The Friendly Visiting Guidebook

The Merrin Institute at DOROT
TITLE PAGE

The Friendly Visiting Guidebook

by

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for

The Merrin Institute
at DOROT
About this Guide

The Friendly Visiting Guidebook is designed for individuals who participate in a supervised friendly visiting program. It is published by the Merrin Institute at DOROT, a nonprofit grassroots organization based in New York City that offers more than 30 intergenerational programs serving the elderly. Friendly Visiting is one of DOROT’s core programs and was established — along with the organization itself — in 1976.

This guide draws on DOROT’s decades of experience in visiting programs for the elderly as well as the input of other agencies and organizations serving the aged. It is written for national and international distribution in the hope that communities everywhere will mobilize caring volunteers to enhance the lives of the homebound seniors who are their neighbors.

This guide will also prove useful to individuals acting on their own who are reaching out to a neighbor. In this case, we recommend that you familiarize yourself with a local organization for guidance and referrals. Consult www.friendlyvisiting.org, your local or state department for the aging or similar service organization, or telephone 211 if that social service referral line is operating in your area.

On the friendly visiting website, www.friendlyvisiting.org you will find a world-wide directory of friendly visiting organizations, links, suggested activities, and a forum where volunteers can share information and ideas.
Acknowledgments

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We also thank the many agencies and organizations with visiting programs for the elderly who shared their insights and best practices with us for inclusion in this guide. They are listed on page ____.

We welcome your comments, feedback and questions.

To contact the Merrin Institute at DOROT, call us at 212-769-2850, fax: 212-769-4989, or e-mail volunteers@FRIENDLYVISITING.ORG.

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Welcome

As a friendly visitor, you join a unique group of volunteers who reach out to isolated elders in your community. Your visits are a gift that makes a world of difference to someone who is alone. The time you spend together and your personal interest communicate caring and warmth that contribute immeasurably to the well-being of your older friend.

In The Friendly Visiting Guidebook, we are happy to share the valuable information gathered over the years from thousands of volunteer visitors who have befriended the elderly through agencies and organizations serving the aged.

We wish you a fulfilling volunteer experience and thank you for being part of a worldwide movement to help the elderly age at home with dignity.
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1 - A Mutually Rewarding Friendship

Fanny and I have a great time together. It has grown into a real good fit... We have a passion for Rummy Q, and I keep telling her she is ready for Atlantic City. We just laugh and laugh at how good we are... I have to thank you for the chance to have such a great friend in my life.

Ethel E., friendly visitor

When you become a friendly visitor, you and your older friend have the opportunity to begin a mutually rewarding friendship. Through common interests and experience you can establish a relationship that will broaden and deepen both your lives.

**Friendly visitors** are people who, in their every day lives, are likely to help older people: assisting them in crossing the street, offering them a seat on the bus, and stopping to inquire about their well-being. They volunteer for many reasons, to:

- Help older people on a regular basis;
- Enjoy a warm relationship with an older person, as with a grandparent, which evokes memories of similar relationships in the past;
- Share the experience of respect and caring for the elderly with their children;
- Give of themselves; and
- Give back to the community.

**Who Will You Meet?**

**Seniors** have rich and diverse backgrounds. The reasons they want to receive your visit are varied and particular to their own specific needs and stage of life.

They are able to remain active and engaged in the community when they welcome visitors into their homes, offer their time and hospitality, and share their wisdom and experience.

Many seniors have experienced dramatic changes in their lives, including loss of loved ones, declining health, loss of vision, hearing, or mobility, and, often, reduced finances. Some may feel marginalized, isolated and alone. Yet they are eager to enjoy life to the fullest.

In receiving friendly visitors, seniors open their homes and lives to new encounters and look forward to meeting someone new. That someone is you.

[Sidebar:] Visiting the elderly is a privilege.
2 - Understanding Your Commitment

Becoming a friendly visitor is a commitment between:

- You;
- The older person; and
- The organization that matched you.

Together you help to strengthen your community.

Your job is to share in conversation and companionship.

- **Visit your older friend at the intervals specified** in your friendly visiting program, for the term of your agreement.

