



# Befriending Training Manual

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## WELCOME TO THE TEAM

Welcome to the Making Connections Befriending team and thank you for your interest in supporting our work to alleviate isolation and loneliness for older people in our community.

This Training Manual is designed to supplement the Making Connections Volunteer Handbook by providing further details about the role, its requirements along with lots of practical tips and guidance. Befriending and Supports Visits and Befriending Telephone Calls are covered, regardless which role you are taking on, we recommend familiarising yourself with all sections.

Volunteers are required to study all materials provided before commencing their role and to ask any questions that may arise. You are also encouraged to return to these materials from time to time to refresh yourself on these important details.

We are confident that you will gain as much as you give through your interactions with the person you support and look forward to hearing your stories of friendship.



## BEFRIENDING & SUPPORTS VOLUNTEERING

Making Connections Befriending & Supports Volunteering involves supported one-to-one relationships between a volunteer and an older person who has been linked in Making Connections. Making Connections Befriending Volunteers provide companionship and practical supports to older people who are socially isolated – it is about sharing common interests, bringing light relief, distraction and if at all possible a bit of fun and laughter.

The meaningful social interaction along with small practical supports aims to; contribute positively to mental health and wellbeing; reduce feelings of isolation and loneliness; to help people to feel more confident and safe living in their own home; and to help older people to feel included and valued within their community.

### Skills and Qualities of a Befriending Volunteer

- Genuine interest in Older People, with an understanding and respect for their needs
- Good communication and listening skills with an ability to develop good relationships
- A respectful, non-judgemental, patient and kind disposition
- Punctual, reliable, trustworthy and respectful of confidentiality
- Willing to be flexible when required
- Committed to the ethos of volunteering
- Ability to follow and adhere to handbooks, training guidelines and policies provided
- Good, clear spoken English
- Previous experience of working with older people or in the voluntary sector is helpful but not a requirement
- The ability to prioritise your own self care and to ask for assistance if you need it
- Note: volunteers must be over 18 years of age

### Benefits & Supports

- The opportunity to making a positive difference in the life of an older person
- The enrichment of engaging with an older generation, their wisdom, stories and insights
- The positive mental health benefits associated with volunteering
- Making Connections Training & Support
- Ongoing Staff Support
- Insurance Cover
- Volunteer Recognition

# BEFRIENDING & SUPPORTS VISITS

## About the Role

### The Commitment

- Minimum commitment: 1hr weekly for 12 months
- To complete training and vetting, including Garda Vetting
- To sign a role description, volunteer code of conduct, and confidentiality agreement
- To comply with all relevant Policies & Procedures
- To adhere to the volunteer role, Volunteer Handbook and any Training Materials provided
- To provide regular feedback reports to Making Connections
- To always be punctual and reliable with your visits

### The Activities:

- Visiting an older person at least once a week to provide companionship
- Providing a basic level of practical support where relevant (see below for examples)
- Encouraging and supporting the older person to;
  - attend local events/ initiatives
  - re-engage in activities that they used to enjoy
- To contact Making Connections if you have any concerns about the older person's health, safety or wellbeing
- Participation in Making Connections surveys (either yourself, or assisting the older person you visit to participate)
- Volunteers are encouraged to share stories/ quotes to share the positive impact experienced by you, and the person you visit
- You may find that as the relationship progresses you are able to offer some practical supports (not tasks or household chores) or to act as an advocate for the older person. Here are some examples;
  - Help with phone calls and technology
  - Help accessing information
  - Help with filling out forms
  - Signposting activities of interest in the locality
  - In principle it is not within your role to do grocery shopping or deliveries but if this arises and it is feasible for you, let us know before you agree. This is likely to arise as an issue more frequently as a result of COVID19 restrictions.



# What to Expect

## The Matching Process

Please be aware that the matching process can take some time due to the various factors involved. We ask volunteers to please bear with us whilst we find a suitable match for you. You are very welcome to contact us in the meanwhile if you have any questions.

Making Connections staff carries out an assessment with all of the older people we support and will be aware of their individual needs and preferences prior to matching.

Making Connections will consider the location, interests and preferred visiting times of the older person and the volunteer alike. If you are a suitable match for an older person you will be provided with some basic information about the older person (e.g. general location, interests, other relevant information). If there is anything that you don't feel comfortable with you are asked to inform us before you are matched so we can take this into consideration.

If you feel happy with a proposed match, Making Connections will contact the older person to introduce you and tell them a little bit about you. At this stage, you will also be provided with the name and the address of the older person and your First Visit will be arranged.



