

Introducing CHAT Children's Activity Time PROJECT

Children living in a refugee have often experienced significant trauma and disruption at a critical stage in their development. Early, accessible support plays an important role in helping them feel safer and build the foundations for long-term wellbeing.

Recognising the need for support that is both evidence-informed and practical to deliver in refugee settings, Refuge and the UK Trauma Council worked with safe parents, children, and experts in childhood trauma and domestic abuse services.

The result is the CHAT (Children's Activity Time) project: a structured therapeutic intervention designed specifically for children living in a refugee.

This is a preview of the handbook providing an introduction to the intervention and how it is delivered.

Grounded in five evidence-based principles



Safe



Calm



Connected



In Control



Hopeful

**If this resonates,
we'd like to hear
from you.**

As we look towards wider dissemination of CHAT from 2027, we welcome interest from organisations, partners and funders who share our commitment to improving outcomes for children affected by domestic abuse.

visit: uktraumacouncil.org/domesticabuse

or email: uktc@annafreud.org

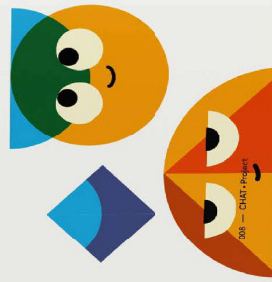


Getting started with CHAT

How to use the handbook

CHAT is divided into separate chapters, each based on one of the principles mentioned above. But you can use the ideas in whatever way suits your particular setting and each particular child. You could deliver one chapter in one session or you might spend more time and deliver a chapter over a number of sessions, depending on the needs of the child and the time you have available. Feel free to be creative and flexible, but remember the principles on which the content is based come from our best understanding of what helps children recover from potentially traumatic events. It's very important that the key ingredients (i.e. the five principles) are included in one way or another.

The handbook outlines the process for setting up and delivering the activities for the child and safe parent and offer suggestions to help you consider some of the potential challenges and how to navigate them.



500 — Chat project

Working out who to invite

The intervention has been designed with 5-12 year-olds in mind. But once you are familiar with the handbook and with each child, you will be best placed to decide if the intervention is likely to be appropriate for a particular child. In the future we may work on developing something for younger children and for young people who are older than 12.

Here is a checklist that will help you work out if a child is suitable for this project – it is intended as a guide to help you make a decision, not as a strict list of criteria.

- ☐ Known to you
- ☐ Currently living in the Refugee
- ☐ Been in the refuge at least 2 weeks and likely to remain for 4 more (there are around 7 sessions; they don't have to attend all of them, but it's best if they can)
- ☐ Able to engage in short chunks of activity/ conversation (sessions are flexible and can be adapted to different needs)
- ☐ Child and safe parent have provided informed consent (see invitations and consent forms)

Children receiving another intervention (e.g. school counselling or CAMHS) can still attend CHAT, but you may want to liaise with the other provider.

Safe parents said that it will usually be better if siblings have CHAT sessions separately. But it might sometimes work for siblings to join some sessions together – you will be familiar with the content and activities, and you will have some knowledge of the children. So make a judgement based on the individual children and what you think would be best for them. We have had some positive feedback from children and parents who have worked together, both in terms of their enjoyment and their sibling relationships. The chapters are so flexible that you could do some sessions together and some

separately. You will need to consider who can supervise the other siblings if the safe parent is attending a session with one of the children (see 10.6). This is something you can discuss with other staff or another child support worker in a nearby refuge if at all possible.

Safeguarding and confidentiality

Follow your existing safeguarding procedures and processes recording concerns or disclosures as you do ordinarily in your role. Within CHAT sessions you will want to create a space where children are able to talk openly and honestly about how they are coping and their experiences. You can

offer a 'safe space' but you cannot guarantee confidentiality.

Keeping children safe always takes priority over keeping things private.

