

## Kids Help Line - 2006 in brief

**Kids Help Line calls remain high from children and young people, with more than 607,000 telephone and online contacts received in 2006<sup>1</sup>.**

Counsellors engaged in almost 60,000 counselling sessions during 2006: 44,554 telephone and 12,384 web and email counselling sessions.

### Why do they call?

Relationships and family continues to be the number one reason children and young people contact Kids Help Line. More than 21,000 counselling sessions about relationships with family, friends and partners took place in 2006.

The table below lists the Top 10 Concerns of Young People in 2006.

### Who's calling?

Females made up the majority of counselling sessions in 2006 with 44,526 females (78%) and 12,412 males (22%) seeking help.

Two-thirds of counselling sessions were with older adolescents and young adults, with 31,223 (55%) from young people aged between 15 and 18 years.

### What are the trends?

Over the past six years the proportion of counselling sessions related to mental health issues and emotional and/or behavioural management has increased along with reports of suicidality and deliberate self-injury. In contrast there has been a substantial decrease in peer relationship concerns and smaller decreases regarding drug and/or alcohol, partner relationship, pregnancy, sexual activity and contraception concerns across the past six years.

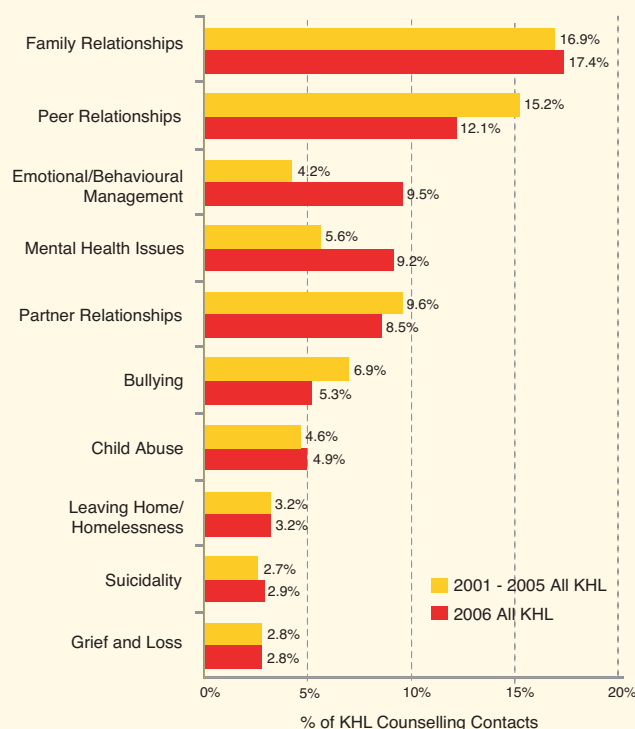
Bullying concerns have decreased over the past three years, while child abuse, homelessness, grief and loss and physical health continue to be common reasons for seeking help.

### How to find out more?

Obtain a copy of the *Kids Help Line 2006 Overview – Issues Concerning Children and Young People* via [www.kidshelpline.com](http://www.kidshelpline.com) or by telephoning BoysTown on 07 3368 3399.



Top 10 Concerns of Young People in 2006<sup>1</sup>



## Impact of family and domestic violence on children

### Exposure to domestic and family violence has ongoing effects on the mental health and well-being of children.

Research indicates that children exposed to sustained trauma such as family violence, may be susceptible to ongoing cognitive, emotional and behavioural difficulties in later life<sup>2</sup>. These include anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, aggressive and oppositional behaviour, substance abuse, developmental phobias and insomnia, poor academic performance at school, poor problem solving skills, psychosomatic symptoms, social isolation, and self-harming behaviour.

It is estimated that 27% of adults who experience family violence have children in their care who witness the violence<sup>3</sup>. National statistics show that almost one quarter of young people in Australia (23%) have witnessed their father or stepfather's physical violence against their mother or stepmother. These figures are higher still amongst Indigenous children and young people<sup>4</sup>.