## Your First Visit – The Practicalities

**A Making Connections team member will accompany you to your first visit and Making Connections will send them a reminder about your first visit.** During your first visit a Making Connections team member will detail the Befriending and Supports Role to the older person and the new volunteer and ensure that everyone is clear. You will also agree a day and time that suits you and the older person for your regular visits including your next visit

**After your first visit and if both parties are happy to proceed you will be provided with;**

- contact details of the older person
- contact details of next of kin or other emergency contact details (to be used only in the case of emergency or with the permission of the older person)
- Please note that all information provided is confidential and should be stored securely

**The older person will be provided with;**

- Your name, and Making Connections' contact details (if they wish to make any changes to your agreement, or to pass on a message)
- Making Connections will not share your personal contact details

**Other important points:**

- A Making Connections team member will not join you on your second, or subsequent visits unless it is otherwise agreed or requested.
- Making Connections will be in touch to make sure you and the older person are happy with the match.
- You will be asked to submit regular feedback forms. This helps us to know how your visits are going and most of all so that we can continue to support you and the older person
- Making Connections will keep you updated about any relevant changes or new needs arising regarding the older person (with the permission of the older person)

**If you encounter any issues, contact Making Connections**



## Your First Visit – Some Helpful Tips

- It's completely normal to feel nervous during your initial visits, this shows that you care!
- On your first visit it might feel a bit odd to have a Making Connections representative with you, remember that you are not being judged or assessed – they are there to support you
- Have you ever made a friendship overnight? No! The same goes with befriending. It is normal to take time to feel comfortable with each other and to form a relationship
- Sometimes a match falls through (e.g. the older person may change their mind about receiving support from Making Connections) or maybe you or the older person simply doesn't feel like you click. Although this can understandably be disappointing – this is part of the nature of the service. We encourage you stay positive and assure you that we will endeavour to find you a new match as soon as possible.
- Over time it is normal that your visits may change. The nature of working with older people means that you may encounter changes in the person's physical or mental health including mobility and cognitive abilities. Making Connections asks you to report any changes that you notice and will support you to continue in your role as long as you remain comfortable to do so

## What Will I do During My Visits?

It is important to remember that your role is primarily social engagement. It is not a sitting service, a replacement for home support, nursing staff or family and volunteers should not take on these roles. You will do a lot for a person by just listening, understanding and sharing interests with them.

- Discuss literature, travel, sport, fashion or other interests
- Go for a stroll around the area – perhaps stop in a café
- Play a game of card or chess
- Assisting the person to read post, books or newspaper
- Assist with new technologies such as laptops or phones, emails
- Do some gardening
- Do some arts and crafts (e.g. knitting, sewing, card making, compile a photo book)
- Watch sports or old movies together
- Go to the theatre or cinema

## Outings

Once you are comfortable and the relationship has developed a little, you may consider going on outings as part of your weekly visit. Volunteers must use their best judgement regarding the suitability and safety of the activity. The activity must be planned with the Older Person who must fully understand and agree to the activity.

### Going for a walk

- Observe how the Older Person moves in their own home
- Be aware if they require a stick or walker
- Make sure that both you and the Older Person are confident in your ability to assist them
- Plan and agree your walk before you go and don't walk too far
- Be mindful of the route you plan (e.g. will it be crowded, walking surface, etc)
- Offer your arm for support instead of holding onto them
- Communicate with them about where you are going (especially for the visually impaired)
- Ensure that you have plenty of time and never rush the Older Person
- If relevant and possible, stand on the opposite side of their walking stick
- Keep an eye on the surface you are walking on (uneven surfaces can be a challenge causing anxiety or even a fall)

### Visiting in Groups/ Pairs

Although Making Connections Befriending typically involves individual volunteers sometimes visiting in pairs or groups are arrange.

- Pairs can be arranged for volunteers to provide mutual support whilst carrying out a visit
- Making Connections Family Volunteering involves parent and child groups offering visits and supports as a family unit
- Similarly, corporate groups may be organized to carry out support projects

Even where a group is visiting an older person to complete a practical support project (e.g. garden clear out) the companionship, even on shorter projects always remains an important priority.

# BEFRIENDING & SUPPORTS VISITS GUIDELINES

## Important Practicalities to Remember

### Arranging Your Visits:

- The day and time of visit is agreed in advance between you and the older person
- Phone on the agreed day as a reminder of your visit
- Encourage them to make a note in diary or calendar of your next visit on a weekly basis
- Reliability and punctuality is very important. Arrive on time. The person you visit is likely to be anticipating your visit and can get worried if you are not on time.
- The older person will phone Making Connections if they need to cancel and we will contact you with any relevant updates

### What if you can't make your visit?

- If unforeseen circumstances arise and you can't make it – contact the person you visit to offer a phone chat instead, and to confirm your next visit
- If you will be away for more than a week, please contact Making Connections

### Contacting the person you visit:

**NB: In principle, we advise volunteers to not share their phone number with the older person they visit.**

It can also happen that due to memory loss, volunteers get calls at inappropriate times and we want to protect you. The older person is asked by us not to request your number but sometimes they forget. In the unlikely event that they insist, it is valid to explain that you are bound by the rules of Making Connections

**TIP: Dial #31#  
followed by the older person's number**  
Your number will appear as 'private'

## Your Visit

- Try not let the visit exceed an hour (or the agreed time) initially as it can create an expectation. However, once you feel this is clear, feel free to be creative and do things that take longer as we aim to encourage people to stay active interested and involved
- Always carry the Next of Kin (NOK) phone details with you at each visit in case needed
- In principle it is not within your role to do grocery shopping or deliveries but if this arises and it is feasible for you, let us know before you agree.
- Complete any scheduled feedback emails/ forms as required.

