



VOLUNTEER AS A BEFRIENDER TO THE ELDERLY

How can you Help as a Befriender to Elderly?

Provide support and help co-ordinate regular / one-time / ad-hoc events and activities including (but not limited) to:

- Games such as mahjong, bingo & board games.
- Performances such as musical and drama.
- Art & craft workshops.
- Excursions to places of local interest.
- House visitations to engage seniors face to face or via phone calls.
- Chit chat corner at public places (parks, hawker centres/activity corners in neighbourhoods).
- Holiday themed events (Chinese New Year, Ching Ming Festival, Mooncake Festival, Vesak Day, Hari Raya, Deepavali & Christmas).

Volunteer your skills and resources in:

- Speaking in any one other dialect to communicate more effectively with the elderly.
- Coordinating and knowledge in playing facilitating sessions to play local board games.
- Skills in organising musical and or drama activities.
- Singing / dancing / theatre expertise.
- Skills in art and crafts suitable to engage elderly.
- Logistics support.
- Transport support for medical appointments.
- On-site event management support.



Code of Conduct

➤ Boundaries

- Do not accept any gifts or money from the elderly. Request them to donate directly to NuLife (<https://nulife.com.sg/how-to-help-cash/>).
- Handwritten cards/ thank you cards are acceptable. Speak to your volunteer manager if you have any doubts/concerns about the card(s).
- Do not give out your personal contact number and/or address to the elderly unless prior approval from the organization is obtained.
- Do not invite them to your home on a personal capacity.



➤ Confidentiality

- All personal information of the elderly shared by the organisation is confidential.
- Do not take or share any photographs, videos and/or audio recordings of the elderly and/or their families unless authorised to do so by the Volunteer Manager.
- Do not bring your family, friends or acquaintances to the outings/events unless you have obtained prior approval from the Volunteer Manager.

➤ Responsibility

- Be punctual.
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- Ensure that you attend all pre-event/activity briefings.
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- Carefully consider the time commitment for the activity/event before signing up as a volunteer.
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- Inform the Volunteer Manager if you are unable to attend the activity/event at least three days prior to the event/activity.

➤ Conduct

- Be respectful towards the seniors. Refrain from using vulgarities.
- Do not make racially / culturally / religiously offensive remarks.
- Refrain from making personal attacks, insults or derogatory / inappropriate remarks against an individual or the organisation.
- Do not consume alcohol or smoke during your participation as a volunteer.
- Be mindful of your role as a representative of the organisation.
- Work together with the other volunteers as a team to promote team spirit and cooperation.

➤ Dress Code

- Dress appropriately (*smart casual*) for all activities/events.
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- Covered shoes are recommended, unless otherwise indicated by the Volunteer Manager.

Befriender Listening Skills

Holding a Conversation

- Be patient, gentle and kind towards the elderly as they may have some difficulties in communicating due to age-related factors.
- Do not discuss your own thoughts or experiences to the extent that the elderly has no room to express their own thoughts and feelings.
- Refrain from giving advice.
- If Befriender specifically asks for practical information (*e.g. where to apply for financial assistance*), ensure you provide accurate information. Seek guidance from your volunteer manager regarding the appropriate resources/networks.

Dealing with difficult conversations

- Elderly befriendees may discuss about challenging and deeply personal topics, such as their childhood trauma, long-held resentment and grievances towards their family, helplessness at experiencing deaths of friends/loved ones and difficulties living with their medical conditions.
- Do your best to hold a safe and non-judgmental space for the Befriender to ventilate their emotions.
- However, do not carry the burden that you need to 'fix' their problems.
- If needed, direct the Befriender to relevant resources (e.g. professional counsellors at NuLife). Speak to your volunteer manager if you would like to discuss about these resources.
- Keep in mind the limits to confidentiality.
- Speak with your volunteer manager if you feel emotionally affected by any of these conversations. Your mental well-being is just as important.

To keep in contact or not?

- Strong relationships are often developed through the befriending period, and both the befriender and the adult may wish to stay in contact after the designated support period has ended. We respect the decisions of both parties.
- However, do note that NuLife will cease all official volunteer support and supervision upon completion of the befriending period.

Managing Endings

Endings do not have to be traumatic or sad

- Goodbyes can be difficult, but it does not have to be a negative experience, nor does it mean the befriending relationship should be prolonged as much as possible.
- Some befriendees may have had negative experiences about ending of relationships in their own lives and can easily feel abandoned if conclusion of the befriending relationship is not managed well.
- Let the elderly know well in advance about the ending of the befriending relationship.
- Support the elderly in identifying what has been helpful for them in the journey together (e.g. *what they have learnt about themselves, their strengths, limitations, acknowledging own growth*).
- Generate hope and positivity about the future where befriender has the resources to meet with challenges and move towards valued goals.
- Plan a last meeting that can be an enjoyable memory for both (e.g. *exchange letters, enjoy a meal together*).



UMATTER – A NuLife Initiative

UMATTER focuses on four key areas pertaining to

- **Grief and loss**
- **Depression**
- **Self-Harm**
- **Suicidal Ideation**
- It also discusses areas on re-evaluating self-worth, self-loathing and regrets, and self-esteem.

Many of our clients have gone through or are still going through situations that are stressful, distressing, and painful e.g. family violence; chronic medical conditions; divorce; social isolation.

