SAYING THE UNSAYABLE

What's affecting children in 2012

The report provides valuable insight into the 1.5 million calls, emails and chats that ChildLine received in 2011/12 and represents one of the biggest snapshots of children’s lives in the UK today.
CONTENTS

Foreword from Esther Rantzen .......................................................... 03
Intro/foreword from Peter Liver ..................................................... 05
Summary ......................................................................................... 06
Reasons young people contact ChildLine ....................................... 07
Top 10 increased primary concerns ............................................... 08
Family relationships ....................................................................... 09
Abuse ......................................................................................... 11
Bullying ..................................................................................... 13
Self-harm ..................................................................................... 15
Suicide ....................................................................................... 17
Health ....................................................................................... 19
School and education .................................................................. 21
Depression and mental health ...................................................... 23
The profile of children contacting ChildLine .................................. 24
Overall figures ........................................................................... 27
Referrals ..................................................................................... 30
We have called this report “Saying the Unsayable” because that is how children and young people use us, and explains why they desperately need ChildLine. The vast majority have never been able to tell anyone else about their suffering. It’s when they have been silenced by fear, or shame, or believe that nobody cares about them, or that they themselves are to blame for their suffering, that they turn to us. Whether by phone (our lines are free, confidential, and open 24/7) or by contacting us online, they trust us, find they can tell us everything, and our counsellors listen and reassure them. No, we tell them, it is not their fault that they feel suicidal, or that they self-harm, or that they are being abused, or bullied. Yes, we say, there is hope, together we may be able to find a solution; even talking about it, sharing the problem, takes a child one crucial step forward, towards the safety every child needs and deserves.

I wish we could bring in a binding law that decrees that every child must be loved and secure. Certainly every child needs loving security, but even though we cannot create those circumstances for them all, we can still transform desperate children’s lives by giving them hope, and lifting their self-esteem. It has been my privilege to meet and interview young adults who rang ChildLine when they were children (for my book Running Out of Tears, published by Robson Books, royalties to ChildLine). They told me the difference ChildLine made to them. They said that until they contacted us they had believed that nobody cared or believed in them and that happiness was out of reach. Our counsellors gave them hope. And hope is what makes life worth living. And that literally turned their lives around.

Some things have changed in the 25 years since ChildLine launched in 1986. Sexual abuse was the most common problem then. Now it is ranked 5th – still far too common, but according to the NSPCC’s most recent “Prevalence Survey” both sexual abuse and physical abuse have
decreased in the last two decades. I believe that is at least partly due to ChildLine’s creation, because ChildLine is not only a support for children, but a deterrent to abusers.

It’s not all been good news. For example, family problems did not figure in our top 10 issues 25 years ago but now they are right at the top. **We need to ask ourselves why children are so often so desperately unhappy at home, that they find family life destructive, rather than the support it should be. What has changed?**

There are other disturbing changes, new problems facing today’s children; cyber bullying, internet grooming, “sexting”, and sexual grooming by groups of abusive predators. Technology has proved, as with every new invention, that it can be exploited to bring new dangers. But technology has also enabled us to liberate young people with online counselling. And thanks to the mobile phone, children no longer have to run out into dark, lonely streets at night to make a safe phone call to us, as they once did. Now they can ring us safely wherever they are, and I know of occasions when we have brought a lost child back to safety when she had been dumped in the middle of bleak moorland in the winter, and reassured a suicidal child hanging from the parapet over a motorway when she had felt so hopeless and desperate she wanted to die.

**We are saving lives, we always have.** But another huge change is that now, for the first time, we are answering every child who needs us the first time they ring, or contact us online. A huge milestone in ChildLine’s history.

This report contains a picture of the nation’s unhappy children – what it does not show is that nearly every phone call or online contact, no matter how painful the child’s situation, ends more happily than it starts. **ChildLine’s notice-boards are filled with thank you messages from children whose hearts and spirits have been lifted.** So I would like to pay tribute to the generations of dedicated staff and volunteers who have spent the last 25 years listening, comforting and protecting children – lives saved, abusers brought to justice, and 2.6 million young people who, without ChildLine, would have had nowhere else to turn.

Esther Rantzen
ChildLine’s aim is to support and help distressed young people to build independence and resilience, as well as to provide direct support for those children and young people in crisis.

This report provides a valuable insight into the 1.5 million calls, emails and chats that ChildLine received in 2011/12 and represents one of the biggest snapshots of children’s lives in the UK today.

Over 25 years ChildLine has seen how children are affected by many forms of neglect and abuse. Every day, we hear from some of the most vulnerable children in the UK and I believe it is vital we share what we know with others to bring about real change for our children.

Looking at trends is important and what is most notable is how children’s emotional wellbeing appears to be challenged by the many pressures they face in the world today. It concerns me to see that more young people are contacting us about self-harm and suicide and the individual cases of online grooming and sexual exploitation are horrifying.

We recognise we have an important role to play in sharing our knowledge and data with professionals, influencers and the public. In future, we will publish in-depth spotlight reports on specific topics throughout each year with an annual overview in July which will give others an insight into the issues our children are facing.

