# When a Guest Asks for Money or Gifts

**Serving with compassion and clear boundaries**

A guest mentions that they need gas to get home. A parent asks whether you could buy a Christmas gift for their child. Someone you have gotten to know asks to borrow a few dollars until payday.

These requests can be difficult, especially when you care about the person asking. At Center of Hope, building relationships is central to how we serve. Clear boundaries help those relationships remain healthy, respectful, and consistent.

**When a guest asks for money, a loan, or a personal gift, listen with compassion and refer the request to staff. Do not make a private arrangement or promise assistance.**

## Listen without judging

Asking for help can be uncomfortable. Respond calmly, and avoid questioning the guest's character or making assumptions about how they would use the money.

You do not have to decide whether the request is deserving. Your responsibility is to treat the person with dignity and connect them with the appropriate staff member.

A simple response is:

> "Thank you for letting me know. I can't give personal money or gifts, but I can connect you with a staff member to discuss what you need."

## Keep assistance within Center of Hope's process

Do not give or lend personal cash, send money through a payment app, buy gift cards, pay a guest's bill, or purchase an item privately in response to a request. The same boundary applies when you notice a need and feel moved to offer help yourself.

Bring the need to staff before taking action. Staff can review the situation, consider available resources, and determine whether assistance or a referral is appropriate. A referral does not guarantee that Center of Hope can meet the request.

Avoid promises such as "We'll take care of it" or "I'll bring you something next week." Instead, say:

> "I can make sure staff knows about your request. They can explain what options may be available."

## Understand why consistency matters

A personal gift may seem like a small gesture, but it can create expectations for future help, pressure other volunteers to give, or leave other guests wondering why assistance differs from person to person. A guest may also feel indebted to the volunteer who helped them.

Handling requests through staff supports fair decisions and helps the team understand needs that might otherwise remain unseen.

Volunteers should never feel that spending their own money is a requirement of serving.

## If the guest continues asking

Remain kind and repeat the boundary without debating or providing details about your finances.

> “I understand this is important. I’m not able to provide personal money or gifts. Let’s speak with staff.”

If the conversation becomes uncomfortable, ask your team leader or a staff member to join you. Report threats or immediate safety concerns promptly. An urgent need should be brought to staff right away.

## Protect the guest’s privacy

Share the request only with the staff or team leader responsible for helping. Do not discuss it casually with other volunteers, post it in a group chat, or organize a collection or online fundraiser without staff approval.

Do not exchange personal payment information or arrange private contact to provide assistance later. If you already know the guest outside Center of Hope, tell staff so they can help you navigate that existing relationship.

## If you have already given something

Speak privately with staff. Explain what you provided and whether you made any promises. That conversation can help clarify expectations and prevent confusion during future visits.

## There is still a meaningful way to help

If you want to contribute beyond your volunteer service, ask staff about donating through Center of Hope and its approved programs. Let staff determine how a particular need can be addressed.

You can listen, offer encouragement, and offer prayer if the guest welcomes it. You can help someone feel heard while connecting them with the people responsible for reviewing their request.

**Our shared approach is simple: listen kindly, keep clear boundaries, and bring the need to staff.**