

Guidance: from Face-to-Face to Telephone Befriending

In light of recent and continuing developments of COVID-19 (Coronavirus) your befriending organisation may wish to consider the option of telephone befriending replacing face-to-face visit for the near future. This guidance provides suggestions to help current face-to-face matches switch to telephone befriending.

Although current Government guidance does not at this point in time mandate that such visits should stop, circumstances will continue to change over the coming weeks. Ensure your organisation stays up to date with the latest guidance and has plans in place to adapt and continue to support befriendees.

1) Decide on a Policy

- Consult the latest guidance from the Government and NHS.
- Have a team meeting among staff to create a plan if guidance were to suggest or if you currently feel that face-to-face befriending is no longer appropriate for the group of people you support
- Consider if telephone befriending is a viable option for your service and what circumstances would dictate it be put in place.
- Ensure staff members are clear on procedures and are able to work remotely if necessary (this includes providing telephone or digital support and supervision to befrienders).

2) Communicate your Plan

If you have not already been in touch with your befriendees and befrienders, it is a good idea to keep them informed regarding current NHS guidance

- wash our hands with soap and water often – do this for at least 20 seconds
- always wash our hands when we get home or into work
- use hand sanitiser gel if soap and water are not available
- cover our mouth and nose with a tissue or sleeve (not our hands) when we cough or sneeze
- put used tissues in the bin straight away and wash our hands afterwards
- try to avoid close contact with people who are unwell

-If befrienders or befriendees have recently visited high-risk areas **or** are experiencing symptoms instruct them how to inform their coordinator and cancel visits until appropriate timescales have passed in line with NHS advice.

-Inform befriendees and befrienders about your organisation's plans (i.e. under what circumstances visits would be cancelled and if/when telephone befriending would replace face-to-face visits).

3) Switching to Telephone Befriending

- Ensure both befriendees and befrienders are comfortable moving from face-to-face to telephone befriending for the time being.
- Ensure befriendees give consent (verbal would suffice) for their befriender to have their contact number, if they don't routinely have this.
- Communicate to befriendees and befrienders parameters regarding the length and frequency of phone calls.
- Encourage befriendees and befrienders to set up a new schedule (arranging phone calls for a certain day/time/duration as they would a face-to-face visit)
- Put in place a policy surrounding privacy of numbers. (To hide a number from a **landline** dial 141 and then the number; from 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'; from 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.)

4) Information for Befrienders

- If appropriate, ask your befrienders to check in on their befriendees wellbeing. This could include asking if they are eating well and staying hydrated, have enough food, have a plan to get more delivered if necessary; asking if they are taking and have access to any medication which they might need; encouraging them to keep in touch with people over the phone or digitally if they can; recommending listening to a chatty radio station and if they are feeling lonely to put some extra pictures around of people they care about.
- Instruct befrienders how to be in touch with coordinators (if coordinators have work mobiles ensure befrienders have these numbers, in case your office is closed) if they are concerned about befriendees wellbeing or if they are concerned about their own wellbeing.

5) Thinking about New Matches

- If your waiting list is growing, consider if staff members whose work load allows to take on a weekly check in until and a befriender can be found.
- If your organisation is recruiting new volunteers for telephone befriending, consult with Disclosure, DBS, or other applicable organisation for your location, to ensure you continue to follow safe recruitment checks. (Current befrienders who are already trained and have had checks completed can transition from face-to-face to telephone befriending without additional external paperwork).
- Consider how you will train new volunteers if you are unable to meet in person.