



# STEPPING INTO THE UNKNOWN

You're expected to be able to cope because you're older, but becoming 18 is not like a magic wand – it doesn't make things suddenly easier.



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# INTRODUCTION

## **“I don’t know what to do, how to cope or who to turn to?”**

These are the common phrases that many young people use when they contact ChildLine. But for 16-18 year olds these words reflect difficult transitions where they think they should know what to do, should be able to cope and most significantly find it really difficult to get the right support from adults around them.

In 2012/13, ChildLine handled over 54,000 counselling sessions where young people identified themselves as being 16-18 years old. This represents almost a third (31 per cent) of all contacts to Childline.

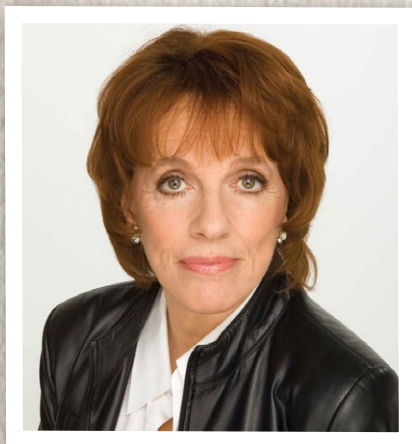
Many 16-18 year olds tell ChildLine they feel totally alone. They say they are scared about having to deal with life-changing decisions or being in situations where they feel that they do not know what to do, what to expect, or who to turn to for help and support.

### ***Stepping into the Unknown* focuses on:**

- **the main concerns that 16-18 years olds contact ChildLine about**
- **those issues which are proportionately higher for this age group than for younger children.**

In deciding what to name this report, we consulted with ChildLine’s youth participation group, who were all aged 16-18. The group came up with a variety of suggestions but overwhelmingly voted for *Stepping into the Unknown*. They felt this title reflected the difficulties of being 16-18 and having to face situations not experienced as a younger child.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



**This report represents concerns raised by 16-18 year olds who contact ChildLine. There is a clear focus on the lack of relevant or appropriate help from services and agencies and their lack of confidence in dealing with the more risky issues teenagers of this age tend to face.**

It is difficult for anyone to admit that they are frightened of new responsibility. But that is what these 16-18 year olds are prepared to tell ChildLine. They are very reluctant to tell anyone else, certainly not professionals such as doctors, not even their own families. And we can understand why.

They are supposed to be adult, they are meant to cope. But of course they are not nearly as tough or as independent as some of them wish to appear. What's more, talking means exposing some very profound problems in their lives. This is the time in life when sex becomes a real issue, complex, overwhelming, sometimes painful and shaming, sometimes disabling young people from protecting themselves. And many of ChildLine's callers tell us about sexual abuse, sometimes by other young people.

Online bullying, and the pressure to send sexually explicit text messages are new dangers in young people's lives. Social networks

seem so seductive that sometimes young people throw caution to the wind and suffer as a result. Ironically, at a time when children are under pressure to become adult, they also face increased stress at school and in the world at large, unsure if they can pass their exams, or find a job. As stress increases, this is the time when some young people start self-harming, or become so depressed they put their lives at risk.

Over 3,500 young people in this age group said they were suicidal, a 35 per cent increase since 2010/11. Some talk to ChildLine about the destructive impact of drugs and alcohol in their lives, which they take because they hope to numb their pain.

Given the economic downturn, these pressures may well get even worse. We have a picture of young people being forced to behave as if they are adults, and yet feeling vulnerable, and alone, without sufficient support around them. Although it is extremely worrying that these problems are greater than ever, one welcome change is that so many of these young people contact ChildLine to discuss them, trusting that they are being heard. We at ChildLine believe it is part of our responsibility to pass on these voices so they can also be heard by the whole country. Let us hope the country as a whole is listening.

*Estee Rauten*

# NUMBERS AT A GLANCE

**54,003**

**COUNSELLING  
SESSIONS WITH  
16-18 YEAR OLDS  
IN 2012/13**

During 2012/13, ChildLine dealt with 278,886 counselling sessions with children and young people. Due to the confidential nature of the ChildLine service, young people do not always provide their age at the time of counselling.

In 2012/13, the young person's age was known for 63 per cent of counselling sessions. Of these, almost a third (31 per cent) of counselling sessions were with young people aged 16-18.

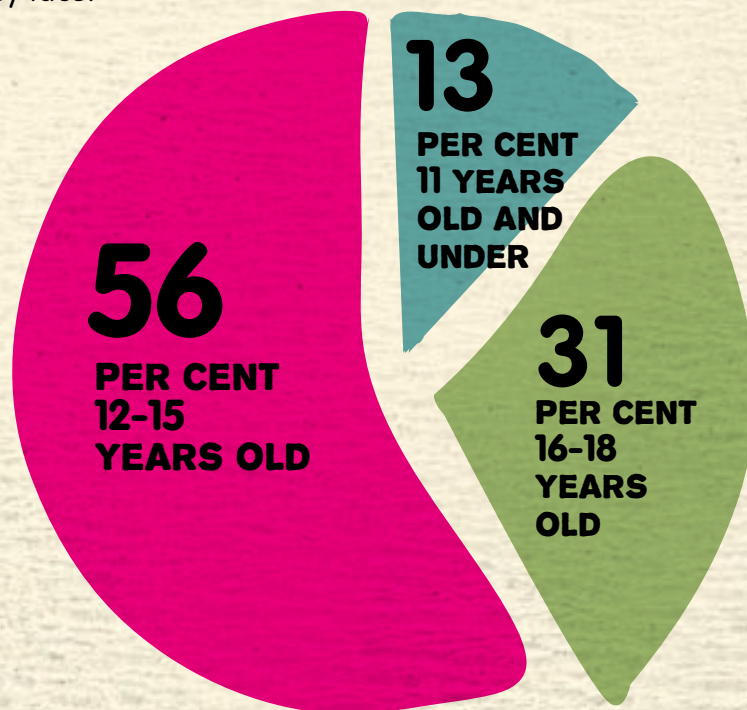
Of the 54,003 counselling sessions with 16-18 years olds, 58 per cent took place over the telephone and 42 per cent through online channels. The percentage of 16-18 year olds that contacted ChildLine by telephone was higher than the figure for all children contacting ChildLine through this channel (41 per cent). This indicates that 16-18 year olds prefer to talk rather than use online chat or email when contacting ChildLine about the issues they face.

**63**

**PER CENT OF  
COUNSELLING  
SESSIONS WITH  
16-18 YEAR OLDS  
WERE WITH GIRLS**

**278,886**

**COUNSELLING  
SESSIONS WERE  
DEALT WITH  
BY CHILDLINE  
DURING 2012/13**



**58**  
**PER CENT  
OF COUNSELLING  
SESSIONS WITH  
16-18 YEAR OLDS  
TOOK PLACE  
OVER THE PHONE**

# KEY FACTS

## GROWING CONCERNS

- Continuing increase in counselling sessions about self-harm – a 4 per cent increase from 2011/12
- Suicide is ranked higher in concerns for 16-18 year olds than for any other age group. 17 year olds were the top age counselled on this issue overall.
- 1 in 5 16-18 year olds contacted ChildLine with concerns about their mental wellbeing.

