

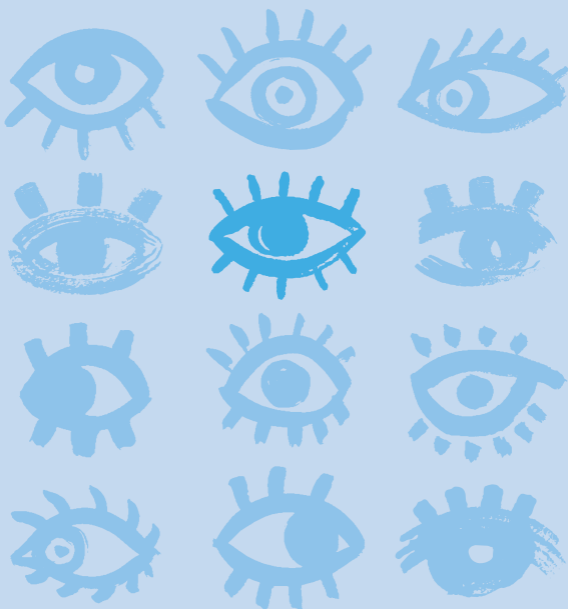


National Healthcare
Communication
Programme

Cornea Donation Telephone Conversation

HEALTH AND LIFESTYLE QUESTIONNAIRE (HLQ)

A leaflet for healthcare staff



Making conversations easier



Cornea Donation Telephone Conversation

HEALTH AND LIFESTYLE QUESTIONNAIRE (HLQ)

“

The gift of sight is yours to truly enjoy but also yours to give away. Think about passing it on when its time.



Brings you back to contents

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Cornea Donation Telephone Conversation

HEALTH AND LIFESTYLE QUESTIONNAIRE (HLQ)

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Cornea Donation Telephone Conversation

HEALTH AND LIFESTYLE QUESTIONNAIRE (HLQ)

Initiating the call

Preparation

Communication skills

- Prepare yourself
- Prepare the environment
- Prepare your information
- Clarify roles

Prepare yourself

- Take a moment to steady yourself and focus before dialling.
- Remind yourself: the purpose is to explore cornea donation sensitively and complete the HLQ to ensure safety.
- Give yourself one calm breath before you dial. A brief pause can help you sound more settled and in control when the call is answered.

Prepare the environment

- Ensure a quiet, private space with no interruptions.
- Ensure the witness is present and can hear the call.



Cornea Donation Telephone Conversation

HEALTH AND LIFESTYLE QUESTIONNAIRE (HLQ)

Initiating the call

Prepare your information

- Have everything you need in front of you (donor details, HLQ, consent form). This reduces the need to search for information mid-call and helps the conversation feel smoother and more contained for the family.
- Review donor name, DOB (date of birth), hospice/location, time of death.
- Check for any record of Expression of Intent to donate.
- Familiarise yourself with the three HLQ sections (medical history, travel, lifestyle).

Clarify roles

- Agree with the witness how consent and responses will be documented, and who is responsible for each part of the process.



Cornea Donation Telephone Conversation

HEALTH AND LIFESTYLE QUESTIONNAIRE (HLQ)

Initiating the call

Establishing initial rapport

Communication skills

- Greeting and introductions
- Confirm who you are speaking to
- Introduce the witness
- Check timing and readiness

Greeting and introductions

- Introduce yourself, your role, and the purpose of the call while expressing condolences clearly and sensitively.

Hello, my name is [name]. I'm calling from Eye Bank Ireland at the Irish Blood Transfusion Service. I'm one of the staff involved in supporting families around cornea donation.

Firstly, I would like to say how very sorry I am for your loss.



Cornea Donation Telephone Conversation

HEALTH AND LIFESTYLE QUESTIONNAIRE (HLQ)

Initiating the call

Confirm who you are speaking to

- Check you are speaking with the correct person and that they are appropriate to give consent according to policy.

*Am I speaking with [name],
[relationship to donor]?*

Introduce the witness

- Explain the witness's presence and role transparently, and seek permission for them to remain on the call.

I also have my colleague [witness name] here with me. They are listening to the call as a witness and will help with documenting the conversation. Is that okay with you?



