



MSFriends® Volunteer: Establishing Boundaries

All MSFriends Volunteers

Creating a Safe Space for Conversation

- Participants utilize the MSFriends program to discuss a wide variety of topics. However, some topics may be easier to bring up than others. For instance, it may be much more comfortable for a participant to discuss their fatigue than it may be to share about bowel and bladder issues.
- As you connect with participants, be mindful of indicators that they may be nervous to talk about something. This might include a quivering voice, a change in the pace of their talking (typically they will begin to talk faster), using words like “um” or “like,” or laughing at inappropriate times. If you can see visual cues, this might include, avoiding eye contact, blushing, or fidgeting.
- Consider ways to create a safe space for a participant to bring up their concerns. You can approach this in a casual manner using humor. For example, you could say, “I’ve had MS for <x> years and I’ve seen it all! Feel free to share anything you’d like with me.” Others may take a more direct approach and say something like, “I am happy to talk about any topic that is important to you. I know some things are harder to discuss than others, but I’m willing to listen to anything you’d like to address.” You might also consider adding a note about this at the top of your connection with an MSFriends participant. After introducing yourself, you could say, “My goal during our time together is to create a safe space for open conversation.”
- When someone tells you something that is clearly difficult for them, provide reassurance. You can say, “Thank you for trusting me with that information.”

Uncomfortable Conversation Topics

- As you begin your volunteer work in the MSFriends program, we strongly encourage you to consider the topics you are comfortable discussing with participants and identify any conversations you may not be comfortable having.
- If a participant brings up a topic you are not comfortable discussing, this is something you may address directly. For instance, you could say, “I am not comfortable discussing that topic. Can we go back to <the previous topic>?”
- If a participant brings up a topic you are not comfortable discussing, you may also choose to just listen. In this instance, draw on your active listening skills and respond with things like, “That sounds really challenging,” or, “I’m sorry you had that experience.” By doing so, you are expressing support and actively engaging in the conversation without having to address the specific topic yourself.

MSFriends Paired Volunteers

Maintaining Your Privacy

Calls

- Call exclusively from a blocked number using the following guidelines:
 - Dial *67.
 - Dial the number you want to call.
 - Tap the call button.
 - This will only block your number for the duration of the call. And this method will not work for toll-free or emergency services numbers.
- A participant might express interest in calling you directly and request your phone number to do so. For your privacy and protection, we ask that you do not do this.
 - You may simply say, “I have really enjoyed speaking with you today! However, it is against program rules for me to share my personal phone number with you. I look forward to connecting with you during our next scheduled time on <next call date>.”

Video Chat

- You can set up a free email account with Outlook or Gmail to utilize their free video chat services, Microsoft Teams or Google Meet, respectively.
- Hold video calls from a space with a neutral background out of sight of any personal identifiers.
 - You may also choose to apply a video background to hide your surroundings.

Email

- Create and utilize an email address solely for your MSFriends Paired connection communication.
 - Use an email address that doesn't share personal information. For example, don't use your last name or city in the address.
 - If available, you can use the convention [firstname].peer@serviceprovider.com (e.g., jana.peer@gmail.com).

Updating Your Communication Method

You and the program participant can decide to update the communication method you use. For example, your Paired relationship could start with a phone call and you two could mutually decide to transfer it to a video chat.

Reach out to the Peer Connections Resource Team (PeerConnections@nmss.org) to let them know and use the above tips for maintaining your privacy in this updated communication method.

Helpline Volunteers

Maintaining Your Privacy

- If you are an MSFriends Helpline volunteer, your phone conversations with participants will be made either via a Society-sponsored cell phone or using a blocked phone number.
- If a call drops and you have received prior permission from the caller, you can dial them back from a blocked number. Do this by dialing *67 before you dial their number.
 - To do so, at the beginning of the call, ask, “If our call gets disconnected unexpectedly, I can call you back from a blocked number. Is this something you would like? If so, what phone number is best to reach you at?”
- Occasionally, a participant may express interest in connecting with you directly and request your phone number to do so. For your privacy and protection, we ask that you do not do this. You may simply say, “I have really enjoyed speaking with you today! However, it is against program rules for me to share my personal phone number with you.”
 - If you are interested in connecting with the participant again, you may encourage them to call again during one of your upcoming shifts.
 - If you are interested in connecting with the participant on a regular basis, please reach out to the Peer Connections Resource Team (PeerConnections@nmss.org) to discuss the possibility of moving your conversations to the MSFriends Paired program.

Managing Frequent Callers

- You may be contacted by the same caller multiple times in one day. These are what we refer to as “frequent callers.”
 - When you are contacted by a frequent caller, you are encouraged to utilize the 10-minute rule. Once you’ve introduced yourself and asked for their name, let them know you have 10 minutes to talk. At the end of those 10 minutes, let them know that time is up and you need to go so you can respond to other callers.
 - Other callers may call multiple times over the course of the week just to chat. This may be because they are lonely, want to talk about a challenge and are building up the confidence to do so, or are experiencing cognitive issues. In these instances, you can ask, “What is it about your MS that you are calling for support today?” or, “How is your MS doing?”
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