- **If your contact information changes** (e.g., change of address, day or evening phone number, or e-mail address), notify your program coordinator (and, if applicable, your older friend).

- **If you can no longer visit regularly**, inform your program coordinator and your older friend, giving them as much advance notice as possible.

- **Do not make promises you may not be able to keep.** Set limits that are comfortable for you. (See "Setting Limits," page __)

- **Keep the promises you make.** If your friend asks you to mail some letters, do so immediately upon leaving the senior’s home. Your visit is not complete until the letters are in the mailbox.

- **Respect your older friend’s privacy.** The things you discuss together are confidential.

You represent your referring organization when you visit with seniors.

- You may be the only person to see your older friend on a weekly basis. Because of this, you are a vital link between your older friend and your program coordinator. Your feedback about your friend’s well-being is invaluable.

- **Pay attention to the senior’s needs and environment** and report changes you observe to your program coordinator; this way staff can follow up to make sure the senior’s needs are met, if possible.

Your program coordinator is there to help:

- **If you have a problem,** talk to your program coordinator.

- **If you become aware of any new physical, emotional, legal or financial problems that your older friend may be experiencing,** alert your program coordinator immediately for information about other programs and community resources that can be helpful to your friend. (For further discussion, see “Setting Limits,” page __ and “Getting Support,” page __)
• **If you feel distressed or overwhelmed by issues arising from your relationship**, speak with your program coordinator. Remember, you are not alone; sharing your concerns may lead to a resolution more easily than you’d expect. (See “Getting Support,” page ___.)
3 - Your First Visit

I was waiting for Maurice as he came rolling into the living room with his walker, and when he saw me he stared at me with surprise, excitement, shyness... It was so tender. I introduced myself we sat down and never stopped talking for an hour. It was awesome. We talked about art, psychology, philosophy, science, serotonin, endorphins, meditation, family, his studies required for the book he published. I found him completely fascinating.

I saw his painting and we talked about it. My art has a similar style. We talked about the abstract expressionists of the New York school... When I told him our time was up, I suggested maybe we could paint together and he gave me this funny look, like “What are you, crazy?” I said to him, “Come on, we’ll have fun, we’ll get a big brush, great colors, a big canvas. It’ll be fun.”

He laughed so sweetly and said ok. I asked him to show me his book next time and promised to show him pictures of my paintings. He said he would love it. Then he said, “So, what is your purpose, a friendly visit?”

“Yes, it is,” I said, “So, was it?”

And he said, “Oh yes, of course, you are very friendly. I was so dazzled to find you here”.

I look forward to my new friendship with Maurice.

Sherri C., friendly visitor

You may approach your first visit to your older friend with mixed feelings – excitement, shyness, interest and uncertainty – feelings that are very likely to be shared by your new friend. Your first phone call to your friend will help ease the anxiety that you both may feel, and your first visit will usually ease the way for future visits.
Getting Off to a Good Start

Here are some proven strategies you may want to use:

• **Learn about your new friend.** Ask your program coordinator about the person’s background and interests. Your program coordinator will tell you if the person you will be visiting has a chronic condition or illness you should know about, e.g., vision or hearing loss. This information can help you tailor your expectations for both your initial conversation and your visits.

• **Call your new friend as soon as possible;** he or she will have been told to expect your call and will be waiting to hear from you. When you call:
  - Introduce yourself, give some brief information about your background and current activities or work;
  - Ask your friend to tell you a little about himself/herself, including his/her interests; and
  - Make an appointment; tell your new friend you are eager to begin visiting and would like to find a time that is convenient for both of you. If you have time restrictions, state from the outset which days and times are available for you, and let your older friend choose among them.

**Before your visit:**

• **Send your friend a photograph of yourself** if time permits;

• **Call your older friend the day before to confirm your visit** or, if your friend is hearing impaired, send a note beforehand;

• **Think of something to say or ask that connects to your previous telephone conversation or correspondence.** For example, if your friend has mentioned an appointment, an interest or a family member, ask about it. This will demonstrate to your friend that your earlier conversation was important enough for you to remember.