Confidentiality and safeguarding are introduced to the child and safe parent in the introduction chapter 0. And then towards the end of each child-only session, you can discuss with the child what you think it would be useful to share with their safe parent and ask them who they would like to lead the conversation – them or their own or with you. For example, they may want you to support them with asking their safe parent to explain more about why they had to move to the refuge but may be happy to show their safety blanket or cloak and tell them about it without support.

Structure of intervention

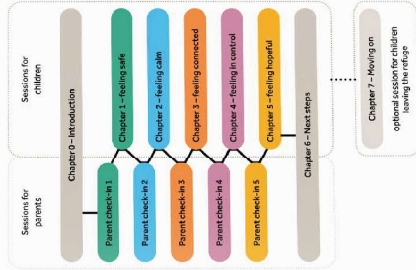
Setting up the sessions

If you think a child may benefit from CHAT, talk with the safe parent and child to explain the project and share the invitations. Arrange a follow-up to discuss the invitations and, if initial consent is given, book the introduction chapter. After this, confirm both are happy to proceed and schedule Chapter 0-6.

It's helpful to give CHAT sessions a clear identity so children understand this is different from general play. Other CSWs have done this by displaying a 'CHAT Club' sign, preparing the child's CHAT folder, and using a visual timetable.

Overall structure

The project is divided into chapters, each focused on one principle. You might cover one chapter per session, or a child may need additional sessions to explore a particular principle. You will need to balance your time and capacity with the child's needs. Each chapter has a parallel parent-only session to support the child's work. During the pilot phase most CSWs delivered sessions 1-11, but there is the option of working with a small group or siblings if you have the capacity and staff support. Chapters 3 and 5 may be best suited for group sessions.



What is the CHAT Project?

CHAT combines conversation, play and creativity to help children develop a sense of safety, calm, connection, control and hope. Crucially it is delivered by workers based in refuges – trusted adults already known to the child – so support can begin quickly, using this window of opportunity.



This chapter is about helping promote a child's sense of safety — not just physically but also psychologically. Experiencing domestic abuse is likely to mean that home didn't feel safe for the child. Whether they witnessed abuse or lived with the atmosphere and tension created by an abusive adult, this will likely have undermined their sense of home as a safe place and may have extended to feeling that nowhere is really safe. Even if the child was not aware of the abuse, having to move away from their home is likely to make them feel somewhat insecure.

1 — Feeling Safe

Aim

For children to:

- 1 explore what makes them feel physically and psychologically safe
- 2 identify the people, places and things that help them feel safer

Activities

Core Activities:

- 1A The safe game
- 1B Sammi's questions
- 1C My safety blanket/cloak

Additional Activities:

- 1D Safety/Medal detector
- 1E Super safe space
- 1F The cosy corner
- 1G Chain of people
- 1H Feeling inside

Materials

Printed materials:

- p.081 The safe game cards
- p.082 The safe game scale
- p.117 Child session feedback

Core activities:

- General craft materials
- Large question mark on paper
- Skipping rope, sticky notes
- Fabric/Sheet and fabric pens

Additional activities:

- Cards/board labels or long stick
- Cosy corner resources (cushions/blanket)
- Staff photos

CHAT Project — A structured, evidence-based journey, from first welcome to moving on.

- Structured evidence based activities for children aged 5 – 12 years
- Flexible sessions tailored to individual needs, interests and preferences
- Joint sessions with parent and child at the beginning and end of the intervention
- Separate child only sessions exploring feeling safe, calm, connected, in control and hopeful
- Parent check ins to help safe parents support their child's recovery
- Moving on session with activities when a child is preparing to move on from temporary accommodation

Start of the session

Icebreaker opening ritual
Select an activity or your own (see page 84 for examples, or even better, use one that is useful to the child only).

Introduction

Today we're going to be thinking about being safe and feeling safe. We'll be doing all sorts of activities to help us with this.

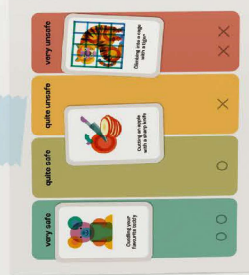
Activity 1A

The safe game

- "First, let's start with a game."

