



Ch@dvce Guide

for one-to-one chat support in first-line social services
(with a focus on sexual abuse)

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This 'Ch@dvce Guide' is a guide for organisations offering first-line social services who already have or are interested in developing a one-to-one chat support service. All examples in this guide focus on chat support in cases of sexual abuse.

This guide was developed in the context of a Daphne III project of the European Commission and is based on ...

... the screening of 161 websites of first-line social services in the European Union;

... the in depth screening of 32 European websites offering chat support in cases of sexual abuse of children and young people;

... an online survey and analysis of documents in 22 of the 32 organisations providing chat support;

... literature, knowhow and the development of methods of the project partners; the Austrian Institute for applied communication (OIAT) (Austria), Child Focus (Belgium) and the Artevelde University College (Belgium).

This 'Ch@dvce Guide' provides you with descriptions, recommendations, examples and questions that could be inspiring for organisations who (wish to) provide chat support on sexual abuse. Providing chat support involves a lot more than simply using the Internet as a new communication channel. Online help implies a different kind of communication. Therefore, this guide is relevant for everybody that offers chat support. Moreover, there are a number of additional opportunities and pitfalls when sexual abuse is the subject of a chat support conversation.

Introduction

This 'Ch@dvce Guide' is not intended to be a restrictive 'set of rules' for the development of good chat support on sexual abuse; each support organisation is too individual and too diverse in this respect, not to mention the cultural differences and the possibilities of different types of support provided in the 27 European Member States. The purpose of this guide is to provide an inventory of descriptions, considerations and inspiring practices that may be used by every organisation in Europe that already offers chat support on sexual abuse, or is intending to launch a support programme, as a stimulant to optimise its operation.

This 'Ch@dvce Guide' focuses on chat support in the context of sexual abuse. Even if 'support related to sexual abuse' is not an explicit (main) subject in the support you are providing, this guide may inspire you to optimise your chat support in case the topic is raised.

This Ch@dvce Guide aims at three target groups: (1) counsellors that want to start with chat support conversations; (2) experienced chat support professionals that want to use this guide as a mirror for their practise; and (3) welfare organisations that are considering to implement chat support. The reading guide and the table of content will lead you to the most relevant chapters.

This guide provides a thorough understanding of one-to-one chat support. Other online help forms, such as group chat, forum or e-mail help have their specific added value, but are not the aim of this guide.

With thanks ...

... to the members of the Advisory Board and the user groups of the Ch@dvce Project for their feedback:

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... to the organisations that completed the online survey regarding chat support on sexual abuse:

AlbaHus – Denmark
Awel – Belgium
Børns Vilkår – Denmark
BRIS – Sweden
Child Focus – Belgium
ChildLine – United Kingdom
City of Helsinki Health Center – Finland
Cyberhus (Center for digital youth care) – Denmark
De Kindertelefoon – the Netherlands
e-Enfance NGO – France
Hulpmix.nl – the Netherlands
Jongerenadviescentra (Steunpunt algemeen welzijnswerk) – Belgium
Kék Vonal Child Crisis Foundation – Hungary
Klikvoorhulp.nl (Impact) – the Netherlands
Linka bezpečí (Safety Line) – Czech Republic
Meldpunt Kinderporno – the Netherlands
Nobody's Children Foundation – Poland
PratenOnline (Jeugdriagg NHZ) – the Netherlands
Roditeli Bulgarian helpline for Online Safety – Bulgaria
Slachtofferchat (CAW Zuid-Oost-Vlaanderen) – Belgium
Tjejzonen – Sweden
Unabhängiges Kinderschutzzentrum Wien – Austria

... for their financial support



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Reading Guide

This 'Ch@dvce Guide' is not a ready-to-use recipe book to provide instantly successful chat support on sexual abuse. There are no do's and don'ts to take or leave. This is because chat support on sexual abuse must be tailored to each individual organisation, depending on the choices and the possibilities of the organisation. For this reason, this guide contains several frameworks that challenge every organisation to give them an individual interpretation and colouring. In addition to descriptions that encourage reflection, this guide also offers the following:



Examples that illustrate how specific organisations have addressed these aspects.

In conversation examples, 'Co' refers to: the counsellor (the professional advisor or volunteer) and 'Cl': to the client (the person seeking support).



Recommendations for organisations that are wondering whether or not this guide may apply to their own context.



Recommendations for chat support counsellors, with a focus on chat support. Because of the experience of most chat support counsellors with counselling, less attention is paid to general counselling guidelines.



Questions that challenge the organisation to concretise or optimise particular aspects further.

Undoubtedly, organisations do much more than only providing chat support on sexual abuse. Each organisation will decide how to implement the tips offered through this guide according to their specific needs, interests, working context, organisational culture, etc.

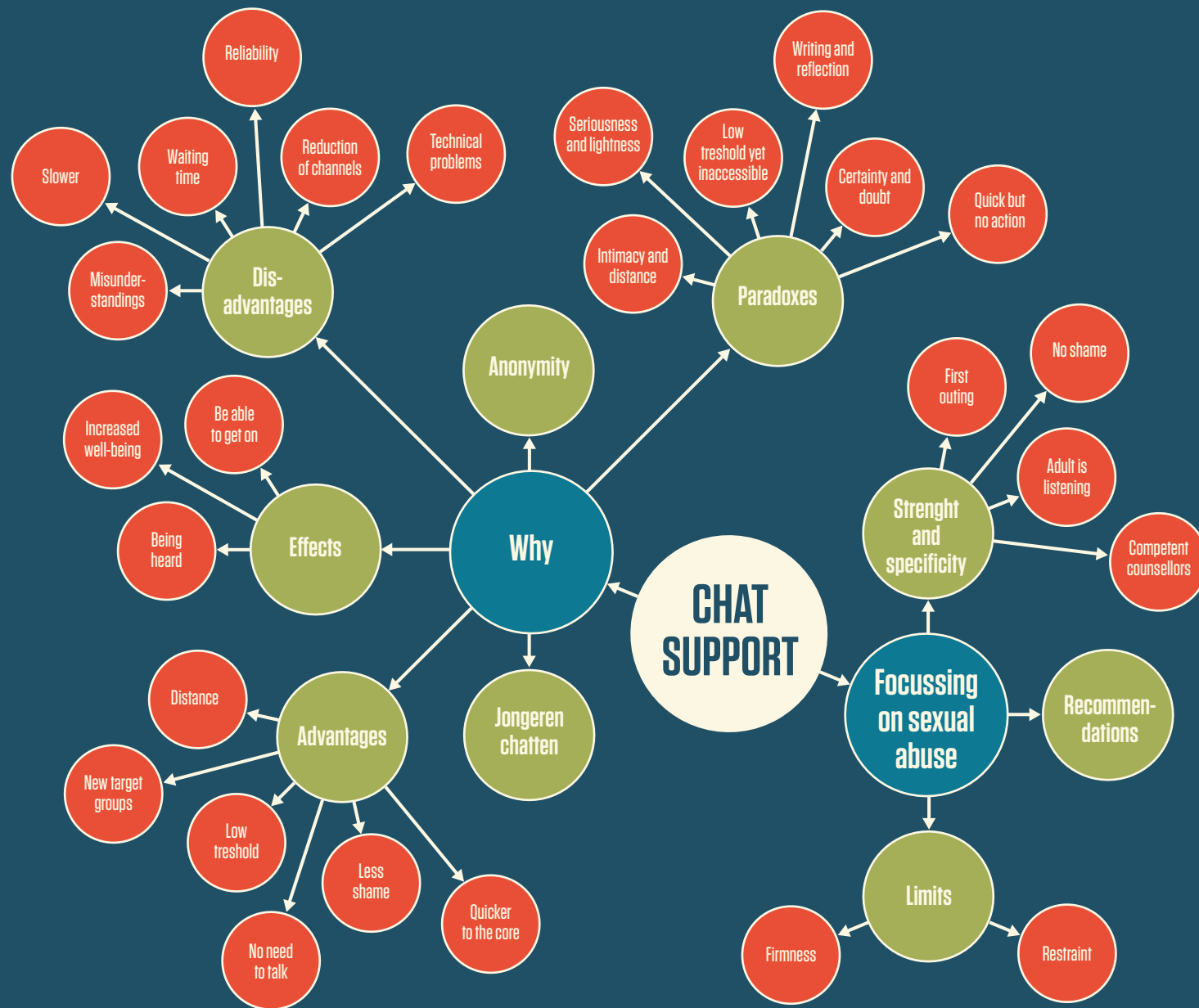
If you have final responsibility in your organisation, you will first and foremost start working with ...

- } Chapter 1: Why chat support?
- } Chapter 2: Chat support on sexual abuse ... specificity, strengths and limits;
- } Chapter 3: Embedding chat support on sexual abuse into the range of services offered by the organisation;
- } Chapter 4: The website as the entrance to the chat support service;
- } Chapter 9: Legal and ethical issues regarding chat support on sexual abuse;
- } Chapter 10: Skills and growth opportunities for chat support counsellors.

If you carry out chat conversations yourself as a counsellor, the above-mentioned chapters will provide you with a solid background reference, but you may benefit more in terms of your daily activities from the following chapters ...

- } Chapter 5: Chat support ... a specific method;
- } Chapter 6: Chat support... a process in steps: length aspects of the method;
- } Chapter 7: Chat support... a process with various key players: the broad method;
- } Chapter 8: Chat support... an engaged and technical process: the in-depth method;

For the sake of easier reading, we always refer to the client or person seeking support and to the counselor or support worker as 'he', 'him' and 'his' in this guide (i.e. using the male case). It goes without saying that these terms also include female clients and support workers, especially as they are, in fact, in the majority in the social welfare sector and as chat support users.



1. WHY CHAT SUPPORT?

“Why should we develop a chat support programme in the first place?” This requires significant investment, and how can we be sure that this would actually help the client? The following aspects are discussed in this chapter: children and adolescents chat; the strengths and weaknesses of chat support; anonymity – the factor that considerably lowers the threshold in chat support; the impact of chat support, and the paradoxes of chat support. These different perspectives offer a nuanced picture about the pros and cons of chat support in general. In the next chapter, we will elaborate on chat support specifically focussing on sexual abuse.

Children and adolescents chat

Nowadays, it is hard to imagine the world without online communications and people, especially the youngest ones, are more and more often in touch with each other via online technologies. Even the ‘digital natives’ cannot imagine that – less than 20 years ago – it was impossible to have continuous access to information online, or to be continuously in touch with each other. The growing number of online support services is in line with this trend.



In the case of Klikvoorhulp.nl, the motives for online support are as follows:

- to reach young people who are seeking help on their own initiative;
- to offer an active form of support that reaches out to those seeking help (without appointments and with a low threshold via an online medium);
- as a supplement to first-line care: to improve and strengthen social self-reliance in a very accessible way via a ‘new’ medium;
- the provision of support is independent of time and place.” (Roijsen, 2008, p6)

Chat support offers – among all other forms of online support – the possibility of carrying out an anonymous, very low-threshold personal support conversation online.

A chat support programme provides the opportunity for an individual conversation between a caller/person seeking help and a support worker/counsellor in a secure, closed chat room. www.sense.info combines this with a chatbot (chat computer) for informative questions that can be reached 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Chatting on appointment also happens occasionally. The person seeking help can, for example, have a chat with a ‘big sister’ on www.tjezonen.se, in addition to ordinary chats. The big sister is a voluntary worker, a woman between 20 and 35 years of age who chats with a young

girl. Clients can talk to the chat sister 1 hour a week for a maximum of 1 year.



What (combination of) online support forms is your organisation offering?

- What reasons does your organisation have for offering/not offering online support?
- Do the management and staff of your organisation support the further development of online help?

ICT-APPLICATIONS AND -TOOLS IN ONLINE HELP IN SOCIAL WORK

one way communication						online help with interaction																	
uncertain interaction						postponed interaction		direct interaction		uncertain interaction													
information sites																							
tips and advice						forum		E-mail		chatroom		one-to-one chat		voice over IP		diary		self test		serious games		social network	

Chat support: strengths and vulnerability

Thorough analyses of the benefits and disadvantages, strengths and weaknesses of chat support – from the perspective of both the clients and the counsellors (Bocklandt, 2011 and 2012; Fukkink & Hermans, (2009); Child Rights Commission, 2007; Schalken, 2010; Sindahl, 2008) - lead to the following, global overview:

“Chat is a safe virtual shoulder”

“It’s easier to tell your story when none hears you”

[Fukkink, 2009]

		Strength - Benefit	Weakness – Disadvantage - Challenge
Chat support from the perspective of the user or client	Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual support worker (quickly) available • No need to talk • Personal, customised feedback • Distance makes it easier to give information • Typing provides more time to reflect • In itself, writing has a therapeutic effect • Taboos can be discussed more quickly • Less shame • The conversation can be re-read during and after the chat • Being in control (and being able to stop the chat at any time) • No awkward silences • Stimulates the self-help of the client • Anonymity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The direct interaction strengthens the expectation of an immediate solution • Commitment is less binding • Sometimes superficial • Reliable counsellor? • Limited response time • Will the user be understood correctly?
	Communication channel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low threshold • Convenience • Secure and anonymous (but at the same time accessible and distant) • No travel and travelling time • No specific location: can take place from a familiar environment • Easily accessible, even if you live remotely • (usually) free of charge • Direct communication (immediate replies) • Less chance of being seen or overheard when seeking help • Sense of closeness is possible through a strong alliance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Possibility of misinterpretation and misunderstanding • Is the Internet safe? • Shopping behaviour from chat to chat • Digital divide: not everyone has Internet or has computer skills • Reduction of channels: few non-verbal communication options • Technical failures • Long waiting times • Digital footprint: a trace of the chat conversation always remains behind • Distance through the medium • Chance of addiction to chat support contacts • Only possible when the user is online

“I find calling
difficult because I’m
afraid I’ve to cry”
[Fukkink, 2009]

“A warm virtual hug”

		Strength - Benefit	Weakness – Disadvantage - Challenge
Chat support from the perspective of the organisation or counsellor	Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low threshold • Quick working alliance • Come to the core problem quicker • No awkward silences • Reduction of channels: less prejudice on the basis of appearances or voice intonation • Stimulates the self-help of the client • Direct replies and feedback possible from the person seeking help • Possibility to re-read the chat during (= scrolling) and after the chat (for supervision or study) • Stimulating tools: hyperlinks to FAQs, testimonials, tests, referrals... 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A client can steer the chat conversation, but maybe the counsellors are too easily afraid to lose the client • Statutory and legal uncertainty • Overdisclosure and underdisclosure: disclosure of problems too quickly or too slowly • Authenticity doubts • Possibility of misunderstandings • Erroneous supplementation or interpretation of missing info • Reduction of channels: no non-verbal signals • Risk evaluation and crisis intervention are difficult • Screen reading and writing skills are required • Multi-tasking: is the client (only) involved in the chat support conversation?
	Communication channel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing a channel that makes it easier to express a problem (disinhibition) • Interface with other online support tools • Re-attract target groups that were lost, such as young people that are not reached anymore through face-to-face or telephone contact • Attract new target groups • Offers more contact opportunities to the target group that was reached • Chat is in line with the familiar culture of the target group • Proximity: strong alliance is possible • Intensive contact possible through distance and proximity at the same time • Wider access • Contact possible from various locations - working from home possible <p><i>For the description of unfamiliar terms: see glossary (Chapter 11)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessibility and findability of the website? • The organisation and training of chat support costs time and money • Coping with the resistance of the counsellors takes effort • Specific and secured software is a necessity • Subsidising and financing of chat support is difficult in the case of anonymous clients • Labour intensive • Conversation is slow • The communication is different • A need to be more explicit • Are the counsellors familiar with the online support ‘yellow pages’? • Possibility of misinterpretation • Uncertainty after a conversation has been disrupted, for instance, after a technical failure • Transcripts can be read by others (digitally or on paper) • Hard to limit to local or regional boundaries

Anonymity – the low threshold factor in the chat support environment

Probably one of the major assets of online support is the fact that many organisations offering online support choose to guarantee the anonymity of their clients.. The person looking for help knows that the counsellor doesn't see, hear or know him; they can simply tell the counsellor what he wants to say (and nothing more). He can hide uncertainty, fear, shame, (excessive) emotionality ...

"The anonymity guaranteed by Bris on all its channels (phone, chat, e-mail, etc.) is an aspect that children really appreciate" (Andersson & Osvaldsson, 2011). After a contact by telephone, the caller is often worried that the telephone number might be seen on the telephone bill. For children and adolescents, anonymity therefore plays a key role in opting for chat support. For this reason, many social service organisations also provide info as to how the client can ensure that all traces of the chat support conversation are removed from the computer.

Organisations often consciously opt in favour of guaranteeing the anonymity of the persons seeking support: *"the anonymous context offers the client a lot of control and safety; the feeling of shame is less present; people seeking support will not feel so much of a difference in power status between the counsellor and themselves."* (Suler, 2004; Roijen, 2008)

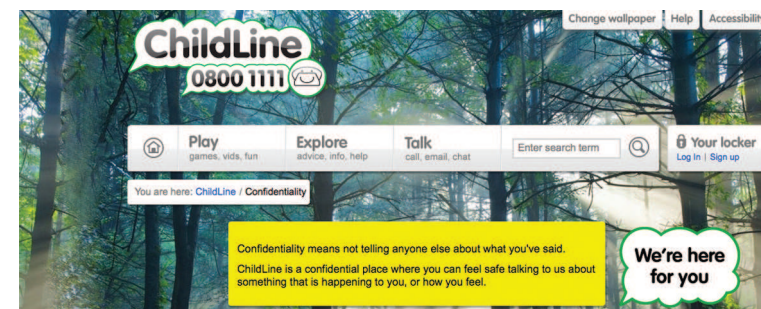
As a result, the person seeking support dares to be more open and often comes to the core of his problem more quickly. Offering and advertising anonymity therefore leads to greater accessibility of social support, and is therefore also important for the organisation.

But anonymity also has disadvantages, of course: the person seeking help may not be genuine, and observations in terms of appearance, voice, non-verbal signals, etc. are not possible. Anonymity on the internet may sometimes bring out the worst in people (such as cyber bullying), but it also often brings out the most intimate and personal aspects.

On the basis of one-sided and/or limited information, the counsellor is also often limited in his options regarding the support he can provide. It is, for example, difficult to chat without an indication of gender or age. Anonymity also makes referrals difficult. Dealing with confidentiality and anonymity is a continuous dilemma, especially if the young person involved is actually at risk. In exceptional cases, it must be possible to breach anonymity (see Chapter 9). Moreover, the 'anonymity of the person seeking support' is often relative. What is important is the 'anonymity that is experienced by the person seeking help' because, in most cases, the IP address of the computer is traceable, as a minimum.

Anonymity in the context of chat support is a means to an end, and not a target in itself. Even though some organisations state on their site that anonymity will never be breached, it must be possible for the person seeking help to opt to step out of anonymity - in consultation with the counsellor.

The way in which European sites inform their users about anonymity and privacy varies from a minimal note to a very detailed explanation.



www.childline.org.uk/pages/confidentiality.aspx - 28/09/2012



www.childline.org.uk answers the following questions regarding anonymity and confidentiality on her website:

- What does confidentiality mean?
- Is the ChildLine confidential?
- You say you might need to tell someone if you're very worried about me or someone else. What does this mean?
- Is the confidentiality of the ChildLine different from school's?
- Do I have to tell you my name?
- What happens if I do tell you my name?
- What happens if I want ChildLine to tell someone about what's happening to me?
- Do you know my phone number/e-mail address?
- Can anyone see that I've used my home computer to get in touch with ChildLine?
- Who at ChildLine knows what I've talked about?
- I've got another question about confidentiality.

Impact of chat support?

Research into whether, when and how chat support works for children and adolescents is still limited.

A study by Fukkink en Hermanns (2009) demonstrates that chat support also succeeds in increasing the sense of well-being in children, and in reducing the severity of their problems. A Swedish evaluation study by BRIS (2011) observed that children felt better after their contact (including via chat) with BRIS. The major impact of the support contact was their sense of improved well-being and the experience that children knew (more about) what to do about their situation. Children also appreciate being listened to. It is often the first time that they have talked about their situation with an adult. For small problems, they prefer help from other children, but they want the support and advice of adults when it comes to bigger problems.

