



Facilitating intergenerational solidarity and learning through building friendships between youngsters and elderly

Module II

2. Befrienders' skills and qualities

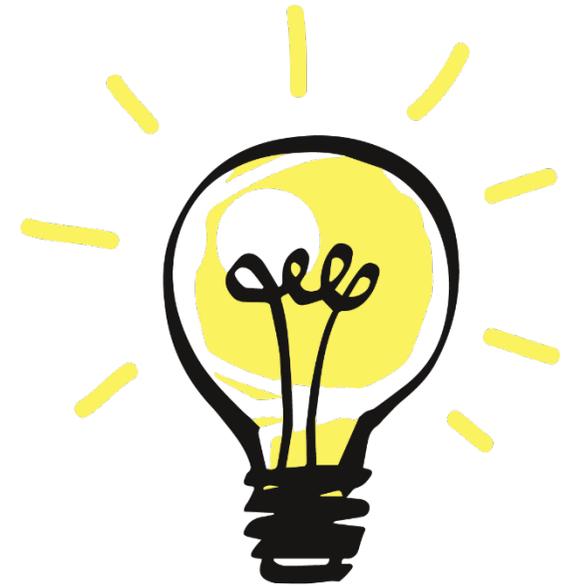


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1. Learn how to build an effective befriending relationship
2. Understand what are the befrienders' core values and attitudes
3. Identify the qualities and characteristics of befrienders
4. Adopt appropriate techniques to build strong relationships with befriendees
5. Develop communication, interpersonal and conflict resolution skills.



How to build an effective befriending relationship?

There are many factors which are important when building a befriending relationship. The following 6 points are essential for an effective befriending relationship. Think about why they are critical when working with the elderly and reflect on whether these factors were important in other relationships in your professional or personal life.



How to build an effective befriending relationship?

It is important to understand that building trust takes time and can not be forced. Some people can be very trusting from the beginning. However, some might have had past experiences where their trust has been abused, so it will take them more time to trust you. Be patient because taking the time to build trust is a fundamental part of the befriending relationship.



ESTABLISH
TRUST

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Tab 2

EMPOWER

Image
Tab 3

ALLOW
CHOICE

Image
Tab 4

ENCOURAGE
PARTICIPATION

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Tab 5

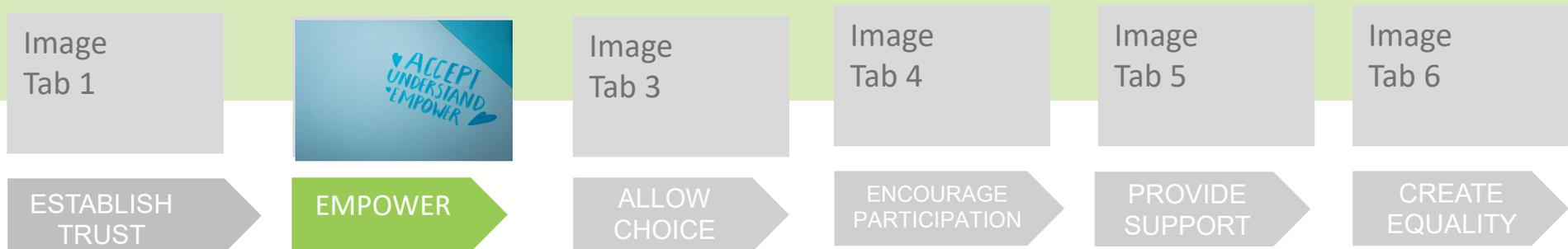
PROVIDE
SUPPORT

Image
Tab 6

CREATE
EQUALITY

How to build an effective befriending relationship?

Empowerment is about making someone stronger and more confident. We do that by tackling challenges in everyday life, no matter how big or small. The ability to tackle challenges can be crucial for self-development and increasing self-esteem. When we overcome difficulties, resilience grows. So it helps if you sensitively judge the appropriate level of challenge and gently push your befriender to achieve something.



How to build an effective befriending relationship?

