



Volunteer as a Befriender to Children

How Can You Help as a Befriender for Children ?

- Provide a listening ear and education support for children.
- Conduct regular home visits (*if feasible*) and maintain regular contact with children and their families.
- Bring the children for outings in a safe environment.
- Be a mentor with a listening ear whom the child can look to for safety, support, and guidance.



Befriender Do's & Don'ts: Policies & Procedures

Boundaries

- Remember you are a befriender, not their parent.
- No involvement in intimate personal care of the child (*e.g. bathing, toileting, dressing of undergarments*).
- Set clear and firm boundaries with children who are overly friendly with you to reduce the risk of misunderstandings/confusions. This helps us create a caring and protected environment for the child, while also protecting you from allegations of abuse and unprofessional conduct.
- Do not accept any gifts or money from the children and/or their families. 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 child and/or their families and do not invite them to your home.
- If the child requests for your social media handles, politely decline and let them know that this is an organisational policy.

Confidentiality

- All personal information of the child and/or their families shared by the organisation is confidential.
- Do not take or share any photographs, videos and/or audio recordings of the children 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.

Conduct

- 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.
- Covered shoes are generally recommended, unless otherwise indicated by the Volunteer Manager.

Responsibility

- Carefully consider the time commitment as a befriender before signing up as one.
- Be punctual for all befriending sessions.

Befriender Listening Skills

Holding a conversation

- Do not discuss your own thoughts, experiences, or problems to the extent that the child has no room to express their own thoughts and feelings.
- Use age-appropriate language with the child and speak at eye level with them so they feel safer and more connected with you.
- Avoid always correcting the child's mistakes. They are at a developmental stage where they are learning their strengths and limitations and having opportunities to explore their abilities is important for growth.
- Use more affirmations to reinforce positive behaviours e.g. *"You're so thoughtful"*, *"You tried your best even though it was a difficult task for you, well done!"*

Dealing with difficult conversations

- It is important for the Befriender to be able to hold a safe and non-judgmental space for the Befriender and to be able to direct the Befriender to relevant resources, if needed.

Managing Endings

To keep in contact or not ?

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

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 befriendedees 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 child and their family know well in advance about the ending of the befriending relationship.
- Support the child 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 child 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

- Focuses on four key areas pertaining to Grief and loss, Depression, Self-Harm, and Suicidal Ideation. Also discusses areas on re-evaluating self-worth, self-loathing and regrets, and self-esteem.
- Many of our young clients have gone through or are still going through situations that are highly distressing, and painful e.g. Parents going through a divorce; family violence; victim of school bullying; child abuse; traumatic death of a family member.
- 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 child and direct them to appropriate resources if necessary.

Grief & Loss

- Children who have lost a loved one appear to switch quickly between crying and playing. This does not mean that the child is not sad or they have 'completed' their grieving, they could be finding ways to cope with the loss without becoming overwhelmed.
- Younger children may not understand yet the concept of 'death'. Be open, gentle, and honest with them during discussions about death. Euphemisms (e.g. the deceased is sleeping) can confuse them or hinder their ability to develop healthy coping skills.
- Children may ask a lot of questions about death and dying. Be mindful of your tone and body language when discussing death with children – if you seem tense and upset, the child may internalise negative associations with death and dying.



Depression

- Some signs of depression in children:
 - Significant change in eating and/or sleeping patterns
 - Disinterest in favourite activities
 - Increased frequency / severity of tantrums (*especially younger children*)
 - Social isolation
 - Somatic symptoms without physical cause
 - Physically unkempt that could be a cause from parental neglect
- Maintain a warm, genuine, and supportive interaction with the child.

Self - Harm

- **What:** Act of physically hurting self without intention die. Sign of emotional distress and lack of healthy coping skills to manage the distress.
- **Why:** Can be used by children as a way of coping with distressing feelings and/or to exert some sort of control in their lives.
- **Behaviors:** Children may cut, burn, or scratch the skin and/or bruise themselves.
- **Who:** Children who have difficulties speaking about their problems or expressing emotions healthily are at increased risk of engaging in self-harm behaviors.
- **Possible signs:** Feelings of shame and worthlessness, and withdrawing from family & friends.
- **What to do:** Inform your Volunteer Manager at the earliest opportunity if you observe any behaviors by the child or they have disclosed information to you that would arise to any concerns regarding self-harm.

Suicidal Ideation

- **What:** Thinking about or planning to take one's own life.
- **Why:** Lack of support system, poor coping skills, victim of bullying, exposure to others who have completed suicide, major changes in their life (*e.g. problems at home / school*).
- **Possible signs:** Frequent talk about wanting to die, express hopelessness / helplessness, plan for death (*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.

➤ **Encourage their family to seek professional help for them**

- Reassure the family that help is available and that they can reach out for additional support.
- The family 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**
 - Institute of Mental Health at **6389 2222** (*their 24-hour hotline*)

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.