## Contact Making Connections if;

- you have any concerns about the health, safety or wellbeing of the older person
- you have additional updates you need to share
- you have any questions, concerns or doubts or require any additional assistance
- you will be away for a number of weeks
- you need to stop visiting for any reason

**For the quickest response we encourage you to email the team at:**

**[info@makingconnections.ie](mailto:info@makingconnections.ie)**

Include your questions/ updates and we will get back to you.

Please indicate in the Subject line if it is an urgent matter.

## Quick Reference Tips

Below you will find helpful tips along with reference to where you will find more detailed information in this manual on relevant topics.

### Respecting the Person and Their Home

- Dress appropriately and respectfully
- Remember the importance of reliability and punctuality
- Avoid making judgement about the older person or their home
- Never wander around the house alone
- If you need to use your phone, please excuse yourself (using it in their company can cause offence, or appear like you're not interested in the visit)
- Your visits are confidential – don't share details about the person with others

### Communication

- Remember that the visit is for the older person's benefit
  - Allow them to set the pace
  - Ask them about themselves, listen and show interest (it could be a long time since someone wanted to get to know them)
  - Keep things positive and avoid sharing your own troubles
- Silence can be ok – your company is more than enough at times
- (see **p14 for more communication tips**)

### Your Role

- Remember that your role is about company and not counselling or problem solving
  - Don't try to tidy or change things unless you are asked
  - Don't offer professional advice (e.g. financial, legal, other)
  - Don't get involved in family matters
  - Don't administer medication, or provide personal care assistance
- Avoid engaging in tasks outside your role (ask Making Connections staff if in doubt)
- Look after yourself, be aware of your limits and remember you can say 'no'
- Don't stay in the person's home overnight. Contact us if you are asked
- (See **p15 for tips about healthy boundaries**)

### Protecting You and the Person you Visit

- Carry your ID badge with you, your phone, and relevant contact details
- Follow good health and safety procedures (see **p17-18 for more on Health & Safety**)
- Be aware of the Incident Reporting Procedure (contact Making Connections)
- Never get involved in any financial matters (see **p24 for more on Financial Matters**)
- Never give or accept gifts (expect small tokens e.g., flowers from your garden)
- Never buy or provide alcohol
- Never allow inappropriate behaviour
- Never visit if you are under the influence of alcohol or drugs
- Always contact us if you have any concerns or need any advice



## Communicating Effectively

It's normal for it to take time to get to know each other. Be respectful and patient - there's no rush. Let the person you visit guide you – they may be comfortable to answer questions or prefer to find out about you first. Listen carefully, be curious and ask follow-up questions. You're likely to discover shared interests but it's not essential - your company and interest in them is more than enough.

Here's some helpful tips;

- When you visit identify yourself clearly and remind them of the length and purpose of your visit (they may have forgotten)
- When you are speaking face the person directly and make eye contact
- Speak clearly and at a moderate pace
- Use open questions that requires more than “yes” or “no”
- Respond positively and encourage the person to continue
- If you are not being understood, slow down and use short sentences
- Be prepared to reword, or rephrase what you are saying
- Avoid expressing strong religious or political views which may cause offense
- Don't use slang, colloquialism or sarcasm (it may not be understood)
- Take time to breathe and slow down (it's normal speed up if you're nervous or excited)
- Allow time and space in your conversation – don't rush their responses

**Moods:** Don't take moods changes or bad moods personally: The Older Person simply may not be feeling well or just had a bad day.

**Repetition:** You may hear the same stories over the weeks, or even during the same day! Sometimes this is due to challenges with memory, or sometimes because they love the story. Be patient if they are talking about something that is important to them at that time. Engage with them positively by clarifying, reflecting and validating can help to develop the story with.

**Excessive Negativity:** Although it is important to listen to what's on the older person's mind, it is also helpful to divert the conversation or put a positive spin on excessive complaining to avoid a negative experience for both or you.

**Despair:** Hearing about an Older Person's experience loneliness, isolation, etc. can be challenging. Be aware that you are not there to 'fix' their problems. The best thing you can do is offer a supportive and empathetic ear.

**Advice:** Although it can be very tempting it is important not to give advice to an Older Person you are visiting. This can reinforce dependency and some may also find it disrespectful or offensive. The best course of action is simply to encourage the Older Person to talk through their own ideas and options and encourage them to come to their own conclusions.

**Your Personal Problems:** Don't burden the Older Person with your personal problems. Befriending Volunteering is primarily a 'supportive' role to provide companionship and social interaction.

**Their Personal Problems:** Don't take the Older Person's problems home with you. This is not your responsibility and it will not benefit your role. If you have any concerns, contact Making Connections staff.