## SEXUAL ABUSE AND PARTNER ABUSE RANKED HIGHER THAN FOR ANY OTHER AGE GROUP

- Half of all counselling sessions about domestic and partner abuse were with the 16-18 age group.
- **Sexual abuse** appears as a top ten concern for 16-18 year olds, representing 6 per cent of counselling sessions – a higher proportion than for any other age group.

**7**  
PER CENT OF  
COUNSELLING  
SESSIONS WITH  
16-18 YEAR OLDS WAS  
ABOUT SUICIDE

## FORCED TO GROW UP TOO SOON

- Many 16-18 year olds are on the verge of leaving care and moving onto independent living, which can be daunting. Since 2011/12 the number of counselling sessions where being a looked after child was the main concern has increased by 8 per cent for 16-18 year olds. Counselling sessions with girls in this age group saw the greatest increase – 16 per cent.
- Boys aged 16-18 had greater concerns about sexuality. Twice as many boys were counselled by ChildLine about sexuality than girls. In addition, 40 per cent of counselling sessions about LGBT issues were with 16-18 year olds, with many seeking advice and support about coming out to their friends and family.
- **Pregnancy and parenting** only appears in the top 10 concerns for 16-18 year olds, representing 4% of counselling sessions with this age group, compared to 2% for counselling overall.



# TOP 10 CONCERNS FOR 16-18 YEAR OLDS IN 2012/13

<b>RANKING</b>	<b>MAIN CONCERN FOR 16-18 YEAR OLDS</b>	<b>NUMBER OF COUNSELLING SESSIONS WITH 16-18 YEAR OLDS</b>	<b>PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL COUNSELLING SESSIONS FOR 16-18 YEAR OLDS</b>	<b>PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL COUNSELLING SESSIONS FOR ALL AGES – INC WHERE AGE UNKNOWN</b>
1	Low mood and self-esteem	7243	13%	13%
2	Family relationship	6925	13%	13%
3	Suicidal	3575	7%	5%
4	Self-harm	3337	6%	8%
5	Problems with friends	3191	6%	5%
6	Sexual abuse	3073	6%	4%
7	Mental health and depressive disorders	3043	6%	3%
8	Puberty and sexual health	2842	5%	4%
9	Pregnancy and parenting	2278	4%	2%
10	Bullying and cyber	2151	4%	11%

# SECTION ONE:

The mental wellbeing of 16-18 year olds





# SELF-HARM

**"I DON'T KNOW HOW TO COPE."  
- FEMALE, 16**

**"I'VE SELF-HARMED FOR A WHILE NOW BUT RECENTLY I'VE STARTED TO CUT, IT MAKES ME FEEL SO CALM AFTERWARDS. I'VE NOT TOLD ANYONE BECAUSE I HATE HOW I'VE BECOME. I JUST WISH I COULD GO BACK TO HOW I USED TO BE." - FEMALE, 16**

**"EVERY DAY I AM REMINDED OF MY SECRET SELF-HARMING AND AS MUCH AS I HATE IT – AND I KNOW THIS SOUNDS CRAZY – IT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT THING IN MY LIFE. SELF-HARMING KEEPS ME GOING AS EVERYTHING ELSE PUSHES ME DOWN. EVERY TIME MY SCARS START TO FADE I FEEL MYSELF MISSING THEM. I CAN'T REALLY EXPLAIN IT, BUT IT'S LIKE I WANT TO HAVE MY SECRET TO THINK ABOUT INSTEAD OF EVERYTHING ELSE." - FEMALE, 17**

In 2012/13 there were just over 3,300 counselling sessions with 16-18 year olds where self-harm was the main concern. This represents 6 per cent of all counselling sessions with this age group. This is a 4 per cent increase on the previous year and a 9 per cent increase for boys aged 16-18.

The most common method of self-harming is cutting. In 2012/13, cutting was mentioned during 1 in 3 counselling sessions about self-harm with this age group.

By deliberately hurting their bodies, young people often say they can cope better with 'other' pain they are feeling. Self-harming is often used as way of distracting from emotional pain. Young people talk about a sense of release when they hurt themselves.



For some, it can be a way to feel 'something', when they are so numb from emotional pain they can't feel anything.

Young people who self-harm tend to do so in private, and cut areas of their bodies that cannot be seen. They go to great lengths to keep their self-harming a secret and rarely seek medical attention or support.

As well as self-harming, many young people talk about excessively drinking or taking drugs as a way to help forget about their problems – or in some cases a combination of all three.

In 2012/13, where age was known, 55 per cent of counselling sessions about alcohol and 32 per cent of counselling sessions about drugs and other substances were with 16-18 year olds.



**"I FEEL REALLY DEPRESSED. EVERYONE HATES ME – I FEEL LIKE I'M SUCH A DISAPPOINTMENT TO MY FAMILY, THERE'S NO POINT ME BEING HERE. I GET SO ANGRY AND UPSET, SO I SELF-HARM OR DRINK. IT'S THE ONLY WAY TO MAKE ME FEEL BETTER".  
– FEMALE, 17**

**"I HAVE FALLEN OUT WITH EVERYONE – MY FRIENDS, MY FAMILY, EVEN MY KEYWORKER. I AM USING ALCOHOL AND DRUGS TO COPE WITH HOW I AM FEELING, MAINLY WEED AND HEROIN. I AM SCARED THAT I AM GOING TO END UP KILLING MYSELF." – FEMALE, 16**

# SUICIDE

## A clear link between self-harm and suicidal thoughts

Although young people who self-harm are not usually trying to take their own lives, ChildLine has seen a clear link between self-harming behaviours and suicidal thoughts.

In 2012/13 ChildLine dealt with just over 3,575 counselling sessions with 16-18 year olds who were feeling suicidal. This represented 7 per cent of all counselling sessions with this age group, compared to 5 per cent for 12-15 year olds.

There were 4 times as many counselling sessions about suicide held with girls than there were for boys. In a third of counselling sessions with 16-18 year olds where suicide was the main concern, self-harming was also mentioned.

In addition, 56 per cent of counselling sessions where overdosing was mentioned were with 16-18 year olds, of which 83 per cent were girls.



Overall, the highest proportion of counselling sessions about suicide were with 17 year olds. It is rare for this group to be the top aged counselled for any issue – for most issues it is 15 years old.

In 2012/13 ChildLine made 1,836 referrals to other agencies. Of these, a quarter (25 per cent) were for 16-18 year olds. 67 per cent of these referrals were made when the young person was considered a high suicide risk.

# 3,575

**COUNSELLING SESSIONS  
DEALT WITH BY CHILDLINE  
WITH 16-18 YEAR OLDS WHO  
WERE FEELING SUICIDAL**



# 4:1

**GIRL TO BOY RATIO  
FOR SUICIDE  
CONCERNS WITH  
16-18 YEAR OLDS**

# DEPRESSION AND MENTAL HEALTH

## Mental health issues are more prevalent for older age groups

### “I haven’t got the words to tell”

Often young people find it difficult to talk about their problems because they don’t have the words to explain how they are feeling. One area where this is particularly difficult is depression and mental health problems.

