



A history of ChildLine

A ChildLine Information Sheet

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'Mum hits me all the time. I don't want to tell anyone. I don't want to get her in trouble. I don't want to be taken away from home. What should I do?' Billy, 11

What is ChildLine?

ChildLine – **0800 1111** – is the free telephone helpline for children and young people. It is available from anywhere in the UK and provides a confidential telephone counselling service for any child with any problem, 24 hours a day, every day. Since its launch in October 1986, ChildLine has counselled more than one million children. We have saved children's lives, brought abusers to justice and found a safe place for children in danger on the streets.

For children and young people who prefer to write down their problems and concerns, we offer a freepost service. Each letter is answered individually.

And that's not all. In 1998, we launched a schools' programme, ChildLine in Partnership with Schools (CHIPS), to support young people and help them work together to address personal problems and school-wide issues.

We are committed to improving the lives of children and young people. We listen to their concerns and produce campaign reports, organise conferences and lobby the Government to change laws to benefit children and young people. We have a website at www.childline.org.uk that provides information and advice, as well as a wealth of information about our campaigns, fundraising, publications and news events.

In 2002/03, ChildLine counselled over 120,000 children about all kinds of problems and concerns:

- over 22,000 of children counselled (20 per cent) contacted us about

physical or sexual abuse, sometimes both

- nearly 21,000 of children counselled (18 per cent) contacted us about bullying
- more than 16,000 children counselled (13 per cent) contacted us about family problems
- children also contacted us about substance misuse, running away, bereavement, the effects of parents' separation or divorce, pregnancy, worries about sex or suicide, and problems with friends or at school

How it all began

In 1986, a BBC1 consumer programme presented by Esther Rantzen called *That's Life!* appealed to viewers to help find out more about child abuse. The BBC ran a helpline for 24 hours after the show for adults and children who wished to call. The response was massive. The details were shocking. Thousands of young people, too frightened to give their names, confided details of terrible cruelty and abuse and jammed the lines.

Three thousand adults completed a BBC questionnaire in which 90 per cent recounted, usually for the first time, the experience of sexual abuse in their childhood. Nine out of ten of those who sent in questionnaires were women. A special ChildWatch team was set up to read the questionnaires and make a programme on child abuse. Again and again, children and adults, who were abused when they were young, recounted the same story. They spoke of how cruelty happened at home; how most abusers were members of their own family; how they



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had no one to turn to; and how they thought no one would ever believe them if they asked for help. Yet they felt able to confide in an unseen, unnamed person at the end of a telephone line.

The ChildWatch team met with childcare professionals from the statutory and voluntary sectors, including social services departments, the NSPCC, Great Ormond Street Hospital, the police, Kidscape and many others to discuss how to establish a permanent telephone helpline for those who could not be reached in any other way. The helpline would be open 24 hours a day.

In October 1986, a BBC special programme on child abuse, called *ChildWatch*, launched ChildLine. British Telecom provided ChildLine with space to work from and a simple memorable telephone number: 0800 1111. The logo – a smiling telephone – was shown on the programme. The response that first night and subsequent nights exceeded all expectations. ChildLine quickly took root in the minds of children and young people as 'their line'. After 16 years in existence, ChildLine is established as the place that children and young people identify as their own.

Why does ChildLine exist?

ChildLine's aims and objectives are:

- to protect children from harm
- to share children and young people's difficulties and help resolve or alleviate their problems
- to raise public awareness and influence policies and practice that affect children's lives and development

How does ChildLine do this?

From the beginning, volunteers have formed a central part of ChildLine's helpline service. We currently have about 1,000 volunteer counsellors and could not provide such an extensive service without them. All volunteers receive specialist, ChildLine-focused training and they are supported by a professional staff team.

Counsellors come from all walks of life, and men and women from many ethnic backgrounds are counsellors. The one thing they all share is a desire to help improve the lives of vulnerable children and young people.

Hundreds of other volunteers, including young people, help provide other services, such as CHIPS (ChildLine in Partnership with Schools), administration and fundraising.

Who calls ChildLine?

Any child or young person can call ChildLine. Many of those who ring tell us that they have never spoken to an adult before about their problems and that it has sometimes taken them months to pluck up the courage to call. Sometimes children start by ringing anonymously and rarely name their abusers, often because they have been threatened with dire consequences if they speak out.

These are some of the things that children tell us:

'He said he would kill Mummy if I told.'

'I don't want him to go to prison.'

'I don't want to be put into a children's home. I just want him to stop hurting me.'

ChildLine's trained counsellors talk through a child's problems with them – the shame, grief or pain that they may be suffering – and help to rebuild their shattered self-esteem. Children and young people are encouraged to believe that they have the right to be safe from abuse, bullying and fear, and ChildLine works actively to get the help that they need.

Do counsellors pass on information about children?

All calls to ChildLine are confidential. ChildLine counsellors will only refer a problem against a child's wishes where there is a life-threatening situation. However, ChildLine will contact social services (social work departments in Scotland) or the police if the child is ready for further action to be taken. In 2002/03, over 1,500 children and young people were referred on for further help.



