



Guidance for Telephone Befrienders (Covid-19 support)

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There are many vulnerable people who are going to find that they are struggling with the loneliness of enforced isolation, so thank you for your help during this difficult time.

Though it may feel strange at first, you can deliver a high quality befriending service and your calls can provide a form of comfort, connection and community during Covid-19. We hope you find this guide a help in setting up and building your phone relationship.

For ease of reference you the volunteer are referred to as the “Befriender” and the person you are chatting to is the “Befriender”

Skills for Telephone Befriending

Delivering telephone befriending can be difficult at first, especially if you are more used to face to face interactions. Here are some good practice guidelines to help you.

- Try to relax yourself and allow for a calm setting. Cut down on any distractions, both internal and external, like the radio, TV etc. Allow yourself the time and space to focus on the conversation with your befriender.
- Put the service user at ease and allow them time to get comfortable at the start of the call. Don't be afraid of silences.
- Make sure the call time is appropriate. Ask them if they are ok to talk now or would they like a call back and agree a time for this.
- Respect and care about your befriender. Listening to them, their stories and their feelings are a privilege.
- Explore the current issues: use open questions, reflecting. Do not interrupt but give them clarification that you are listening by repeating back to them what they've said.
- Allow your befriender to set the pace and tell the story in their own way.
- Listen carefully, consider what is being said between the lines.
- At intervals, sum up what your befriender is telling you to ensure you have understood them correctly.
- Ask questions, take an interest in what they are saying.
- At the end of each call, make a day and time for the next call.
- Once the call is finished, you may want to make a few notes of your conversation to help you with your next call. Maybe jot down any names they mentioned i.e their sons name, to help you remember next week.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, please speak to your befriender to check on their welfare:

- Do they have a supply of food and general household supplies like soap and washing powder? Are they eating well? Do they have enough supply of their regular medication? How are they getting these?
- Do they have neighbours or family checking on them?
- How are they feeling regarding isolation and loneliness during this pandemic?
- Are they happy with you continuing to keep in touch with them in this way?

- Promote having a structure, trying to keep meal times and a sleep pattern.
- Establish a routine. Suggest some of the following where appropriate:
 - Exercise – Online You Tube workouts, walk up and down stairs. If you can safely have a short walk outside – as long as you are avoiding social contact
 - Nature – if they have a garden or outside area spend time looking after it and relaxing in it. House plants, flowers etc.
 - Entertainment and Relaxation – books; jigsaws; tv; music (listening, playing an instrument, singing), write a poem or short story, colouring, crosswords, baking, painting, make cards, write a letter
 - Do a focused activity – tidy a wardrobe, paint the hallway, sort through old photo albums, batch cook some of your favourite meals for the freezer
- Promote turning off the news sometimes, it may lower stress levels to have a break from it.
- When things start to feel overwhelming, talk to someone!



Our Sutton Befrienders Facebook page will be posting ideas and resources to help people establish a routine – find us here:

<https://www.facebook.com/SuttonBefrienders/>

Information Guidance

Your befriender may not have access to the internet or be able to leave the home. You may be their only connection to the community. It may be your role to update them on the pandemic so please do this responsibly. Let them know the current NHS Guidance and remind them the simple steps they can take:

- Wash hands with soap and water often, take at least 20 seconds to do so
- Use hand sanitiser gel if soap and water are not available
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or sleeve when you cough or sneeze
- Put used tissues in the bin straight away and wash hands afterwards
- Avoid close contact with people who are unwell

You should only provide information taken from reliable sources such as Public Health England. Information <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus> or NHS <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>

This may need to be broken down into bite-sized chunks. Check they have understood the information before moving on. It is important to use appropriate language and pace. If they ask you a question and you don't know the answer, please admit this. You can offer to look into it and get back to them with the correct information.

Structuring the conversation: What not to do

- Refrain from reassuring that everything will be alright, and you can make things better.
- Divert the conversation away from what the person is saying
- Don't tell the person what to do
- Assume you know everything about the situation

Structuring the conversation: What to do

Open/helpful statements,

“Perhaps you can tell me more about that”

“It might be helpful if you could tell me what happened”

DO NOT USE Closed/Unhelpful Questions/statements such as:

“What are you going to do about it”

“You’ll be fine, don’t worry”

Dos and Don’t

Here are a few other things to think about when offering telephone befriending:

- Do recognise your own boundaries and think before you say yes to things. We don’t know how long people might need to self-isolate for so don’t take on more than you feel you can manage over a potentially long period of time.
- Do remember that the main focus of the relationship is the needs of the other person.
- Don’t give out your telephone number or home address. See below on how to hide your number.
- Do let them know when you will next be calling them.
- Don’t take them to your own home.
- Don’t become emotionally over involved.

Privacy of numbers

If you wish to hide your number, then follow the below guidance:

From a landline – dial 141 and then the number

From an Android device – press the vertical 3 dots for a drop down menu and select ‘settings’, select supplementary services, select ‘showing caller ID’, click ‘hide my number.

Getting Support and Safeguarding Concerns

If your befriender mentions anything to you in a phone call that makes you worried about their safety or someone else's safety, then please contact your named Safeguarding Lead. The organisation that is co-ordinating your volunteering support will provide you with your named Safeguarding Lead.

If for any reason you are unable to contact your Safeguarding Lead, please contact, The Duty Social Worker number is 020 8770 4565. In the very unlikely case of an immediate emergency call 999.

What if I get sick?

If you yourself fall ill, please inform your coordinator at the first opportunity. Though we understand you may feel tempted to power through and make phone calls from home while ill, this is not necessary. You must look after yourself. There are procedures in place to accommodate this circumstance:

- The organisation may ask another befriender to take over your phone calls
- The coordinator may take over the phone calls while you are ill

- The service user will be kept up to date and asked their opinion on how best to proceed by the coordinator

What if I want to do more?

Requests for befrienders will escalate as people are forced to socially isolate and group activities stop during the pandemic. If you think you could provide more support to the organisation you are befriending with, you could request an additional match. Many befrienders may be in a position where they can take on an additional match(es).

As distance befriending does not have travel time included, befrienders may have more time to accommodate befriending. This may be temporary but is an opportunity to provide a valuable befriending service for those on the waiting list or others the project is trying to support.

Speak to your coordinator about your availability and they will be able to guide you on what is available and how you can help at this time.