**When you visit:**

• **Be punctual and consistent;** if you must delay your visit or if you need to reschedule, call your older friend, giving as much advance notice as possible.

• **Turn off your cell phone;** telephone interruptions are distracting;

• **At the beginning of the visit** tell your friend how long you can stay and let the senior know a few minutes before it is time to leave. You might say, for example, “Mrs. L., I’ve been looking forward to our visit today. I will be able to stay until three p.m.”

• **Schedule your next visit before you leave** and offer to write down the time and date for your friend. For seniors who experience difficulty remembering recent events, this will help guarantee that your visit won’t be forgotten — and your friend can look forward to it all week.

• **At the end of the visit,** tell your friend how much you enjoyed your time together and how much you look forward to the next visit. Ask if there is
anything in particular your friend would like to do or talk about the next time you come.

[SIDEBAR]

**Consider the first few visits a trial period.**
All relationships are different and some may need more time than others before you feel completely comfortable. Most friendly visiting relationships work out quite well. However, this relationship should be personally satisfying; if you remain (or become) uncomfortable, speak with your program coordinator about a different match.
[SIDEBAR]
25 Ways to Share Quality Time

Friendly visits encompass a wide range of activities, from a relaxed, engaging conversation to a structured project. The most satisfying and rewarding activities grow out of your common interests, things that the two of you decide to do together. Here are suggestions for conversational topics and activities that have proven enjoyable to other friendly visitors and older friends. As you get to know each other better, you will discover other activities to enjoy together.

1. **Ask about the photographs, furniture and memorabilia in your friend’s home.** These can help you learn about your friend’s interests and personal history.
2. **Ask your friend about work, leisure time, hobbies and childhood and how your friend spends time now.**
3. **Discuss your own interests.** Your older friend may enjoy hearing about your life, work, leisure activities and family. Bring pictures to share.
4. **Discuss historical events.** How did your friend participate? How did an event affect your friend? What was it like to live through the experience?
5. **Ask questions about the changing world.** What was life like before the invention of television? Before computers? What were the social norms 50 years ago? How were politics different? How are they the same?
6. **Talk about the news of the day.** Your friend might keep you up to date!
7. **Help your friend reminisce.** Discussing a person’s past can be a valuable source of empowerment, pride and healing. If possible, create an oral history by recording your friend’s life story in writing or through audio- or video-recording devices. (Links to resources on creating an oral history can be found online at www.friendlyvisiting.org)
8. **Take pictures together, help your friend put photos in an album, or label existing albums with descriptions (in large print, if possible).**
9. **Help your friend make his or her family tree.** (Links to resources for making a family tree can be found online at www.friendlyvisiting.org)
10. **Help your friend make a scrapbook of memorabilia.**
11. **Celebrate birthdays and holidays** (bake a cake, make a holiday dish, light candles, bring a balloon or flowers and listen to music).
12. **Play games** like cards, chess, checkers, Rummy Q, Scrabble, and board games; do a jigsaw puzzle; complete crossword puzzles.
13. **Discuss books, short stories, poetry or magazine articles.**
14. **Read aloud.** This is especially helpful if your friend is visually impaired, in which case he or she may also appreciate assistance with letter writing.
15. **Tell jokes or read funny stories.** Laughter can be great medicine!
16. **Teach** your friend how to use a computer, use e-mail or surf the Web.

17. **Learn a new skill from your friend** – or learn one together – such as knitting, sewing or crafts; bring former hobbies back to life.

18. **Do an art project together**, draw, paint, make a collage, mold clay or make greeting cards for holidays and birthdays.

19. **Cook a meal together**, exchange recipes, or make a cookbook.

20. **Grow herbs, flowers or plants.**

21. **Watch a special TV program or movie together** or watch a program at home between visits and discuss it when you next see each other.

22. **Listen to music together**, sing or play duets. Bring your favorite CD (and player, if necessary).

23. **Converse in a common foreign language**, teach each other a new language, or learn a new language together.

24. **Take a walk**, go to the movies, a museum, or the park.

25. **Pet visits**; if you have a pet, ask your older friend for permission to bring it for a visit.

