

“ALWAYS
there when
I NEEDED
YOU”

ChildLine Review

What's affected children in April 2014 – March 2015

0800 1111 childline.org.uk

NSPCC

EVERY CHILDHOOD IS WORTH FIGHTING FOR

Contents

Introduction.....	03
Executive summary	05
Key stats	06
Reasons why children and young people contact ChildLine	07
Who contacts ChildLine?	10
Referrals	19
Mental health and wellbeing.....	22
Abuse	28
Appendix: four nations	35
From young people	42
ChildLine locations	44

Introduction

This ChildLine Review poses an urgent question, and highlights a new danger – a danger just as crucial as the perils which have created recent headlines, such as grooming over the internet, or exploitation by gangs, or the psychological harm created by pornography. The danger children and young people describe to ChildLine is as intense, and makes it as difficult for them to seek help. It is their own deep unhappiness. And the question ChildLine poses is how can we protect children from such desperate loneliness that they feel their lives are not worth living?



How can we alter our attitudes so that they know they are valued, that someone really cares about them? When young people visit ChildLine (we carried out almost 300,000 counselling sessions in the past year), I ask why so many feel so alone they have only us to turn to. And invariably they tell us, there is nobody else they feel they can talk to.

The good news is that when they have the awareness, and the courage, to contact ChildLine, either by telephone or via the ChildLine website, that simple step makes a huge difference, transforming the lives of the children who contact us. We know that to be true, because the children and young people tell us so. *“I felt like someone actually cared and when I started talking, by the end of the session I felt so much better”* one young person told us. Another said, *“I just want to say a massive thank you for helping me through my depression. I used to self-harm but I stopped doing that now thanks to ChildLine.”* A boy told us, *“I always feel so good after speaking to ChildLine; you are always there when I need you. I used to feel really down and suicidal but I am in a much better place now.”* This year more than half of the children we referred to others, such as the ambulance service, were suicidal. So we actually have to intervene to save more and more precious young lives. But why?

When ChildLine launched nearly 30 years ago in 1986, the children who rang told us about abuse, neglect and bullying inflicted on them by others.

Bullying is still in the top ten problems, but whereas children used to be able to escape their tormentors when they reached the safety of their homes, now cyberbullying can follow them everywhere. After 29 years, abuse is also still in the top ten list of problems children and young people contact ChildLine about (29,000 counselling sessions in the last year). But now the invention of sexting,

where children are persuaded to send compromising pictures of themselves, and the advent of cyber-grooming have created new ways of trapping children and frightening them into silence. Social networks are exciting ways to communicate, but sometimes exacerbate the feelings young people so often have of their own ugliness and inadequacy. Often the adults in their lives who could be reassuring them seem not to notice, or not to care. So looking back, the difference today from the calls we received 29 years ago is a huge rise in mental health counselling sessions (85,000 in the past year). Warning signs that many of today's children are feeling utterly miserable. To the point that for some, they feel like their life is simply not worth living.

It starts young. The number of children aged 11 and under who told us that they felt suicidal increased this year by 18 per cent. One little girl told us, ***"I really just want to die."*** In her case it was because she was being severely bullied, and was desperate for the school to take action to protect her. ***"They know about the bullying but they haven't done much. I have been waiting a month to see a counsellor but I need help now. Maybe they would listen more if you [ChildLine] spoke to them?"***

Bullying is the biggest problem in the youngest age group (with children as young as six calling us). It is tempting to think that surely if children so young are being bullied so badly, their families would step in to alert the school. But looking over the ChildLine statistics covering every age, this year we received over 38,000 calls relating to unhappiness within the family, a lack of emotional security, with parental divorce playing its part in many of them. Even when the family lives together in one house, far too often they are not actually together, physically or emotionally, as one boy told us, ***"Most days I sit in my room and cry for no reason. I feel so empty and don't know what to do."***

How do we protect children and young people from this profound unhappiness? If I were to try to answer my own question, I would suggest that somehow in our busy lives we must give them time, and a range of people to confide in. Of course we need far more mental health resources for young people, but austerity is threatening even the meagre resources that do exist. So I would suggest that if child protection is, as we have always said, everybody's business, this is too. Offer a silent child, an unhappy teenager the chance to tell us what's in their heart. And whether you are a professional working in child protection, or an adult who cares about children, do please talk to them about ChildLine. Tell them it's free, confidential, there for them 24/7, available on the telephone or online, and, as one girl told us, ***"It feels good to know that I can share my troubles in full confidentiality and know that I won't be judged."***

Esther Rautzen

Executive summary

For hundreds of thousands of children and young people, ChildLine (**0800 1111, www.childline.org.uk**) provides the only safe space to talk about the issues affecting their lives.

It's important that we learn from what young people are telling us. So we're providing this overview of the key concerns we've been hearing about in 2014/15. Further reports will be published throughout the year looking more closely at some of these issues.

This year we've seen a rise in the number of young people who found the courage to come forward with their experiences of sexual abuse. In many cases it was the first time they'd told anyone.

Counselling sessions about partner abuse also increased. In particular, girls told us how the sexual, emotional and physical abuse they'd experienced affected their self-confidence and left them feeling worthless and alone.

Mental health issues continued to be a source of great concern among young people, with almost one third of all counselling sessions being about suicidal feelings, self-harm, mental health/depressive disorders or low self-esteem/unhappiness.

At the same time, we saw a big increase in the number of children telling us they were struggling to access the support they needed.

We want to make sure no young person feels that they have to deal with their problems alone. That's why ChildLine is here for every child, whatever their concern, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

"I have never told anyone about this until now. My dad touches me and it's been happening for a while now. I can't tell anybody else about what's happening because he will hurt me and make sure that people don't believe me. I don't have many friends so I have no-one to turn to."

(Girl, 12-15)

"Whenever I'm feeling low, I know I can go on the ChildLine website and it will make me feel better."

(Gender unknown, age unknown)

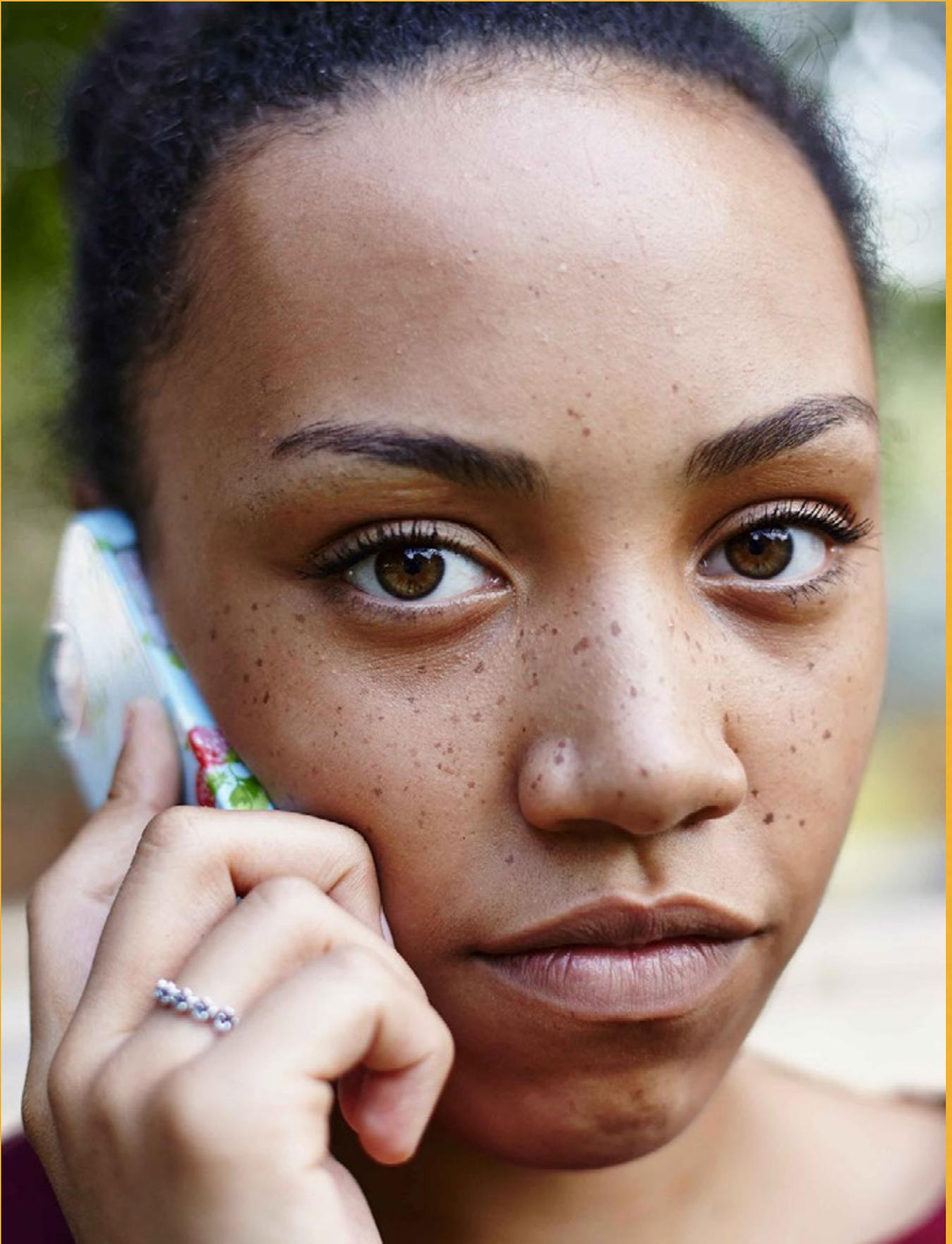
"I have just started using ChildLine and I feel like a massive weight has been lifted off of my shoulders. I feel so much happier now knowing that there is somebody who will listen and that I can talk to in confidence. I feel so much better now I know that someone will always be there for me."