My hope is that this report, reflecting the voices of children and young people, will be both influential and relevant in addressing some of the challenges faced by children in the UK today.

Peter Liver
Director, ChildLine
• ChildLine received 1.5 million contacts in 2011/12 of which over 1.2 million were calls and nearly 270,000 were online contacts.

• The website received 1.85 million visits, an increase of 36 per cent from 2010/11.

• 13 per cent of the telephone, email and online chats received by ChildLine were related to family relationships. These can often be linked to financial worries, problems with communication, sibling conflict and potential family breakdown. Alongside abuse, ‘family relationships’ is the main reason young people contact ChildLine.

• ChildLine records the various types of abuse such as emotional, physical and sexual separately.

• The next biggest issue is bullying, which represented 10 per cent of all counselling provided.

• Self-harm saw the biggest increase and is now the fourth most common reason for young people to contact ChildLine. Counsellors carried out 68 per cent more sessions than in 2010/11. Despite a decline in the rate of reported youth suicides, the amount of counselling ChildLine carried out relating to suicide increased by 39 per cent. The issue was particularly acute among girls and those aged 16-18.
### Reasons Young People Contact Childline

#### Top Ten Reasons for Contacting Childline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Issue</th>
<th>Top Additional Concern</th>
<th>The Number of Counselling Sessions</th>
<th>Percentage of Total Counselling Sessions</th>
<th>Change from 2010/11</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family relationship</td>
<td>School/education problems</td>
<td>39,683</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>+18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullying</td>
<td>Family relationship</td>
<td>31,599</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>+4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical abuse</td>
<td>Family relationship</td>
<td>17,542</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>-5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self harm</td>
<td>Family relationship</td>
<td>16,264</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>+68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual abuse</td>
<td>Family relationship</td>
<td>15,993</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>-1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depression and mental health</td>
<td>Family relationship</td>
<td>14,297</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>+19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facts of life</td>
<td>Family relationship</td>
<td>14,285</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>+10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problems with friends</td>
<td>Family relationship</td>
<td>13,362</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>+31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner relationships</td>
<td>Family relationship</td>
<td>13,070</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>+31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suicide</td>
<td>Family relationship</td>
<td>12,260</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>+39%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# TOP TEN INCREASED PRIMARY CONCERNS

## TOTAL CASE NOTES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THE ISSUE</th>
<th>2010/11</th>
<th>2011/12</th>
<th>% CHANGE</th>
<th>STATISTICAL INCREASE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self harm</td>
<td>9,707</td>
<td>16,264</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>6,557</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>7,534</td>
<td>11,810</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>4,276</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School and education</td>
<td>6,774</td>
<td>9,956</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>3,182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eating problem</td>
<td>3,049</td>
<td>4,360</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>1,311</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suicide</td>
<td>8,835</td>
<td>12,260</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>3,425</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looked after child</td>
<td>1,895</td>
<td>2,627</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>732</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem with friends</td>
<td>10,163</td>
<td>13,363</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>3,199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner relationships</td>
<td>10,001</td>
<td>13,070</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>3,069</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional abuse</td>
<td>2,192</td>
<td>2,729</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>537</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bereavement</td>
<td>5,069</td>
<td>6,188</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>1,119</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In 2011/12, 13 per cent of all ChildLine counselling was linked to family relationships. Alongside abuse, it continues to be the main reason for young people to contact ChildLine, occupying the same spot as the previous year.

A total of 39,683 sessions took place. 54 per cent with girls, 16 per cent with boys and 30 per cent where the gender wasn’t known. This equates to approximately 109 counselling sessions a day.

The subject is among the top three concerns for children and young people of all ages, and is the number one concern for 12-17 year olds.

This is now the main reason for young people to contact ChildLine across all three channels: telephone, email and online chat.

QUOTES FROM YOUNG PEOPLE

“I have a lot of problems with my family. My mum ignores me and favours my older brother. I have never known my father, and my mum and stepdad have split up.

My stepdad still visits us every week but he has a terrible temper and anger problems. He physically fights my brother, which I find really frightening. Mum has health problems so she is in and out of hospital all the time. There is no one I can turn to for support.”

“I have a lot of things going on at home. I feel like I am trapped in a dark hole and the only way to get out is to just run away – run away and leave all my problems behind and start afresh. The only problem is I don’t know where to go”.

COMPLEX DRIVERS

Many young people begin their conversation with us by talking about a family relationship but the underlying issue can often be of even greater concern. For example, the young person may talk about experiences that could be identified as neglect, but – because of complex issues – they may not be able to identify it.

Equally, family relationships is the top additional concern for every one of the top 10 reasons for children contacting ChildLine. In other words, although a child may contact us with a concern relating to bullying, partner relationships, depression or self harm, the next most significant issue is family relationships.
WHAT'S NEXT FOR CHILDLINE?

In order to better understand the range of issues affecting family life for young people in 2012/13 and because this is such a complex problem affecting many children, we are improving our ability to analyse and delve deeper into the underlying issues.

ChildLine recognises the need to understand the subject of family relationships in more detail. It covers a wide range of issues for children and young people – from relationships with family members to the effect of external pressures on the family.