Depression and mental health was a main concern in 6 per cent of counselling sessions with 16-18 year olds. This compares to 3 per cent for 12-15 year olds, and less than 1 per cent for children aged 11 and under.

When depression and mental health was the main concern for 16-18 year olds, suicidal thoughts and self-harming were mentioned as an additional concern in over half of counselling sessions.

Many 16-18 year olds expressed feelings of loneliness and despair as they struggled to pinpoint a reason or make sense of why they were feeling so low.

Young people struggle to understand the signs of depression in themselves. This makes it all the more difficult for them to open up and discuss it with their friends and families.

ChildLine helps young people explore whether they feel they can talk to someone they could trust about how they are feeling. Our counsellors help young people to identify possible support within their own network of friends and family members. During these conversations many young people felt exactly the same – they did not want to be a burden, they were worried that it would somehow damage a relationship and, most commonly, they felt they would not be understood.

**"I FEEL SO ALONE AND ANXIOUS AND DEPRESSED ALL THE TIME. I DON'T UNDERSTAND BECAUSE LIFE IS PRETTY GOOD AND I HAVE HAD NO MAJOR TRAUMAS."  
– MALE, 17**

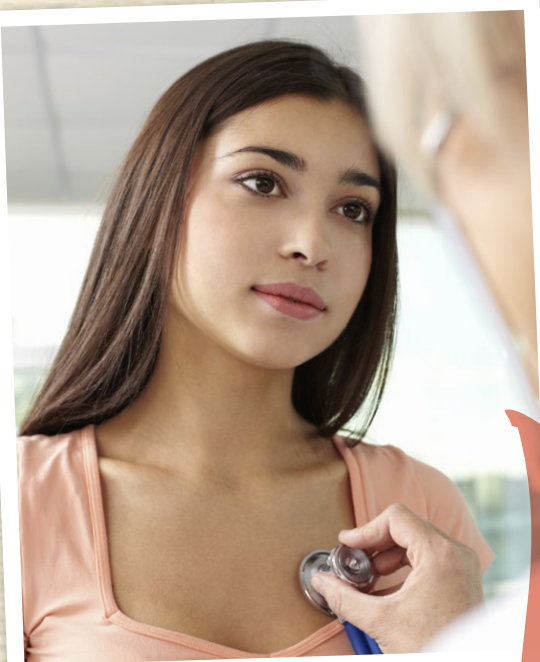
**"I WANT TO BE NORMAL, HAVE FUN AND BE HAPPY BUT I JUST CAN'T SEEM TO BE ABLE TO. I HAVEN'T TOLD MY FRIENDS OR FAMILY BECAUSE I DON'T WANT TO BURDEN THEM WITH MY ISSUES. IT'S TOO COMPLICATED TO EXPLAIN HOW I'M FEELING."  
– FEMALE, 16**

## Reluctance to seek support

Young people are not only reluctant to seek support from family and friends, they are also hesitant about seeking professional support.

Too frequently young people do not think the symptoms of depression and mental health they experience are worthy of involving a professional. This often creates a barrier to getting support.

In their counselling sessions many talked about how they would either be wasting the professional's time, would not be taken seriously, or that somehow their emotional state was not a legitimate illness as it was not to do with their physical health.



**"I HAVEN'T BEEN TO THE DOCTOR YET AS I'M WORRIED THEY WON'T TAKE ME SERIOUSLY AND NOT LISTEN TO MY FEELINGS. I DON'T WANT THEM TO GIVE ME TABLETS SO I CAN JUST BECOME ANOTHER NUMBER ON A PAGE AND ANOTHER STATISTIC."**

**– FEMALE, 18**

**"I FEEL LIKE DOCTORS JUST WANT TO FOCUS ON THE PHYSICAL FACTORS BEFORE THEY LOOK AT MENTAL FACTORS."**

**– MALE, 17**



**"THERE ARE PEOPLE WITH BIGGER ILLNESSES AND PROBLEMS THAN ME WHO DESERVE THE THERAPY MORE"**

**– FEMALE, 17**

# LOW MOOD AND SELF ESTEEM ISSUES

## The top reason for 16-18 year olds to contact ChildLine

In 2012, ChildLine introduced a new concern category of low mood and self-esteem having noticed a growing trend of young people contacting about feeling low, when they had not been diagnosed with mental health issues or severe depression. In 2012/13, ChildLine dealt with 7,243 contacts from 16-18 year olds who talked about this issue – equating to 13 per cent of all counselling with this age group.

The high prevalence of this issue links to other trends that are emerging within this age group. Suicidal and mental health concerns are ranked higher for 16-18 year olds than any other age group and for the 3rd year running there is an increase in counselling about self harm.

The key issues which were a feature of low mood and self esteem for 16-18 year olds were anxiety, body confidence and issues related to money and employment.

**"I AM REALLY STRUGGLING TO MOVE FORWARD WITH MY LIFE. I WAS ABUSED WHEN I WAS YOUNGER AND THE SITUATION HAS BEEN DEALT WITH NOW BUT I KEEP HAVING FLASHBACKS ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED. EVERY DAY IT AFFECTS ME. I JUST CAN'T STOP THINKING ABOUT IT AND HOW IT MADE ME FEEL."– FEMALE, 16**

**"I LEFT SCHOOL LAST YEAR AND HAVE BEEN TRYING TO FIND A JOB SINCE. I HAVE APPLIED FOR LOTS OF JOBS BUT I'M NOT GETTING ANYWHERE. I DON'T WANT TO GO BACK TO COLLEGE; I WANT TO WORK. I HAVE LOTS OF MATES IN A SIMILAR POSITION. WE END UP DOING STUPID THINGS LIKE TAKING DRUGS BECAUSE WE ARE BORED."– MALE, 17**



## Anxiety

Many young people talked to us about post traumatic anxieties where they had experienced abuse in the past. They frequently told ChildLine about having nightmares and flashbacks which were affecting their ability to cope with everyday life. Anxieties also stemmed from the pressure of exams and the stress of having to make decisions about their future which they didn't feel ready for. This is reflected in the fact that there were over 2,300 counselling sessions with this age group who were seeking help with stress symptoms – an 18% increase.

## Body confidence issues

Body image concerns were a particularly strong theme for girls in this age group. Almost 700 16-18 year olds contacted ChildLine to talk about their lack of body image confidence – 5 out of 6 were girls. They often described themselves as ugly, worthless and constantly put themselves down. A number of young people talked about how they compared themselves negatively against their friends and celebrities.

## Money & employment issues

Over two thirds (69 per cent) of counselling sessions about money and employment issues were with the 16-18 age group. At this age, young people often have a greater degree of financial independence and talked about the difficulties they had in affording their upkeep and paying for food and bills. Some 16-18 year olds spoke to counsellors about their escalating debts and told us about situations where they had to take out loans as a temporary solution. The pressure to find work also caused a great deal of anxiety for young people in this age group and they told ChildLine about having no confidence and fearing rejection. Where young people were employed, some were struggling with the transition into a working life and felt there was inadequate support to help them cope with these changes.