Cornea Donation Telephone Conversation

HEALTH AND LIFESTYLE QUESTIONNAIRE (HLQ)

Initiating the call

Check timing and readiness

- Check whether this is an acceptable time to talk and offer the option to pause or reschedule if needed.

Is now an okay time for you to talk, or would you prefer that I call you back a little later?

This call may take around [X] minutes because I need to ask you some questions about [donor's name]'s health and medical history. Is that something you feel able to do at the moment?

TIP

If the family member sounds overwhelmed, offer to pause, or reschedule and validate that this is understandable.



Cornea Donation Telephone Conversation

HEALTH AND LIFESTYLE QUESTIONNAIRE (HLQ)

Initiating the call

Non-verbal behaviour

Communication skills

- Attend to your own non-verbal signals
- Use vocal tone and pace to convey warmth
- Use silence and breathing to support the family

Attend to your own non-verbal signals

- Notice your posture, facial expression, and breathing before you dial. A grounded, steady posture can help you sound calmer and more contained.
- Take a slow breath out before you speak; this can soften your tone and help you sound less rushed or tense.



Cornea Donation Telephone Conversation

HEALTH AND LIFESTYLE QUESTIONNAIRE (HLQ)

Initiating the call

Use vocal tone and pace to convey warmth

- Use a gentle, steady tone of voice and speak slowly, especially when giving information or asking sensitive questions.
- Allow brief pauses between questions so the family member has time to process and respond.
- Keep your volume moderate – loud enough to be heard clearly, but not so loud that it feels intrusive.

Use silence and breathing to support the family

- Notice long pauses, sighs or changes in the person's breathing, and respond with empathy (for example:

I can hear this is very difficult for you.

- Allow silence after emotional statements rather than rushing in to fill the gap; this can signal respect and give the person time to gather themselves.



Cornea Donation Telephone Conversation

HEALTH AND LIFESTYLE QUESTIONNAIRE (HLQ)

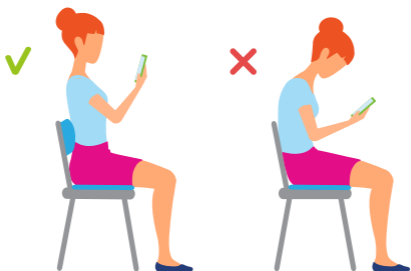
Initiating the call

Use silence and breathing to support the family
(Contd.)

- If you feel yourself becoming tense or emotional, take a slow, quiet breath to steady yourself before continuing.

TIP

Your own body language affects your tone. Sitting upright, with both feet on the floor and a relaxed jaw and shoulders, can help you sound calmer, warmer, and more reassuring on the phone.



Cornea Donation Telephone Conversation

HEALTH AND LIFESTYLE QUESTIONNAIRE (HLQ)

Gathering information

Assessing understanding and explaining purpose

Communication skills

- Check what they already know
- Check about information leaflet
- Check for expression of intent
- Explain purpose and structure

Check what they already know

- Explore what the family has already been told to avoid repetition and correct any misunderstandings.

Before I explain anything, can I check what you've already been told about cornea donation for [donor's name]?



Cornea Donation Telephone Conversation

HEALTH AND LIFESTYLE QUESTIONNAIRE (HLQ)

Gathering information

Check about information leaflet

- Ask whether they have seen the leaflet and offer to clarify or summarise key points in simple language. *“Have you been given, or had a chance to read, the cornea donation information leaflet?”*
- If yes: *“Was there anything in that you’d like me to clarify before we start?”*
- If no/not sure: briefly summarise key points (what is donated, time limits, effect on appearance and funeral, safety checks).

Check for expression of intent

- Ask sensitively whether the donor ever expressed a wish to donate, and acknowledge any prior conversations or documentation.

Do you know if [donor’s name] ever expressed a wish to donate their corneas, for example by signing an Expression of Intent form or talking with you about donation?



Cornea Donation Telephone Conversation

HEALTH AND LIFESTYLE QUESTIONNAIRE (HLQ)

Gathering information

Explain purpose and structure

- Clearly explain why you are asking health and lifestyle questions and outline the main sections of the HLQ.

The reason for my call is to talk with you about the possibility of cornea donation, and to ask you some questions about [donor's name]'s health and lifestyle.