We know, for example, that for young people aged 12-17 (for whom family relationships are the primary concern) the reasons for contacting ChildLine can be linked to financial worries, breakdown of communication, sibling conflict as well as potential family breakdown.

To address this, and gain greater insight, we have added new categories to help us measure the reasons for children to contact us about family relationships, and these include:

• parents divorce and separation
• bullying by a family member
• issues for young carers.

In addition, the overall list of topics that we report on has been updated to reflect what children and young people are telling us. An example is ‘emotional wellbeing’ which is featured in a lot of interactions about family relationships. Our website will continue to feature the overarching topic of ‘family relationships’, but will now have additional information that relates to specific issues such as domestic violence, emotional, physical or sexual abuse.
“Physical and sexual abuse remain among the top concerns facing children but – of all forms of abuse – emotional abuse saw the biggest rise from 2010/11”

**Quotes from Young People**

“I feel like hurting myself because I feel really scared. My dad scares me. He comes into my room every night when mum is at work. What he does to me hurts. I have not told anyone because my dad says all dads do it and I must not tell mum or it will cause real trouble. I am scared and want it to stop.”

“I am regularly criticised and insulted by my parents. I am constantly taunted for being fat. I am so upset I want to leave home, but I don’t think they will let me. I can’t cope with all the criticism and I cry a lot and then eat to feel better – it’s a vicious cycle.”

“I want to be taken into care as my dad keeps hitting me. I am really scared but I don’t feel like I can talk to anyone else about this in case they get the police involved.”

The five main categories of abuse, as used by ChildLine to report and measure concerns affecting children, are:

- **physical abuse**
- **sexual abuse**
- **emotional abuse**
- **neglect**
- **unspecified abuse**.

In total, all forms of abuse accounted for 40,199 counselling sessions – 13 per cent of the total number of calls, emails, and online chats received in 2011/12. This equates to approximately 110 counselling sessions a day.

Compared to 2010/11 there has been a 36 per cent increase in children using online chat and email to contact us about abuse, compared with a 13 per cent decrease in calls.

The most significant rise was in counselling 16-18 year olds about abuse, where ChildLine saw a 13 per cent rise on the previous year.

This age group also had the largest rise in use of online chat – up 66 per cent on 2010/11.

This demonstrates that 16-18 year olds are increasingly using online channels to contact ChildLine about abuse.

**Emotional Abuse** showed a 24 per cent rise in 2011/12 – although it still remains outside the top 10 reasons for children to contact ChildLine, representing just 1 per cent of all counselling.

Contacts about physical and sexual abuse fell marginally (by 5 per cent and 1 per cent respectively), but both remain in the top five issues overall.

**Physical Abuse** was the third most common reason for children to contact ChildLine, and is the main reason that children contact us on behalf of another child. It features in the top three concerns for children aged 15 and under, but moves down the ranking the older the young person is, and does not feature in the top 10 concerns for young people aged 16-18.

Conversely, **Sexual Abuse** – the fifth most common reason to contact ChildLine overall – becomes more of an issue the older a young person gets. It was the fifth most common reason for young people aged 12 and 13 to contact ChildLine, and the second most common for 15-year-olds.
What’s next for ChildLine?

ChildLine will run campaigns throughout 2012/13 on physical abuse, neglect and sexual abuse. These will raise awareness of the issues as well as providing information and support to young people.

We will focus on reaching the most vulnerable groups of young people, as our evidence shows that these are often the children who experience multiple problems in their lives.

We know that many children don’t talk about abuse when they first contact ChildLine, and only feel able to disclose what is happening after gaining support about other issues. Because of this, it is vital that we continue to remain a valuable and trusted place of support for children, whatever their worry.

We will publish quarterly spotlight reports on specific forms of abuse. These reports will use statistical evidence gathered through our service and examine the relationship between abuse and other issues such the recession, the impact of online channels, the rise in relationship abuse and the increase in contacts we receive from 16-18-year-olds.

Childline’s role in tackling abuse

Ever since ChildLine was launched 25 years ago, it has remained a fact that children find it almost impossible to tell anyone if they are suffering abuse. They are often threatened or intimidated into silence by their abuser, or dread the consequences if they ask for help. ChildLine is sometimes their only source of support.

The ability to offer different modes of support such as online chat has enabled some young people to disclose when they would not have felt able to speak about it over the phone or face-to-face.
BULLYING
“remains the second biggest reason for contacting ChildLine – although more acute for younger children”

QUOTES FROM YOUNG PEOPLE

“I am really upset as I am being bullied at school. They call me fat which has made me stop eating. I have tried to talk to my dad and the teachers but they don’t seem to listen or do anything about it. I am bullied online all the time and sometimes get threatened. They say they will find out where I am and hurt me. I am scared that I might get hurt if I do tell someone. Help!” ChildLine caller

“I am really worried about my best friend who is being bullied by some girls at school. They used to bully me but since I have moved schools they have started being nasty to my friend. They send her emails calling her names. My friend is scared that they might do the same to her as they did to me. Please help me.” ChildLine caller

Bullying remains the second most common reason for children to contact ChildLine with 31,599 counselling sessions being carried out about bullying in 2011/12, equating to approximately 87 a day.