**"I HAVEN'T SLEPT PROPERLY FOR OVER A MONTH NOW BECAUSE I AM SO STRESSED ABOUT GETTING THE RIGHT GRADES I NEED TO GO TO UNIVERSITY. I FEEL LIKE I AM ON THE VERGE OF A PANIC ATTACK BECAUSE THE DECISIONS I HAVE TO MAKE NOW ARE GOING TO AFFECT THE REST OF MY LIFE."  
– FEMALE, 18**

## SECTION TWO:

**Sexual Abuse and Partner Abuse feature more in the concerns of 16-18 year olds than any other age group.**

Sexual abuse – biggest rise in sexual abuse counselling was with 18 year olds

Partner abuse – half of all counselling was with 16-18 year olds





# SEXUAL ABUSE

**“I need to deal with it myself”**

**“It’s my own fault – I’m so ashamed”**

Young people who are sexually abused frequently blame themselves for the abuse, taking on the guilt and shame. They may be shocked and confused by what is happening, especially as it is usually by someone they know, often within the family, and therefore they feel unable to seek help. They may be made to feel that it is their fault. In addition, the abuser will often use intimidation and emotional blackmail to prevent the young person from telling anyone. Being forced to keep the abuse secret can increase feelings of guilt.

In 2012/13, a third (3,073) of all counselling sessions about sexual abuse – where the age was known – were with 16-18 year olds. There was a 14 per cent increase in the number of sessions with 18 year olds, compared to 2011/12 – the biggest rise for any age.

In 31 per cent of counselling sessions with 16-18 year olds the young person said they had not told anybody about the sexual abuse.

Boys in this age group found it even more difficult to talk about this concern, with 68 per cent suggesting they had never told anyone before speaking to ChildLine about the sexual abuse.

As well as feeling intimidated and being emotionally blackmailed into keeping quiet, 16-18 year olds also talked about other reasons as to why they felt they could not tell anyone. These included feeling they were to blame, embarrassed, ashamed, being unaware that the abuse was wrong, and believing that the situation would get worse if they did tell.

Young people also said that they were unable to speak about the full extent of their abuse, indicating that some details were too harrowing to talk about and relive. They often knew they were not coping with their ordeal but did not know what support they needed or did not believe that the support they were getting was helping.

**"I REALLY STRUGGLE TO TALK TO ANYONE ABOUT BEING SEXUALLY ABUSED. IT HAPPENED FOR A FEW YEARS SO I FEEL LIKE IT TOOK MY CHILDHOOD AWAY. I FEEL REALLY ASHAMED THAT IT HAPPENED TO ME – I'M UNABLE TO COPE. I WANT SOME SUPPORT BUT I DON'T KNOW WHAT KIND OF SUPPORT I NEED OR WHAT WILL EVEN HELP. I JUST CAN'T CARRY ON LIKE THIS." - MALE, 18**

**"I'VE BEEN ABUSED BY A FAMILY FRIEND FOR YEARS NOW. IT STOPPED FOR A BIT BUT THEN RESTARTED WHEN I GOT A LITTLE OLDER. IT MAKES ME FEEL SO HORRIBLE ABOUT MYSELF THAT I DRINK AND TAKE DRUGS TO HELP ME COPE. I FEEL BAD THAT I'M PUTTING SO MUCH STRESS ON MY DAD BECAUSE OF THE ABUSE SO I WISH I COULD TELL HIM, BUT I'M SCARED THAT IF I DO HE'D DO SOMETHING STUPID. I'M STARTING COUNSELLING SOON BUT I DON'T THINK IT WILL HELP ME. I STRUGGLE TALKING ABOUT WHAT I'VE BEEN THROUGH WHEN I'M FACE TO FACE WITH SOMEONE - I'M TOO EMBARRASSED." – FEMALE, 17**

# IS THERE ANYONE THERE TO HELP ME?

ChildLine records when a young person tells a counsellor if they have told anyone else about their problem before calling ChildLine.

“I wish I hadn’t told”

TOP FIVE PEOPLE 16-18 YEAR OLDS SPOKE TO BEFORE CONTACTING CHILDLINE ABOUT SEXUAL ABUSE	PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL CASE NOTES
Police	12%
Friend	10%
Mother	9%
Counsellor	5%
Social worker	5%

**“I WAS BEING SEXUALLY ABUSED BY MY DAD AND HIS FRIENDS FOR YEARS BUT IT STARTED TO GET TOO MUCH FOR ME SO I TOLD THE POLICE – NOW HE'S IN PRISON AND I HAVE TO GO TO COURT ABOUT IT. THIS ISN'T WHAT I WANTED TO HAPPEN, I JUST WANTED HIM TO GET HELP, BUT INSTEAD HE'S JUST REALLY ANGRY AT ME. I HAVEN'T EVEN TOLD THE POLICE THE WHOLE STORY – I DON'T WANT TO, I REGRET TELLING THEM ANYTHING. MY MUM THINKS I'M LYING ABOUT THE ABUSE AND I'M NOT ABLE TO SPEAK TO MY SIBLINGS ABOUT IT. I FEEL GUILTY ABOUT THE WHOLE SITUATION. I'VE BEEN OFFERED COUNSELLING BUT I DON'T WANT TO HAVE TO SPEAK TO ANYONE FACE TO FACE ABOUT WHAT I'VE GONE THROUGH.” – FEMALE, 16**

During 2012/13, the number of 16-18 year olds who told us they had spoken to someone about the sexual abuse before contacting ChildLine increased by 37 per cent when compared to 2011/12.

There has also been a large shift in the people 16-18 year olds chose to talk to. In 2011/12, the most common person 16-18 year olds spoke to about sexual abuse was their mother. However, in 2012/13, where young people told us who they had spoken to before – 1 in 8 said they had disclosed the abuse to the police – an increase of over 200 per cent .

Young people who have found the courage to tell someone about the sexual abuse they have experienced, past or present, often told ChildLine they felt overwhelmed with regret for speaking out. Where they had spoken to the police, or there had been a subsequent court case, they frequently mentioned feeling as though their voice wasn't being heard and that no one believed them.

When the young person had told their parents or a family member, they hadn't always been believed. This disbelief was often associated with the fact that almost half (48 per cent ) the perpetrators, where stated, were a family member.

# ONLINE RISKS

**ChildLine also hears from young people who have been sexually abused by someone they initially met online.**

Many young people do not realise that being asked to perform sexual acts on a webcam link or sending sexual images by mobile phone or through the internet is categorised as sexual abuse. Most are completely unaware that by sending indecent pictures of a person under 18 they could be breaking the law.

**"THIS MAN I MET ONLINE TOLD ME TO DO STUFF VIA A WEBCAM AND I STUPIDLY DID. I HAVE NO IDEA WHY I DID IT – IT WAS LIKE IT WASN'T ME! I AM NOT SURE IF WHAT I HAVE DONE IS SEXUAL ABUSE?" – FEMALE, 16**

ChildLine is running a campaign for young people in October to raise awareness of the risks of sending sexual images by mobile or through the internet. We believe 'sexting' has become a familiar part of every teenager's life but that most young people are not aware of the potential risks and consequences.