Flemish research conducted by the Artevelde University College shows that in the majority of the cases the expectations of clients are accomplished after one-off chat support contact (especially in the area of 'ventilating' and 'feeling understood'). The result was even better than expected for a third of the clients. Furthermore, the researchers also found that the counsellors are quite successful in assessing the expectations of the clients. But the conclusion is that there would be even more benefit from chat support conversations if the counsellors were not to simply 'ride along' with the expectations of the clients, but would take an active part in defining the objectives of the chat (Bocklandt, 2011, p. 232; Vanhove & Vercaigne, 2011).

Paradoxes of chat support

Chat support is a "*lean medium*". It is like dancing on a tightrope between several paradoxes. Chat support is also a recent method where the person seeking support is 'torn' between different expectations.

The paradoxes below are intended to trigger the thought process (Vlaeminck et al, 2009a):

The paradox of intimacy THROUGH distance (isolation & connection)

Personal, vulnerable questions can – only – be expressed via an anonymous screen. Forced intimacy through a faceless ICT link.

The paradox of professional seriousness and friendly lightness

Chatting wraps the seriousness and tragedy of the requests for help in a friendly language and shape, associated with an adolescent culture.

The paradox of low threshold and inaccessibility

Chatting suggests a low threshold, yet struggles every day with waiting lists, inaccessibility and unavailability.

The paradox of talking by writing and (in)visible reflection The paradox of writing as one speaks and (in)visible reflection

Writing is different from speaking. It generates different (therapeutic) effects. The text on the screen only conveys the illusion of being fully aware of the communication. What appears on the screen is only a fraction of the thoughts and considerations that the chat partners go through while they are waiting.

The paradox of text certainty and authenticity doubts

A screen offers something to hold on to: text and symbols can be reread, and convey reliability. At the same time, doubts regarding the authenticity of the chat partner raise suspicion and reserve.

The paradox of the power of reaching intimacy quickly and the inability to act

The medium clearly has the power to move clients to share highly personal information, but is powerless when it comes to approaching and dealing with emotional requests for help with a responsible offer of support.

2. CHAT SUPPORT IN THE CONTEXT OF SEXUAL ABUSE: SPECIFICITY, STRENGTHS AND LIMITS

On the one hand, this chapter focuses on the specificity and opportunities of chat support on sexual abuse, and reflects on the limits of chat support in this context on the other. At the end of this chapter, recommendations and questions are formulated.

Specificity and opportunities of chat support on sexual abuse

Many instances of sexual abuse are not reported, and remain unknown. *"In order to remediate this, very low threshold support possibilities are necessary. New media are the ideal response to this ... For victims of violence, seeking support is not an obvious step. Experiences with violence usually remain a well-kept secret for a long time. Domestic violence, sexual abuse and bullying are still major taboo themes. In the cases of "classic support", we also observed that people often only take the first step towards asking support after a long time. There is no doubt that many people who are experiencing, or who have experienced, violence never take that step. Even seeking*

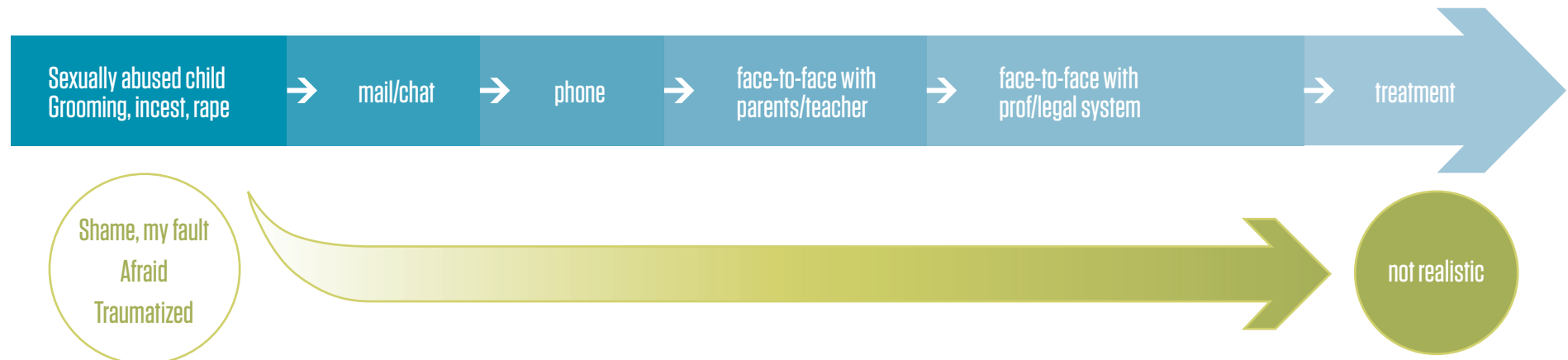
support via telephone contact appears to be too high a threshold for many victims of violence." (Slachtofferchat, 2010, p. 2)

"Chat and other online services have a potential to reach children and youth suffering with severe social and emotional problems. More cases of neglect and different forms of abuse are seen at the chat services than in comparable telephone services. It is assumed that this is due to its ability to create an environment where the child or adolescent feels more private, less exposed and where they have time to express themselves." (Sindahl, 2009)

In the case of chat support on sexual abuse, the typical characteristics of online support, such as anonymity and safety, play an even more pronounced role. Victims (or offenders) of sexual

abuse often struggle with strong feelings of shame and guilt. If this burden is too heavy, contacts by telephone or face-to-face may be too threatening, and waiting for a reply by mail could take too long. The advantages of chat support (see Chapter 1) are such that these thresholds can be bridged, and that the problem can be addressed, even though this may perhaps only be possible after several chat conversations.

"Why chat counselling? A marginalized and/or sexually abused child often doesn't have the ability to identify, accept, understand, verbalize or even manage its own feelings. It can't take the step to treatment.



Chat is often the first step ... for many children



(Marshall, 2012)

Even though, it is usually adults who commit sexual abuse, from the Swedish Bris study (Sindahl, 2009), it appears that children still prefer the support and advice of adults when they have serious problems. The respectful interaction with another adult may have a healing effect. On the other hand, recognition by another adolescent (a 'peer' or equal) who condemns the behaviour may (also) be positive in the case of sexting or cyber bullying with sexual overtones. Some European websites provide persons seeking support with the possibility of giving an input regarding who they would like to chat with (see Chapter 7). In the case of chat support on sexual abuse, this is indeed appropriate, because it is an essential condition for a person seeking help to know whether he will be chatting to a man or a woman, or with another adolescent or an adult.



"Through the internet, Tjejzonen comes into contact with girls who might otherwise never have talked to anyone about their thoughts and worries. Our experience is that many girls experience that they are not taken seriously, not seen or listened to. They often have difficulties to put words to their problem. That the girls can talk about themselves anonymously and try to put words to their thoughts together with an adult creates a basis for possible change. ... There are obvious differences between the girls who seek contact offline versus online. The girls online have more severe problems with pronounced anxiety and worry." (Munkesjo, 2011)

And finally: the specificity of responding to calls for help in the context of sexual abuse requires specific skills from the chat support counselors, particularly with regard to knowledge about sexual abuse and the complexity of how it is experienced (see Chapter 11).

Limits of chat support on sexual abuse

In addition to the general disadvantages of chat support (see Chapter 1), the 'restraint and firmness' that is used in chat support on sexual abuse is of crucial importance.

Restraint

If people bring up the subject of sexual abuse, this must be handled with great care. Young people seeking support need and are entitled to a professional attitude. Prudence is called for, especially in the case of sexual abuse. This applies to the counsellors during the chatting, but also to the organisation. Moreover, providing the opportunity to raise the issue of sexual abuse and defining it in a professional manner is one aspect. Providing the support needed to (help) stop the sexual abuse and to heal the resulting mental distress is quite another matter. This is where we reach the limits of social services in general, and of chat support in particular. Collaboration with other bodies and the involvement of other forms of support is therefore appropriate.

Firmness

Chat support cannot be started in a casual manner! If there is a major chance that you may have to discontinue the service after a number of months, something that has already happened to several organisations (through lack of funding, for example), it is better not to launch chat support. If your organisation indicates on its website that sexual abuse is a topic in the range of support services you are offering, even if not the main topic, please be aware that you are opening a door. Behind this door, sufficient appointments, care and professionalism must be available to ensure that the people seeking help are not invited

in only to be put out in the cold again a little later. This is a case of professionalism as an ethical duty. Roijen (2010) argues that the task of the counsellor is first and foremost to clarify with the person seeking help whether the latter is aware of the problem of sexual abuse, then to determine if and what support he requires, and finally whether he is prepared to accept this support.

Recommendations relating to chat support on sexual abuse

- Only start up chat support if you believe that this is a low-threshold tool designed to bring up the subject of sexual abuse.
- Develop a vision concerning chat support on sexual abuse that clearly outlines the scope and limits of the services you offer.
- Be aware of the following: even if sexual abuse is not a major subject and is only implicitly referred to in your website, or not at all, there is a real chance that people seeking support may raise the subject of sexual abuse.
- Consider whether or not the people who come to you for support should have a say in which counsellors they can chat with. Reliability is paramount, any you must not promise exclusive contact between one counsellor and one client.
- Be reliable with regard to the information you provide to your staff, and certainly with regard to the information you give your target group.

Ensure that you retain the acquired expertise when chat support counsellors leave the organisation.

If your organisation offers a broad range of services, ensure easy referral to specialised chat support on sexual abuse.

Concrete recommendations regarding chat support conversations are available in Chapters 6, 7 and 8.



3. EMBEDDING CHAT SUPPORT ON SEXUAL ABUSE INTO THE SERVICES PROVIDED BY THE ORGANISATION

A chat support programme focussing on sexual abuse cannot be developed in your organisation overnight. It is a far-reaching process that has an impact on both the internal organisation and the position of your organisation in relation to other social service organisations. This chapter therefore centres around ...

- ... the positioning of chat support on sexual abuse with regard to the other support services offered by your organisation;
- ... the new position of your organisation in the social work environment following the development of chat support;
- ... recommendations for the successful implementation of chat support.

Chat support on sexual abuse with regard to other internal support services

Two perspectives will be addressed:

- the positioning of chat support with regard to other support programmes offered by your organisation;
- the positioning of chat support on sexual abuse with regard to other chat support options in your organisation.

The positioning of chat support with regard to other support programmes offered by your organisation

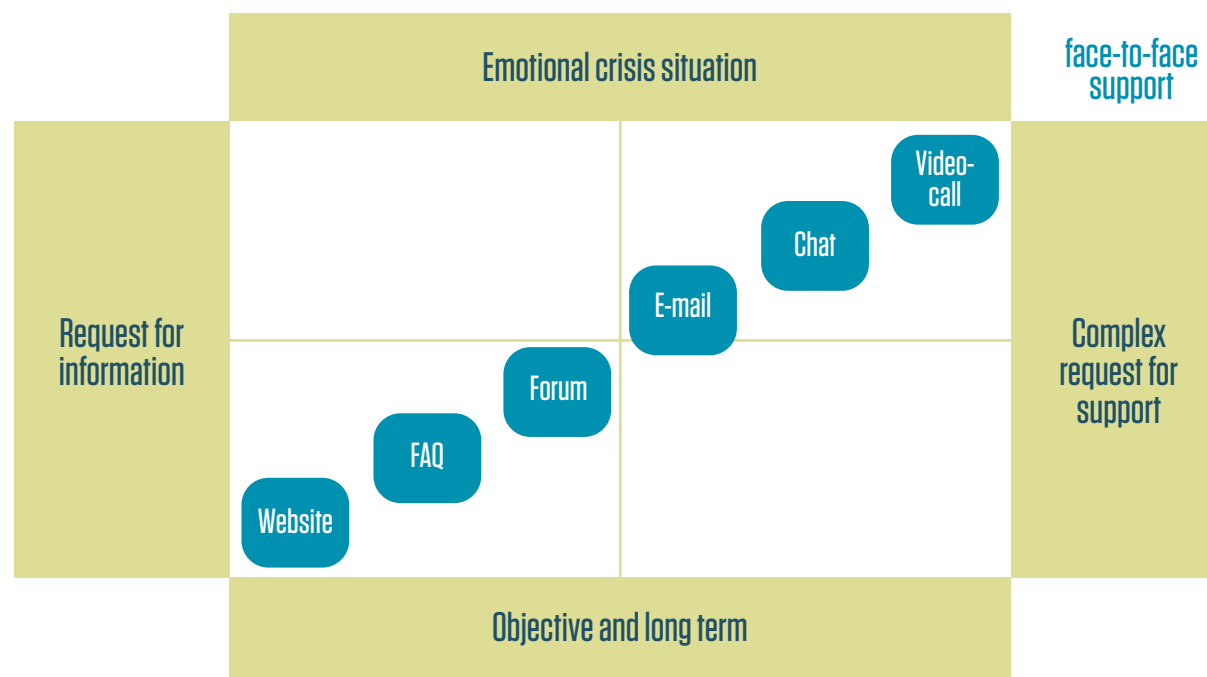
Organisations are required to make clear decisions with regard to the position of the chat support programme both before and after the launch of a chat support programme.

All communication tools have benefits and disadvantages. According to Fransen (2010), chat support is an appropriate communication tool to address and discuss complex requests for help in emotional (crisis) situations.

The switch between communication tools (from chat to face-to-face for example) is not easy. De

dropout risks are significant. It is important to pay enough attention to this switch. Register whether this switch is successful or not.

Chat compared to other forms of communication



? Which elements from the overall vision for the provision of support are decisive for the chat support on sexual abuse programme in the organisation?

- Which elements from the overall vision of the provision of support must be adapted within the organisation in order to accommodate the chat support on sexual abuse programme?
- How do chat support on sexual abuse conversations compare with regard to other (online or offline) types of support?
 - Chat support conversations are an autonomous type of support;
 - Chat support conversations are a complementary type of support;
 - Chat support conversations serve as advisory introductions to other types of support;
 - Chat support conversations serve as intermediate support (pending other types of support);
 - Chat support conversations are a component of 'blended support';
 - Chat support conversations are a supplement to, equivalent to or a substitute for other types of support.
- Is the chat support on sexual abuse in your organisation primarily aimed at ...
 - ... active listening (presence)?
 - ... providing psychosocial support?
 - ... offering support?
 - ... providing crisis intervention?
 - ... (active) referral to other organisations or to other types of support in your organisation?

The positioning of chat support on sexual abuse in relation to other chat support within your organisation.

? In the description of the website and the chat support programme, do you explicitly state that talking about 'sexual abuse' is a possible subject (or the main subject)?

- Do you know how your target group (children and/or adolescents) understands your (implicit) description of 'sexual abuse'?
- On your website, do you avoid explicitly talking about 'sexual abuse', or do you use a 'vague' or an 'explicit' definition?

For a number of clients, the fact that they know that they can talk about 'sexual' abuse' in a chat support conversation with your organisation has the effect of lowering the threshold. As a result of the (explicit) reference on the website, they don't expect the counsellor to be surprised if this subject is raised, and that it will be addressed in a professional manner. The client can therefore talk about his or her problem without having to use explicit words.


For other clients, the (explicit) reference to 'sexual abuse' might frighten them off, because they themselves are not (yet) ready to describe their situation as such, or because they are not aware that what is happening to them has to do with sexual abuse.


From the client perspective, it is therefore very important to find the right balance in terms of how 'explicitly' sexual abuse should be listed as a chat item.


Offering chat support on sexual abuse within a broader chat support programme is also not all


that obvious from an organisational perspective: Chat support on sexual abuse requires specific expertise of the employees (see Chapter 10) – even if the chat support is working with a 'log on' system and referral, and if no further psychosocial counselling or support is provided via chat; Even if the focus is on exploration, logging on and referral to further sexual abuse counselling will often involve several chat support conversations (if this is the client's wish) – preferably with the same employee in order to avoid the client having to retell his story over and over again.

But even then, it makes sense for general support lines for one-off chat conversations to also list 'sexual abuse' as a subject. A broader site could perhaps lower the threshold for young people, or they possibly entered the site by chance. 'The way to handle conversations focusing on sexual abuse' could then be included in the thematic training of counsellors, together with other issues such as eating disorders, suicide, self-harm, etc.

 First, clearly determine the target group for your chat support programme;

 Decide whether or not you will explicitly list the 'chat support on sexual abuse' subject on your website or in your organisational advertising, using words and language that your target group uses and understands;

 Be aware of the fact that children and young people often do not describe themselves as victims of sexual abuse.

 Clearly define what you can and cannot provide with regard to support in the context of sexual abuse.

- Clarify what your target group understands by 'sexual abuse';
- If you explicitly list 'chat support on sexual abuse', ensure that it is possible to chat with the same counsellor several times;
- In the case of 'chat support on sexual abuse' there is a very real chance that the step towards other forms of support should be made. You should therefore ensure clear protocols and smooth referral to other forms of support within or outside of your organisation.



"Slachtofferchat aims to provide support to people who have not yet found the courage to ask for help, or who haven't found affiliation with existing support providers. Slachtofferchat also welcomes people who have already found their way to support organisations, but who need additional help." (Slachtofferchat, 2010, p. 3)

"We do not replace health care, student health, welfare or other experts and clinicians. We do not provide diagnosis. We do not replace friends, family and other relations. We do not mention, refer or tell the girls what they should do if they do not ask for it specifically." (Munkesjö, 2011)

A new positioning of the organisation following the chat support offer

By offering 'chat support on sexual abuse', the organisation takes up another position with regard to other social service and support organisations. For a start, you are easily accessible to people seeking support via chat from your entire language area. This means that you may have to review or supplement the protocols and partnerships that you have developed, for example with regard to face-to-face support relating to sexual abuse. This could possibly lead to collaboration with, or referral to organisations from other regions. If further types of support are necessary, the client may be more interested in online support than in face-to-face help. Comprehensive knowledge and cooperation agreements with organisations outside of the region and offering different types of online support should therefore be developed. This could involve a lot of time and energy. New online support initiatives could also be developed on the basis of these new partnerships or chain organisations.



"Meldknop.nl is a website offering information, support and advice to young people aged 11 to 16 who have experienced something unpleasant on the Internet. 'Meldknop.nl' is an initiative of 'Digibewust' and the 'Meldpunt Kinderporno' on the Internet, and is supported by the 'Kindertelefoon', 'Pestweb', 'Meldpunt Discriminatie Internet' and 'vraaghetdepolitie.nl'. In 2011, Kindertelefoon (child phone) made an active contribution to the realisation of 'Meldknop.nl'. (Kindertelefoon Nederland, 2011, p. 16)



"Something we learned is that networking is more fruitful when gathered around specific issues and problems, and we feel that our network is valuable because this is where we can interact with experts, health care and associations that conduct issues that we do not, and thus complement and inspire each other." (Munkesjö, 2011)

Recommendations for a successful implementation

From the survey, organisations quoted the following suggestions and success factors in connection with the launching of a chat support on sexual abuse:

- Start in a small, slow and quiet way: take your time away from the spotlight, but be prepared for a (too) fast growth.
- Keep the chat support line anonymous and free-of-charge, this helps to lower the threshold.
- Be available, and offer a wide range of opening hours: be sure to offer time during school-free hours, and, if possible, also during the weekend and evenings. Place your chat opening hours clearly on the website, and ensure that it is available at those times. This will enhance your reliability.
- Develop procedures, protocols, methodologies and work methods for counsellors regarding crisis situations, referrals and legal issues (Chapter 9).

Combine the chat support line with your own offline services to facilitate referrals and to ensure that the expertise is used more extensively.

Work together and form networks. Combine strengths in social work. Limit the number of new (short-term) initiatives to ensure that continuity and overview are retained.

Do not launch a chat support experiment if you have no perspective of continuity, as you will be creating expectations for the target group. Several chat support on sexual abuse providers in Europe have (temporarily) stopped operating after an experimental phase due to...

- changes in the (priorities of) the management;
- an unclear long term vision on the future of chat support in the organisation;
- the lack of accordance with other relevant chat support organisations in the region and subsequent conflicts between organisations;
- insufficient chat help counsellors and insufficient training for them;
- a lack of structural funding.

Always make the website and the chat support offer user-friendly: the client is the central focus, not the technology or your organisation.

Provide a secure chat support environment. Be first and foremost a sounding board, build up trust and do not refer too soon.

Provide secure technology. The software must be stable, safe and reliable. Technical problems make a chat alliance very difficult.

Invest in the (ongoing) education, training and coaching of the counsellors. Keep refining the method that is used.

Invest in making your organisation and its chat feature known.

