

Cornea Donation Telephone Conversation

HLQ SUMMARY SKILLS CARD

This summary card is for staff making cornea donation telephone calls. It offers a simple guide to preparing for the call, introducing cornea donation, and taking families through the Health & Lifestyle Questionnaire (HLQ) in a way that is clear, compassionate and safe. The aim is to support you to ask sensitive questions skilfully, protect the donor's dignity, and help families make informed decisions at a very difficult time.

PREPARE YOURSELF AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Prepare yourself

- One slow, steady breath before you dial.
- Remind yourself:

My role is to explore cornea donation sensitively and complete the HLQ safely.

Prepare the environment

- Quiet, private space; minimise interruptions.
- Ensure the witness is present and can hear the call.
- Have donor details, HLQ, consent form and notes ready.

Clarify roles with the witness

- Who will record consent.
- Who will complete/oversee the HLQ.

One calm breath before you dial



KEY IDEA

Steady yourself; set up the space; hold the purpose in mind.

INITIATE THE CALL & BUILD RAPPORT

Greeting, introductions, condolences

- Your name, role, and organisation.
- Briefly explain that you support families around cornea donation.
- Offer clear, sincere condolences.

Confirm who you're speaking to

- Check the person's name and relationship to the donor
- Confirm they are the appropriate person to consider consent.

Introduce the witness

- Explain the witness's role (listening and documenting).
- Ask permission for them to remain on the call.

Check timing and readiness

- Explain approximate length of the call.
- Say you will need to ask about the donor's health and medical history.

ALWAYS ASK:

Is now an okay time to talk?

Is now an okay time to talk, or would you prefer a call-back?



KEY IDEA

Start with who you are, why you're calling, and their loss.

It's okay to pause or call back.

INTRODUCING CORNEA DONATION & THE HLQ

Check what they already know

- Ask what they've been told about cornea donation so far.
- Gently correct misunderstandings if needed.

Leaflet and Expression of Intent

- Ask if they received/read the cornea donation leaflet.
- If yes: offer to answer questions or clarify
- Ask sensitively if the donor ever expressed a wish to donate (form, donor card, or conversations).

Explain purpose and structure of the HLQ

I'll talk with you about the possibility of cornea donation and ask some health and lifestyle questions.

- Emphasise these questions are safety checks required by law to protect anyone who may receive a transplant.
- Briefly outline the three parts:
 1. Recent medical history and illnesses.
 2. Travel history.
 3. More personal lifestyle questions.

Normalise & rationale:

Some of these questions are very personal. I'm sorry if they feel intrusive. We ask the same questions of all families to protect anyone who may receive a transplant.

Offer control:

If you're unsure or need a break, please just tell me – we can pause or come back later.



KEY IDEA

Give a simple map: what this call is about and why the questions matter.

NONVERBAL BEHAVIOUR (ON THE PHONE)

Your posture and breathing

- Sit upright, feet on the floor, relaxed shoulders and jaw.
- Take a slow breath out before you speak to soften your tone.

Tone, pace, and pausing

- Slow, steady voice; short, clear sentences.
- Avoid rushing, especially after sensitive questions or key information.
- Allow brief silences; don't rush to fill them.

Use silence supportively

- Notice long pauses, sighs, changes in breathing.
- Respond gently:

I can hear this is very hard for you.

- Give them time to gather themselves before continuing. Slow voice, gentle tone, short sentences. Allow silence – don't rush to fill it.



KEY IDEA

Your body and voice still send signals of safety or pressure.

Cornea Donation

EXPLAINING WHAT CORNEA DONATION INVOLVES

Explain procedure and timing

- “A specialist doctor will remove only the clear front part of the eye – the cornea, about the size of a contact lens.”
- “The eyes themselves are not removed.”
- Explain where the procedure will take place and that it needs to happen within about 24 hours of death.

Reassure about appearance and dignity

- “The eyelids will be gently closed afterwards.”
- Emphasise that the donor’s appearance and dignity are carefully preserved.

- Confirm that funeral plans, including an open casket if wished, will not be affected.

Explain storage and use

- Corneas can be stored for up to one month.
- If a cornea cannot be used for transplant, it is disposed of respectfully, or – if they consent – used for training.

Only the clear front part of the eye – the cornea, like a contact lens – is removed. The eyes themselves are not removed.



KEY IDEA
Give clear, concrete information and protect dignity.

SUMMARISING & CHECKING

Summarise key points

- Thank them for answering the questions.
- In simple language, summarise key information they gave, especially anything they seemed concerned about.

Check accuracy

Let me just check I've understood you correctly...

Is there anything I've missed or misunderstood?

Thank you, I know this is a lot to think about.



KEY IDEA
Briefly summarise, then invite corrections so they feel heard.

SUPPORTING DECISION-MAKING

Explore what is important

What feels most important to you and your family right now?

What do you think [donor's name] would have wanted?

Acknowledge difficulty

We know this is an incredibly difficult decision at a very painful time.

Check if they need time

- Offer time to talk with other family members where possible.
- Explain any time limits for cornea donation clearly and kindly.
- If needed, arrange a call-back and be clear by when a decision is needed.

Would you like some time to talk with others, or are you able to decide now?



KEY IDEA
Explore what matters most to them; respect their pace and choice.

CLOSING THE CALL

If the family decides TO proceed

Confirm consent clearly

- Confirm that they are giving consent for the donor’s corneas to be donated and ensure documentation is complete.

Explain next steps

- In simple steps, outline what will happen next:
 - where and when the procedure will occur
 - care of the donor afterwards
 - links with funeral directors.

Express appreciation and meaning

Thank you for considering donation at such a difficult time. This gift may help up to two people to see again.

Close with support

- Slow your pace and invite any final questions.
- Provide a contact number for later questions or concerns.
- End with sincere condolences and a warm, steady tone.

If the family decides NOT to proceed

Acknowledge and respect the decision

Thank you for talking with us. I completely respect your decision not to proceed.

- No pressure; no judgement.

Offer final questions

Is there anything you'd like to ask or clarify before we end the call?

Close with support

- Close with warmth and sincere condolences, regardless of the decision.

Thank you for considering donation at such a difficult time.

I'm very sorry for your loss, and I wish you and your family strength in the days ahead.



KEY IDEA
Whatever the decision, end with respect, clarity, and warmth.

SELF-CARE FOR STAFF

Your reactions are normal.

- Notice and name the emotional impact on yourself.
- Take a brief pause after difficult calls – stand, breathe, hydrate.

- Use supervision, debriefing, or informal team support where possible.

Take a brief pause for yourself after difficult calls.



KEY IDEA
These calls are emotionally demanding.

Making conversations easier