# TEL-A-FRIEND

## GUIDLINES FOR TELEPHONE BEFRIENDING

Telephone befriending is a specialized skill which is probably best developed through practical experience. The following are guidelines which should help to make a conversation of greater benefit to the caller:-

### A. BEGINNING THE CONVERSATION

1. Answer the phone with "TEL-A-Friend, Information and Befriending. Can we help you?"

2. Give your first name as soon as suitable, and if the caller is to ring back at any time ensure that they remember it before hanging up. Ask also for their first name and use it during the conversation.

3. Find out fairly quickly where the person is phoning from. (e.g. Belfast, country areas), and if they can talk freely. If they are ringing from a call-box ask if they have enough money for a long chat, and if warranted get their number and ring them back - but watch the time.

4. Ask fairly soon "Are you homosexual?" and mention that you are also. (Some callers may assume that we're a group of helpful hets!)

5. If the caller is not of your own sex, ask "Would you prefer to speak to a man (or woman)? John's right here if you wish."

6. Because we advertise as an information service only (the Belfast Telegraph will not accept the work 'befriending') many callers may begin by asking "What sort of information do you have?" or "Where can I meet people?"

   Always begin by describing the work of Cara-Friend. Your words: "Perhaps I can tell you about Cara-Friend first." Then give an abbreviated version of our Introductory Sheet, mentioning that we provide two services: Information - on homosexuality, on social facilities for gays (i.e. pubs, discos and organisations), or specific information related to particular situations.

   Secondly, that we provide befriending - i.e. friendship and support to isolated gays - initially over the telephone and later if they wish in person. Stress our confidentiality and that we, as befrienders, are in a position not very different from themselves (i.e. partly closeted, some of us only recently having contacted Cara-Friend). Mention also that after meeting them, we can later introduce them to others either in small groups or at social functions.

   With this information they can then decide which service they require.

### B. INFORMATION

1. Be familiar with the information that is available at the phone desk (i.e. our Information Sheet; Gay News Guide; Spartacus Gay Guide).

2. If you are unable to supply obtainable information immediately, ask the caller to phone back on another day (a non-advertised befriending day); ensure that the volunteers of that day have been informed.

3. Indicate that we have information sheets etc., which can be sent out to the caller's address or to a post office address. (i.e. Post Restante)

4. Where appropriate, point out that GAY NEWS (a wealth of information), is on sale at the Kandy Kabin on Botanic Avenue.

5. If you are giving out extensive information (or arranging a meeting place/time), ask if the caller has a pen, and proceed accordingly.

## C. BEFRIENDING

The telephone is not the best of mediums for befriending, but for many callers it may be for a lenghty time - their only contact with another gay person. Therefore, one should always strive to develop a friendly rapport with the caller such that at some stage they may feel sufficiently confident to meet us.

1. Most of the points listed in "Notes on Befriending" apply to telephone befriending. These should be carefully re-read before staffing the phone.

2. Because of the expected high response of incoming calls on advertised befriending days, conversations should be brief (i.e. under 10 minutes). If extended telephone befriending is required, suggest that the caller ring back on a non-advertised night.

3. Get relevant information about the caller without obvious interrogation (e.g. age, domicile, gay contacts, interest in social facilities).

4. Don't force meetings on callers; if possible let them suggest it. In fact avoid arranging a meeting at the first call. Suggest they think it over and ring back later, but if they wish, do arrange it first time.

5. If a meeting is to be arranged specify that it is for a chat, and that you and another/or others will be there. Mention that there can be no sexual contact between the caller and their befrienders.

6. Be familier with the rota sheet and quick in arranging a time/place/persons. Be very wary about inviting a caller to your own home. 4 University Street can be used as a meeting place, and keys obtained from the Clients Committee.

7. Assess the persons stability, reliability in turning up and requirements.

8. If no follow-up has been arranged in ending a conversation, always mention that they can ring us again - either for information or a chat. i.e. "Ring again if you think we can be of further help."

## D. RECORDS

During the call:

1. Number each call in sequence (e.g. 1 - 1 - the first call on day one).

2. Make rough notes (on paper identified by the call number).

After the call:

1. Fill in the log-book.

2. For first calls, fill out a report sheet.

E. MISCELLANEOUS POINTS

1. Be punctual - arrive before duty-time and don't expect to leave 'til after. Get settled in and ready before the first call comes in.

2. Deal with hostile; hoax; or 'obscene' callers politely. Aviod discussion. Keep the line free for others.

3. Refuse politely to discuss personal matters with a caller, (e.g. your looks, your sexual preferences), particularly when these are suggestive.