(Girl, 13)

Key stats

- * During 2014/15, ChildLine carried out 276,956 counselling sessions with children and undertook 9,856 sessions with children who had serious concerns about another child. This brings our total counselling sessions to 286,812, a similar total to 2013/14.
- * The top three concerns counselled were family relationships, low self-esteem/unhappiness and abuse.
- * Four of the top ten issues relate to mental health, accounting for almost one third of total concerns. These are low self-esteem/unhappiness, self-harm, suicidal feelings and mental health/depressive disorders.
- * The number of counselling sessions about low self-esteem/unhappiness increased by 9 per cent.
- * Fifty nine per cent of referrals on behalf of the most vulnerable and at risk children related to suicidal feelings.
- * There were 29,126 counselling sessions about all forms of abuse in 2014/15
- * Sexual/online sexual abuse saw an increase of 8 per cent from 2013/14.
- * Domestic/partner abuse saw an increase of 4 per cent from 2013/14.
- * There was a 124 per cent increase in the number of counselling sessions where young people talked about problems accessing services.
- * Online counselling continued to grow, rising from 68 per cent in 2013/14, to 71 per cent in 2014/15.
- * The ChildLine website received over 3.2 million visits – 5 per cent more than in 2013/14.

Reasons why children and young people contact ChildLine



The top ten reasons why young people contact ChildLine

RANK	MAIN CONCERN	DEFINITION	NUMBER OF COUNSELLING SESSIONS
1	Family relationships	Conflict/arguments with family members, parents' divorce/separation.	38,231
2	Low self-esteem/unhappiness	Low self-esteem, lack of confidence, feeling sad, low mood, lonely.	35,244
3	Abuse	Sexual abuse/online sexual abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse, partner abuse, neglect.	29,126
4	Bullying/online bullying	Peer-to-peer bullying, either face-to-face or online.	25,736
5	Self-harm	Self-injury that is intentional.	19,557
6	Suicidal	Suicidal feelings or actively suicidal.	17,782
7	Friendship issues	Falling out with friends, difficulty making friends.	17,105
8	Sex/relationships/puberty/sexual health	Sexual development, relationship issues, body changes, STIs, contraception etc.	16,533
9	School/education problem	Exam pressures, concerns about performance, not coping with workload, dislikes school, new school worries, problems with teacher, truancy etc.	13,815
10	Mental health/depressive disorders	Mental health issues which are significantly interfering with the young person being able to lead a normal life and are prolonged or re-occurring.	12,598

How children and young people are contacting ChildLine

Young people can get in touch with a ChildLine counsellor by phone or online, via email or 1-2-1 chat. This year we've continued to see more children and young people choosing to get in touch online.

In 2014/15, 71 per cent of counselling sessions took place via 1-2-1 chat or email. This was up from 68 per cent last year, making 2014/15 the third year in a row that ChildLine has counselled more young people online than over the phone.

We don't always know the age or gender of the young people, especially in online counselling sessions. However, where the age was known, more counselling sessions for all but the youngest children took place online.

For over half of children aged 11 and under ChildLine's telephone service remains crucial. However, we have seen a continuing increase in the proportion of children aged 11 and under contacting us online.

In 2014/15, 43 per cent of children aged 11 and under chose to contact us online, compared with 40 per cent in 2013/14.

Age group	Telephone	Online
11 and under	57%	43%
12-15	32%	68%
16-18	39%	61%

As in previous years, a bigger proportion of boys (61 per cent) than girls (35 per cent) chose to phone ChildLine.

Young people were more likely to contact us online about some concerns than others. We have continued to see a particular preference for contacting ChildLine online when it comes to discussing mental health issues. Over 80 per cent of counselling sessions about suicide, self-harm, mental health/depressive disorders and low self-esteem/unhappiness took place online in 2014/15. Young people tell us that they find it easier to communicate with counsellors this way, rather than having to say out loud what they are going through.

Who contacts ChildLine?



ChildLine is a private and confidential service. It's up to children and young people to decide how much, or little, information they want to share with us. However, enough children provide information to give us an idea of who is contacting ChildLine.

Age overview

Children chose to tell us their age in 64 per cent of counselling sessions in 2014/15.

Of these, the majority were with young people aged 12 and over. Over half (57 per cent) of counselling sessions were with young people between the ages of 12 and 15, and a further 30 per cent between the ages of 16 and 18. As in 2013/14, the most common age of young people counselled was 15.

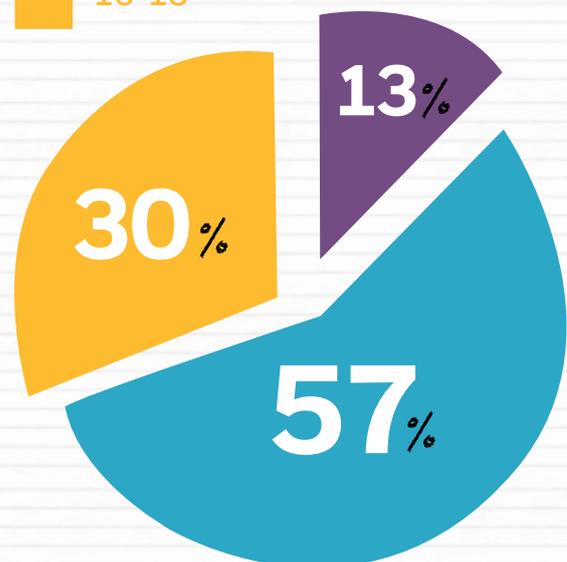


Family relationships is the top main concern for 12-15 year olds

54,000 counselling sessions with young people aged between 16 and 18

Increase in counselling sessions about school with children aged 11 and under

AGE (percentage where age was known)



Children aged 11 and under

There were 22,194 counselling sessions with this age group, a 3 per cent increase on the previous year. Consistent with last year, one in four children from this age group contacted us about bullying – making it their top issue.



Once again ChildLine saw a growth in counselling sessions among primary school aged children relating to school and education problems (a 17 per cent increase). This was the fourth most counselled concern for this age group, and saw the biggest increase in counselling sessions out of the top ten concerns.

A quarter of counselling sessions about school or education problems with this age group were about going to a new school, a big concern for primary school children. In comparison, older children were much more likely to be contacting us about exam stress.

Top ten concerns for children aged 11 and under

MAIN CONCERN	NUMBER OF COUNSELLING SESSIONS	PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL COUNSELLING FOR 11 AND UNDER
Bullying/online bullying	5,496	25%
Family relationships	3,791	17%
Friendship issues	2,143	10%
School/ education problem	1,565	7%
Physical abuse	1,485	7%
Low self-esteem/ unhappiness	1,321	6%
Sex/relationships/ puberty/sexual health	1,032	5%
Sexual abuse/online sexual abuse	829	4%
Loss and bereavement	524	2%
Physical health/ illness/disability	461	2%

Young people aged 12-15



In 2014/15 where age was known, 12-15 year olds represented 57 per cent (100,319) of all counselling sessions. As in 2013/14 family relationships remained the top concern.

Young people aged 12-15 saw the largest increase in counselling sessions about sexual abuse since 2013/14 (up 17 per cent).

Young people aged 12-15 spoke about the internet as a way to explore their sexuality and form new relationships. However, this sometimes put them in risky or upsetting situations. Exposure to online sexual abuse, such as grooming behaviour, sexual harassment, and sharing and viewing sexually explicit images affected this age group the most.