**The Role of Making Connections:** If you are unsure how to deal with a situation or have any concerns or difficulties, please contact Making Connections for advice and support.

## Healthy Boundaries



### Why Boundaries are Helpful

Clear boundaries are vital for a successful volunteer experience. Boundaries protect both the Volunteer and the Older Person providing clarity about what is and is not acceptable behaviour.

Maintaining clear boundaries from the start will ensure that you are both respected, protected and that you do not create expectations beyond your role.

### Starting as You Plan to Proceed

As a caring volunteer, we understand that you might be eager to say 'yes' to be helpful and to go above and beyond. Over-committing however can lead to frustration and burnout. It's important to pause and consider 'is this within my role' and even if it is, 'can I commit to this in the long term.' If in doubt, err on the side of caution and contact us if you need advice or support.

**Helpful Tips:**

- Before you begin have a think about the following;
  - What do you need/ want in order to feel comfortable in your role?
  - Are there things you'd like to avoid?
  - Having a picture of your boundaries in advance can help
  
- When you're starting off;
  - Restate your role and relationship with the Older Person and Making Connections
  - Be clear from the start about anything you are not willing, able or permitted to do  
E.g. it's ok to explain that you are required to follow certain rules as avolunteer
  
- As you continue your visits;
  - Avoid setting expectations which won't work for you in the long term  
E.g. how much time can I commit to visit *each week in the long term*
  - Use your initiative to make decisions about the boundaries you are setting
  - If you don't know how to respond, you can divert the situation and buy time for example, "I'm not sure about that" or "I need to think about that"
  
- If anything makes you feel uncomfortable
  - Trust in your gut feelings and don't do anything you are not comfortable with
  - If inappropriate requests are made – acknowledge the request but firmly decline
  - Don't feel you need to apologise or explain
  
- If an Older Person is revealing too much sensitive personal information to you
  - Contact Making Connections (they may benefit from additional support)

**Always contact Making Connections if you have any concerns about the older person, if any incidents occur, or if you need additional support or advice. If in doubt, contact us.**

# PROTECTING YOU AND THE PERSON YOU VISIT

Making Connections takes all practical steps to safeguard the health, safety and welfare of volunteers, staff and the older people of Making Connections. A copy of Making Connections Health and Safety Policy is available on request.

Although we don't expect you to run into difficulties, it is important to be aware of and adhere to all health and safety guidelines.

## Protecting You

### Personal Safety Tips

As a 'lone worker' Volunteer you should take certain precautions to ensure your safety. Some of the most important tips are listed below.

- Bring your mobile phone
- Inform a significant person (e.g. family, partner) of where you are going, and how long you will be there and contact them afterwards.
- If driving, park in an open, well lit, populated street where possible
- Keep to the main routes if walking to the Older Person's home
- Take minimum personal belongings with you
- Do not give your home address or phone number to the Older Person or anyone else associated with the role (except authorised Making Connections staff)

### Disputes/ Accusations

In the unlikely situation that you encounter a dispute or if an accusation is made against you (e.g. taking money or belongings) don't try to resolve it alone - please contact Making Connections. An incident report will be completed and we will work with both you and the older person accordingly to resolve the situation.

## Health & Safety Guidelines for Your Visits

- Phone numbers to bring: the person you visit, their next of kin and/or emergency contact and Making Connections
- When the door is answered check who you are talking to. Under no circumstances should you enter the house if the appropriate person is not available
- If the person appears to be under the influence of drugs/alcohol or acting aggressively it would be prudent to immediately leave

- Familiarise yourself with the home you are visiting (surroundings, exits, and how the doors lock/ unlock)
- Ask yourself – “do you feel comfortable to be here alone?” if you are not comfortable, trust your instincts and leave and contact Making Connections
- Don’t carry out tasks or activities if you feel there may be a health or safety risk to you or the person you visit
- If you find yourself feeling stressed, concerned or upset about a visit or circumstance, contact us for support
- If you ever experience any inappropriate, embarrassing or disrespectful behaviour, remarks, gestures, or suggestions it is important that you report this to us
- If you are worried about the health, safety or wellbeing of the older person you visit, please contact us (see **p16 for information on Vulnerable Adult Safeguarding**)
- If you become aware of additional/ new needs or challenges arising for the person you visit please contact us with relevant details
- **If an emergency occurs during your visit, please contact 999, or 112 immediately**
- If you encounter any incident during your visit, contact Making Connections as soon as practically possible.

#### **What if the Older Person expresses suicidal thoughts?**

If an Older Person ever expresses suicidal thoughts and has clearly stated that they are intending to take their own life, call 999 or 112 and ask for an ambulance. Do not leave the person alone until help arrives. Call Emergency contact/Next of Kin if outside Making Connections office hours and inform Making Connections at the first opportunity

#### **What if the Older Person has a fall or is sick during my visit?**

In the case of a fall where an Older Person cannot get back to their feet alone, Volunteers must seek the assistance of at least a second person – if the volunteer cannot assist the Older Person without risk of injury to themselves they are required to call the Next of Kin or emergency contact person or call 999 or 112 and ask for an ambulance.

