How Safe Are Our Children?

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ChildLine Counselling Sessions

Percentage of counselling sessions broken down by primary concern (2012/13)

*Counselling sessions refer to calls, online chats and emails.

Abuse and neglect: self-reported sources

Indicator 7 — Contacts with ChildLine

Key messages

- Depression and unhappiness and family relationships were the two most prevalent issues that children and young people contacted ChildLine about in 2012/13.
- Physical abuse accounted for 42 per cent of all abuse-related main concerns.
- In 2012/13, ChildLine referred 1,836 children to external agencies.
- Counselling with children who mentioned self-harm as a main or additional concern increased by 41 per cent from the previous year.

Why is this measure important?

ChildLine is the UK’s free, 24-hour helpline for children and young people. Information about ChildLine counselling sessions* provides a unique indication of the nature and levels of concerns among children. It allows us to identify emerging trends in the issues that children are facing. ChildLine information also allows us to track concerns about specific forms of abuse and neglect that may not be covered in official crime or child protection statistics.

What are the limitations of the data?

This data only captures where children have contacted ChildLine and is therefore only a snapshot of the concerns they may have. In general it is not possible to identify the number of individual children who are contacting ChildLine, as the same child may make multiple contacts. The number and reasons for contacts can also be affected by news coverage, NSPCC marketing and the introduction of new ways to contact ChildLine, such as online counselling.

Data availability and comparability

ChildLine data covers the UK as a whole and comparable data is available for the previous three years. Due to the confidentiality of the service, very few young people tell a counsellor where they live, and therefore a UK nation breakdown of data is not possible.

ChildLine Counselling Sessions

Depression and unhappiness and family relationships were the most talked about issues from children in 2012/13. (Depression and unhappiness is a new concern category for ChildLine).

Bullying remains a significant concern for children which accounted for 11 per cent of main concerns counselled.

In terms of abuse, physical abuse accounted for 5 per cent of main concerns counselled and sexual abuse for 4 per cent.

For the third year running there was an increase in counselling where suicidal feelings (21 per cent increase) and self-harm (39 per cent increase) were the main concern.
In 2012–13, ChildLine made 1,836 referrals on behalf of children to external agencies. The most frequent reason for a referral was for children who were feeling actively suicidal which accounted for 60 per cent of all referrals. This figure increased by 14 per cent compared with 2011/12.

Four per cent of referrals were the result of young people who were worried about their own behaviour, which was usually sexually or physically abusive towards another child. There was a 37 per cent increase in referrals by this primary concern from the previous year.

In addition to offering counselling sessions on the phone or online, the ChildLine website is a resource for children and young people.

In 2012/13 the ChildLine website received a total of 2,368,875 page views. Advice about bullying was the most viewed ChildLine page, closely followed by cyber bullying and self-harm. (Please see Indicator 9 for detail on online harm.)

The ChildLine Message Boards received a total of 4,295,572 page views and 93,897 posts were submitted and published by children and young people.

Data source
ChildLine data on file with the NSPCC