Some of the ongoing challenges in any chat support on sexual abuse programme are:

The creation of a support base for the provision of online support. The work environment and the government still need convincing that chat support is an appropriate and complementary form of support.

The guarantee of availability puts a lot of strain on the organisation. The request for chat support is much greater than the capacity of volunteers or employees.

Finding regular and structural funding is a constant concern. The demand for chat support is high, and, as a result, there is pressure to continuously increase opening hours and to expand the professional support provided; this in turn implies an

increased need for organisation: this requires a lot of manpower and resources.

Monitor the legal and ethical aspects of chat help in your country and in the countries of collaborating partners.

The organisation of chat support by a local, community-bound organisation comes up against the reach of the Internet. Cooperation between different regions must be foreseen.

Cooperation requires time and energy in terms of alignment, making supported decisions, the management of the range of services and the employees, etc.



And, in addition ...

In addition to the elements that have been mentioned so far regarding the development of a chat support on sexual abuse programme, there are also numerous implementation issues, such as:

	How many and which counsellors will you free up for the development, implementation or maintenance of the chat support programme? Will you recruit chat support counsellors from your existing workforce, or will you attract new chat support counsellors?
	What are the consequences of the chat support for the workplace of the staff? Could counsellors (volunteers or professionals) provide chat support from their home?
	How long and at what times in the week will your chat support be available? Are you opting for 'one-off chat support conversations' on the subject of sexual abuse or for a longer support process via chat?
	Are you opting for your own chat support operation, or will you outsource it to another organisation (via a cooperation protocol)? What type of relationship is your chat support on sexual abuse programme aiming at with the Safer Internet support service, for example?
	What new ICT modifications or extensions do you need for your chat support? Who is (quickly) available if technical problems occur?
	How much money should be provided for the development, implementation and maintenance of the chat support programme? How can you guarantee that, after receiving 'experimental financing' you will not have to shut down your chat support service due to lack of funding?

The 'Ch@dvce Reflector' is a tool that can be used by an organisation as a 'reflector' for the development of a chat support on sexual abuse programme or for the assessment of the current offer (also see the last but one page).

The opening hours of chat support on sexual abuse in Europe are very diverse:

- 24/24, 7/7
- or on fixed hours, e.g. during the day on working days or on after-school hours,
- but less during the weekends,
- or on a limited number of very irregular hours, and therefore unpredictable,
- or only on appointment via e-mail

Number of chat support conversations in screened organisations in 2011:

- Varies between 191 to 7,000, of which between 4% and 74% on sexual abuse
- Sexual abuse is mostly mentioned as topic, but rarely as the main item.

4. THE WEBSITE AS GATEWAY FOR THE CHAT SUPPORT SERVICE

This chapter provides recommendations for a well-developed chat support programme on the website of the organisation based on the screening of 38 sites that offer chat support in Europe. The following topics will be covered successively: the attractiveness of the website, the power of interactive tools, the user-friendliness of the website, what should be mentioned on the homepage, security measures and the chat support on the website.

Attractiveness of the website for children and young people

The paradox of the 'professional seriousness' versus the 'friendly lightness of chatting' also applies to the website in which the chat support is embedded. On the one hand, the website must reflect the seriousness with which the personal problems of the persons seeking support are handled, while the site must be attractive for the target group on the other.

The use of language and images in particular has an impact on whether children and young people

find a site attractive.

For language, this mainly relates to:

- language use (informal style, adjusted to the level...);
- not too much text, or text in harmony with images;
- keep the text brief and to the point, yet offer the option of obtaining a lot of information;
- large enough letters;
- column headers that draw the attention/interest.

In the case of images, the emphasis is on:

- a 'young' attractive lay-out;
- drawings or photograph(s) on the homepage;
- a flashy start (the logo appears in an original manner, for example);
- transitions to other screens supported by original forms/colours/lines;
- the visitor has the option of adding a personal touch (e.g. selection of the background);
- interactive tools, videos, games... on the site
- lay-out (per sub-site) aligned to your target group.



www.kindertelefoon.nl – January 25, 2013



www.cyberhus.dk – January 25, 2013



www.awel.be – January 25, 2013

- 🚩 Create sites that appeal to the target group in terms of images and language.
- 🚩 Highlight the seriousness van the chat support you offer, in order to distinguish from fun websites.
- 🚩 Consider whether partial or sub-websites for children and adolescents require a different lay-out while still offering the same functions, services and support.
- 🚩 If you have an adult website with a sub-division for children or young people, ensure that this is clear on your homepage.
- 🚩 Ensure sufficient difference in design and content between the sub-sites for adults and young people. Avoid adolescents seeing more or less the same pages as the adults.
- 🚩 Refrain from using too much text, images are usually more appealing. Ensure appealing proportions, particularly on the homepage. Be aware that young people value clear information on violence and sexual abuse on the internet.
- 🚩 If you opt for small(er) characters, make sure you use a larger font for the column headers.
- 🚩 Provide simplicity. A site can quickly appear chaotic.

The power of interactive tools

European websites for young people seeking chat support regarding sexual abuse work with a range of interactive tools. In addition to the (more) classic tools such as forums, (serious) games, polls, self tests, testimonials, quizzes, surveys, requests for feedback... the following examples are inspiring:

- Young blogs (cyberhus.dk or tjejjouren.se);
- Puzzle corner as a combination of forum and group chat (nuoret.info);
- Interactive columns, games and films or music clips, and, in particular, a fun zone with 12 videos and the assignment to make choices in relationship situations (canyoufixit.sense.info);
- Scribble: where you can draw how you feel and save your drawing (getconnected.org.uk);
- Column 'idols were also kids once': cards or photos of idols who talk about a problem they had when they were small (bris.se);
- 'Tell a friend': send an e-mail to a friend to introduce the site to him (kindertelefoon.nl);
- Forum directly on the homepage: if you click a question or a header in the forum, you immediately get a list with additional information, links, etc. relating to that subject;
- A suggestion box for site improvements with a reward (hulpmix.nl);
- A report button for reporting sexual abuse (an organisation is often unable to provide this itself).

These tools not only make your website more attractive, but they also and above all provide a lot of added value in terms of content. For example:

- Film clips with 'testimonials' demonstrate to young people that they are not alone in struggling with their problem;

- Tests, film clips... give young people a 'language and structure' to put their problems relating to sexual abuse into words;
- Interactive tools enhance the 'involvement';
- The time waiting for a chat conversation can be bridged.

- 🚩 Ensure that the users can download games free-of-charge without problems.
- 🚩 Use the information and referral function by means of interactive tools and links.
- 🚩 Visit other sites to find ideas and explore possibilities!

User-friendliness of the website

Young site users should be able to easily find their way through the general information and in the chat.

- ✚ Make sure that the content corresponds to the name of the heading.
- ✚ Avoid repetition and overlapping in the columns.
- ✚ Also provide information about the chat in the FAQ section or disclaimer.
- ✚ Keep the information up-to-date.
- ✚ Ensure that the website can easily be found with search engines ('search engine optimisation' or SEO).
- ✚ Provide clear information headings: Who are we, how does the chat work, FAQ...
- ✚ Make essential items (immediately visible without additional.



www.jac.be – January 16, 2013

What to put on the homepage?

Here again, diversity is a bonus! The following elements certainly deserve to be highlighted on the homepage:

- ✚ Clear links and data relating to the chat and the other forms of (online) support.
- ✚ Information about the site's target group.
- ✚ Information about the online counsellors (professionals, trained volunteers, peers, people with similar problems); for example: *"Consultants have extensive experience of working with children and young people. In their earlier work, they have been exposed to a wide range of child and adolescent problems."* (www.lasteabi.ee)
- ✚ If you are working with volunteers, indicate that they have been trained or that they have experience.
- ✚ Information about privacy, anonymity, confidentiality.
- ✚ The indication regarding 'sexual abuse' or other subjects the visitor can find on the site.
- ✚ A close button (hide page) to hide the page if someone comes in unexpectedly.
- ✚ Information about the envisaged target group.

Consult sources with checklists for good on-line support websites (Bocklandt, 2011, p. 135; Eidenbenz, 2009, p. 213; Gerö, 2009, p. 65–71; Schalken, 2010, p. 238)



www.childfocus.be/nl/nu-praat-ik-er-over/child-advice-home – January 14, 2013



Inspiring examples:

- www.cyberhus.dk: The English summary with plenty of information and an attractive brochure about the organisation are very useful.
- www.awel.be shows an interview with a volunteer in connection with the organisation.
- www.bris.se shows a clip in which children are talking about the organisation.
- www.sense.info has a section: 'sense in jouw regio' ('sense in your region') with information about consultation hours and the availability of STI tests, condom vending machines and the morning-after pill in their vicinity.
- www.kinderschutz-wien.at provides an explanation about children's rights, and also introduces other organisations (youth services, crisis centres, police, etc.).
- www.netecoute.fr demonstrates originality by providing the option of returning users' calls.
- www.getconnected.org.uk is the only site to mention free support through texting. They also offer web support (24/7). It is possible to click a subject here, following which you can see where you can find support; for what age; for what target group, etc.
- www.hulpmix.nl does not specifically mention the subjects you can chat about, but the site is remarkably full of subjects and information.



www.getconnected.org.uk – January 16, 2013



www.netecoute.fr – January 16, 2013



www.hulpmix.nl – January 16, 2013

Security measures

A website for online support must be reliable. This applies in particular if sexual abuse is one of the subjects. The following are important security measures (Dimitrova, 2011 and Alzin, 2012):

- Provide each chat support counsellor with a personal login and password to log into the computer system and the chat application.
- Avoid the use of external devices (USB, CD-ROM, disk...).
- Ensure that the database with the chat support transcripts is stored on a separate server that is not connected to the Internet. Limit the number of employees who have access to this server.
- Ensure that the data is regularly backed up.
- Secure the communication between clients and counsellors using encryption technology (SSL).
- Explain to the website users what they can do themselves in order to maximise security.
- Ensure that they understand that nobody else is able to read the chat conversation in a one-to-one chat, except for the other counsellors (in the context of shared professional secrecy).
- Ensure that the chat support software can easily be secured.

- As counsellors, ensure the highest possible confidentiality.
- Ensure that the counsellors take care that persons seeking support do not disclose their identity due to carelessness or ignorance.



The heading 'How to hide your visit to' on www.tjejjouren.se includes information on how to erase the internet history. Www.FierFryslan.nl even explains this by using screenshots.



www.fierfryslan.nl – October 7, 2012

The chat support on the website

The website is the gateway to the chat. The smooth easy way to find and reachability of the chat support are of crucial importance.

Before the client starts the chat conversation, he must have enough information to allow him to have realistic expectations about the course and the possibilities of the chat conversation.

Recommendations on the chat support program

- 🚩 Make sure that all links and steps of the chat work fluently. Test this yourself regularly!
- 🚩 Describe the method in chatting, even if the chat is closed.
- 🚩 If the chat is closed (unscheduled), persons seeking support should not be able to log in.
- 🚩 Provide information in terms of waiting times.
- 🚩 Consider whether the person seeking help should register. If so, make it simple.
- 🚩 Make it clear that the chat is free-of-charge.
- 🚩 Clarify the purpose of the chat and of your support provision in general terms.
- 🚩 Indicate the opening hours of your chat.
 - Create opening hours when your clients have the opportunity to chat.
 - Opening hours during weekends and evenings are popular.

🚩 Ensure that the chat feature is actually available during the stated times.

- 🚩 Ensure that the link to the chat room is always easy to find and is always working.
- Access to the chat room is always possible with a single click.
 - If the chat is closed: specify when the chat is open and refer to other sources of support.

🚩 If the chat is busy: give an estimate of the waiting time and refer to other tools and sources of support on your own site, the site of other support organisations or to offline support. A good example can be found at Hulpmix.nl, who, in addition to the offer to send an e-mail, also give the following message: *"The chat cannot help if you are in a life-threatening situation. If this is the case, we advise you to phone your family doctor or the Youth Care Office in your own region as soon as possible."* The client can then click on a link to the 'Youth Care Office'.

🚩 If possible, display a queue where the client can see how many people are waiting before him. Make it clear that those who are in the queue will have an opportunity to chat. *"During the opening hours of the chat line, a number of children can join a queue. If the queue is full, they have to try to come back again later. BRIS lets all children chat who joined the queue during the opening hours."* (Bris, 2011)

🚩 Provide information about the consequences of certain actions, such as clicking on a link. The user must always know in advance when he is clicking through the portal or when he will enter the chat room itself.

Recommendations on the content about the chat support

- Indicate the subjects the user can chat about (briefly) and consider whether or not you will explicitly mention 'sexual abuse'. For organisations with a broad range of topics (such as a child helpline), this can be done in general terms (such as 'about everything on your mind'), but sexual abuse can also be mentioned as a topic among other topics.
- Organisations that work specifically on the topic of sexual abuse may implicitly or explicitly refer to situations and degrees of sexual abuse. For example: *"Do you have questions about sexual abuse? Do you feel forced to do things that you do not want to do? Do you know anyone with such a problem?"* (www.childfocus.be/nl/nu-praat-ik-er-over/child-advice-home - 25/09/2012)
- Explain what the client may expect: the type of conversation, advice, (no) guidance, duration of the conversation ... and, if possible, give an example of a chat support conversation. Such an example of a chat will help to illustrate what a client can expect.
- A 'roadmap' on how the chat progresses is useful.



On this site, the steps are clearly indicated 'around' the opening hours: Indications:

- 1) Go to the chat room,
- 2) If you have to wait, have a look around the website,
- 3) If the chat room is free, you can start a conversation,
- 4) Would you like to try?



<http://kek-vonal.hu/tini/chat/> – 25 september2012

5. CHAT SUPPORT ... A SPECIFIC METHOD

The previous chapters focussed on the vision and the positioning of chat support on sexual abuse within the organisation, and on the website of the organisation. In the following, attention is drawn to the chat support conversation itself. The following is clarified in this chapter:

- What is a 'method'?
- Length, breadth and depth aspects of this method
- Method rules of thumb

This chapter provides the framework for the in-depth discussions of the subsequent chapters.

What is a 'method'

The method of chat support will focus on the way in which good chat support is achieved. It is not purely theoretical; even though the method has a theoretical foundation, it will always be strongly based on practical observations. It makes reliable and effective practical experience stronger. At the same time, it identifies new knowledge by looking at practical experience in an alert, critical manner. In order to be able to refer to a method, it must meet three essential requirements: a systematic approach, purpose and process consistency.

The **systematic approach** of the chat support method is expressed in the consistency with which various perspectives and characteristics are related to one another: the successive steps that can be distinguished in virtually every chat support conversation; the way in which not only the discussion partners but also their environment is involved; the way in which chat support conversations are conducted; the attention to ethical and legal issues relating to chat support in the context of sexual abuse.

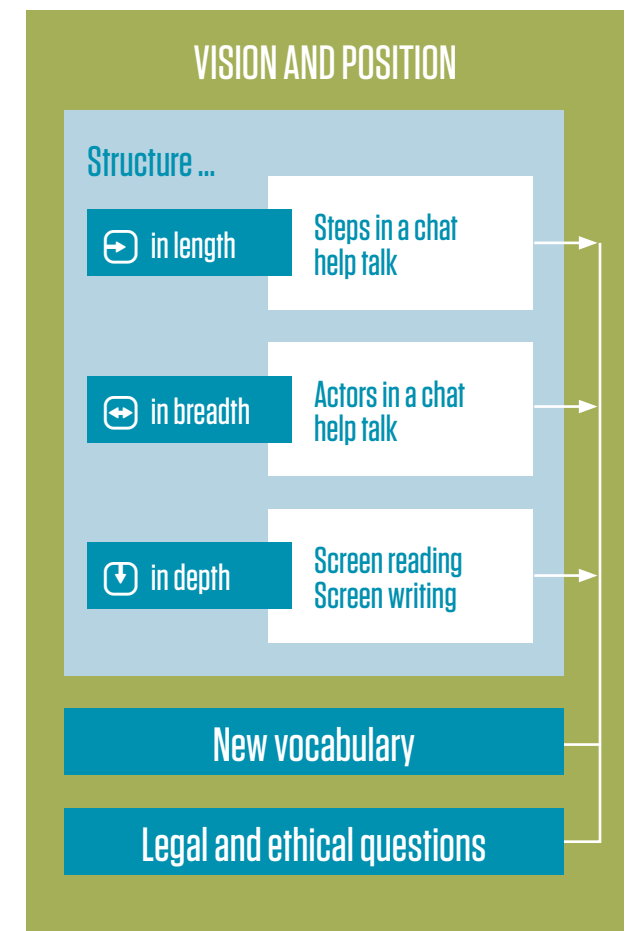
For chat support, the **purpose** of the method is closely related to the key mission of the

organisation, and to the vision on the chat positioning in the overall context (see Chapter 3).

The **process character** is demonstrated by the development of a number of steps between prologue and epilogue, but is primarily strongly defined and borne by the quality of the contact between the client and the counsellor—referred to as 'the relationship' in face-to-face contacts. In the framework of chat support, the relationship is called 'the chat alliance', and is described as the 'relationship between client and counsellor that ensures safety and reliability, as the basis for openness' (Vlaeminck et al, 2009b).

Length, breadth and depth aspects of the chat support method

Various aspects of the chat support method are addressed in this 'Ch@dvce Guide'. First and foremost, this relates to the background against which all other elements should be considered; i.e., the organisational choices in terms of the vision and the positioning of chat support on sexual abuse.



Within this vision and positioning, the systematic approach and the process consistency can be expressed through a structure in which certain steps or phases are followed either sequentially (one after the other) or iteratively (repetitive, sometimes also simultaneously). Every chat support conversation has the following phases: prologue, introduction, problem exploration and problem definition, action and closure, possibly supplemented by an epilogue. We call this **the structure in length** (see Chapter 6). Every step or phase will be assessed by the various actors, each from their own (individual) perspective

or compass. For every method, the following questions will be reflected upon 'Who are the actors?' and 'What are their motives in the process?'. This component is referred to as **the structure in breadth** (see Chapter 7). In order to guarantee purpose, a method will effectively and efficiently make use of adequate skills, techniques and resources: called **structure in depth** (see Chapter 8). Finally, **ethical and legal aspects** will be also considered (see Chapter 9), as well as new concepts that are used by this chat support method (see Chapter 11).



Method rules of thumb

Rule of thumb 1: the chat support method is strongly based on practice.

The method recognises and archives experiential knowledge derived from good practices, and identifies new knowledge in a critical, alert manner.

Rule of thumb 2: The chat support method obtains an individual 'colouring' for every counsellor.

During the actual application, the method user will link the instrumental side of the method to personal authenticity. This is the reason why these recommendations should not be seen as a restrictive set of rules, but as a stimulus for counsellors and/or organisations to make individual choices.

Rule of thumb 3: The chat support method provides guidance while reflecting on how to act.

Daily practice calls for making informed choices for oneself and for others. The method offers a coat hanger here. We therefore hope that conscious choices are made in day-to-day chat support on the basis of these recommendations, examples and questions.

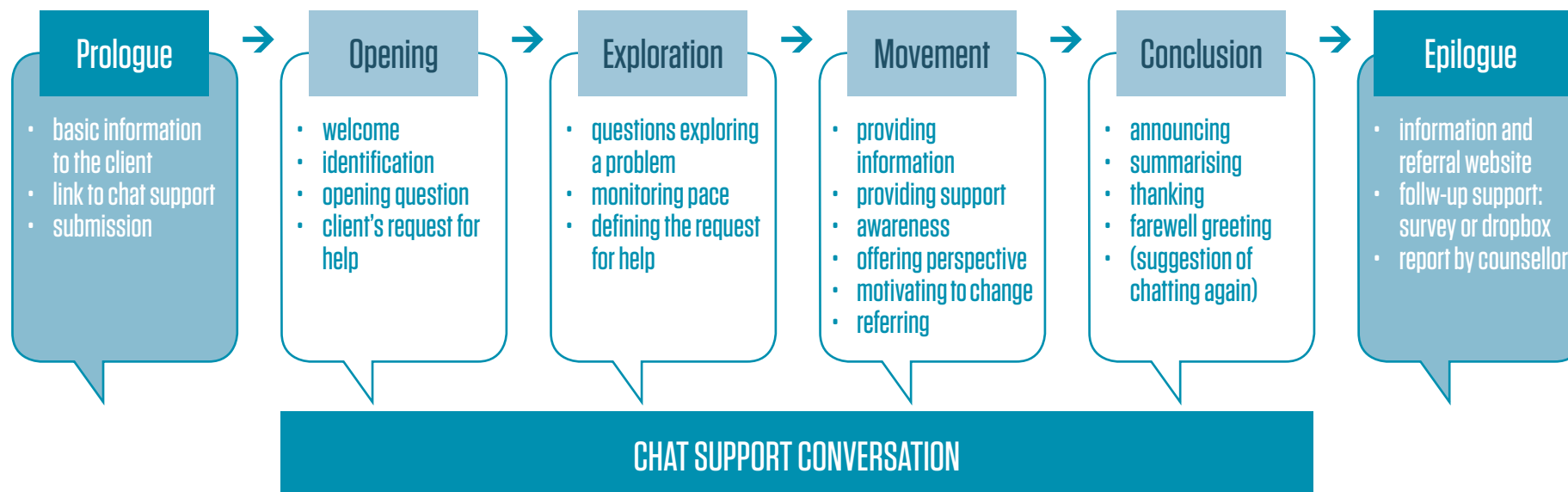
Rule of thumb 4: The method acknowledges professional intuition, tacit knowledge and pragmatics and encourages the systematic approach.

