



MSFriends® Volunteer: Conversation Quick Guide

Contents

- Starting a Conversation..... 1
 - First Conversation Overview..... 1
 - General Greeting..... 1
- Implementing Boundaries..... 1
 - Listening Response..... 1
 - Change of Topic 2
- Responding to a Request for Contact Information..... 2
- Active Listening Technique Examples..... 2
- Solutions Focused Conversation Questions..... 3
- Difficult to Understand Participants 3
- Responding to Derogatory, Discriminatory and Racist Statements 3
- Referral to the MS Navigators 3
- Ending the Conversation..... 3
 - General Ending..... 3

Starting a Conversation

First Conversation Overview

- Introduce yourself and get to know the other person
- Discuss:
 - What are you wanting to get out of these conversations?
 - Are there specific topics you want to address or talk through?
 - How frequently will we meet and for how long?
 - Prior to your first conversation, determine what your capacity is for conversations as well as what days and times work best for you. Provide these as options for the participant to decide between.
 - Best Practice: Connect for 30-45 minutes each week.
 - Connections last for up to 6 months but can end prior.

General Greeting

- “Hi <program participant>, this is <your name>, your MSFriends volunteer. I’m excited to connect with you for the next <scheduled length of time*>. How has your MS been this past week?”
 - For example: “Hi Jane, this is John, your MSFriends volunteer. I’m excited to connect with you for the next 40 minutes. How has your MS been this past week?”

Implementing Boundaries

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>?”

Responding to a Request for Contact Information

- “I am not able to share that information, but I look forward to continuing to connect with you through the MSFriends program on <agreed upon cadence, e.g. Tuesday evenings>.”

Active Listening Technique Examples

Restating is repeating what was said in your own words.

- If a person says, “I’m afraid I’m not going to be able to live alone much longer.”
- Restating response: “Are you saying that you’re worried about your ability to live independently?”

Reframing involves restating what has been shared from a different perspective, usually in a positive and supportive manner.

- If a person says, “I have to change everything! I can’t even use the same coffee cup anymore. I need one that is lighter with a large handle.”
- Reframing response: “It is difficult, I know, but it sounds like you are learning to make things easier for yourself.”

Probing is gentle questioning that elicits more information and clarity.

- If a person says, “Sometimes I’m so stiff I just don’t want to do anything.”
- Probing Response: “When does this usually occur?” “What do you do when this happens?” “When did this happen before?” “How was this like the other time?”

Reflecting expresses the underlying feelings revealed in the person’s statement.

- If a person says, “I don’t want to get a cane; it will make me look funny.”
- Reflecting response: “Tell me more about what it means for you to use a cane; you sound upset.”

Summarizing is stating what happened during the current conversation, or in past calls, to show how a situation has evolved.

- Summarizing response: “We’ve talked about a lot of things today: how helpless you feel when you see your children behaving in ways you don’t like, but most of all we’ve talked about how hard it is for you to disagree or speak up for yourself for fear you will lose the people you depend on and care about. Next call we can talk more about this.”

Solutions Focused Conversation Questions

- "What did you do differently?"
- "What's been better?"
- "What's good?"
- "What's the best thing that happened in the past week?"

Difficult to Understand Participants

- "I'm having a bad connection- can you repeat what you just said?"
- "I'm having trouble hearing, could you repeat or speaker <slower/louder/etc.>?"
- "I'm hearing that you're interested in talking about <topic you heard>. What have you experienced recently?" OR "I'm hearing that you're interested in talking about <topic you heard>. What has changed with that recently?"
 - For example: "I'm hearing that you're interested in talking about mobility. What have you experienced recently?"
 - For example: "I'm hearing that you're interested in talking about cognition. What has changed with that recently?"

Responding to Derogatory, Discriminatory and Racist Statements

- "You just used a word that is derogatory. We do not tolerate that language within our conversations. I am asking you to not use that language and should you use it again, I will have to ask you to leave."
- "You just used a racist statement. I am requesting that you refrain from using that language during our conversation. The National MS Society has a no tolerance policy when it comes to derogatory, discriminatory, and racist language. If you are not able to conduct a respectful discussion, then we cannot move forward with this conversation. Let us remain focused on your needs related to MS."
- "Due to the continued use of (derogatory, discriminatory, racist) language, I am ending our conversation and I am asking you to leave our group setting/I am ending our phone call. When you are ready to communicate in a respectful manner, please contact the National MS Society. Goodbye."

The National MS Society hopes you never have to address derogatory, discriminatory, or racist statements within your Peer Connections Volunteer role. Should the need arise, however, we want you to feel empowered to know the Society's policy and have language you can use. Always contact the Peer Connections Resource Team (PeerConnections@nmss.org) following these situations for support and additional guidance.

Referral to the [MS Navigators](#)

- "I'm glad we could talk about the resources you're looking for. I recommend you call the MS Navigators since they're a great source of information about that. Their phone number is 1-800-344-4867. They're available Monday through Friday between 9 a.m. and 7 p.m. ET (7 a.m. - 5 p.m. MT)."

Ending the Conversation

General Ending

- "I'm glad we could talk about <main topic from the conversation>. The next time we talk I look forward to hearing how <plan> goes. Have a good rest of your day. Bye."
 - For example, "I'm glad we could talk about how you talk to your daughter about your MS. The next time we talk I look forward to hearing how your conversation goes. Have a good rest of your day. Bye."