

# Telephone helplines

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

- To understand how to use the NHS 111 service to get advice on urgent medical conditions
- To know that there are other telephone helplines
- To understand the type of information that will be requested



## RESOURCES

- Copies of Resources 1A and B, 3 and 4
- Scenario cards prepared from Resource 2
- Copies of Resource 5 (Activity 4 Support and ESOL)
- Telephone directories and local newspapers with helpline information
- Audio equipment

- Audio scripts 25–27
- Highlighter pens

## RELATED TOPICS

NHS website (Theme 9, Topic 6)  
Emergency calls (Theme 9, Topic 10)

## HEALTH SKILLS

There are many sources of help and advice that are now available on the telephone. Although for many people the first reaction is to contact their local GP practice or clinic when they have a health problem, an increasing number of people are becoming aware of the benefits of using telephone helplines such as NHS 111. These enable people to receive professional advice at any time of day or night and in many cases replace the need to visit the doctor, or hospital A&E departments.

It is important that learners understand what services are available to them online and on the telephone. It is also important for them to anticipate the type of information that will be requested when they phone for advice, and understand the sort of help they will be given.

### Related health information

[www.nhs.uk/111](http://www.nhs.uk/111)

[www.helplines.org.uk](http://www.helplines.org.uk) (Helplines Partnership, with information about finding specific helplines)

YouTube (search NHS 111)

## FUNCTIONAL SKILLS

In order to use NHS 111 and other telephone helplines, learners need to be able to:

- understand how to access these services
- anticipate and plan what information they will be asked to give
- listen and respond to questions and advice.

### Functional Skills/Core Curriculum

Activities in this topic will contribute to learning in the following curriculum areas:

- find out what will be needed in order to answer questions on the phone  
**English** L1.11 (**L**Rt/L1.1)
- locate information from written text  
**English** L1.14 (**L**Rt/L1.5)
- listen and respond to questions from medical practitioners **English** E3.3 (**L**Slc/E3.3) **English** E3.2 (Slc/E3.4).

- Introduce the topic by explaining that although the GP or the hospital are there to deal with our health issues, there may be times when using other support services such as the Internet or telephone helplines may be a better way to deal with immediate needs.
- Talk about times when people may feel ill, worried or concerned and would benefit from speaking to a knowledgeable person over the phone.
- Encourage learners to suggest scenarios. These can be personal or generalised depending on the group and their relationship with you and with each other. It may be useful to suggest some scenarios to get the group started. These might include:
  - a person feeling ill in the middle of the night or outside normal surgery hours – at weekends or bank holidays
  - a person with a problem that they need to discuss confidentially with someone who is not directly involved
  - an emergency situation
  - a person who just needs more information about a health issue
  - a person who needs to speak to specialised support about a particular condition (e.g. a terminal illness, a problem such as drug abuse, financial problems)
  - a person who feels they have no one else to turn to for advice or support.

*Have you ever been ill (or had someone in the family that was ill) in the middle of the night and needed to talk to a health expert?*

*Are there times when you think people might like to talk to a stranger about specific problems?*

## ACTIVITY 1

### Understand what helplines are available

- Check learners understand what you mean by helplines.
- Ask learners for the names of any helplines they are already aware of. Display these. These might include NHS 111, MIND (mental health), Childline, The Silver Line (older people) and the Samaritans.
- Use Resource 1A and 1B to discuss some of the telephone helplines that are available, and how to find the numbers. 1B refers to PALS (Patient Advice and Liaison Service) which is a locally-based service. You will need to determine the relevant local service for your learners. Note that the PALS website is for professionals only.
- Explain the key points about the NHS 111 service. Also point out the use of the emergency number 999 (or 112 which is the European emergency number and can also be used in the UK in exactly the same way as 999).
- Discuss what long-term conditions people might be living with, and about which they might want to find out information or ask for advice. Suggest that learners do an internet search for helplines that might provide this. A search for 'helpline' plus the specific condition (e.g. carers) will come up with some ideas.
- Discuss which helplines may be relevant to the learner group and other sources of information that may also be able to provide help (e.g. websites).
- Give pairs or small groups of learners scenario cards prepared from Resource 2. Ask them to discuss the scenarios, decide on the appropriate helpline and locate the number.
- Check and discuss answers. Ask learners to make a note of numbers that are important to them. Emphasise that if they are not sure who to contact, NHS 111 or their local PALS will be able to advise them and give contact details.

*What telephone helplines do you know?*

*Where can you find other helpline numbers?*

## Support

- Learners may need support to scan for headings and key words in directories and other sources. Ask direct questions about the scenario (Resource 2) to establish the type of information they are looking for. Restrict the amount of information learners need to access. Give more straightforward scenarios to begin with.
- Check that dyslexic learners are able to copy and dial telephone numbers in the correct sequence. Give strategies for remembering numbers.

