



Child sexual abuse helpline at its busiest after ten years Statistics show an average year-on-year increase in calls of 21%

December 19, 2012: Calls to the child sexual abuse Helpline, Stop it Now! have reached record levels after ten years of operation. Child protection charity the Lucy Faithfull Foundation reveals the figures today (December 19) which show call numbers rise year-on-year at an average rate of 21%. In the last 2 years alone call numbers rose 43% from 3,513 in 2009/2010 to 5,034 in 2011/2012.

Over the decade experienced operators have dealt with more than thirty thousand contacts (30,318 calls/emails) and helped over 14 thousand people protect a child/children (14,008 callers). When looking at the whole ten year period a 291% increase in call numbers is seen (1,287 in 2003/2004 compared to 5,034 in 2011/2012 – year 2 compared to year ten*). Currently, the Helpline is taking an average of 500 calls a month.

The Helpline was set up in November 2002 by the child protection charity the Lucy Faithfull Foundation to give adults a safe and confidential place to talk about child sexual abuse concerns. This includes people with concerns about their own thoughts or behaviour towards children.

Callers to the Helpline range from protective adults, including mothers and fathers, calling with concerns about someone they know, to men and women concerned that they themselves may be at risk of harming a child, and parents and carers of children and young people with worrying sexual behaviour. Other people contacting the Helpline include parents worried about a child who may have been abused, professionals looking for advice and adult survivors of sexual abuse.

Director of Stop it Now! UK and Ireland Donald Findlater said:

‘The range of issues callers talk to us about is vast. But what each caller has in common is the desire to protect a child from harmful sexual behaviour. All callers are given advice and a number of actions they can take immediately to protect a child. These can range from reporting concerns to police or children’s services to implementing child protection measures within the home or workplace. In all cases the agreed actions look to ensure that one or more children are kept safe from abuse.

‘Whilst we do not always know what happened next, it is encouraging that 50% of people call back to confirm the actions they took and what happened as a result, and then to discuss the next steps they might take. In many cases this is evidence of adults taking action to protect a child, whether police and children’s services are involved or not.’

38% of callers to the Helpline over the decade were from adult abusers and those at risk of abusing (5,330 callers). 27% of people who call were family and friends concerned about an adult displaying concerning behaviour towards a child (3,756 callers) and 6% of callers were parents and carers concerned about a child or young person with worrying sexual behaviour (815 callers). Additional callers included adults concerned about a child being abused (712 callers), professionals calling for case advice (1,864 callers) and adult survivors of sexual abuse (567 callers).

Donald Findlater added:

‘This Helpline data, coupled with the current unprecedented public debate about child sexual abuse reminds us all that abused children do not typically report abuse. It is surely for all adults to play their part in keeping children safe – knowing the signs to look out for, talking through any concerns they have and crucially, taking action to help protect a child.

‘Most callers to Stop it Now! are not in touch with police or social workers when they call but each and every one of them can take action that protects a child. The Helpline’s job is to help and support them to do just that.’

Comments from Helpline callers:

A man who had inappropriately touched 3 teenage girls:

‘I know I have to change, and I will’

A man arrested for downloading indecent images of children:

‘If I had had someone to talk to before, I don’t think it would have come to this’

A woman concerned about her husband’s internet use:

‘I can’t think of anyone else I can trust to talk about this to. Only you. You have helped me to be more determined to do something I knew I should do’

A young man whose father had been arrested for internet offending:

‘So helpful to be able to speak to someone, I will get my father to call you as well’

Youth worker calling for advice:

‘You have been ridiculously helpful’

-Ends-

Notes to editors:

* Figures taken from full financial years 2003/2004 – 2011/2012 as Helpline started June 2002 not allowing for a full 2002/2003 comparison. Figures for June 2002-March 31 2003 = 370.

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1. Call examples x2

Call from Potential Abuser / Internet Offender

Ben, a 22 year old university student called the Helpline with concerns about his feelings towards young adolescent boys. He said that he had been aware of being sexually interested in young males for a number of years although he did not consider himself to be gay. He has had several relationships with women of his own age. He split up with his last girlfriend five months ago. Since then he reported increased internet use and admitted accessing indecent images of children on a daily basis.