**"I MET A GUY ONLINE. HE TOLD ME HE WAS A YEAR OLDER THAN ME, SO WE ARRANGED TO MEET. HE TURNED OUT TO BE MUCH OLDER THAN HE SAID HE WAS. WHEN WE MET, HE BEAT ME UP THEN RAPED ME. I FEEL LIKE I DESERVED IT. I DESERVED IT TO HAPPEN TO ME. I SHOULD NEVER HAVE MET UP WITH HIM." - FEMALE, 17**

**"I AM 17 AND I RECENTLY SENT PICTURES OF ME UNDRESSED TO SOMEONE I THOUGHT WAS A GIRL, BUT IT TURNED OUT TO BE A GUY. AFTER I SENT THE PICTURES, HE THREATENED ME BY TELLING ME TO UNDRESS LIVE VIA WEBCAM. HE SAID THAT IF I DIDN'T, HE WOULD UPLOAD ALL MY PICTURES TO THE INTERNET AND WOULD MAKE SURE MY FAMILY AND FRIENDS SAW THEM. I AM SO SCARED RIGHT NOW; I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO. IS WHAT HE IS DOING ILLEGAL?" – MALE, 17**



# DOMESTIC/PARTNER ABUSE

Half of these counselling sessions were with 16-18 year olds

In 2012/13 there were 1,133 counselling sessions with 16-18 year olds who told ChildLine they were experiencing domestic/partner abuse, almost half of all the young people counselled about this issue. Where the type of domestic/partner abuse was specified, 38 per cent was emotional abuse, 35 per cent was physical abuse and 23 per cent was sexual abuse.

Many 16-18 year olds talked about feeling isolated from their friends and family. They were reluctant to tell people around them about the abuse as they believed they had got themselves into the situation so only had themselves to blame. Many also felt they should be able to deal with the problem without involving anyone else.

In many instances the young person's partner was older so the young person felt as though they were being dominated and controlled.



**"I'VE BEEN LIVING WITH MY BOYFRIEND FOR A FEW MONTHS – HE'S OLDER THAN ME SO HE EXPECTS CERTAIN THINGS FROM OUR RELATIONSHIP. THE OTHER DAY HE FORCED ME TO HAVE SEX. I TOLD HIM I WASN'T READY AND THAT I HADN'T DONE IT BEFORE, BUT HE MADE ME DO IT ANYWAY. WHEN I GOT UPSET HE TOLD ME I WAS OVERREACTING AND THAT IT WAS WHAT PEOPLE IN RELATIONSHIPS DID. IT'S NOT THE FIRST TIME HE'S BEEN AGGRESSIVE TOWARDS ME – I'M OFTEN LEFT COVERED IN BRUISES. MY PARENTS THOUGHT I WAS TOO YOUNG TO MOVE IN WITH HIM SO I DON'T WANT TO TELL THEM ABOUT WHAT'S HAPPENING. I SPEAK TO MY MUM REGULARLY AND TELL HER EVERYTHING'S FINE. EVEN THOUGH I MADE THE DECISION TO LIVE HERE, SOMETIMES I JUST WANT TO GO BACK HOME – I FEEL SAFE THERE." – FEMALE, 18**

**"I'VE BEEN FEELING A LOT OF MIXED EMOTIONS RECENTLY. I'VE BEEN WITH MY BOYFRIEND FOR A FEW MONTHS NOW AND THINGS AREN'T GREAT. HE'S A BIT OLDER SO I FEEL LIKE HE'S PRESSURING ME FOR THINGS AND IS REALLY CONTROLLING. I'VE TRIED TO CONFRONT HIM ABOUT IT, BUT HE DIDN'T TAKE IT WELL SO I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO. IT'S GETTING ME REALLY DOWN SO I KEEP SNAPPING AT PEOPLE AROUND ME. I KNOW MY PARENTS WOULD SUPPORT ME IF I TOLD THEM BUT I DON'T WANT TO. I NEED TO DEAL WITH IT MYSELF." – FEMALE, 17**

# SECTION THREE:

Forced to grow up



# LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

**Worries about becoming a “grown up” and the fear of services ending are a key feature for 16-18 year olds leaving care.**

## **“I’m scared of the future”**

In 2012/13, ChildLine carried out over 800 counselling sessions with 16-18 year olds in care. This is an 8% increase from 2011/12.

Young people leaving care were concerned about living independently or moving to supported accommodation.

Some talked about the difficulties of having to move too far away from the care home. They felt this would mean losing contact with their friends and were worried about feelings of loneliness and the difficulties of trying to make new friends.

## **Unable to cope living alone after leaving care**

Young people feel unprepared to live alone and are scared about being able to cope. They talked about not having enough money, not being able to manage on benefits and feeling worried about paying bills.

For some there was a distinct feeling that they had not been helped with this transition and needed help with practical skills such as form filling, understanding how to manage finances and taking care of their own every day domestic needs.



Not knowing where they might live creates high levels of anxiety and frustration. Young people frequently mentioned not being kept informed, delays in progress and difficulties in contacting anyone for more information. Many called ChildLine when they could not reach their advocate or social worker.

**"CAN YOU FIND ME A NUMBER FOR AN ADVOCATE PLEASE? MY SOCIAL WORKER HAS TOLD ME THAT I WILL BE MOVING OUT OF MY CURRENT FOSTER HOME AND WILL HAVE TO MOVE BACK TO LONDON BUT I HAVE NO IDEA WHERE TO? I FEEL SAFE AND SECURE IN MY FOSTER HOME AND I DON'T WANT TO MOVE. MY SOCIAL WORKER'S MANAGER SAID THERE WAS NOTHING THEY COULD DO TO STOP IT AND I FEEL SCARED." – FEMALE, 17**

For those who had been placed in a hostel, many expressed how much they disliked it.

**"I HATE LIVING IN A HOSTEL – I SPEND MOST OF MY TIME SITTING IN MY ROOM WHILE EVERYONE ELSE JUST GETS OFF THEIR FACE ON DRUGS AND STUFF. THERE'S HARDLY ANYONE HERE THAT'S THE SAME AGE AS ME, MOST ARE A LOT OLDER. I WANTED TO GO INTO A YOUNG PERSON'S HOME BUT THEY WOULDN'T ACCOMMODATE ME BECAUSE I SELF-HARM. AFTER BEING CHUCKED OUT I HAVE NOWHERE ELSE TO GO IF I LEAVE THIS HOSTEL EXCEPT TO LIVING BACK ON THE STREETS." – FEMALE, 17**

**"I DON'T KNOW WHAT'S GOING ON AT THE MOMENT AND WHO I CAN GET SUPPORT FROM. I AM IN BETWEEN CHILD AND ADULT SERVICES RIGHT NOW AND FEEL ANXIOUS ABOUT THE CHANGE AND LIKE NO ONE CARES. I'M HAVE BEEN MOVED INTO SUPPORTED ACCOMMODATION AND AM FINDING IT REALLY DIFFICULT TO ADJUST TO WHERE I AM – ESPECIALLY BECAUSE I DON'T KNOW WHAT'S GOING TO HAPPEN TO ME." – MALE, 18**

# SEXUALITY AND GENDER IDENTITY ISSUES: THE FEAR OF BEING DISOWNED

One of the most common reasons for 16-18 year olds to seek help from ChildLine is how to 'come out' to family and friends.

