



# Decision Making Toolkit

---

THE IMPACT OF LIVING SAFELY WITH COVID-19  
FOR BEFRIENDING SERVICES

Updated April 2022

## Overview

The governments across the UK have started to remove restrictions and implement strategies for living safely with COVID-19.

It is not possible for an organisation, such as Befriending Networks, to provide exact guidance for each individual organisation because the next steps must involve working within devolved and local government guidance and rules and will depend upon good risk management. **Ultimately decisions remain an individual organisations responsibility and should be agreed through line management and good governance processes before they are implemented.**

In this toolkit we will provide some overarching principles that we are suggesting you use, as to how you make decisions and some thoughts on the risk assessment process. **This is aimed at decisions around 1:1 befriending and ways to manage the risks to volunteers and service users. The return of face to face befriending including home visits and group befriending may vary between countries, service user groups and individual organisations.**

Organisations also have a responsibility to keep their staff as employees safe, but this is not the focus of this guidance. We have developed this guidance with a focus on volunteers and service users.

## Principles

Our collective responsibility is to others and the rights, wellbeing, dignity and safety of those most vulnerable in our communities and they must be at the heart of our next steps.

Involve your staff, volunteers and service users in open discussions, about their situations, feelings and hopes.

The management of risk for the organisation depends on being able to be flexible and person-centred, as every volunteer and service user, and their particular circumstances, will be different.

At present there are still steps to reduce the risk of catching and spreading COVID-19 and we have now moved into a *'living with COVID-19'* and *'COVID sense'* approach.

## Suggested Process

<p><b>1. Reflect</b></p>	<p>Consider what your organisation has learned since March 2020 and what aspects can be carried forward within your project.</p> <p>Have this conversation with your staff, volunteers and service users - this is a chance to make your organisation stronger &amp; more resilient.</p>
<p><b>2. Stay Informed</b></p>	<p>The UK Parliament and the devolved governments keep us informed on simple things we can do in our daily lives that will help reduce the spread of COVID-19 and other respiratory infections whilst protecting those at highest risk. Things you <b>can choose to do</b> are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Get vaccinated</li> <li>2. Let fresh air in if meeting others indoors</li> <li>3. Practice good hygiene (wash your hands, cover coughs and sneezes, clean your surroundings frequently)</li> <li>4. Wear face covering or a face mask especially in crowded, enclosed spaces.</li> </ol> <p>Click to visit government guidance from <a href="#">England</a>, <a href="#">Northern Ireland</a>, <a href="#">Scotland</a>, <a href="#">Wales</a></p> <p>Make sure you check this carefully and regularly when making decisions within your organisations.</p>
<p><b>3. Communicate</b></p>	<p>It is important to make sure your volunteers and service users are clear about your continuing support, and expectations around keeping everyone safe.</p> <p>Try not feel under pressure to reintroduce face to face, home visits or group befriending just because restrictions have been eased, it doesn't mean everyone is ready.</p>

#### 4. Risk Assess

Take time to consider how your organisation's service users, volunteers and staff will be impacted by easing restrictions. Involve them in identifying what support they made need.

***For volunteers** you need to have an open honest conversation. Explain why you are asking these questions and you are not making judgements but will use it to assess risk and identify was to manage the situation so that everyone is comfortable. We suggest covers the following:*

- Do they have any health issues/conditions that placed them in a higher risk category?
- Do they live with or are they a visiting carer someone in the above category, that would mean they are putting someone else at increased risk if they were to have face to face contact?
- Have they been vaccinated? Are they up-to-date with their boosters? If not, what are views on the vaccine?
- How do they feel about the easing of restrictions, what are their preferences/thoughts?
- How would they get to a face to face meeting? If it involves public transport is this increasing risk? Are they comfortable using public transport?
- Explain that you will contact the befriender(s) to also carryout this risk assessment process and, after this, you will be back in touch to agree next steps.
- Make sure to remind all volunteers, especially interim ones, how important their role is and that they are still needed at this time.