It often takes very little to make a visit satisfying for both of you.

More activity ideas can be found online at www.friendlyvisiting.org.

**[CALL OUT]**

**Sometimes a conversation between friends is the best activity of all.**

*[PHOTO: Lamp with shade]*

*When I was matched with Judy M. in 1998, she was looking for someone who could help her "tie up the loose ends of her life." At 92 and in declining health, Judy had always met challenges head-on. She was concerned that many of her possessions would not find their way to the people she intended to have them. So we set about wrapping her jewelry in tissue paper and pink ribbon and attaching nametags designating the person to whom she wanted to leave each piece. Judy would tell me the history of each item as we wrapped: where it came from, whether it was a gift or if she’d bought it for herself during her global travels. She delighted in sharing these long-forgotten stories with someone new, and it was a great way for me to get to know her better.*
After completing this task, we discovered that Judy had numerous unmatched earrings, "singletons," as we called them. We gave a lot of thought to what we should do with these bejeweled orphans, and I suggested that we attach them to a small, plain white shade for the lamp on her bedside table. We spent many of our visits arranging these varied, colorful and mismatched baubles. What we ended up with was an eclectic household item that became one of Judy’s most prized possessions. She showed it off to everyone.

Imagine my surprise and pleasure when I found that Judy had attached to it a tag bearing my name.

Judy’s lampshade now crowns the lamp on my desk, where I see it every day and fondly remember the wonderful friendship I shared with a very special lady.

Sharon R., friendly visitor
4 - Visiting Guidelines

How can I ever thank you enough for introducing me to Avrum G., my friendly visitor? It's such a joy to be able to talk, to experience new things, to laugh, to share things together. At age 81 years, I didn't think it possible to have such a friendship! My family loves him, and it's as if he has been in my life forever. What is it that makes him so special? He's sensitive to my needs. If I'm not feeling well, he'll read to me. If I have 'house fever' and want to go out, we do interesting and often exciting things. Because he is so thoughtful, he will rearrange things in the apartment to make it easier for me to manage (I'm in a wheelchair) and also help with little household repairs when he sees they are needed. I can go on and on about how wonderful he is. This relationship has enhanced the quality of my life!

Jean A.

Once the ice is broken and visits to your friend have become a regular part of your routine, the following guidelines will help to ensure a successful and rewarding time together.

- **Reserve the hour you have set aside** but be flexible enough to accommodate occasional changes. Alert each other in advance when you must change your schedule.

- **Alert your friend well in advance of any changes in your regular visiting schedule**, such as vacations, business trips or other circumstances. If possible, send a postcard or call when you are away for several weeks.

- **A short visit may yield as much benefit as a long one**. If your friend appears tired or is not feeling well, consider a briefer stay. Discuss this with your friend.

- **Visit on a day when no one else does**. Some older people have other visitors, and they cherish their time with these people as well. Spreading the wealth of companionship is an added gift.

- **Holidays or dates that mark special occasions (birthdays, wedding anniversaries, anniversaries of the death of a loved one) may be difficult times for your older friend**. Some seniors may want to reminisce or share stories of loved ones as a source of comfort; others may not want to talk about those memories. Ask your friend for guidance on how you can help. In any case, be assured that your presence is meaningful.

- **In extreme weather or emergency circumstances** (e.g. blackouts, strikes, or natural disasters) call or visit your friend to see if assistance is needed.
• **Perform small chores around the apartment;** securing a loose scatter rug, putting reflective tape at the edge of a step, even changing a light bulb can be a big help.

• **Shopping;** if you shop for your friend, get receipts and bring them back to him/her for reimbursement.

  **[SIDEBAR]**

  **Legal concerns:**
  While your older friend may ask you for help with activities such as measuring out medications or writing checks, we discourage friendly visitors from taking on that type of role.
  You may be uncomfortable about fulfilling certain requests. In such cases, it is advisable to explain to your friend that you do not feel comfortable performing these functions.