He said he has never sought out contact with any of the boys but he does fantasise and masturbate to the images. Ben confirmed that he knew what he was doing was wrong and said he wanted some help and guidance as to how he could manage his behaviour. He said he was terrified of being caught by the police and how any conviction would affect him.

Ben was not in direct contact with children or vulnerable adults, however he was aware that he was involved in abusive and illegal behaviour and was very motivated to take action to address his problems.

Discussion/Advice:

- We reassured Ben that he had contacted the right place and that we would provide confidential support, advice and information to help him
- We considered ways in which Ben could modify his behaviour to avoid potentially risky situations, specifically placing parameters around his use of the internet to reduce his temptation to access illegal images
- To not place himself in situations where he could be left alone with a child or young person
- To use offline resources such as adult magazines should he wish to continue to access legal pornography
- We recommended a number of books and online resources to enable him to consider ways to curb his illegal online behaviour
- We suggested that a Lucy Faithfull Foundation practitioner may be able to help him gain further understanding of his behaviour and what function this was serving
- We encouraged him to keep busy and active as a distraction

Actions agreed with Ben:

- Arranged a time for him to speak to a practitioner to discuss his behaviour and to look at strategies he could employ to reduce his risk of online offending
- To access CROGA (self-help website) and Cybersex Unhooked (self-help workbook)
- To restrict the amount of time he spends on the internet and not to be drawn into looking at illegal images
- Consider the use of computer monitoring software that helps identify illegal or risky online behaviour

Outcome:

Ben spoke with a Lucy Faithfull Foundation practitioner over the phone and confirmed that he had accessed the recommended resources and that he was finding them very useful. He said that since calling he had managed the temptation to look at illegal images but acknowledged this had not been easy.

Discussions with the practitioners focused on exploring fantasy management techniques and the role of sexual fantasy in his life. His methods for dealing with his feelings, problems and issues was talked about and how his online behaviour could be linked to escapism. Practical strategies were also discussed and Ben was encouraged to consider replacing the time spent on his computer with other hobbies to keep himself occupied and increase his engagement in safe behaviour and activities. Ben was extremely positive during the call. He confirmed he would contact the Helpline immediately for support should he feel that he may relapse.

Call from an adult concerned about a child displaying concerning behaviour

Richard and his wife Claire have two children, Steven, 12, and Karen, 7 (not biological siblings, Steven was from an earlier marriage). Steven has learning difficulties and some problems at school with peers.

Richard called the Helpline and told us he had found both children in Steven's bedroom in a state of undress and Steven was touching Karen's bottom. Steven and Karen said they were just playing doctors and nurses. They were spoken to about what was appropriate play/touching and what was not. They agreed not to play in each other's bedrooms.

Following this, Richard discovered that Steven had pictures on his phone of Karen touching his penis. At the point of his first call, Richard had not yet discussed what he had found with Steven.

Discussion/Advice

- We were clear with Richard that Steven's on-going risk to Karen (and perhaps other children he could gain access to) must be taken seriously, given the extent and nature of Steven's harmful sexual behaviour.
- We discussed the importance of implementing immediate child protection measures in order to protect Karen.
- At this point Karen is in need of clear, reassuring messages from both parents that what Steven did was wrong and that they will not allow him to do it again. They should watch for changes in her demeanour or behaviour which might indicate distress.
- We advised that Steven needed to know that his parents knew what he had been doing, that it was wrong and harmful to his sister, and that they would not allow him to do it again. Then reassure him of their on-going love.
- We discussed the options available to them, explaining the likely implications of each course of action. Richard was keen to seek help for Steven but concerned about the legal consequences of involving the authorities.
- Despite our view that Steven's behaviour went well beyond sexual exploration and curiosity, and would probably need professional intervention, Richard and Claire were adamant they would not involve the statutory services unless absolutely necessary because they would feel they were letting their son down if they did not try to resolve matters themselves.