The method increasingly acknowledges the power of intuitive knowledge that drives our daily activities. For this reason, this guide aims to be a modest incentive, respecting the skills and experience of the counsellors who create the practical reality every day.



6. CHAT SUPPORT... A PROCESS IN STEPS – LENGTH ASPECTS OF THE METHOD –

The system and process inherent in the chat support method are reflected in the successive steps that can be found in a chat support conversation. These steps are not necessarily linear: in practice, the counsellor sometimes returns to a previous step. Moreover, not all phases must be addressed in every conversation. This depends on the nature of the conversation and the expectations of the client. The phased structure is therefore not a compelling element.



Prologue

The phase before the actual conversation starts is the prologue. This is the phase in which the client visits the website and finds the information about the chat (opening times, aim, how the chat progresses, how to start, etc.). If he decides to have a chat conversation, he will log in.

The website as gateway to the chat support link

The website forms the gateway to the chat support. It is the first step in the chat support process. Many of the questions and uncertainties of the help seekers can be solved there. See page 25 for recommendations on this topic.


Login or registration?

The login is an intermediate step between the prologue and the start of the chat conversation


(and is often initiated by clicking on the chat button of chat link). In this phase, the client is asked to provide information about himself. Usually a name or nickname is asked for, and sometimes the client can specify what he would like to chat about.


The user is sometimes asked to 'register' (even before the login), for example in order to be able to post messages on the forum or to chat by appointment. The information that is asked for usually consists of a combination of name or


nickname, gender, age or date of birth, place of residence (post code), password, e-mail address, and sometimes 'acceptance of the terms of use' is requested. Occasionally, the user can specify which information is visible to others.


 What information do you really need from the client to enable the best possible chat support? It may, for example, be relevant to know whether the client is a boy or a girl. In the case of (the reporting of) sexual abuse, it is very important to know whether or not the person is under age. The place of residence may also be relevant, for example, for referrals by an umbrella site, if off-line follow-up is appropriate or if regional registration is required for the financing.

- Should you ask for this information in advance, or can you also do this in the course of the conversation, depending on the turn the chat takes?

 Indicate that the client may use a nickname in the login screen. The nickname may be a source of additional information for the counsellor.

 The request to write down the subject, the support that is needed, or the formulation of the problem can help the client to focus and can offer the counsellor a starting point for the conversation.

 Do not ask for more information than necessary for an efficient conversation during the login. The more information you ask for, the more complex the prologue phase becomes, and the higher the threshold. Limit the login by making some of the fields optional.

 Consider whether registration in advance can be avoided.


Chat support conversation


In the chat support conversation itself a distinction can be made between different stages: the opening, the exploratory phase, goal setting, movement and conclusion.


This is translated into the following approach by the counsellor: after the introduction, the focus is determined. The counsellor creates a context that allows reflection and perspective. The next stage is to motivate and put forward options. Upon conclusion it is still possible to focus on (positive) things, which the client can do after the conversation.


Opening: a warm welcome and the first stage in the request for help


The opening of the conversation is the first point of contact between the client and counsellor. The 'tone' of the conversation is set at this point. The opening creates the basis that inspires the client with the confidence to dare to make a request for help.

 Provide a (personal) warm welcome. *"Hi, you're talking with Martine from the organisation [x]. Welcome to our chat."* or *"BLOB consultant, Hello, how can I help you"*. Tip: Wait for 5 minutes for clients who do not respond. (They may, for example, have already been in the queue for fifteen minutes and in the mean time have been looking at the website or regularly switching between 2 screens).


 Be aware that many clients will have had to have forced themselves to get over this hurdle in order to register.

 Immediately examine the information that the client has provided. *"I read that you have some difficulties?"* or *"You are worried, but you don't know what to do?"*.

 If the client does not immediately take the initiative, more general questions may provide a framework of reference. Good starter questions are: *"What do you want to talk about?"*, *"Do you want to ask or say something?"*

 If possible, pay them a compliment. *"That's brave of you to ..."*

 Show understanding, empathise, reassure.

 Recognise that for the client this conversation is the source of tension.



Co: *Hi Saartje, welcome to XX* (personal welcome, the counsellor starts the conversation)

Cl: *Hi*

Co: *I read that you are being bullied/you're afraid of your brother...* (address information from the submission)

Cl: *Yes that's right, it's been going on for two years now*

Co: *I'm so sorry to hear that* (empathic response)

Cl: *I think it's good that you want to do something about it* (compliment)

Exploration and goal setting

What are the facts, feelings and needs of the client? What does the client expect from the chat support conversation? In this phase the counsellor explores the client's request for help. For this purpose, the facts, circumstances (what exactly is going on?), making sense of the situation and perception are explored. Some clients get to the point quickly, but often the person seeking help does not know what the nub of the matter is. Often the client broaches a number of aspects to the problem or various situations. It is then necessary to define the issues and set goals.

- Discuss with the client what expectations he has for the chat. If the client doesn't clearly understand this for himself, then find a starting point and start at where he is now.

Co: *In fact you yourself want to leave home, but you don't want your parents to find out?*

Cl: *Yes, that's right ☺*

Co: *And you're asking me how you can go about tackling this?*

Cl: *Yes !*

Co: *Unfortunately, I don't think that it is possible for you to leave home without informing your parents.*

Cl: *We can look at where you can go, and how you might deal with your parents on this. Is that what you want?*

- Adopt an enquiring approach towards clients who really have difficulty expressing themselves (who may, for example, respond to many questions by saying 'I don't know'). *"I just wonder if something particular has happened which is making you sad?"*

- Give the client the opportunity to define the topic of the conversation for himself. Start with general questions if the client does not indicate a specific problem or is finding it difficult to move forward.

- Explore the issues and as well as facts also ask about the client's feelings and his values and standards. Exploring the client's experience, ensures that the client feels understood and helps to establish the chat alliance. Expressing feelings can be very short and sometimes involve the use of short words from everyday usage.

Co: *gosh... that's difficult*

Co: *oops*

- Connect the 'replaying of feelings' as part of the same intervention to 'making one further step in the process'. An additional question should help to clarify the situation or to encapsulate one aspect of a problem.

- If the client hardly shares anything about any request for help (underdisclosure), then ask additional factual questions about his living situation and, where applicable, refer to a nickname or submission form information.

- Focus on what is most important for the client here and now. Being able to explore the history (the 'then') of the problem situation is not self-evident in a chat support conversation.

- Make sure that the focus of the goal of the conversation lies with the client. *"People and children tend to talk about*

the desire for the other person to change. Changing the behaviour of other people is not within your own control. The only behaviour over which you have much influence, is the behaviour of you, yourself" (Meldpunt Kinderporno Nederland ['Netherlands child pornography helpline'], 2001b)

- Consider the available time and the mandate within the organisation. Don't get bogged down in exploring and unravelling the (often complex, multiple) issues. If confronted with complex issues, focus on what the client can do after the chat conversation and whether any alternative support can help in this.

- "As a rule it is always the young person who determines and defines the contents and speed of the individual chat session. As the counsellor it is your responsibility to set a framework, which gives the child/adolescent a chance to reveal and clarify emotions and problems, and reflect on solutions and options."* (Cyberhus, 2012)

Movement

After exploration comes the 'movement' phase. Through various forms of support (questioning, information, support, awareness, motivating to take action) we are working towards a tipping point... a step forward. In chat support conversations bringing about action, change or a solution is not self-evident. In the first chat support conversation it is more about a minor change, a possible perspective, something allowing the client to go further... When it comes to multiple chat support conversations a process of change may be initiated. For example, it is often neither

“People do not change as a result of what they hear others saying, but as a result of what they hear themselves saying in response to others.”

(Blaise Pascal, scientist 17th century)

desirable nor feasible to encourage the client in one conversation relating to sexual abuse to immediately report this abuse or to refer them for further guidance. A number of contacts are often required to achieve this. In situations involving on-going sexual abuse, there is also a tension between the needs of the client to feel safe and to feel listened to and the counsellor's compulsion to intervene or 'to stop the abuse' (see Chapter 9).

- Ask the client: what do you think you could do? Urge him to take action. It is not only the task of the counsellor to find solutions (the person seeking help is also involved in thinking things through).
- In the case of on-going sexual abuse 'the movement' depends on 'stopping the abuse'. It cannot be the intention that the client gains sufficient strength from being able to let off steam 'normally' in the course of the chat thereby allowing him to continue to live with the abuse.
- Recognise the limitations of your organisation in cases of sexual abuse. Can you yourself help further or is a referral required (see below)?

- Encourage the client to give up his anonymity in serious threatening situations.
- Work at a balanced and specific approach tailored to the young person: first work at closeness (where is the young person? What change is now (not yet) possible?) Reassure him or her.

Providing information

Providing information is a form of personalised knowledge transfer. Specific to online information questions is the availability of the extensive internet-based services. Anyone wishing to provide information customised for the client, will have to assess the client's knowledge base on screen.



Case study (Dimitrova, 2011):

- "I want to ask you something... They posted a picture of me which is not very nice. I mean that if my mom and dad see it I may have problems... But I like it a lot. It's cool ... Is there any possible way of making it invisible to grownups?"*
The task of the consultants is to clarify the problem, to ask for and to think of examples.
- "My mommy told me that on the Internet there are some old bad paedophiles who... can rape me in the computer."*
The task of the consultants is to explain in the simplest possible way what kind of person a paedophile is and that it is impossible to be raped through a computer. However, it may also be important to take the opportunity to make children aware of other possible (sexually-related) risks and how to cope with them.

- Avoid long information-based messages: if necessary, break things down into short, easy-to-understand messages.
- Depending on the type of question or chat, consider what is the most appropriate medium for this information. Where applicable, refer to email, to information on your own website or refer to other specific websites. Be aware that this switch of communication channel is not without risk of dropout.
- Think of the legal and ethical consequences if incorrect information is given.

Providing support

Support involves any form of encouragement, reassurance, safeguarding, empathy or appreciation. It promotes the chat alliance and reduces doubt, uncertainty or shame.

- Provide adequate safety. Provide information about anonymity and confidentiality, and the specificity of this in an online context.
- Avoid throw-away expressions of understanding. This can come over as phoney especially during the start-up phase, when you still have limited information about the client.
- Encourage the client to take achievable steps. Pre-empt any eventual failures.

Work at raising awareness and understanding

Providing insight is offering a different perspective in the hope that as a result the client gains a more balanced, realistic or hopeful picture about his/her situation or request for help.

🚩 Explore to find out where the client is in terms of his awareness regarding the topics that he wants to discuss. Some may not yet be able to effectively identify feelings of doubt, or ambivalence, others are clearer about this and mainly want to talk about their options, and then others know what they need, but lack the courage to take steps to back this up person-to-person.

🚩 A client may formulate a different perspective as a result of reflective questions from the counsellor.

Co: "What would you most dearly like to do?"

Co: "So this is how you feel... but do you think you have the courage to deal with this in the same way?"

🚩 Express the position of your organisation. (Sexual) abuse is wrong.

Co: "What you are describing, we in our organisation would label as 'sexual abuse'. Do you also feel that this is the case?"

From the point of view of 'Safer Internet' it seems that clients are not so much lacking in knowledge or insight into the possible dangers or consequences of online behaviour. BRIS reports that it is more that there is a lack of reflection than a lack of knowledge.



Lack of reflection rather than a lack of knowledge

"In contact with BRIS, young people often wonder how to report something they have experienced. In addition to this, there are rarely any indications that the young people have a lack of knowledge about security online. At the same time, a large portion of the contacts in part regret, are worrying about or are ashamed of what someone has done. The question then is why so many young people still did what they did, why they exposed themselves to these risks? Basically, it appears to be a matter of a general longing for affirmation, which can be quickly and easily satisfied online. The young people are often well aware of how it works and know the consequences – at least on a superficial level. At the same time, the fact that so many clearly have regrets indicates that they did not have the opportunity to really reflect over the consequences. They know how it works and what can happen, but they have not reflected more closely about what it could entail for them in particular." (Bris, 2011)

Offering perspective and looking at options

Providing a different perspective is a form of offering insight or promoting reflection. By typing in or eliciting new points of view himself, the counsellor hopes to influence the client's positions discussed earlier or to create an opening in what might seem like a hopeless situation.

🚩 Look for tailored suggestions to support the client to act in accordance with what he wants. (Do not force the issue).
Co: "What would living with your father without abuse be like?"

🚩 Help the client to seek out resources, strength, courses of action that previously worked.

🚩 Using the conditional tense when typing in points of view. For example "Could it mean that..."

🚩 Ask about trustworthy people in their environment. Who can they go to, offline or online?

🚩 Find out how long a client waits before typing in a response to the new point of view.

🚩 Carefully read the response to the new points of view. Are any objections raised? Are there any signs of slight hesitation? Does it evoke indignation, discussion?

Motivating to change










What is the client going to do about his problems after the chat conversation? Chat conversations are not exclusively intended to provide ad hoc help but many organisations also want to increase the self-reliance of clients.

In chat support conversations about sexual abuse there is often a tension between 'being present for the client' and the need/necessity to change the abuse situation. It is important that the client is himself aware of his (unwanted) situation and consciously chooses those steps, which are achievable for him.

🚩 Look at what the client has already tried or thought of. Use the online and offline network of the client.

🚩 In the conversation, try together with the


client to work towards achieving a more action-oriented approach.

-  Look together for a workable solution in which the client has confidence and which, in your assessment, could be successful.
-  Adapt your approach to the client. Tie in with the phase (of change) which the child is in.
-  Build things carefully. Outrunning the client will inevitably bring about resistance.
-  Encourage the client to think of something. Hypothetical question: *"If you were to dare do anything, how would you tackle the situation?"*
Brainstorm: *"Shall we first think of all the things and then make a choice?"*
Ask for suggestions from the supporting community: *"Have other people already given you any tips?"*
-  Present options that you yourself put forward, in the conditional tense: *"Could you imagine that with someone else you would..."*
-  Encourage the client to take achievable steps. Pre-empt any eventual failures.
-  Consider aspects of safety. Make an assessment whether the steps that the client is planning are 'safe'.
-  Suggest collaboration or referral if relevant.
-  Properly inform the client about the consequences of his choices, and actions.

Making a referral

Making a referral means that the client is encouraged to use other services or channels (email, face-to-face) for further support or reporting. It is evident from the online survey that the emphasis in most organisations is on providing information, listening and supporting, and not on talking about a full-blown treatment process. Actively making a referral to other organisations is limited. The choice is rarely made to make a referral to (off-line) therapeutic organisations.

In conversations relating to sexual abuse, demands for referral are pertinent. Thanks to its anonymity and accessibility, chat support invites 'disclosure' but quickly comes up against its limitations when it comes to further counselling or treatment. Referring to other organisations or suggesting the switch to other communication tools is not free of risk.

-  In which situations would you make a referral?
 - How do you refer with adequate care and attention?
 - For which level of referral do you mainly aim: Contact with a teacher, parent, doctor ... / with specialist support workers, with police services?
 - What are the consequences of a referral for the client? Be aware that this can vary.
 - Are the channels to which you are making referrals mainly offline, or are there online services too?
 - How far do you go in making referrals? Some gradations: Do you propose one or more referrals as options between which the client can choose? Do you encourage the client to actively take the lead in this? Do you ask the client to make further contact after an initial appointment? Do you yourself make an appointment for the

client? Do you offer to accompany the client in person when going to ...



Child Focus advocates an approach that is tailored to the case that presents itself. Sometimes multiple points of contact are necessary to gather sufficient information before an appropriate referral is possible. The following forms of intervention are possible:

- No referral: the counsellor listens, provides information, advises and helps to look into possible solutions and/or provides some impetus to take action.
- Referral (steering):
 - Encourage the client to make telephone or personal contact with Child Focus or another more appropriate organisation. The counsellor assesses how high the threshold is for the client (to make more personal contact) and explores the factors that underlie this initial hesitation. In addition, the counsellor is able to provide information about the terms of such contact, and about issues such as confidentiality, privacy and professional secrecy. He may initiate this contact.
 - Steering towards the police / crown prosecution service / support services: the counsellor can provide the client with careful information based on need, about the possible options for seeking support or legal proceedings. The choice always remains (with some exceptions) that of the client.
- Referrals to first or second line organisations that offer online help: if the client does not want to try anything other than online support and wants to receive long-term counselling.

Making a referral is not always easy, because you do not want to give the client the feeling that he is being turned away, or is being sent from pillar to post. Albahus makes the following sensible suggestions:

- 🚩 Work in steps.
- 🚩 First find out whether the client personally thinks that he will benefit from any change. You can't force the client. Help the client to reflect on whether referral is a good idea. Ask specific questions that gauges or generates motivation.
"If you could decide everything for yourself, how would you have liked things to be? Is there something you imagine could be different? What would you like to happen?"
If you could decide, what should happen next?" (Albahus)
- 🚩 If the client is open to change, then steer the conversation in the direction of 'the changes, which the client thinks of'.
"What measures should be taken to change the present circumstances? Is there something you can do yourself? Is there something that somebody else should take care of? Can you imagine yourself doing this or that? Imagine that you talk to somebody else about the matters you have just talked to me about: who should it be? What do you think would happen if you did this?" (Albahus)
- 🚩 Present all your possible referrals as options, which the client has at his disposal, if he wants to make use of them.
"It sounds like a good idea to talk to your teacher. Do you think you would be able

to do that?" *"In other cases I have talked to people who made contact with their doctor. Perhaps that could be an opportunity for you too. What do you think about that?"*
"I know a website where the counsellors talk with a lot of girls who are in situations like yours. They also have a chat room where you can remain anonymous. If you want to read more about it, I would be glad to send you a link." (Albahus)

- 🚩 Active listening is a prerequisite for being able to achieve a good referral.

Conclusion

The conclusion of the chat support conversation begins when one of the two parties announces the end of the conversation. This conclusion often takes place over two stages: the start of the conclusion (announcing the end) and the actual end.



"As a rule it should always be the young person who chooses to end the individual chat session. It may be the case that you consider that you have reached a point where the young person is no longer profiting from the conversation and you therefore want to end it.

"This may be the case if a young person is no longer profiting from the conversation, due to emotions like fierce anger, exhaustion, or lack of perspective. It is very difficult to state precisely when the situation is right for a counsellor to end a chat session. This will be an assessment you must make together with the coordinator in charge." (Cyberhus)

This does not mean that the conclusion should be left to the client. *"We advise you to take the responsibility for ending the conversation, when you get the chance."* (Cyberhus)

- 🚩 Consider the organisation-related restrictions, such as opening hours, waiting times and maximum conversation duration. Where applicable, make a referral; clients generally understand.
- 🚩 Always provide timely announcements, if you want to conclude the conversation (e.g. nearly closing time, the conversation is about...). *"I should tell you now that we have 20 minutes left to talk"*
- 🚩 Avoid repetition or going round in circles while concluding the conversation.
- 🚩 Provide a summary of what has been discussed and focus in a positive way on what the child can do.
- 🚩 Ask if the client is able to take on board everything that has been discussed.
- 🚩 Ask whether the conversation was helpful. *"Has the conversation given you a little bit of reassurance? What has the conversation provided you with?"*
- 🚩 Refer to any relevant online or offline resources (or repeat the referral that you have already made) at the end of the conversation.
- 🚩 Pay careful attention to offer some form of thank you and/or type in a farewell.
"I appreciate that you have trusted us. It is

always hard to share something so intimate and it takes much courage.” (Dimitrova, 2011)

- ✦ Offer that they can make contact again. *“I’m glad that you contacted us. I hope I was helpful. If you have anything else you want to share, we are available” (Dimitrova, 2011)*
- ✦ Some conversations are prematurely/ suddenly aborted. The reason for this is not always clear (technical fault? Does somebody arrive disturbing the client?) If the client prematurely disappears, then close the conversation with a concluding sentence. Who knows whether or not the client is still looking on.
- ✦ The last sentence can come from the client or the counsellor. Say, for example, the client might exit the program.
- ✦ Do not take too long saying goodbye. Be bold about concluding the conversation and, where applicable, referring to another conversation.