#### **If the fall or illness occurs outside Making Connections office hours**

- call the Next of Kin and
- report the incident to Making Connections as soon as possible.
- If the incident is serious, call 999 or 112 and ask for an ambulance.
- Stay calm and try to keep the Older Person at ease.
- Try to make them as comfortable as possible and keep them warm by covering them with a blanket, coat or whatever you can find.
- Stay with them until the ambulance or emergency contact or Next of Kin have arrived.



# TELEPHONE BEFRIENDING



## About the Role

### The Commitment:

- Minimum commitment: 12 months, at least one call per week
- To complete training and vetting, including Garda Vetting
- To sign a role description, volunteer code of conduct, and confidentiality agreement
- To comply with all relevant Policies & Procedures
- To adhere to the volunteer role, Volunteer Handbook and any Training Materials provided
- To provide regular feedback reports to Making Connections
- To always be punctual and reliable with your visits
- Volunteers will receive the following supports

### Activities Involved

Due to concerns about Covid-19 or other needs or preferences of the older people we support, Telephone Befriending can be taken on as a unique role. It can also become part of the role of a Befriending Visits volunteer as needs arise. Your role involves;

- Calling an older person/ people regularly to provide companionship
- To act as an advocate for the older person where relevant (e.g. helping them to access information)
- To contact Making Connections if you have any concerns about the older person's health, safety or wellbeing
- Providing feedback about your calls and any additional supports provided
- Participation in Making Connections surveys (either yourself, or assisting the older person you visit to participate)
- Volunteers are encouraged to share stories/ quotes to share the positive impact experienced by you, and the person you visit
- Your role is a social support and it is not to provide professional advice, substitute the role of family, act as counsellor, carer or home help.

## Telephone Befriending Guidelines

- The average time on each phone call is between 15-30 minutes and we recommend that no one call exceeds 45 minutes
- The day and time of call is agreed in advance between you and the older person
- In principle, we advise volunteers to not share their phone number with the older person they visit. It can also happen that due to memory loss, volunteers get calls at inappropriate times and we want to protect you. The older person is asked by us not to request your number but sometimes they forget. In the unlikely event that they insist, it is valid to explain that you are bound by the rules of Making Connections

**TIP: Dial #31# followed by the older person's number**  
Your number will appear as 'private'

- In principle it is not within your role to do grocery shopping or deliveries but if this arises and it is feasible for you, let us know before you agree.
- At times, you will be asked to complete the feedback

### Contact Making Connections if;

- you have any concerns about the health, safety or wellbeing of the older person
- you have additional updates you need to share
- you have any questions, concerns or doubts or require any additional assistance
- you will be away for a number of weeks
- you need to stop your calls for any reason

**For the quickest response we encourage you to email the team at [info@makingconnections.ie](mailto:info@makingconnections.ie)** with you questions/ updates or to request a call back. Please indicate in the Subject line if it is an urgent matter.

## Safeguarding – practicalities

**NB: If a volunteer has a concern about abuse or neglect (including self-neglect) of an older person or a child that you encounter. It is essential to report it immediately to the Making Connections Designated Person:**

Mary O Donohue, Executive Director,  
Landline: 01-2951053; Mobile Number: 087 2058074;  
[maryodonohue@makingconnections.ie](mailto:maryodonohue@makingconnections.ie).

You will have been introduced to the importance of Safeguarding in your Volunteer Handbook. Below we have included some additional practical tips in case any Safeguarding issues arise during your volunteer role. The Making Connections Safeguarding Policy is also available on request.

### Safeguarding Principles

1. Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility.
2. Everyone must have a 'zero tolerance' approach to any form of abuse.
3. The duty to report safeguarding concerns rests with the person who has the concern.
4. There should be no delay in reporting a safeguarding concern.

### What is Elder Abuse?

Elder abuse is defined as "a single or repeated act, or the lack of appropriate action (where there is an expectation of trust), which causes harm or distress to an older person or violates their human and civil rights". Types of abuse can include physical, sexual, psychological, financial or material, institutional, neglect and acts of omission, and discrimination.

## Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults

If you witness abuse, or if abuse has just taken place, the priorities will be to:

- Call an ambulance, if required;
- Call the Gardaí, if a crime has been committed;
- Preserve evidence;
- Keep yourself and the older safe;
- Inform the Designated Safeguarding Officer in Making Connections;
- Record what happened.

