



## Conversations to Remember (C2R) Tip Sheet for Virtual Visits

- These visits are conversations, not interviews
  - When you are talking to a senior, don't rattle off a list of questions. Start each new topic with a story. This story should be more than just a couple sentences. When you have a question, you should first answer by telling a story. While you are talking, the senior will be thinking about the topic of your story so that at the end of your story when you address the senior, they will have an easier time joining the conversation.
- Ask follow-up questions
  - If the senior or the other student on the call says something interesting or talks about something you don't know about, you can join in by asking them to give you more information about the topic - but be careful not to ask the senior too many questions in a row - you do not want them to feel like they are being interrogated.
- Delve deeper into topics
  - You don't always have to ask questions for a conversation to continue. Exchanging stories and thoughts can take the conversation in a different direction than you intended.
- Let the conversation flow naturally
  - One topic can lead to other topics of conversations as they come up. For example, you might tell a story about your favorite sport and then end it by asking the senior what their favorite sport is. They may say swimming, which leads to conversations about going to the beach, fun swimming stories, vacations, etc. To get to these types of conversations, try to go more in depth with your stories, rather than switching from question to question quickly.
- Pick topics that you can talk about and be prepared with stories
  - Some seniors will get on the call and will talk a lot - but on our calls, this is less common. Many of the seniors who sign up for the weekly video calls are more quiet and reserved, which means that you, the student volunteers, need to keep the conversation going.
  - Before EVERY call you need to come up with at least 6 stories that you can tell which will start the conversation going. You will be required to list the story topics or a couple of words about the story in the room for your call before each call begins. For the mock call, you should just write this some place that you will have access to during the mock call.
  - When you tell your story it needs to be more than one or two sentences. Don't be afraid to go in depth when telling the story, and at the end of the story don't just



leave it hanging - now address the senior and bring them into the conversation. If the senior doesn't respond, bring the other students into the conversation.

- Talk to the other volunteers
  - Sometimes the senior may be quieter and may not want to talk, which is perfectly fine. To allow your conversation to not be completely one sided, make conversation with the other volunteers. Take time to engage with one another, regardless of how much the senior is talking. BUT – be careful not to exclude the senior, make sure that even when you are speaking with the other student(s) you still address the senior and attempt to bring them into the conversation. In other words, if you are responding to something one of the other students says, start your response with the senior's name, to show that you are addressing the senior.
- Use the seniors name:
  - Start your story by using the senior's name and then continue including their name in your sentences as you speak. This will keep the senior engaged, and let the senior know that you are talking to them.
- Talk to the senior like they are a new friend or new person in school
  - When a new person joins your school, the first conversations with them typically consist of learning about their lives and creating a bond. When we do this, we subconsciously use almost all of the previously mentioned tips. While the senior may be older and have different life experiences than a new person in school, treating them in the same way can help make the conversation easier and more natural.
- Ending the Call
  - At the end of the call thank the senior for taking time out of his or her day to speak with you. Sometimes they feel like they are being a burden, and you want to let them know that you appreciate them speaking with you. Also tell them that you are looking forward to speaking with them again next week.
- Prepare topics for future calls based off of the senior's interest
  - If a senior mentions a book, movie, etc. that they like, learn a bit about that topic after your call, so you can talk about it next time.
  - If you tell a senior you are going to do something, like read a book or watch a tv show, make sure you follow through. Regardless of their cognitive state, they may remember this in the future.
- Don't start a topic by saying, "Do you want to speak about this?"
  - Phrasing questions in this way adds the component of whether a senior wants to discuss the topic, which can bring more confusion, as they may already be struggling to come up with an answer.
  - If a senior doesn't want to answer something or discuss a certain topic, it will become clear to you through their body language or response.



- For example, instead of saying “Do you want to talk about favorite vacations?” you should just start telling a story about your favorite vacation.
- Avoid overly broad questions, specifically when it comes to their past. For example, a good type of broad question could be, “Do you have a favorite vacation memory?”
  - However, a bad type of broad question is, “Do you have a favorite memory?”
  - A question like this is hard for a senior with dementia to answer, as it covers an overwhelming amount of subject areas.
  - Asking more pointed questions will lead to better results and more in depth conversations.
- Don’t ask questions that look into the future, like, “Do you have any plans?”
  - The future starts the second your call with the senior ends.
  - Most seniors don’t know what they will be doing in the future, which can become triggering for them.
  - Additionally, with COVID, some communities are having little to no activities during the day, so the seniors are not doing anything (even 3 years into COVID, there are times when a senior community still goes into a lockdown state for a week or two at a time).
  - Asking this question can become upsetting for the senior.
- Avoid the question, “Do you want to tell a bit about yourself?”
  - Along with this question being very broad and hard for the senior to answer, it also makes the conversation sound like an interview.
  - We want to avoid making our conversations feel like an interview, as it can be uncomfortable and stressful for the senior.
- Don’t ask complex questions
  - A complex question is one that has multiple parts to it, like “What is your favorite song and who is the artist?” While the question could lead to an interesting conversation, having two questions combined into one may be confusing for the senior, as it adds more to think about.
  - Instead, ask the first half of your question, which is “What is your favorite song” in this example. Use the other half of the question, which is “Who is the artist” as a follow up question.
- **Telling stories is the best trick in the book**
  - Our experienced volunteers find that telling stories about your life, no matter how mundane they may seem, are the best way to connect with the senior and break away from continuously asking questions
  - Stories are also a good way to fill in any pauses
  - When telling a story, you can also use it as a transition to a new topic
  - For example, if you were talking about sports and there’s nothing more to say, you might say, “My brother plays soccer all the time. It is his favorite thing, so it takes up a large amount of his time. It also takes up my dad’s time because he is



always driving him. The two of them love soccer so much that they talk about it all day every day, even at the dinner table. It makes me kind of hate soccer, since I hear so much about it at dinner. While they talk, I usually pay more attention to my food. My favorite food is steak, I like it cooked rare and the thicker the steak the better. I remember one time...(tell your story). Then you can ask: do you have a favorite food?" In this example, the conversation topic has now changed to food, without a drastic switch.

- Support
  - If at any time you need assistance or guidance, reach out to C2R. We are here to assist and support you.
  - During your weekly call you will have someone monitoring the room in the chat application so that you can seek immediate assistance by writing a message there.