You must allow choice in any activities and decisions you make with your befriende. Because of the changes in sensory, physical, and cognitive functions, the elderly might need a lot of help and support, but by allowing them to choose and make decisions, you provide your befriende with autonomy and create freedom and power.



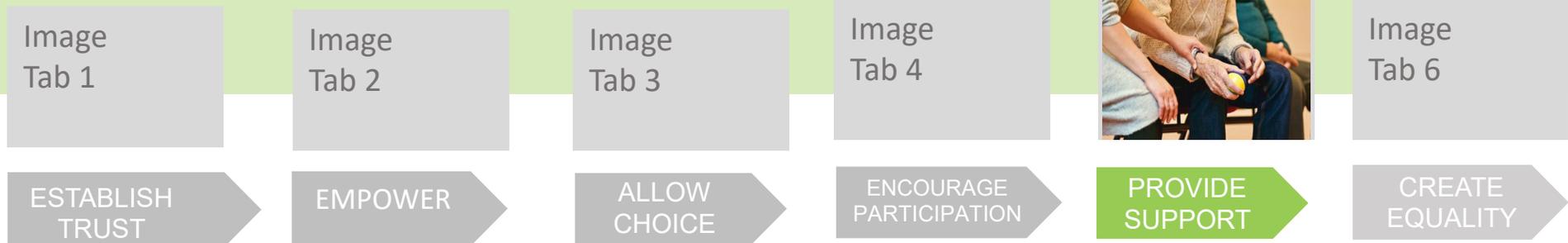
How to build an effective befriending relationship?

It is crucial to motivate your befriender to participate in their own self-development and empowerment. The befriender is an active partner in the befriending relationship rather than a passive recipient of services. Adequately responding to and involving them is part of this process and requires your patience and sensitivity.



How to build an effective befriending relationship?

Just as you would with any of your friends, you need to encourage your befriender because you genuinely want them to do well. You need to provide reassurance and show compassion whenever your befriender feels hesitant or thinks they might fail at doing something. Support should include verbal/facial expressions of empathy or physical gestures of affection whenever appropriate.



How to build an effective befriending relationship?

Just because you can move faster does not mean you are better than your befriende. You are both equally human beings, and this equality involves respect, appreciation, and acceptance of the befriende as the individual they are. Your befriending relationship should revolve around “being with” and not “doing for”.

Image
Tab 1

ESTABLISH
TRUST

Image
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PROVIDE
SUPPORT



CREATE
EQUALITY

The befrienders' core values and attitudes (1)

- Even before engaging in the befriending relationship, you might want to examine your assumptions and attitudes about the befriendees' group. It is no secret that older people may experience prejudice and discrimination. It is crucial that the vulnerable people who use the befriending service are not judged by those there to support them, as this will only create bigger barriers for them.
- We all, including you and your befriender, have our set of personal values and core beliefs and these define who we are as people and determine how we function in our lives. Your own personal values must not hinder your ability to support befriendees on their own terms.
- Consider the following four core values and attitudes and reflect on what situations they might be especially relevant.

The befrienders' core values and attitudes (2)



Non-discrimination - acknowledging the variety of your befriender's characteristics and abilities but not discriminating against them or treating them unfairly.

The befrienders' core values and attitudes (3)



Equality - granting your befriender the same status, rights, opportunities and treatment as everybody else.

The befrienders' core values and attitudes (4)



Engagement - older adults might experience a lot of loneliness and social isolation. You should be reliable and consistent when you engage yourself in providing mental stimulation and improving their mental well-being as a befriender.



Inclusion - include your befriender in the decisions and discussions of their own life and befriending relationship. That's how you show you value them and their opinion.

Qualities and characteristics of befrienders (1)

Besides core values and beliefs there are some other qualities and characteristics that every befriender should have. How many of them do you think you have?