In 2011/12 10 per cent of all counselling we provided was about bullying.

47 per cent of the counselling that took place for bullying was with girls, 26 per cent with boys and 27 per cent with young people whose gender wasn’t identified.

Bullying is now the second most common reason (after physical abuse) for young people to contact ChildLine with concerns about another child.

Bullying is affecting children at a younger age than previous years. In 2011/12 it was the top concern for children aged 7-11, in 2010/11 it was top for children aged 8-11.

However, as children get older – between 12 and 18 – bullying becomes less of a concern.

In 57 per cent of counselling sessions about bullying, the young person said the bullying took place in school or on the way home from school.

20 per cent talked about physical bullying – with this being more of an issue for boys than girls.

ChildLine saw a 7 per cent increase in the amount of counselling about cyberbullying. It now accounts for 8 per cent of all interactions that relate to bullying.

Many young people tell ChildLine that the support they receive from friends, teachers, parents and other trusted third parties, is ineffective.

Some say that even if the bullying stops, they end up losing friends and still feel bullied, and many tell us that they don’t ever talk about bullying as they are put under pressure to remain silent.

ChildLine focuses on supporting the child to take action, devise coping strategies and deal with difficult emotions brought about by bullying.

31,599 COUNSELLING SESSIONS

26 PER CENT WITH BOYS

47 PER CENT WITH GIRLS

27 PER CENT UNKNOWN GENDER
WHAT’S NEXT FOR CHILDLINE?

ChildLine supports anti-bullying week each November, and provides resources to help children and young people throughout the year. Our website has information to help children identify incidents of serious bullying – particularly violent physical abuse – suffered at the hands of other children and adults.

The new ChildLine Schools Service, which aims to visit every primary school in the UK by 2016, will teach younger children about abuse in all its forms, including bullying. The service will help children identify the different forms of abuse, give them the confidence to talk about them, and teach them where to turn to for help.
SELF-HARM
“the single biggest increase for any issue affecting children and young people”

QUOTES FROM YOUNG PEOPLE

“I started self-harming when I was being bullied at school. It was a way for me to cope with all the names they were calling me and how it was making me feel. Things at home weren’t good either, Mum and Dad argued. Self-harming helped me to feel numb and to forget about all that was happening to me. It was my release, something I was in control of.” ChildLine caller

“A lecturer at college saw a scar on my arm and referred me to the college counsellor. I felt so ashamed and didn’t want to see the counsellor. I wasn’t sure the counsellor wouldn’t tell anyone else or if they would understand how I was feeling. Then I saw a poster for ChildLine in college, I felt confident that ChildLine would keep what I told them confidential.” ChildLine caller

“ChildLine helped me to think about the positives in my life, and what I enjoyed doing. The counsellor helped me to think about other techniques I could use that were safer than cutting. She told me I could contact ChildLine whenever I felt like self-harming – I now feel more able to cope.” ChildLine caller

ChildLine counsellors carried out 16,264 counselling sessions about self-harm – up 68 per cent from 2010/11. This equates to approximately 45 counselling sessions a day.

In the last year there has been a huge rise in the number of girls who contact us about self harm. Last year, 92 per cent more counselling was provided to girls on this issue than in 2010/11.

78 per cent of all counselling sessions about self-harm took place online. This makes it the second most common reason for children to contact us online.

It is also the third most common reason for young people to contact ChildLine to seek advice and support on behalf of a friend.

Children are affected by self-harm at a younger age than ever before. It appeared in the top five concerns for 14 year olds for the first time this year. In 2010/11 this concern made its first appearance in the top five concerns for 15 year olds.

When ChildLine is concerned a child may be in danger, we can refer a child to other agencies – such as the police, children’s services or health. Of all the subjects for which we refer children and young people to external agencies, self-harm saw the biggest percentage increase: up 100 per cent on the previous year.
What's next for ChildLine?

ChildLine will continue to raise this as an issue of concern and plans to run further campaigns about self-harm in 2013 to ensure we are regularly reaching out to young people who need help.

In a bid to counteract negative stereotypes, and the effect of websites that seek to glamorise self-harm, we are working with selfharm.co.uk, to promote support and positive messages about the issue.

In February and March 2012, we ran a campaign with thesite.org, Young Minds and selfharm.co.uk to raise awareness of the issue, and to promote the help and support available to young people. We are now building on this to develop an ongoing relationship.

We have set up a partnership with a King’s College research project that will produce a self-harm self-assessment tool to help support young people to recognise and manage risk.

Why?

ChildLine recognises self-harm is an issue affecting greater numbers of young people. The reasons for self-harm are complex, but it’s a trend seen within schools, health and other voluntary support agencies. Often, children keep their self-harm secret and don’t access help, even medical help – which is why the confidential nature of our service is so important.

Many young people who contact us talk about using self-harm as a coping mechanism for a wide range of pressures. We work with young people to look at their immediate safety, possible sources of support and alternative coping strategies.

The high levels of confidentiality we can offer young people, combined with the range of channels through which they can access help, support and advice, mean that many young people take the first steps toward seeking support with ChildLine. In many cases, this is enough to help them deal with the issues that may lead them to self-harm.