Actions agreed with Richard:

- Implement immediate child protection measures, including never leaving Steven alone with children and close supervision of both him and Karen
- Continue to monitor the behaviour and demeanour of both children for signs of distress or other problems
- Monitor all computers/mobile devices enabling parental controls and restrictions of use
- Have a specialist Lucy Faithfull Foundation practitioner call-back and, in the meantime, either parent to call the Helpline for advice and support whenever necessary, particularly if there are problems involving the children

Outcome:

Richard and Claire had six further calls with two senior Lucy Faithfull Foundation practitioners. They were keen to receive practical advice and would always act on it; they continued to strive to be part of their own solution in the belief that this was best for their children. A face-to-face meeting was suggested, which they were in favour of, but they decided against when it was explained that the conditions for such a meeting would require local child protection police to be informed of it taking place. They did not want to give up their anonymity.

Contact continued over the next 3-months. Acting on advice given, the parents did a lot of work with the children. Steven was asked to write a letter of apology to Karen, which he did. Karen was showing no signs of distress. Richard spent more one-to-one time with Steven in shared activities and encouraged him to engage socially with friends of his age. They spoke to the school regarding Steven's learning difficulties to ensure he was getting all the support and assistance he needed to keep up with his peers.

Richard took Steven to their GP to ask for a referral to a young peoples' counselling service, to help him address issues he had been having with peers at school, which was agreed. He was aware that during counselling Steven's concerning behaviour may be disclosed, but he and Claire were not prepared to tell Steven to lie, saying that they would deal with whatever may happen. Richard stated that he and Claire would keep in touch with the Helpline and call immediately if they had any further concerns.

2. About Stop it Now!

The Stop it Now! Helpline is part of Stop it Now! UK and Ireland. The National campaign aims to prevent child sexual abuse by increasing public awareness and empowering people to act responsibly to protect children. Stop it Now! believes that it is the responsibility of all adults to take positive action to prevent the sexual abuse of children. Stop it Now! is an alliance of leading children's charities including the NSPCC, Action for Children, Children England and The National Association of People Abused in Childhood, working with the government and child protection agencies, to promote public education and prevent child sexual abuse. The Stop it Now! helpline has been operating since 2002 and aims to prevent child abuse by encouraging abusers and potential abusers to seek help and by giving adults the information they need to protect children safely. The helpline is funded by the Ministry of Justice and the Lucy Faithfull Foundation.

www.stopitnow.org.uk

3. About the Lucy Faithfull Foundation

Named after its founder, Baroness Lucy Faithfull of Wolvercote, the Foundation is the only UK-wide child protection charity dedicated solely to reducing the risk of children being sexually abused. Expert staff work with entire families that have been affected by abuse including: adult male and female sexual abusers; young people with inappropriate sexual behaviours; victims of abuse and other family members. In 2002 the Foundation established the prevention campaign, Stop it Now! UK and Ireland. The Foundation also runs a website specifically for parents and carers; www.parentsprotect.co.uk, designed to raise awareness of child sexual abuse and provide positive messages about what parents, carers and other adults can do to protect children.

www.lucyfaithfull.org.uk

4. About the Helpline:

Principal target groups:

- Adult abusers and those at risk of abusing: to encourage them to recognise their behaviour as abusive or potentially abusive and to seek help to change
- Family and friends concerned about an adult displaying worrying sexual thoughts or behaviour towards a child: to encourage them to recognise the signs of abusive behaviour in those close to them and to seek advice about what action to take
- Parents and carers concerned about a child or young person with worrying sexual behaviour: to encourage them to recognise the signs of concerning or abusive behaviour and to seek advice about what positive action they can take

Additional groups included due to caller demand:

- Adults concerned about a child or young person who may have been abused

- Professionals calling for case advice
- Adult survivors of child sexual abuse

The Helpline's main objectives are to:

- Assist callers to identify the nature and seriousness of their concerns
- Provide information and support to callers to help them clarify their thinking
- Explore options available, including referral to our own follow-up service or to another agency
- Advise callers about further actions to consider
- Agree one or more protective actions the caller will take