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It is not always possible to help. Very early in ChildLine's life, counsellors learnt that attempting to intervene in this way before a child is ready simply means the child might never ring back again. So ChildLine's counsellors work patiently and carefully with children, often helping them to identify a person whom they know and trust and who can help them to change their situation. This person may, for example, be a friend of the same age, a teacher, a near relative, a family friend or a trusted professional.

Does ChildLine get hoax calls?

Sometimes, yes, and these calls can jam the lines, preventing those in need of help from getting through. We also receive calls from children in groups, laughing and joking with friends. Often though, these are 'test' calls and one of the group may call back later with a particular problem.

Like the Samaritans helpline, we often receive silent calls or calls where children can only sob down the phone, as they cannot bring themselves to talk immediately. These young people desperately need help. They also need reassurance that we do not trace telephone calls and need time to find the courage and the right words to describe what is happening to them.

Does every child get through?

Since 1986, ChildLine has expanded rapidly to meet the needs of the children who call. Every day around 4,000 children and young people call ChildLine, but lack of funds means that only half of them will get through to our counsellors for comfort, advice and protection. ChildLine's goal is to be able to answer every child, the very first time they ring.

Does ChildLine provide special help?

Yes, we do. ChildLine has a special number – The Line – for children and young people who live away from home. They may be in care, in a foster home, away at boarding school, in hospital or in a secure unit. Wherever they live, we can help. The number is **0800 88 4444**.

As part of its core service, ChildLine provides a Minicom service for children with hearing disabilities on **0800 400 222**.

ChildLine also runs regional lines in the Channel Islands, West Sussex, and Lincolnshire. ChildLine Scotland runs its own Bullying Helpline for Scottish children and young people. The number is **0800 44 11 11** and lines are open Monday to Friday from 3.30pm to 9.30pm.

Where is ChildLine based?

Our headquarters and largest counselling centre is in London, although a child can call ChildLine from anywhere in the UK. To increase the number of children we can reach, we have opened additional call centres across the UK in Nottingham, Glasgow, Manchester, Swansea, Rhyl, Newton Abbott, Birmingham, Leeds, and Belfast.

Our main contact address is:

ChildLine
45 Folgate Street, London E1 6GL
Tel: **020 7650 3200**

How is ChildLine funded?

It costs over £10 million each year to run ChildLine's helpline and support services. Ninety per cent of ChildLine's income is raised each year from the public, business and grant-making trusts. The other 10 per cent is raised from central and local government.

Every year the number of children ChildLine is able to help increases. With the support of the public and business, we are gradually meeting more of the huge demand from children for our service.

Our ultimate aim is to answer every call for help from every child who needs us.

ChildLine's achievements

ChildLine is committed to ensuring that children's voices are heard. We campaign for changes that will bring lasting improvements to the lives of children and young people. These have included:

- joining forces with six other leading children's charities to form the Children's Charities Coalition on Internet Safety (CHIS) after years of campaigning to provide greater protection for children using the web



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- two ground-breaking conferences about bullying held in November 2001 and March 2003. Both conferences were chaired by Cherie Booth, QC. The most recent conference, *Bullying – How To Beat It*, launched research funded by the Department for Education and Skills about children's views on bullying and their ideas for addressing the problem
- producing a number of campaign reports based on the experiences of ChildLine callers about eating problems, bereavement, suicide and young runaways, which received widespread media interest
- holding a major international conference on children and the law in 1999, *Hearing Children's Voices*, after campaigning for many years to make the ordeal of giving evidence in court easier for children. Also ChildLine Scotland played a leading role in the Child Witness Reform Group. In its report, *Justice for Children*, the group called for changes to be made to the present legal system, which is traumatic and distressing for children
- lobbying, at the forefront of the Children for Scotland campaign, for a children's commissioner to be appointed
- highlighting the vulnerable position of children who live with parents suffering from alcohol abuse at a conference in 1998, co-hosted with Alcohol Concern

To order more copies of this information sheet or for general enquiries please call 020 7650 3200.

ChildLine is a registered charity no. 1003758

Please note – all names and identifying details have been changed to protect callers' identities.

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CONTACTING CHILDLINE

Children can call ChildLine on **0800 1111** (all calls are free of charge, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year).

Or write to us at ChildLine, Freepost NATN1111, London E1 6BR; or visit www.childline.org.uk

Children who are deaf or find using a regular phone difficult can try our textphone service on **0800 400 222**.
Monday to Friday 9.30am to 9.30pm
Saturday to Sunday 9.30am to 8.00pm

We have a special helpline for children and young people living away from home in places such as refuges, boarding schools and young offenders' institutions called The Line on **0800 88 4444**.
Monday to Friday 9.30am to 9.30pm
Saturday to Sunday 9.30am to 8.00pm

ChildLine in Partnership with Schools (CHIPS) helps schools set up schemes to encourage children and young people to support each other. For more information call **020 7650 3230**.