How to respond if an older person tells you they have experienced abuse

- Reassure the person concerned;
- Listen to what they are saying;
- Record what you have been told/witnessed and inform the Designated Safeguarding Person in Making Connections (a special report form for this purpose is available for this purpose);
- Remain calm and do not show shock or disbelief;
- Assure them that the information will be treated seriously;
- Do not start to investigate or ask detailed or probing questions;
- Do not promise to keep it a secret

For further details please check the HSE guide on Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults here:

<https://bit.ly/HSE-Safeguarding-Adults>

## Safeguarding Children

- **Volunteers should not allow themselves to be in a situation where they are alone with any children without the presence of their parent/guardian**
- Under no circumstances should a child be left in a situation that exposes him or her to harm or to risk of harm pending a response from the designated Making Connections Designated Child Protection Person (DCPP), or Túsła if the DCPP cannot be contacted
- In the event of an emergency where a child may be in immediate danger and the DCPP or Túsła cannot be contacted, the Gardaí should be contacted at any Garda Station, or by simply dialing 999.
- If a person is unsure whether or not to make a formal report they should discuss their concerns with the DCPP who may contact the Túsła Duty Social Worker for advice. Concerns in relation to children out of hours should be reported immediately to An Garda Síochána.
- A concern about a potential risk to children posed by a specific person, even if the children are unidentifiable, should also be reported to the DCPP and communicated to the Túsła Child and Family Agency by the DCPP.
- In so far as possible Túsła and Making Connections will respect the wishes of non-professionals reporting concerns in good faith who wish to remain anonymous, but it is not possible to guarantee that the information would not be sought and given within judicial proceedings.

## Driving and Car Insurance

### Car Insurance

As mentioned in the Handbook - volunteers who use their own motor vehicle during the course of their volunteering activities do so at their own risk and under their own vehicle insurance. Typically it is required to notify insurers if the vehicle is used for volunteering purposes. This may vary depending on the insurer.

- It is the volunteer's responsibility to check the requirements with their insurance company.
- Where a letter is required, it is the volunteers' responsibility to request a letter from Making Connections to provide to your insurance company.

### Safe Driving

- Ensure you understand the Older Person's mobility needs and that you are confident about your ability to support them as required
- Be aware that it is your own responsibility- not that of Making Connections - to ensure that your car is roadworthy and that it is properly insured to carry people when volunteering with Making Connections
- Drive carefully and ensure that you adhere to all the road traffic rules and regulations as laid down in legislation, such as securing all passengers by a seat belt
- Think of the things that affect the Older Person's comfort and safety, e.g. air temperature, music, driving speed, breaking, smoking, seatbelts, going to the toilet before starting out





## FINANCIAL MATTERS & GIFTS

### What if the Older Person Needs Financial Assistance?

For the safety of you and the person you visit - volunteers are never permitted to get involved with the financial matters of the Older Person they visit or anyone else connected to the role. Here are some important guidelines to follow;

- Never give or lend money to the person you visit.
- If they are experiencing any financial difficulty please contact Making Connections.
- Never collect pensions on their behalf (you may however drive them to the collection point)
- Never agree or arrange to be named on a bank account, savings account, or any other holding account
- Never provide any practical assistance which gives you access to personal details (e.g. online banking, payments, etc)
- If a Volunteer receives any request to become involved in these or any other financial matters they are required to inform Making Connections.

### What if we want to give/ receive gifts?

Over the course of your visits you or the older person might want to give a gift or token of thanks. This is very natural however it should be done with care as it can change the nature of the relationship. Here are some important guidelines to follow;

- Appropriate gifts
  - Gifts should be infrequent e.g. for special occasions (birthday, Christmas, etc)
  - Small tokens e.g. chocolates, flowers, hand-made card, home baking
  - Low value gifts under the value of €10 (otherwise it may cause unease, or there may be pressure to reciprocate which the older person may not be able to afford)
- Inappropriate gifts
  - Cash, cheques, jewellery
  - Personal belongings
  - Items of significant sentimental value
- Tips on declining inappropriate or overly frequent gifts
  - Acknowledge the gesture, but politely decline (don't accept the gift)
  - Explain that it is against Making Connections policy
  - If the person expresses a desire to 'give back' suggest that they contact Making Connections to make a small donation (don't accept donations yourself)

### What if the Older person wants to leave me something in a Will?

Volunteers are prohibited from being named as beneficiaries or executors of the Will or Legacy of the Older Person that they visit or anyone connected to the role. If this arises Volunteers are required to politely decline and inform Making Connections.

**What if the Older Person wants to name me as Next of Kin?**

Volunteers are not permitted to be next-of-kin by an Older Person. If this arises Volunteers are required to politely decline and inform Making Connections.

## SUPPORTING AGE-RELATED CHALLENGES

This section offers tips and guidance on how to deal with common age-related challenges that you may experience through your role.

