



**AGE UK WANDSWORTH**

**VOLUNTEERING SUPPORT**

**DURING COVID19**

**March-April 2020**

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## WHAT DO OUR BRAINS NEED AND VALUE RIGHT NOW AND WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR US AS VOLUNTEERS?

While everyone is different and has differing preferences in terms of how they like to live, there are two main things that all our brains need now:

### **1. Connectedness:**

- The ability to engage with others: to feel a sense of connection and relatedness.
- To have trust and empathy on a mutual level: to feel safe, cared for and part of something bigger than just us.

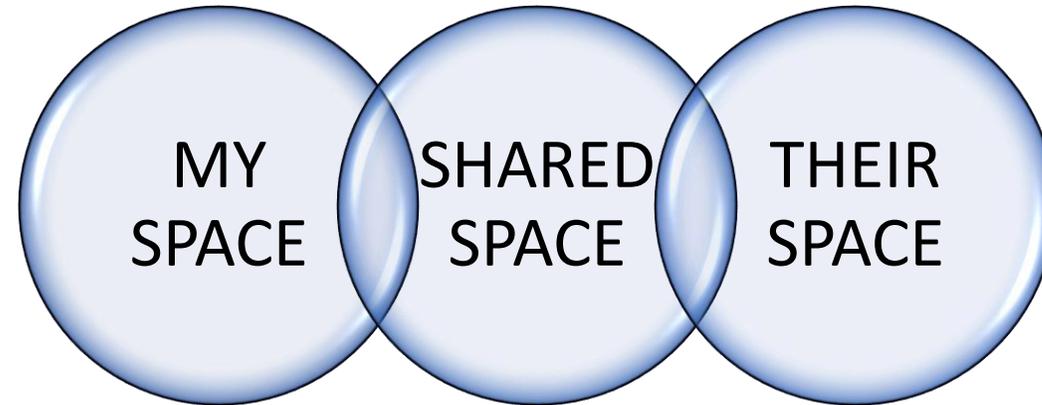
### **2. Certainty, and a sense of control over ourselves and our ecosystems:**

- To have a sense of control, authority or be able to impact on what happens around us, our behaviours, circumstances, or individuals around us.
- To make our own choices, and to have elements of routine in our days and lives.

**Both of these are limited for older members of our community at the moment. So, as volunteers, we can help to support them through the ways we engage as individuals.**

## HOW CONNECTIONS WORK

There are three spaces in any interpersonal dialogue, virtual or in person:



How we feel and what we bring to the dialogue: how positive we are, how nervous/ anxious we are and how engaged and focused we are.

How we feel about each other: how respected, listened to, etc.

What the other person feels and brings to the dialogue: their optimism, feelings of anxiety, what they need from others, how much they can listen, etc.

- **How we manage dialogue, what we talk about and what we focus on can impact the connection within these three spaces.**
- **As volunteers, we can plan for our connections and dialogues by thinking about these elements.**

## TIPS FOR DIALOGUE

- **Asking and listening are key here:** how can you show interest in what's happening in 'their space'?
  - How are you feeling?
  - How has today been?
  - What's been a positive part of today? Help individuals to see the little things – i.e. if they washed their hair, had a call from a loved one, enjoyed their morning tea or coffee, etc.
  - Have they had a chance to look outside to see others, spring emerging in the streets or a garden?
  - How can you balance empathy (and showing understanding, 'I can hear that this is tough for you') with objectivity (looking at events from a more balanced perspective, 'the other side to this is xyz')?
- How can you **help to create certainty** for others?
  - Can you call/ connect with this person at a regular time? 'I will call you again on Wednesday at 3pm'.
  - Good questions for creating certainty might be: What have you got planned for tomorrow? What time will you wake up and have breakfast? Which news bulletin do you not like to miss?
- **Connections are two way:** there is a shared space between us. This means that to feel connected, we need to both ask questions and listen to responses, but also share things about ourselves:
  - What can you share about how you are spending your days?
  - What is helpful for you now? What helps you to stay positive?
  - If you are comfortable, what can you share about your own personal situation: how many children you have, if you have a pet, something you cooked or ate yesterday.
  - Is the conversation more focused on you or them? How can you balance this?
- **COVID-19 is not the only thing in our world and it will not go on forever.** How can you acknowledge the focus on this in the media, but also talk about other things in your dialogues with others?

## TIPS FOR MANAGING OURSELVES

- **Managing ourselves in the dialogue is important.** If the other person already feels under pressure, anxious or isolated, what we say can add to this.
  - How anxious do you feel? What's happening in 'your space' and how might that impact how much you can listen/ focus/ show empathy?
  - What are you focused on, and what do you plan to talk about on your call?
- How can you **show the other person that you have listened to them?**
  - If you can, turn off your mobile phone or try to find a quieter space to avoid interruptions.
  - If the connection is virtual, try to maintain eye contact, as this is a powerful form of non-verbal communication that tells the other person that you are engaged and interested in the conversation and in them.
- There is a difference between having a conversation and connecting with someone, and solving their problems. We often feel like we need to solve problems, when in most cases the real and underlying need from the other person is simply to be heard and to feel connected. **Try to make the goal of this dialogue simply to connect with them, not to solve their problems.**
- **Respect Differences.**
  - Generational gaps can create differences in opinion, views and general outlooks on life. An attitude of respect and tolerance for differing beliefs can help you to better handle communications with others.
- **Communicate Clearly.**
  - Clear communication skills are vital when communicating with older people in our community. Speak clearly using an appropriate volume and rate of speech, so that the other person can understand you.
  - Stick to one topic at a time to avoid confusion, and try not to get irritated or frustrated if you have to repeat something several times. Try to maintain a calm and empathic attitude.

## **FINALLY**

**Try to enjoy the experience of connecting with someone on a deeper level. It's a privilege. This could also be the start of a longer term friendship.**

**Make sure you are looking after yourself too. It can be easy to think that you can/should solve everyone else's worries/problems, but with the best will in the world that isn't realistic.**

**If in doubt, ask for help. Our coordinators at Age UK Wandsworth are busy during this crisis, but they will always find time to help!**

