



# What is Mutual Aid?

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Mutual aid is when everyday people cooperate for the common good. It's an approach to providing services and resources that asks community members to care for one another for the benefit of all. Participants work together to determine how to meet each other's needs. Benjamin Shepard defines it as "people giv[ing] what they can and get[ting] what they need."

Almost every person has participated in a form of mutual aid at some point in their life. If you have brought food to a sick loved one, showed up to a community clean up, or provided transportation to a friend, you have given mutual aid. You can participate in mutual aid at any time, simply by giving and receiving help from those around you. When we practice mutual aid, we recognize that none of us can thrive on our own. If we want to survive and build good lives, we need to act in cooperation rather than competition.

## Important ways that mutual aid is unique:

- Mutual aid recognizes that individual people are not at fault for their own poverty, crisis, and vulnerability. Instead, it focuses on the ways that current systems are not meeting everyone's needs.
- It asks people to build relationships based on trust, common interest, and shared needs.
- Mutual aid pushes us to share what we have.
- Mutual aid recognizes that all kinds of support are important and valuable, whether it's more formalized work like building something or making something, or less tangible like emotional support.
- It doesn't position one person as saving other people. Everyone contributes and works together. Everyone is respected and allowed to participate in decisions.

## Why should autistics and their communities care about mutual aid?

It's no secret that many autistics and their families/caregivers don't feel they have adequate supports. Needs are often outside of the structures that currently exist. Mutual aid is one way to support each other in meeting needs while also pushing the current systems to provide more. Connecting with other people who have similar lived experiences also can provide us with more effective strategies, more compassion, and shared understandings. Mutual aid can help provide tools and frameworks to make reliance on neighbors and communities easier.

## What does mutual aid look like?

It's impossible to describe all of the things that mutual aid could be. If you can imagine a way for a group of people to work together to support each other, you've imagined mutual aid. But there are some common examples that can help you to picture what mutual aid is.

Many communities have worked together to coordinate buying and dropping off groceries for community members who can't leave their homes. During the COVID pandemic, some people have made masks and shared them with their neighborhoods. When a church community comes together to provide food or financial support to a family in need, that's mutual aid too. When we get a big snowfall, one of the most common Minnesota mutual aid actions is to all come together and shovel out driveways or snowed in cars. Support groups, or online pages in which people share resources are also great examples of mutual aid.

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To help you get a better handle on mutual aid, AuSM has created some resources with information about specific forms of mutual aid. Click on the concepts below to learn more about them.

- [Pod Mapping](#)
- [Care Webs/Collective Access](#)

## How do I get started?

There's no right or wrong way to start practicing mutual aid. You can start by connecting with someone you care about and working on something together. You also could go much bigger and work on creating a neighborhood group or a specific project. If you're nervous about taking on too much or want an approachable way to start, here are some ideas:

- Donate to a bail fund
- Look for local mutual aid groups:
  - [Mutual Aid Hub](#) (helps you locate groups near you)
  - [South Minneapolis Mutual Aid Autonomous Zone](#)
  - [Twin Cities Logistics Collective](#)
  - [Twin Cities Queer and Trans Mutual Aid](#)
  - [Women for Political Change](#)
  - [Community Vs. COVID](#)
  - [TCMAP](#)
- Walk, feed (and foster if needed) pets for neighbors who may be too frail to care for them or unable to go outside.
- Give emotional support to those who need it – a phone call, playing a video game together, or a video chat goes a long way.
- Write a resource - if you have experience navigating a particular element of autism, you can share information about how you manage it
- Try a work trade - one example of mutual aid is moving toward a barter-based approach to getting your needs met. If you're struggling to keep your home clean, you could offer to cook meals for a friend in exchange for them cleaning your home. Trades like this can include almost anything, as long as each participant is getting something of value to meet needs, this is mutual aid.

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# Resources and Citations

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## Citation

Shepard, Benjamin (2015). Community practice as social activism : from direct action to direct services. Thousand Oaks, CA. p. 166. ISBN 978-1-4833-0937-8. OCLC 962305465

### **How to Neighborhood Pod**

This resource focuses on the needs created by the coronavirus, however most of the resources are applicable to any set of needs. You also can use these strategies to build a pod that is not contained in a neighborhood.

### **Pitt's COVID-19 Response Resource Guide**

Students came together during the COVID crisis to provide resource to each other when their university shut down.

### **Tips for Preparing for a Coronavirus Quarantine**

A variety of practical suggestions and resources for disabled and chronically ill folks struggling with disaster. This was created in response to the coronavirus, but has information that is applicable to a variety of situations. Some of these resources will be helpful in ongoing day to day life while others are most helpful in disaster situations.

### **Twin Cities / MN Mutual Aid Resources for COVID-19**

A spreadsheet with a variety of resources local to the Twin Cities. Some may no longer be active.

### **Big Door Brigade**

A website with a wide variety of resources about mutual aid, both theory and practical. Includes an in-depth toolbox with information on topics ranging from starting a project to prisoner support to childcare.

### **Example Resource: How to Go Scent Free**

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