Top ten concerns for 12-15 year olds

MAIN CONCERN	NUMBER OF COUNSELLING SESSIONS	PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL COUNSELLING FOR 12-15 YEAR OLDS
Family relationships	14,749	15%
Low self-esteem/ unhappiness	12,012	12%
Bullying/online bullying	9,407	9%
Self-harm	7,421	7%
Suicidal	6,211	6%
Sex/relationships/ puberty/sexual health	6,107	6%
School/education problem	5,787	6%
Friendship issues	5,487	5%
Sexual abuse/online sexual abuse	5,230	5%
Physical abuse	4,608	5%

Young people aged 16-18

ChildLine carried out almost 54,000 counselling sessions with young people aged between 16 and 18, representing 30 per cent of counselling sessions. Family relationships remained the top concern for this age group.



In 2014/15, the number of counselling sessions about pregnancy and parenting saw the greatest increase (up by 23 per cent) out of the top ten concerns. Where gender was known, 94 per cent of counselling sessions were with girls.

In 20 per cent of sessions where girls mentioned if they'd told anyone about their pregnancy/parenting issues, the girls had already spoken to their boyfriends. A further 13 per cent had told their mums. However, in 13 per cent of counselling sessions they were talking about their pregnancy or parenting concerns for the first time.

Young people talked about feeling scared, worried, anxious and upset. The majority of young people were contacting ChildLine to talk through the fact they thought they were pregnant or to discuss the difficulties of being a young parent.

Top ten concerns for 16-18 year olds

MAIN CONCERN	NUMBER OF COUNSELLING SESSIONS	PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL COUNSELLING FOR 16-18 YEAR OLDS
Family relationships	8,106	15%
Low self-esteem/unhappiness	7,192	13%
Sex/relationships/puberty/sexual health	4,992	9%
Suicidal	3,959	7%
Mental health/depressive disorders	3,536	7%
Sexual abuse/online sexual abuse	2,966	6%
Self-harm	2,669	5%
Pregnancy and parenting	2,446	5%
School/education problem	2,252	4%
Friendship issues	1,987	4%

Gender

There were 148,356 counselling sessions with girls (54 per cent), 35,557 with boys (13 per cent), and 93,043 counselling sessions with young people who didn't tell us their gender (33 per cent).

COUNSELLING SESSIONS BY GENDER



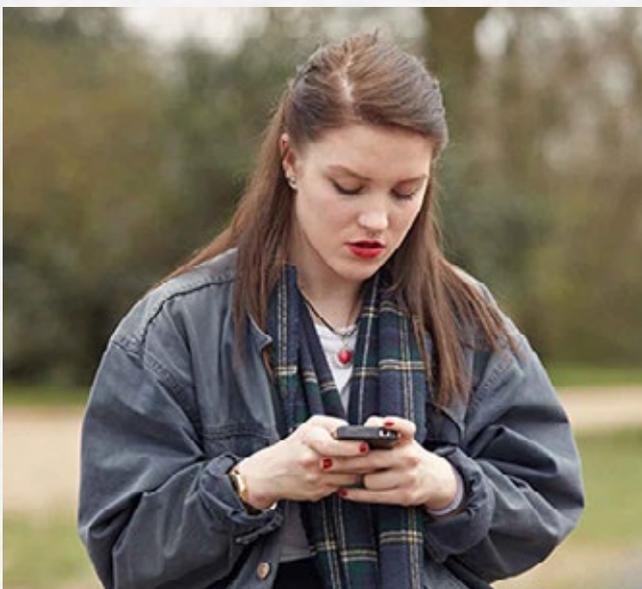
It seems that, in general, girls may be more open to the idea that it helps to talk about a problem. However, there were some issues that boys were proportionately more likely than girls to contact ChildLine about.

This included sexual or gender identity, physical abuse or their own behaviour. In comparison, girls were much more likely to be concerned about domestic/partner abuse, eating disorders, pregnancy and parenting, and self-harm.



148,356 counselling sessions with girls in 2014/15

35,557 counselling sessions with boys in 2014/15





Top ten concerns for girls

TOP TEN MAIN CONCERNS FOR GIRLS	NUMBER OF COUNSELLING SESSIONS WITH GIRLS	PERCENTAGE OF ALL COUNSELLING SESSIONS WITH GIRLS
Family relationships	20,149	14%
Low self-esteem/ unhappiness	18,893	13%
Bullying/online bullying	12,764	9%
Self-harm	10,616	7%
Suicidal	9,929	7%
Friendship issues	9,199	6%
Sex/relationships/puberty/ sexual health	8,916	6%
Sexual abuse/ online sexual abuse	7,643	5%
Mental health/ depressive disorders	6,903	5%
School/ education problem	6,884	5%



Top ten concerns for boys

TOP TEN MAIN CONCERNS FOR BOYS	NUMBER OF COUNSELLING SESSIONS WITH BOYS	PERCENTAGE OF ALL COUNSELLING SESSIONS WITH BOYS
Family relationships	4,985	13%
Bullying/online bullying	4,616	12%
Sex/relationships/puberty/ sexual health	3,557	9%
Low self-esteem/ unhappiness	3,126	8%
Physical abuse	2,141	6%
Friendship issues	1,845	5%
School/ education problem	1,664	4%
Sexual and gender identity	1,625	4%
Suicidal	1,534	4%
Own behaviour/actions	1,477	4%

Fight Against Porn Zombies (F.A.P.Z.) campaign



In 2014/15, ChildLine continued to look at ways to reach more young people with the emerging issues they are facing. For example, we ran the Fight Against Porn Zombies (F.A.P.Z.) campaign to help build young people's awareness of and resilience towards the impact of unlimited and easily accessible online pornography.

This campaign used a series of animations, video content and online advice on the ChildLine YouTube channel and website, receiving almost two million views in total. It addressed concerns about excessive porn exposure that we know, from their contact with ChildLine, both girls and boys are worried about. It was particularly successful in addressing concerns from boys, who accounted for 63 per cent of animation views.

Referrals

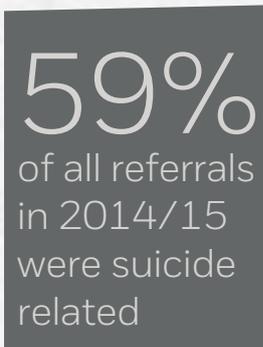


When a child or young person is in a life-threatening situation, or when they are requesting direct help, ChildLine will make the decision to refer the child to another agency. For younger children, or those deemed less competent, ChildLine may also make a referral when we assess they are at risk of significant harm.

Children and young people continued to contact ChildLine when they haven't felt able to speak to anyone else. We know that sometimes they feel embarrassed or ashamed, and sometimes they are fearful of what will happen if they tell. Many have tried to talk to someone but haven't known how to or have not been heard. ChildLine will always encourage young people to think about who they could talk to locally for support or to consent for ChildLine to contact someone who can help on their behalf.

In 2014/15, ChildLine made 3,714 referrals to external agencies, such as the police or children's services, on behalf of 3,379 children and young people (some young people are referred to multiple agencies).

In 2014/15, 1,996 (59 per cent) of all referrals were suicide related, which is by far the most common reason for a young person to be referred to an external agency.

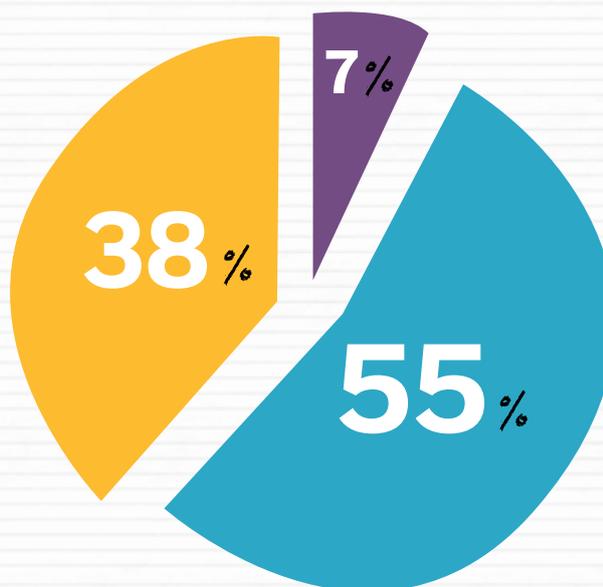
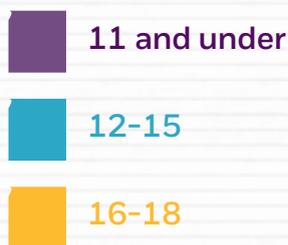


Top ten reasons for referral

REASON FOR REFERRAL	PERCENTAGE OF ALL REFERRALS	TOTAL REFERRALS
Suicidal	59%	1,996
Physical abuse	11%	362
Sexual abuse/online sexual abuse	7%	220
Own behaviour	4%	129
Runaway	4%	123
Self-harm	3%	108
Family relationships	2%	74
Mental health	2%	53
Neglect	2%	53
Homeless	1%	42

Seventy five per cent of referrals were made to the police, and 9 per cent to children's services. A further 16 per cent were made to other agencies such as the ambulance service.

