

Before the conversation

- Review the Companion details (name, support needed, contact info)
- Be aware of other services that may be available to assist the companion, reducing reliance on Vinnies
- Arrange a visit with a partner, ideally with complementary skills
- It is advisable to call the Companion to introduce yourself and confirm a suitable time for the visit
- Prepare necessary materials (vouchers, information) for the visit
- Ask for God's guidance in a brief prayer.
"Jesus guide me as I reach out in your name"

During the conversation

- Approach the conversation with a compassionate and open mindset. Be sensitive to the emotional state of the companion
- Build a relationship with the companion
- Offer a simple introduction and ask how you can help
- Listen attentively and show understanding through positive body language
- Remember it has taken much for the Companion to ask for help and they may be stressed or agitated. Talk calmly with them. Learn how to deescalate a situation.

After the conversation

- Debrief if needed
- Ensure paper copies containing personal information are destroyed in accordance with the St Vincent de Paul Society Canberra/Goulburn Records Management Policy, Privacy Policy and the Privacy Act 1988
- Enter visit information in CDS (Companion database)
- Review visit at next Conference meeting



'Do not be content to dole out alms. That is a cheap and unwise charity even if you have wealth. Go and make friends among the poor. Give to each family what personal help your own better training enables you to give. In one case the help will be legal, in another, medical. To some you may judiciously offer practical advice. For others, you will procure work. In all cases help them to help themselves and consider it your primary duty, whether you take them tickets for food or not, to render some personal service...'

Joseph Emanuel Bailly - the first president of the Society of St Vincent de Paul and a member of the initial group of seven that first met in April 1833.

CONVERSATIONS *with* COMPANIONS

Hello, we're
from Vinnies

I need help

These guidelines aim to ensure interactions with Companions are safe, confidential, and respectful, fostering trusting relationships and providing effective assistance.



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CONVERSATIONS WITH COMPANIONS

Conversations with companions are a core activity for members of the St Vincent de Paul Society. Our conference members are a diverse group who carry out the Society's "Good Works" in the Archdiocese. Members are central to the work of the Society, helping companions by giving them a 'hand up' to make life-changing decisions.

Inspired by the Society's founders in 1833, our Conference Members continue to visit people in their homes or within Vinnies Centres to provide support, friendship, and material assistance.

The purpose of the conversation for Vincentians is to **deepen their relationship with the companion and provide relevant, meaningful, and appropriate assistance**. Supporting the poor in every possible way is a path towards Vincentians deepening their faith in action.

A conversation with the companion is often more important than the material assistance we give. Someone experiencing social isolation may be asking for material assistance as a pretext for simply needing someone to talk to.

The spirituality of St Vincent de Paul is encountered and expressed in visitations

- To love God, our Father, with the sweat of our brow and the strength of our arms
- To see Christ in the poor and the poor in Christ
- To share the compassionate and liberating love of Christ the Evangeliser and Servant of the poor
- To heed the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

THINGS TO REMEMBER

Respecting dignity

- Treat everyone with respect, regardless of background or situation
- Avoid judging or assessing worthiness.

Effective assistance

- Offer a *hand-up*, not just material aid
- Establish trust and friendship
- Empower individuals to take control of their destiny.

Ensuring safety

- Do not enter if the location feels unsafe; suggest an alternative meeting place
- Keep a mobile phone and keys on your person and be aware of exits
- Report any incidents and prioritise your safety
- If you have any concerns, cut the visit short
- Don't park in the driveway to avoid being parked in.

Meeting in Companion's home

- Understand the value of seeing people in their environment
- Identify underlying needs through personal interactions
- Consider home visits as part of a holistic approach to assistance.

Meeting in a support centre

- Create a welcoming environment, resembling a dining or lounge room
- Sit together with those we assist, not behind a desk
- Work in pairs for safety, wisdom, and better support.

Communication

- Be fully present and listen actively
- Allow enough time for each visit to build trust
- Use positive and engaging language.

Language and terminology

- Use terms like "companions" or "people we assist" instead of "clients" or "cases"
- Reflect values through language and encourage respectful discussions.

Spiritual formation

- Pray individually and as a Conference
- Reflect on service as part of spiritual practice—your Faith in action
- Recognise the blessings received from those we assist.

TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL CONVERSATION

- Always **visit in pairs** for support, safety, and compliance with policies
- **Wear your name badge** and introduce yourself as a member of St Vincent de Paul
- **Greet the companion** in a friendly and respectful manner
- **Smile**, the companion may not have seen an authentic one in a while
- **Avoid making judgements** before or after the visit
- Do not enter the home **unless invited** to do so by the companion
- Start with general, **open-ended questions** and be friendly, relaxed, and empathetic
- **Listen** with your heart
- **Focus** on the companion's needs without making promises that may not be fulfilled
- **Avoid discussing sensitive topics** like religion or politics
- **Maintain confidentiality** and respect the companion's dignity
- Be patient, understanding that building **trust takes time**.