Top 5

Concerns for 14 year olds for the first time this year

What's next for Childline?
SUICIDE
“a large rise in suicide counselling, particularly among girls and 16-18 year olds”

QUOTES FROM YOUNG PEOPLE

“I don’t want to be alive anymore. Mum has just yelled at me, I hate it. I know she can’t control her anger, but now I just want to die. Me and my mum don’t get on at all. Mum drinks loads and she doesn’t have time for me anymore. I’ve had some vodka and I have more. I have a razor too and I think that there are about 24 tablets in the house.” Paula continued to talk about how she felt it wasn’t worth being alive and that she couldn’t think of anything positive going for her. She felt lonely, saying “nobody will miss me”.

“I’m feeling suicidal at the moment. I have been to hospital before as I have tried to end my life by taking an overdose. I’m bullied at school and I feel so angry with my dad. He drinks a lot and moved away a year ago. Sometimes going for a walk can help and I’m really close to my mum. I have medication for my severe depression, but I really feel like it isn’t working. I’m so glad ChildLine can help me.” (Teenage male).

ChildLine has seen a 39 per cent rise in the number of children receiving counselling about suicide in 2011/12. There were 12,260 sessions on this issue, rising from 8,835 in 2010/11. This equates to approximately 34 counselling sessions a day.

This rise was particularly noticeable among girls. 7,069 sessions were provided – up 63 per cent from the previous year.

43 per cent of counselling for suicide took place over the phone. 41 per cent happened on online chat, and 16 per cent by email.

Suicide mainly affects older age groups – only featuring as a top five concern for 16-18 year olds – and its impact is on the rise. In 2010/11 it was the fifth most common reason for 17-year-olds to contact us. In 2011/12 it was third.

Suicide was the main reason for ChildLine having to refer children to external agencies. Referrals for this topic account for 53 per cent of the total referrals made in 2011/12. In 2010/11 it accounted for 41 per cent of the total.
WHY?

The Department for Justice (2008) quotes suicide as the second largest cause of death for “young people” in the UK, after road traffic accidents.

The challenge is that the Department for Justice defines young people as those aged “15-44 years” and that its report does not account for levels of suicide attempts or suicidal thoughts among young people.

Despite the apparent decrease in suicide rates, the large rise in children and young people contacting ChildLine about suicide is not surprising, and is actually part of a sustained pattern.

We know that many young people talk about needing a place to turn when they feel no one can, or wants to, help. Though still an obvious concern, ChildLine’s position as a confidential and trusted service combined with its online offering can – in part – explain these increased figures.

Just under 8 per cent of all the contacts between young people and ChildLine relating to suicide led to a referral to an external agency for immediate intervention. This would suggest that the majority of contacts are from young people thinking about suicide and seeking support, rather than being actively suicidal.

The rise in contacts about suicide mirrors ChildLine’s launch of online chats and suggests that young people feel more comfortable seeking support through online channels that allow high levels of anonymity and confidentiality.

WHAT’S NEXT FOR CHILDLINE?

This is a significant area of concern for ChildLine as we have seen an increase year on year for the last five years. The introduction of our online service has provided an environment in which young people feel more comfortable to express their suicidal thoughts.

We have a growing partnership with the Samaritans which means that young people calling their service can be warmly transferred to ChildLine if they need direct intervention in a life-threatening situation.

We will continue to work closely with Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) and local police forces to ensure that we gain direct support as quickly and effectively as possible if a suicidal intention is immediately life-threatening.

When children and young people come to ChildLine seeking help and support about suicide, they also talk about a range of related issues. We will carry out further research into these, and produce a report on suicide and self-harm that aims to help us, and other agencies, understand the breadth of this topic.

Because we know how concerned young people are about their own unhappiness, and the unhappiness of their friends, we will launch a campaign in 2013 to address the issue.
HEALTH
“concerns around health are rising rapidly for both girls and boys, and affecting ever younger children”

QUOTES FROM YOUNG PEOPLE
“I’ve been told today that I have cancer. The doctors told me and my mum that I have a brain tumour, which is cancerous. I don’t like all the tests – they are horrible and embarrassing. I have got to go for another scan and then after that start Chemo. I had to have a catheter fitted, which was embarrassing. My mum is really upset too so I don’t feel I can tell her how upset I am.”

There was a 57 per cent increase in counselling for health-related issues this year. 11,810 counselling sessions took place, up from 7,534 in 2010/11. This equates to approximately 32 counselling sessions a day.

In 2011/12 the number of contacts from girls who have health concerns rose by 65 per cent from the previous year. Contacts from boys increased by 35 per cent.

Children are affected by concerns about health at a younger age than in previous years. For each age group, ChildLine reports the top five reasons for contacting the service. In 2010/11 the youngest age at which health appeared in the top five concerns was nine. Last year, the youngest age was eight.