Cards – Front Side

COMMUNICATION
AND
INTERPERSONAL
SKILLS

LISTENING
SKILLS

FRIENDLINESS
AND WARMTH

HONESTY AND
TRUSTWORTHINE
SS

Cards – Back Side

to be able to
listen, speak,
write, respond
accurately and
appropriately to
others and build
strong
relationships

to accurately
understand
messages,
showing that you
are really
listening and
what is said
matters to you

to be kind, open,
polite, pleasant
and sensitive to
others

to be truthful and
sincere, but also
reliable and
dependable in
what you do

Qualities and characteristics of befrienders (2)

Besides core values and beliefs there are some other qualities and characteristics that every befriender should have. How many of them do you think you have?

Cards – Front Side

COMMITMENT

RELIABILITY

EMPATHY

RESILIENCE

Cards – Back Side

to be willing to give your time and energy in a consistent manner

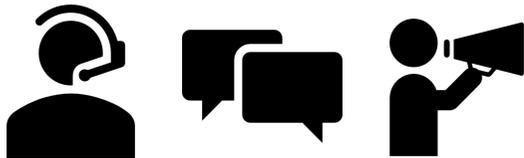
to be someone that can be trusted to work hard and do what they say they will do

the ability to understand another person's thoughts and feelings from their point of view

successfully adapting to difficult or challenging life experiences

Verbal and non-verbal communication

There are many ways to facilitate effective communication. How you use your words, body language, tone of voice, and visual cues determine how you are understood. As mentioned, proper communication with your befriendees might require a mix of verbal and nonverbal signals to convey your message.



Verbal communication is interpersonal communication that includes oral communication, written communication, and sign language. Verbal communication relies on words to convey meaning, but also on the voice rhythm, pace, volume etc.

Nonverbal communication entails a number of physicalised nonverbal cues that convey emotional states and complement verbal messages (leaning forward, nodding, smiling, etc.) Nonverbal human communication involves many different parts of the body.



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How to prevent a communication breakdown?

We are all humans, and conflicts happen whether we want them or not. However, there are some ways you can avoid communication breakdowns.

Be present

Given our busy schedules and the many messages and emails, sometimes we are not present in the moment and with the people close to us. To help stay present in a conversation, turn away from your computer, put your phone into airplane mode and focus on what is happening at the time.



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Listen more

Show curiosity and interest in what is being said, even if initially you may not feel like it. Also, pay attention to cues: does the person spend a lot of time on a particular point? Do they get more animated at specific junctures and less at others?

Such observations can help you tune into the topics your befriende is passionate about. From this place of actively listening, your conversation will move forward more constructively.



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Be open

Communication involves the exchange of opinions – sometimes opposing ones. Common ground can be hard to find unless you open your mind to the other person's perspective. Thus, it is required to really listen in order to consider the other person's position.

Over time, listening openly and attentively to others helps to establish trust. This contributes to a sense of psychological safety, which is key to successful relationships.



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Behaviours you should embrace as a befriender

Behaviours to embrace

Responding
to what the befriender is communicating and to the challenges of the relationship in an empathic and confident manner.

Treating
befrienderes as unique individuals, showing kindness and respect.

Forming
a stable, genuine and honest relationship with the befriender in which they feel less isolated and lonely.

Understanding
the befriender's lived experience, hopes, dreams, challenges and obstacles, broadening their worldview.

Seeking
training, support and help to adequately assume the befrienderes' role and responsibilities.

Displaying
an approachable, positive, open attitude to the befriender and help them feel valued.

Common mistakes to avoid in communication with befriendees

Placating

Agreeing with everything your befriendeo tells you because you want them to like you.

Advising

Advising can be quite tricky, it is better not to offer suggestions especially on sensitive matters that you are not knowledgeable about.

Comparing

Measuring your experience as compared to the befriendeo's experience and comparing them.

Mistakes to avoid

Rehearsing

Do not prepare in advance what you will say to your befriendeo, as this limits your attention to what they are saying at the moment.

Identifying

You may mean well, but referring back to your own experience based on what the befriendeo is telling you, shifts the focus to yourself which should be avoided.

Derailing

Do not rush to change the subject or make jokes about it if you feel bored or uncomfortable.

6 steps to de-escalate an argument

Even if you do all the things mentioned before, you might still not be able to prevent an argument, so it is crucial to know also how to manage escalation. The six steps below can help you achieve that.

