

ask the children



nsw commission for
children & young people

Children and young people speak about getting help

In a joint initiative, the NSW Commission for Children and Young People and the Kids Help Line interviewed 195 children and young people to find out whom they approach for support when they have problems, and the factors that encourage or deter them from seeking help.



Who did we speak with?

A telephone survey was conducted with 195 children and young people aged 6-18 years who had previously contacted the Kids Help Line.

When children and young people have a problem where do they go?

Most of the children and young people we interviewed (90%) said they believed they had adequate people or support in their lives to assist with problems and concerns.

The majority (70%) said they go to their parents – mostly their mothers – if they have a problem.

A third nominated friends as a key source of support. Similar numbers also nominated the Kids Help Line.

One in five said they turn to school staff such as teachers, counsellors and principals.

What encourages children and young people to seek help?

Feeling safe and comfortable are the most important determinates that encourages children and young people to seek help. This includes feeling safe to approach the support person, knowing they care, or won't judge or criticise.

It is important to children and young people that their privacy is respected and confidentiality ensured.

'Being listened to' was raised as the next most important factor, followed by knowing the person could offer good advice and help solve the problem.

What prevents children and young people from seeking help?

For more than half of the children and young people we spoke with, feeling uncomfortable or unsafe prevented them from seeking help. This includes feeling embarrassed, scared, or nervous.

Others indicated they would not seek help because they worry about negative consequences – such as getting in trouble.

A perception that no one is available also prevents children and young people from seeking help when they need it.

Different help for different problems

Most of the children and young people (74%) said who they turn to depends on the nature of the problem.

Family problems and conflict are an important issue for young people. They are unlikely to seek help from their parents in this case. They are most likely to turn to other family members, the Kids Help Line or friends for help.

For problems and conflicts with friends, children and young people are likely to turn to other friends and parents.

For school problems or problems at school, school staff are most often turned to, followed by parents.

Another area of concern is relationship problems, for which more than half turn to their parents for help.

Kids Help Line is Australia's free, 24 hour phone and online counselling service for children and young people aged between 5 and 18.

More information about Kids Help Line can be found at www.kidshelp.com.au or call 1800 55 1800.

When are children young people disconnected from help?

More than half of the children and young people we asked said they have felt cut off from help at some stage.

When this happened, most said they kept it to themselves and tried to cope alone. For some, this meant developing strategies to address the problem. Others adopted avoidance strategies such as 'trying not to think about it'.

Being cut off from help evoked strong emotions of anger, sadness, being 'upset'.

Importantly, around one in five (18%) of those who felt cut off from help at some stage, said their problems had become worse.

Where do children and young people feel unsafe or unwelcome?

The most common place where children and young people feel unsafe is on the streets at night. Other unsafe places are public places such as parks, bus stops, train stations and shops. A small proportion (5%) said school is an unsafe or unwelcome place.

People who are seen as the most unsafe are drug dealers and alcoholics, 'strange' people, and gangs. A small number (6%) said an unsafe person is someone they know or see regularly eg 'stepdad', 'man at daycare'.

More than a third of the children or young people we spoke with said there are no places or times they feel unsafe or unwelcome in their communities.

Where do children and young people feel safe or welcome?

Most children and young people we spoke with (85%) said there were some places or people in their communities that made them feel safe and welcome.

'Home' was identified as the most safe or welcoming place. Other safe places are public places, houses of family members, friends' houses, and clubs. Ten percent nominated school as a safe or welcoming place.

Around 20% said they felt safe around family members and friends, followed by adults they know, police or security guards, neighbours, and teachers.

Parents the key to help and support

Most children and young people in NSW have people in their lives that can provide help and support when they have concerns or problems. The most common support is parents, followed by friends and school staff.

The qualities that children and young people describe as helpful are feeling comfortable and safe. Conversely, feeling unsafe or uncomfortable is the most common cause that turns children and young people away from seeking help.

Their choice of who to speak with is also influenced by the nature of the problem or issue, the experience of the person, and their ability to provide good advice and help solve the problem.

Most children and young people said there were times when they felt cut off from people who can help. At these times, they would most likely keep things to themselves, and experience an ongoing problem or concern.

Most children and young people feel there are safe places in their communities, and 'safe' people for them to turn to. The most common safe place is 'home' and the most common unsafe places are streets and public spaces.