### How does Kids Help Line help?

During the past five years Kids Help Line has responded to an average of 300 contacts per year from children and young people concerned about domestic violence.

The telephone and online counselling services at Kids Help Line play an important role by providing both short and long-term responses to family violence in the lives of children and young people.

**Kids Help Line counsellors provide crisis intervention directly and through liaison with agencies who ensure the safety of children at risk of harm.**

Counsellors may also embark on longer term counselling relationships aimed at helping children deal with their history of trauma and its impact on every day life.

### What other help does BoysTown provide?



**Parentline  
1300 30 1300**

BoysTown's other services engage in a broad range of responses to family violence from prevention programs to parenting support via *Parentline* (Queensland and the Northern Territory) and the provision of accommodation for families escaping violence.

BoysTown domestic violence staff share their experiences on page 6.

## What can you do to help a victim of violence?

Domestic and family violence involves the use of force, threats or intimidation by one person to control and manipulate others.<sup>5</sup>

### What are the signs of abuse?

- They seem nervous, depressed or withdrawn
- They are overly anxious about their partner and their partner's moods
- Their partner controls the money, children, social activities, work, clothes and/or friends
- Their partner often orders them about or makes all the decisions
- They have stopped seeing their friends and/or family
- They have unexplained bruises, cuts or sprains.

## What can you do to help a victim of violence?

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*Your support and encouragement can help them feel stronger and more able to make decisions.*

*Listen without judging, respect their decisions, and help them find ways to become stronger and safer.*

### Being Safe

Assess the level of danger to yourself and your friend before deciding how to support them.

- If your friend might be in danger, call the police
- If they decide to leave, help to put them in touch with a specialised domestic violence service or the police
- If they do not want to involve professional help at this point, encourage them to make a personal safety plan.

### Domestic violence crisis helplines

National	1800 200 526
ACT	(02) 6280 0900
NSW	1800 656 463
NT	1800 019 116
QLD	1800 811 811
SA	1800 800 098
TAS	1800 633 937
VIC	1800 015 188
WA	1800 007 339

### 7 Step Personal Safety Plan

- 1 Arrange a secret signal, e.g. a special word or phrase, for use in an emergency
- 2 Prepare an excuse to leave quickly and rehearse it
- 3 Always carry change for phone calls
- 4 Have a list of relevant phone numbers
- 5 Organise a safe place to go in an emergency
- 6 Prepare an *escape bag* and hide it – include money, car keys and copies of documents like property deeds, Medicare cards, children's records, ID
- 7 Find out how the police can offer protection

## Mobile phone use on the rise

**Kids Help Line has experienced a six-fold increase in calls from mobile phones over the past five years.**

In 2002, 7% of calls made to Kids Help Line were from mobile phones. This increased to 45% or more than 250,000 calls in 2006.<sup>1</sup>

### Who's calling?

Callers using mobiles are:

- Mostly aged between 13 and 17 years
- More likely to be female; and
- Mostly come from non-metropolitan areas.

Forty-four percent (44%) of young people aged 13 to 17 years use mobile phones to contact the service with the balance (56%) relying on landlines. Interestingly, calls from mobile phones

drops to 20% among young adults aged 19 to 25 years.

Over half (55%) of the calls made from non-metropolitan areas came from mobile phones. In contrast, only 38% of calls from metropolitan areas were from mobiles.

### Public phones still relevant

Despite the enormous growth in mobile phones use, payphones still play a significant role in facilitating children and young people's access to Kids Help Line.

Access to payphones is particularly important for Indigenous children and those young people located in regional and remote areas of Australia.

- 30% of calls to Kids Help Line from Indigenous children and young people were from payphones
- 12% of calls from regional and remote parts of Australia were also made from payphones.

## Help Line Case Studies

### *Kids, parents and internet predators*

A teenage girl rang Kids Help Line about how she had done something “silly” with a friend who was visiting her place.\*

They had entered into an internet chat room and started to talk with a male who they believed to be a few years older than them. During the session he asked them to expose their breasts to him via the web cam and they did.