AGE BREAKDOWN OF REFERRALS 2014/15 (percentage)



In 2014/15 where age was known, 55 per cent of all children referred to external agencies were aged 12–15, 38 per cent were aged 16–18, and 7 per cent were aged 11 and under.

For children aged 11 and under, the most common reason for a referral was physical abuse, making up 40 per cent of all referrals for this age group. In comparison, suicidal feelings were the top reason for older children, making up 52 per cent of all referrals for 12–15 year olds and 67 per cent of referrals for 16–18 year olds.

There were also some noticeable differences in the reasons for referrals for boys and girls. Boys were proportionately more likely to be referred because of physical abuse, and girls for feeling suicidal.

Drug-related issues, bullying and emotional abuse were in the top ten reasons for a referral for boys only, while self-harm, neglect and mental health were only in the top ten for girls.



40%
of all referrals for children aged 11 and under was for physical abuse

Suicidal feelings made **67%** of all referrals for 16-18 year olds

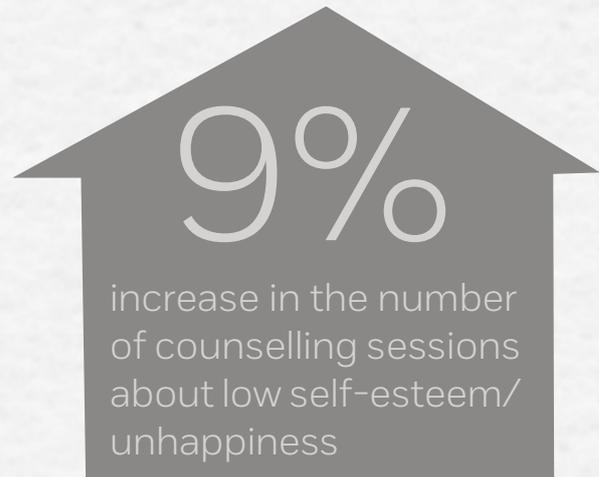
Mental health and wellbeing



Mental health and wellbeing overview

In 2014/15, there continued to be high numbers of counselling sessions about mental health and wellbeing. In total, one third of all counselling sessions were about mental health concerns.

Many young people contacted us with concerns about mental health/ depressive disorders, self-harm and suicide, all of which remained in the top ten main concerns. However, only low self-esteem/unhappiness (the second most counselled concern) saw an increase in the number of counselling sessions (up by 9 per cent) compared with 2013/14.



Low self-esteem/unhappiness

In 2014/15 there were 35,244 counselling sessions about low self-esteem/unhappiness.

The five most common specific concerns were:

SPECIFIC CONCERN	NUMBER OF COUNSELLING SESSIONS	PERCENTAGE OF ALL COUNSELLING SESSIONS ABOUT LOW SELF-ESTEEM/ UNHAPPINESS
Anxiety	8,642	25%
Self-esteem issues	4,150	12%
Lack of self-confidence	3,840	11%
Social withdrawal	2,305	7%
Body image	2,245	6%

Anxiety was the top issue mentioned in relation to low self-esteem/unhappiness, mentioned in a quarter of counselling sessions. There was a 183 per cent increase in young people talking about anxiety between 2013/14 and 2014/15.

It is normal for young people to feel worried and anxious at key times in their lives, particularly in times of major change or pressure, such as starting at a new school or taking exams. However, for some children, anxiety affects their behaviour and thoughts on a daily basis, interfering with their school, home and social life. Fortunately this is when many young people turn to ChildLine for support.

The reasons for the anxiety differed depending on the age of the child. Separation anxiety was common in younger children, whereas older children and teenagers worried more about issues like relationships, academic performance and health.

Often young people found it difficult to express to the counsellor what it was that they were feeling anxious about. In some cases the anxiety manifested as a fear or phobia, whereas others described feeling anxious for most of the time but could not pinpoint a reason.

Anxiety disorders that start in childhood often persist into the teenage years and early adulthood, and without help and support they are more likely to develop into more serious mental health conditions such as clinical depression, self-harming behaviour and suicidal feelings. You can read more about what children and young people have told us about these serious mental health concerns in ChildLine's 2014 report *On the Edge*.

Young people told us about feeling sad and alone, and about how their troubled thoughts made them feel unable to eat or sleep. They also told us they feared 'opening up' to their parents or another adult in case they were a burden. They were worried about being seen as attention seeking and dismissed as not needing help. Young people often felt they had no one to turn to and 'put a brave face on it' so no one could see how sad they felt. Young people asked us for help about what to do.

"I've been feeling pretty rubbish for ages and lately I have become paranoid and anxious. I am having trouble sleeping as I am constantly worried something bad might happen. I can't really talk to anyone about it as I am worried that they will think I am wasting their time."

(Girl, 12-15)

Young people talked about their feelings of anxiety in

8,642

counselling sessions

Accessing services

Often young people told us they find it difficult to talk about the way they feel. They may not want to worry their parents by talking to them about their problems. And they are worried about confidentiality if they talk to another adult (such as a teacher).



“I can’t really talk to anyone about how I’m feeling, I’m scared they will think I’m crazy and treat me differently. Some days I am ok but most days I sit in my room and cry for no reason. I feel so empty and don’t know what to do. I just want to be normal but I feel so trapped.”

(Boy, 13)

In 17 per cent of counselling sessions about mental health issues where young people mentioned if they had confided in anyone else, they were talking about their issues for the first time. However, this dropped to 9 per cent for sessions where the problem related to serious mental health conditions. In these sessions, children were most likely to have spoken to their GP, followed by their mother and then Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).

When young people found the courage to talk about their concerns, they did not always find it easy to get the support they needed. This year we saw a 124 per cent increase in young people talking to us about problems accessing services.

Where accessing services was mentioned as a problem, four of the top five concerns related to mental health and wellbeing. In 16 per cent of all counselling sessions where accessing services were mentioned the young person was worried about a mental health/depressive disorder, in 15 per cent low self-esteem/unhappiness, in 12 per cent suicidal feelings and in 5 per cent self-harm.

124%

increase in counselling sessions that mentioned problems accessing services

Top five main concerns:

RANK	TOP FIVE MAIN CONCERNS WHERE 'ACCESSING SERVICES' WAS MENTIONED	PERCENTAGE OF ALL 'ACCESSING SERVICES' COUNSELLING SESSIONS WHERE THIS CONCERN WAS MENTIONED
1	Mental health/depressive disorders	16%
2	Low self-esteem/unhappiness	15%
3	Family relationships	13%
4	Suicidal	12%
5	Self-harm	5%

Young people mentioned a number of issues related to accessing services, including:

Lengthy waiting lists

Young people told us the long wait left them feeling anxious and frightened that they wouldn't be able to cope. They also spoke about feeling abandoned when appointments were cancelled or calls to mental health services were not returned.

"My GP has booked me in for some therapy but there's a six-month waiting list. I don't know if I can hold on until then; I feel so stuck."
(Girl, 16)

Lack of out-of-hours support

Young people raised concerns about a lack of out-of-hours support from mental health services, particularly when they were distressed and in need of someone to talk to.

Lack of information

Young people asked us for explanations about the help they were receiving. For example, they worried about not knowing what to expect from a face-to-face counselling session or what would happen when they move on to adult services.



Cessation of services

Young people described feeling let down and unimportant, scared and alone when a familiar service came to an end. The number of counselling sessions where concerns about services ending were mentioned increased by 18 per cent between 2013/14 and 2014/15.

You can read more about the challenges young people faced accessing services in [ChildLine's 2014 report, On the edge](#).

"I had my last counselling session today but I don't feel as if I am in a better place yet. I'm scared that I will end up going back to how I used to feel" (Girl, 15)



Helping children get the information they need

61% increase in views of ChildLine's webpage about types of mental health problems

"This helped me because for a few months now I've felt really down. I looked at the symptoms and realised they described me. I'll talk to my mum about taking me to go to the doctors."