32 COUNSELLING SESSIONS A DAY

57 PER CENT INCREASE IN COUNSELLING FOR HEALTH-RELATED

UP FROM 7,534

65 PER CENT INCREASED CONTACTS FROM GIRLS WHO HAVE HEALTH CONCERNS

35 PER CENT INCREASED CONTACTS FROM BOYS
**WHY?**

Health acts as an umbrella term for a range of issues that can include children and young people seeking information, through to wanting to talk about a serious illness and its effect on them and their families. ChildLine does not give specific medical information but is able to support children who are experiencing problems.

The range of subjects covered is vast and ChildLine is contacted about conditions from earaches or stomach upsets, to sexual health issues and more serious and long-term illnesses such as cancer. In addition, in 20 per cent of counselling sessions where the primary concern was health, the young person also talked about wheelchair and mobility issues. This was often a temporary physical impairment such as when a child or young person had broken a limb.

Children and young people talk to ChildLine about the emotional impact of some health issues – saying that they feel embarrassed, confused and sometimes scared. They may be anxious about an operation, visiting hospital or undergoing treatment but often don’t want to upset parents who may also be worried. Many young people who contacted us had been recently diagnosed and wanted support. They wanted to talk through practical or emotional issues and used this as an opportunity to help them come to terms with what has happened.

Children and young people often talk about being embarrassed or self conscious about an issue – most commonly things such as head lice, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), acne and weight issues. Often, they are too embarrassed to seek help or visit a GP. ChildLine can help by talking to young people about what to expect if they visit a GP or by providing information about accessible clinics aimed at young people.

**WHAT’S NEXT FOR CHILDLINE?**

Health covers a wide range of issues. We will continue to develop a greater understanding of health issues affecting young people.
School and Education

“an issue of increasing importance for children and young people, including exam stress”

Quotes from young people

“I am about to take my GCSEs and am under so much pressure as my parents are expecting me to do really well. I am going to revision classes and trying really hard but I feel like it is not good enough for them. My parents don’t allow me to do anything else apart from revision and if I try and talk to them it always ends up in an argument.”

“I’m really frustrated and annoyed as I have so much going on in my life at the moment. I have loads of school work which is starting to get on top of me and the deadlines are all really soon. I am not normally like this but I feel so unorganised. I am under loads of pressure because I need to get good grades to get into university but don’t think I will do very well in my exams. I spend so much time at college doing work that I don’t have any time to enjoy myself. I can’t talk to my parents about this as things are not great at home.”

2011/12 saw a 47 per cent increase in concerns about school and education – the third largest rise overall. While it is an issue of increasing concern, school and education does not appear in the top 10 reasons for contacting ChildLine.

ChildLine dealt with 9,956 counselling sessions about problems relating to school and education, which equates to approximately 27 counselling sessions a day.

Of all the reasons young people contact ChildLine, school and education saw the third largest rise for girls and the ninth largest for boys. This marks a 63 per cent increase for girls, and a 24 per cent increase for boys compared to 2010/11.

25 per cent of counselling relating to school and education was about exam pressures.

Where exams were the issue, 66 per cent of counselling was conducted through online chat or email. Just under a third (32 per cent) of these contacts took place in exam season between May and June 2011. This coincided with our Beat Exam Stress marketing campaign.

Where school and education was the main concern, the top additional concern (for 18 per cent of young people) was family relationships. Young people frequently told us that they could not talk to their parents, either because they didn’t want to worry them or because they were fearful of their reaction. The perceived pressure from schools and families is a significant factor either in exams or with issues happening at school and children and young people often link this to not being able to seek support and not feeling good enough academically.
WHAT'S NEXT FOR CHILDLINE?

Through the ChildLine Schools Service we aim to reach every primary aged child every two years by 2016. To ensure appropriate resources are available, we will be developing a website for this age group in 2012/13.

We aim to reach out to vulnerable groups through digital platforms such as Facebook as we have seen that young people experiencing other issues in their lives are particularly at risk when they have additional school pressures. We will continue to run awareness campaigns to direct children and young people online to our range of self help tools and services.
DEPRESSION AND MENTAL HEALTH
“primarily a concern for young people contacting ChildLine online – affecting 16 and 17 year olds more than any other age”

QUOTES FROM YOUNG PEOPLE

“I suffer with depression and am really struggling with it. I don’t know what to do. Nothing helps. I just have to wait and hope it goes away. I feel so alone. I find it impossible to do any work as I have no motivation to do anything or organise myself. I wish I had a way to cope with depression and not let it take over me.”

“I can’t remember what it’s like to feel good or happy. I don’t see the point in living when I feel like this. I’m so angry at everyone including myself and I don’t even know why! I feel like crying all the time. Every time I think I’ve hit rock bottom, I slip even further down. I cry myself to sleep every night for no reason. I wish someone could help me.”

Mental health and depression is the sixth most common reason for children to contact ChildLine, with the number of contacts rising by 19 per cent on the previous year. The total number of counselling interactions about depression and mental health during 2011/12 was 14,297 – approximately 39 a day. 71 per cent of counselling on this subject took place through online chats or email – suggesting young people prefer to talk about this subject online. Many children and young people discuss the difficulties they experience talking about their feelings of unhappiness face-to-face. They also tell us that they find it difficult to engage with counselling, when it is offered.

There was a 33 per cent increase in the number of girls contacting ChildLine about depression and mental health, which correlates to the high increase in contacts about self-harm, suicide and eating disorders among girls.