Since that time the caller had continued to engage in a chat room with this male and after a while he started to ask her to expose herself through the web cam again. Each time she told him “no”. The male then proceeded to threaten to put the photo of her and her friend on the internet for others to see if she didn’t say yes. She became quite concerned and scared about his behaviour and called Kids Help Line.

The caller asked Kids Help Line if the male could technically still have the photo of her and what her legal rights were if he did put it on the internet. The caller was also concerned about how her parents and others would react about the situation if the photos were posted and they found out.

The counsellor talked to the client about how often this has started happening on the internet and how it did happen to other girls.

### ***The caller had no idea that it happened to other girls.***

The counsellor also explained that the male was mainly using this as a form of sexual gratification. They discussed her feelings around the situation and some possible ways to prevent this from getting worse and what she could do to stop it.

By the end of the call the caller agreed that she was going to talk with her mother about what had happened and discuss the possibility of going to the police to make a report.



A mother of a teenage girl rang Parentline# about her anger at discovering chat transcripts from MSN saved on the home computer. \*

The mother said the transcripts were of her daughter talking to a male presenting as an older teenager. The male asked her daughter sexual questions and to describe detailed sexual behaviour. Eventually, he asked that they meet. The caller talked about how she was extremely shocked and angry that her daughter was participating in these conversations because she had talked to her daughter numerous times about internet safety. The mother had followed the correct internet safety procedures, including having the computer in a shared area in the house.

The counsellor advised the mother how best to deal with the situation and how to manage her feelings of anger when she needed to pick her daughter up from school. The counsellor explained that situations like this were increasing and how girls like her daughter were a primary target of internet predators. By the end of the call the mother had calmed down enough to pick up her daughter and have a discussion with her around using the internet safely. The caller was also going to discuss with her daughter ways that she can be aware of these kinds of people and how to avoid getting involved with them.

\* Details have been changed to protect client confidentiality.

# Parentline is a Queensland and Northern Territory service.

### **What rules can parents teach children about chat rooms?**

- Only speak to people they have met in person
- Don't give out ANY personal information about themselves
- Don't send photographs of themselves; and
- Never arrange to meet face-to-face

### *Safe ways to enjoy the internet*

For further information about safe ways to enjoy the best of the internet visit the following web sites:

Australian Broadcasting Authority  
[www.cybersmartkids.com.au](http://www.cybersmartkids.com.au)

Australian Internet Safety Advisory Board  
[www.netalert.net.au](http://www.netalert.net.au)

Australian Communications and Media Authority  
[www.acma.gov.au/hotline](http://www.acma.gov.au/hotline)



## Who's chatting to your kids?

**Online chat rooms are a dangerous destination for children who are unsupervised or unaware that sexual predators also chat.**

While the internet is fundamentally a great place for children, in a recent presentation to Kids Help Line staff, Peter Ahloy of the Queensland Police Service's Task Force Argos revealed that sex offenders are exceptionally skilled at using the internet to exploit and harm our children.

"These individuals listen to and empathise with the problems of children, and are aware of their latest music, hobbies and interests," Detective Senior Constable Ahloy said.

"They use this knowledge to gradually seduce children through the use of attention, affection and even gifts."

Detective Senior Constable Ahloy said that research shows that children are often naïve when it comes to developing friendships, relationships and identifying suspicious behaviours.

"Parents need to realise that while a child's technical skills may be high, they are still vulnerable to child sex offenders who utilise a variety of techniques to locate and befriend children."

## INTERNET TIPS FOR PARENTS AND CARERS<sup>6</sup>

How do you know your child is at risk?

- Your child is receiving phone calls from people you don't know or is calling numbers you don't recognise
- Your child is spending a large amount of time on the internet
- Your child is receiving gifts or mail from people you don't know
- When you enter the room your child changes the screen or turns off the computer
- Your child becomes withdrawn or is displaying behavioural problems
- You find pornography on your child's computer

How can parents monitor who their child is talking to?