4. Silent Calls - If someone too shy or nervous to utter a single work should ring, be ready with a gentle conversation. Build up confidence and try to keep the caller from putting down the phone.

5. Where you get a Third Party call suggest to the caller that the other person contact us themself, stressing confidentiality. Exceptions may include young people being discussed by their parents.

6. At the end of the session ensure that all reports are properly filled and filed. Inform back-up befrienders immediately of arrangements made.

7. DO NOT give out names, addresses or telephone numbers, or information on other befrienders or consultants (e.g. doctors, social workers etc.) unless you have the specific permission of the person concerned. NEVER give out the location of the telephone.

8. DO NOT volunteer information on 'cottaging'. DO NOT name specific toilets. Use your discretion in discussing 'trolling'.

TEL-A-FRIEND

Internal memo for the attention of TAF personel:

CODE OF PRACTICE

I. Volunteers shall not engage in sexual activity with callers as a direct result of those callers contacting a Gay Switchboard service.

2. If a caller has to be met outside the centre, two volunteers must be available for the duty.

3. Switchboards shall ensure that their services are available as and when stated.

4. Each gay switchboard shall have a selection and training procedure for prospective new volunteers.

5. The information provided by a gay switchboard shall be as full, accurate and unbiased as possible.

6. Gay switchboards shall operate a doctrine of absolute confidentiality in respect of callers and volunteers with-in a switchboard.

7. Information, advice or befriending offered by gay switchboards shall be non-directive in nature.

8. In operating a common code of practice

   a) There shall be no discrimination in respect of callers on the grounds of age, sex, race or sexual orientation.

   b) There shall be a selection committee who will have the final say in the recruitment of trainees.

   c) There shall be recognition of the right of lesbians to organise seperately.

9. Membership of any political or religious organisation shall NOT be a prerequisite of acceptance as a trainee or a member.

MARCH, 1980.

# CARA - FRIEND.

## Notes on Befriending.

The work of befriending can be challenging, exciting, rewarding; it can also be - and often is - difficult. Nobody can say, "Here is a list of rules, follow these and you won't go wrong", simply because of the nature of befriending itself; it involves individuals - and as gays we all know what happens when society tries to make "rules" about the way individuals should behave.

So these points below are intended for your guidance. They are principles which it might be useful to keep in mind when you're befriending; they are intended to help the befriender and to be of maximum use to the client.

DO:-

1). Put the client at ease, as much as you can. Let the client take time to start chatting. Try to be relaxed and natural, right from the start.

2). LISTEN. This can't be emphasised enough. Be perpared to accept that much of the help you can give, is in listening and nothing more. Encourage the client to talk, and let him/her do so freely. Be attentive, avoid interruption.

3). Assess exactly what the client wants. Do this firstly by listening, but later on ask directly if you think this will be of help - "What would you like us to do?" - "How can we be of use to you?"

4). Relate your own experiences if you think these are relevant and that doing so might help the client.

5). Give relevant factual information about gay bars, publication, meetings and so on.

6). Co-operate with the other befriender during the meeting. Work together for the benefit of the client. If your fellow-befriender and the client are discussing a point, let the conversation run on. Make any point of your own afterwards.

7). Try to assess your work after the meeting. Discuss the client with the other befriender. How might the meeting have been improved? Did you give the client what was wanted? Did you work well together?

8). Be concise and definite in writing your Report. State the clients problems, as seen by the client and by yourself. Mention the options given to the client.

DON'T 1). Write anything at all during the meeting. Make "mental notes", instead.

DON'T 2). Over-emphasise your own ideas. By all means express these if you think this will help the client - remember, they are after all only your ideas. Concentrate instead on your actual experience, as the client can relate to it.

DON'T 3). Give advice. We are <u>not</u> a counselling service. It's no use saying "if I were you..." because you are not the client. Give factual information, indicate possibilities, relate your experience. Let the client decided him/herself.

DON'T 4). Judge the client. Try instead to show that you understand difficulties, without making value-judgements of them.

DON'T 5). Categorise clients. Every client is, like you, an INDIVIDUAL.

DON'T 6). Leave a client at a "loose end" after a meeting. Whenever possiblew, arrange some sort of follow-up definitely, e.g. a futher meeting of letter. If a client states that he/she does not wish for any futher contact to be fixed, say something like "Well, now you've got our address. Please remember that we're here to be contacted....we'll be very glad if you feel like getting in touch again at some stage. Don't hesitate to write to us."

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