GUIDANCE FOR TELEPHONE BEFRIENDING SCHEMES

Telephone befriending is a great way to support those that are lonely or self – isolating during the coronavirus outbreak.

Just knowing that someone will contact you on a regular basis can make a genuine difference. It can provide reassurance, comfort, companionship, emotional support and a means of obtaining information about other avenues of support if required.

Recruitment and retention of telephone befrienders

* Ask volunteers to complete an application form and check their I.D
* Ensure that you take up references, ideally 2
* Check these references carefully, ensuring that names and dates of birth correlate with the information you were originally given
* Ask prospective volunteers to declare any unspent convictions
* Ask volunteers to sign a volunteer agreement before starting
* Provide volunteers with a ‘line manager’ who has regular phone calls with them to offer support and guidance

Data Protection

* Ensure that befrienders only have the information that they need – i.e a phone number and the person’s name. Befrienders should not ask for any further details from the person they are phoning
* Set up a system for the befriender to keep these details confidentially – i.e in a password protected spreadsheet

Suggested code of conduct for befrienders

**Befrienders should NOT:**

* Share their personal telephone number(s) - always dial 141 before the telephone friend’s number
* Share their full name (volunteers should just use their first name) nor any personal details including their email address
* Accept any gifts, gratuities or bequests from their telephone friend or their friends and family
* Telephone when driving
* Visit their telephone friend
* Communicate with their telephone friend via social media

# Give advice

# Ask for any personal details, bank account details etc from their telephone friend

**Befrienders should:**

* Respect their telephone friend's confidentiality by not discussing them at all with friends or family.
* Show respect and not use inappropriate language or behaviour including discrimination
* Make the organisation aware if their telephone friend tries to give them any of their personal details or contact them in anyway
* Pass on useful information and signpost to other support

Safeguarding

* Volunteers should be asked to share any safeguarding (welfare) concerns about the individual they are supporting with the organisation they are volunteering for. A Safeguarding Lead should be appointed and their contact details given to the volunteer. It is the Safeguarding Lead’s role to determine whether to act on any of the concerns raised.
* Share your Safeguarding Policy for Adults and Children before volunteering commences and the volunteer asked to sign to confirm that they have read and understood the policies.
* Ensure that the telephone friends know not to share any personal or financial information with their telephone befriender

Ideas for conversation starters for befrienders

After introducing yourself, you could consider asking:

* How are you today?
* How is your day so far?
* How are you feeling?

As the conversation progresses

* What have you been doing today?
* It is good to ask questions about their welfare. Are you eating properly? Do you have enough food? Do you have the medication you need for now?
* Share information that you have about things that are happening locally and any other sources of support
* You could ask them to share their ‘story’ with you – ask about their occupation, interests, and pets. You could ask them about family but remember not everyone may be in contact with them or may not have any close family members.
* A good topic is what someone has been watching on TV or Do you have a garden – have you had any fresh air today?
* You could discuss Coronavirus if they raise it or you feel it is appropriate. Try not to add to any anxiety they may already have about this.
* You can share your own story if you feel willing to do so, but don’t share worries or tales of woe!

Tips for maintaining calls

* Keep them up and call regularly
* Try to stick to the timings you have agreed as they may be relying on your call and really looking forward to it. If you cannot make the call, then try to rearrange it for another time that week.
* A 10-15 minute call should generally be enough
* You might want to consider if there are other ways to keep in touch – Facetime/Skype/Whatsapp (if you and they are comfortable with this?)
* Be prepared to listen – this might seem obvious, but sometimes we feel the need to fill in during periods of silence.
* Be honest – if you don’t know the answer to something, then say so
* Be sensitive
* If the person you are calling becomes emotionally distressed and frightened, reassure them that you will call again and you may want to consider if there are any other services that might also benefit them.
* If any of your calls cause you (the caller) personal distress and upset, then offload to a colleague at the organisation for which you are volunteering. They are there to support you.

You might find the Age UK Call in Time website useful (frequently asked questions section)

<https://www.ageuk.org.uk/services/befriending-services/sign-up-for-telephone-befriending/>

# **Free training support**

**Telephone Befriending volunteers – how to guide conversations and respond to mental health concerns**

***Together Co – Making connections to change lives***

This is a useful website for volunteers who are new to a telephone befriending role and want to learn how to guide conversations and deal with sensitive issues, and promote physical and mental health and wellbeing. You have to enrol to see videos and access the presentations but it is free of charge.

It includes prompts that the volunteers might wish to use to remind people about their mental and physical health whilst in isolation. There are tips on guiding a conversation, and if a person is having mental health problems, or drifting off and having negative thoughts, how they can help them to re-focus and think about the present.

<https://together-co-s-learning-hub1.teachable.com/courses/covid-19-community-hub-guided-conversation/lectures/15835401>