(Visitor to the ChildLine website)

"I realised that there is a lot of places I can turn. I thought that it was just me and only me but now I know to speak out and it'll get better."

(Visitor to the ChildLine website)

ChildLine remains available 24 hours a day, seven days a week for children to talk about their concerns. We also continue to develop and promote the information on our website to help young people find the information and advice they need.

We've seen a big increase in visits to some of our web pages offering advice and support for children worried about mental health related issues. There's been a 47 per cent increase in the number of page views for our page on self-harm coping techniques, a 29 per cent increase in page views of our content on building confidence and self-esteem, and a 61 per cent increase in views of our page on types of mental health problems,

Young people tell us this information has helped them feel less alone, recognise their symptoms and get help.

Abuse



Abuse remains a key issue that children contact ChildLine about.

In the last year, there were over 29,000 counselling sessions with children and young people contacting us about abuse.

This figure is broken down as follows:

MAIN CONCERN	TOTAL COUNSELLING SESSIONS
Sexual abuse/online sexual abuse	11,398
Physical abuse	10,155
Emotional abuse	3,306
Domestic/partner abuse	3,251
Neglect	1,016

The majority of counselling sessions about abuse were focused on sexual or physical abuse. We have seen a rise in young people calling about sexual abuse (up 8 per cent) and domestic/partner abuse (up 4 per cent).

Sexual abuse overview

During 2014/15, there were 11,398 ChildLine counselling sessions about sexual abuse/online sexual abuse. This is an 8 per cent increase compared with the previous year.

Nearly two thirds (65 per cent) of sexual abuse counselling sessions were with girls, 12 per cent were with boys and in 23 per cent of sessions the gender was not disclosed. Where age was known, over half (58 per cent) were 12–15 year olds, with the majority being 15. However, it was counselling sessions about sexual abuse with 18 year olds that saw the biggest increase, up by 54 per cent compared with 2013/14.

In 2014/15, there was a rise in nearly all issues relating to sexual abuse. The two issues mentioned most often, as in 2013/14, were rape and penetrative sex followed by online sexual abuse and exploitation (although young people didn't tend to describe the abuse in these terms, instead talking about being 'touched' or 'made to do things'). Counselling sessions about both these issues have increased by 21 per cent since 2013/14.

29,126
counselling
sessions
about abuse

11,398
counselling
sessions
about sexual
abuse/online
sexual abuse.

For 18 year olds the number of sessions specifically mentioning rape or penetrative acts more than doubled from 107 in 2013/14 to 231 in 2014/15.

Where young people told ChildLine who the abuser was, half said the sexual abuse was perpetrated by an acquaintance such as a friend or neighbour. Only 8 per cent of sessions said the perpetrator was a stranger; 42 per cent of the abuse was intra-familial (perpetrated by any relation of the child including step, fostered and adopted relations as well as parent's partners if they were living with the child). Where the gender of the abuser was known, the vast majority were male (91 per cent).

In **42%** of counselling sessions about sexual abuse the perpetrator was related to the child

Duration of abuse and who the young person had told before

Where young people disclosed how long the sexual abuse had been going on for, 16 per cent said the abuse had happened in the last week; 15 per cent said the abuse had been going on for years. A further 30 per cent said the abuse had occurred in the past and was no longer happening. For 18 year olds, this figure increased to nearly half (45 per cent).



suggesting that young people find it particularly difficult to talk about sexual abuse. Although it is positive that more young people are finding the courage to contact ChildLine about the sexual abuse they experience, it is important to look at why they did not talk to anyone sooner.

Young people gave lots of reasons for this. Many told counsellors they felt ashamed and confused, blaming themselves for the abuse. When counsellors reassured them that this was not the case, they often said they felt a huge sense of relief.

Many young people waited years to tell anyone. Some told a trusted adult at the time but were not believed.

In counselling sessions about sexual abuse where the young person mentioned if they had spoken to anyone about their concerns, 33 per cent had not told anybody about the abuse before. This is a far higher proportion than the figure for all concerns (18 per cent),

In **33%** of counselling sessions the young person hadn't told anyone about their experiences of sexual abuse before

In some situations young people had been abused at an early age and had not recognised the perpetrator’s actions as abuse at the time. Others were scared of what would happen if they reported. They wanted to know: would they have to talk to the police? Would their parents have to be told? Would they be taken into care?

In counselling sessions where young people had told someone before about the abuse, this was most likely to be their mother (11 per cent) or the police (10 per cent).



“During the night when everyone is asleep, mum’s boyfriend climbs into my bed and does things to me. I tell him to stop as he is hurting me but he doesn’t listen and continues. I feel so scared and humiliated and most nights I can’t stop crying. I don’t feel safe when he is around and sometimes I hate going home knowing that he will be there. I feel so trapped; I’m scared that if I say something to someone they might tell the police or social services and they will take me away.”

(Girl, 15)

In **30%** of counselling sessions about sexual abuse the abuse was no longer happening

Top five people children had told before contacting ChildLine

PEOPLE CHILDREN HAD TOLD BEFORE CONTACTING CHILDLINE	GIRLS	BOYS	GENDER UNKNOWN	TOTAL
Nobody	2,238	431	565	3,234
Mother	825	86	214	1,125
Police	775	72	170	1,017
Female friend	522	9	103	634
Parent/s	393	32	96	521

ChildLine continues to be there for young people who do not know who else to talk to.

Partner abuse overview

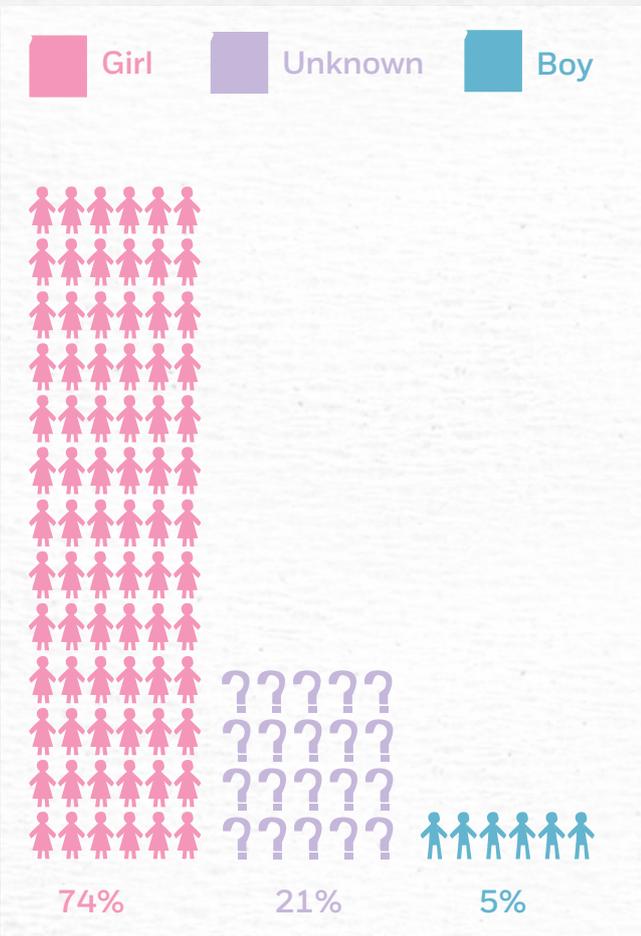
During 2014/15, ChildLine carried out 3,251 counselling sessions where the young person's main concern was domestic/partner abuse.

In 42 per cent of these counselling sessions the abuse had been going on for less than a year, suggesting that young people felt more able to talk about partner abuse while it was still happening than sexual abuse.

In counselling sessions where the young person said if they'd told anyone else, 29 per cent had not told anybody. This suggests that young people find it particularly hard to talk about abuse by their boyfriend/girlfriend. Where young people did tell someone, the most common person was their mother. However, this only happened in 10 per cent of sessions.

Three quarters of counselling about domestic/partner abuse was with girls, and just 5 per cent with boys.

3,251 counselling sessions about domestic/partner abuse



Where age was known, just over half (51 per cent) of counselling sessions were with young people aged between 16 and 18. This is a significant over-representation considering that just 30 per cent of all counselling sessions were with this age group. Because partner abuse appears to be a particular concern for this age group, we've taken a closer look at their experiences.

In 51% of counselling sessions about domestic/partner abuse the young person was aged between 16 and 18

Emotional partner abuse

Thirty seven per cent of abuse by a boyfriend/girlfriend with 16–18 year olds was emotional in nature.

For 16-18 year olds emotional partner abuse increased by 50 per cent year on year. Young people described how their partner's comments reduced their confidence and self-esteem, and left them feeling worthless.



