



Telephone befriending guidelines

Having positive social contact with other people helps us to maintain good mental health. One way to do this at the moment is through telephone befriending. This could be very helpful to people who are self or socially isolating and live alone. The role of a telephone befriender is to ring one or more people on a regular basis – perhaps weekly – for a chat. It is as simple as that. Talking with others helps us feel connected and whether the call is just about the weather or touches on the current situation both befriender and befriended should end the call feeling a little more positive and less isolated. Befrienders are not expected to be counsellors, do the shopping or resolve problems.

Confidentiality and Safeguarding

The organisation supporting you will have explained how the scheme works to the person you call.

The organisation who has asked you to phone someone will have policies about confidentiality and safeguarding for you to follow. Obviously you should not share information about the person you phone or details of your conversation. There are exceptions to this if there is a safeguarding concern. If you are concerned about someone's safety the organisation you are volunteering for will have told you what you need to do about your concerns. However, because of the particular challenges of the COVID-19 situation we would ask you to follow the following guidance:

In the unlikely event that you think the person you are calling is in immediate danger call 999 and then tell your organisation.

Raise any safeguarding concerns with NYCC on 01609 780780 immediately. Let the organisation for which you volunteer know that you have done this as soon as possible.

Your organisation should be able to offer you support if you have to raise safeguarding concerns. This may include asking NYCC to contact you to check that you are OK.

Some tips for telephone befrienders

First steps

- We suggest that you don't share your phone number with the person you are calling. You may be happy to do this later on but it may be difficult for some people to grasp that you will be in contact at a regular pre-arranged time only – a bit like popping into a coffee morning!
To withhold your number when you make a call from a:
 - **landline or android device** - dial '141' and then the number you are calling
 - from an **Apple device** go to '**settings**', select '**phone**', select '**show my caller ID**', slide the circle to the left to hide number and back to right (green) when you want to reveal it again.
- Agree the day and time you will phone. If you can stick to the same day and time each week this will help. The time and day need to work for both of you so ask about favourite TV viewing or other routines!
- Agree how often you will call – perhaps weekly?
- Agree roughly how long the calls should last. 20 minutes could be a starting point but you may start with a shorter call and build up as a relationship develops.

Explain that what you talk about will be confidential. The only exception to this is if you are worried that the person you are calling is not safe for some reason. If this happens you will ask them if you can pass your concerns on but if they refuse explain that you may still need to raise your concerns.

Making the call

At first it might be hard to talk to someone you don't know and can't see! These tips might help:

- Try to relax and sit in a quiet place, without distractions.
- Check that you are speaking to the right person!
- Introduce yourself – first name, perhaps a little bit about you.
- Make sure that they are ok to talk. Something may have changed since you arranged a call time. If they seem to be angry, frustrated or upset, ask are they okay to talk now or would they like a call back and agree a time for this. In such a situation you may like to arrange a fairly quick call back – within the next couple of days.
- Accept that it may take some time for the person you are calling to get comfortable with you.
- Perhaps try a gentle prompt – What have you been up to today? or Have you had lunch/tea yet? What can you see from your window?
- Don't be afraid of silences.

Listening

We all need to feel that someone is listening to us and that we matter. Most of us will talk if we have the space and the invitation. It might take time for the person you call to start talking but when they do try to really listen So:

- focus on what they are saying
- encourage them – you might do this using sounds like ‘uh-huh’, ‘mmm’ but just enough to let them know that you are there and paying attention.
- When they come to a stop you could reflect back what they have said to show that you are listening and to check that you have understood them e.g “it sounds as though” or “so that conversation was quite difficult ...” or “ it sounds as though you have some good friends”
- Just listen and be kind. You can’t fix the current situation but you can give them the chance to share their feelings if they want to. You might have dealt with a situation differently but that doesn’t matter. You aren’t there to pass judgment or give advice.

Keeping a conversation going

- It helps to use questions which prompt more than “Yes” or “No” answers. These might begin with ‘what...’ ‘how.....’ or “why....’
Examples are:
 - What do you like about where you live?
 - What do you usually do in the evenings?
- Let the person set the agenda and talk about what they want. You could ask follow-up questions about what they say to show that you were listening.
- Try not to say things like “You’ll be fine, don’t worry”. We want to make people feel better but we can’t guarantee that someone will be fine. However, you could say “It is a worrying time but I will ring you again on Tuesday” or “The BBC news said that doctors and carers are getting more protective equipment” . Try to be positive and truthful.
- If the person you are calling has questions about the coronavirus situation pass on accurate information from trusted national sources eg <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/> or www.gov.uk Make sure you understand fully any information that you give. If you don’t know the answer say so and say that you will try to find out. Check that they have understood any information you give before moving on.
- If the person wants to ask about you then try to go with this unless you feel uncomfortable. If you do feel awkward or reluctant to answer then try to re-direct the conversation gently but you might have to say something politely on the lines of “I’m sorry I don’t feel able to talk about that right now”.
- Over time you will probably start to talk about hobbies or more usual activities or life experience/history and get to know one another that way. You could ask about TV viewing, sports’ interests or holidays in the past
- Try not to push people towards a decision or action.

Ending the call

- At the end of each call, check you have agreed a date and time for the next call
- Once the call is finished, make a note of any discussion points which you could pick up next time eg shared interest in football or person expecting a family phone call.

Telephone circles

Over time If you are telephoning a number of individuals it may be worth considering setting up a telephone circle, with the people you are talking to being encouraged to talk to each other. This will extend the number of social contacts people have.

You will need to develop a relationship with each of the people you are supporting before you ask if they would be willing to talk to each other. When you ask them, you need to check they are happy for their phone number to be shared.

References

TRANSITIONING TO DISTANCE BEFRIENDING Guidance for Befrienders during COVID-19, Befriending Networks www.befriending.co.uk

Top 10 Tips for Emergency Befrienders, Befriending Networks

MIND website

Royal Voluntary Service 'Getting you started as a Community Response Volunteer'