Epilogue

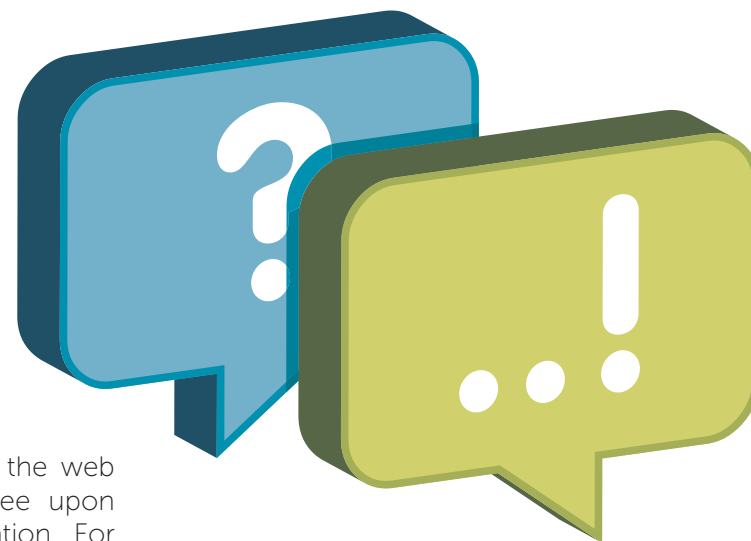
The epilogue is the phase after the conclusion of the chat support conversation. The organisation is able to provide the client with options for follow-up support. The counsellor uses the epilogue for reflections and flagging up issues. Organisations also sometimes use a feedback form or evaluation form.

The feedback tool can be in a section or page on the website and can then be used freely. For

others, the tool is part of the chat applications and a screen automatically appears with some (short) questions about the wellbeing of the client and about the course of the conversation.

What is the client going to do about his problems after the chat conversation? Chat support conversations do not only aim to provide ad hoc support; many organisations also want to increase the self-reliance of clients.

- ✦ Provide relevant information on the web page that the clients get to see upon concluding the online conversation. For example, put on web links, FAQs and other offers of support.
- ✦ Provide the client with an opportunity for further reflection after the online conversation; for instance, by using a survey, a dropbox or an e-mail to the counsellor.
- ✦ Make sure that a new conversation is not automatically opened when the previous conversation has ended. Allow the counsellor to personally activate a conversation from the queue, himself. This provides the opportunity to catch your breath after a serious conversation or to take a short break.
- ✦ As a counsellor, write a short reflective report after each online conversation and use this for your peer supervision sessions or performance management reviews and/or as a reference framework for subsequent online conversations.



7. CHAT SUPPORT... A PROCESS WITH VARIOUS KEY PLAYERS – THE BROAD METHOD –

Two explicit conversation partners are involved in a chat support conversation relating to sexual abuse: the 'client' and 'the counsellor'. It makes sense to introduce these new names, in each case, to 'the person seeking help', 'the client', 'the visitor', on the one hand, and the 'social worker', the support worker, 'the volunteer', on the other, to thus stress the uniqueness of the chat support medium. The two key players are discussed in this chapter and it will become evident that through these two key players, other key players are involved in the chat support conversation.

The client as a key player in the chat conversation

Five subsidiary themes are central to the chat support client as a key player:

- Who is this client, how does he present himself and what influence does he have in the chat support conversation?
- Is the 'abuse' itself presented as a key player and if so how?
- Who is or are the 'other key players' in the sexual abuse, how are they presented and how do they influence the chat support conversation?
- Who from the client's supporting community are involved as key players and how are they presented?
- Finally some specific 'client phenomena' are covered.

The client himself as a key player

The following findings and areas of tension have been distilled from literature and research (Bocklandt, 2011 and Vlaeminck, 2009b):

- the client does (not) have a name;
- the client does (not) have a gender;
- the client does (not) have an age;
- the client discloses and conceals.

These findings raise a number of questions that are also immediately recommendations for the alert counsellor:

- ? Does the client use his own name or a nickname?
- Does this nickname say something about himself, someone else, or about the abuse?
- Does the nickname refer to a fact, an experience, a norm?
- Is it desirable or necessary to know the gender and/or age of the client for your conversation?
- Is the client talking about his own situation? A lot or a little? Too much or too little?
- What does he say about his own situation? In terms of facts and/or experience?

Who are the clients?

From a comparison between telephone support and chat support it appears that in chat support:

- Clients are a little older
- More girls chat
- More clients have left home or only live with one parent
- Clients discuss more domestic or family problems (rather than problems with peers)
- Clients bring up more serious problems (suicide, self-harm...) more abuse and neglect
- Client conduct fewer test conversations

(Sindahl, 2009)

The sexual abuse as a key player

'Sexual abuse' as the subject of the chat support conversation is of course also an important key player in the conversation.

- ? Is the client aware that what is happening to him is to do with sexual abuse?
- Does the client mention 'sexual abuse' himself?
- In what way: facts, experience, norms?
- Does the client type about sexual abuse in black and white terms or does he not (yet) explicitly refer to the abuse?
- What emotional baggage, and severity is outlined in the descriptions of the abuse?
- Is 'sexual abuse' described explicitly or referred to using woolly descriptions?
- What words does he use to describe sexual abuse?
- How does he react if you yourself, as the counsellor, use the word "abuse"?
- Do you follow suit and also use the woolly descriptions used by the client or do you explicitly refer to the abuse?
- Is it 'physical abuse' and/or 'online abuse'? Does this otherwise make any difference in the approach to the chat support?
- Is it a question of a 'one-off incident of sexual abuse or sexual abuse during a defined period' or is it a 'life situation in which sexual abuse is permanently taking place'?

- Through the chat, how can you assess the realistic extent of the sexual abuse? Taking the experience of the client seriously is one thing, assessing possible incorrect perceptions, lies and exaggerations on the part of the client is another.

The offender as a key player

The offender is also a key player in sexual abuse. Does he or do they feature in the conversation? How?

- ? Does the client know the offender(s) or not?
- Does the client mention the offender(s) himself or does the question come from the counsellor?
- In what types of expression is (are) the offender(s) mentioned?
- Does the client provide factual details, experience and/or normative statements about the offender(s)?
- What is the relationship between the client and the offender(s)?
- Does it involve domestic violence or violence outside the family?
- If the client himself is the sexual abuser, what does this then mean for the chat support conversation?

The client's supporting community as a key player

The client's broader socio-relational context may also be discussed during the chat support conversation.

- ? To whom can the client turn in his supporting community?
- Whom from his supporting community does the client himself discuss?
- Who from the client's supporting community knows about the sexual abuse?
- Is it possible to talk with those people about the sexual abuse (in a manner that is acceptable to the client)?
- Has there been any communication with people from the client's supporting community either face-to-face or through digital channels about the sexual abuse?
- How can you involve the family and other relevant individuals from the supporting community in any further chat support counselling on sexual abuse?

Specific client phenomena

Just as with other forms of support, chat support relating to sexual abuse has specific client phenomena, including:

- Frequent users of chat services: clients who frequently use different chat support services;
- test chatters: clients who chat to test the credibility of the counsellor and the medium;
- frequent chatters: clients who frequently and repeatedly chat and thus pose a challenge to organisations that focus primarily on providing one-off chat support;
- informants: clients who are not chatting about themselves, but about someone else's problem.

Different organisations flag up challenges in this:

- ❓ How do you deal with frequent users of different online support services, without them (wanting to) obtain offline support?
 - How do you deal with repeated test chats from the same client?
 - How do you structure a frequent user policy so that clients who make frequent contact do not in each instance have to tell their story again?
 - How do you deal with clients, who are reporting the sexual abuse of others without themselves being directly involved?
- 🚩 Take each test chat seriously and answer it professionally on the basis that it involves clients, who want to verify whether or not the chat support is reliable.
- 🚩 Make sure that chat support conversations with informants primarily focus on the informant and that the emphasis is not on the abuse: why is the informant chatting? What can he do himself?

The chat support counsellor as a key player

Five questions are addressed: Is the counsellor a professional employee or a volunteer? Can the client choose a counsellor? Does the counsellor use a nickname? Is the counsellor a lone worker or a team player? Is the chat support organisation also a key player?

Is the counsellor a professional employee or a volunteer?

It is evident from the survey of 22 European organisations offering a chat support service (including sexual abuse) that 90% of the counsellors are (trained) volunteers and 10 are% professional employees. The number of professional employees varies per organisation from 0 to 150, with an average of 20. The number of volunteers per organisation is between 0 and 850, with an average of 96.

- ❓ Do you make it know to your chat support clients whether your counsellors are professional employees or (trained) volunteers?
- Why specifically would you or would you not do that?
- What are the additional benefits and restrictions of expanding your chat support service with volunteers?
- What are your additional benefits and restrictions on expanding your chat support service with professional employees?
- Do professional employees and volunteers take on the same chat support tasks or (how) is work referred to one another?

Can the client choose a counsellor?

In chapter 1 it has already been stated that it is often essential for the client to know whether he will be chatting with a man or a woman, an adult or a young person about sexual abuse. He may also find it to be an added bonus to know the counsellor's training.



At www.helpline.bg you can choose to chat with a peer or an (adult) professional.

At www.kinderschutz-wien.at the client can choose between a man and a woman (by making an appointment).

In www.save-me-online.de (www.nina-info.de) the chat times are directly linked to one of the employees.

"To provide some idea about who the people are, a brief profile can be found on the site. We keep this information limited but still find it important that the chatters are able to have a choice. Some chatters prefer for example to chat with a female employee, and others are more guided by the age of the employees" (Slachtofferchat ('Victim Chat'), 2010, p. 4.)

Does the counsellor use a nickname?

Usually the organisation makes choices about the use of the counsellor's real name or nickname. This varies greatly.



Sometimes the counsellor uses his own name as he can then switch more seamlessly to other forms of support offered by the same support service provider.

Sometimes the client uses his own nickname to ensure, for example, that one or a few personal characteristics (e.g. gender) are clearly identified. An organisation, for example, uses profiles as a nickname and refers on its website to a short profile for each employee.

Sometimes the counsellors all use the name of the organisation as their nickname. This reduces the ability to form a quick, strong alliance but also indicates that the client is chatting with a representative of a (child) welfare organisation.

The organisation may choose to safeguard the anonymity of the counsellor. Often this depends on ...

- ... the referral opportunities to other forms of support in the organisation;
- ... whether the chat is manned by volunteers or professional employees;
- ... the choice in favour of 'one-off chat support conversations' or offering a 'chat support process' (where applicable with the same counsellor).

Is the counsellor a lone worker or a team player?

Vlaeminck (2009b) states: "The counsellor may present himself as 'I' on the screen, but can also choose to use 'we'. By displaying 'we' on the screen, the counsellor is referring to his/her team colleagues and organisation. An organisation may

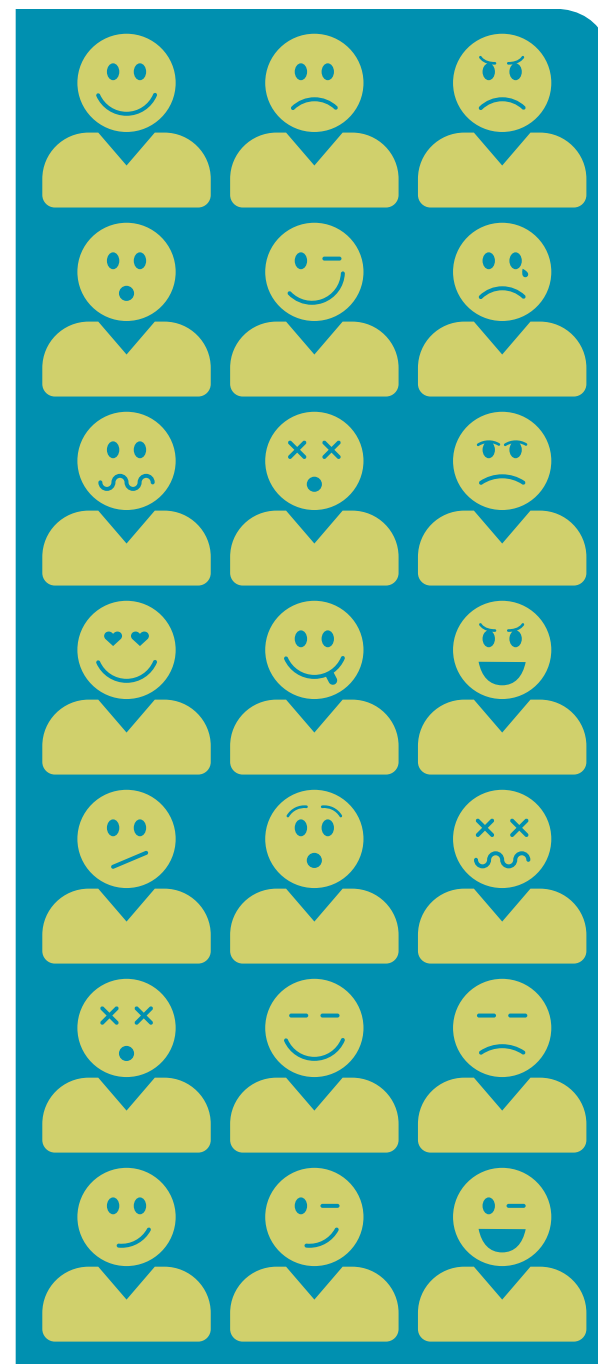
encourage its counsellors to position themselves mainly as a team player, and as a member of the organisation and thus to emphasise the functional character. The point is not a friendly chat, but a chat from an organisation providing support." (Bocklandt, 2011, p. 175)

- 🚩 In the team discuss unexpected (side)-effects of using 'I' or 'we';
- 🚩 Consider where it is strategically desirable to refer to 'we'. For example, if you want to say something about guidelines, procedures, agreements and practices within the organisation;
- 🚩 Be careful about using 'normative statements' in the 'I' person if you do not have enough information available. For example: *"Your parents do not believe you, but I believe you. Your parents must believe you."*

Is the chat support organisation also a key player?

The organisation is a key player in the chat support conversation in the following ways:

- By the way in which the chat support is announced on the website;
- By the 'rules of play' for using a nickname, which does or does not include the organisation name, for example, *'Peter of JAC Ghent'*;
- Through the recommendation to profile yourself as the chat support counsellor as 'I' or 'we';
- Through the physical context or circumstances in which the chat support takes place (see Ch@dvce Reflector);
- Through the consultation and care services, which are made available to the counsellor (see chapter 10).



8. CHAT SUPPORT... AN ENGAGED AND TECHNICAL PROCESS – THE IN-DEPTH METHOD –

With an in-depth method, the focus lies on 'the way in which' chat support conversations are held. Chat support calls for a different way of communicating than in face-to-face or telephone support because information, which is commonly imparted through body language or vocal nuance, is not available. This restricted availability of communication channels does have an impact on the flow of the conversation. Yet online it is possible to provide additional information and to give added meaning 'between the words and phrases' and to build up a good (working) relationship with the client. Screen-reading and screen-writing are essential skills for this. Even professional conversation techniques are conducted for chat support in writing and are therefore deployed 'differently'. In what follows, the focus lies mainly on typical aspects of online help. Other, more general recommendations on counselling apply as well.

Chat alliance

Good contact or 'making a connection' is also needed in chat support conversations to support a good working alliance/chat alliance. Based on his professional attitude, the counsellor will set the right tone for the conversation.

"To set the right tone, your closeness is always connected to that distance in which you can still see what's going on and why you choose which forms of intervention: maximum empathy and optimal distance" (De Groot, 2010, p. 30)

In the chat support conversation, the client and his request are of central importance. The counsellor goes along with the client to find out the nub of the issue/to facilitate movement towards a request for help. Trust is needed for this. The client wants to be heard, wants to feel that he is being taken seriously. The attitude of the counsellor is characterised by 'a sincere wish to find out'. He shows attention to who the client is and what inspires and engages him.

Meldpunt Kinderporno Nederland ('Netherlands child pornography helpline') (2011b) emphasises the following basic attitude on the part of counsellors:

Forms of intervention that can contribute to a good chat alliance:

- Working on the basis of equality;
- Suppressing an excessively quick help reflex;
- Respect for autonomy;
- Eliciting the intrinsic motivation.

Provide a warm welcome, an inviting opening sentence at the start of the chat support conversation.

Make contact by fitting in with the client's use of language (see further). Listen actively through short sentences and sound words like 'ok', 'hmm' or 'gosh'.

Take the client seriously. His compatibility, empathy and authenticity are important in this.

Be aware of your own reference framework (values and standards) and try to defer your own judgment.

In the conversation focus on the client and his situation and avoid gratuitous reassuring messages. E.g. in the case of cyber bullying the counsellor can say: *"I understand you're worried, they should not have posted that picture of you" instead of "Maybe no one will see that picture, as XX is not such a popular networking site"*.

Empathy is important, but merely stating you can relate to the experience, is not enough and sometimes meets with resistance.

Allow the client the opportunity to express and clarify his feelings and problems and to reflect on solutions and points of view.

As a counsellor, choose your words very carefully. One wrong word can quickly undo the alliance that has been built up..

Screen-reading and screen-writing

In chat support conversations there is only text and symbols on a screen. But chatting is more than just typing into a chat box. Through text and symbols, significant additional meaning is given to the conversation partner. Language tools slightly change the intonation or other non-verbal communication thereby making the chat text lively. The counsellor will therefore not only be watching out for how the conversation progresses but also pay systematic attention to language, symbols and elements that affect the pace of the conversation.

Attention to the use of language

The use of language in chat support conversations differs from formal written language. Chat is 'typing talk'. Young people and children in particular use a specific chat language. To be able to send messages more quickly, in chat conversations the challenge is to express as much information as possible in the smallest amount of text. As a result, chat language is partly characterised by:

- use of short sentences
- use of abbreviations: for instance, BRB (be right back)
- use of emoticons: for example ☺
- expressing non-verbal behaviour: e.g. <sigh>
- abbreviating words
- missing out words, letters and punctuation
- coupling words together
- use of dialect and colloquialisms
- use of English words and internet jargon
- emergence of spelling and typing errors
- use of incorrect sentence constructions

Adapt your language to the client. Do not use the same youth language, but adapt

your language to the level of the client's. Authenticity is paramount! With children use simple language and check whether or not they understand properly.

Preferably use direct language that is not too informal. This ensures that you remain at an inviting professional distance.

Ask for clarification - even if for example you are not familiar with a chat language word or emoticon. The use of chat language and restricting the availability of communication channels increase the risk of misinterpretation. Checking whether you properly understand the message is even more of a requirement online. Carefully read the reactions of the client.

Accept that writing errors are inherent to the medium and do not correct each typo. Correcting 'every' typo slows down the conversation pace.

Pay attention to any sudden increase in writing errors on the part of the client. This may point to emotional tension, fatigue... Sometimes meta-communication (talking about the conversation) may then be sensible.

Use simple sentences. Short sentences maintain pace in the conversation. It is best to omit auxiliary verbs. Interchange short sentences with long ones.

Wording things simply and clearly is the message!

Split up longer messages into multiple messages.

Pay attention to symbols

"I'm sooooooooooooooooooooo...angry!"

In chat support conversations, symbols partly replace non-verbal communication. Through the use of abbreviations, emoticons, capital letters, quotation marks, exclamation marks, the repetition of vowels, the ellipsis (dot, dot, dot) ... words and sentences take on added importance. For example, emoticons make it possible to quickly express a feeling without having to type in a whole sentence.

The client types in symbols to emphasise, refine or reword something thereby colouring his message.

When training trainee counsellors, pay sufficient attention to the reading, decoding and use of symbols.

An up-to-date list of frequently used abbreviations and emoticons is useful for trainee counsellors.

