

# It might be scary, but making phone calls can be good for young people's wellbeing

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Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

Some people might remember the days of coming back from school eager to call a friend, sometimes sitting for hours talking about anything and everything. However, today most young people rarely call each other. The very idea of calling someone or receiving a call seems to

cause anxiety in many.

When Alexander Graham Bell invented the telephone in 1876 it's doubtful that he imagined how its usage would change over time. What started out as a wired medium for a voice conversation is now wireless and mobile, used to transmit written messages, photographs and access the internet.

To some extent the changing use of the telephone is positive for [young people](#), as phones allow them to communicate with people worldwide more easily and quickly than before.

Despite, how "connected" we are and how easy it might be to communicate, [mental ill-health](#), including anxiety and depression, is on the increase among young adults. They were also one of the groups who felt [most lonely](#) as a result of the pandemic.

Would this outcome have been different had they used their phones for live calls? It might have. Particularly given that that a live [phone](#) conversation can make us [feel good](#) and give us a sense of fulfillment, which continues after we've hung up.

## Meaningful phone calls

Arguably it's the quality not quantity of phone calls which is important, and those which support meaningful relationships with significant others and friends can improve well-being.

Social neuroscientist, John Cacioppo's [loneliness theory](#) suggests that when people feel lonely, they become more motivated to meaningfully connect with others as a remedy against the negative emotions, thoughts and feelings associated with [loneliness](#).

In 2018, the BBC carried out the [world's largest loneliness study](#) and found that 40% of 16 to 24-year-olds reported feeling lonely. This might seem like an alarming finding, but Cacioppo's theory suggests that there may be a window of opportunity to alleviate loneliness and keep it at bay before it becomes harmful.

This is where live phone calls can help. Calling someone you feel close to and engaging in a meaningful conversation over the phone can alleviate loneliness and help [young people](#) reconnect with others. Although phone calls are not a panacea for loneliness, they can have beneficial effects.

Having dialogue in real time also helps us clarify things by creating an opportunity to ask questions and listen, along with sharing knowledge and ideas in a mutual space. The benefits of this reciprocity and being present with another can help with [problem solving](#) and reduces misunderstandings, which can be interpreted as [social rejection](#)).

Many of us have had the experience of getting the tone or intention of a text confused, which has sent us into a bit of tailspin. It's harder to confuse what someone means on a [phone call](#). And if you do, it's easy to ask for clarification.

## **Change your habits, make a call**

As well as helping with loneliness, [phone calls](#) with a [friend](#) or relative can help regulate our nervous system and create feelings of belonging in ways which are lost when we don't use our voices.

When we make calls, we pick up cues through the [rhythm of the voice](#), the way it rises and falls, which can help us feel safe, build trust and create warm and cozy feelings that can support the [nervous system](#).

Trust is enhanced through positive conversation as our body chemistry changes, creating oxytocin (the love hormone) and a drop in cortisol ([the primary stress hormone](#)).

The effect of a voice's rhythm goes beyond the content of what's said. According to American Psychologist [Albert Mehrabian](#) when a person is communicating at an [emotional level](#), such as on a phone [call](#), 38% of the communication is credited to the effects of vocal quality and 7% to the content of what is being said.

Now we know the well-being value of making a phone call, here are some tips that might help you get started.

## **1. Decide if you prefer a voice call or a video call**

With video calls it can be great to see a friend or family member in their own environment. This may help you to feel more socially connected and it may be easier to see facial expressions and laughter.

## **2. Will it be a surprise call or planned?**

You and your friend might like the element of surprise that comes from an impromptu call. However, if someone does not answer or cannot talk bear in mind that it's just not the right time for them. They may be busy with family, shopping or eating dinner. If you want to avoid this, send a text asking the friend or family member if they are free to talk and if not set up a mutually convenient time later.

## **3. What to talk about?**

You may love to talk and have lots of spontaneous ideas while on the phone. Or you may prefer in advance of the call to jot down a few ideas

of what you would like to talk about. This will ensure you don't forget things you want to say or avoid moments where you might be thinking about what to say.

## 4. Taking the focus away from the talk

If you want the focus to be less on the talk, but still make a social connection why not try something like a [video call](#) while simultaneously playing a [video game](#) with a friend or watching something. The talk will then be governed by the game or show and take away any pressure you might feel about what to talk about.

## 5. Start with simple things

If this all sounds too daunting, then start with simple things. Make shorter calls or interact with someone in friendly way on a business call.

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