



Volunteer as a Youth Befriender

How can you help as a Befriender for youth?

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

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

➤ Boundaries

- It is normal for youths to develop 'crushes' (romantic feeling towards another youth or adult), even towards their befrienders. Set clear and firm boundaries with youths who are overly friendly with you to reduce the risk of misunderstandings/confusions. This helps us create a caring and protected environment for the young person, while also protecting you from allegations of unprofessional conduct. You can also use this opportunity to help the young person recognise what they value and look for in a relationship.
- Do not accept any gifts or money from the youth 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 youth and/or their families.
- Do not invite them to your home.
- Do not accept an invitation to visit them at their home.
- Youths often ask for their befriender's social media handles. Refrain from doing so as boundaries can easily become blurred. Politely decline and let them know that this is an organisational policy.

➤ Confidentiality

- All personal information of the youth 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.

➤ Responsibility

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

➤ Dress code

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

Befriender Listening Skills

➤ Holding a conversation

- Do not discuss your own thoughts or experiences to the extent that the youth have no room to express their own thoughts and feelings

- Refrain from giving advice. Offer information instead to support the young person in seeking their own answers to the problem.
- Young people can be more resistant to sharing. This does not mean that they do not want to express their feelings or they are trying to hide something from you. Continue to reflect their feelings, and listen without judgment. This allows the youth to recognise you as someone who respects and values what they have to say.
- Many youths may perceive themselves negatively. Thus, it is helpful to understand these negative perceptions and guide these youths to improve their perceptions of themselves.

➤ Dealing with difficult conversations

- Youths may start off such conversations by first asking the Befriender to “promise not to tell anyone”. Be mindful that you cannot make such promises to them due to the limits of confidentiality. Be honest with the young person about this and let them know your role is to support them as best as possible and at times this may mean involving other people to help keep them safe.
- 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. Speak to your volunteer manager if you would like to discuss about these resources.
- Remain calm and warm, as this allows the young person to recognise you as a safe figure they can approach in future for support.
- Speak with your volunteer manager if you feel emotionally affected by any of these conversations. Your mental well-being is just as important.

Managing Endings

➤ To keep in contact or not?

- Strong relationships are often developed through the befriending period, and both the befriender and the youth may wish to stay in contact after the designated support period has ended.
- However, 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, especially for a youth who has developed a bond with a safe and supportive figure.
- Let the youth know well in advance about the ending of the befriending relationship. This is much preferable to them finding out a week or a few days before.
- Support the youth in identifying what has been helpful for them in the journey together (e.g. what they have learnt about themselves, their strengths, limitations, progress).
- Plan a last meeting that can be an enjoyable memory for both.

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 stressful, distressing, and painful e.g. Parents going through a divorce; family violence; victim of school bullying; youth 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 are able to interact effectively with the youth and direct them to appropriate resources if necessary.



➤ Grief & Loss

- Compared to children, youths have a deeper understanding of abstract concepts about death and grief. They may start engaging with their Befriender on abstract conversations about death and meaning of life.
- Youths tend to experience intense emotional reactions to significant losses, but they do not yet know how to handle or comfortably talk about them. They may withdraw from their peers/family and/or increase their engagement in risky behaviors.

What To Do

- Remain calm, warm, and open to what the youth is sharing with you. They are often not looking for answers, they are just struggling to understand and cope with the ambiguity of it.
- Help the young person to identify people and activities that help them feel safe and supported.

➤ Depression

- Some signs of depression in youth:
 - Social withdrawal especially decreased interest in socialising with peers.
 - Persistent negative mood, irritability, hostility and/or aggression.
 - Engagement in risky behaviors (e.g. *binge drinking, substance abuse, unsafe sexual activities*).
 - Difficulties in school (e.g. *poor concentration, low energy, decline in grades, sudden drop in grades, low motivation to attend*).
- In general, look out for:
 - Significant changes to behaviors/mood lasting for >2 weeks.
 - Difficulties noticed in several domains of the youth's life (in school, with peers, at home).

What To Do

- Maintain a warm, genuine, and supportive interaction with the youth.
- 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 the youth feel understood and supported.
- Be gentle but persistent. The young person may not open immediately, but it means a lot to them to know that you are there and ready to give them the support they need.
- Youths 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.



➤ Self-Harm

- Can be used by youth as a way of coping with distressing feelings, to exert some sort of control in their lives, and/or to gain acceptance from others.
- Behaviors: Youths may cut, deeply scratch, pierce, or burn their skin. They may also bang their head or other body parts against hard surfaces, pull out their hair, or persistently pick at their wounds.
- Youth who have difficulties speaking about their problems or expressing emotions healthily are at increased risk of engaging in self-harm behaviors. Social media is an easily accessible tool that can expose youth to self-harm behaviors and/or encourage it as a way of managing distress.
- 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

What To Do

Inform your Volunteer Manager at the earliest opportunity if you observe any behaviors by the youth 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 lack a stable support system, have poor coping skills, are victims of bullying, are exposed to others who have completed suicide, experiencing major changes in their life (e.g. *problems at home / school*), engage in substance abuse, and/or have a mental health condition.
- 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**
 - 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.