“I have really low self-esteem at the moment because of how my boyfriend treats me. He makes me feel like I’m not good enough for anyone and that I’m ugly and worthless. He points out my imperfections all the time and sometimes he will hit me. It’s like everything I do is wrong in his eyes. I don’t want to end things because I have such strong feelings for him but I’m not sure how much more hurt I can take.”

(Girl, 17)

Physical partner abuse and controlling behaviour

In 21 per cent of counselling sessions about partner abuse with 16–18 year olds, young people told ChildLine about being abused physically.



A further 26 per cent talked about their boyfriend's/girlfriend's coercive or controlling behaviour.

Young people in this age group frequently talked to ChildLine about being threatened by their partners. They often understood that their relationship was not healthy, but either felt too scared to leave or thought that they would be able to change their partner's behaviour.

In some cases, the threats from their partner had prevented them from seeing

their friends and family, which led them to feel increasingly isolated with nobody to turn to.

“My boyfriend is blackmailing me. He is so possessive and tells me that if I don’t do what he wants he will make sure no one will ever talk to me again. He doesn’t let me do anything and has stopped all my friends from talking to me.”

(Girl, 16–18)

“I’m not stupid and I know what is happening to me is wrong. When you are in a relationship you are supposed to support each other, listen to each other and show respect towards each other. You are not meant to be beaten. If one of my friends was in my position, I would make them talk to the police. But I’m not my friends and I don’t have the strength or confidence to do it for myself.”

(Girl, 16–18)

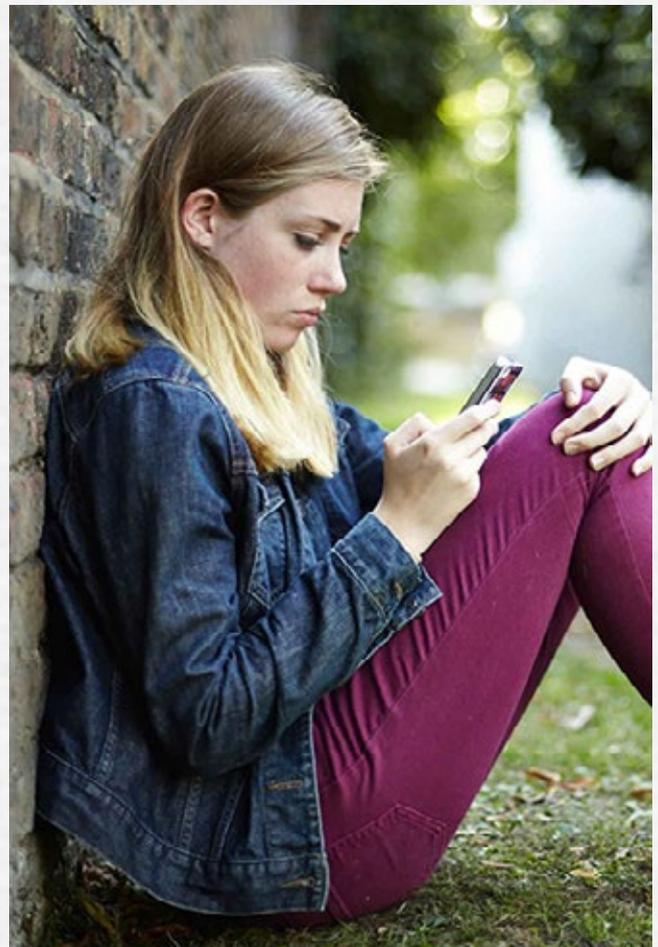
Sexual partner abuse

One in ten 16–18 year olds said the abuse they had experienced from a partner was of a sexual nature.

Young people told ChildLine about traumatic incidents where they had been pressurised or forced into having sex. Where this had happened, young people were often left feeling violated and scared, but found it too difficult to tell anyone else about what they had experienced.

“I’ve been living with my boyfriend for a few months – he’s older than me so he expects certain things from our relationship. The other day he forced me to have sex. I told him I wasn’t ready and that I hadn’t done it before, but he made me do it anyway. When I got upset he told me I was overreacting and that it was what people in relationships did.”

(Girl, 16–18)



Appendix



Please note that counselling sessions by nation figures represent the number of sessions handled by a ChildLine base that is located in a particular nation. These figures do not represent where a child or young person lives, as all ChildLine bases can deal with contacts from children anywhere in the UK.

Total counselling sessions by nation 2014/15

NATION	COUNSELLING SESSIONS ABOUT OWN CONCERNS	COUNSELLING SESSIONS ABOUT CONCERNS FOR ANOTHER CHILD	TOTAL COUNSELLING SESSIONS
England	178,538	5,979	184,517
Northern Ireland	28,842	921	29,763
Scotland	45,803	1,955	47,758
Wales	23,773	1,001	24,774

Top ten concerns counselled

England

MAIN CONCERN	COUNSELLING SESSIONS
Family relationships	23,638
Low self-esteem/unhappiness	21,651
Abuse	19,166
Bullying/online bullying	16,400
Self-harm	13,082
Suicidal	12,253
Friendship issues	10,819
Sex/relationships/puberty/sexual health	10,396
School/education problem	8,830
Mental health/depressive disorders	8,054

Northern Ireland

MAIN CONCERN	COUNSELLING SESSIONS
Family relationships	4,159
Low self-esteem/unhappiness	3,480
Abuse	2,784
Bullying/online bullying	2,614
Self-harm	2,059
Friendship issues	2,001
Sex/relationships/puberty/sexual health	1,760
Suicidal	1,649
Mental health/depressive disorders	1,553
School/education problem	1,481

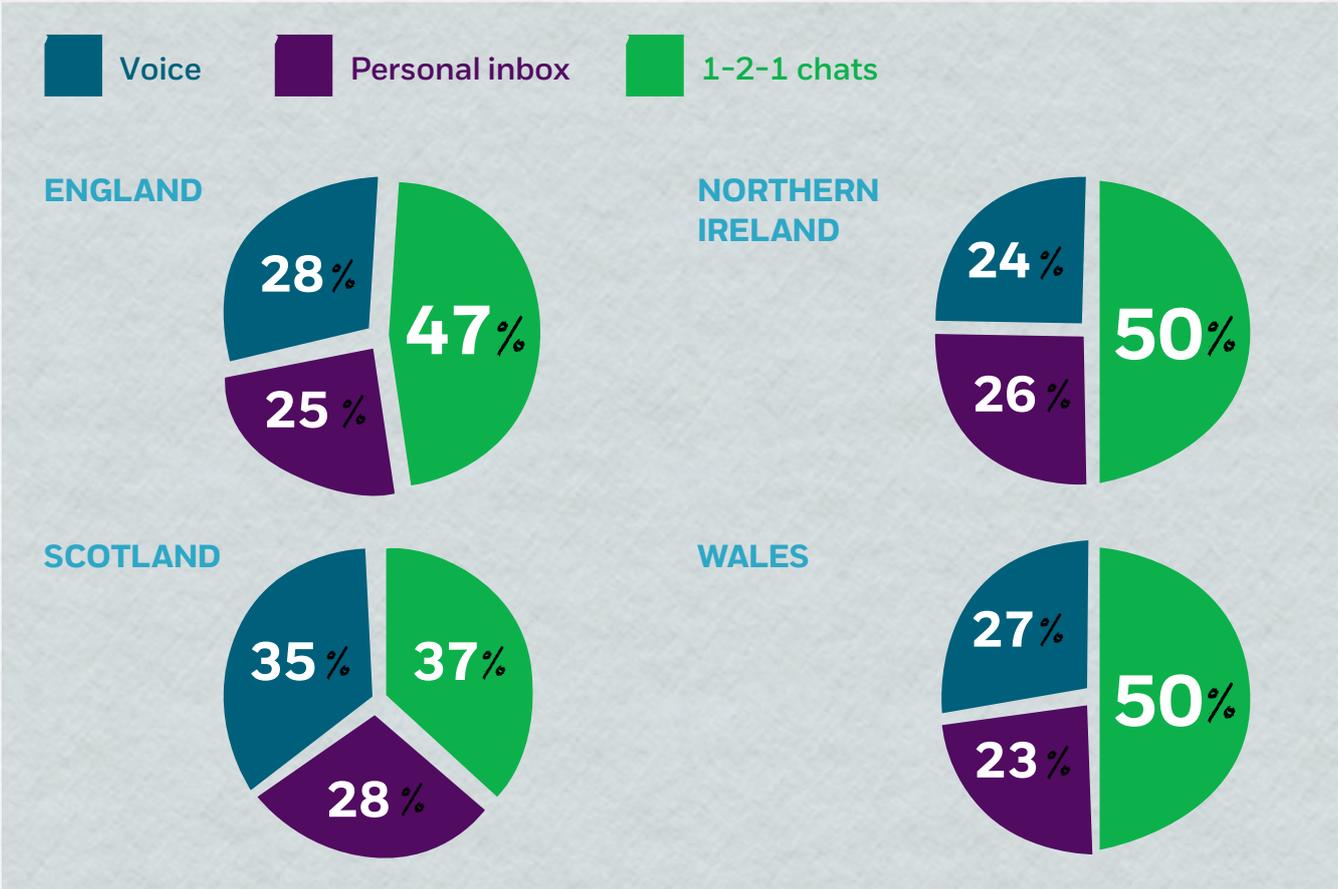
Scotland

MAIN CONCERN	COUNSELLING SESSIONS
Low self-esteem/unhappiness	7,010
Family relationships	7,005
Abuse	4,661
Bullying/online bullying	4,444
Sex/relationships/puberty/sexual health	2,886
Friendship issues	2,806
Self-harm	2,722
Suicidal	2,452
School/education problem	2,191
Mental health/depressive disorders	1,790

