like or agree with something someone else says or does, we try to remember that we need not respond in anger and sometimes need not respond at all; we seek the council of trusted others without compromising confidentiality; we do not speak disparagingly or gossip about others in our community and we model appropriate, professional group behavior for other members; we extend a loving hand and heart in the best way we can; and, in borrowing from AA's very successful model we put our *principles before our personalities*.
4. As an organization and sometimes as chapters, we may seek opportunities to bridge the gap between us and the non-bereaved communities in which we reside. This may mean planning community-based activities such as support groups, family remembrance ceremonies or picnics, and other events, which bring us together.
5. We trust in the inherent wisdom of our grief, and we respect the grief of others. We do our best to meet their needs, guiding them on *their terms not ours*.
6. We respect each person's unique grieving style and engage in mindful, nonjudgmental relationships which do not pathologize their experiences and expressions of grief.
7. We do not diagnose or label one another with mental disorders. We do not diminish the value of another parent's child based on their cause, age, or circumstances of death.
8. We believe in individual and family strengths, and we do our best to use those to benefit our clients and their family systems.
9. We pledge to remember and honor the lives of the children who died too soon and stand with our families as they mourn.

10. We care deeply for our community and engage in activities which reflect such human caring.
11. We believe that, as volunteers, self-care, self-awareness, and self-compassion as well as ongoing education are crucial to our community's well-being. Thus, we commit to strive toward good self-care and ongoing educational opportunities when available to us.
12. We strive to offer uniquely individualized care that creates healing environments for our clients. We are not constricted by rigid guidelines or rules which do not, ultimately, result in best care practices for our families.
13. If we have a concern or complaint about another volunteer or leader in the group, we first approach that person with kindness; if we cannot resolve our issue, we will work together to seek council from trusted leaders within the organization; we will ask ourselves before we speak: Is this kind? Is this necessary? Does this improve upon the silence¹? Is it being said with love or with anger? And we will not speak of the experience with others in such a way that it promotes gossip or in any way undermines the value and worth of the other person.
14. We recognize the efforts of many other volunteers, just like us, and their tireless labor of love and grief. Thus, we invite you to remember to express gratitude to others within the organization for this beautiful work which we are all privileged to do and to exercise patience at all times. We are doing the best we can with the resources we have. Imagine, for a moment, if we heard that the person we are aggravated with- or the person we dislike- or the person who frustrates us- died today. Imagine how it would feel to leave the relationship in this way. This feeling is an invitation to mindfully adjust the ways in which we choose to think about, experience, and treat others.
15. We are here to behave in ways which *honor all our children*. When we fail to meet the guidelines of the 15 principles, and we will fail because we are human, we accept responsibility for our actions and we offer a sincere apology to those we have hurt; When someone apologizes to us for hurting us, we accept their apology with grace; We are part of an unwilling community of brothers and sisters here to embrace and manifest their collective legacy. Guided by the ethics of human compassion, we serve, we care, we nurture, we exude kindness. Above all things, be love.

Should an individual or group of individuals not feel in alignment with our principles, council may ask him/her/them to resign. We understand that not everyone seeks this type of paradigm and, thus, might not be suitable for our community. In this instance, we expect volunteers to exercise their integrity and professionalism through abiding by the terms of the confidentiality agreement, respecting others' privacy, MISS Foundation/CLT intellectual property, and conflicts of interests. We are grateful, deeply grateful, for your time, for your compassion, for your support of our amazing, innovative, and mindful work in the world for all our precious children.

¹ From Saibaba