***For service users** you need to have an open honest conversation. Explain why you are asking these questions and you are not making judgements but will use it to assess risk and identify was to manage the situation so that everyone is comfortable. We suggest covers the following:*

- Do they have any health issues/conditions that placed them at a higher risk?
- Do they live with someone in the above category, that would mean they putting someone else at increased risk if they were to have face to face contact?
- Have they been vaccinated? Are they up-to-date with their boosters? If not, what are views on the vaccine?
- How do they feel about the easing of restrictions, what are their preferences/thoughts? (For CYP services, what are both parents and CYP thoughts? For those who are living with carers, what are their thoughts?)
- How would they get to a face to face meeting? If it involves public transport is this increasing risk? Are they comfortable using public transport?
- Is the service user able to understand and follow social distancing rules? Age, disability or a condition such as living with dementia may impact upon this.
- Explain that you will contact the befriender to also carryout this risk assessment process and, after this, you will be back in touch to agree next step

### **Important Considerations:**

#### **Vaccinations**

We have included questions about vaccine status in the above. It is public health advice that people should where they are eligible get vaccinated. At present the governments across the UK are making vaccines available **but it remains an individual's choice to accept this or not.** In addition, volunteers and befriendees can choose whether or not to share this information with you.

**Information about vaccines can be found here:** [COVID-19 Vaccines & Boosters](#)

Therefore, at present we are suggesting that this information is used as part of risk management approach and not as any form of criteria for either volunteering or accessing a service. However, policies or decisions on disclosure of this information or it being a criterion for your service will need to be considered and taken by your organisations manager/board/trustees.

### **Lateral Flow Testing**

At present befriending services and volunteers cannot routinely access free lateral flow tests.

If you decide that testing is required, you will need to pay for it unless the individuals meet government's eligibility criteria for free testing. Examples where they may be eligible include if befrienders are visiting people in care homes or if they themselves have particular health condition.

There is an online checker for checking current eligibility for free tests here: [Government Guidance - Lateral Flow Tests](#)

For anyone not eligible for a free test, tests are now available to buy at major chemists and online. Generally, at a cost somewhere between £1 and £2 per test – we don't know of anywhere specific offering cheaper testing.

Staff and volunteers should not be expected to pay for this themselves. If you feel it is necessary for them to carry out their role effectively and safely, these costs would have to be met by the organisation and this would need considered against budgets.

Whilst vaccines, Lateral Flow Tests and PPE may significantly reduce the risks, they cannot eliminate it entirely. Reminders about social distancing and good hand hygiene remain important.

	<p><b>Decide what is appropriate for that match, document this and note when you will review it again.</b></p>
<p><b>5. Keeping Safe</b></p>	<p>Let both parties know the outcome of the risk assessment, but protect people’s rights to confidentiality. Take responsibility for the decision so that neither party feels they are letting the other down and reassure them.</p> <p>Agree what the next steps for that specific match are, provide them with the most up to date government guidance. (Refer back to Section 2- Stay Informed Section for useful links)</p> <p><b>Remind both parties</b> if they have symptoms of a respiratory infection, such as COVID-19, and they have a high temperature or do not feel well they are advised to <b>try to stay at home and avoid contact with other people.</b></p>
<p><b>6. Be Flexible</b></p>	<p>It is prudent for organisations to have contingency plans in place:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can you service run in a different way if needed? e.g. Telephone Befriending</li> <li>• What else can you do to ensure all parties are safe?</li> </ul> <p>Volunteers and service users need to know how you will communicate to them any changes to the agreements, so you need to make sure you have their most up to date contact details.</p>
<p><b>7. Keep it Under Review</b></p>	<p>Although restrictions have eased its important to stay informed and keep your decisions under review. Support and supervision sessions are good way of checking in with all parties.</p>

**Support:**

Remember, Befriending Networks is here to support you:

- Email or call one of the team to discuss your specific thoughts:  
<https://www.befriending.co.uk/contact/>
- Join one of our Q&A or networking sessions:  
<https://www.befriending.co.uk/training-events/networking-events/>