This issue starts to feature as a major concern for children aged 15 and older. It features much higher in the top five concerns among 16 and 17 year olds than for any other age group. For both girls and boys, depression and mental health are closely linked with the additional concerns of family relationship problems, self-harm and suicide.

There was a 27 per cent rise in counselling sessions where the additional concern was self-harm, 13 per cent for family relationships, and 19 per cent for suicide. This evidence indicates strong links between a range of problems and in the next year ChildLine will focus on examining the underlying relationships between different topics and what form of help is most effective.
As with previous years, a significant number (41 per cent) of young people do not disclose their age when contacting ChildLine. But, from those who do, the majority (41 per cent) are aged between 13 and 17.

As with those whose gender is unknown, this could be down to the increased popularity of online chats and email, which afford the child greater anonymity.

For children aged 11 or under, the main reasons for contacting ChildLine are physical abuse, family relationships and bullying.

Neglect appears as a top 10 concern for under 11s, but not for any other age group. It is among the top five concern until the age of seven, after which it starts to fall down the list.

Children are affected by concerns about health at a younger age than in previous years. For each age group, ChildLine reports the top five reasons for contacting the service. In 2010/11 the youngest age at which health appeared in the top five concerns was nine. Last year, the youngest age was eight.

The same trend can be seen for children contacting ChildLine about problems with friends. In 2010/11 this first featured as a top five concern among children aged 11. In 2011/12 it first appears for children aged nine.

“neglect affects this group more than any other, while health and problems with friends is concerning ever younger children”

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“Mum takes stuff that makes her shout and swear. I get frightened when this happens. I have to get myself to school but mostly I just don’t go.”

Child aged seven

“I wish I didn’t have to go home from school as I like it there. I get left alone all night sometimes. We used to be happy before but I don’t like it now.”

Child aged 10
12-15 YEAR OLDS

“family relationships is the main concern for many, but depression, mental health and self-harm begin to feature heavily”

Family relationships is a concern that ranks consistently high for this age group. For many, it is the main reason for contacting ChildLine.

Issues such as bullying and physical abuse start to move down the list the older the child becomes.

In contrast, sexual abuse ranks more highly the older children become. It was the fifth most common reason for contacting ChildLine for children aged 12 and 13, but the second most common reason for 15-year-olds.

Facts of life feature as a major concern for young people aged 12 and 13. For 13-year-olds it has moved up to the fourth most common reason to contact ChildLine (from fifth in 2010/11).

It is in this age group that issues such as depression, mental health and self-harm first appear.
16-18 YEAR OLDS
“bullying decreases but depression, mental health and partner relationships dominate”
Family relationships remain the main reason for this age group to contact ChildLine. Depression and mental health features much higher in this age group than any other – reaching its peak among 16-year-olds.
Sexual abuse becomes less of a concern for young people aged 16-18, and bullying stops featuring in the top five at all.
Suicide and partner relationships, however, make their first appearance in the top five reasons to contact ChildLine among this age group.
Partner relationships is the main concern for 18-year-olds. Young people contacted ChildLine about breaking up with their partner, often having refused sex or having had sex for the first time. Many mentioned that they were being put under pressure to have sex and were not ready, but did not know how to refuse their partner without risking the break-up of the relationship.
Partners were often described as being abusive and controlling and often young people were worried about the repercussions of leaving their partner.
Pregnancy and being a young parent were often reasons for the breakdown of relationships.

QUOTES FROM YOUNG PEOPLE
“I am a teenage mum. The dad is much older than me and he is saying he wants more access to our daughter but I don’t want this because he is violent. I ended it with him because he was physically abusive towards me. The courts have been involved and he gets supervised access at the moment. He has been ringing me and making threats – the police won’t do anything until things get really bad and I don’t know what to do.”

WHAT’S NEXT FOR CHILDLINE?
In recognition of these issues, ChildLine has introduced a new primary concern category of teenage intimate partner abuse to help us further explore abusive teenage relationships. We have also expanded the pregnancy category to ‘pregnancy and parenting’ in order to better understand the difficulties young people have in coping with being a parent.
Last year, ChildLine answered 98 per cent of calls, and responded to 84 per cent of online chats.
ChildLine counsellors carried out 325,471 in depth sessions with children and young people in 2011/12. This is 50,000 (18 per cent) more than the previous year.
The use of our online channels has soared, with an increase of more than 105 per cent* in the number of online chats taking place between children and ChildLine counsellors.

The ChildLine website received 1.85 million visits in 2011/12, up 36 per cent from 2010/11. There were 84,834 registrations to the website in 2011/12, taking total registered users to over 188,084. This is 82 per cent more than in March 2011.
217,500 online chats requested – up 62 per cent from the previous year.
183,000 online chats took place between children and ChildLine counsellors – an increase of more than 100 per cent from the previous year.
Counselling over email has risen by 76 per cent* – from 28,000 sessions in 2010/11 to 49,000 in 2011/12.
Message boards posts, which are sources of child-to-child peer support, increased by 47 per cent.

