

Purpose of the Starter Kit

The Child Helpline Starter Kit is intended for professionals, government representatives and INGO/NGO workers who are in the process of establishing, or are exploring setting up, a child helpline. It can also be used by donors, government and humanitarian coordination groups' representatives who wish to better understand the process.

The Starter Kit comprises two parts, highlighting the considerations needed before starting up a helpline, as well as the steps required and the resources available to support that process.

The Starter Kit draws on Child Helpline International's more than 15 years of experience starting up and scaling up child helplines together with our members and partners. To find out more visit: www.childhelplineinternational.org

Key questions before setting up a child helpline

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A HOTLINE AND A HELPLINE?

Both terms are sometimes used interchangeably. However, it is important to distinguish between hotlines, which are primarily used for reporting purposes and sign-posting (although they may also provide some limited advice and information), and child helplines, which generally provide more active support, including active listening / counselling services and referral of self-reported concerns from children and adults, such as cases of violence, abuse and neglect¹.



Child Helpline International's vision is a world where the voices of children and young people are heard and taken into account, and their rights are realised and protected.

IS A NEW CHILD HELPLINE SERVICE NEEDED?

This is an obvious but nevertheless important question. Is there an existing child helpline or Gender-Based Violence (GBV) helpline that can be partnered with and which, through better coordination and assistance, would be able to expand its services in order to refer cases for additional support? Are other actors considering setting up a child helpline service that could be shared or run jointly in order to maximise the use of resources? Is technology, including mobile phones, available and accessible? Is another method of outreach more appropriate where there is low usage of mobile phones? Such methods could include radio or postal services or travelling child helpline caravans/mobile child protection (CP) services or community worker outreach².

IS IT THE RIGHT TIME TO LAUNCH A NEW CHILD HELPLINE?

Setting up a child helpline that will be sustainable requires sufficient time, human and financial resources, as well as careful planning. The onset of a crisis or the heights of a pandemic might not be the best time to consider it. Instead, the focus should be on how an existing service can provide or expand its telephone or online support to suit the current needs. In effect, this means putting in place interim arrangements that in future could lay the ground for a permanent child helpline when it becomes more feasible³.

WHAT RESOURCES ARE NEEDED?

A dedicated coordinator with sufficient knowledge of the local context, political sensitivities and the ability to mobilise and advocate with various stakeholders will be needed to lead the setting up of a child helpline. Ideally, the coordinator should be available for at least one year to be able to oversee the whole process. This in turn will require sufficient financial resources to be secured at the beginning of the process.

Child Helpline Starter Kit

PURPOSE

The Starter Kit is intended for anyone in the process of establishing, or exploring setting up, a child helpline. It can also be used by donors, government and humanitarian coordination groups representatives who wish to better understand this process.



MAP RESOURCES

Map out existing helplines, hotlines and key stakeholders

1

Months 1-5



ASSESS AND COORDINATE

Conduct a feasibility and needs assessment study and coordinate with key stakeholders, including children

2

Months 1-5



DEVELOP BUSINESS PLAN

Initiate a business plan (including resource mobilisation, outreach and communications strategy)

3

Month 5



SECURE A TOLL-FREE NUMBER

Obtain a short, easy to remember 3 or 4-digit number

4

Months 6-8



DEVELOP TOOLS

Identify referral pathways and develop practical tools and SOPs

5

Months 6-10



SET UP INFRASTRUCTURE AND STAFF

Set up a call centre and train counsellors

6

Months 9-13



PROMOTE CHILD HELPLINE

Launch an awareness campaign

7

Months 14-15



LAUNCH YOUR CHILD HELPLINE!

8

Months 14-15



COLLECT DATA

Compile data to identify trends and needs for feed-back

9

Month 14 onwards



CONSOLIDATE AND SCALE-UP

Exchange best practices with peers and consolidate/expand services

10

Month 15 onwards

What are the minimum steps required to build a child helpline?

NOTE: This is a summary of the minimum steps that need to be taken and is therefore not an exhaustive list. The timeline is indicative and will depend on the context and commitment of relevant stakeholders.