In 2012/13, ChildLine carried out almost 1,500 counselling sessions with 16-18 year olds about sexuality and gender identity issues. In 36 per cent of cases the young person said to the counsellor that they had not told anybody else. This is much higher than the average for all counselling sessions within this age group, which was 17 per cent.

Boys are much more likely than girls to talk about issues surrounding sexuality than for other concerns. In 2012/13, twice as many 16-18 year old boys talked to ChildLine about sexuality as their main problem than girls. In addition, 40 per cent of counselling sessions about LGBT issues were with 16-18 year olds.

## "I'm too frightened to tell"

Young people described how they struggled to communicate with their parents and friends. They were scared that telling family and friends the truth about their sexuality would result in a negative reaction, and many were fearful of being disowned.

Parental reaction is something young people who contact ChildLine have great anxieties over. Young people often struggle to tell parents something they believe will disappoint or anger them. ChildLine works with young people to help them find the words and provides them a safe place to rehearse what they want to say.

**"I DON'T WANT TO DISAPPOINT MY MUM AND DAD BY TELLING THEM I'M GAY BUT I CAN'T HIDE MY FEELINGS ANY MORE – IT'S MAKING ME FEEL SO ANXIOUS AND LONELY ALL THE TIME. I'M REALLY WORRIED ABOUT HOW THEY ARE GOING TO REACT THOUGH. WHAT IF THEY ARE ANGRY WITH ME?" – MALE, 16**

**"I'M FEELING REALLY DOWN AND LONELY. I HAVE STARTED TO DEVELOP REALLY STRONG FEELINGS FOR OTHER GIRLS AND I THINK I'M A LESBIAN. I CAN'T EVEN TALK TO MY BEST FRIEND ABOUT IT BECAUSE I'M WORRIED SHE MIGHT HATE ME AND NOT WANT TO TALK TO ME ANYMORE." – FEMALE, 16**





# COMING OUT

**Many LGBT young people have to cope with negative reactions when they come out, which can be very painful, particularly when that reaction is from someone they really care about.**

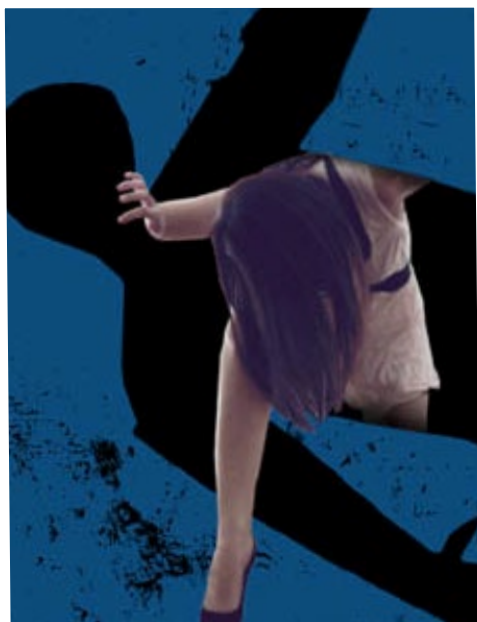
In some cases, the young person said that their religion posed a major obstacle to coming out. They talked about the fear of being punished for going against their faith and the shame it would bring on their family.

ChildLine supports young people to prepare for the reactions of family and friends. We help them to understand that it's possible some people may initially be shocked, or feel uncomfortable and therefore not know how to react. But we also explain that in time many people will accept the news. We help young people explore different ways of telling friends and family. For example, writing everything down in a letter, so they can explain fully what they want to say.

We also help young people to think about how they can engage in an open and honest conversation, which is a vital part of coming out.

Doing this helps to move a relationship forward towards a point of mutual understanding and acceptance.

ChildLine counsellors work with the young person to help them to identify someone they think is more likely to react positively. This not only helps to give the young person an idea of how people may react, but often means they have someone to support them when they are ready to come out to others.



**"I DON'T MIND THE IDEA OF BEING GAY AND I AM COMFORTABLE WITH THE WAY I FEEL. I WISH MY FAMILY THOUGHT IN THE SAME WAY THOUGH. IN MY RELIGION AND CULTURE, BEING GAY ISN'T ALLOWED. I WILL BE SEVERELY PUNISHED BY MY PARENTS IF I ACT UPON MY FEELINGS FOR OTHER MEN. I KNOW OTHER PEOPLE WHO HAVE COME OUT AS GAY AND HAVE BEEN SENT BACK TO THEIR HOME COUNTRIES TO BE PUNISHED." MALE, 18**

**"I'M SO CONFUSED AND STRESSED. I THINK I AM A LESBIAN BUT IT FEELS WRONG AND UNCOMFORTABLE. I HAVE BEEN BROUGHT UP AS A CATHOLIC AND IT MAKES ME FEEL GUILTY ABOUT MY SEXUALITY." – FEMALE, 17**

**"I HAVE A BOYFRIEND BUT I'M FEELING VERY CONFUSED ABOUT MY FEELINGS. I'VE FELT THIS WAY FOR A WHILE NOW. I LIKE THIS GIRL AND SHE LIKES ME TOO. I'M TOO AFRAID TO COME OUT AS I'M SCARED OF LOSING FAMILY AND FRIENDS. WHAT IF THEY REACT BADLY TO IT? WHAT WILL THEY THINK OF ME? I WISH I DIDN'T HAVE THESE FEELINGS - I JUST WANT TO BE NORMAL." FEMALE, 16**

## FEAR OF BEING THROWN OUT: BECOMING A YOUNG PARENT

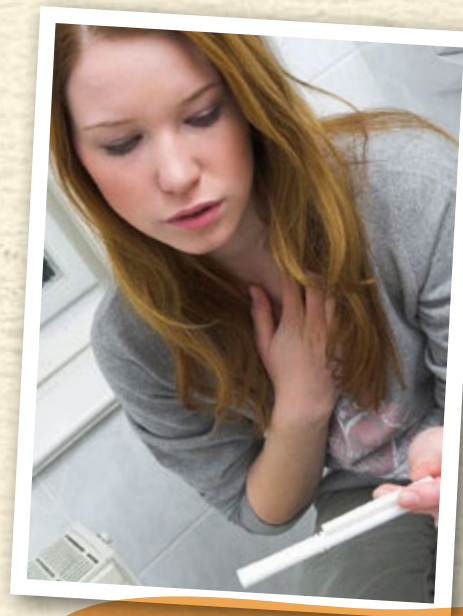
Being expected to make "adult choices or decisions" yet not being fully independent, is a common concern raised by 16-18 year olds. Pregnancy is a good example of when this can occur.

