

Child sex offenders get help to stop abuse

How the big society is protecting children from sexual abuse.

A new report published today (December 2, 2010) shows that some child sexual abusers can and do seek help to manage their thoughts and behaviour so as not to harm a child. The Stop it Now! Helpline report (June 2005 – December 2009) shows that the Helpline received 11,975 calls from 5,634 callers who were looking for information, advice and support in connection with child sexual abuse issues. **(See notes to editors for regional figures).**

The child protection confidential freephone Helpline is for adults who need advice on all matters relating to child sexual abuse – with target groups including abusers and potential abusers concerned about their own thoughts or behaviour, those worried about the behaviour of another adult, child or young person and professionals needing case advice.

Over 50% of calls were made by adults concerned about their own thoughts or behaviour towards children, 25% were made by adults concerned about another adult and 4% were made by adults concerned about the sexual behaviour of a child or young person. Other calls were from professionals (8%) and survivors of child sexual abuse (4%).

In most cases the caller had not had any contact with any child protection agency at the time of calling but wanted to take action to protect a child. The Helpline operator listens, encourages, supports and agrees one or more actions for the caller to take immediately. In some cases this leads to contact with statutory agencies such as the Police or Children's Services. In all cases the agreed actions look to ensure that one or more children are kept safe from sexual abuse.

Use of the Helpline has increased steadily over the years, with 1834 calls made in 2005 compared with 3182 in 2009. The value of the service is demonstrated by callers making repeat calls to help address on-going issues; adults concerned about their own behaviour call on average three times each, those concerned about another adult or young person call on average twice. In addition, many decide to give up their anonymity and come forward for face-to-face help.

One of the largest increases in calls has been from those concerned about their own behaviour on the Internet. In 2009 the Helpline received 1259 calls from this group compared with 267 in 2005 – a four-fold increase – demonstrating that the Internet is a cause of concern for a growing number of callers.

Director of Stop it Now! UK and Ireland and Director of Research and Development, Lucy Faithfull Foundation, Donald Findlater, said:

“Telephone helplines for children are a key part of child protection services. However, it is ultimately the responsibility of adults to protect children from abuse and helplines for concerned adults are a powerful means of protection and prevention.

“Many people who contact the Stop it Now! Helpline are not in contact with agencies or the authorities but want to protect children. To do this they need advice, support and information. This is the ‘Big Society’ at work.

“Current public feeling about child sexual abuse, child abusers and the continuous headlines in the media do little to make children safe. They imply that child sexual abuse is inevitable and that the only response to the problem is to identify abusers after they have offended and punish them. But child sexual abuse is not inevitable, it is preventable. We need all adults to develop the skills and knowledge they need to play their part in keeping children safe.

“It’s easy to talk tough about known offenders. But talking tough is not solving the problem. At best, the authorities deal with only 25% of abuse. Responding to offenders after the abuse has taken place does not impact on those not reported or convicted. We need a range of solutions and a broader vision to tackle this problem.

“One of the key findings from our report is that only 4% of calls were made by adults concerned about a child or young person. Yet research suggests that one third of all offences are committed by those under the age of 18. Parents need to be able to pay attention to their children’s behaviour, recognise issues when they arise and be confident enough to take action. If it goes unaddressed, there could be disastrous consequences for the child and other children down the road.”

Key findings from the report:

Adults concerned about their own behaviour – Summary

- Year-on-year the number of calls from this group increased substantially and almost doubled over the period of the report (304 in 2005 and 584 in 2009). 98% (1921) of these callers were men who made 5925 calls to the helpline. 2 per cent were women who made 111 calls to the Helpline.
- The most notable increase was from people who had offended on the Internet. In 2009 the Helpline received 1259 calls from Internet offenders, compared to 267 in 2005.

Adults concerned about their own behaviour – offline

- 804 callers were abusers or potential abusers, with behaviour or concerns unrelated to the Internet. They made 1916 calls to the Helpline.
- 436 of these had previously abused one or more children and wanted help to manage their behaviour. 368 had not yet abused a child but were troubled by their sexual thoughts and wanted help to manage their behaviour.
- 81% of offline abusers or potential abusers had not been arrested and were not in contact with the authorities prior to calling the Helpline.

Adults concerned about their own behaviour – online

- 1156 people had concerns about their behaviour on the Internet. They made 4071 calls to the Helpline.
- This group of callers increased four fold over the period of the report. (In 2009 the Helpline received 1259 calls from adults concerned about their own behaviour on the Internet compared to 267 in 2005).
- 1080 callers had already committed offences on the Internet. 15% (162) of these callers were not in contact with the police but wanted advice about ways of combating their illegal behaviour.

Family and friends concerned about another adult’s behaviour

- 1497 people contacted the Helpline because they were worried about another adults behaviour. They made 3013 calls.
- The volume of calls from this group has steadily increased with 846 calls received in 2009 compared to 506 in 2005.
- 80% of callers were women.
- 89% stated their relationship to the person of concern. Partners (35%), Parents (18%) and ex-partners (9%) made the highest number of calls in this group.