  If you need guidance, contact your program coordinator. For further discussion of this issue, see “Setting Limits,” page __.
5 - Consider Your Older Friend’s Challenges

Jean is in good spirits, if in somewhat fragile health. She has been subject to bouts of IBS with susceptibility to infection and fever. She managed quite well in the blackout, however; her daughter Dee made sure she was okay, and, of course, the staff at her residence was wonderful, staying there all night, napping on chairs, to make sure the residents were okay.

Avrum G., friendly visitor

Changes in Sensory Function
Changes in hearing, vision, speech and mobility affect all aspects of a person’s daily life. Sensory changes are often gradual; as they occur, seniors adapt in many different ways, sometimes without realizing it. For example, you may notice that your older friend stands very close to you. Often this is because the senior has difficulty with vision or hearing, and wants to see or hear you better, or has problems with balance and may need assistance while standing or walking. Your sensitivity to these challenges will be supportive of your older friend and meaningful to your relationship.

[Sidebar]

Tips for Visiting the Blind or Visually Impaired

1. **Lighting** is very important for people with limited vision:
   a. Sit face to face;
   b. Make sure that the available light shines on your face; do not sit with a bright light or sunlight behind you;
   c. If the room appears dark, ask if you can turn up the lights or open the shades; and
   d. Offer to make large-print labels for the senior’s prescription bottles, spices and cooking supplies.

2. **Reading**: ask if the senior would like your assistance in reading anything.

3. When **walking together**,
   a. Offer your arm for assistance and let the senior know if there is a step, doorway or ramp.
   b. If walking with the senior, call out the street names if necessary.
   c. Shiny floors or wall surfaces can cause glare; ask if the senior needs assistance.

4. **If you notice an obstacle** in the room that might be difficult to see and could cause the senior to trip, such as a wire running atop a carpet, bring it to the senior’s attention and ask permission to move it out of the way. (Do not place a power cord under a carpet, this is a fire hazard.)
Tips for Visiting the Hearing Impaired

1. **Maintain eye contact**
   a. **Face the older person** directly when speaking; and
   b. **Sit somewhat close and with your face at eye level** with the older person.

2. **Avoid distracting background noises:**
   a. Select a quiet, relaxing place away from other people, machines, and traffic sounds; and
   b. If the TV or radio is on, ask the senior if you can turn it down or off while you are visiting.

3. **Keep your face visible;** do not cover your face with hands or objects when speaking.

4. **Ask** if the person can hear you.

5. **Speak slowly and clearly, but without exaggeration;**
   a. Do not shout;
   b. If specific information is to be transmitted (e.g., what time you will arrive to visit, teaching seniors computer use), structure the message in a clear, systematic manner.

6. **Use short words and simple sentences.**

7. **Be patient,** if the senior doesn’t understand what you say, repeat your statement calmly and clearly; choosing other words to convey what you want to say may make it easier for the senior to understand.

8. **Repeat** key points in different ways.

9. **When you ask questions,** leave time for the senior to respond.

Changes in Memory Function

Often a change in your older friend’s memory function is indicated by a change in the senior’s behavior and environment, or an off-hand comment or by small, ordinary things. Be sensitive and observant.

The senior may:

- Feel overwhelmed by paperwork; or
- Be unable to find house keys; or
- Be unable to get out of the house; or

You may notice:

- A strange odor in the kitchen;
- Perhaps the garbage needs to be emptied; or
- The senior looks unkempt.
In such cases,
- Be courteous and respectful, you don’t want your friend to feel embarrassed;
- Offer to help where appropriate, such as taking out the garbage; and,
- Most importantly, communicate your observations to your program coordinator.

