

Happy to Chat benches and spaces

A toolkit with ideas and insights for
creating your own



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1. What is a ‘Happy to Chat’ bench?

‘Happy to Chat’ or community benches are designed to help combat loneliness and encourage community interaction.

Designated benches typically feature a simple sign, which for example could read ‘Sit here if you don’t mind someone stopping to say hello.’

The bench becomes a public asset which anyone can use to take time out of their day to reflect. They provide opportunity to connect with people and perhaps start a conversation about how they are feeling.



Chat benches [exist across the UK](#) and [also internationally](#), they have been used in places such as:

- Schools
- Train stations
- Places of worship
- Parks
- Public spaces



Remember the benches can be adapted to suit different audiences.



2. How do they work?

Chat benches are simply a bench in a space which can be easily accessed by passers-by to use.

Benches typically have signage to indicate that this space is used to encourage conversation and community interaction. This helps to let people know that anyone sitting there is happy to talk or would like to talk.

The signage can also include signposting information or QR codes for people to explore further resources or support, if they need it. This can help localise the bench and ensure it's adopted by the community.



In 2019, Thrive LDN met DS Ashley Jones MBE who has been leading a community bench scheme in Avon and Somerset to great effect.

He told Thrive LDN: “Some people may go days or even weeks without the simplest of human contact, so the Chat Bench seeks to break down that social barrier and allow us to all say ‘hello’.”



3. Setting up a chat bench:

Step 1 - What you'll need

Setting up a bench can be a very simple process.

You will need the following:

- ✓ Bench or benches
- ✓ Signage
- ✓ 'Need help' leaflet (see page X)



Optional ideas:

- ✓ If permitted, paint or decorate the bench to designate it as a chat bench
- ✓ Create a system to monitor or manage the bench with volunteers on hand to support people using the space.

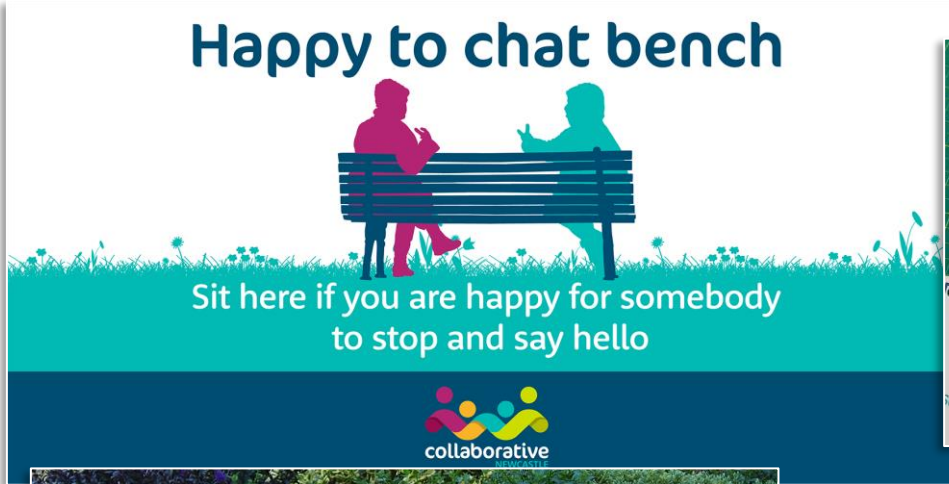
Chat Benches are a great way to get Londoners thinking and talking more about mental health and wellbeing.

The benches can help Londoners to become more comfortable talking to each other and provide the space for Londoners to improve mental health and wellbeing in their communities.



3. Setting up a chat bench: Step 2 - Creating or choosing signage

- Pick a name for your chat benches (you don't have to call them chat benches).
- Include a small note about what the bench aims to do and how it will work.
- Try and use simple language in a clear font to make this easy to understand and read.
- Be as creative as you like with the signage, the more appealing it is the more likely people are to notice it.



Here we have included some examples of existing signage on chat benches across the country

3. Setting up a chat bench:

Step 3 - Encouraging people to use the bench

Once you've set up your chat bench and attached signage, you will want to think about how you want the bench to be used in the long term.