In each case look at the symbols again in context. Their meaning is not always clear. Quotation marks can, for example, emphasise a word, as well as concealing a message.

Cl: *That's why I find it so difficult to talk about my "past"*

Ask for clarification if an abbreviation or emoticon is unclear or ambiguous. The fastest way to do this is to repeat the abbreviation or emoticon, followed by a question mark.

Co: AYM?

Cl: *'are you mad'*

🚩 Pay attention to words that appear in uppercase. Typically, no uppercase characters are used, so what nuance is given then to this word? Where applicable, mirror or repeat the word in uppercase, thereby confirm that the message has been read and then examine in more detail.

🚩 Only use uppercase words yourself in response to the client. Text in uppercase quickly comes over as blatant.

🚩 Be alert about taboo word abbreviations. Sometimes the client can't bring himself to speak out his experience.

Cl: *I was ra...* [ra = raped]. Watch out for the implicit message that the client is giving with the taboo word and check it out.

🚩 Use sound words (onomatopoeia)/listening clues as an expression of active listening: for example, "oops" or "ah ok"

🚩 Take note of exclamation marks! When do they occur? Are they being increasingly used? Does it point to despair or anger?

🚩 ??? Several question marks quickly take on something compelling. Caution is advised.

🚩 Watch out for 'quotation marks'. Words in quotation marks are often key words that need to be followed up.

🚩 Where applicable, mirror the use of the quote marks, but do not overdo it because excessive use may cause annoyance. If on the other hand you mirror in a caring way, it can promote empathy and chat alliance.

🚩 Interpret the meaning behind the client's ellipsis (dot, dot, dot). Is this an indication of silence? Is he not able to articulate his message? Is he finding it difficult? Is he pausing to think? If a response takes too long, you might ask: "Are you still there?"

🚩 Use the ellipsis (...) yourself

- to bide your time;
- to indicate that you have not yet finished your message (in the case of longer messages);
- as a type of question: "You're the oldest of ... how many?"

Attention to pace

In chat support conversations inertia can rapidly occur. On the one hand, typing is slower than talking and waiting for an answer sometimes seems to take a long time. In addition, measuring, clarifying and specifically determining impressions and assumptions demands extra time.

On the other hand, clients often maintain a rapid pace and often after a relatively short time the most delicate of issues has been laid out.

In chat support conversations the client and the counsellor have more time to reflect and to re-read content. This opens up new possibilities for feedback and insight (Knatz, 2009).

Other than by the language, the pace of a chat conversation is also determined by the length of the messages, the speed of typing and response, the pause between the messages (passive rest), the introduction of active rest (empty messages, ellipsis) and the use of punctuation.

Chat support conversations are also characterised by two pace-related phenomena: lassos and cross-references.

A lasso occurs when the same person sends multiple messages in succession. Thus, a message is

spread across multiple messages and the conversation partner gets to read an (albeit chopped up) message faster.

Crosstalk occurs when subjects of conversation or storylines become confused. If someone is quickly typing messages one after the other, the other person's response sometimes appears on the screen after the first person has already posted new messages. This is a familiar phenomenon for chatters, but can sometimes lead to confusion.

Some chat programs are equipped with a typing indicator. You can then see on the screen when the chat partner is typing a message. The time indication or timestamp is another useful tool. Each time you make a text insertion, you get to see how much time has elapsed between messages.

🚩 Type quickly and use a direct style.

🚩 Only correct errors if there is a risk of a misunderstanding and do this as concisely as possible. For example **strong=wrong* Use the "*" It saves time.

🚩 Use lassos by sending several short messages. Clients do not want to wait too long for a response.

🚩 Invite the client who is sending lots of long, wordy messages, to post a message sentence by sentence. Indicate that you will find it easier to follow in this way.

🚩 Do not correct every bit of crosstalk. Decide whether correction or clarification is preferable. Sometimes it is not necessary.

🚩 Be aware of the typing time-text volume ratio. Is the client a 'waterfall' or does he have difficulty typing in words?

- 🚩 Note any changes in tempo on the part of the client. Do the messages suddenly arrive faster or just noticeably slower? If you suspect that the client is overcome by emotion, you can, for example, ask: "Are you still there?" or "If you're not ok, can you give a sign?". That helps to pay due respect to their experience and to bide time.
- 🚩 Be confident about biding time yourself or allowing silences. Use the ellipsis '...' to denote this.
- 🚩 Avoid sending empty messages yourself, because the client might interpret this differently: for instance, he might think there is a technical fault.
- 🚩 Look to see whether a typing indicator can be enabled in the chat program. This will reduce the amount of crosstalk.

Online conversation techniques

In face-to-face conversations the support worker uses a number of conversation techniques and tries to gain insight into the client's perceptions and emotions. He adjusts his interventions based on the responses he perceives using verbal and non-verbal reactions. In contrast, the online counsellor will actively seek written feedback signals and will deploy his conversation techniques in a more specific way.

Observing is screen-reading

Observing takes place online based on screen-reading. Observing well involves paying extra attention to changes in writing (changing use of characters, increase in errors, changes

in pace...). What is the dominant tense (past or present) that the client is using at the start and are there any changes to use of the future or conditional tense: "I would very much like..."? Observing also involves an alertness to the way in which key players move through the chat support conversation. The use, in particular, of people from the supporting community such as friends, teachers, support workers may indicate significant problem issues or needs.

Active listening means actively observing

The risk of misunderstandings is great due to the lack of non-verbal communication. As a result, tensions between the client and the counsellor can quickly develop. The clients cannot always express themselves effectively. On the other hand, demonstrating online empathy is also difficult for the counsellor. This requires training and experience. The listening ear is a 'seeing eye', which is carefully read and interpreted. WHAT is written? What is NOT written and HOW is something written?

- 🚩 Show the client that you are listening.
- 🚩 That may be by using sound words or by repeating a fragment of a word "hmm", "oh yes"

Asking questions... more than providing information

By questioning the client in an inviting way, he may become aware of his own thoughts and feelings and gain a better understanding of himself. The counsellor not only asks questions according to the answers he is looking for. By asking specific questions, the client will not only surrender to his situation, but he will also be activated.

Closed questions are relevant in obtaining a picture of the context, but provide little depth to the conversation. Open questions invite the client to speak freely about his experience or context. "How exactly did that meeting go for you?", "How does that feel to you?" Open questions provide the counsellor with more opportunities to build rapport with the client, but are a little more difficult for the client and require more time. Younger children sometimes have more difficulty in responding to open questions.

- 🚩 Alternate your use of open and closed questions.
Too many closed questions in succession undermine the initiative of the client, because the counsellor is keeping the conversation going. Too many open questions in succession can give the client the feeling that he is making a lone stand.
- 🚩 Ask probing questions if you notice that the client is generalising.
- 🚩 Avoid the why question because it requires a 'justification'. One alternative is "What makes you think like this?"
- 🚩 Do not exaggerate when asking questions. Staggering is the trick, otherwise the conversation can end up as one-way traffic while the client is passively waiting for the next question.
- 🚩 Change the focus from facts to feelings and norms by asking specific questions.
- 🚩 With a question you can also invite the client to explore a different view of the problem.

Cl: *I am a failed son*

Co: *are you saying that your parents are disappointed in you?*



"Good questions..."

- are short;
- are straightforward (one question per message);
- do not require any explanation;
- are followed by sufficient time to allow an answer;
- are not answered by the person who is asking them;
- do not come over as some kind of "interrogation". (Dimitrova, 2011)

Support

Support promotes a positive chat alliance. It brings warmth to the chat support conversation. Support can be shown by making contact and demonstrating understanding, expressing feelings and to check whether you have fully understood. The counsellor will put back into his own words the feelings, which are directly described (in text) or indirectly resonate (through symbols and emoticons), in the client's story.



In the following excerpts a subtle difference in symbols leads to a different atmosphere in the working relationship

Co: *You don't have it easy ...*

Cl: *Its' not so bad*

Co: *You don't have it easy?*

Cl: *Its' not so bad*



Make your support visible using written language.

- Express feelings: *"I notice that you're angry"* or *"You sound relieved"*
- Empathise: *"What a disappointment for you"*
- Compliment: *"Good that you are not just ignoring it"*



Use smileys and other (punctuation) marks and symbols to support your message.



You can encourage by empowering the client.

Co: *Smart of you to raise that here.*

Co: *Looks like you are a very dear friend.*

Good that you...

Clarify, structure and summarise

As result of restricting the availability of communication channels there is a possibility of misinterpretation in chat support conversations. Regularly ask for clarification.

Structuring helps guide the conversation along in the right direction. This is important for two reasons. First of all, the request for help is not always clear. The client jumps from one topic to another or there is a range of problems or the client doesn't really know all that well for himself. Secondly, regular storylines get mixed up throughout the chat support conversations. Because chatting is slower than speaking, it is necessary for the counsellor to carefully monitor the thread of the conversation.

It is instructive to reword what the client is saying. By doing this attention is directed both towards things that are not explicitly stated but that come through in the conversation in some way. A paraphrase is (often) linked back in question form. This also invites the client to continue to relate his story. For example: *"Actually, you want something completely different?"*, *"Are you not saying that so as not to hurt the other person?"*



Ask specific questions. This helps the client to make his story easier to understand by arranging elements in time, by juxtaposing facts and experiences, by making a distinction between main and secondary issues, by interrelating cause and effect.



Preferably ask direct, short questions that can provide a lot of information and hardly require any typing time.



Monitor the thread of the conversation. Note that departing from the thread of the conversation takes up time.



Regularly summarise (not just at the end) and so monitor the structure of the conversation.



Summarising and paraphrasing also works well when the counsellor wants to change the layer of the conversation or subject.



Use the scroll function to keep an overview of the chat conversation.



Refer when needed to a previous section of the chat conversation.

Steering the conversation

Getting the balance right between active listening and offering support is difficult. And how do you encourage someone to follow advice? Achieving movement in a conversation is of greater necessity than monitoring and supporting the client. If there is a good chat alliance, the counsellor will steer the conversation. Depending on the nature of the conversation, his interventions will be more directed towards motivating, respectfully confronting, looking at points of view, looking to the future, etc. (See also Chapter 6, 'movement'). Some clients find it very difficult to express themselves and might, for instance, answer most questions by saying: 'I don't know?'. The counsellor demonstrating a more steering and questioning stance is recommended here.

- Steer the conversation itself for clients demonstrating underdisclosure and in so doing adopt a questioning stance.
- Now and again use open questions so that the client is given the opportunity to probe his answers more deeply.
- During the conversation, check whether it is in fact 'that', which the client wants to talk about.
- Word your interventions carefully if you want to mirror or confront and immediately ask for a response.
- Control your tendency to adopting a problem-solving approach in the beginning of the chat conversation.

Meta-communication

During chat support conversations the counsellor can step out of the content of the conversation to stop and reflect on how the conversation 'is going' and to identify this interaction. Meta-communication is useful for checking how the client is experiencing the conversation, especially if the conversation is not going well.

Co: I read that you are constantly asking about my experiences.

Co: This conversation is not about me but is mainly about you. What do you really want to say?

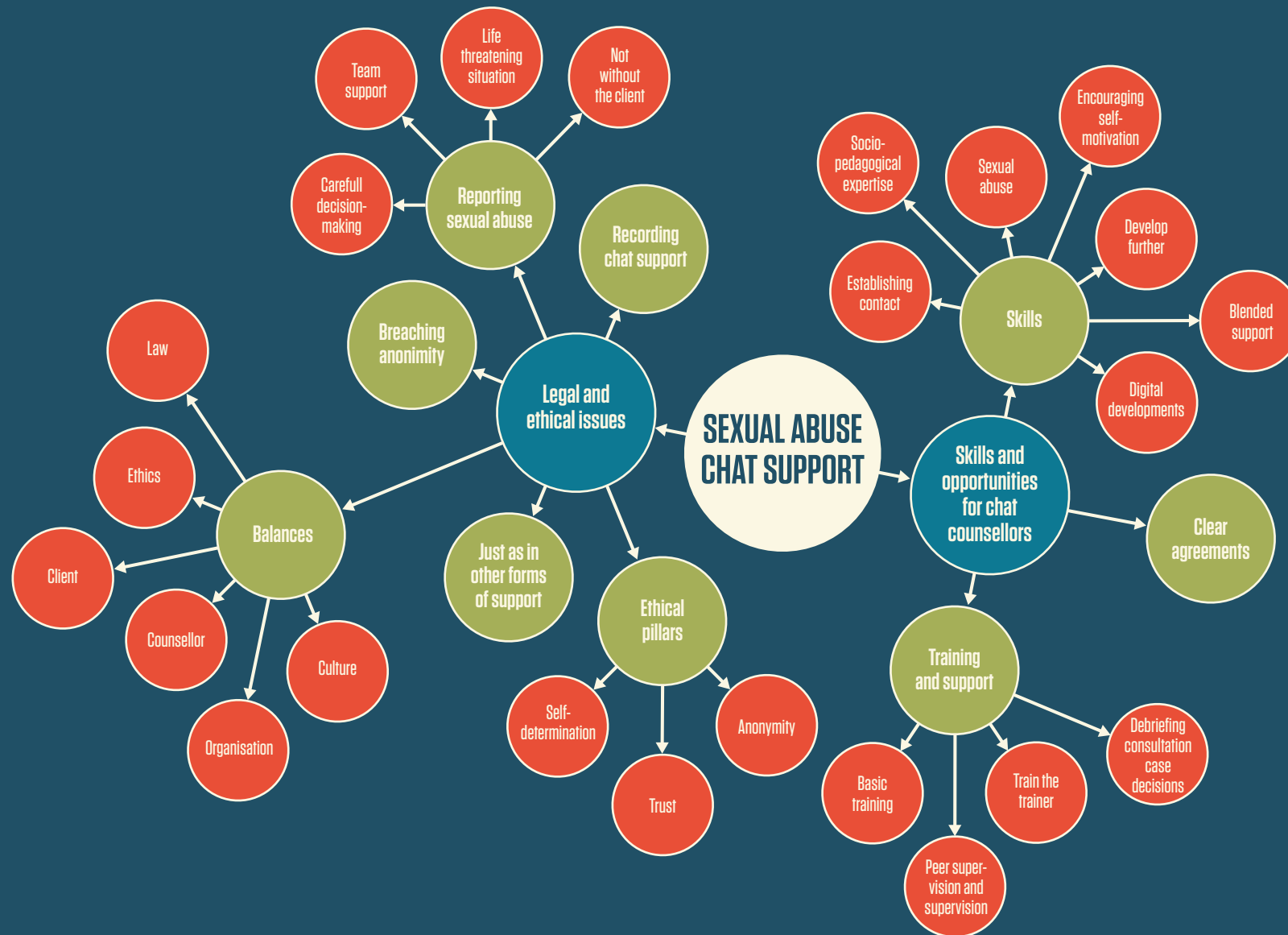
- If a conversation is not going well, then discuss this with the client. Look together to see what is happening in the conversation.

- Identify what is happening.

Co: "You've clearly shown me that you do not really want to talk about this with your mum, but I am trying to convince you to do this."

- Scroll to look back over the text. This can be helpful if together with the client you want to highlight certain patterns in the conversation.

Co: "At the start you wrote a few times, that you do not wish to go on... and then again that you don't want to do anything!" Can you see that too? / It is quite understandable in your situation, that you just don't want to take this step but let's see what is possible?"



9. LEGAL AND ETHICAL ISSUES FOR CHAT SUPPORT RELATING TO SEXUAL ABUSE

Up to now the chat support method with a focus on sexual abuse has been presented from a management or technical-instrumentation perspective. But there is more. Chat support relating to sexual abuse also requires an ethical and legal discussion.

? Are there specific basic values for chat support relating to sexual abuse?

- Do these basic values taken from face-to-face support services assume a different meaning in chat support relating to sexual abuse?
- How to handle the tension between 'anonymity', 'confidentiality', 'professional secrecy' and 'duty to disclose'?
- How to handle recording and filing chat support conversations relating to sexual abuse?

These and other questions need to be addressed... the answer is a difficult balancing act for a number of reasons.

Getting the balance right between the client, counsellor, organisation, the law, ethics and culture

Legal and ethical issues relating to sexual abuse are a complex combination of conflicting views, interests, guidelines and expectations. Providing responsible online support services relating to sexual abuse means that chat support counsellors and organisations are rightly very

alert to what can, may, must happen in these often very drastic situations.

This involves finding the (difficult) balance between legal obligations and ethical choices; finding the balance between the (often not very explicit) expectations and choices of the client, of the organisation and of the counsellors involved.

From a European perspective, there are often differences (in nuance) in statutory regulations and there are also cultural differences (even within the same region) in one's vision amongst other things of 'privacy', 'self-determination of the client' and 'support services'.

Tackling legal and ethical issues just as in other forms of support

Many legal and ethical issues, which are raised by chat support relating to sexual abuse, are very similar to questions, which are covered by other forms of support, such as telephone and face-to-face support services. For example:

? If a client gives me the link to his web blog, should I read through his entire life story?



- When should I breach the anonymity of the client (in consultation)?
- When should sexual abuse be reported to the authorities?
- If a child is making a disclosure of sexual abuse, should or must proceedings be initiated?
- Do you as a chat support counsellor have to make INDIVIDUAL decisions that may often have far-reaching implications for the client and his family?

In response to similar questions, it is useful to first determine what choices or rules apply in similar situations in the regular support services.

Amongst other things, this means that the decision to read through a web blog can be made in the same way as when someone brings along his diary in face-to-face contact; that in chat support, consultation with colleagues might also need to take place; that important decisions about complex situations are made in consultation with the team or the responsible party, etc.

"It's a fallacy to think that you need to come up with solutions quickly in the case of chat support, faster than in the case of face-to-face support services. Indeed it is good that the counsellor carefully unravels the reported question or the disclosed story and quickly makes it clear in the conversation that the client can resume contact at any time. The fact that those seeking support can report something here and now from a place that suits them and at a time that suits them, may give them the impression that they can expect an instant response." states K. Stas. (Bocklandt, 2011, p. 104).

Particularly in situations involving sexual abuse, careful listening, analysing and decision-making is essential. Indeed: *"It is not easy to carefully assess what is going on in a family and to decide what should happen. It is evident from research that the quality of unstructured professional decisions is not always optimal (Garb, 2005; Munro, 2008). Neither do support workers always have all of the information for very long that is needed to form an objective picture of a family."* (Bartelink, 2012, p. 1-2)

Generally using chat support you can obtain information from one client. Consciously or unconsciously this person passes on his selection of facts and experience about the situation, reasoning on the basis of his own standards and values or from the emotions that the situation evokes for him. The information is thus coloured. For example, often *"decisions are made based on an intuitive picture of the safety of the child, which is built up by what support workers see, hear or experience in relation to a family, combined with their own knowledge and experience. That first picture often consists of untested impressions, concerns and suspicions. This picture may contain blind spots."* (Bartelink, 2012, p. 2)



First check on the issue of ethical or legal questions on chat support relating to sexual abuse, in particular what you would do in similar face-to-face situations; The possible approach may often already be (extensively) identifiable in this.



Resist the pressure of offering an answer/solution too quickly by providing a speedy support service.

But this is not yet the end of the matter. Chat support relating to sexual abuse places the counsellor and his organisation before specific legal and ethical issues."The differences between face-to-face and online support services come down to the following elements:

1. anonymity;
2. the lack of auditory and visual signals;
3. the person seeking help is at an earlier stage of his perceived problem based on the easy accessibility of the service." (Roijen, 2010, p. 21).

The person seeking help is in this stage because, due to the lower threshold, he can talk about the problem for the first time.

Anonymity, trust and self-determination: ethical pillars in chat support relating to sexual abuse

Anonymity is essential for clients. Sexually abused young people often worry about what will happen if they were to report the abuse: they feel responsible, and are afraid of being threatened. Without the guarantee of anonymity they would probably not make the commitment to seeking chat support.