[Sidebar]

**Tips for Visiting the Memory Impaired**

1. **Take the time to listen.**
2. **Be patient:**
   a. Let the conversation wander, even if it doesn’t make sense to you.
   b. The senior may repeat the same story over and over; yet each time you respond to the story with interest, your friend will feel your kindness.
   c. The senior might not remember your name, or may ask you for your name many times. Don’t get upset. It’s not important if your friend gets your name right.
   d. At times it can be difficult to be sure that your friend understands you. At the center of the senior is a part that is aware and understanding, even if they are unable to let you know at all times.
3. **Don’t correct,** the facts are not important; what is important is that your time together is enjoyable and pleasant.
4. **Speak to the person with respect.**
5. **Be encouraging,** but avoid saying, “You can,” when it is likely that your friend cannot.
6. **If the senior is confused** and refers to a deceased spouse or parent as living, acknowledge the senior’s memories of the past and do not argue, as this can cause your friend to become frustrated and agitated.
7. **Look at old photos together** and ask questions about the people pictured, and when the picture was taken. If your friend cannot remember the details, ask what the photograph brings to mind.
8. **Ask general questions** rather than asking for specific facts. For example ask, “Did your family celebrate holidays?” Instead of, “How did your family celebrate holidays?”
Loss & Grieving
Sometimes a senior will express sadness or grief about declining health and abilities or about the loss of a loved one. If your friend starts to dwell depressively upon a loss, you can acknowledge the importance of those feelings and attempt to steer the conversation to positive thoughts and memories.

- Encourage the senior to tell stories about the loved one that make your friend feel good, proud and happy;
- Ask how the senior met the loved one and some of the things they did together;
- If the senior bemoans the inability to travel, ask about some favorite travel destinations and what your friend did while there.

This approach may help your friend to remember in a joyful way, and prompt a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction.

Remember: The best contribution you can make to your friend is being there, talking and listening.

[SIDEBAR]

Tips for Falls Prevention

Falls are the leading cause of injury deaths among older adults. If you notice a situation that you can improve, such as replacing a light bulb or moving an extension cord or throw rug, ask your friend for permission to do so.

1. **Throw rugs are a tripping hazard**; remove them or fasten them securely.

2. **Good lighting can reduce the chance of falling**; change light bulbs to a higher wattage (as long as the fixture is rated for it) and add night lights in the bathroom and wherever else lighting is lacking.

3. **Make sure stairs and handrails are in good repair** and have handrails added where necessary; bright tape strips on the edge of each stair improves visibility.

4. **Keep walkways and stairways clear of clutter** such as shoes, electrical cords and magazines.

5. **Put regularly used items within easy reach** on shelves between hip and eye level; a long-handled grasper can be used to reach objects on high shelves or on the floor.
6. **Arrange for the landlord, handyman, or organization that matched you to add grab bars or handrails** in the shower, on walls around the bathtub, and alongside the toilet; add a non-skid bathmat; a non-skid shower chair and hand-held shower head will allow your friend to sit while bathing.

7. **Chairs with arms and good back support make it easier to get up**; if your friend’s feet don’t touch the floor in a favorite chair, add pillows to the back of the chair.

8. **Multiple medications can cause balance problems**; encourage your friend to have all medications reviewed by a pharmacist or doctor at least once a year.

9. **A charged flashlight** should be kept near the bed for emergencies.

10. **A cane or walker** can help those who are unsteady in walking; to ensure that the device is the proper height, it should be prescribed by a physician.
6 - Setting Limits

In any relationship, it is important to establish clear and realistic expectations that will help to make the experience satisfying and fulfilling for all concerned. As you begin the relationship with your new friend, set limits that are comfortable for you. If your older friend asks you to do something that does not feel right to you, or does not match your understanding of the commitment you made, feel free to say no. As your relationship evolves and if your older friend’s needs increase, speak with your program coordinator before assuming any additional responsibilities.

These recommendations will help you establish and maintain your visits in a way that is beneficial for both of you.

• **Keep your initial visits limited to ONE HOUR.** In your enthusiasm, you may wish to visit longer or more often, but longer visits in the beginning establish a precedent that may be difficult to maintain. Over time, you may choose to change the length or frequency of your visits.

• **Do not give out your telephone number unless you are comfortable doing so.** If you do, make it clear to your older friend that you may not be available in case of an emergency and that he/she should designate someone else to respond in such cases. You and your friend can complete the On-site Emergency Information form included in this guide on page _____ for your friend to keep by the telephone.

• **Use your best judgment about touching or being touched by your older friend.** A hug or kiss in greeting can be appropriate, adding dimension to your friendship. Do so only if both of you feel comfortable.