It could be a good idea to have a few people assigned to look after the space to replace any signage or keep the area tidy.

Having a chat bench is a great way to work in partnership with people and organisations in your community, so perhaps invite them to help you to look after the space and support those who use the bench.

Below are some possible steps for getting conversations started with people in and around the chat bench:

Approach passers-by

- *“Hello, have you seen our chat benches. If you have some time, I’m happy to tell you more about them?”*

Share your experiences

- Take a seat and start a conversation.
- Perhaps choose something fairly general and relatable, like such as event or things happening in your community or sharing something you feel comfortable with.

Have a conversation

- Listen and converse in a friendly and non-judgmental way – keep it informal!
- Ask for feedback from those who have used the benches.

3. Setting up a chat bench

Step 4 - Consider further signposting

Chat benches are a great initiative to support conversations between people about their wellbeing and mental health.

But it's important to remember that we may not always be able to offer the correct advice or solution in some circumstances.

There are however, lots of ways to get help both online and urgently via phone, if needed. We have included some examples of this on the next page.

Bench signage can also include signposting information or QR codes for people to explore further resources or support, if they need it. This can help localise the bench and ensure it's adopted by the community.

You can also visit the [Help Yourself and Others section](#) of our website for further resources to support wellbeing and free training offers, including our conversation starter tool.



Need help?

Things can feel very hard at times.

Support is available for whatever you are going through, there is hope and you are not alone.



Good Thinking, London's free digital wellbeing service, offers free, NHS approved digital tools to help manage anxiety, low mood, sleeping difficulties, or stress.

Visit www.good-thinking.uk

If you need to speak to someone urgently, the following service is available:

Samaritans: 116 123

Whatever problems you are facing Samaritans are there to listen

SHOUT: Text Shout to 85258

Text service for support with any mental health concern (it will not show up on your bill)

Cruse Bereavement Care: 0808 808 1677

Support and advice if you are grieving or dealing with bereavement

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4. How to run a chat bench in an education or youth setting

Chat benches can be used in a variety of settings, including schools.

When thinking about creating and running a chat bench you should consider how the pupils at the school will be involved. Ideally, it should be a project that the children help to create and have ownership of.

Here are the steps they have taken at St Mary’s RC Primary School, Wimbledon, to create their ‘chitter chatter benches’:

- House Captains / School Council selected a design for the benches.
- House Captains / School Council selected names they liked.
- The whole school voted for the name they wanted for the benches.
- The benches were painted by the children, with an adult supervising.
- The school held a competition for the children to design their own ‘Chitter Chatter’ bench poster.
- The school laminated the winners and launched the benches. Since launching, the children have said *“they have a safe and calm space to look out for one another.”*



4. How to run a chat bench in an education or youth setting



In this short video, hear from the pupils and staff about the initiative and how it's successful in their school.

[Watch video](#)



4. How to run a chat bench in an education or youth setting - signage



You could consider creating a competition in your school to help design the signage for your chat benches.

These are some examples from pupils for St Mary's RC Primary School's 'chitter chatter benches'.



Assistant Headteacher at St Mary's, Lauren Davis, tells us about the importance of talking about mental health and wellbeing with children, and how they've been approaching this at St Mary's. [Watch video](#)

5. Incorporating benches into events and existing initiatives

You may also want to think about how you could incorporate chat benches into events and existing initiatives.

This photo (right) displays two chat benches which were decorated and managed by the [Jen Group](#) - a collaborative organisation supporting people with their mental health and wellbeing - as part of a film screening held at Rich Mix on World Mental Health Day 2021.

Those attending the film screening were asked to help decorate the benches by writing a hopeful message on them. The benches helped to create a space for people to both reflect on their mental health and wellbeing and discuss this with others.

You can also use your benches for outdoor activities, exercise, storytelling... Think as creatively as you're able to.





With thanks to St Mary's RC Primary School, Wimbledon, for sharing their ideas and story to support this toolkit.

Thank you

If you have any questions please get in touch.

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