Recommendations for Visiting with Elders
9/15/2020

With continued good weather and overall, the state’s COVID-19 numbers remaining low, many elders and volunteers wonder if it is safe to start visiting in person, take a walk together outside, or help with specific tasks. The range of risk tolerance among individuals, and the diversity of health and environmental conditions need to all be considered. FriendshipWorks suggests using the following guidelines and questions to help guide your decision.

*If you are experiencing ANY symptom associated with COVID-19, such as coughing, fever, or shortness of breath, DO NOT visit or assist an elder or volunteer in person. Our goal is to keep both elders and volunteers safe!

Please keep in mind that the recommendations from Health officials may change as the situation improves or declines. Currently, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts recommends that high-risk populations, including elders, isolate through the end of Phase III. If any FriendshipWorks recommendations conflict with state or local health officials recommendations, please follow the health officials’ recommendation.

Guidelines:

- Please make sure to wear a mask and follow the latest guidance if you plan to be around any elder.
- For any volunteer, we strongly recommend no visiting indoors or entry into an elder’s residence at this time.
- Any volunteers who are engaged in Medical Escorts or Friendly Helping should wear a mask, use gloves, and use hand sanitizer. Please contact your coordinator if you would like another copy of the original April guidelines.
- For Friendly Visiting outdoors, both the elder and the volunteer need to be comfortable and neither should feel the need to meet in person if they are not ready to do so. FriendshipWorks will continue to support all matches meeting virtually.
  - Many assisted living and other elderly buildings may have specific policies regarding in person visiting. Volunteers should abide by any policies/recommendations. If a building/facility allows an elder to leave and visit outdoors, both the volunteer and the elder need to be comfortable with an in-person visit.
  - If you decide to visit outdoors or take a walk with an elder, use a mask and ensure at least 6 feet distance between you and the elder.
Any volunteer meeting in person with an elder is strongly encouraged to have a flu shot.

Questions to ask yourself or your elder before visiting an elder outside:

- Are any people in your household or close contacts being monitored, in self-quarantine, or been ill?
- Is your elder able to get to the sidewalk, a yard or take a walk without any help from you?
- Will you be willing to wear a mask and wash your hand/use sanitizer before visiting?
- Do you have hand sanitizer you can bring with you to use in case of an emergency where you needed to assist an elder?
- Does your job or activities increase your risk of being exposed to COVID-19 (and therefore, increasing risk for others)?
- Does your elder have any significant underlying health conditions that place either of you at more risk of serious complications from COVID-19?
- Is your elder aware of the risks involved and do you both feel safe visiting in person?

Once you answer these questions, we recommend discussing them with your elder before you start visiting. Your FriendshipWorks Coordinator is happy to talk with you further should you like to discuss a particular situation or ask additional questions.