*Based on answered and all figures have been rounded.
GENDER

Girls, boys and the unknowns

Due to the increased popularity of online channels, a large percentage of counselling takes place with young people whose gender remains unidentified. There has been a 19 per cent increase in the number of counselling sessions where the gender was unknown.

From those young people who do tell us their gender, we can see that we receive more contacts from girls than boys. 167,371 (51 per cent) sessions were with girls, 65,794 (20 per cent) with boys and 92,306 (28 per cent) where the gender wasn’t identified.

Among girls, the largest increase in reasons for contacting ChildLine were self-harm (a 92 per cent increase), health (65 per cent), school and education (63 per cent), suicide (63 per cent) and being in care (59 per cent).

For boys, some of the biggest increases in reasons for contacting ChildLine included concerns about committing an offence (51 per cent), drug abuse (41 per cent), health issues (35 per cent) and self-harm (30 per cent).

Where the gender was unknown the largest increases were for health (58 per cent), self-harm (46 per cent), school and education (42 per cent), running away (35 per cent) and partner relationships (30 per cent).

Some of the primary concerns for young people whose gender was unknown saw larger proportional increases than the overall increases in counselling sessions. For example, counselling interactions about running away increased by 35 per cent among those who didn’t provide their gender against a 9 per cent increase overall. Similarly, calls regarding sexuality increased by 20 per cent against an overall increase of 7 per cent.

This could indicate that children and young people are more likely to want to keep their anonymity when speaking about these particular concerns.
WHY?
We have spent the last 18 months transforming our operations to make efficiencies that have enabled us to improve our ability to answer all calls from children and young people.
Because we are now able to help children online, as well as by phone, young people who may have felt too fearful or ashamed to speak about their problems, are able to contact us and feel in control of their anonymity.
They feel more confident to describe, for instance, suicidal thoughts or self-harm, without actually having to speak about them. Perhaps most importantly, the young person is able to choose how to contact ChildLine – the channel of their preference, at a time that suits them. This has increased confidence among children and young people which has driven up the number of contacts they make.

WHAT’S NEXT FOR CHILDLINE?
ChildLine will need to maintain high answer rates as demand for online interactions rises. We will focus on increasing the number of ChildLine volunteers to ensure we have the resources available to respond to children and young people who may contact us at any time of day.
Children and young people have told us they want access to self support and follow up information as well as direct intervention. In the next year, through our website, we will increase the resources available to young people about high-risk topics as well as working to reach isolated and vulnerable groups of children such as those living in care.
As with all helplines, there is a higher number of girls contacting ChildLine than boys. This has had a significant impact on the rise in topics such as self-harm (which rose by 68 per cent) and suicide (39 per cent). As well as directly supporting the young people who contact us, ChildLine will continue to raise awareness of these issues through the targeted use of digital channels. We will provide multi-media information, self-help tools and peer support through our message boards.
We are working on attracting more boys to the service and will continue to use focus groups and targeted communications to do this.
ChildLine will only refer a case to an external agency – the police or social services, for example – without the child’s consent if:

* we think the child’s life or someone else’s life is in immediate danger
* the child is being hurt by someone who has a position of trust and works with other children, such as a teacher or policeman
* a child tells us that they have been hurting another person which makes us worried about that person’s safety.

If a child asks for support and we know an agency can and will provide it we will progress a referral.

2011/12 saw a 33 per cent increase in the total number of referrals made by ChildLine (1,827 compared to 1,373 in 2010/11).

Suicide was the main reason for ChildLine having to refer children to external agencies. Referrals for this topic account for 53 per cent of the total referrals made in 2011/12. In 2010/11 it accounted for 41 per cent of the total.

Although suicide is the primary reason for referrals, and represents a 396 increase on the previous year (jumping from 566 referrals in 2010/11 to 962 in 2011/12), self-harm is also a big concern.

There was a **100 per cent increase in referrals relating to self-harm** – up from 32 to 64.
## TOP 10 REFERRALS BY PRIMARY CONCERN

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PRIMARY CONCERN</th>
<th>2011/12</th>
<th>2010/11</th>
<th>% CHANGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Suicide</td>
<td>962</td>
<td>566</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical abuse</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual abuse</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Runaway</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>-14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-harm</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abuser</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homelessness</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>-43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family relationship</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>-5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk of abuse</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neglect</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total referrals</td>
<td>1,827</td>
<td>1,373</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Total referrals sum is the total referrals overall not the sum of the Top 10.

64 per cent of referrals were made to the police, 18 per cent to children’s services and 18 per cent to other agencies, such as ambulance and CEOP. This ratio has stayed similar to the previous year.

In 2011/12 we saw a slight increase in the percentage of referrals to other agencies made without the child giving consent. 61 per cent were made without the child’s consent, 39 per cent with their consent (compared to 59 per cent and 41 per cent respectively in 2010/11).
Wherever we have used quotes from young people, names and potentially identifying details have been changed to protect their identity. These quotes are created from real ChildLine contacts but are not necessarily direct quotes from an individual young person.

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 confidentially 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 per year on 0800 1111 and at www.childline.org.uk.

For any enquiries please contact us at ChildlineBusinessSupportTeam@nspcc.org.uk

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