



TRANSITIONING TO DISTANCE BEFRIENDING

Guidance for befriending projects during COVID-19

Befriending Networks
www.befriending.co.uk

We understand that a lot of organisations are struggling during the pandemic of COVID-19. This guidance has been created for a project to use at this difficult time. Please get in contact with *Befriending Networks* if you have any questions. As a team, we are working together to gather and create the best advice and good practice for services at this time. We are currently working from home but are reachable:

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This document contains a range of information that we feel may be beneficial to you at this time. Please note the range of links and resources referenced that may also be of benefit to you. This document includes:

- Challenges you may face switching to distance befriending and potential solutions to the challenges (page 2 – 5)
- Advice for your befrienders (page 6)
- Advice for protecting staff wellbeing (page 7)
- Helplines for signposting (page 8)

We are aware that many services who have never provided distance befriending before are now currently trying to do so. It is a great solution during the pandemic to ensure your service users are still receiving support and to consider how you could support others in your community such as those on your waiting list.

This section has been written to highlight to you just some of the points you may wish to consider prior to making the transition. If you have already begun delivering distance befriending, this section may give you some points for consideration:

Befriender Training

During this time, you will be unable to gather befrienders to train them in how to deliver distance befriending, but you can consider running a training session on Video conference or by phone. Our free monthly online volunteering course also remains available to our membership however, we have also created COVID-19 Support Resources to help you prepare volunteers and respond more quickly to the changing needs of your community. Among these new resources is 'COVID-19 Guidance for Befrienders' (links to this resource on page 7), which you may provide to volunteers. Use page 11 of this document as a starting point for discussions with new and existing volunteers.

The Finances

For some, expenses at this time will not be a concern, but for others, depending upon their circumstances, the cost of calls could become a challenge and barrier to offering their support. Think about how you would reimburse the cost of the calls if necessary (assuming calls will be made from befrienders' homes or mobiles). Whilst most people will have free minutes on their mobile/landline package, some may still have to pay for daytime calls. How can you support them, could you pay some expenses upfront? Do they get itemised bills that you can use for expenses evidence?

Phone number protection

Befriending Networks would normally recommend volunteer befrienders never give their numbers to service users however, at this time, we understand that some projects are changing this advice. Please ensure if you are changing this advice that your volunteer befrienders have agreed for their number to be shared.

If you are not changing your advice, then telephone befriending is still possible! There are ways for volunteers to hide their number. These can vary for android, apple and landline, so please ensure you give out the relevant advice.

- To hide a number from a **landline** dial 141 and then dial the number
- For an **Android** device go to the *phone*, press the vertical 3 dots for a drop-down menu and select *settings*, select *supplementary services*, select *showing caller ID*, click *hide my number*
- For 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*) to show number

The telephone and its lack of visual communication tools

If you are switching to telephone befriending, you will quickly realise the difference in your communication abilities. There is no body language or visual clues to help the conversation so *listening* is vital. This transition will be easier to achieve if the match is established, as the match will be more familiar with one another. However, new matches may take time to feel comfortable. Remind befrienders of non-verbal clues such as tone, vocabulary, silence and emotive language.

Writing and the lack of tone

If befrienders are switching to letters or emails to provide befriending support, please highlight the importance of clear handwriting or use of size 14 minimum font for emails. You can also highlight the importance of word choice. In written form, tone is suggested through use of words, grammar and punctuation. Your befrienders can discuss what is

happening in the community, news and events. Make sure to ask questions too, so the service user has plenty to respond to.

Launching a new delivery

The first few calls can feel awkward, particularly if the match has not met before. Reassure your befrienders that this is perfectly normal. If the match is new and is launching via distance, then please gather information on both the service user and the befriender prior to the first match contact. This way you can provide the both sides of the befriending relationship with any information you have such as likes, hobbies, previous travel experiences. This can support the build-up of the befriending relationship.

Call duration

Established telephone services may do weekly phone calls of long durations, but if you are transitioning to telephone befriending temporarily, you may wish to do things differently. You can suggest calls last no longer than thirty minutes. It might be, in the current circumstances, a couple of shorter calls a week break up the loneliness for both parties. Discuss with your befrienders' things such as exit strategies, importance of arranging the time and date of the next call.

Signposting

Provide staff and befrienders with relevant telephone numbers to pass on if topics arise such as Social Services, NHS Helplines, Silverline and so on. However, reiterate that it is vital that they report back to you anyone who is struggling in any way (physically, mentally or financially) for you to make the referrals. A list of useful helplines can be found at the back of this resource.

Boundaries in Befriending

There are still befriending boundaries to adhere to in distance befriending. Befriending relationships can give empathy, support and comfort, but should not be giving medical advice, financial guidance or promising anything to the service user. Unless your service has agreed to

it, the volunteer should not offer to do shopping, handle cash, swap phone numbers and so on.