These questions are required by Irish and European law to make sure that, if donation goes ahead, it is safe for anyone who receives the transplant.

There are three main parts to what I'll ask you:

- 1. Questions about recent medical history and illnesses.*
- 2. Questions about travel.*
- 3. Some more personal questions about lifestyle.*

I'll explain each part as we go, and we can pause at any time if you need a break.



Cornea Donation Telephone Conversation

HEALTH AND LIFESTYLE QUESTIONNAIRE (HLQ)

Gathering information

TIP

Use the person's name occasionally and acknowledge effort.

Thank you Linda, I know this is a lot to remember.

This helps the call feel like a conversation rather than an interview.



Cornea Donation Telephone Conversation

HEALTH AND LIFESTYLE QUESTIONNAIRE (HLQ)

Gathering information

Introducing the Health & Lifestyle Questionnaire (HLQ)

Communication skills

- Normalise and provide rationale
- Offer choice and control

Normalise and provide rationale

- Normalise the sensitive questions and explain that they are routine safety checks for every potential donor.
- Normalising the questions “*We ask these of all families*” can reduce feelings of being judged and helps the person understand that this is about safety, not scrutiny.

Some of the questions may feel very personal. I'm very sorry if they feel intrusive.



Cornea Donation Telephone Conversation

HEALTH AND LIFESTYLE QUESTIONNAIRE (HLQ)

Gathering information

Normalise and provide rationale (Contd.)

We ask these questions of all families for every potential donor. They are part of the safety checks we must complete to protect the person who may receive the cornea transplant.

This next part may feel intrusive, and I'm very sorry for that. These questions are part of the safety checks we must complete for every donor, and they help protect the person who may receive the transplant. Please know that we ask these questions of all families.

Offer choice and control

- Emphasise that the family can pause, skip, or return to questions, giving them a sense of control over the conversation.

If at any point you feel you can't answer a question, or you're not sure, just tell me, and we can move on or come back to it later.

If you need a pause at any point, please just say so.



Cornea Donation Telephone Conversation

HEALTH AND LIFESTYLE QUESTIONNAIRE (HLQ)

Gathering information

TIP

Check understanding in simple language and avoid jargon. If you find yourself giving a long explanation, pause and ask,

What questions do you have for me now?



Cornea Donation Telephone Conversation

HEALTH AND LIFESTYLE QUESTIONNAIRE (HLQ)

Gathering information

Conducting the Health & Lifestyle Questionnaire (HLQ)

Communication skills

- Signpost each section
- Use clear, neutral, non-judgemental language
- Acknowledge emotions
- Check understanding and pace

Signpost each section

- Introduce each part of the questionnaire so the family knows what to expect and why you are asking particular questions.

I'll start with some questions about recent medical history.

Now I'm going to ask a few questions about travel.

The next part includes some more personal questions about lifestyle and sexual health. These are asked of every potential donor.



Cornea Donation Telephone Conversation

HEALTH AND LIFESTYLE QUESTIONNAIRE (HLQ)

Gathering information

Use, clear, neutral, non-judgemental language

- Ask about sensitive topics in a calm, factual way that avoids judgemental wording or tone.
- Maintain a calm, even tone when asking about:
 - Operations, illnesses, or transplants
 - Serious infections (e.g., hepatitis, HIV, TB, malaria)
 - Travel history
 - Recreational or injected drug use
 - Sexual history and sexually transmitted infections.



Cornea Donation Telephone Conversation

HEALTH AND LIFESTYLE QUESTIONNAIRE (HLQ)

Gathering information

Acknowledge emotions

- Notice and name when something is difficult to talk about, and thank the person for their effort in answering.

I appreciate that this is not easy to talk about, especially at a time like this.

Thank you, I know this may be hard to remember or discuss.

It's absolutely fine if you're not sure of the exact dates – just tell me what you can.



Cornea Donation Telephone Conversation

HEALTH AND LIFESTYLE QUESTIONNAIRE (HLQ)

Gathering information

Check understanding and pace

- Regularly check that the questions are clear and adjust your pace in response to the family's reactions.

Is everything I'm asking making sense so far?

Would you like me to repeat or explain any of the questions?

TIP

Notice changes in voice, long pauses, or sighs.