Most people quickly respond to what was just said by the other person. Force yourself to ignore that impulse and instead take a breath and slowly count to 3. This grants you time to collect your thoughts and consider how to respond. Take a moment to think of what the person you disagree with is saying and how you could affirm to them that you at least heard them (even if you disagree).



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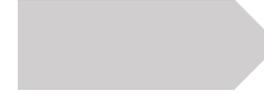
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TAKE A
BREATH



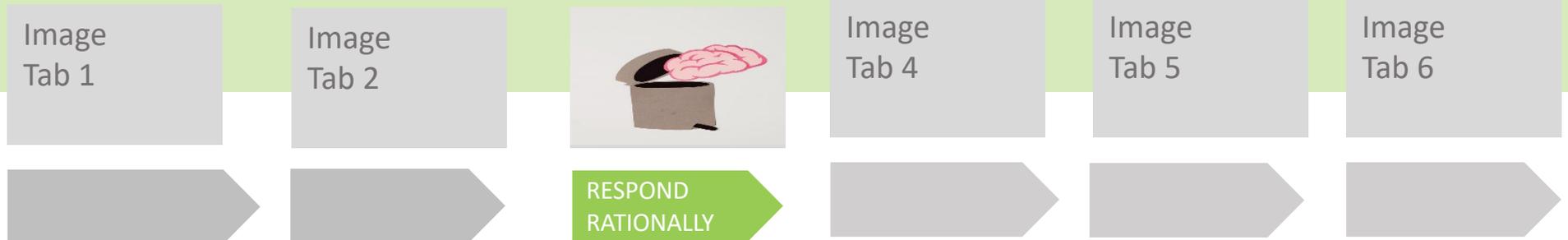
6 steps to de-escalate an argument

Arguments do not all have the same importance, weight, value or consequence for the people involved. Hence, it would help if you took the time to decide on the argument's value and how much time and effort it is worth investing.



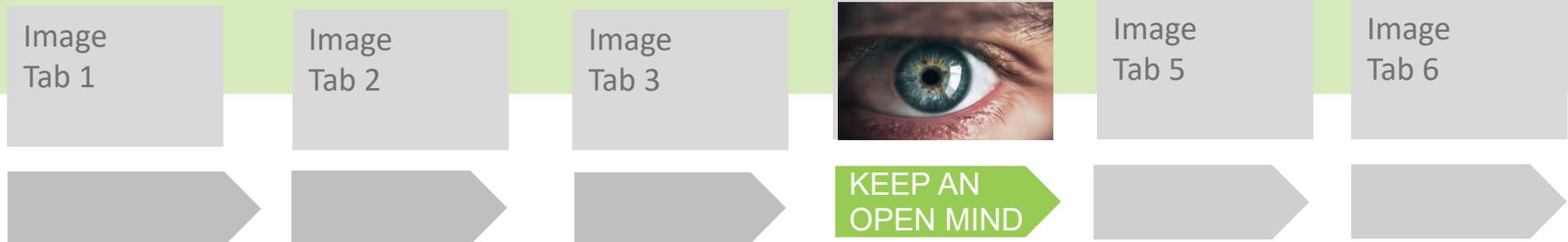
6 steps to de-escalate an argument

Disagreements escalate because we allow our emotions to take over. Try your best to avoid from your part or ignore from the other person's part personal insults and attacks and instead work toward a compromise or mutual solution, showing that you can see things rationally.



6 steps to de-escalate an argument

When you find yourself in an argument it is not always about reaching a solution or agreement. Sometimes people just want to feel they are being heard and that their opinion matters. Therefore, providing space for someone to share their thoughts, keeping an open mind and simply acknowledging that you hear them may prevent further escalation of the argument.



6 steps to de-escalate an argument

In any case, when you find yourself in an argument it is because you have a different perspective than the other person. It is OK to disagree as long as you do it with respect. That means you listen to the other side without taking it personally, stay calm, do not put them down and communicate your wants and needs.