'Anonymity', 'trust', 'self-determination of the client' and '(shared) professional secrecy' are key concepts in chat support relating to sexual abuse. Thanks to this anonymity, the closeness is achieved to be able to take the risk of talking. This early "trust" should be reinforced carefully. The following code of conduct is also essential in this:

Values in online support	Code of conduct for chat support
<i>Anonymity</i>	The counsellor only asks for that information that is strictly necessary to understand the client's situation. Right to scrutinise the chat support transcripts (only) for a select group of authorised employees. Guarantee of the software program: not to leave any traces on the client's computer.
<i>Reliability of the online medium Safety and protection of the client</i>	Informed consent: the client has the right to correct information. The counsellor and the organisation have a duty to provide information about how the medium operates and is protected: who can store, view, print, modify, destroy what type of data for how long?
<i>Autonomy of the client</i>	The client determines (in part) what can be discussed with whom. Principle of empowerment: urging the client to focus in on, and define problems himself or with the counsellor, and to take a 'step forward'
<i>Shared professional secrecy with external professionals</i>	All information is treated as confidential by the counsellor. Only the 'need-to-know information' is shared with other employees depending on the appropriate support service. Information can only be shared after an (implicit or explicit) approval of the client.
<i>Joint professional secrecy within the team</i>	It is clearly defined in the organisation who belongs to the 'team' - chat support counsellors never even sit together in the same location.
<i>Expertise</i>	Chat support expertise is continuously promoted by reflecting on print-outs as part of training, peer supervision. Granting licenses for high-quality online support using qualified or certified-trained employees.
<i>Integrity</i>	Protecting integrity through agreements on the use of nicknames and sharing information about the (age, sex, education, first name of) the counsellor.

- ✚ Make it clear on the home page of your chat support site what 'anonymity', 'trust' and 'self-determination of the client' means for your organisation in concrete terms.
- ✚ Inform your employees about the practical importance of these principles in relation to situations involving sexual abuse.
- ✚ Make it absolutely clear to the counsellors what precisely 'confidential information' means.
- ✚ Practice with and train your employees to implement these principles in full - even though there are only a few symbols on a screen to go by.
- ✚ Consider whether it is appropriate that the client's IP address is/needs to be visible to the counsellor?
- ✚ Arrange for your counsellors to sign an 'employee agreement' (annually), which also includes the pillars.
- ✚ Describe a specific code of conduct outlining what you expect from chat support counsellors. For example: *"Treat the young person with the same respect you would show if he/she were in front of you and the conversation were taking place face to face. Do not make fun of the issue or the young person with whom you are chatting right now. Focus fully on the chat you are working on. This means no mobile phone, no Facebook, etc. when you chat with the young person. Speak only professionally when you chat."* (Cyberhus, 2012, p. 7)

- ✚ Only contact other support workers or organisations when the client knows about and agrees to this.
- ✚ Wherever possible, make it the client's decision to determine what he wants to chat about, when he wants to stop, if and when he wants to come back to the chat...
- ❓ Does the client give you the opportunity to keep or print out the chat support transcript or not?
 - Someone who listens, understands and imparts confidence... in chat support relating to sexual abuse can in fact ensure that as a result the client is able to tolerate his abuse situation for longer. Then again, chat support on sexual abuse can prevent suicide, auto mutilation or starvation when the situation becomes unbearable for the client. How do you trace, challenge, avoid this all?

Breaching anonymity and reporting sexual abuse

Only in exceptional cases is breaching 'anonymity' desirable or necessary. Desirable... if the counsellor at the request of or with the consent of the client wishes to refer this to another support service. Necessary... if statutory regulations require the organisation and therefore the counsellor to report sexual abuse. Intervening in a situation to put a stop to sexual abuse is not in fact the job of welfare organisations but of legal and police authorities.

In all chat support organisations relating to sexual abuse, specific conditions are stipulated in respect of the situations or the circumstances in which sexual abuse is reported to the authorities. These specific conditions are usually a combination of:

- A report is not made without the informed consent of the client;
- Reporting sexual abuse only takes place when there is an acute danger posed to the physical or mental integrity of the person involved;
- Reporting sexual abuse takes place if there are indications that in the very near future there is a significant and real danger that other minors may fall victim;
- The client is not able to protect this integrity himself or with the help of others;
- Reporting sexual abuse only takes place after consultation with the team and/or the coordinator/supervisor;
- Reporting sexual abuse only takes place on the basis of careful consideration.

❓ Nevertheless, chat support organisations (in the survey and at an Insafe meeting with European representatives (Hopwoods, 2012)) have formulated a number of questions ...

- ... relating to the definition of 'acute risk to the psychological or physical integrity':
 - What does the law state in your country or region on 'acute risk to the psychological or physical integrity'?
 - Is sexual abuse that lasts for years an 'acute risk to the psychological or physical integrity' in your country and for your organisation?

- Is it useful for your organisation to operate different criteria as points for consideration when considering reporting an incident? For example: abuse in the past or present; a real chance of fresh abuse; a real chance of there being other victims; distinction between domestic abuse and abuse outside the family; age of the victim; organisations/persons, who have already been informed...)?
- ... in relation to the involvement of the client in reporting sexual abuse:
 - How do we handle 'the knowledge of the client' if this client is a younger child?
 - When do you inform the client about reporting sexual abuse?
 - How can you attempt to intervene in the situation of abused children, if they do not fully understand why you want to do this?
 - How do you handle the tension that children should be protected from abuse, while at the same time supporting the fact that they should be able to choose to take action when they are ready?
- ... in terms of responsibility for reporting sexual abuse:
 - When breaching anonymity, what is the responsibility or the mandate of the counsellor in your country or organisation?
 - Is reporting sexual abuse in your country or organisation the individual responsibility of the counsellor, or is it the responsibility of the organisation for which the counsellor works?
 - When reporting an incident how do you deal with the tension between 'carefully

considered decisions based on sufficient facts that have been gathered and checked' and on the other hand 'making a quick decision in acute risk situations'?

- How do you handle possible claims of 'default or gross negligence' by third parties in your organisation?
- ... in terms of breaching anonymity:
 - How do you deal with anonymous reports made via online forms in your country or organisation?
 - Can, may and do you want to breach anonymity by tracing the IP address? What are sufficient causes to do so?
 - Can, may and do you want to make it technically (im)possible to know the IP address of the client?
- ... in terms of involving other organisations when reporting sexual abuse:
 - What do you do when making a referral to other organisations, for which you know that they clearly have a different approach to 'reporting'?
 - In what situations can law enforcement (police, court) undertake action in your country if you report sexual abuse? When can they not intervene?

Legally, there is hardly any framework surrounding the specific provision of online support services. Online support often works in a vacuum. The (inter)national and local legislation are often not adapted yet to online support.

- Ensure that in your organisation there is the clearest possible information and code available about the duty to disclose or right to disclose. For example: "Article 458a Sw.

thus provides a right of disclosure (not: duty of disclosure). It is expected of the support worker that he himself first does everything in his power - where applicable with the help of other support workers - to avert the dangerous situation. The disclosure to the Crime Prosecution Service (public prosecutor) should be considered as a last resort" (Child Focus, 2012, p. 8).

- Describe as clearly and understandably as possible (the interpretation of) 'acute risk situation', 'integrity of the young person'.
- Devise clear, understandable guidelines on what should be done by whom, when considering reporting sexual abuse.
- Provide clear guidelines on how the counsellor should respond in case of any 'urgent danger' (for example switch from a discussion to compelling advice, provide contact details to the ambulance service or police or suggest that you contact them yourself).
- 'Breaching anonymity' and 'reporting sexual abuse' is rarely possible on the basis of one chat support conversation. It is also desirable for counsellors to take the time to first consider things together and to set them out in context.
- Reporting sexual abuse often means initiating a set of radical changes for those involved. Ensure you have a clear decision-making process when deciding to report or not to report an incident. Crucial decision-making steps in this are:
 - interpreting the message about a child either as (the need to make) a report or as an advisory or consultative conversation;

- whether or not to research the message about a *child* based on consultation with peers;
- determining whether *or not* there is some form of abuse or otherwise a high-risk parenting situation;
- deciding whether support *is or is not* required;
- deciding *in favour or against* reporting an incident. (Bartelink, 2012, p. 3)
- Decide whether an incident is reported with the approval of the young person *or only* with the knowledge of the young person.

Pay careful attention to exploring the client's strength and capabilities. It is nonetheless sensible to (continue to) delegate responsibility for making a submission to rest with the client if he is able to handle it.

Support the counsellor: in case of difficult decisions about breaching anonymity and reporting an incident, consulting with colleagues is recommended.

Within the organisation the limits (and opportunities) of chat support in crisis situations relating to sexual abuse need to be clearly defined and communicated to the clients.

Be aware that IP addresses in chat support transcripts can be used as evidence. Consider the consequences of saving transcripts and making them available.

Provide clear communication to the client about the consequences of breaching

his anonymity and about reporting sexual abuse to the police or courts.

Transparency towards clients is essential; both through general information on the website and through concrete statements at various stages in each chat support situation.

Points for consideration for careful decision-making include:

"Take your own professional judgment seriously, but realise that you too can make mistakes;

Avoid errors of assessment by working systematically and using checklists;

Make sure that you form an assessment clearly and carefully substantiate it;

Test your assessment against that of others.

In terms of breaching anonymity, there is divergent practice prevalent amongst European chat support organisations:

- The choice based on principle never to breach anonymity and never to report situations;
- The choice always to refer to other (child) welfare organisations and never to the police or judicial authorities;
- Some organisations are granted an 'exception approval' to the 'reporting act' in order to be able to continue to fulfil their role as the most accessible support organisation;
- The choice to encourage young people to report an incident themselves;
- The choice to report an incident together with the young person;
- The choice not to report an incident by the

counsellor but by the responsible person within the organisation;

- The choice upon reporting an incident to make the transition to another channel of communication (telephone or face-to-face),
- In exceptional cases: report an incident based on the IP address.

Some organisations are quick to engage the police service; others (almost) never.

There is a diversity of opinion throughout European chat support organisations in terms of the involvement of the client in the reporting of sexual abuse:

- Or encouraging the client to report an incident himself.
- Or to report an incident together with the client.
- Or only to report an incident with the approval of the client.
- Or to report an incident with the knowledge of the client.

There is a diversity of opinion throughout European chat support organisations in terms of the responsibility for reporting sexual abuse:

- Usually, a method is proposed in which the decision to report sexual abuse is the responsibility of the organisation (after consultation with colleagues and the involvement of the management);
- Sometimes the responsibility for reporting sexual abuse is placed with the chat support counsellor.



An example of communication about breaching anonymity on the organisation's website:

"Confidentiality

If you confide in one of our counsellors,

you can be certain that we will handle your information in confidence. We are Psychotherapists or Clinical Psychologists. For us - and our colleagues - legislation is in force, which guarantees that we are not allowed to pass on secrets. ... In certain instances, we are obliged to notify Children and Young People Services. This may, for example, be if we suspect that you will continue to be hit or abused and we do not see any other opportunity to put an end to this danger on your behalf. Indeed in such circumstances we will not act "above your head" but will speak to you (and possibly also argue with you) about this beforehand and - wherever possible - report such an incident together with you. If we have grounds for suspicion that you will harm yourself or somebody else in some way, we are also obliged to organise psychiatric support and/or to notify the police."
<http://www.kinderschutz-wien.at/index.php/hilfe-holen/schweigepflicht> on 12/09/2012

Recording chat support relating to sexual abuse

There is diverse practice across the European chat support organisations on the issue of recording data about chat support conversations and about whether or not to retain and use chat support transcripts. Each organisation collects and processes (anonymous) data about the number of chat support conversations, the topics discussed, (assumed) personal data (gender, age), duration of the chat support conversation... depending on how a chat support policy is implemented. Retaining and using chat support conversation transcripts varies from 'not retaining

any transcripts' to 'retaining client files with transcripts' and 'using transcripts for performance management and peer supervision sessions'. Even the decision whether or not to make the conversation transcript available to the client varies from organisation to organisation. Most organisations provide clear information on their website on whether or not data is kept; Sometimes, however, this info is difficult to find.



- An organisation notifies the client that they can specify an e-mail address to which the chat support transcript can be sent.
- Information for the employee:
"As Cyberhus must be able to guarantee the anonymity of the young people; it is not permitted to print or save transcripts of the conversations. There are no exceptions to this, this rule is absolute.
All contacts with the chat service must be noted. For this purpose we use an online record form, which the counsellor will find under your personal account at cyberhus.dk. The form must be filled in immediately after the conversation. The counsellors alone have access to the forms. They must log in with their personal password to get access.
On the basis of the record forms, Cyberhus compiles statistics, which will be used to document the work of the counselling service. The documentation is also used in connection with fundraising and coordination with the press or other media where we wish to call attention to some current problem or anomaly." (Cyberhus, 2012, p. 10-14)
 Information for the counsellor on the website:
"When the chat is over, everything disappears that we've talked about. We do not store copies

of the talks. To make the advice better, after each counselling session fill in an anonymous form for us. Here we list the date, time and the problem that the advice was about. Evaluations are general and anonymous." (www.Cyberhus.dk op 12/09/2012)

- *"The discussions of individual and group chat will be stored in a chat log. The stored data can be evaluated only for statistical purposes. A transfer of data to third parties does not take place."* (<https://jugend.bke-beratung.de/views/home/index.html>)
- *"The chat conversations that are conducted are retained. These can be viewed by employees of Slachtofferhulp Nederland ('Victim Support Netherlands') for training purposes. The chat conversations are also retained for research. No other data is retained other than your age, gender and when you are e-mailed with victim support mail to your e-mail address."*
 (www.ikzitindeshit.nl/12tot18jaar/?pageID=147&lb=True on 12/09/2012)
- *"Chat conversations that are led are retained for one month. These can only be viewed by employees of 'chatmetfrier' [Dutch chat support website]. In addition, these conversations can be used in training sessions for employees of 'chatmetfrier'.*
'Chatmetfrier' uses cookies to see how visitors use this site. A cookie is a small piece of information (a file) that a website leaves on your computer. If you do not want us to use cookies, you should change your browser setting to 'cookies off'. If you accept cookies, then they remain on your computer unless you delete them yourself." (www.fierfryslan.nl on 12/09/2012)

Some considerations are set out below in connection with the provision of chat support transcripts (Bocklandt, 2011, p. 255):

Arguments relating to the provision of chat support transcripts to the client

IN FAVOUR	AGAINST
Equality of the conversation partners	Protect the counsellor against the fear of failure
Right to scrutinise	Professional secrecy is undermined if transcript falls into the hands of third parties
Respect / right to scrutinise	Right to confidentiality
Client's right to self-determination	Counsellor's and organisation's right to self-determination
It is always possible to produce a print screen, so ...	Actual and suspected risks of 'abuse' of the transcript
Importance of transparency and openness of the support	Safeguard the opportunity to develop the chat support
Autonomy of the client	Fear of possible adverse consequences

Conditions for the use of chat support transcripts in the organisation

Philosophical

- Work on the basis of trust
- Allow chat support counsellors to determine themselves which (fragments of the) print-out to present within the team in a peer supervision or case consultation

Legal

- Client must know what data is retained for what purposes by the organisation
- Shared professional secrecy = only exchange information on a 'need to know' basis
- Joint professional secrecy = determine what 'a team' is - even if you are working in different physical locations
- Client must be able to choose 'not to save' transcripts
- Chat support transcripts must be made anonymous if they are being used in the organisation for training and research
- Find out what is possible in your country on saving and using chat support transcripts, such as
 - The obligation to delete all data after every (chat) support session
 - Chat support transcripts have to be made anonymous when used for research or training
- Counsellor is entitled to feedback on chat support transcripts following examination or in the case of training

Ethical

- The duty to provide information to the client and counsellor that transcripts should be retained and what they are used for
- Responsibility = do not leave transcripts lying about
- Responsibility = apply strict rules of etiquette
- Responsibility = make transcripts anonymous



What data do you register on chat support conversations: the number of conversations, the themes of discussion, (suspected) personal characteristics (gender, age), duration of the conversation?

- Do you keep chat support transcripts or not and if you do, do you keep them anonymised or in client files?
- What is included in the client's personal formal support file? What is included in the employees' personal notes?
- How do you combine anonymity and privacy with the requirement to report to the subsidising government or organisation?
- How long are chat support transcripts retained for?
- Who is responsible in the organisation for the safekeeping of the transcripts?
- Who has access to the chat support transcripts?
- For what purposes are chat support transcripts retained?
- Is it possible, or desirable, to use chat support transcripts... to "provide evidence" of the quality of care - for example if the organisation were to be accused of 'gross negligence'?
- How are chat support clients informed about the retention and use of chat support transcripts by the organisation?

- How are chat support clients given the opportunity to prohibit the retention of their chat support conversations?



10. SKILLS AND OPPORTUNITIES TO DEVELOP FOR CHAT SUPPORT COUNSELLORS

Three considerations are examined in this chapter relating to the professional conditions for being able to implement chat support relating to sexual abuse in a professional manner:

- the skills required on the part of chat support counsellors relating to sexual abuse;
- the clear agreements with chat support counsellors relating to sexual abuse;
- the support and training that is provided by the organisation to chat support counsellors relating to sexual abuse.

It is essential to stop and reflect on these three considerations as the burden of such chat support conversations on a counsellor is great and preparation, support and care for chat support counsellors are necessary in order to deliver sustainable, professional support services on this issue.

Skills of chat support counsellors (with a focus on sexual abuse)

Chat support counsellors relating to sexual abuse are first and foremost employees (professionals or volunteers), who are engaged in providing support services relating to sexual abuse. This already requires a number of skills in terms of knowledge about the issues, counselling skills and attitudes towards providing support. Moreover, support is being provided through chat, which presupposes a number of additional skills. Set out below is a brief summary layout of a combination of the two types of skill expectations for which it is not, of course, possible to examine all skills in detail. This summary is based on various literature sources and sources of good practice (Bocklandt, 2010, p. 114-119; Cyberhus, 2012, p. 7; Dimitrova, 2011, p. 12-14; Jacobs, 2012, p. 3-6; Nijis, 2012).

Preliminary note: this summary of skills does not outline a pass-or-fail checklist that are likely to put off prospective chat counsellors. Instead it states what might or might not be expected

of chat support counsellors relating to sexual abuse. This summary is intended as a 'mirror' for chat support counsellors so that they can assess to which aspects of professional development further attention can be devoted.

A chat support counsellor establishes contact through chat

The chat support counsellor builds up professional and authentic contact with the client via the computer screen.

This means that he is initiating a reliable working alliance with the client, based on an open - non-judgmental - attitude, he recognises the signals of non-authenticity, aims to achieve an online presence whilst at the same time maintaining sufficient professional distance.

For that reason the chat support counsellor is himself a warm, authentic, responsible person.



At Cyberhus we look for volunteers who are:

- Warm adults who are able to "give a hug" through the keyboard, if that is what is needed in the situation.
- Authentic adults who are able to ask themselves: "What would I say and do if this young person were sitting right in front of me?" – and to act accordingly.
- Responsible adults who take responsibility for their answers to the young people and their meetings with them at Cyberhus.dk.
- Straightforward adults who have the courage to ask open but difficult questions, which might give rise to reflection for the young person, and at the same time adults who dare to listen and to accept the answer.

A chat support counsellor offers socio-pedagogical expertise through chat

The chat support counsellor employs appropriate online interaction skills to take the various steps in the chat support conversation, adapted to the abilities of the person seeking help and in line with the objectives of the organisation.

This means, amongst other things, that he takes the various steps in providing chat support (see chapter 6 and chapter 8, conversation skills), has mastered screen-reading and screen-writing, and can deal with underdisclosure and overdisclosure on the part of clients.

A chat support counsellor makes it possible to discuss problems relating to sexual abuse through chat

The chat support counsellor is familiar with various types of sexual abuse, knows what psychological mechanisms lie behind them and what the effects of sexual abuse may be on the client, and on the people around him. He is familiar with the guidelines on what he has to do concerning the reporting of sexual abuse.

In other words, this means that he is also aware of issues such as 'safe use of the Internet', physical sexual abuse, sexual abuse via the internet (cyber-bullying, sexting, grooming...) and the complexity involved in recovering from the effects of sexual abuse.

He also recognises the possibilities of the role that he can play in this as a chat counsellor and the limits that chat support, his own expertise and the organisation has in this process.

A chat support counsellor encourages self-motivation on the part of the client

The chat support counsellor encourages and supports the client to take control of his own situation as much as possible. Empowering the client, gauging what his expectations are and honouring

what is achievable for the client, are essential in this.

That means that he almost never makes decisions on behalf of the client, and if he were to do so, always does so with the knowledge (and preferably with approval) of the client. To encourage this self-motivation, he will also point the client to the (online) information, FAQs, self-tests, advice... that the organisation has available on its website. That also means that he will encourage the client to also seek help within his own family and social milieu.