1. MAP RESOURCES: MONTHS 1-5

- Map out all existing helplines and hotlines and identify what services they provide, including gaps.
- Map out key stakeholders (e.g. law enforcement operators, community-based organisations, religious and traditional leaders) and conduct a stakeholder analysis.
- **Consider** linkages with sub-national helplines, potential for synergies and scaling up of existing helplines/hotlines (e.g. GBV).

2. ASSESS AND COORDINATE: MONTHS 1-5

- Conduct a feasibility study that includes the analysis of the local and political context, conduct a needs assessment, and identify the possible structure of the child helpline as well as call centre architecture and technological tools and others necessary resources.
- Organise a meeting with key stakeholders to discuss feasibility and referral pathways, and get feedback, including from children⁴, local government representatives, religious and traditional leaders, media and private sector, including social media platforms where relevant.
- **Consider** phone coverage and outreach options, data and general safety protocols that will need to be developed, under which ministry the helpline will be housed in the case of a government-led child helpline, linkages with coordination groups for child protection as well as emergency coordination mechanisms at national and sub-national level, ensure that vulnerable and marginalised groups are consulted.

3. DEVELOP A BUSINESS PLAN: MONTH 5

- Develop a costed business plan that includes clear objectives and timeline, a resource mobilisation, outreach and communication strategy.
- **Consider:** the choice of technology and its future implications (e.g. free software that will need to be upgraded at a cost vs open-source software for data collection and management), sustainable funding sources, acceptability and accessibility of a future or current helpline⁵, as well as how the business plan can be used for advocacy.

4. SECURE A TOLL-FREE NUMBER: MONTHS 6-8

- Ensure that the telecoms regulatory authority (or the department/ministry responsible for telecommunications) and private telecom companies are involved at the initial planning stages of the child helpline.
- Advocate with the regulatory authority or the relevant ministry to designate the child helpline's contact number as an emergency number.
- Advocate with the telecoms sector to operationalise the toll-free number for children to contact the child helpline free of charge that is also free of charge for the child helpline.
- Secure a short, easy to remember 3 or 4-digit number⁶. Check if there is already a harmonised child helpline number being used in your region⁷.
- **Consider:** in most countries, the regulatory authority needs to receive an official written request for a toll-free number, which can be supported by letters of commitment from the private telecom companies. Child Helpline International can also assist in this process⁸.

5. DEVELOP TOOLS: MONTHS 6-10

- Identify referral pathways and protocols for services that the child helpline will provide, and those it cannot.
- Develop a safeguarding policy for the child helpline and data safety protocols, including protocols with regard to the use of social media.
- Develop Standard Operating Procedures ('SOPs') for the operation of the child helpline, including what to do in cases of urgent referral or breaches of confidentiality, and how to operate in extraordinary circumstances such as lockdowns, civil unrest etc.
- Design together with children and young people a logo and name for the child helpline.

- **Consider** developing contingency plans as well as support and development plans for staff. Consult with staff on practical issues that might not have been previously considered (for example, transportation to and from the office at late hours, access to the office for people with special needs).

6. SET UP INFRASTRUCTURE AND STAFF: MONTHS 9-13

- Set up the call centre with necessary infrastructure and materials to operate the child helpline.
- Hire staff and counsellors of all genders and from diverse backgrounds⁹.
- Train counsellors on safeguarding policies, SOPs, minimum standards for child protection, call responses, case management, data collection and the use of the software.
- Identify further training needed in the future.
- **Consider** different levels of knowledge and experience of counsellors, diversity of staff, including languages to ensure that minority and other vulnerable groups (e.g. migrant children) can also access and benefit from the child helpline.

7. PROMOTE THE CHILD HELPLINE: MONTHS 14-15

- Launch an awareness campaign in accordance with the communications strategy, using different medium and languages.
- Advocate with private sector to support the campaign.
- **Consider** relying on the education sector to promote the child helpline as well as child protection partners, including coordination groups in humanitarian situations. Consider a phased campaign beyond the launch of the child helpline with a monitoring system to adjust it as necessary over time.

