



Doctors  
to Children

Interregional nongovernmental organization for  
the support of family, motherhood, and  
childhood  
«Doctors to Children»

**Dear colleagues,**

We are pleased to share with you our experience in provision of crisis assistance and psychological counseling for children via web-based services. The web-site Pomoschryadom.ru (“Help is Near”) which operates since 2012 is providing psychological assistance to adolescents through online chat service and responses to e-mails from children.

**Q: What kind of chat modules/applications do you use for communication with survivors? What are the useful-to-know experiences, what kind of key factors should be taken into consideration when choosing a module/application?**

A: We use the service for online counseling LiveTex. The cost of the service usually depends on the number of counselors connected. The service is provided by a third-party company, and the module itself is configured and “attached” to your site. The advantages of using an external service for a non-profit organization include regular updates and maintenances carried out by the supplier company. Another important point is functionality of an administrative dashboard, which provides statistical data about consultations and counselors (including working hours, number of consultations provided, etc.) and store the history and content of consultations, which is important to monitor quality of the service. The administrator (supervisor) can monitor the work of counselors. Additionally, this platform provides opportunity for remote work of counselors (the software is installed on their own computers, and each counselor has a personal account).

**Q: What’s the degree of interest in the chat service?**

A: Chat is a familiar communication platform among adolescents, so this is a popular way to contact psychologist. This type of services also ensures greater confidentiality and anonymity compared to phone-line, which makes it more attractable for youth. Also it is important that one can access chat-lines from any device (e.g., smartphone, tablet) and from any location (home, street, school, work, etc.). The online format provides more opportunities for the client to seek help, especially when an aggressor is in the same space, controls phone conversations, or the client doesn’t want her/his conversations is heard by somebody. Our experience shows constantly growing interest to online-chart service. In 2018, we received 11 900 requests, in 2019 – 13 500, and during first quarter of 2020 we received almost 4 000 requests.

**Q: On average how long does a chat session take?**

A: We have a recommended time of 50-60 minutes for each session. But, given technical issues and type of request, the session can last less than 50 minutes or, if necessary, longer than that amount of time (when it is case of acute crisis situation such as violence or suicide attempt).

**Q: Is there any special, additional knowledge required for a chat-line, as compared to a traditional hotline operation?**

A: There are some similarities between phone-based hotlines and chat-based services. However, chat-based counseling has a number of unique features that require special training for counselors. There's no visual or audio presence, just a chat box. This can be more difficult to understand and reflect emotional state of the client. Anonymity is higher. Many counselors require support in order to switch to this work format and, of course, regular supervision. There are also a number of technical issues that need to be considered when organizing this work and training counselors. Written language literacy and typing skills are also important. All our psychologists undergo mandatory training (which includes theory and internships).

**Q: Is there any specific target group worth focusing on for a chat-service?**

A: We feel online counseling is suitable for anyone with access to the Internet. For teenagers, who are generally more used to writing than talking; we get a lot of chat messages from them. This format is especially relevant for adolescents who are, for example, studying at boarding schools, where there is a lack of personal space.

For women who are on parental leave; they spend most of their time at home, often together with other family members (e.g. mother-in-law).

For women living in certain settings (e.g., some regions, communities, or households) where their behavior is subjected to many controls and prohibitions, including controls mandated by religion.

For women who are held in custody by the state (e.g., in prison); the issue of personal space is also relevant for them.

**Q: Generally speaking, going beyond the current situation as regards COVID-19, what needs can be (better) served by the chat service, as compared to telephone/e-mail-based services?**

A: The anonymity of chat messaging that provides a safe space for both client and counselor, has already been highlighted above. Access to chat-service is easier: you can access it from any device (smartphone, tablet) and from any location (home, street, school, work, etc.). The online format provides more opportunities for clients to seek help, especially when aggressors are in close proximity to them, when aggressors control phone conversations, or the clients don't want her/his conversation is heard.

Best regards and good luck in your work!  
DTC Team