## ESOL

- Learners may need support with vocabulary. Encourage them to work out the meaning from the context (e.g. 'What do you think common health problems means?' 'Which word tells you that you don't pay for the phone call?'). Give simple explanations of unfamiliar words (e.g. 'resolve a problem' means to find a solution).
- Learners may like to add some notes on Resource 1 about each service in their first language.

## ACTIVITY 2

### Prepare for a call to NHS 111 helpline

- Give out Resource 3 and discuss the questions. Draw out anything learners already know about the NHS 111 service.
- Use Resource 4 as an information source to answer the questions as a group or in pairs. Use the answers as a focus for discussion. You might also like to watch the YouTube video 'Call NHS 111' for more information.
- Ask learners to work in groups to make a checklist of the sort of information they will need when making a call to NHS 111. Key points for the checklist should include:
  - personal details (name, telephone number and postcode)
  - details about the person you are calling about (if calling for another person)
  - what the call is about
  - a description of the symptoms, when they started and how they affect you (or the other person)
  - what you or the other person have tried already
  - any drugs you or the other person are taking
  - any existing medical conditions
  - any other relevant details.
- Go through these points and ask learners to offer examples of the sort of information required for each one. Ask for strategies for preparing the information and remembering what to say.

*Do you have any experience of using the NHS 111 service?*

*How helpful did you find it?*

*What information do you think you will be asked for?*

*Why do you think call handlers need so much information that is not about the symptoms?*

### Support

- Learners can work in pairs for support.
- Note that some learners, especially those with transient lifestyles, may not know their postcode and you may need to discuss strategies to deal with helpline operators' requests for this information.

### ESOL

- As you go through the list of points, discuss useful phrases. For example: (point 2) 'It's about my (daughter)' (point 4) 'She's got (earache)'; 'She feels (sick)'; 'It started/came on (yesterday)' (point 5) 'She's taken/I've given her (painkillers)'.
- Give learners practice in giving their personal details – name, phone number, address, doctor's details. Provide feedback on clarity, speed and spellings.

## ACTIVITY 3

### Watch a call to NHS 111

- Watch the following clip which shows what happens when you call NHS 111. Search on YouTube 'NHS 111 An Inclusive Service' This is a film made by the young people of The Reporter's Academy and is designed for people with a learning disability, autism or both. However, it is very useful for showing the process even for those without a learning disability.
- You might like to use the checklist developed in Activity 2 to tick off items such as personal details – name, telephone number, postcode as they watch the clip. The learners might also note down any other information that was asked for, which is not on their checklist.
- Discuss the call as a whole group. Point out strategies the people in the clip used that would be helpful to everyone in this situation e.g. asking the call handler to speak slowly and not use big words
- Give the learners the opportunity to ask questions and clarify points. You might need to watch the clip a second time.

*Why is it important to speak clearly?*

*What could you say if you don't understand?*

### Support

Learners may need support in listening for specific information. Be prepared to replay sections several times.

### ESOL

To get the most from the video clip, you may need to go through the following steps:  
Step 1: set the context – explaining who made the video and why  
Step 2: discuss likely content with learners – what they can expect to see  
Step 3: play it through in short sections, pausing to check for understanding and giving the opportunity to clarify words/points

### TIP

Learners may like to make a personal checklist of key information (e.g. address, postcode, medical history, medicine taken).

## ACTIVITY 4

### Feel confident answering questions

- Hand out Resource 5 and go through the questions with learners. Explain they are making a call to NHS 111 about their young son, aged 8, who is ill. Get the learners to practise responding to the questions in pairs.

#### Support

Hand out Resource 5 and go through the questions with learners one at a time. Make notes about the answers and practise responding to them together as a whole group.

#### ESOL

- Hand out Resource 5 and work with a volunteer to model how to answer the questions.
- Set up pairs. Allow time for learners to discuss a scenario and decide what to say. When they are ready, encourage them to practise the call. Ensure that learners swap roles.

*Can you think of a time when you might need to ring the NHS 111 service?*

#### Action

- Suggest that learners create a list of helplines that will be relevant to them. They can keep this list by the telephone at home. They might also like to do the same with some useful websites.
- Learners should also develop a checklist of their own personal information and update this when necessary.
- Further role plays of emergency situations, as well as asking for advice about health matters could be useful.

*Which helplines would be useful to you?*

# Telephone helplines

## RESOURCE 1A



What can I do if I feel ill or have health concerns? Should I always go to the doctor?

How can I find out more about local services or other support organisations?

