



# Time to Talk BEFRIENDING

**COVID 19**  
Telephone Befriending  
Honouring • Connecting • Engaging

## TIME TO TELEPHONE BEFRIENDING

*Creating meaningful moments with people living with dementia over the phone*

**The value of telephone befriending.** Whatever our age, and whether or not we are living with dementia or memory loss, having a friendly chat on the phone can be the highlight of our day. During this time of increased physical distance, regular phone calls provide a great opportunity for social connections and friendship.

### *Moments over memories*

If a person is living with dementia or memory loss, asking what a person has done that day might be tricky to answer. The goal of the phone call is enjoy time together *in the moment*, and to give your befriender your full attention. Rather than asking what your befriender has done that day, asking, 'How are you doing today?' creates more of an opportunity for someone to answer without having to share memories which may be difficult to recall.

Why not take the opportunity to do something together during your phone call, like looking out the window wherever you are and describing what you can see, reading a poem, or doing some gentle exercise or stretches together. The key here is doing something *together*. It's good for everyone's wellbeing to notice the seasons and have a good stretch!

### *Will my befriender be able to remember my call?*

If a person is living with dementia it may be difficult to recall the content of a phone call, or even that the phone call has taken place. That said, more and more research is confirming that a good interaction and happy time can positively impact a person's mood long after that interaction, even if they aren't able to recall what the interaction was. Your call *will* make a difference to a person's quality of life.

### *How do I know what the right length call is?*

When a person is not living with dementia we would suggest 30 minutes as a guideline time, but if a person is living with dementia their concentration span may be more limited, or a call of this length could be exhausting. Play it by ear, keeping in mind that a person's energy levels may be different at different times of the day, and also from one day to another.

### *I feel like I'm talking a lot, and the conversation is drying up.*

You may find that your conversation comes to a natural end after 15 minutes or less, even if you have made a note of possible topics of conversation. That's OK. It's more important to let someone know you are thinking of them and glad to be in touch with them than staying on the line in awkward silence.

### *I can barely get a word in!*

You may find that having a listening ear is all a person needs, and they are keener to chat than to hear from you. This is understandable, especially if you are the only person who is calling 'just for a chat'. Make a note of the topics your befriender especially enjoys talking about, and return to these during future phone calls.

## Is it OK to talk about the same things again?

Yes! The goal of your time is to create a positive experience, so if you discover that your befriender enjoys talking about a particular topic – whether this is their cat, a hobby, or a particular time in their life – do return to this as much as they are happy to talk about it.

## What happens if my befriender gets anxious or upset during the call?

We all have good days and bad days, whether or not we are living with dementia. If your befriender shares how they are feeling, the most important thing is to listen and not dismiss their emotions. Rather than straightaway trying to distract a person from feeling low, acknowledge how they are feeling, before gently introducing a different topic of conversation.

## What happens if my befriender asks for something I'm not able to help with or I don't know the answer?

Anything you're not sure about, share that with your befriender and let them know you will check in with the Time to Talk Befriending team and you'll get back to them. A simple, 'I'm not sure about that, but I'll do my best to find out' should reassure someone that you have listened to their questions and concerns and you will try to find an answer.

## Should I give my befriender my phone number?

We suggest that you call your befriender from a withheld number. To withhold your number, just dial 141 before the telephone number you want to call. If your befriender asks for your number, let them know you are happy to pass on any questions they have to the Time to Talk team, who will then be in touch with them direct.

## POSSIBLE PROMPTS /STRUCTURE FOR YOUR PHONE CALL



## How is Time to Telephone Befriending different from the new 'Check in and Chat' initiative from the NHS?

'Check in and Chat' is a service set up to provide one off telephone support specifically for people who are self isolating due to symptoms of Covid-19, and who may feel lonely during this time. The aim is to ensure that the wellbeing of the isolated person is taken into consideration and possibly identify any practical support they may require. With 'Check in an Chat' there is no expectation of a follow up call, or establishing a friendship.

## How do I explain the current Covid-19 situation to a person with dementia?

If Covid-19 comes up, explain the current situation to the person with dementia using simple and short sentences that you can repeat if needed, rather than trying to explain things in detail. For example, you can say that there is a serious virus going round and people are being told to stay home for their safety, and for the safety of everyone. Try not to speculate about what the future may hold. Instead, focus on what we can all do now and in the coming days to stay safe and connected.

Is now a good time to speak?  
(Offer to call back if now isn't a good time)

Hello  
[befriender's name],  
it's [your name here]  
and I'm your Time to Talk  
befriender, calling for  
a chat, and to  
see how you are.

Where are you at the moment? (Living room, kitchen, hallway, etc.)

What can you see? (Pictures, ornaments, a view out the window)

Is there an object or photo in your room you can tell me about?

Are you near a window? What can you see from the window?

Can you see any signs of the seasons?

Can you hear the birds?

What's your favourite season? Why?

What are you going to do now? (Share what you plan to do next, for example, 'I think I might have a cup of tea...')

Share an encouragement or good news story you have heard, perhaps about neighbourhoods pulling together and helping one another

Are you getting about the house OK? (Why not try some gentle exercises / stretches together)

Are you managing to make meals OK at the moment?

Are you finding anything a bit tricky at the moment?

How are you doing today?  
How are you feeling today?  
Is there anything you need at the moment? (food, toiletries, prescription, etc)

Are you sure? (asking a second time let's a person know you aren't just making small talk)

Finish on a positive note, and use the person's name when you say goodbye. It may seem like a small thing, but it can mean a lot.

"I've really enjoyed speaking with you.  
I'm looking forward to speaking to you again soon."

# Jotting down some helpful notes

**Before the call.** Have a think about some things you'd like to talk about and make a note of these. As you get to know your befriender you will become more confident that conversation will flow, but if you are feeling nervous about what you'll talk about then a list of possible topics can help to keep the conversation going.

**During the call.** The most important thing is to be present during your phone call. If possible, minimise background noise, which could be a distraction, either for you or your befriender. Have a piece of paper to hand to make a note of anything that comes up that you might forget after the call.

**After the call.** Take a moment to reflect on how do you feel the call went. Did your befriender particularly enjoy any topics of conversations? Were there any that weren't received so well? Is there anything to feedback to the TTTB office around your befriender's immediate needs for food, medication, or signposting to other services?

Please do check in with the TTTB team on 01273 737710 with any questions or concerns, for example about lack of food, medication collection, leaving the house, or the latest public health guidance.

Over the coming weeks and months, we would also love to share ideas of what works well during a phone call with your befriender. Whether it's reading a poem, singing together, or doing gentle exercise together over the phone, let us know what works well so we can share this with other volunteers.

Our phone lines are open between 9.30am - 2.30pm every day. If you don't get through straight away please leave a message.

With thanks to Fran & Charlotte for helping put together this advice.



**Charlotte Overton-Hart**  
Story Chaplain

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



**Fran Hamilton**

Occupational Therapist, Trainer and Consultant  
Enabling wellbeing at all stages of dementia.



Time to Talk Befriending, West Werks,  
41-43 Portland Road, Hove, East Sussex, BN3 5DQ

T: 01273 737710

E: [info@tttb.org.uk](mailto:info@tttb.org.uk)

[www.tttb.org.uk](http://www.tttb.org.uk)

Charity Incorporated Organisation Number: 1186555

Newsletter design: [ellenstew-art.com](http://ellenstew-art.com)