*I can hear this is very upsetting.
Would you like to take a moment?*



Cornea Donation Telephone Conversation

HEALTH AND LIFESTYLE QUESTIONNAIRE (HLQ)

Providing information and planning

Summarising and clarifying

Communication skills

- Brief summary
- Check accuracy

Brief summary

- Summarise the key points back to the family to show you have listened and to check shared understanding.
- Use the summary not just to check accuracy, but also to show you have listened: emphasise key points the family member seemed most concerned about.

Thank you for answering those questions. Just to make sure I have everything correct; I'll briefly summarise what you've told me.



Cornea Donation Telephone Conversation

HEALTH AND LIFESTYLE QUESTIONNAIRE (HLQ)

Providing information and planning

Check accuracy

- Invite the family to correct or add details so the record is accurate, and they feel heard.

Does that sound right to you, or is there anything I've missed or misunderstood?



Cornea Donation Telephone Conversation

HEALTH AND LIFESTYLE QUESTIONNAIRE (HLQ)

Providing information and planning

Explaining what cornea donation involves

Communication skills

- Explain procedure and timing
- Reassure about appearance and dignity
- Explain storage and use
- Confidentiality and follow-up
- Check for questions

Explain procedure and timing

- Describe the procedure and time limits in small, manageable chunks, pausing to check understanding.
- Offer information in small pieces and pause regularly to ask, “*How does that sound?*” or “*Is that clear?*” This can prevent the person from feeling overwhelmed.

If donation goes ahead, a specialist will perform a short surgical procedure to remove only the clear front part of the eye – the cornea – which is about the size of a contact lens. The eyes themselves are not removed.



Cornea Donation Telephone Conversation

HEALTH AND LIFESTYLE QUESTIONNAIRE (HLQ)

Providing information and planning

Explain procedure and timing (Contd.)

This will take place in [location], and it needs to happen within 24 hours of death so that the corneas remain healthy.

- When describing procedures, move between facts and reassurance: explain one step, then briefly reassure about comfort, dignity, or appearance before moving to the next step.

Reassure about appearance and dignity

- Reassure the family that their loved one's appearance and dignity will be carefully maintained, and funerals will not be disrupted.

The procedure will not interfere with any funeral arrangements, including an open casket if that is what you wish.

The eyelids will be gently closed afterwards, and great care is taken to preserve [donor's name]'s appearance and dignity at all times.



Cornea Donation Telephone Conversation

HEALTH AND LIFESTYLE QUESTIONNAIRE (HLQ)

Providing information and planning

Explain storage and use

- Give clear information about how corneas are stored, assessed, and possibly used for training if consent is given.

Corneas are stored for up to one month after retrieval.

If, after examination, a cornea is not suitable for transplantation, it will be disposed of in an ethical and lawful way, or, if you consent, may be used for training and surgical technique development.



Cornea Donation Telephone Conversation

HEALTH AND LIFESTYLE QUESTIONNAIRE (HLQ)

Providing information and planning

Confidentiality and follow-up

- Explain how personal and consent information will be stored, and when the Eye Bank might contact the family in future.

Your contact and consent details will be stored in the strictest confidence by the IBTS Eye Bank.*

If there were any unexpected blood test results, we might need to contact you.

The Eye Bank may communicate with you after the donation, for example with a thank you card, and sometimes there may be indirect communication from recipients, such as a card or note, depending on circumstances and your preferences.

Check for questions

- Invite questions and clarify any remaining concerns before moving towards a decision.

What questions do you have about the procedure or what happens next?



Cornea Donation Telephone Conversation

HEALTH AND LIFESTYLE QUESTIONNAIRE (HLQ)

Providing information and planning

Supporting decision-making

Communication skills

- Explore what is important
- Acknowledge difficulty
- Check if they need time

Explore what is important

- Explore the donor's values and what matters most to the family to support a decision that feels right for them.
- Keep bringing the focus back to what matters most to the family and to the donor's values. This can help them feel more confident that whatever they decide is the “*right*” decision for them.

What feels most important to you and your family right now, when you think about [donor's name] and donation?



Cornea Donation Telephone Conversation

HEALTH AND LIFESTYLE QUESTIONNAIRE (HLQ)

Providing information and planning

Acknowledge difficulty

- Name and validate how hard this decision is at a time of acute grief.