• **Share only personal information that you feel comfortable disclosing.**

• **Keep the confidences that your friend shares with you.** It is appropriate and necessary to discuss the relationship with your older friend with your program coordinator, however, if you wish to discuss your older friend with others, use only his/her first name and do not divulge personal information without permission.

• **If your friend asks to be accompanied outdoors, do so only if you feel comfortable and confident.** If you have doubts about your ability to support your friend physically or feel that perhaps he or she should not be venturing outside, ask what kind of assistance would be most helpful and call your program coordinator for further guidance.

• **Do not make promises you can’t keep.**
• **Do not get involved in family problems.** If your older friend wants to share problems or conflicts, you may want to offer a sympathetic ear, but taking any more active role in such matters can be disastrous. If you feel the need to take some action, speak with your program coordinator.

• **Do not give legal, financial or medical advice.** Your program coordinator may be able to help with appropriate professional referrals.

• **Do not, under any circumstances, assume legal responsibilities,** such as power of attorney or executor/executrix, or become the designee on a healthcare proxy. These responsibilities have many implications that may not be immediately apparent to you. Discuss these issues with your program coordinator if they arise.

Note: Some organizations have a policy of removing from their friendly visiting programs volunteers who do not follow these guidelines.

• **Do not tolerate verbal abuse or rude behavior.**
  Just as you are expected to be respectful of your friend, you should expect the same in return. Let your program coordinator know about any inappropriate behavior; it may indicate a medical or psychological condition that needs professional attention.

• **If your friend seems overwhelmed by feelings of sadness or anxiety,** contact your program coordinator. Professional counseling or support may be available.

• **Do not accept gifts or money.**
  If your older friend wants to express appreciation with gifts or money, emphasize that you enjoy this special friendship and that your time together is already a gift. For elders who feel increasingly frail or disenfranchised, giving is a precious assertion of self. Refusing a gift they deeply wish to give might hurt their feelings. You may suggest that your friend make a contribution to sustain the friendly visiting program that brought you together. If your friend persists, use your best judgment. Some volunteers have accepted flowers from older friends. One suggested that her friend host her for an ordered-in meal. If you have difficulty resolving the situation, or if the gift being offered is too valuable to accept, call your program coordinator to discuss other solutions.
Expanding Your Role
If you are considering taking on additional responsibilities in your friendly visiting relationship, discuss them with your program coordinator first. Your spontaneous offers of assistance, although genuine and thoughtful, may create further expectations and foster a dependency on you to continue providing such assistance. To prevent unrealistic expectations (and unnecessary disappointments) in your relationship, review your older friend’s needs with your program coordinator before making any additional commitments.
7 - Emergency Preparedness

As your friendship with your older friend develops, we suggest that you ask for pertinent medical information in case of medical emergencies, power blackouts, water supply disruption, blizzard, heat wave, etc.

In Case an Emergency Arises During a Visit

- **If your friend does not answer the telephone or door** when you have made plans to visit, be patient. He/she may not have heard the telephone or buzzer or may have forgotten the appointment. If you cannot reach your friend:
  - Call your friend's emergency contacts or your program coordinator.
  - If you suspect an emergency, call 911.

- **In the rare event that a medical emergency occurs during your visit**, it is best to assume your friend is at risk and to seek help immediately.
  - Call 911 and
  - Call your friend’s doctor.

- **While waiting for professional help,**
  - Try to make your friend feel as comfortable as possible.
  - Stay calm; it will help your older friend relax.
  - Report the incident to your program coordinator as soon as possible.

Forms for Your Reference

You will find two forms at the end of this book. Complete them together with your friend.

- **On-site Emergency Information** should be posted in a prominent place in your friend’s home (e.g., on the back of the front door or on the refrigerator), where it can easily be seen by emergency personnel.

- **Emergency Information for Volunteers** is for you to take home for your reference in case you learn of an emergency situation concerning your friend.