Pregnancy and Parenting is a top 10 issue for 16-18 year olds. Almost 2,300 counselling sessions were carried out with this age group in 2012/13. Of these, 8 per cent told ChildLine they were struggling with being a young parent.

In many of the counselling sessions where pregnancy featured as a main concern young people were worried they would be thrown out of the family home, if they announced their pregnancy. Fortunately for most, this fear is based upon how the young person anticipates their parents will react and does not become reality.

Often young people contacting ChildLine about pregnancy mentioned that their parents wanted nothing to do with them once they found out they were pregnant. Others, both girls and boys, expressed concerns about what their responsibilities would be and felt unsure if they were ready to be a parent.

**"I'M STRUGGLING TO COPE AND I'VE GOT NO ONE TO TALK TO. I'M PREGNANT AND LIVING WITH A FAMILY MEMBER AT THE MOMENT HAVING BEEN THROWN OUT. IT IS FINE, BUT I CAN'T LIVE HERE FOREVER SO I NEED TO SORT OUT SOME HOUSING AND FINANCIAL SUPPORT. I CAN'T TALK TO MY MIDWIFE ABOUT IT BECAUSE I KNOW SHE THINKS I'M STUPID FOR BEING PREGNANT. I JUST DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO." – FEMALE, 16**



**"I FOUND OUT I WAS PREGNANT SO MY PARENTS THREW ME OUT. THANKFULLY MY FRIEND HAS LET ME COME AND STAY WITH HER FOR A BIT, BUT I CAN'T STAY HERE FOREVER. I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO? I REALLY NEED SOME HELP AND ADVICE ABOUT WHAT MY OPTIONS ARE." – FEMALE, 17**

**"MY GIRLFRIEND IS PREGNANT. I'M SCARED BECAUSE I'M NOT SURE IF I'M READY TO BE A DAD YET. WE HAVE A REALLY GOOD RELATIONSHIP AND I LOVE HER VERY MUCH, BUT I'M FINDING ALL OF THIS QUITE HARD TO COPE WITH. WE'RE GOING TO BE MOVING IN WITH EACH OTHER SOON, WHICH I'M EXCITED ABOUT, BUT AT THE SAME TIME, I AM QUITE SCARED." – 18 MALE**

## BEING THROWN OUT: FAMILY RELATIONSHIP BREAKDOWN

A particular feature for this age group, more than any other, is being thrown out of the family home. During 2012/13, this issue was mentioned in just over 1000 counselling sessions – in over half of these the young person was aged 16-18.

16-18 year olds often tell ChildLine how challenging family life can be for them. There were almost 7,000 counselling sessions with 16-18 year olds about family relationships during 2012/13. It was the top reason for 16 year olds to contact ChildLine and the second most common concern for 17 and 18 year olds.

Relationship breakdowns are the most common reason for young people to be thrown out of the family home, however some young people talk about economic factors leading to them being asked to leave.

This can also be linked to changing life choices as young people get older.

**"I AM SCARED AND WORRIED BECAUSE I AM GOING TO BE KICKED OUT OF THE HOUSE. I HAVE DROPPED OUT OF COLLEGE AND MY MUM EXPLAINED THAT DUE TO THIS, HER CHILD BENEFIT WOULD STOP SO SHE COULD NOT AFFORD TO HAVE ME AT HOME ANY MORE. I AM WORRIED ABOUT WHERE I WILL LIVE." – MALE, 17**

**"I AM JUST WALKING AROUND THE STREETS. I CAN'T GO TO MY FRIENDS AS I AM TOO EMBARRASSED. I FEEL SO ALONE AND CONFUSED. MUM AND I HAVE ARGUED BEFORE BUT SHE HAS NEVER THROWN ME OUT. MUM WANTS ME TO LEAVE FOR GOOD, BUT I HAVE NOWHERE ELSE TO GO – I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO?" – FEMALE, 16**

**"MY PARENTS HAVE SPLIT UP AND I LIVE WITH MY DAD. I AM A COLLEGE AT THE MOMENT BUT I WOULD LIKE TO LEAVE AND GET A JOB. MY DAD HAS THREATENED TO THROW ME OUT IF I GET A JOB AS HE WOULD LOSE HIS CHILD BENEFIT. I DON'T FEEL LIKE I HAVE A SAY IN MY OWN LIFE AND HAVE TO DO THINGS DAD'S WAY." – FEMALE, 17**

# SECTION FOUR:

**Relevant and better services are needed  
for 16-18 year olds**



## LACK OF SUPPORT FROM THE POLICE OR SOCIAL SERVICES

Where young people had reported an incident to the police or social services, they also felt as though they were not being offered adequate support. This left the young person feeling abandoned.

Their family life had been disrupted to such an extent that many young people said they regretted telling anyone. In some cases the young person told ChildLine that they had felt pressured by family to report what had happened to the police, but that they had not been ready to do this.

**"DURING A SESSION WITH MY COUNSELLOR I TOLD THEM ABOUT THE SEXUAL ABUSE I'D EXPERIENCED. I DIDN'T MEAN FOR IT TO COME OUT BUT IT JUST DID. I REGRET SAYING IT SO MUCH BECAUSE NOW THEY'VE INVOLVED THE POLICE AND SOCIAL SERVICES. I'M BEING PRESSURED TO SAY MORE ABOUT THE INCIDENT BUT I JUST DON'T FEEL READY. I WISH I HADN'T SAID ANYTHING."  
– FEMALE, 16**

**"I'M FEELING REALLY SAD AT THE MOMENT – I JUST WISH I WASN'T EVEN HERE. MY DAD AND HIS FRIENDS SEXUALLY ABUSED ME FOR YEARS SO I WENT TO THE POLICE ABOUT IT. I REALLY WISH I HADN'T NOW BECAUSE I'VE GOT TO GO TO COURT IN A FEW DAYS AND AM FEELING COMPLETELY ALONE. I DON'T HAVE A COUNSELLOR OR A SOCIAL WORKER TO TALK TO. I WAS TOLD I COULD SPEAK TO SOMEONE THROUGH THE COURT OR MY DOCTOR BUT I HAVEN'T - I'VE JUST BEEN DEALING WITH IT MYSELF." – FEMALE, 17**



## LITTLE CONFIDENCE IN AGENCIES

Where an agency had been involved, some young people expressed a loss of confidence in the agency as the resolution offered didn't help. Furthermore, some young people said they didn't feel they were being believed or adequately supported. In some cases this left them feeling suicidal.