Supporting you Volunteers/befrienders

It is important that you still provide support and a level of supervision to your volunteers, but this can be done by phone or video conferencing. When you are providing support to your befrienders via the telephone, ensure you do so in a quiet and peaceful environment, so that you can remain focussed on the conversation. You may get some ideas from our resource **Looking after your befrienders – the four principles:** <https://www.befriending.co.uk/resources/24736-looking-after-your-befrienders-the-four-principles>

Avoid distractions

Befrienders should find a private, quiet area to make their calls so they can focus on the service user and not have any distractions such as the TV, people in the background. Recommend service users do the same thing. For example, if they live by themselves, you can ask them to turn off the TV when on the phone with your befriender.

Consider alternatives

If phone calls do not seem the best form of contact for your service during the pandemic, you can consider emails, letters or videocalls. With letters, you will have the additional consideration of stamps, envelopes and paper and that may be claimed as expenses.

Useful Resources for befrienders

We have collated a short guidance document for befrienders on distance/telephone befriending it is free to download available on our website

<https://www.befriending.co.uk/resources/covid-19-support/>

You can provide befrienders with our **Good Practice in Befriending Guide** which is currently free to all during this time:

<https://www.befriending.co.uk/resources/24738-being-a-befriender-the-good-practice-guide>

We are aware that social distancing can have a negative effect on mental health. Here is a document for befrienders called **Protecting your wellbeing:**

<https://www.befriending.co.uk/resources/24737-protecting-your-well-being-guidance-for-befrienders>

We also offer online **befriender training** for free to our membership. It runs every month and you can find out more information here:

<https://www.befriending.co.uk/training-events/core-skills-for-befrienders/>

Useful resources for Coordinators

We are trying to provide you with as much guidance, information and resources as possible, but if you can't find the answer on the News section of our website or in the new resources, use the contact details at the beginning to get in touch with us and we will answer your enquiry as soon as we can.

Q+A Webinar with Befriending Networks

We will holding Q+A sessions with a member of Befriending Networks staff, every Wednesday from 1st April from 12.30pm to 2.00pm to try to provide an open discussion between us and many befriending organisations on how we are all handling this current state of affairs. Please message Victoria@befriending.co.uk or click the link below for more information on how to join in the discussion:

<https://www.befriending.co.uk/training-events/covid-19-support/>

Looking after your wellbeing during social distancing and self-isolating

COVID-19 Pandemic can mean our focus is on helping as many people as we can as the communities' isolation and loneliness levels escalate rapidly due to social distancing and self-isolation.

As staff, many of us are now having to work from home and are also practicing social distancing and self-isolation as we work. Though we are all working hard to support many who are deemed vulnerable at this time, it is important that we acknowledge how we are feeling as well.

Here are some pointers on how to protect your health during this time:

1. Keep in touch with colleagues, line managers from work via phone, WhatsApp, skype, emails etc. Remember to have time away from work to contact you own family and friends and get some down time, it can be all too easy to never switch off.
2. Establish a routine to your working from home – include some of the suggestions below:
 - Working hours – Be aware of how many hours you are working, try once this initial period of change has passed to settle this into a routine
 - Screen Use – You should be aware of your posture and sitting position whilst working from home try to get this as safe as possible. Remember getting up and moving away from screen is still important.
 - Nature – Fresh air is important. Take a walk round your garden or go for a short walk during your lunch break.
 - Relaxation – Try to relax in your non-working hours reading, listening to music (listening, playing an instrument or singing), write a poem or short story, crosswords, baking
 - If things start to feel overwhelming, then talk to someone!

Some useful links:

- <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus-and-your-wellbeing/>
- <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/looking-after-your-mental-health-during-coronavirus-outbreak>
- <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-51873799>

Helplines for signposting

Having spoken to a few organisations, we are aware that many services are amending their hours. With working from home / operating a distance befriending service now, many matches would prefer making phone calls or writing emails at a time that best suits them. Be aware of their needs/intentions of service before recommending them. We have checked and some of the services available via telephone have extended their operating hours to try and accommodate the demand during this pandemic. Below are just some services you could research before recommending to your staff, befrienders or service users:

Age UK: 0800 6781 602

Operates 365 days per year, 8am – 7pm

Age Scotland: 0800 12 44 222

Operates Monday – Friday, 9am – 5pm

Alone Ireland: 0818 222 024

Operates 7 days a week, 8am – 8pm

Breathing Space: 0800 83 85 87

Operates 6pm – 2am Mon - Thursday, Operates 6pm – 6am Fri - Mon

Chest Heart and Stroke Scotland: 0808 801 0899

Operates Monday – Friday, 9:30am – 4pm

Samaritans: 116 123

Operates 365 days per year, 24 hours per day

Silverline 24 hour Service: 0800 470 8090

Operates 365 days per year, 8am – 8pm