

Practical tips for your role

Preparing for your call

- plan your call – check you're somewhere you won't be interrupted
- preferably use a landline, when using a mobile, check your phone is charged
- if you don't feel comfortable sharing your number, please use 141 when you dial their number
- introduce yourself and that you're a volunteer at Independent Age
- check that it's still a good time to call
- if you notice any delays in them responding, check that the line is clear, and they can hear you well
- be aware of how you speak, you may need to speak slower than you usually do
- don't be afraid to say that the radio or TV is on too loud if you can't hear
- recap on what you're there to do (and what other support can be provided by others if not within your role). Explain that what you talk about is between you but if you felt they were at risk for any reason you'd have to talk to your Independent Age contact
- show empathy, ask questions, actively listen, get to know them
- arrange your next call

If you feel comfortable sharing your number with the person you support, you can do so to stay in touch.

Listening on the phone

This can be more challenging as you can't see the person. There is a greater reliance on your voice and being aware of: tone, pitch, emphasis, speech and volume.

We have more useful tips on listening and conversation skills on the training folder of our useful documents for volunteers:

www.independentage.org/volunteer-training

Reassuring people during calls

During these difficult times, some areas to cover as part of your phone chats could include:

- checking that they are eating well, have enough food in, have a plan to get more delivered if necessary and are staying hydrated
- that they are taking and have access to any medication which they might need
- encourage them to keep in touch with people over the phone or digitally if they can
- recommend that they listen to a chatty radio station and if they are feeling lonely to put some extra pictures around of people they care about
- if you feel comfortable sharing your number with the person you support, you can do so to stay in touch

Sharing NHS advice

- wash our hands with soap and water often – do this for at least 20 seconds
- always wash our hands when getting home
- use hand sanitiser gel if soap and water are not available
- cover our mouth when we cough or sneeze
- put used tissues in the bin straight away and wash afterwards
- try to avoid close contact with people who are unwell
- do not touch your eyes, nose or mouth if your hands are not clean

Supporting someone who is very emotional

There's often little you can say that's actually useful or helpful. The most important part is just your presence and your time.

- **Let them cry.** They are sharing a vulnerable moment with you, allow them to express what needs to be expressed without telling them how to feel. Avoid telling them to stop crying or that whatever they are crying about isn't worth their tears. Emotions when vented are better than if they are stored inside.
- **Don't jump to creating solutions.** If the person is crying and upset about a situation, don't try to immediately solve the problem for them. It's more important for you to do less talking and more listening. Their crying is a way to express their emotions. Let them do so without interfering.

- **Don't try to turn the conversation instantly positive.** It's a natural tendency to want to help the person feel better by having them look at the positive side. However, when you do that, they may feel like you are glossing over what's wrong and they may feel like their feelings aren't important.
- **Ask what they need.** Don't assume you know what they want. Asking what they want and need puts the other person in control and gives you the opportunity to listen and respond. Whatever they ask for or need, respect what they say.
- **Acknowledge your helplessness:** For example, you could say, "I'm so sorry you're going through this. I don't really know what to say to make it better, and I know no words really could. But I want you to know that I'm here for you when you need me".



If you have any concerns about their wellbeing, share them as soon as you can with your Independent Age contact or the Out of Hours Safeguarding number on 020 7605 4455 from 5–9pm on the week days and 9am–9pm on the weekends.

What to do if...?

What to do if someone doesn't answer your call?

- if you can't get hold of them at the agreed time, try again in 15 minutes and then again in another 15 minutes
- if you have still not been successful, leave a voicemail and ask them to contact their local Independent Age contact

Inform your Independent Age contact of the situation or call the Out of Hours Safeguarding Team on **020 7605 4455** (5–9pm on the week days and 9am–9pm on the weekends).

- if the older person is at immediate risk, for example if there is a medical emergency, contact emergency services on 999



If you can't get hold of your Independent Age contact as soon as possible, contact the Out of Hours Support number on 020 7605 4455, 5–9pm on the week days and 9am–9pm on the weekends.

- You are concerned about the older person's Wellbeing, for example:
 - getting shopping or prescriptions
 - carers not being able to visit/ have not been around
 - how to stay fit and well if they can't leave the house

On those and other similar situations, let your Independent Age contact know as soon as possible so they can liaise directly with them.

Our website has a great source of answers to some of the questions we are being asked most often through our Helpline www.independentage.org/FAQCOVID19. You can have a look at them or direct the older person to them if they can access online resources.

Take care of yourself

These are uncertain times for all of us. We have never experienced anything like this in our lives, so make sure you also look after your own wellbeing.

Mind website has very good resources on how to look after your own wellbeing: www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus-and-your-wellbeing

Some other practical tips are:

- read and surround yourself with uplifting information
- reduce the amount of news you expose yourself to (particularly false news)
- think of what you have control over
- create a temporary new routine
- continue to prioritise your emotional wellbeing
- take deep belly breaths (in through you nose 3 seconds and out through your mouth 5–7)
- explore how you stay grounded so you can ground others and be a reduce of the viral anxiety and panic
- this too shall pass

**Remember, look after yourself,
there is only one you!**