NHS 111 is much more than a helpline – if you're worried about an **urgent medical concern**, you can call 111 to speak to a fully trained adviser.

Depending on the situation, the NHS 111 team can connect you to a nurse, emergency dentist or even a GP, and can arrange face-to-face appointments if they think you need one.

NHS 111 advisers can also assess if you need an ambulance and send one immediately if needed.



### When should I call NHS 111?

If you're worried about an urgent medical concern, call 111 and speak to a fully trained adviser. For less urgent health needs, contact your GP or local pharmacist.



What do I do in an emergency?

If you need to contact the police, fire service, ambulance or coastguard in an emergency: **dial 999** or 112.

# Telephone helplines

RESOURCE 1B

Where else can I get confidential advice?



## PALS (Patient Advice and Liaison Service)

PALS provides help in many ways.

For example, it can:

- help you with health-related questions
- help resolve concerns or problems when you're using the NHS
- tell you how to get more involved in your own healthcare

PALS can give you information about:

- the NHS
- the NHS complaints procedure, including how to get help if you want to make a complaint
- support groups outside the NHS

You can find your nearest **PALS** office on the NHS website. You can also ask your GP surgery, hospital or phone NHS 111 for details of your nearest PALS.

## Other helplines

### Drugs



Tel: 0300 123 6600

### Carers Direct



Tel: 0300 123 1053

### Emotional help



Tel: 116 123

### Family lives



Tel: 0808 800 2222

You can find many helplines on the internet and some are in the telephone book. Some are freephone numbers (0800 and 0808) and are free to call from all landlines and mobiles. Freephone numbers are not shown on some telephone bills. 0300 numbers are used by charities and are often a bit cheaper to call.

# Telephone helplines

## RESOURCE 2

**1**

You are worried that a friend has an alcohol problem. Where can you get some advice about this?

**2**

Your mother is in hospital and you are unhappy about the care and treatment she is receiving. Is there someone you can call to talk about this?

**3**

It is late at night and your child has a high temperature. He has been unwell for most of the day but now seems worse. Who can you call for advice?

**4**

You have a hospital appointment at a hospital 30 miles from your house. You don't drive and there is no public transport to get you there on time. Is there someone you can ask for help with transport?

**5**

Everything is going wrong: you have split up with your partner, you have money problems and you have lost your job. You feel desperate and alone. Who can help?

**6**

You have a long-term condition that you have been told cannot be treated. You hear of a new treatment that may help. How can you find out if this is available on the NHS?

**7**

You are a long-term carer for a child with a severe disability. You need a break. Who can you call about this?

**8**

You call in on your elderly mother and find her unconscious at the bottom of the stairs. Who do you call?



# Telephone helplines

## RESOURCE 3

Can I call  
NHS 111 at  
any time?

What will they  
ask me?

Do I need to give  
my name?

Can I make  
a call for  
someone else?

How much will  
the call cost?



Is the service  
confidential?

What sort of  
advice will they  
give me?

If I'm ringing about a health  
problem, will I need to give details  
about the symptoms and previous  
medical conditions?

## NHS 111

NHS 111 is the free number to call **when you need medical help fast – but it's not an emergency.**

It takes you to the right service, first time.

It is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

Calls are free from landlines and mobile phones.



**when it's less  
urgent than 999**

### **When should you call NHS 111?**

It is the number you should call when you need advice or medical treatment quickly, and you cannot wait for an appointment to see your doctor.

For less urgent health needs, contact your GP or local pharmacist.

### **What happens when you call 111?**

When you call 111 a fully trained adviser will ask questions to find out what help you need. Depending on what the problem is, the adviser will:

- give you advice on how to deal with the problem yourself (self-care)
- connect you to a nurse, emergency dentist or GP
- book you a face-to-face appointment
- send an ambulance directly, if needed
- send you to the local service that can help you best with your concern.

## Feel confident answering questions

**Call handler:** You're through to NHS 111. Are you phoning for yourself or somebody else?

**You:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Call handler:** That's fine. I need to take some details. What's your telephone number?

**You:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Call handler:** Could I have your postcode, please?

**You:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Call handler:** Could you repeat your postcode?

**You:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Call handler:** And the patient's name?

**You:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Call handler:** Can you spell that for me?

**You:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Call handler:** What's your son's date of birth?

**You:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Call handler:** Just a few more questions ... What's the name of your GP?

**You:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Call handler:** And the practice?

**You:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Call handler:** Now, can you tell me what's wrong with your son?

**You:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Call handler:** Thank you. I'm now going to hand you over to a nurse who can deal with your questions.



# Telephone helplines

## ANSWERS AND AUDIO SCRIPTS

There are no answers or audio scripts for this topic.