**As always, If you need any advice or assistance, or if you notice any changes or have any concerns about an older person's health or wellbeing please contact Making Connections.**

### Hearing Loss

Follow the Communicating Effectively Guidelines (see p13)

- Face the hearing impaired person directly, on the same level and in good light whenever possible
- Position yourself so that the light is shining on the speaker's face, not in the eyes of the listener
- Do not talk from another room
- Speak clearly, slowly, distinctly, but naturally, without shouting or exaggerating mouth movements (shouting distorts the sound of speech and may make speech reading more difficult)
- Say the person's name before beginning a conversation (this gives the listener a chance to focus attention)
- Keep your hands away from your face while talking
- Don't eat or chew during a conversation
- Find out if the Older Person's hearing is better in one ear and sit to that side of them
- Be aware that an Older Person may hear your voice but distortion of the sound may make it difficult for them to understand your words
- Avoid situations where there will be loud sounds when possible (people with hearing loss are often very sensitive to loud noises)
- Avoid changing the topic of conversation suddenly - introduce new topics slowly
- Where possible, put important information in writing (e.g. date of your next visit)
- Be aware that their hearing may be worse if they are ill or tired
- Have pen and paper ready in case the Older Person would like to write something down

## Cognitive Challenges

- Follow the Communicating Effectively Guidelines (see p13)
- Set a positive mood for interaction with your mood and body language
- Use short sentences and use 'yes' 'no' questions
- Use visual prompts to assist
- It's ok to politely suggest words if they can't recall a word
- Ask one question at a time and don't rush the older adult to answer your questions
- Talk about real, tangible subjects and objects; if you are discussing a picture in a frame on a desk, pick the picture up and show it to the individual
- Watch for nonverbal cues and body language, and respond appropriately
- If the Older Person becomes distressed try to connect with them, distract and redirect  
E.g. *"I see you're not feeling happy—I'm sorry you're upset. Would you like a cup of tea?"*
- Try to see the challenge from the perspective of the individual

## Dementia

- Many people with dementia may not remember what happened 45 minutes ago, but they can clearly recall their lives 45 years earlier
- Avoid short-term memory questions (e.g. what they have done that day)
- Ask about their distant past – remember the past is often a very enjoyable and soothing activity for people with dementia

## Physical Discomfort

- Shake hands very gently – even a small amount of pressure can be extremely painful to some individuals (e.g. those suffering from arthritis)
- Don't be afraid to ask the individual how they are feeling (a small recognition that the person experiences pain, can help relieve the emotional burden of suffering)
- If you accidentally hurt someone (e.g. whilst shaking hands) apologise and indicate that you will be gentler so that the individual will not be fearful of being hurt in the future
- Allow for more time to move and complete activities
- Allow for rest time following even small activities
- Offer to retrieve small items the individual may need – a glass of water, the paper, etc. upon arrival and before leaving

## Vision Impairment

- **Greetings**
  - Say your name when you greet them
  - Use their name whenever you start talking to them
  - If you are in a group scenario, introduce the other people present
- **Avoid Making Assumptions**
  - Don't assume that those who are visually impaired are completely blind
  - Always ask before you assist, don't assume that they need help
- **Communication about your surroundings**
  - Don't rearrange or move items in their home
  - Be aware of potential hazards and obstacles
  - Inform the person of any changes in the environment around you (e.g. if you need to leave the room/ if someone else joins you, etc)
  - Don't fill glasses/ cups to the brim or re-fill without asking/ telling them
  - Sometimes it is helpful to give commentary about your surroundings (e.g. the chair is to your right/ the cup of tea is on the table in front of you)
  - If you are eating out for example – you can offer to read the menu/ offer to describe the location of items on the table or their plate (e.g. the chips are at 12 o'clock on the plate)
- **Guiding People**
  - If a person would like you to guide them – offer your elbow for them to hold on to
  - If you are climbing stairs, entering a car or sitting down – place their hand on the reference point (hand rail/ door handle/ back of chair) tell them what it is and let them continue themselves be ready to offer further assistance if required
  - If you are finished guiding someone, bring them to a reference point that they can feel so that they don't feel disorientated (e.g. wall/ table/ chair, etc.)
- **Guide Dogs**
  - Never distract a working guide dogs

## Personal Care Needs

Volunteers should not get involved with or assist with the older person's care needs. This is the role of HSE professionals and/ or designated family or carers.

Incontinence: This can be a sensitive matter. If incontinence is an issue for the person you visit it is important to respond sensitively and discretely to ensure the privacy and dignity of the person you visit. It is not your role to assist them, but if you are concerned do contact Making Connections

**If you have any concerns, or if you believe the person needs additional personal care assistance contact Making Connections. We can link them in with their Public Health Nurse or other supports as required.**

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Please be sure that you have studied the Making Connections Handbook, this Training Manual and any other materials provided. These are aimed at equipping you with the information and tips you need to carry out your role confidently and safely. Below you'll also find some frequently asked questions. This is not an exhaustive list and no doubt you will have other questions which we will be happy to answer.



### How long will it take to be matched with someone?

It depends. There are a lot of factors involved in the matching process and things can change. Getting the match right is important and we ask all new volunteers to be patient and to understand that we can't give a timeframe. We will keep you posted.

### What if I can't reach the person on the phone, or if they don't answer the door?

Leave a voicemail and state the day and time that you called. If you can't make contact on the day and this is unusual for the older person you visit; please contact Making Connections. If you are outside their home and feel something is wrong, call the Gardaí on 999.



