

Helpful Pointers for Friendly Phone Calls

During this very strange time of Covid-19, it's more important than ever to make and maintain contact with those in our communities who are feeling isolated and lonely and in need of some social contact. Friendly phone calls are about comfort, connection and community – reducing social isolation and improving mental health.

What makes a good listener?

- Friendliness and warmth
- Strong listening skills
- Honesty and trustworthiness
- Empathy and resilience
- A compassionate ear
- Respect for confidentiality
- Commitment and reliability

Establishing Trust

- People in need of phone support are often vulnerable and need to be able to build trust with the person calling them to talk through their worries, concerns and any issues they are experiencing
- It can take time to build trust, particularly when you can't see the person face to face
- Enable the person you call to chat. Listen carefully and respect their opinions
- Show interest in their lives, what they have done in the past and do encourage them to share memories
- Respect and appreciate the person you are calling, take a non-judgemental approach and see them as a whole person
- Don't interrupt them – listen carefully and sometimes try to 'read between the lines' of what they are saying.
- Try to sum up what has been said & check that you have understood them correctly

Enable choice

- Decide together when you will call each other, for how long and at what time of day, then ensure that you are relaxed and calm and are not likely to be interrupted. If the person you are calling is feeling unwell, flustered, overwhelmed or anxious and does not want to talk, then calmly accept that and arrange to call back another time.
- Don't be afraid of silences or feel that you have to fill them

Having fun

- Never underestimate the importance of having fun together and sharing a laugh with one other
- Find out about the person's hobbies and interests and discuss with them
- Do not put pressure on the person you are chatting with to start the conversation, have an idea of the things you could discuss before you call

Ideas for new opportunities:

- Read the same book in between calls and discuss on the phone
- Do crosswords/puzzles/scrabble together online or by phone
- Listen to some music or singing together
- Listen to the same radio programme or watch the same TV programme and discuss
- Encourage them to sit in their garden if safe/able to do so

Tackling challenges

- These are challenging times and the person you chat with may feel lonely and/or fearful
- Remind them of what they have already overcome, remind them they are stronger than they think
- Be supportive and encouraging
- Use reassuring tones and a sensitive approach when discussing challenging themes
- Do not assure them that everything will be OK, be reassuring but enable them to talk about their worries

Setting boundaries - a few things to consider

- Please do be careful not to promise anything to the person you're calling – this is a friendly, supportive call – you can't necessarily fix the things they are struggling with
- Are you allowed to give out your phone number, or do you have to hide it to make the phone call?
- Has the service user given their consent for you to have their number?
- Is there guidance on how long the phone calls should last?
- Is there guidance on how frequent the phone calls should be?
- Are you both clear about expectations of the calling relationship and what is going to be happening? This is not a friendship relationship call – it's a supportive call. However, this does not mean it won't develop into a friendship over time!
- Try to ensure that the person knows this is phone support is time-limited
- If you are worried about the person you're calling or have concerns, what is the contact number for the coordinator or project you should use?

Confidentiality

You can respect someone's confidentiality by:

- Not disclosing any identifying or personal information about the person you are matched with, or their personal circumstances to anyone.
- Respecting their privacy

We cannot however, agree to keep secrets for people if we believe they are unsafe or putting other people at risk. When we are concerned about someone's welfare, we must report this, we have a duty of care around safeguarding.

Safeguarding

Safeguarding is an action that organisations take, to promote the welfare of vulnerable and protect them people from harm. Organisations and individuals have a responsibility to report any concerns about an individual through the appropriate channels.

It is important to share any concerns you have with the co-ordinator of your group/project.

If you are unable to speak with your Co-ordinator, and immediate attention is required, you can find information on how to handle a safeguarding concern here:

<https://sparksomerset.org.uk/self-isolating>

During the Covid-19 pandemic, please do use this time to check on their welfare:

- Do they have a supply of food and general house supplies such as soap? Are they eating well? Who is doing shopping for them? Do they need help with this?
- Do they have enough supply of their regular medication? How are they getting these? Do they need someone to collect a prescription on their behalf?
- Do they have family/friends/neighbours checking on them?
- How are they feeling regarding isolation and loneliness during this pandemic?
- Do they have a dog that might need to be walked? Do they have enough pet food?
- Are they happy with you continuing to keep in touch this way at the moment?
- Promote having a structure, trying to keep meal-times and a sleep pattern
- Promote turning off the news sometimes, it may lower stress levels to have a break from it i.e. read a book, listen to radio, phone friends/family or take a break in their garden if they have one

What would improve your current situation? Welfare support available.

- For health concerns, they can contact their GP or call NHS 111
- You can find information to help people stay safe and well whilst self-isolating at <https://sparksomerset.org.uk/self-isolating>
- For housing support they can contact their local district council or the Housing Association with whom they are a resident.

And finally... look after yourself!

Sometimes listening to people who are distressed and anxious can be very difficult and it may make you feel upset and powerless to help. The main thing is that you have given them a chance to connect with another person and they will doubtless feel better for having spoken to you.

However, you do need to take care of your own mental and physical health – here are a few ideas of how to do this:

- Keep in touch with friends and family - phone, WhatsApp, Zoom, Skype, emails etc.
- Limit time looking at the news/social media. If you do, ensure it is reliable information and does not cause you too much stress to do so.
- Establish a routine – include some of the suggestions below:
- Exercise – Fitness DVD, Wii fit, use equipment (exercise bike), online YouTube exercise classes, dancing, walking up and down stairs
- Nature – If you have a garden or outside area spend time looking after it and relaxing in it. House plants, flowers, etc. If you can safely, have a short walk outside – as long as you are maintaining social distancing

- Entertainment & Relaxation – Books, jigsaws, TV, music (listening, playing and instrument or singing), write a poem or short story, crosswords, colouring, painting, scrapbooking, make cards, baking
- Do a focussed activity – Learn something new, tidy a wardrobe, paint the hallway, sort through old photos, batch cook some of your favourite meals for the freezer
- If things start to feel overwhelming, talk to someone!

Please ensure that you regularly check in with the co-ordinator of your scheme and let them know how you are doing. Tell them if you are feeling overwhelmed and/or if you are concerned about anyone.