To find out if children understand the concept of physical safety, invite them to decide how safe or unsafe something is. This is not a school activity where the aim is to reach the 'right' answer; it's a chance to playfully explore safety and what makes them feel safe. Unless the child is only really able to think in all or nothing terms, bear in mind that most things are a bit unclear – few things are completely safe, most could be dangerous.

- There are some things people might do. Do you think they are:
very safe, quite safe, quite unsafe, very unsafe.

Activity 1B
Sammi's questions

Explain to the child/children

- Sometimes even when people tell you it is safe it doesn't always feel like that inside you.
- Remember that last time I told you about Sammi and you chose your own Sammi like this. Here's the first part of Sammi's story.



- Sammi had to leave home in a rush because it wasn't safe to stay.

Sammi travelled with mum and baby sister, and the family could only bring a few things. "Where are we going? Why are we going?" Sammi wondered.

They arrived at a large building and someone opened the door. "Hello, my name's Esther. Welcome. Come inside." Everything felt confusing, and questions kept swirling around inside Sammi's mind.

- "What do you think Sammi's questions were?"

Draw a large bubble question mark and invite the child/children to suggest questions Sammi might have in mind. You could write these inside or around the question mark shape.

You don't need to answer these questions. Hearing two child's suggestions can help you understand what might be on their mind. You will be able to reflect that they might be lots of unanswered questions right now and that might feel confusing.

- "Which questions can you answer for Sammi?"

"Who else could Sammi ask?"

"Are there any questions no one can answer, because there aren't any answers yet?"

Adaptation ideas

If a child finds it hard to spontaneously think of questions you could play this, maybe using a toy puppet or Lego figure as Sammi. You could ask Sammi: "What are you thinking Sammi?" You might even suggest some questions yourself for example, I wonder whether Sammi is thinking:

- Why am I living here?
 - How long will I stay here?
 - Will I still go to school?
- This might prompt the child to add a question of their own. If they are not able to do this, then they may still benefit from hearing the questions you have suggested.

Activity 1C

My safety blanket – places, people & things

In the part of the chapter you'll be thinking with the child about the people, places and things that help them feel safe. You can use Sammi's story to prompt conversation and to help the child begin to identify what helps them before recording their ideas on a safety blanket or cloak.

Places

44 Esther said, "You can stay here, you will all be safe together," but Sammi still felt a bit scared and worried. Back at home, Sammi would have made a cosy den behind the sofa and curled up with Coco the dog. Where could Sammi hide or feel safe here?"

- "If Sammi was living here, where are the places Sammi might go to help feel safer?"

What about you? Where do you feel most safe/least safe? Have there been places where you didn't feel safe?

People

44 Living here was different, friends and family couldn't visit and Sammi missed them. Who could Sammi talk to or play with? Who could be trusted?

Detailed session plans – Everything you need to feel confident in the room.

- A range of core and additional activities using play, creativity and discussion
- Ideas for adapting activities for inclusivity and cultural sensitivity
- Suggested wording to support you to feel confident in explaining activities
- Pause and notice – guidance to help consider challenges that might arise
- Includes sections of "Sammi's story" – following a personalised fictional character who moves into a refuge – to illustrate the key principles
- CHAT Plus sections of the story help to respond when children share some of their more challenging experiences



CHAT Children's Activity Time PROJECT

Together, Refuge and UKTC have co-produced CHAT in response to the often unmet needs of children in refuge settings to promising results. As we look towards wider dissemination from 2027, we welcome interest from organisations, partners and funders who share our commitment to improving outcomes for children affected by domestic abuse.



Developed through a unique partnership between Refuge the UK's largest provider of accommodation-based domestic abuse services and the UK Trauma Council (UKTC), a national leader in childhood trauma resources and training. Funded by the Dahan Family Foundation and co-produced with children, safe parents and frontline staff.

To find out more visit our website →

www.uktraumacouncil.org/domesticabuse