## Can I share my contact details?

In the initial period of your visits, you are strongly advised against sharing their phone numbers or addresses (for at least the first 6 months). This is; to help to establish Making Connections as the older person's main point of contact; to avoid you getting frequent calls or messages at all hours (it has happened!); to ensure you don't take on more than you signed up to; and to ensure the older person does not become overly dependent on you.

When you contact the older person;

- Call them and dial #31# before their number to keep your own number private
- Don't use text messages/ Whatsapp, etc
- You can also leave a message with Making Connections at 01 2951053 and we will pass it on

With time, the nature of your relationship may develop. After 6 months a volunteer may choose to share their phone number. This will be done at the volunteer's discretion. If in doubt, please contact Making Connections for advice.

## What if I don't seem to be compatible with the person?

Although we make matches based on the personal criteria of you and the older person – like any relationship, sometimes it simply doesn't work out and that's ok. If you feel a match isn't suitable, or if you're stressed about it, or if it's not enjoyable contact Making Connections for advice and support. We can support you and the older person with a new match where suitable.

## Can I take on more than one visit?

Some of our volunteers do support two or three older people. There is no expectation from Making Connections to take on more than one person. If you are interested in supporting others, contact a staff member to discuss your options.

## Will the older person's family know I am visiting?

Family involvement differs from case to case depending on how they were referred to us. Generally, it will be at the discretion of the older person if they want their family informed or not. The most important thing is that older person themselves have given permission of Making Connections to send a volunteer for visits.

## Can I introduce the person to my friends and family?

For safety reasons only trained and vetted volunteers are allowed visit the older person in their home.

## What if I've been asked to assist with banking/ pension, etc?

Volunteers should never get involved in any financial matters. Please refer to p24 for guidelines.

## What if they need help with shopping?

Let us know and we will advise.

## Can I bring, or have an alcoholic drink with the person I visit?

In general consumption of alcohol is not encouraged as part of your visits. We do understand however that there may be circumstances where you may wish to share a drink and that you are both adults.

Be mindful that alcohol can have adverse effects on people. Any consumption of alcohol should be done responsibly and in moderation. Alcohol should never become a key part of your regular visits.

If you are aware that the person has an alcohol problem, please contact Making Connections for advice. In this case it is strongly advised to not bring alcohol or drink alcohol with them.

## What if the person has become confused or forgetful?

It is possible that the physical and/or mental health of the older person you visit may change over time. Avoid the temptation to try to diagnose or 'figure things out' yourself. If you notice any changes or have any concerns, please contact Making Connections.

## What if they've become overly dependent on me?

If this arises, please contact Making Connections for advice and support. We will work with you on an appropriate solution. This could involve advice and support. It could also involve being assisted to step back from your role if required.

## Do I keep visiting if the person moves to a Nursing Home?

It's up to you. If the location is suitable and you're willing and able you can continue your visits. Please contact Making Connections if you become aware that the person is moving to a nursing home and we will advise.

## What if the person I visit passes away?

Sadly, due to the age and health of the people we support this can be something you experience in your role. Making Connections will contact you if we are informed of the death of someone you visit. In turn, if you are aware of the death of the person you visit please contact Making Connections immediately. You will be provided with support and guidance from Making Connections.

## I can't continue visiting anymore, what do I do?

We understand that circumstances can change unexpectedly. When this happens volunteers can be worried about hurting the person's feelings. Here's some useful things to be aware of;

- The older person will have been informed from the start that this can happen
- Making Connections will work with you to plan how you finish your role in a positive way
- Usually, honesty works best and the older person understands
- Making Connections will arrange a new match where appropriate
- It can be helpful for you to attend a handover visit so you can introduce the new volunteer

## I can't continue as a Making Connections volunteer anymore, but I'd like to keep in touch with the person – is that allowed?

If you can't continue as a volunteer with Making Connections but you are interested in keeping in touch with the person you visit, please contact a staff member to discuss.

# CONTACTING MAKING CONNECTIONS

## When to Contact Us

The short answer is - any time you or the person you visit need support, we are here to help and we' will be delighted to hear from you. If you'd like a bit more guidance here are some tips;

### **If you have updates/ concerns about the older person:**

- If you have any trouble contacting the person you are visiting
- If you are aware of any changes in their situation (e.g. physical health/ mental health/ mood/ mobility/ cessation of other activities/ change of family circumstances, etc.)
- If their living situation changes (e.g. moves home or into care/ in hospital)
- If you feel that they requires additional services or resources
- If you feel that the Older Person's living conditions are unhealthy or unsafe in any way
- If you have any reason to believe that the Older Person is being abused in any way

### **Any updates or concerns you have yourself**

- If your own circumstances change in any way that may affect your role
- If you're going away on holiday or can't visit for a number of weeks
- If you are not getting along with the person you are matched with
- If you experience any inappropriate behavior towards you
- If you need any advice or support

## How to Contact Us

**In general, the fastest way to contact us is by email.**

Email: [info@makingconnections.ie](mailto:info@makingconnections.ie)

The relevant person will respond to you by email or callback.  
If you require an urgent response assist us by indicating this in your message.

*Your updates questions or concerns are important to us*