Parents and carers concerned about a child or young person’s sexual behaviour

- 311 people contact the Helpline because they were worried about the sexual behaviour of a child or young person. They made 533 calls.
- The majority of callers were parents concerned about their child. Other callers included carers or close family members, teachers, neighbours and child minders.
- 79% of these callers were women.

- In 2009, 76% (74) callers were not in contact with any child protection agency, statutory or voluntary at the time of calling.

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

- 332 people called the Helpline because they were worried a child may have been abused. They made 550 calls.
- We estimate that over half called with concerns that the child was being sexually abused by another child (52%, 173 callers, based on a 15% sample of callers in this category).

Professionals

- 862 professionals called the Helpline. They made 974 calls.
- Most callers were from Children's Services or Health. Social workers were seeking advice when working with families who had been affected by child sexual abuse. Callers from the Health Service included GPs, mental health workers, psychotherapists and those providing services to people with drug or alcohol issues. Many called because the people they were working with had disclosed that they had committed a sexual offence or were concerned about their thoughts or behaviour towards children.

Adult survivors

- 316 survivors called the Helpline. They called 406 times.
- 63% were women whilst 37% were men.
- This group included those who needed to talk about their own experiences of being abused and to gain access to survivor services. Others were concerned that the person who abused them might still pose a risk to children.
- 5% (16) of callers had suffered abusive experiences in their past and were now struggling with inappropriate thoughts towards children.

Findings demonstrate that:

- Some individuals who have sexually abused a child want help in managing their behaviour.
- Some people recognise their thoughts about and behaviour towards children as potentially harmful and will seek help to manage them.
- Some adults are able to recognise inappropriate sexual behaviours and attitudes in those close to them and will seek help and support in protecting children and holding other adults accountable for their behaviour.
- With accurate information and support, adults can be effective agents of prevention within their family and wider community.
- Some adults are able to recognise inappropriate or harmful sexual behaviour in children and young people and they will seek help to address this.
- The Internet has become a major vehicle for harmful behaviour by adults, but it is also a place where some offenders and those close to them will seek help to ensure responsible online behaviour in the future.
- Where a sexual offence may have been committed or a child may be at risk, anxiety about repercussions, for themselves and loved ones, causes many people not to report concerns or seek help from relevant agencies.

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Notes to Editors – This release is embargoed until Thursday, December 2

To receive an embargoed copy of the report and summary, a further breakdown of regional figures, request interviews and a range of case studies please contact

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1. The Stop it Now! Helpline report 2005-2009 will be published on Thursday, December 2nd and coincides with the Centenary Celebration of the life of Baroness Lucy Faithfull of Wolvercote. A celebratory event will take place to mark both occasions. Baroness Faithfull's work protected thousands of children while supporting abusers to live offence-free lives.

2. Regional Figures. Further detailed breakdowns are available from Deborah Denis (contact above).

Region	Number of new callers	% of all new callers
South East	1394	25%
Not Given	998	18%
London	520	9%
South West	501	9%
West Midlands	416	7%
East Midlands	391	7%
North West	332	6%
North East	231	4%
Yorkshire and Humberside	222	4%
East of England	200	4%
Scotland	146	3%
Wales	137	2%
N. Ireland	77	1%
S. Ireland	33	1%
European	27	0%
Outside Europe	8	0%
TOTAL	5634	100%

3. The Stop it Now! Helpline takes calls from adult abusers and those at risk of abusing; family and friends concerned about an adult displaying worrying sexual thoughts or behaviour towards children; parents and carers concerned about a child or young person with worrying sexual behaviour; adults concerned about a child or young person who may have been abused; professionals calling for case advice and adults 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 and agree one or more protective actions the caller will take. www.stopitnow.org.uk

4. Stop it Now! UK and Ireland 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, 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 Stop it Now! Helpline is funded by the Public Protection and Mental Health Group in the National Offender Management Service of the Ministry of Justice, Lucy Faithfull Foundation, charitable trusts and donors. The England campaign is supported by the Department of Education. The Stop it Now! campaigns in Wales and Scotland are supported by the Welsh Assembly Government and the Scottish Government respectively. www.stopitnow.org.uk.

5. Named after its founder, Baroness Lucy Faithfull of Wolvercote, the Lucy Faithfull Foundation is a child protection charity operating UK-wide and specialising in safeguarding children from sexual abuse. The Foundation's policy is to collaborate with individuals and agencies internationally to develop a more child sensitive and offender aware culture in our societies. The Foundation contributes to legislation and to policy and procedure reviews concerned with safeguarding children in faith communities, in schools, in leisure facilities, on the Internet and living away from home. It also manages the national campaign, Stop it Now! UK and Ireland. www.lucyfaithfull.org.uk