Wales

MAIN CONCERN	COUNSELLING SESSIONS
Family relationships	3,429
Low self-esteem/unhappiness	3,103
Abuse	2,515
Bullying/online bullying	2,278
Self-harm	1,694
Sex/relationships/puberty/sexual health	1,491
Friendship issues	1,479
Suicidal	1,428
School/education problem	1,313
Mental health/depressive disorders	1,201

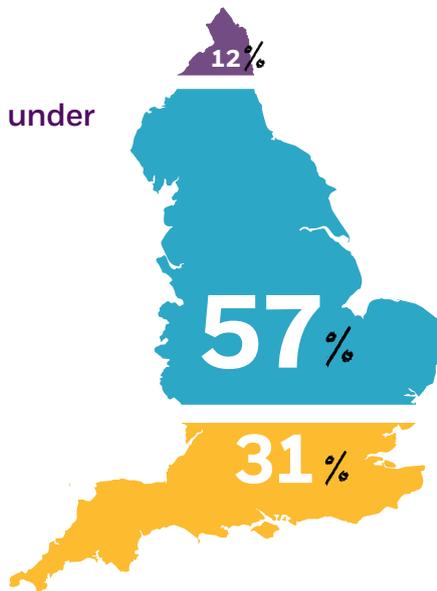
Channel breakdown by nation



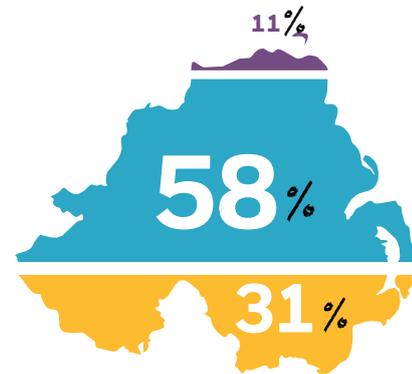
Age breakdown by nation

NATION	11 AND UNDER	12-15	16-18
England	13,362	61,784	33,386
Northern Ireland	2,259	11,347	5,981
Scotland	4,414	18,159	9,770
Wales	2,159	9,029	4,775

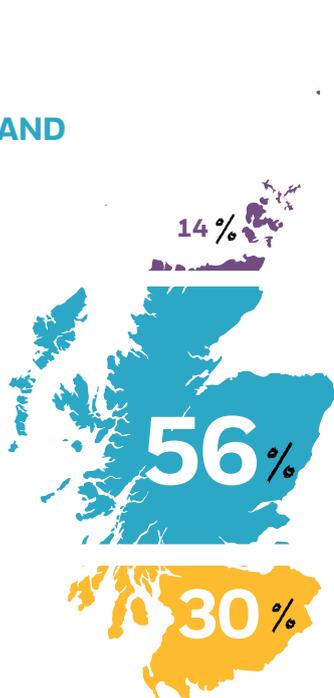
ENGLAND



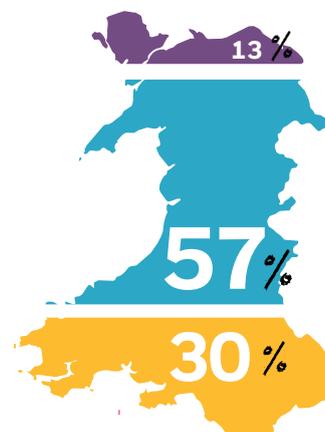
NORTHERN IRELAND



SCOTLAND



WALES

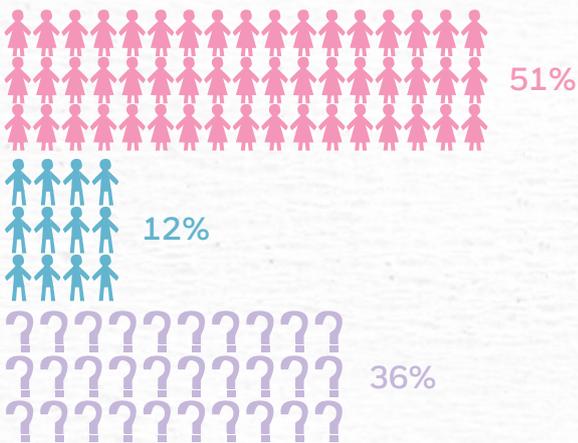


Gender breakdown by nation

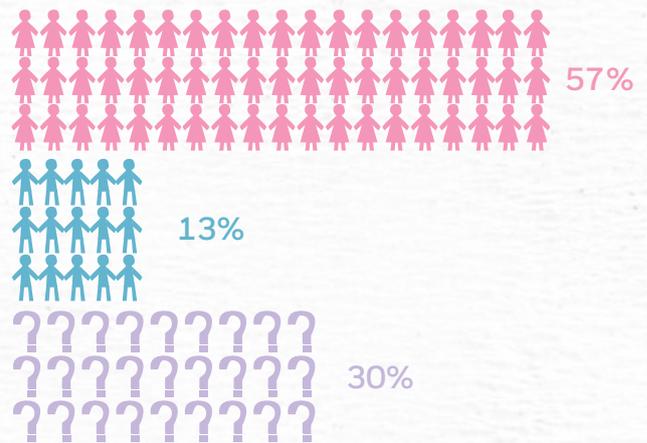
NATION	GIRL	BOY	GENDER UNKNOWN
England	91,801	22,104	64,633
Northern Ireland	16,456	3,723	8,663
Scotland	26,553	6,607	12,643
Wales	13,546	3,123	7,104



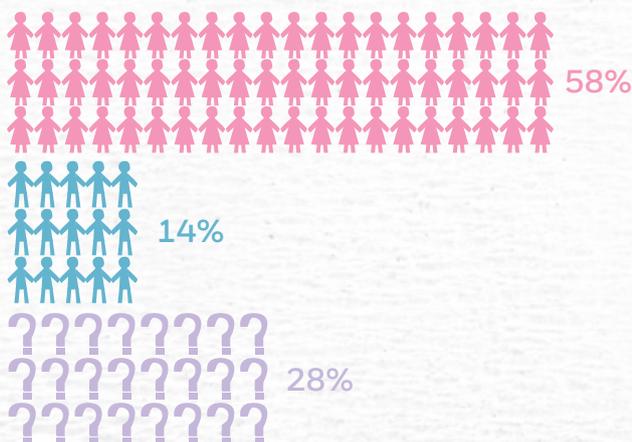
ENGLAND



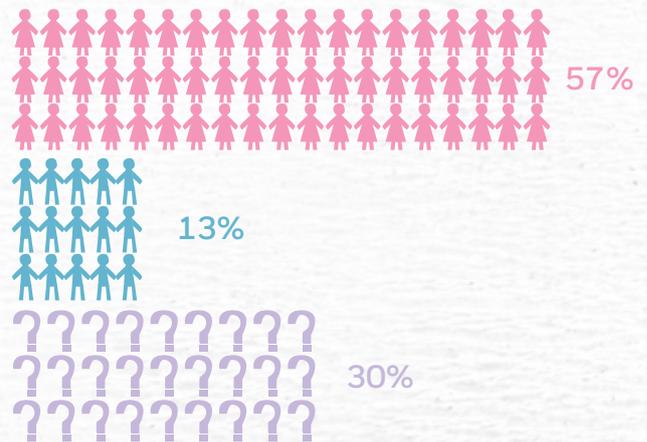
NORTHERN IRELAND



SCOTLAND



WALES



Referrals by nation

NATION	NUMBER OF CHILDREN REFERRED
England	2,337
Northern Ireland	306
Scotland	395
Wales	341
Total	3,379

Nation breakdown of issues covered in-depth in the ChildLine Review 2014/15

MAIN CONCERN	ENGLAND	NORTHERN IRELAND	SCOTLAND	WALES	TOTAL
Mental health/ depressive disorders	8,054	1,553	1,790	1,201	12,598
Low self-esteem/ unhappiness	21,651	3,480	7,010	3,103	35,244
Self-harm	13,082	2,059	2,722	1,694	19,557
Suicidal	12,253	1,649	2,452	1,428	17,782
Sexual abuse/ online sexual abuse	7,406	1,195	1,841	956	11,398
Domestic/ partner abuse	2,113	294	552	292	3,251

From young people

ChildLine is here thanks to the generosity and dedication of our amazing volunteers. These quotes from young people show the difference the invaluable support of these volunteers has made to their young lives.

