



# MSFriends® Volunteer: Establishing Boundaries

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## Maintaining Your Privacy

### Email

- Create and utilize an email address solely for your MSFriends connection communication.
  - Use an email address that doesn't share personal information.
    - Don't use your last name, birthday, city, etc. in the address.
  - If available, you can use the convention [firstname].peer@serviceprovider.com (e.g., jana.peer@gmail.com).
  - Share this email address with the Peer Connections Resource Team ([PeerConnections@nmss.org](mailto:PeerConnections@nmss.org))

### Calls

- Call exclusively from a blocked number using the following guidelines or a call blocker app you're comfortable with.

### How to Block Your Number

1. Dial \*67.
2. Dial the number you want to call.
3. 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.

### 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.
- You can utilize your MSFriends email address to create a free Zoom account.
- 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.

## Maintaining Your Privacy

- 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>.”

## Updating Your Communication Method

You and the program participant can decide to update the communication method you use. For example, your MSFriends connection could begin with phone calls. As your conversations progress, you two could mutually decide to transfer it to a video chat for future conversations.

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

## 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

Determine 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, you may also choose to just listen or change the topic.

### Listening Response

- “This is a topic I don’t share personal information about, but I am here and happy to be a listening ear on this topic.”
- “This is a topic I don’t have personal experience in, but I am here and happy to listen if you want to process your experience with it.”

- 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.

**Change of Topic**

- “I’m not comfortable with that topic. Can you tell me more about <previous topic you were okay with>?”