

Guide for a Successful Friendly Phone Connection

For older adults, social isolation and loneliness were hazardous long before the Coronavirus and shelter-in-place order; the negative health impacts of which are well documented. Physical distancing threatens to make matters worse. Our goal is to facilitate meaningful connections during this crisis that will become the basis of long-lasting relationships long after the crisis is over.

1. **Before your first call, learn about the person you are speaking to.** Open the Mon Ami app and select “Manage Calls” → “Upcoming”. There you can find information about the person you are speaking with.
2. **Speak slowly and clearly, especially for seniors that may be hard of hearing.** It’s good to check in once you first start speaking to make sure that the senior can hear you well, and that your cadence works well for them.
3. **Call at the scheduled time and be in an area with minimal background noise.** If you are going to be late, or if you need to reschedule, give the person a call in advance to let them know.
4. Give the senior space to share their thoughts, try not to interrupt, and don’t be afraid to share your own stories.
Try to steer the conversation towards positivity if you can! Find moments to laugh – this is just a conversation and should feel natural even if it initially feels awkward :)
5. **Start by introducing yourself, and then get to know the person you’re speaking with.** If you’re unsure about what to discuss during your first call, below is a short script you can follow. It helps to use open-ended questions, and to come in with an open mind, open heart, and willingness to engage in storytelling.
 - Hi this is _____, your volunteer calling from San Francisco Village. How are you today?
 - How do you pronounce your name, and how would you like to be addressed?
 - How have you spent your day so far?
 - I learned from San Francisco Village that _____. Tell me more about _____.

See additional questions and conversation prompts below.

6. It goes without saying, but **no profanity or inappropriate topics.** If you are ever made to feel uncomfortable during a call, please let us know ASAP!

7. **Remember that we are all different.** The person you are speaking to may be of a different gender, race, ethnicity, or sexual orientation, and may hold different religious or political beliefs. Try not to assign values to those differences (better or worse, right or wrong), and be open and flexible with others' values, beliefs, and perceptions.
8. After the phone call, **submit your call recap!** Each call recap gets shared with the person you spoke to as well as San Francisco Village.

Things to consider

When you initially connect with your phone buddy, make a plan for how often you will check in and how you would like to engage. Here are some things to consider in advance:

- Are you able to check in with your member once a week? Twice a week?
- Would you like to give the member the option to call you at their convenience?
- Would you prefer to keep your contact information private?
- Ask the member if they are able to communicate by text or email? Facetime? Zoom?
- If member can Facetime or Zoom, consider creative ways to engage like show and tell, sharing photos or playing online games.
- If member tells you that they need additional help or they have a question or situation that you don't know how to handle, please report this to Jill Ellefsen, jill@sfvillage.org 415-387-1375 x2.
 - As a phone buddy, you are not expected to help with other needs like grocery shopping or technology. but we do ask you to let us know if the member has additional needs so that we can connect them with another volunteer.
- If you are no longer able to continue calling your phone buddy, please let Jill jill@sfvillage.org know so that she can connect them with another volunteer.

Additional prompts and questions

To start off the conversation, it will be helpful to find out some basics such as:

- How are you faring during the shelter-in-place?
- Do you have any specific worries or concerns?
- How are you spending your time?

As you get warmed up, consider asking:

- Tell me about yourself. What kind of work do/did you do? Do you have family nearby?
- How long have you lived in SF? What brought you here?
- What changes have you seen in the city during those years?
- What is your favorite thing to do in San Francisco?
- Do you travel? Where? Favorite places?

As you get to know each other better:

- What are you grateful for today?
- What expectations of “normal” are you letting go of today?
- How are you exercising or moving your body today?
- What beauty are you creating, cultivating or inviting in today?
- What is this experience like compared to other challenging events that you have experienced in your life? Immigration, war, losses, etc.

Here is an excellent resource for asking good questions from [Story Corps](#)