- Strongly consider moving computers out of your child's bedroom into a central area of the house. Opportunities for sexual exploitation are limited if the computer monitor is visible to all members of the family

- Make internet access conditional upon being able to access your child's emails and messenger chat logs
- Consider installing filtering and monitoring software on their computer. The Netaalert web page provides information about products [www.netaalert.net.au](http://www.netaalert.net.au)
- Spend time exploring the internet with your children and talk to them about who they speak to on the internet

When should the police be contacted?

If your child:

- Receives child exploitation material
- Has been sexually solicited
- Receives sexually explicit images or messages

Call NetAlert, Australia's internet safety advisory body, on 1800 880 176 or your local Police to report a concern you have about your child and the net.

## Observing the impact of domestic violence on kids



Service Manager Jane MacPhail and Child and Family Worker Jody-Ann Willoughby share their experiences from **Parmenie** – BoysTown's domestic violence refuge.

### *What behaviours in children and young people do you see are linked to domestic violence?*

Children and young people experiencing domestic violence often have behavioural and emotional problems. They can have limited understanding of normal, healthy behaviour because they have not had positive role models.

Kids we see often have learning difficulties. Sometimes there is a total closure of abilities whereby imagination gets stilted because they are not allowed to explore that part of themselves due to what is going on in the family situation. Underlying this is a deep fear about everything.

Children and young people may also act out the behaviours they have seen at home. They might, for example, be verbally and physically abusive to siblings and in other relationships, becoming the perpetrators of violence themselves by taking on the patterns learnt from parents. Their behaviours can range from being withdrawn to outwardly violent. For example, two year-olds forming a fist and communicating using violence with other children and their parents.

### *Can children let adults know about domestic violence at home through some classic behaviours?*

Yes. The classic way that children let adults know about domestic violence at home is to mimic what they have seen. This is usually unintentional, but adds to the continuation of violence within the family, for example, with children acting out violent behaviours.

Some children and young people are creative and are able to use their imagination and symbolism to tell the story of their trauma and life experiences. This creativity, whether it is in drawing or music or something else, gives the child space to explore what is going on for them. This often helps young people to develop an emotional intelligence in order to express their feelings.

### *What are the longer term effects for kids?*

Children can have mental health issues, such as anxiety and depression, into adulthood. There is also the risk that children will not get the opportunity to develop their own language about the trauma they have experienced. This is important in order to work through the emotional effects of domestic violence to make it possible to develop healthy relationships in the future.

### ***Children and young people who have witnessed domestic violence will often have trouble defining boundaries in their relationships.***

In addition, they usually have low self esteem and getting them safe is the first step to building trust and stability, and to foster a degree of control in order to improve their sense of themselves.

### *Why is having the ability to 'imagine' important?*

Those children and young people who can express themselves creatively are able to go into their imagination to explore their feeling about the trauma. For example, children will say they really hate it at school but draw pictures about how wonderful school is. One child did a drawing of an underground tunnel with a torch to represent a place to be safe and escape the trauma.

<sup>1</sup>Kids Help Line 2006 Overview – Issues Concerning Young People, BoysTown (2007). <sup>2</sup>DeBellis, M.D., Keshavan, M.S., Clark, D.B., Casey, B. J., Giedd, J.N., Boring, A.M., Frustaci, K. and Ryan, N.D. "Developmental Traumatology Part II: brain development" *Biological Psychiatry*, 45:10, 15 May 1999, pp 1271-1284. <sup>3</sup>Australian Bureau of Statistics (2005). <sup>4</sup>National Crime Prevention (2001) *Young people and domestic violence; national research on young people's attitudes and experiences of domestic violence*. Crime Prevention Branch, Attorney-General's Department, Canberra. <sup>5</sup>*What do you do when she tells you?* WESNET, ACT. <sup>6</sup>*Who's chatting to your kids?* Queensland Government (2005).