

Decision Making Toolkit

THE IMPACT OF EASING RESTRICTIONS ON BEFRIENDING

5 June 2020

Overview

As the governments across the UK begin to loosen lockdown restrictions, we need to consider the implications for befriending. It is not possible for an organisation, such as Befriending Networks, to provide exact guidance for each individual organisation because the next steps must involve working within devolved and local government guidance and rules and will depend upon good risk management. **Ultimately decisions remain an individual organisations responsibility and should be agreed through line management and good governance processes before they are implemented.**

In this toolkit we will provide some overarching principles that we are suggesting you use, as to how you make decisions and some thoughts on the risk assessment process. **This is aimed at decisions around 1:1 befriending and protecting volunteers and service users at this time, face to face group befriending remains against government guidelines.** Organisations also have a responsibility to their staff as employees, but this is not the focus of this guidance.

Principles

Our collective responsibility is to others and the rights, wellbeing, dignity and safety of those most vulnerable in our communities must be at the heart of our next steps.

Be cautious. It is better to move slowly and get it right, taking your volunteers and service users with you. Involve your staff, volunteers and service users in open discussions, about their situations, feelings and hopes.

The management of risk for the organisation depends on being able to be flexible and person-centred, as every volunteer and service user, and their particular circumstances, will be different.

At present, there remains the possibility that restrictions may tighten again. Any planning should, therefore, allow for how you would revert back to distance befriending.

Suggested Process

<p>1. Reflect</p>	<p>Consider what your organisation has learned during this time and what aspects should be learned from and carried forward.</p> <p>Have this conversation with your staff, volunteers and service users - this is a chance to make your organisation stronger & more resilient.</p>
<p>2. Stay Informed</p>	<p>The UK Parliament and the devolved governments have different timescales and rules around easing lockdown, information is likely to change quickly, so ensure you are getting updates from credible sources.</p> <p>Click to visit government guidance from England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales.</p> <p>Make sure you check this carefully and consider all the different elements involved in matches before making decisions. (see next steps)</p>
<p>3. Communicate</p>	<p>The easing of lockdown is not straight forward and messages can be nuanced and confusing.</p> <p>It is important to make sure your volunteers and service users are clear about your continuing support, expectations and that they shouldn't ease restrictions or resume face to face befriending, until agreed with the organisation.</p> <p>Explain that over the coming weeks you will be contacting them to discuss easing and next steps.</p>

4. Risk Assess	<p>Take time to consider how your organisation's service users, volunteers and staff will be impacted by easing lockdown, involve them in identifying what support they made need during this time.</p>
	<p><i>For volunteers you need to have an open honest conversation that covers the following:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do they have any health issues/conditions that place them in either a higher risk or shielding category? • Do they live with or are they a visiting carer someone in the above categories, that would mean they are putting someone else at increased risk if they were to have face to face contact? • How do they feel about the easing of restrictions, what are their preferences/thoughts? • How would they get to a face to face meeting? If it involves public transport this is increasing risks (this should still be avoided according to most government guidance) • Explain that you will contact the befriender(s) to also carryout this risk assessment process and, after this, you will be back in touch to agree next steps. • Make sure to remind all volunteers, especially interim ones, how important their role is and that they are still needed at this time.
	<p><i>For service users you need to have an open honest conversation that covers the following:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do they have any health issues/conditions that place them in either a higher risk or shielding category? • Do they live with someone in the above categories, that would mean they putting

Risk Assess (continued)	<p>someone else at increased risk if they were to have face to face contact?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do they feel about the easing of restrictions, what are their preferences/thoughts? (For CYP services, what are both parents and CYP thoughts? For those who are living with carers, what are their thoughts?) • How would they get to a face to face meeting? If it involves public transport, this is increasing risks (this should still be avoided according to most government guidance). • Is the service user able to understand and follow social distancing rules? Age, disability or a condition such as living with dementia may impact upon this. • Explain that you will contact the befriender to also carryout this risk assessment process and, after this, you will be back in touch to agree next steps.
	<p>Once you have the information you need to document the risks and any mitigation factors that you are putting in place, including PPE equipment, if appropriate. (If you are issuing this, you will need to provide guidance on how and when to use this properly).</p> <p>Decide what is appropriate for that match, document this and when you will review it again.</p>
5. Communicate	<p>Let both parties know the outcome of the risk assessment, but protect people’s rights to confidentiality. Take responsibility for the decision so that neither party feels they are letting the other down and reassure them.</p> <p>Agree what the next steps for that specific match are and when this will be reviewed again.</p>

	<p>Remind both parties if either as an individual or any one in their household is symptomatic of Covid 19, any planned face to face visits should be cancelled immediately and the coordinator informed.</p>
<p>6. Be Flexible</p>	<p>All the devolved Government's plans are clear that any easing in lockdown measures will be based upon a variety of factors and statistics. There is not a guaranteed timescale and it is unlikely to be a straightforward path from lockdown.</p> <p>It is therefore prudent for organisations to have contingency plans in place:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If lockdown measures are eased at a slower pace than planned or are even reinstated for a certain period of time how will you manage this? Can you transfer quickly back to distance methods? • Volunteers and service users need to know how you will communicate this to them, so you need to make sure you have their most up to date contact details.
<p>7. Keep it Under Review</p>	<p>Uncertainty is one of the biggest challenges for everyone right now, stay informed and keep your decisions under review.</p>

Support:

Remember, Befriending Networks is here to support you:

- Email or call one of the team to discuss your specific thoughts, <https://www.befriending.co.uk/contact/>
- Join one of our Q&A or networking sessions, <https://www.befriending.co.uk/training-events/networking-events/>