**"I'M HAVING COUNSELLING AT THE MOMENT TO HELP ME GET OVER BEING SEXUALLY ABUSED BY MY UNCLE. SO FAR COUNSELLING IS NOT HELPING. I'M REGRETTING TELLING ANYONE BECAUSE IT'S MADE THINGS REALLY TENSE AT HOME. I JUST FEEL SO DOWN THAT I'VE CONSIDERED ENDING MY LIFE." – FEMALE, 18**

**"I REALLY NEED SOMEONE TO TALK TO AT THE MOMENT. I WAS BEING SEXUALLY ABUSED BY SOMEONE IN MY FAMILY SO I LET THE POLICE KNOW. THEY'RE TALKING ABOUT ME HAVING TO HAVE A MEDICAL EXAMINATION BUT I DON'T EVEN KNOW WHAT THAT INVOLVES. MY SOCIAL WORKER IS BEING RUBBISH AND ISN'T HELPING ME AT ALL. I DON'T THINK SHE LIKES ME BECAUSE SHE DOESN'T SEEM TO LISTEN TO ANYTHING I SAY. NO ONE IN MY FAMILY IS SUPPORTING ME EITHER - MY MUM THINKS I'M LYING ABOUT THE WHOLE THING SO SHE'S REALLY ANGRY WITH ME. I'M JUST SO SCARED ABOUT THIS WHOLE SITUATION. I JUST WANT TO RUN AWAY." – FEMALE, 16**

# CESSATION OF SERVICES

16-18 year olds who talk to ChildLine about mental health issues often speak about the support they are getting from Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services. Many of those approaching the age of 18 shared their fears about what is going to happen to them once they were no longer eligible for support.

They explained how they felt not seeing a counsellor any more was likely to adversely affect their mental health. They talked about the transition to adult services being disjointed to the service they had previously received and were worried about their future with a lack of support.

Young people's anxieties of the cessation of services also extended to support from ChildLine.

**"I HAD MY LAST COUNSELLING SESSION TODAY AND AM FEELING REALLY UPSET AND WORRIED ABOUT WHAT WILL HAPPEN NEXT. SHE HELPED ME SUCH A LOT IN GETTING THROUGH SOME OF THE WORST TIMES IN MY LIFE AND IT'S GOING TO BE HARD NOT HAVING HER SUPPORT. ANOTHER COUNSELLOR IS MEANT TO BE CONTACTING ME BUT I HAVEN'T HEARD ANYTHING YET AND I'M SCARED BECAUSE I JUST THINK I WILL GO BACKWARDS." – FEMALE, 18**

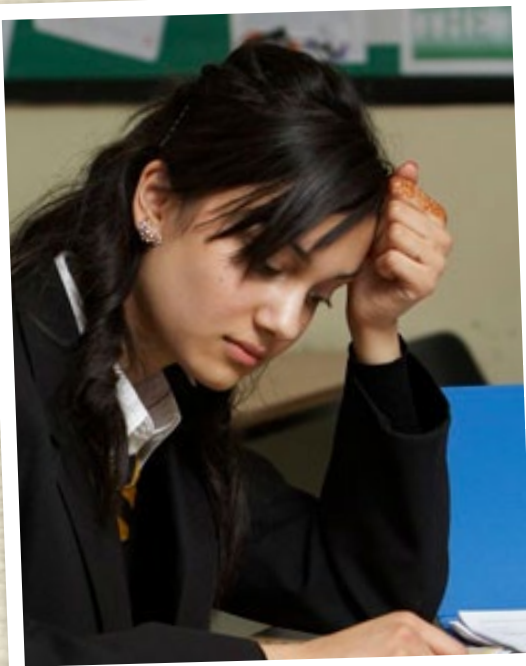
ChildLine do not offer services to young people once they reach their 19th birthday, at which point they are given the details of adult services. If ChildLine has a long standing relationship with the young person, an end of service plan will be made to prepare them for this.



# NEEDING SUPPORT FROM TEACHERS

Frequently young people told ChildLine that they were not always believed or taken seriously when they disclosed abuse to their teacher. This was particularly the case when the perpetrator of the abuse was the young person's partner, or ex.

From what young people tell ChildLine, it appears that teachers do not always seem confident in how to deal with partner relationship abuse, and therefore do not respond in the way that is right for the young person. Teachers seemed unsure of the appropriate immediate course of action. Some teachers referred the young person straight to ChildLine for advice. Others told young people that they were going to think about the solution rather than acting immediately to safeguard them.



**"MY BOYFRIEND PERSUADED ME TO POSE NAKED FOR HIM AND HE TOOK PICTURES OF ME. I TRIED TO END THINGS WITH HIM RECENTLY AS I DIDN'T TRUST HIM ANYMORE. NOW HE IS THREATENING ME, SAYING IF I BREAK UP WITH HIM HE WILL PUT THE NAKED PHOTOS OF ME ALL OVER THE INTERNET SO EVERYONE CAN SEE. I TOLD MY TEACHER ABOUT WHAT WAS GOING ON AND SHE SUGGESTED I PHONED CHILDLINE SO THEY CAN TELL ME WHAT TO DO TO STOP IT."**

**– FEMALE, 16**

**"MY BOYFRIEND SEXUALLY ABUSED ME AND I TRIED TO TALK TO MY TEACHER ABOUT IT BUT THEY DIDN'T BELIEVE ME. IT'S HARD BECAUSE I'VE GOT NO SUPPORT AND FEEL HORRIBLE AND ISOLATED. I HAVE BEEN SELF-HARMING TO HELP TO ME COPE." – FEMALE, 16**





**"I WAS RAPED LAST YEAR BY MY EX. IT MAKES ME FEEL DIRTY AND REALLY UPSET WHEN I THINK ABOUT IT. I TRIED TO PRETEND LIKE NOTHING HAD HAPPENED BUT MY TEACHER NOTICED SOMETHING WAS WRONG AS IT WAS AFFECTING MY SCHOOL WORK. THANKS TO MY TEACHER TALKING TO ME AND ENCOURAGING ME TO REPORT IT, THE POLICE ARE NOW INVOLVED AND MY MUM IS BEING REALLY SUPPORTIVE." – FEMALE, 16**

Encouragingly, young people also tell ChildLine that they had only disclosed to their teacher as a result of that teacher noticing a change in their behaviour or academic achievement.

**"LAST YEAR MY BOYFRIEND SEXUALLY ASSAULTED ME. MY TEACHER NOTICED I WAS ACTING DIFFERENTLY AND MY GRADES WERE GETTING WORSE. THEY ASKED IF THERE WAS ANYTHING BOTHERING ME AND THEN SPOKE TO ME AND MY MUM. THINGS HAVE BEEN SORTED OUT NOW BUT I STILL FEEL REALLY UPSET ABOUT IT. MY TEACHER HAS ALWAYS BEEN THERE FOR ME WHEN I'VE GOT UPSET AND I TALK TO HER QUITE A LOT – SPEAKING TO CHILDLINE REALLY HELPS TOO." – FEMALE, 16**

Wherever we have used quotes from young people, names and potentially identifying details have been changed to protect their identity. These quotes are created from real ChildLine contacts but are not necessarily direct quotes from an individual young person.

**ChildLine is the UK's free, 24-hour helpline and online service for children. Trained volunteer counsellors comfort, advise and protect children and young people. Calls to ChildLine are confidential, but if a child is in immediate danger the counsellor will let the caller know if they have to break confidentiality and contact the emergency services to save the child's life.**

**Children and young people can contact ChildLine 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days per year on 0800 1111 and at [www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk).**

**For any enquiries please contact us at [ChildlineBusinessSupportTeam@nspcc.org.uk](mailto:ChildlineBusinessSupportTeam@nspcc.org.uk)**

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