Emergency Preparedness Plan

While we all hope that emergencies will not occur, it is better to have a plan and never use it than to be caught by surprise. Call your program coordinator for assistance in developing an Emergency Preparedness Plan. After you and your friend have developed an emergency plan, review it periodically to make sure the senior remembers and understands it.
**Emergency Supplies**
You might want to ask your older friend if there are emergency supplies on hand, such as a flashlight, batteries, radio, bottled water and canned goods. If not, help or encourage your friend to obtain these supplies.

**Emergency Medical Response System**
Additionally, you may want to ask if your friend has, or wishes to obtain, an emergency medical response system that can ensure assistance in case of a fall or a need for medical attention. If your friend is interested, discuss this with your program coordinator.
8 - Getting Support

A friend of mine had to have a cataract operation and had no one to escort her home. I called my program coordinator, and she sent Marie, the escort who takes me walking every week, to help. This is the greatest thing I ever heard.

Estelle

As your relationship with your older friend evolves and deepens, it may also bring challenges and expose you to the sadness and frustrations of aging. If you have a concern about your friend or yourself at any time, turn to your program coordinator for support.

Support for Your Older Friend

Call your program coordinator if:

- **You become concerned about your friend’s health**, such as an illness or changes in vision, hearing, speech, hygiene, mobility, mood or memory;
- **Your friend is hospitalized**;
- **You are concerned about your friend’s ability to take care of basic needs**, e.g., cooking, shopping, dressing or bathing;
- **You observe homecare needs** or problems with a homecare worker;
- **You are concerned about your friend’s living conditions**, such as slippery throw rugs, inadequate lighting, overloaded electrical sockets, flammable objects or extreme clutter. Please take note of these environmental hazards and report them to your program coordinator;
- **Your friend needs financial and/or legal help** or referrals for service;
- **Someone close to your older friend becomes ill or dies**.

Support for Yourself

Call your program coordinator if:

- You are sad about your friend’s circumstances or deteriorating health and increasing frailty;
- You have difficulty coping with your friend’s depression;
- You feel overwhelmed by your friend’s expectations;
- You have conflicts with your older friend;
- Personal and/or professional circumstances make it difficult for you to maintain your weekly commitment;
- You need to discontinue your visiting relationship.
Call with good news, too!

Your program coordinator will be delighted to hear about your joys as a friendly visitor. With your permission, your stories may even be used to encourage others to give of themselves to the frail elderly.
On-site Emergency Information – To Be Posted

Name of resident

In case of emergency, contact:

Name ____________________________  Phone ________________

Relationship to Resident ____________________________

Resident’s primary physician

Name ____________________________  Phone ________________

Medications resident is taking

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Notes on resident’s medical condition(s)

Contact person at your friendly visiting program:

Name ____________________________  Phone ________________

Emergency contact number at your friendly visiting program:

Date: ____________________ (update annually)
Emergency Information for Volunteers

Name of Friend ______________________________   Phone ______________
Address  ______________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________

In case of emergency, contact:

Name ________________________________   Phone ______________

For access to home:

Name ________________________________   Phone ______________

Contact person at your friendly visiting program:

Name ________________________________   Phone ______________

Emergency contact number at your friendly visiting program:

____________________________________
[Sidebar:
The relationship between every friendly visitor and older friend is special; each brings unique talents, experiences and creativity to the friendship. The fruits of this exchange are joys and memories that last a lifetime.

DOROT is grateful to the friendly visiting organizations and other agencies providing services for the elderly whose input has informed and enriched this Guide.

[List in formation]

Bikur Cholim of Westchester
Bronx Jewish Community Council
Citymeals-on-Wheels
Connect2: Jewish Community Council of Greater Coney Island
Goddard Riverside Senior Center
Heights and Hill Community Council
Hungarian Jewish Social Support Foundation (Hungary)
JASA Pets Project
Jewish Care (England)
Jewish Social Welfare Commission (Poland)
Little Brothers - Friends of the Elderly (France)
Morningside Retirement and Health Services (MRHS)
United Neighbors of East Midtown Faith In Action

Back Cover

inspire
visit
discover
befriend

DOROT logo and address

[NOTE TO DESIGNER: ON EVERY PAGE OF THE BODY OF THE BOOK, INCLUDE WWW.FRIENDLYVISITING.ORG]