

Key takeaways

In 2021 our child helpline members received

13,835,892 contacts

It's important to differentiate between contacts for which a child helpline was able to provide assistance to the caller (**counselling contacts**) and contacts for which it was not due to the nature of the contact (**non-counselling contacts**).

Counselling contacts are situations in which a child helpline was able to provide assistance to the caller.

Non-counselling contacts include (but are not limited to) silent calls, abusive calls, test calls, missed calls and information requests.

10,910,650
non-counselling contacts

2,925,242
counselling contacts

MAIN REASONS FOR CONTACT GLOBALLY

In 2021, the main reason globally for making contact was children and young people's **mental health** (28.9% of all counselling contacts). Specific issues raised during these contacts were emotional distress (fear/anxiety and mood problems), as well as self-destructive tendencies (suicidal thoughts and suicide attempts; self-harming behaviours).

The second main reason for contact was **violence** (23.1%). These contacts frequently related to physical violence, mental/emotional violence or neglect (negligent treatment). Many children were also victims of bullying or sexual violence.

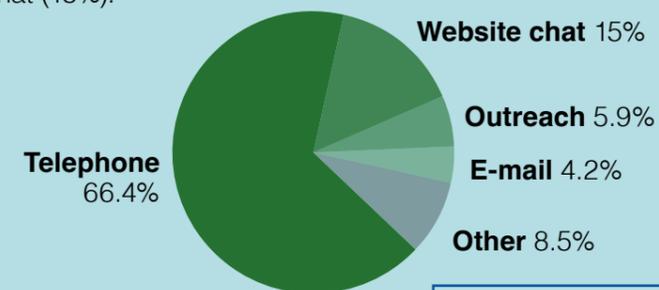
Family relationships were also an important reason, accounting for 11.3% of all contacts, emerging as one of the main reasons for making contact in all five regions.

3 MAIN REASONS FOR CONTACT REGIONALLY

Africa	1. Violence 2. Physical health 3. Peer relationships
Americas & The Caribbean	1. Violence 2. Mental health 3. Family relationships
Asia-Pacific	1. Access to services 2. Violence 3. Mental health
Europe	1. Mental health 2. Violence 3. Family relationships
MENA	1. Violence 2. Mental health 3. Family relationships

METHODS OF CONTACT

Worldwide, **the majority of contacts made with child helplines were by telephone** (66.4%). The next most frequent means of making contact was via website chat (15%).



WHO'S CALLING?

47.8%

of the **contacts made with child helplines came from children and young people themselves**.

The next most frequent callers were adults (40.3%), including those making contact on behalf of a child or young person, and people in a position of responsibility.

WHAT'S BEEN HAPPENING SINCE THE START OF THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC?

There was a

5% increase

in counselling contacts with child helplines between 2020 and 2021. On the other hand, the number of non-counselling contacts **decreased** by 12.5%.

Data based on 80 child helplines who reported for both 2020 and 2021.

Almost 1 in every 3 contacts concerned mental health

Mental health
28.9%

Violence
23.1%

Family relationships
11.3%

All other reasons
36.7%

Mental health

Emotional distress – mood problems	17.6%
Emotional distress – fear and anxiety problems	17.4%
Suicidal thoughts and suicide attempts	17.4%
Self-harming behaviours	7.9%
Concerns about the self	7.8%
All other reasons (including unspecified/other)	31.9%

Violence

Physical violence	24.6%
Mental/emotional violence	19.6%
Neglect (or negligent treatment)	12.9%
Bullying	10.9%
Sexual violence	10.1%
All other reasons (including unspecified/other)	22%

Family relationships

Relationship with caregiver(s)	34.1%
Family health and wellbeing	23.2%
Adoption, fostering and extended family placement	8.8%
Relationship with sibling(s)	8.7%
Unspecified/other	25.2%

Data based on 91 child helplines across 5 regions, unless otherwise specified. Explore the data in more detail in the [Deep Dive into Data](#) section.

Key recommendations

#1 Every child and young person should have free and unrestricted access to child helpline services

Governments and the ICT sector should promote children's rights by supporting child helplines so that they can improve their reach and accessibility to all children and young people. In particular, vulnerable groups of children and young people – and their unique needs and service barriers – need to be accounted for in the push for greater accessibility of child helpline services, ensuring that child helplines are always free of cost, and offer a variety of appropriate contact methods.