We know this is an incredibly difficult decision to be making at such a painful time.

Check if they need time

- Offer time to talk with others where possible, while explaining any time limits clearly and kindly.

Would you like a little time to talk with other family members, or are you able to make a decision now?

- If time is needed:

Because of the time limits for cornea donation, we would need to know by [time] at the latest. Would it help if I called you back then?



Cornea Donation Telephone Conversation

HEALTH AND LIFESTYLE QUESTIONNAIRE (HLQ)

Closing the call

If the family decides to proceed

Communication skills

- Confirm consent
- Explain next steps
- Express appreciation and meaning
- Close with support

Confirm consent

- Clearly confirm consent in straightforward language and ensure it is appropriately documented.

Can I just confirm that you are giving consent for [donor's name]'s corneas to be donated?



Cornea Donation Telephone Conversation

HEALTH AND LIFESTYLE QUESTIONNAIRE (HLQ)

Closing the call

Explain next steps

- Outline what will happen next, including location, procedure, and arrangements, in a simple, stepwise way.

The short surgical procedure will take place in [location].

Afterwards, [donor's name]'s eyelids will be closed, and we will ensure they are treated with the utmost respect.

We will contact the funeral director, and arrangements will be made for [donor's name]'s remains to be moved to the funeral parlour as planned.



Cornea Donation Telephone Conversation

HEALTH AND LIFESTYLE QUESTIONNAIRE (HLQ)

Closing the call

Express appreciation and meaning

- Acknowledge the generosity of the decision and highlight its potential impact for recipients.

Thank you so much for taking the time to talk with me today and for considering donation at such a difficult moment.

This generous gift of cornea donation could help up to two people to see again. I hope that, in time, it may bring you and your family some comfort to know that [donor's name] has helped others in this way.

TIP

Briefly restate the meaning of their decision “*This may help up to two people to see again*” – many families later report that this is what they remember and draw comfort from.



Cornea Donation Telephone Conversation

HEALTH AND LIFESTYLE QUESTIONNAIRE (HLQ)

Closing the call

Close with support

- Slow the pace, check for final questions, and end the call with warmth and condolences.
- A calm, unhurried ending can help the conversation feel more containing and respectful.

Do you have any other questions or concerns before we finish?

If you think of anything afterwards, you can contact us on [Eye Bank phone number].

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



Cornea Donation Telephone Conversation

HEALTH AND LIFESTYLE QUESTIONNAIRE (HLQ)

Closing the call

If the family decides not to proceed

Communication skills

- Acknowledge and respect the decision
- Offer final questions
- Close with support

Acknowledge and respect the decision

- Respect the family's choice and recognise the care and thought they have given, without pressure or judgement.

Thank you for discussing this with us. I understand and respect your decision not to proceed. I really appreciate the care and thought you've given to this at such a difficult time.

Thank you for taking the time to talk with us. I respect your decision not to proceed and we again wish to express our sincere sympathy on your loss.



Cornea Donation Telephone Conversation

HEALTH AND LIFESTYLE QUESTIONNAIRE (HLQ)

Closing the call

Offer final questions

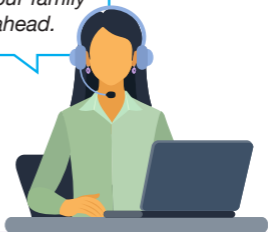
- Give space for any final questions or clarifications before ending the call.

Before we end the call, is there anything you'd like to ask me, or anything that wasn't clear?

Close with support

- Close with sincere condolences and a warm, steady tone, regardless of the decision made.

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



Acknowledge emotional impact

- Notice and name the emotional impact of these calls on yourself, especially after difficult conversations.



Cornea Donation Telephone Conversation

HEALTH AND LIFESTYLE QUESTIONNAIRE (HLQ)

Self-care for staff

Seek support

- Use supervision, debriefing, or informal team support to process particularly distressing calls.

Basic self-care

- Take short breaks, hydrate, and move briefly to help maintain your capacity for calm, compassionate contact.

TIP

Reflect briefly on your own reactions after calls and consider a check-in with a colleague or supervisor if needed.

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This Skills Card is the work of the National Healthcare Communication Programme in conjunction with the Irish Blood Transfusion Service.

