

Friendly Calls to Older Adults: Volunteer Protocol

Purpose: This is a protocol to share with volunteers who will be contacting older adults through a Friendly Caller Model during the COVID-19 Pandemic. This can also be used by others in your organization/group who want to connect with socially isolated older adults as a source of social connection.

Who might use this? Volunteers, neighbors, trusted community members, employees/staff of service providers, faith communities, and other groups/organizations.

When should this be used? This worksheet is best used as a follow-up call to an older adults, after a wellness call has been made. These calls are more social, though the caller should be listening to assure that basic needs are being met.

Confidentiality: A confidentiality/consent form is included for your use in case you wish to use when engaging volunteers to do this work.

Friendly Calls to Older Adults: Volunteer Protocol

Thank you for making friendly calls to our community's older adults during the coronavirus epidemic!

We know that older adults are more prone to loneliness and isolation under normal circumstances. Now with the spread of COVID-19, those over the age of 65 are considered most at-risk in developing life-threatening conditions if they were to contract the virus. Nursing home facilities have cancelled social activities or at-home older adults are confined to their homes. For some, loved ones are forced to stay away due to increased risk of exposure. All of these current circumstances play a negative effect on the emotional and social health of these important community members. As a result, feelings of loneliness and isolation increase, in addition to new emotions like fear and worry.

During this time when many of us are also feeling isolated and helpless, there are also tremendous opportunities to stay connected. That is the purpose of the friendly phone calls to older adults. **By making a call each week, you're making an emotional and social impact on vulnerable members in our community!**

Before starting your volunteer calls, read through the following guidelines.

(Optional language to use if working with volunteers: After you have read through the entire document, please click on the link at the end of this document to complete a consent form. Once we receive your returned form, we'll be in touch to assign you your older adult!)

(Add Link to Volunteer Consent Form)

Call Guidelines:

- ❖ Start by introducing yourself. Something like this:
 - “Hi! This is (Name). I’m a volunteer with/work for [name of organization]. I’m making a friendly call just to check in on you and see how you’re doing.”
Note: You should start your call this way every time. Older adults may have some memory loss and will need to be reminded of who you are each time.
- ❖ Allow the older adult time to talk and share. Our goal is for you to build a friendly rapport with them over the phone that will ultimately reduce loneliness. The following are a few sample questions to get you started:
 - What are you doing to keep yourself busy?
 - Do you have a favorite TV show you like to watch? Tell me more about it.
 - Who else is calling to check-in on you? If they tell you about a family member or friend, ask more about them.
 - Is there any music you enjoy listening to?
 - What’s been one need you realized you did not expect over the last few weeks?
 - Has there been anything that is easier about your life since the quarantine?
- ❖ Think about something to share that would bring laughter or a smile to the older adult. Some examples could include:
 - Have an upbeat or positive story to share. Have you read something uplifting that is happening in the community? Any touching story you’ve heard?
 - Have you recently read a good joke or funny story?
- ❖ End your call with: “Could I call again on (day), at (time)?”

Dos:

- ❖ Call from a **quiet area** with limited background noises.
- ❖ **Speak clearly** and with a slightly **slower pace** to be sure they hear and understand you.
- ❖ Keep a **calm and reassuring voice**, even if they express worry and fear. Our goal with these calls is to reassure the older adults and reduce their worry and loneliness
- ❖ **Listen first**. Give opportunities for the older adult to talk about how they are feeling.
- ❖ **Validate their feelings**. This could include reflecting back a stated feeling (e.g., "that does sound scary!") or guessing what the feeling may be (e.g., "that sounds scary"). Sometimes, you can even disclose what you are feeling to help validate (e.g., "I've been scared too."). Just being heard in this way is proven to reduce negative feelings.
- ❖ If the client shares apparent misinformation about COVID-19, you should encourage them to consume only trusted, local information. You can also encourage them to **focus**

on what they can control by taking their own **precautions** as outlined by the health department. Helpful information includes:

- Wash hands often (using soap, warm water, and at least 20 seconds)
 - Take everyday precautions to keep space between yourself and others.
 - If you go out in public, keep a safe distance of at least 6 feet.
- ❖ If the older adult shares worrisome health information, especially if they are experiencing symptoms related to COVID-19, tell them to contact their doctor or talk with their caretaker or nursing home staff. If they do not have a doctor, they should call the Upstate Triage Line at 315-464-3979)

Don't:

- ❖ **Don't promise to fulfill any requests, needs or other demands** - If they share any needs, tell them, "I will share this with [name of group/agency] and they will follow-up".
- ❖ **Don't share worrisome information** - They are probably seeing the statistics, number of cases and deaths on the news already. We don't want to increase their existing fears.
- ❖ **Don't diagnose any health symptoms over the phone** (especially if they share symptoms like difficulty breathing, shortness of breath, pressure in the chest and/or bluish lips or face), Instead, direct them to call their doctor or talk with their caregiver or nursing facility staff. You should also notify [name of agency] as well to follow-up appropriately.
- ❖ **Don't ask for personal information** - In order to protect the older adult during a vulnerable time, do not ask for their last name, address, or any other personal information that has not been given to you by agency staff.
- ❖ **Don't share the older adult's information** with anyone, including name, phone number, or what they share with you during the call (please refer to the confidentiality agreement on the consent form link below).

Schedule:

- ❖ Make your calls during normal hours between 9:00am and 6:00pm.
- ❖ A call could last anywhere from 5 minutes to 20 minutes, depending on the older adult's interest and level of comfort in talking with you.
- ❖ Once you designate the day and time when you'll talk with the older adult going forward, it's important to be consistent in calling at the designated time. This is important for building trust with the older adult while also establishing clear boundaries. Keeping a schedule also reduces any anxiety for them around when and if you will call.

- ❖ In order to protect you, if the older adult calls you outside of your agreed scheduled time, you are not expected to answer the call. However, if you have time and want to take the call, you may do so. Feel free to reach out to [name of agency] if this becomes an issue or challenge.

Sample: Volunteer Consent and Confidentiality Form

Tip: Create a Volunteer Consent Form using a tool like Microsoft Forms or Survey Monkey. This will assure that your volunteers have read this guidance, and have agreed to your Confidentiality Agreement.

SAMPLE TEXT: Friendly Volunteer Calls to Older Adults Consent Form

Please complete the mandatory consent form so that we can match you with an older adult to call. Thank you for volunteering your time!

1. I acknowledge that my personal phone number will likely be seen by the older adult when I make my call. By typing my name below, I give consent for my number to be revealed.
2. I acknowledge that I have read the volunteer guidelines for making friendly calls to older adults. By typing my name below, I acknowledge that I have read and agree to adhere to these guidelines.
3. **CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT:**

I understand that all personal information given to me or told to me by an older adult I am calling is private information.

I will not share personal information about the older adult I am calling with anyone other than [name of agency/organization] staff. Even then, I understand I should not share private information without a clear and immediate purpose.

In extreme circumstances, I may need to break this confidentiality; for example, if the older adult I am calling has told me something that may lead to harm, either for themselves or for someone else. I may talk with staff, with the police, or with another appropriate professional (not another volunteer) in order to figure out what is the best action to take under the circumstances.

By typing your name below, you are acknowledging that you have read the Confidentiality Agreement and you agree to adhere to these policies.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Some Useful Resources

- **Medical Information:**
 - **Upstate Triage Line** – 315-464-3979
 - **NYS Department of Health COVID-19 Hotline** – 1-888-364-3065
- **Onondaga County Senior, Healthcare Worker and Adult Nutrition Hotline:**
(315) 218-1987.
Provides support for nutrition needs
- **Mental Health and Wellbeing**
 - **CONTACT Hotline:** 315-251-0600
 - **New York State Emotional Support Line:** 1-844-863-9314
The Emotional Support Line provides free and confidential support, helping callers experiencing increased anxiety due to the coronavirus emergency. The Help Line is staffed by volunteers, including mental health professionals, who have received training in crisis counseling.
- **General Referral and Information Services:**
 - 211CNY: Dial “2-1-1” to be connected with services in Central NY
- **Elder abuse, neglect, exploitation and scams**
 - **Vera House 24 Hour Support Line:** 315-468-3260
- **Groceries**
 - Some stores have “seniors-only” hours
 - Price Chopper: 6am to 7am Daily
 - Tops: Tuesdays and Thursdays 6am to 7:30am
 - Target: Wednesdays 7am to 8am
 - Dollar General: 8am to 9am Daily
 - Delivery services, including grocery stores and Instacart
- **Low cost/no cost internet**
 - Spectrum Internet Assist: low cost internet for people with low incomes. Call 1-855-243-8892

Websites:

Onondaga County COVID-19	https://covid19.ongov.net/
NYS COVID-19	https://coronavirus.health.ny.gov/home
Centers for Disease Control (CDC)	https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html

The “Volunteer Protocol for Friendly Calls to Older Adults ” was created by the **Greater Syracuse Aging Services Coalition** and the **Onondaga County Elder Justice Coalition’s Outreach Subcommittee**.

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