It is important to have some understanding of the areas of Grief and loss, Depression, Self-Harm, and Suicidal Ideation to ensure you can interact effectively with the Befriender and direct them to appropriate resources if necessary.

GRIEF & LOSS

Grief does not always have to involve death of a loved one. It could also come from the loss of a significant relationship (*e.g. estrangement from children*), loss of health (*e.g. receiving a difficult medical diagnosis*), loss of self-esteem (*e.g. having to use a wheelchair due to reduced mobility*).

Possible Impacts

- **Emotional:** Experience feelings of denial, guilt, anger, fear, sorrow.
- **Behaviors:** Engage in alcohol / substance abuse, poor sleep, social isolation.
- **Cognitive:** Slow speech, poor concentration.

What to do

- Remain calm, warm, and open to what the Befriender is sharing with you about their loss. Converse with them about death, loss, and/or meaning of life as best as you can.
- Help them to identify possible coping strategies and come up with a plan together for them to engage with healthy coping (e.g. people or activities where they feel safe and supported).
- Speak with your volunteer manager if you have any concerns that the adult is not coping well with the loss and/or may require professional support.

DEPRESSION

Some signs of depression in elderlies:

- Social withdrawal.
- Persistent negative mood, irritability, hostility and/or aggression.
- Significant change in sleeping habits.
- Sudden change in eating habits.
- Persistent lethargy.

In general, look out for:

- Significant changes to behaviors/mood lasting for >2 weeks.
- Difficulties noticed in several domains of the adult's life.

What to do

- Maintain a warm, genuine, and supportive interaction.
- Let them know what you have noticed about their behavioral changes and invite them to share with you what they are going through.
- Do not downplay their emotions. Acknowledge them so that they feel understood and supported.
- Elderlies who are depressed may self-harm or have suicidal ideation too. Speak with your volunteer manager at the earliest opportunity if there are such concerns about your Befriendee.



Behaviours

- Elderlies may refuse to eat, refuse medical treatment or medication, overdose on medication, cut themselves or engage in binge drinking.
- Elderlies who are socially isolated, have serious physical or mental health issues or face financial difficulties are at increased risk of engaging in self-harm behaviors.

Possible Signs

- Unexplained cuts / burns / bruises, wearing bandages, expressions of self-loathing / shame / worthlessness, wearing long-sleeved clothing in warm weather, withdrawing from family & friends.

SELF-HARM

Prevalence of self-harm behaviors in elderlies in Singapore is unclear and could be under-reported.

It can be used by adult as a way of coping with distressing feelings, to exert some sort of control in their lives, and/or to gain acceptance from others.

What to do

- Inform your Volunteer Manager at the earliest opportunity if you observe any behaviors by the adult or they have disclosed information to you that would arise to any concerns regarding self-harm.

SUICIDAL IDEATION

More likely to occur in those who have a physical disability, are dealing with chronic pain or chronic medical conditions, have a mental health condition such as depression, are socially isolated, and/or have financial difficulties.

Possible Signs

Frequent talk about wanting to die, express hopelessness / despair, plan for death (e.g. give away favorite items), withdraw from family and friends, abrupt joy after continued period of low moods.

What to Do

➤ Look After Yourself

- Look after your mental well-being, it is just as important. You need to be mentally and emotionally healthy before you can offer help to another person.
- Inform your Volunteer Manager as soon as possible if you observe any behaviors that lead to concerns regarding suicidal ideation.
- This is to ensure both you and the person who is feeling suicidal receive professional support from NuLife.

➤ Be Attentive and Empathetic

- **Talking about suicide does NOT encourage suicide attempts.** If you suspect the person is contemplating suicide, ask them direct questions (e.g. "Are you thinking about dying or taking your own life?").
- Listen without judgment. It is more likely to help the person to feel heard and understood and reduce their inclination towards suicide.
 - Avoid making patronising or simplistic comments (e.g. "Things could be worse", "Just sleep it off", "everyone goes through tough times", "it's not that bad").
 - Do NOT tell the person that they are 'selfish' for not thinking about how their death would affect their family and friends. A person who is suicidal is often already struggling with guilt and shame about being a burden to others.



➤ Encourage Them to Seek Professional Help

- Reassure the person that help is available and that they can reach out for additional support.
- If you know and understand their immediate support system (*e.g. close friends, family members, partners*), offer to help rally them together to create a strong safety net for the person.
- The person may already be considering approaching a mental health / counselling professional, but may be unsure where to start. Suggest speaking to a mental health / counselling professional and refer and/or accompany them if required.

➤ Refer Them to External Support Systems

- NuLife for counselling support at **6300 8706 / 9734 1560**
- Samaritans of Singapore (*an organisation dedicated to supporting individuals thinking of harming themselves*) at **1-767** (*their 24-hour hotline*)
- The nearest Family Service Centre (FSC). FSCs are community-based social service providers who support individuals and families in need. You can identify the closest FSC for the person via this link: (<https://www.msf.gov.sg/our-services/directories>).
- Their respective self-help groups:
 - Chinese Development Assistance Council: **6841 4889**
 - Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura: **6359 1199**
 - Singapore Indian Development Association: **1800 295 3333**
 - Eurasian Community Fund: **6447 1578**

If there is immediate danger to the person's life:

Alert Emergency Services (Police: 999; Ambulance: 995) right away or accompany them to the Accident & Emergency room at the nearest hospital.