"I love ChildLine; your work is amazing. I used to look in the mirror and hate myself but now I see someone beautiful and intelligent. I just wanted to say a huge thank you to everyone at ChildLine."

(Girl, Foyle base)

"ChildLine counsellors have been so inspirational and helpful. I feel much happier and calmer now. You have helped me with all my problems and I would love to work with ChildLine in the future to help others someday too."

(Girl, Birmingham base)

"I used to feel so alone and like there was nowhere to go but my life is a lot more joyful now and I feel I can handle stressful situations better. It feels good to know that I can share my troubles in full confidentiality and know that I won't be judged."

(Girl, Prestatyn base)

"When I found out that I was pregnant I felt so scared and confused. It was a really difficult time for me and I felt like I couldn't tell anyone about it. Having someone to talk to and tell about everything that was happening meant so much to me. I feel so much more positive now."

(Girl, Cardiff Base)

"I want to thank all the counsellors that helped me at ChildLine. I am so grateful for such a great service. I used to struggle to deal with my frustrations but now I manage to smile through the storm. I would definitely recommend this service to others that have problems."

(Girl, London base)

"I feel a lot better; I've been laughing and smiling and it's all thanks to you. You guys helped me when no one else could. This is the first time in months I haven't self-harmed. I followed your advice and it's helped me a lot."

(Boy, Manchester base)

"I had depression and it felt like nobody cared about me. I used to self-harm but with the techniques I learned I have stopped doing that now. I'm also helping support another friend going through the same thing; talking to someone about how I was feeling inspired me. I know that if I ever feel down I can tell someone and it helps."

(Boy, Nottingham)

"I'm so grateful to ChildLine for listening to me. I feel like I can talk about all the things I'm going through and can say exactly how I'm feeling, knowing that I won't be judged. Thank you for all your support!"

(Girl, Cardiff online base)

"I have been speaking to counsellors online and it's helped me so much. It is hard to say how I feel but it I find chatting so much easier. They responded really quickly and were very helpful. I felt like someone actually cared and when I started talking and by the end of the session I feel so much better."

(Gender unknown, Belfast)

"I always feel so good after speaking to ChildLine; you are always there when I need you. I used to feel really down and suicidal but I am in a much better place now. My confidence has increased and I look forward to the future."

(Boy, Liverpool base)

"I've been feeling really confused and like there is no way out. Talking to a counsellor really helped me to look at things from a different perspective. I feel like I am in a much better place now and things are starting to make sense."

(Boy, Glasgow base)

"This time last year I couldn't stop crying whilst I was speaking to a counsellor and I was so grateful to have someone that would listen. I just wanted to let you know that I'm much better and happier. I feel like a different person and am starting to enjoy life."

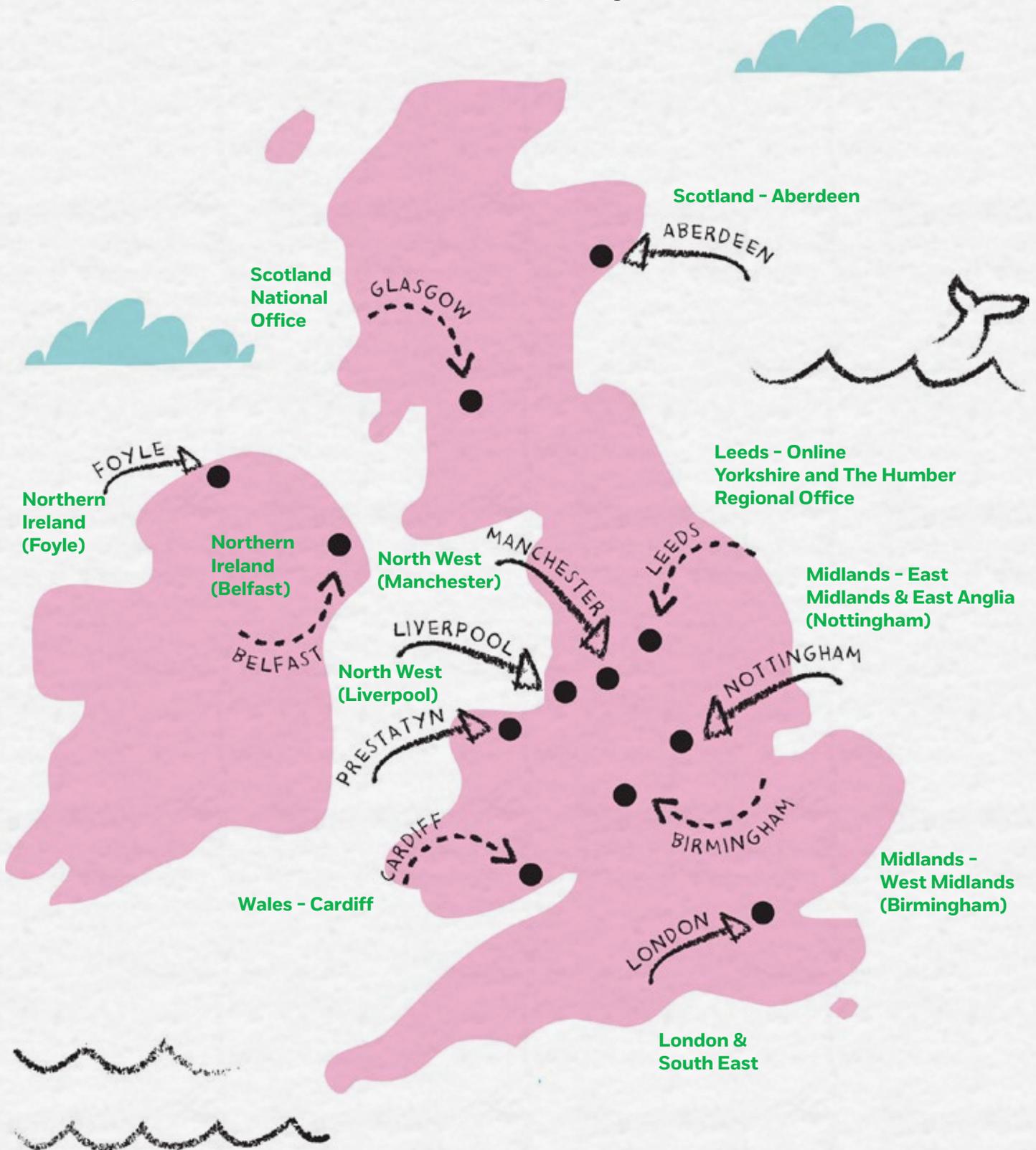
(Girl, Aberdeen base)

"I haven't cut myself for months; it feels really good. I stopped by myself with the techniques that ChildLine advised me and they really work! I want to thank you for all that you have done to support me during such a low period in my life."

(Girl, Leeds base)

ChildLine locations

ChildLine has 12 bases around the UK. ChildLine is dependent on the kindness and generosity of volunteers who give up their spare time to support children and young people who need us, by phone, online 1-2-1 chat and email. For more information or to find out how to get involved, please visit the NSPCC website www.nspcc.org.uk/volunteer



Wherever we've used quotes from young people, we've changed their names and details that might identify them to protect their identity.

ChildLine is the UK's free, 24-hour helpline and online service for children. Trained volunteer counsellors comfort, advise and protect children and young people. Calls to ChildLine are confidential, but if a child is in immediate danger the counsellor will let the caller know if they have to break confidentiality and contact the emergency services to save the child's life.

Children and young people can contact ChildLine 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year on 0800 1111 and at childline.org.uk. For any enquiries please contact us at help@nspcc.org.uk

**ChildLine is a service provided by the NSPCC.
Registered charity numbers 216401 and SC037717.**