

ChildLine Online Issues Report 2012-13

Aims

This research highlight provides an overview of the trends and key issues children and young people have contacted ChildLine about when they have experienced a problem online. It highlights the key areas of online abuse and safety which have increased, and examine the age and gender profiles of these contacts.

Key Findings

Online Abuse & Safety Issues

- During 2012-13, ChildLine carried out over 10,600 counselling sessions where young people talked about a problem they had experienced online. This is a 65% increase compared to 2011-12. The main issues young people talked to ChildLine counsellors about were cyberbullying, online sexual abuse, sexting, social networking and online safety issues.

Cyberbullying

- During 2012-13, cyberbullying concerns were mentioned by young people in 4,507 counselling sessions - an increase of 87% when compared to 2011-12. This is a sharp rise considering there was a 4% decline in overall bullying counselling.
- Cyberbullying tended to affect a slightly older age group when compared to bullying concerns overall during 2012-13. During this year, 84% of cyberbullying counselling was with 12-18 year olds and only 16% was with those aged 11 and under. For overall bullying counselling, 72% was with 12-18 year olds and 28% was with those aged 11 and under.
- Where bullying occurred over the internet, the issues young people talked about included harassment, people hacking into their personal accounts, people sending them threats and inappropriate pictures being posted online. During 2012-13, ChildLine carried out almost 1,100 counselling sessions with young people who specifically mentioned issues with social networks, online chat or gaming sites.
- Mobile phone devices were also frequently used by cyber bullies to target young people. Young people mentioned being bombarded with threatening texts and picture messages with inappropriate content.

Online Sexual Abuse

- Sexual abuse online was talked about by young people in over 1,061 counselling interactions during 2012-13. In 475 of these counselling sessions, young people suggested they had been exposed to sexually explicit images or pornography with many young people telling ChildLine they had been a victim of webcam abuse.
- Online grooming was another form of sexual abuse talked about by young people during counselling. ChildLine carried out 327 counselling sessions about grooming/exploitation last year and many of these young people told ChildLine they had met the perpetrator online.
- Perpetrators used the internet to gain access and build up trust with young people often by paying compliments and boosting their self-esteem. They then used their relationship to get them to share sexual material online. In addition to this, vulnerable victims were sometimes convinced that the relationship they had struck up with an online stranger was legitimate and became at risk of face to face sexual abuse.

Sexting

- During 2012-13, Sexting was talked about in 351 counselling sessions with children and young people – an increase of 28% from 2011-12. Young people described sexting both peers, people who they knew and also strangers who they had met online.
- During ChildLine counselling, some young people showed an understanding of the concept, directly referring to 'sexting' and 'sexts', whereas others explained the act of sexting by talking about sharing sexual images and pictures.
- There were a greater number of ChildLine counselling sessions with girls about sexting when compared with boys (9:1 girl boy ratio) during 2012-13. Young people aged 12-15 were the most represented ages counselled accounting for over 75% of sexting counselling.
- ChildLine counselled many young people who had sent messages to their partners or online contacts who they believed they could trust. Once they had shared pictures, they felt out of control and wished they could reverse what had happened in the fear that they would be shown to other people.
- Where the young person discovered their sexts had been shared with others, young people were devastated and often experienced bullying and ridicule from their peers leaving them feeling extremely distressed and in some cases suicidal.

Methodology

ChildLine has a variety of codes which can be applied to counselling sessions in order to provide insight into the issues children and young people experience online. Once counselling sessions are completed, the interaction is coded with a number of different concerns depending on the issues the young person has raised. This allows ChildLine to statistically report on the changing trends and issues young people have spoken to us about each year. Any counselling sessions which are testing or abusive in nature, silent/empty or unfocused are excluded from the statistics and therefore the information we provide is only for genuine counselling sessions. The codes also go through a quality assurance process so we are able to maintain a high level of reliability in our statistics. ChildLine has introduced a number of online related codes in recent years in response to the growing use of the internet and mobile phones. This report is based on the information captured by these codes.

Background

ChildLine is the UK's free, confidential helpline dedicated to children and young people. At ChildLine bases around the UK, trained volunteers are on hand to provide advice and support 24 hours a day. Children can get in touch either by phone on 0800 1111, or online provided through live 1-2-1 chats and email which are accessed from the ChildLine website. Since ChildLine was launched in 1986, ChildLine has helped over 3.2million children and young people and over the last year alone, there were almost 290,000 counselling interactions where young people received in-depth support. This year, for the first time ever, more counselling sessions took place online than via the phone.

Source ChildLine Business Support Team - Information

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