6 steps to de-escalate an argument

Last but not least, there may be no winners in arguments. Both sides can come together, discuss something, argue and, in the end, simply agree to disagree. Common ground may not be reached, and there is no point in thinking with the terms “losers” and “winners”.



DO



1. **Be aware of the person's health.** Older adults may face health problems that impede their hearing, speaking and understanding. Be sure to consider the person's health before engaging in communication (e.g., hearing aid, memory loss).
2. **Make sure you are in a comfortable environment.** Evaluate the environment in which you are communicating, and make sure there are no disturbing background noises (e.g., TV or radio), many people speaking, or other distractions that might affect hearing and speech problems.



DON'T

1. **Don't make fun of your befriender's issues.** Even though laughter is the best medicine and sometimes the best you can do in difficult situations is to use humour, some subjects might be too sensitive for your befriender. Be mindful and only make jokes if they are ok with it.
2. **Don't talk to the person as if you were talking to a child.** Even though you might need to speak more clearly or repeat things, try not to be condescending. Your befriender is not a child, and it can really injure their dignity if you start "baby talking" to them.

DO



3. Speak clearly, articulately, and make eye contact. Older adults may have trouble hearing. It is important to articulate your words and speak clearly. Direct your speech to the individual's face - not to their side.

4. Use clear and precise questions and sentences. Do not hesitate to repeat or rephrase your sentences and questions if you sense there is an absence of comprehension.

5. Employ visual aids, if possible. Visual aids help being creative. Not only say but show your befriended what or who you are talking about. For example, it may be better to say, "Is there any pain in your back (pointing to your back)?"



DON'T

3. Don't be too serious or hasty. Take your time talking to your befriended and speak clearly, providing explanations if necessary. Make sure to give a sincere smile to show you care and understand them.

4. Don't disregard talk that may seem to be "rambling". They might not have many opportunities to talk to others so you should encourage them to talk about things that they are familiar with and care about and really listen to them.

5. Don't attempt to touch or invade their personal space if they are showing signs of fear or aggression. Of course, some light appropriate touches are totally fine, but if the person shows any signs of discomfort or anger stop immediately.

Assessment activity 1: Drag and Drop

The first column entails behaviours to avoid in communication with befriendeds and the second one their specific description. Please drag and drop each verb to its corresponding behaviour.

Elements to Drag
(e.g. text boxes, images...)

Content

placating

Content

derailing

Content

rehearsing

Content

identifying

Drop positions

Content

Agreeing with everything your befriended tells you because you want them to like you.

Content

rushing to change the subject or making jokes when you feel bored or uncomfortable.

Content

preparing what you will say to your befriended, not paying attention to what they are currently saying.

Content

referring back to your experience based on what the befriended is telling you, shifting the focus to yourself.

Assessment activity 2: True / False Questions

- **QUESTION 1:** *Active listening is the ability to focus completely on a speaker, comprehend the information and respond thoughtfully.*

Possible answer(s)	1. True 2. False
Correct answer(s)	True
Response to correct answer(s)	Congratulations! Your answer is correct.
Response to wrong answer(s)	Not quite right. The correct answer is "1. True"

True / False Questions

QUESTION 2: *Verbal communication relies solely on words to convey meaning.*

Possible answer(s)	1. True 2. False
Correct answer(s)	False
Response to correct answer(s)	Congratulations! Your answer is correct.
Response to wrong answer(s)	Not quite right. The correct answer is "2. False"

True / False Questions

QUESTION 3: *An argument should always aim to reach a solution, agreement or compromise.*

Possible answer(s)	1. True 2. False
Correct answer(s)	False
Response to correct answer(s)	Congratulations! Your answer is correct.
Response to wrong answer(s)	Not quite right. The correct answer is "2. False"

True / False Questions

QUESTION 4: *As the befriender of an older person, you should not disregard talk that may seem to be “rambling”.*

Possible answer(s)	1. True 2. False
Correct answer(s)	True
Response to correct answer(s)	Congratulations! Your answer is correct.
Response to wrong answer(s)	Not quite right. The correct answer is “1. True”

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