8. LAUNCH THE CHILD HELPLINE: MONTHS 14-15

- Launch the child helpline officially, ideally under the auspices of the government or a champion.
- **Consider** a soft launch prior to the official launch to pilot, test and adjust the child helpline services over a couple of months. Monitor quality of services and referrals as well as access to the helpline. Consider becoming a member of Child Helpline International in order to benefit from targeted support as well as the experience, knowledge and richness of a diverse network of national child helplines¹⁰.

9. COLLECT DATA: MONTH 14 ONWARDS

- Compile data on each contact received by the child helpline services disaggregated by age, gender, region and type of issues, in order to identify gaps and trends in child protection issues.
- Analyse data and adjust counselling practices as needed, based on identified needs (volume and types of contacts).
- Share trends with relevant partners, including child protection coordination groups in humanitarian contexts.
- **Consider** whether the system you have established is the best for your needs. Identify gaps to improve data collection, including additional training.

10. CONSOLIDATE AND SCALE-UP: MONTH 15 ONWARDS

- Continue reviewing, monitoring and evaluating the child helpline services to adjust and consolidate them in cooperation with other service providers, partners and children/end-users.
- Identify potential for scale-up and/or new services (e.g. web-chat).
- Contribute to national, regional or international efforts to monitor and report on children's rights by continuing to share trends with partners and advocate for children's rights.
- Continue to advocate for adequate resources for the child helpline operation, including in case of emergencies.
- **Consider** participation in peer exchanges with other child helplines, and contribute to the Child Helpline International network by sharing your own experiences.

For additional support or questions, please contact Child Helpline International at: info@childhelplineinternational.org

Available Resources

RESOURCE (CLICK FOR LINK)	YEAR	TYPE*
Guidelines on operating a child helpline in emergency areas	2012	guidelines
Counselling Practice Guide	2009	manual
Child Helplines and Mobile Operators: Working together to protect children's rights	2018	manual
Media collaboration toolkit	2016	toolkit
What happens when you phone a child helpline?	2016	video
Child Helplines and Telecoms: A toolkit to assist your child helpline to advocate for a free of costs telephone number	2012	toolkit
Child Online Protection for Child Helplines	2018	e-learning*
Supporting and responding to forcibly displaced children: Training Module for Child Helpline Counsellor	2017	manual
Technical Note: Child Helplines and the Protection of Children during the COVID-19 Pandemic	2020	guidelines
Non-Discrimination, Social Norms and Accessibility	2019	e-learning*
Inclusive Practice: Children in Migration	2020	e-learning*
Counselling Skills for Child Helplines: Introduction	2021	e-learning*
Counselling Skills for Child Helplines: Good Practices During Emergency Situations	2021	e-learning*
Inclusive Practice: Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression and Sexual Characteristics (SOGIESC)	2019	e-learning*
Inclusive Practice: Gender Toolkit	2015	e-learning*
Data Management	2020	e-learning*

* For eLearning access, please email [Child Helpline International](mailto:membership@childhelplineinternational.org) to discuss membership

FOOTNOTES

¹ Technical Note: Child Helplines and the Protection of Children during the COVID-19 Pandemic, The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, Child Helpline International, Child Protection Area of Responsibility and UNICEF, May 2020, p. 1

² Idem, p. 5

³ Ibidem, p. 5. See e.g. the child helpline AGUIAS 116 in Guinea

⁴ For additional tools on child participation, see compilation of key resources [here](#).

⁵ See [Availability, Accessibility, Acceptability and Quality framework: A tool to identify potential barriers to accessing services in humanitarian settings](#), UNICEF, 2019

⁶ See [E.164 : Guidance with regard to the selection of numbers for helplines for children \(itu.int\)](#)

⁷ E.g. 116 in Africa, 116 111 in Europe, 1098 in South East Asia or 150 in Central Asia.

⁸ Building your Child Helpline, CHI, 2011, p. 48-49

⁹ CHI can provide support on key position to consider and templates for job descriptions.

¹⁰ For more information on becoming a member, send an email to membership@childhelplineinternational.org