



TELEPHONE BEFRIENDING

A-Z OF CONVERSATION STARTERS

When you speak to your befriender on the phone it's always a good idea to have a few conversation starters up your sleeve.

As you get to know one another, you may feel that you don't need prompts quite so much, but at least to begin with you might like to make a note of topics of conversation that are received particularly well. You may equally want to make a note of any areas of conversation that aren't received so well. We all have things we prefer talking about.

While these prompts have been put together particularly with people living with dementia in mind, these topics of conversation may be used for phone calls with anyone.

A **Animals and pets** – a pet is often like a member of the family, or a friend. If your befriender has a pet, or had pets in the past, they may enjoy talking about them.

B **Birds** – can you see or hear any birds outside? Seagulls, pigeons, or sparrows? Perhaps you or your befriender has a bird table you can look at while you're on the phone, and describe what you can see.

C **Cuppa** – what's your favourite hot drink? A strong coffee? A milky tea? Or perhaps you prefer cold drinks? Do you have a drink by you side, or do you fancy one after the phone call?

D **Do you need anything at the moment?** As volunteers you are not expected to help out in practical ways (like getting someone's shopping), but if your befriender is struggling with anything, do let us know (with their permission) and we'll see how we can help.

E

Emotions – how are you feeling today? Even if your befriender is feeling low, it may help to share how they are feeling. The idea is not to dwell on sadness so much as to recognise how a person is that day. We all have good days and difficult days.

F

Food – what sort of food does your befriender like? Do they have a sweet tooth, or enjoy more savoury food? Do either of you like cooking? Do they have any snacks by their side? Will either of you have something to eat after the phone call?

G

Google! – while you are talking to your befriender (or afterwards), if there's something that comes up that neither of you can *quite* remember the details of, like an advertising jingle, or the name of a particular seaside town, why not look it up online, and share what you find with your befriender.

H

How are you? – so often we ask or answer this question without much thought. *Really* asking the question and *really* listening to a person's experience lets them know you care about them.

I

Interests – are there any interests or hobbies your befriender has had throughout their lives? Whether it's fishing, cooking, or listening to music, friendships can develop through sharing common ground, or being interested in what a person has to share. Chatting about interests and hobbies, even if they aren't active hobbies might be a welcome talking point.

J

Jokes and humour – why not look up a few jokes online, or invest in a joke book to have by your side during your phone calls. Humour can be a great way to develop a befriending, but be aware of how the jokes are being received. If your befriender laughs politely, take the hint!

K

Keep Calm and Carry On – why not exchange some sayings and wisdom for times such as these. Does your befriender use any phrases or sayings you haven't heard before? Let them know you've learnt something new from them today.

L

Look out the window – what can you see? Are your views similar or different? Does your view change depending on the season?

M

Music – do you like listening to music? What kind of music do you like? Do you like listening to the radio? Is there any music you can't stand? Are there any songs (or a few lines from a song) you can sing over the phone?

N	News – have you heard any good news stories you can share with your befriender? It might not be recent news, but sharing stories can be encouraging when so much of the news seems gloomy.
O	Open questions – rather than asking questions that might lead to one word answers, asking your befriender, ‘Tell me...’ or ‘I’d love to hear more about that...’ let’s them know you are interested in their experiences and stories.
P	Poems – while not everyone loved poetry during their school days, plenty more people enjoy a few thoughtful lines with strong rhymes, whether they are familiar or heard for the first time. If you enjoy poems, your befriender might like to hear a line or two during your call. The key here is not to read anything that’s too long.
Q	Quiz questions and trivia – while there might not be any prizes, if your befriender enjoys quiz questions and trivia this could be something you both enjoy during your phone calls.
R	Reminisce – thinking about the good times. With reminiscence we may think this may involve recalling stories from many years ago. While this may be enjoyable for you and your befriender, you may also reminisce over previous phone calls and shared memories from your befriending.
S	Seasons – what signs of the season can you see from where you are? Which season do you like best, and why? Are there any things you like to do each season, like eat particular food, or wear favourite clothes?
T	Television – is it on in the background during your phone call? What do you like watching? Are there any programmes you both enjoy? Are there any theme tunes you can sing over the phone?
U	Updates – is there anything to catch up on since your last phone call? Or perhaps there are some updates from Time to Talk Befriending that you can share with your befriender.
V	Validate a person’s experience – being there for someone and listening to their experience is a hugely important part of your role as a befriender. Whether your befriender is feeling low, anxious, or upbeat, letting them know you are happy to hear how they are that day will be so important to them.
W	Weather – the weather is always a solid topic of conversation, whatever the time of year. The weather might even change while you are on the phone. Related to the weather, ask if your befriender is keeping warm / staying cool, depending on the time of year. Sometimes small changes like an extra layer of clothing, or having a glass of water can make all the difference.

X

eXtraordinary times we are living through – OK, not exactly an ‘X’, but we are living through very strange times indeed, and it’s important to name that. Without being too gloomy or dwelling on the negatives, if your befriender feels particularly anxious about what they have heard on the news, for example, it may be a comfort for them to know they can talk it through.

Y

Younger days – recalling memories from your befriender’s youth may be enjoyable for them. Whether it’s talking about their childhood, summer holidays, or memories from their working life, a trip down memory lane may be something your befriender has little opportunity to do apart from with you.

Z

Zimmer frames and other helps in the home. Is your befriender finding anything tricky at the moment? Again, you are not expected to help out in this practical way, but the TTTB team might be able to refer your befriender for health and social care support that might help in their daily routines. With your befriender’s permission, do get in touch with the TTTB and we’ll see how we can help.

Do you have any topics of conversation that are particular favourites?

We’d love to hear your ideas and suggestions to share with other volunteers.

Give us a mention on social media, drop us a line
to info@tttb.org.uk or give us a call on **01273 737710**

With thanks to Charlotte
for putting this together.



Charlotte Overton-Hart Story Chaplain

Encouraging everyday creativity and meaningful moments
for people living with dementia, carers, and everyone.

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