He will also (actively) refer the client for further support and guidance, where necessary, to other relevant resources.

This assumes that the chat counsellor is familiar with the social map of support services relating to sexual abuse, with special attention to the available online support services.

A chat support counsellor wants to develop further

The chat support counsellor is prepared to seek (further) training in chat support relating to sexual abuse. To do so he works together in a team and within (new) networks of organisations. He is also willing to participate in exchanging experience and research.

This means that he seeks training out of a sense of personal interest and for his own professional development (see below). He is open to feedback and can reflect on his own attitude (in general and as a counsellor) and the influence of his personal history. He also invests in the further development of chat support services as a help method. By taking part in exchanges of experience and evaluation within the organisation, in the development of synergies with other organisations and in research, he can further develop this new form of online support.

A chat support counsellor is open to the further development of blended support

The chat support counsellor exudes a positive attitude towards online support services.

The chat support counsellor identifies gaps in (chat) support services relating to sexual abuse.

The chat support counsellor also invests in developing support services relating to sexual abuse in which online forms of support, including chat, can be seamlessly combined with other forms of support (for example, face-to-face or telephone support) so that the delivery of support can be organised as effectively and efficiently as possible.

This means that he demonstrates the abilities involved in chat support relating to sexual abuse - without ignoring the limitations and barriers and that he views new online support services more as an opportunity than a threat.

A chat support counsellor can handle digital developments

The chat support counsellor keeps abreast of new developments in digital technology and is ready to integrate new relevant tools that assist in chat support.

This means that he has ...

...some digital knowledge: the basic operation of a computer, the software program and the Internet; frequently used emoticons and abbreviations;

...has at least basic technical instrumentation skills (= expertise of buttons): creating hyperlinks, consulting online resources, typing quickly, looking up information on the Internet, using search engines, creating a print screen (screen dump);

...has structural skills: assessing the value of information sources; is easily able to put thoughts into words using a PC; is able to communicate

frequently used ICT instructions to the client;
 ...strategic skills: creating structure within the chat support conversation; deciding when the limits of the chat support have been reached;
 ...digital attitudes: exercising patience during a chat support conversation; having appropriate trust/mistrust of software and hardware; allowing errors to remain in a chat support conversation; having a predominantly positive view of the online support opportunities.

A contract with clear agreements

Chat support counsellors are involved by the organisation in a process of support relating to sexual abuse. It is therefore important to have a clear agreement with them about the mutual rights and duties. An organisation can only actually provide a high-quality chat support service relating to sexual abuse if it can fully trust its employees in this. And chat support counsellors can only concentrate 100% on the support they provide relating to sexual abuse if they know what their mandate is and for which support they can come to their organisation. This clarity is best reflected in a contract.

The possible content of such a contract for volunteers is (inspired by Cyberhus, 2012, p. 8):

- As an organisation we expect from you as a chat support counsellor that you ...
 - sign a confidentiality agreement;
 - undertake an average of ... chat support shifts per month;
 - take part in ... training sessions per year;
 - actively take part in performance management reviews with the coordinator;
 - are willing to accept both positive and negative feedback;
 - are aware of our vision for chat support and can also back this;

- can support the values, legal and ethical guidelines of the organisation;
- are willing to discuss problems that you experience in your chat support work;
- You can expect from us as an organisation ...
 - day-to-day practical support and backup that is continuously available following a difficult chat support conversation
 - regular feedback and supervision
 - relevant workshops a year
 - opportunities for regular contact with our staff team
 - after 12 months of commitment a letter of commendation attesting to these 'prior learning skills'

Training and support for chat support counsellors

Counsellors are entitled to appropriate training and support for the chat support they provide relating to sexual abuse...

...because this chat support expects quite a lot of expertise from employees (see skills);

...because this chat support is so drastic that employees must be able to rely on debriefing sessions and opportunities for reflection after a demanding chat support conversation;

...because the discussion of 'sexual abuse' and the care provision surrounding it are evolving rapidly from a social perspective;

...because chat support services as a method can be developed further professionally based on the evaluation of and reflection on such support.

Consequently, as well as a 'right' for the counsellors it is also their 'duty' to take part in this training programme.

Based on research (De Zitter & Saelens, 2011) recommendations for basic training, peer

supervision and other forms of support have been formulated.

General recommendations concerning training and education

During training sessions do not only focus on joint agreements, guidelines, step-by-step plans and a framework of reference. Leave room for the personal reflections of the counsellor.

Provide specific training for experienced chat support counsellors. They are key figures for further development of a method.

Ask the counsellors to briefly re-read the chat support transcripts after their shift. They can record notable interpretations, questions, experiences in written or electronic document. This practical knowledge and these reflections can then be given a place during peer supervision sessions.

Incorporate the individual findings of counsellors in the training and education programme. This can be achieved, for example, by providing a set pro forma during peer supervision or training sessions. In this way you systematically gather knowledge about any gaps that counsellors are experiencing.

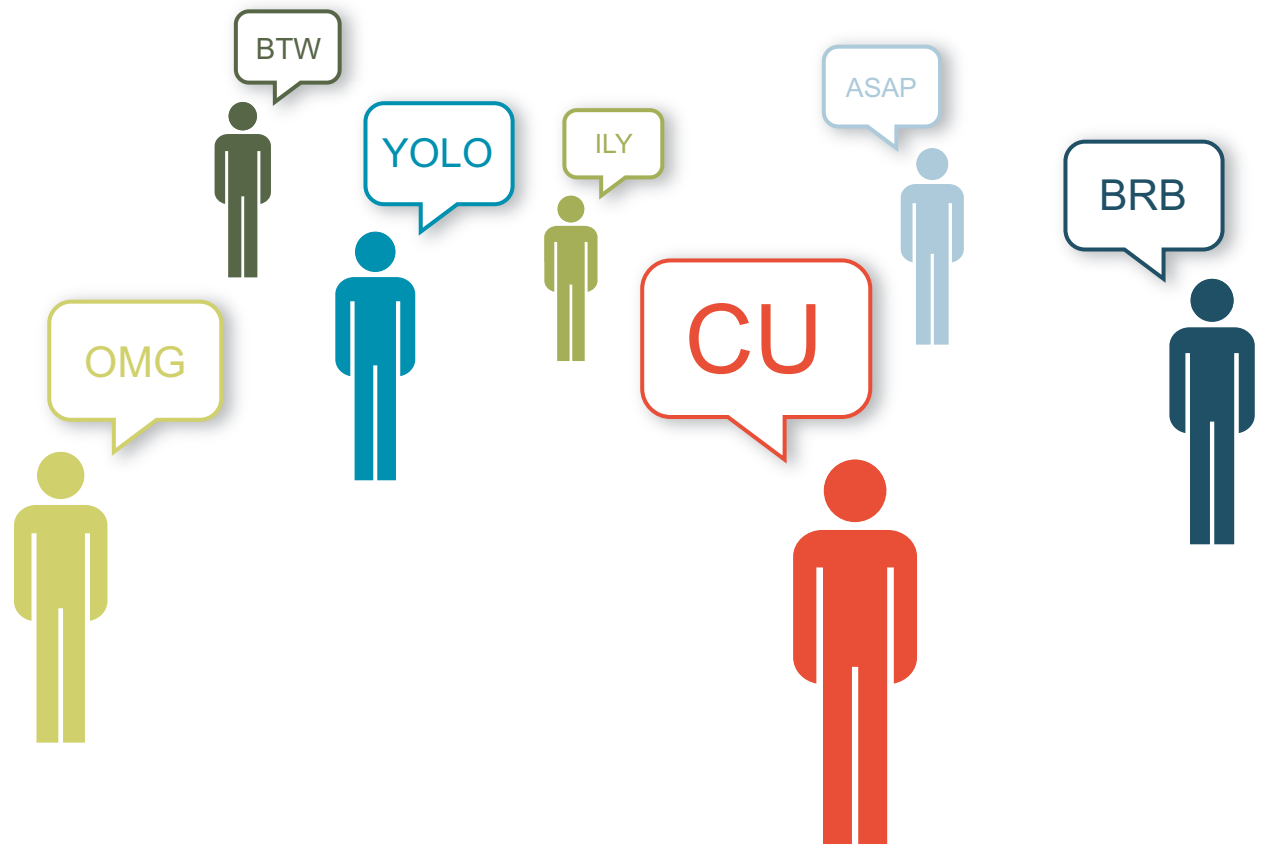
About the basic training on chat support relating to sexual abuse


The specific nature of chat support relating to sexual abuse requires basic training for each counsellor. The basic outline in terms of the content of this basic training must be streamlined according to the participants' existing skills.

- ✦ In terms of the content of the basic training you can find many topics and ingredients in this guide. All relevant competences of chat support counsellors (see 10.1) have to be attended to, including on media and digital developments. To be able to work with chat support software is an important condition for chat support counsellors.
- ✦ Practical sessions using chat are preferable;
- ✦ Engage young people as opposite partners during chat conversation practicals (for instance, social work students).
- ✦ Use the chat support expertise relating to sexual abuse that is already available in other organisations.

About peer supervision/performance management review for chat support relating to sexual abuse

Peer supervision is a form of professional supervision between chat support counsellors in which participants learn from each other's experiences. Peer supervision aims to create a safe learning environment. Prioritising the exchange of experience also requires sufficient restraint on the part of any line managers that may be present. Performance management review is a form of professional supervision between a chat support counsellor and his immediate line manager based on discussions about completed chat support conversations.



 Recommendations toward peer supervision and performance management review for chat support			
	For the participants	For the supervisor	For the organisation
Relating to starting peer supervision or performance management review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using transcripts is possible but not a must. Encourage a learning question to be written down. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Set clear goals for the peer supervision: unburden, release, stimulate the learning process, learn from others, keep in touch with colleagues, refine the method. When and why use transcripts? Provide transcripts beforehand Indicate line numbers In peer supervision, discreetly indicate the identity of the counsellor. Determine which selection of the transcript is relevant 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide exclusive peer supervision for chat support counsellors Limit the size of the peer supervision groups As an organisation sometimes suggestion the peer supervision topic
Relating to the process of peer supervision or performance management review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Give the author of the case study room to explain the context and perception of the chat conversation. Continue to pay attention to feelings, factual information and norms. Be alert to 'here and now' but also be aware of 'then', 'there' and 'later' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In peer supervision widen out the individual learning question into a shared question Raise awareness of specific online tools Ask for references to similar or opposite online conversations Systematically refer back to the transcripts Think more about <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the vision and position of the online service, - theory versus practice, - context and comfort of the counsellor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop tools to focus attention during peer supervision sessions on language, text, symbols and pace
In terms of the conclusion of the peer supervision or performance management review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has the discussion provided an answer to the initial question? Does the peer supervision or performance management review generate collective knowledge? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make a note of what is remembered when it comes to conducting / organising chat support conversations Archive the knowledge using a clear report. Provide a set of pro forma 'recommendations/ points for consideration for the further development of) chat support relating to sexual abuse' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make a list of suggestions, questions and recommendations relating to chat support conversations Translate these signals into actions and monitor the impacts that are achieved

About train-the-trainer sessions on chat support relating to sexual abuse

There is already quite a lot of know-how available on chat support relating to sexual abuse throughout Europe. But developing the method on chat support is fairly recent, and everyone recognises that this is still very much undergoing development. It may therefore be best to bundle together the available know-how from across the organisations. This Ch@dvce project is the first step in seeking to achieve this. Further development may include, amongst other things, the development of train-the-trainer sessions and a network for chat support relating to sexual abuse.

Potential content for a train-the-trainer session or a network for chat support relating to sexual abuse might include:

- ✚ An exchange and critical questioning of each other's vision and positioning of chat support relating to sexual abuse;
- ✚ An exchange, assessment, survey or development of training packages on chat support relating to sexual abuse;
- ✚ Organising topical peer supervision sessions for trainers;
- ✚ Research into the perceived benefits of chat support relating to sexual abuse by querying clients and counsellors about their expectations and results.
- ✚ Demonstration of alternative approaches in peer supervision sessions (e.g. topical peer supervision sessions, further reflection depending on how the method might be developed...);

✚ Analysis of 'good practices'.

✚ Becoming a member of the LinkedIn groups 'Digital Youth Care'.

About other forms of assistance for chat support relating to sexual abuse

In addition to training it is best for attention to be given to providing assistance to chat support counsellors by:

- Proper interviews and screening of candidate counsellors;
- An (online) diary for the chat support counsellors in which he writes down marked experiences, questions and doubts. This tool can be used in performance management review;
- Consultation with colleagues between two chat support conversations relating to sexual abuse;
- Case discussions at team meetings... with the focus on further guidance. At peer supervision sessions there should be more of a focus on case studies for the continuous professional development of the employee;
- Topical training relating to sexual abuse;
- A confidential counsellor who supports a counsellor after a 'difficult' conversation;
- Mentors for overseeing trainee chat support counsellors;
- Reading and typing level of counsellors in training with experienced chat support counsellors.

11. GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Developing a specific method for a new medium in (child) welfare work also requires a definition of terms, which within this context acquire a different meaning or a specific meaning or calls for new words or terms. We have made a start on this process.

Advisory introduction → is the use of chat as an introductory step or transition to a different programme of support (often face-to-face)

An intermediate form of support → is support offered through one channel that is used as a link at the start, during or at the end of a programme of support.

Anonymity → is the complete inability to recognise, or identify a person by not communicating the person's real proper name (or a nickname), his actual home address, work address, names of third-parties, organisations, services.

Autonomous form of help → represents a programme of support through a communication channel in which one is not dependent on other channels.

Blended help → refers to the combination or mix of online and offline communication channels, which together make up a programme of support.

Chat alliance → the understanding (conduct) or 'relationship' between client and counsellor, which ensures safety and reliability.

Chat support → is the support, which is provided (usually via one-to-one) chat.

Clicks → refers to the number of times the mouse button has to be pressed on the computer to reach a particular web page.

Client → is the person seeking help from a chat support conversation.

Close button → or hide page is a tool for quickly exiting the site if, for example, someone unwanted comes to view the screen.

Complementary form of support → is a programme of support through a communication channel that is complementary to support offered via other communication channels.

Counsellor → the chat support worker (may be both a professional member of staff or a volunteer).

Digital divide → highlights the differences between people who do and do not (yet) have access to and engage with digital media.

Digital footprint → is traceability of information that users leave behind on the Internet. Anonymity is only relative.

Digital natives → is the standard term for people, who have grown up in the Internet age and for whom online communication is self-evident.

Direct interaction → refers to the online communication in which the answer to a question is formulated immediately, for example via chat.

Direction → refers to the person who takes the lead in a chat support conversation. More often than with face-to-face support, this is the client.

Disclosure → means the revelation, divulgence, sharing by communicating information about one's own person and situation.

Disinhibition → is the phenomenon in which clients very quickly disclose highly personal, intimate information. A number of inhibitions are removed.

Doubts about authenticity → refers to the possible doubts about the integrity of the client because the conversation uses symbols on a screen.

Dropbox → is a tool or screen in which the client can say something about the conversation after the chat support conversation has taken place.

Emoticon → is a combination of punctuation marks and characters which conveys an emotion or feeling. The expressions can be recognised more effectively by tilting your head a quarter turn to the left :)

Encryption → is the encoding or encrypting of data based on a specific algorithm to be able to safeguard this information.

FAQ → are Frequently Asked Questions and refer to the website section in which frequently asked questions are answered.

Findability → is the degree to which or rate at which the site can easily be found on the Internet (World Wide Web).

Frequent chatter → is the client, who often and repeatedly chats with one (or more than one) organisation.

Frequent user of chat services → is that client who frequently uses the chat support services provided by various organisations.

Home page → is the start or opening page of a website that serves as the website address and point of departure for all information on that website.

Hyperlink → is an on-screen link in which the client is given access to other databases or digital information simply by clicking on the hyperlink.

Informant → is a specific client, namely someone who is not chatting about himself, but about someone else's problem.

IP address → or Internet Protocol address is a unique number of a computer that allows computers to be able to find and identify one another. The person behind an IP address can usually be discovered (directly or through the collaboration of judicial authorities).

Lasso → In a lasso, multiple messages in succession are sent by the same chat partner. A lasso can consist of multiple complete, (semi-)finished sentences, or can consist of disparate parts of the same sentence.

Link → is establishing a connection to a web page.

Multi-tasking → is the simultaneous combining of (Internet) communications, which may jeopardise one's ability to focus on one task.

Netiquette → refers to the behaviour and codes of conduct (chat rules) concerning online communication.

Nickname → is a fictitious name, a virtual identity that allows clients to guarantee their anonymity.

Online help tools → are digital tools that streamline communication via the Internet; For example, word clouds, frequently asked questions.

Online referral → is encouraging the client to consult additional services (websites) because these address specific questions more effectively or from a different perspective.

Online support → is support, which is provided via Internet communication.

Opening the chat conversation → is the phase after the prologue in which the client and counsellor type in their first messages.

Overdisclosure → means too much information is provided by the client. Disclosing profuse and superfluous information.

Pace → is the speed (slowness) at which messages are typed, read, corrected, answered in a chat conversation. The ratio between the number of messages, words and recorded time.

Peer supervision → is a form of professional supervision between helpline counsellors in which the participants learn from one another's experiences.

Performance management review → is a method for promoting expertise in a service organisation in which case conferences between a counsellor and supervisor are of central importance.

Presence → is a support method in which the entire focus is on closeness and being present as a counsellor.

Response time → is the (limited) time a conversation partner has to formulate an answer in the chat conversation.

Restricted availability of communication channels → is the limitation of information channels in terms of digital communication, reduced to words and symbols on a screen.

Screen-reading → is the term for online listening and observing.

Screen-writing → is the term for providing an online response, intervening by typing in words and symbols.

Scrolling → moving the content up or down on a computer screen using a scroll bar or the mouse wheel.

Shame → is a feeling that usually forms the basis for the decision to seek chat support. This is evident from the choice of nickname, from the hesitation to start the online conversation, from not typing in words in full that refer to sensitive issues (e.g.: rp for rape)

Site → or website is a collection of related web pages with a variety of information, such as text, images and videos.

Smiley → is a simple drawing of a smiling face, thus the name. The term smiley is also more extensively used for similar faces that depict different moods.

Sound words (onomatopoeia) → are symbols that link in particularly strongly with spoken language and colloquialisms.

Submission → is the first step in the process of online contact: the client makes it clear that he/she has a question and/or would like to apply to take advantage of chat support.

Test chatter → is the client who chats to test the credibility of the counsellor and the medium.

Transcript → or print-out represents the papers or electronic version of a chat conversation that is used for a debriefing, case file or research.

Typing indicator → is an indicator, which shows whether or not the conversation partner is typing.

Underdisclosure → is the provision of too little information and in an excessively laboured manner about oneself as a client or about the situation.

Virtual → is 'not real' but only available via the screen, through an online existence.

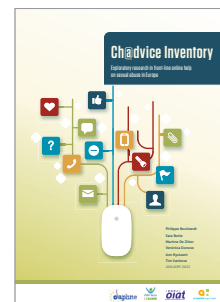
Word cloud → is an online tool in which terms concealing information are presented in different sizes. The size of a term often refers to the number of times that a term has been clicked.

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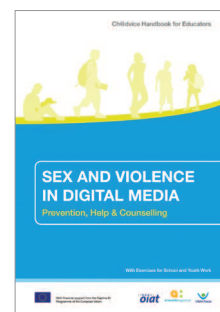
Other publications from the Ch@dvice project

This Ch@dvice Guide is only one of the results of the Ch@dvice project. Other publications from this project include:



The **Ch@dvice Inventory** is the report of exploratory research into front-line online support services relating to sexual abuse in Europe. It is the research report from the screening of 161 European online support websites and in-depth screening of 32 chat support services in Europe.

The Ch@dvice inventory is available in:  





The handbook '**Sex and violence in digital media - prevention, support and advice**' gears towards teachers and youth workers and aims to discuss safe use of the Internet and support relating to sexual abuse for children and young people through easy-to-understand diagrams and exercises.

The handbook is available in:    



The **Ch@dvice Reflector** contains more than 200 questions. In this way it aims to hold up a mirror to the organisations that aim to develop or further extend chat support relating to sexual abuse.

The Ch@dvice Reflector is available in:  

All these publications can be ordered via philippe.bocklandt@arteveldehs.be or can be found on this website:

<http://www.digitalyouthcare.eu/articles>

<http://www.onlinehulp-arteveldehogeschool.be/onlinehulponderzoek/>



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