



## Establishing and Maintaining a Meaningful Companionship

**What does it mean to establish and maintain a meaningful long-term companionship with an older person as a volunteer or caregiver?**

**It means to experience a genuine partnership, discover more about what you have in common, and build the foundation of an enriching and reciprocal relationship.**

**It means to be together, to be one: to go beyond each individual to create something new.**

It is important to be aware of your own motivations for providing companionship, to be aware of your values and to identify situations to which you react strongly.

Take the time to get to know each other, to establish common companionship boundaries.

You must know and feel comfortable with yourself before you can reach out to others, become part of something greater, and contribute to a caring companionship full of sharing and discovery.

We wish you pleasant reading and a rewarding companionship journey!

**Little Brothers**

## Testimonials

*"I love what I do. Older people love to learn and want to learn: not only that, they have so much to share.*

*They are walking libraries: it's incredible! All this nourishes me and brings me a lot of happiness!"*

Gaétane, Volunteer for Little Brothers



## Good practices

- Prepare yourself emotionally and be aware of your own mindset before engaging with the elder;
- Establish clear guidelines, for example, the frequency of visits or the type of companionship desired;
- Set a limit on what personal information you are willing to share while remaining sincere and genuine;
- Create a trustworthy, safe and cozy environment;
- Take an interest in the person's history and their life experiences, ask open-ended questions;
- Do not minimize difficult testimonies or personal discomfort. Show compassion;
- Adhere to the organization's guidelines for intervention and refer to professionals if the situation evolves or becomes concerning.

## Telephone

- Choose a quiet location. Be available;
- Do not share your phone number;
- Adapt to the other person's pace, adapt your language: take time, let the other person speak, ask open-ended questions that encourage communication.



## Attitudes to adopt



- Embrace the whole person.
- Respect the elder's environment.
- Give the companionship time, become aware of your successes, now matter how small.
- You are not alone! As a volunteer, share your observations: your coordinator can offer you perspective and support in dealing with difficult situations you may encounter.
- As a close caregiver, do not hesitate to consult with professionals or organizations in your area to get appropriate support and establish a network.



## Things to avoid

- Deciding on someone's behalf, imposing your ideas;
- Insisting on ideas for activities;
- Making the other person's stories all about you;
- Making unrealistic promises in the context of your companionship.

## Additional resources

### Reading

D'ANSEBOURG Thomas, *Cessez d'être gentil, soyez vrai!*, les Éditions de l'Homme, 2013.

### Online

Programme EVE, *Cessez d'être gentil, soyez vrai!*, conférence de Thomas d'Ansembourg, [vidéo] <https://bit.ly/soyez-vrais>. (in French only)

Little Brothers, *Little Brothers Factsheet: Complex Health Disorders*, <https://www.petitsfreres.ca/programmes/tcs/> (in French only)

Government of Canada, Age-Friendly Communication: Facts, Tips and Ideas, <https://bit.ly/fact-tips-ideas>