

Hints, Tips & Resources to Support Positive Conversations including Non-Digital Suggestions

This short guide provides conversation starting points and suggested activities for volunteer distance befrienders supporting lonely or isolated individuals during COVID-19 who have limited or no access to the internet. In appendix 1 there is some information on group telephone calls should that be of interest to your project.

#1 Cover the Basics

At this time, it is important that calls check in and cover some welfare aspects such as:

- Do they have a supply of food and general house supplies such as soap? Are they eating well? Do they have enough supply of their regular medication? How are they getting these?
- Do they have neighbours checking on them?
- How are they feeling during this pandemic?
- Promote having a structure/routine, 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.*

It is also important to listen to how people are feeling and to talk about this at this time. [Click here](#) for a great story from a volunteer on how she was able to use her call to listen and recognise someone's feelings, but also to help them reflect and identify hope and more positive feelings.

#2 Find other things to talk about

Part of your role is providing companionship, so it is important the conversation goes beyond welfare and Covid-19, just as the befriender in the case study above managed so well. Here are some possible topics and resources that might be helpful:

Television: How entertaining is 'Gogglebox', watching people simply chatting about the last weeks television? Why not find out what they like to watch? Do you have favourite shows in common? If not before the next call, could you

both watch the same programme and catch up on the plot, discuss the gardening tips or the antique worth the most?

Music: [Playlist for Life](#) have activities to use music to create connection, start conversations and distract people from the stress of what's going on. First conversation starter is at this link - and more to come in the coming weeks.

Sport: [Sporting Memories Foundation](#) offers resources, quizzes and access to newsletter to help chat about sporting memories.

Books: [Reading Friends](#) have produced a staying connected toolkit. There are also lots of ideas on [The Reading Agency Hub](#) and [on the Reading Groups for Everyone site](#). Something simple like reading the same newspaper and discuss the articles that interest you or reading together during the call can all help, you could even do the crossword together.

Play Games: do a quiz together or play a game over the phone (battleships, categories, etc) <https://ourpastimes.com/games-play-over-telephone-5106636.html>

Travel: If you both have access to the internet use [virtual tours](#) or even [Google Earth](#) to visit places you've always wanted to go to. Wild Earth also hosts live safaris twice a day through their [YouTube Channel](#). Where is your favourite place for a walk/holiday/short break? If your befriender doesn't have the internet but you are allowed to post them things, post pictures of a particular place and you can discuss them during your next call.

Food: Food is something we all have in common and everyone has their own likes and dislikes, so favourite dishes, recipes/baking exchanges, family traditions can be a good conversation starter.

Hobbies/Interests: Pursuit of interests can enrich life, be it painting, drawing, knitting/crochet/quilting/needlepoint, writing, gardening, DIY, bird watching or more. Allowing someone to talk about things they are passionate about is a great opportunity, especially if it's an interest you share; if it's not, it's a great way to learn about something new. Even if they don't have internet access, but you do, you could choose to do a bit of research before the next call to give you things to talk about or you may find more groups/resources, like [Grayson Perry's Art Club](#) on Channel 4. See #4 Resources and speak to your coordinator about what they might be able to help with.

#3 Get Creative

These are just a few ideas to start you off! There are new ideas and initiatives beginning every day, like [Bridging Ages'](#) intergenerational project that enables young people to write an older person's life story. But be free to be creative...who knows what great ideas you might come up with?!

#4 Resources

For those with no digital access could your project send out resources? This helps to provide activities into someone's daily routine, and allows befrienders to follow up on progress discuss how they are getting on or share the same resources with your volunteers and they can do them together, whilst on a call or if emailing or writing could update on progress. Resources other projects have sent out have included:

- Puzzle books
- Books
- Audio Books
- Jigsaws
- Magazines
- Art materials
- Disposable camera
- Newspapers
- Music CD's
- Craft materials/kits
- Knitting, sewing, crochet supplies

The main point is to listen and share positive stories, news and to be there!

N.B if phone isn't an option letters and postcards are still opportunities to connect and share with your befriender, we all know how nice it is to get a letter that isn't a bill! Why not include a nice article you have read or some photo's.

Appendix 1

Group phone calls / social groups (telephone hub).

These are generally easier if you have a set a theme to talk about this can change each week or month:

- Quiz
- Speaker/discussion on a topic of interest (eg gardening)
- Bingo

If you want to set up a group call then you can use a variety of different platforms or set ups, this website was suggested by another member:

<https://www.powwownow.co.uk/conference-call> Click on the top green button 'start my free 60 day video trial'. Although it says 'video' this gives you access to do telephone group calls. Only ONE person signs up and then it will give you instructions and a code on how others can join the call. If you want to continue after 60 days then you have the option to pay monthly. £10+VAT per month. The organisation is UK based and has a helpline if you have any queries.