Child helplines should be strengthened through investments in infrastructure and new functionalities, offsetting service costs, and research and analysis concerning accessibility. Additional considerations include expanding modes of contact, service languages offered, and hours of operation at child helplines.

Funding and support should be made available to raise awareness of child helplines in a child-friendly manner. This would ensure that children and young people know how to use child helpline services and what they can expect. Promotion of regionally harmonised child helpline numbers has a vital role to play in raising public awareness of child helpline services and easing access for children and young people wherever they may be in the world.

Toll-free status data

We obtained information regarding the toll-free status of our child helpline members (data based on 90 child helplines).

Fixed lines:

Free for the child and for the helpline (56%)
Free for the child but not the helpline (40%)
Not toll-free (2%)

Mobile lines:

Free for the child and for the helpline (48%)
Free for the child but not the helpline (37%)
Not toll-free (7%)

#2 Quality and sustainability of child helplines are crucial to ensuring children's rights

Child helplines require reliable long-term funding to sustain and evolve their operations, and to consistently improve the quality of services offered to children and young people in need of support and protection. Child helplines provide an essential social service to children and young people within national jurisdictions while contributing to the broader realisation of children's rights. Governments should thus provide sources of long-term funding to facilitate high quality and sustainable child helplines. Telecommunication companies and the ICT industry should waive costs where possible.

Child helplines should receive funding and support towards the implementation of good governance practices, effective data collection and analysis, comprehensive training programmes for staff and volunteers interacting with children and youth, and contingency plans to help keep child helplines operational during national emergencies and technological or infrastructural failure, among other needs.

Child Helpline International has developed a robust Quality Assurance Framework for child helplines. Governments and other actors should support child helplines to implement the quality standards, and to monitor and evaluate the broader social service scene available to children and young people as a wider support network. Special support and measures such as trainings are required, so that child helplines worldwide can deal with the large number of these cases appropriately.

Key recommendations

#3 **Child helpline data and youth participation should inform policy and decision-making that affects children and young people's lives**

Every child and young person has the right to be heard, and it is the responsibility of child helplines, governments and other child protection actors to listen to and act upon the views and needs of children and young people. Children's voices should not only play a role in shaping child helpline services, but should inform decision-making at the highest levels. Governments, INGOs and other actors should implement effective child and youth participation practices to ensure that services and policies affecting young people are relevant to their lives and uphold their best interests as enshrined in the UNCRC.

Child Helpline International and child helplines offer a wealth of data on the issues and trends most affecting children and young people in local, regional and international contexts. Given that psychosocial and mental health are among the main reasons for contacting child helplines around the world, governments and policy makers should address children and young people's access to high quality mental health services, or lack thereof. Such valuable data and the insight it provides into the issues affecting children and young people's lives and their rights should not go to waste.

Governments, INGOs and relevant actors should act on children and young people's voices and child helpline data to implement the kinds of evidence-based changes children and young people need in society. They should sign onto and monitor the implementation of international conventions, such as the UNCRC, that protect a favourable policy climate for children's rights and the work of child helplines.

#4 **Structured partnerships are needed to eradicate violence against all children and young people**

The implementation and monitoring of Sustainable Development Goal 16.2 to end the abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against children is the responsibility of all governments and child protection actors. Child helplines play a decisive role in ensuring children's safety as they are frequently the first point of contact for children and young people facing violence, and provide critical counselling services and referrals to the broader child protection network.

Governments, child protection agencies and thematic expert organisations should work with child helplines to build a highly integrated service network that children and young people can depend on.

Structured partnerships are needed to establish clear referral pathways and effective knowledge exchange on topics pertinent to children and young people's lives, and to inform interventions taken to protect children and young people.

Funding should be made available through collaborative partnerships to strengthen child helplines' data collection and the quality of frontline services offered.

The diverse needs of children and young people should be taken into account. In particular, vulnerable and underrepresented groups of children and young people stand to benefit from increased coordination among child helplines and other actors.

