

A ChildLine Information Sheet

Suicide

“Six weeks ago a friend of mine took an overdose. She was under a lot of pressure and couldn't tell anybody. She said she really wanted to die and wouldn't let me phone for an ambulance or call her parents...so I called ChildLine.”

“I'd just like to say how brilliant they were. They talked to her and stayed on the phone while the ambulance was coming, and also helped me afterwards. I never believed that ChildLine could be so helpful but they saved my friend's life.”

Letter to magazine problem page

Feelings of despair, isolation and hopelessness can affect anyone of any age, at any time. When these feelings become too much to bear, it can seem to some young people that suicide is the only way to escape their problems.

Some facts and figures about suicide

(Latest statistics provided by The Samaritans for 1997)

- There are at least two suicides every day by young people under the age of 25 in the UK and Republic of Ireland.
- In the UK the suicide rate in young men (aged 15-24 years) is 17 per 100,000 compared with the national suicide rate of 13 per 100,000.
- In the Republic of Ireland, suicide amongst young men continues to rise dramatically and in 1997 was 27 per 100,000; three times the rate for 1987.
- It is estimated that there are approximately 19,000 suicide attempts by adolescents every year, which is more than one every 30 minutes.
- Young women aged between 15 and 19 years are the most likely to attempt suicide, usually by overdose. However, the rate amongst young men has nearly tripled since 1985.

What causes some young people to feel suicidal?

There is no simple explanation for suicidal behaviour. Calls to ChildLine show that abuse, constant rows with someone close, bullying, stress over exams, and worries about the future are just some of the things that, in some young people, can cause feelings of anxiety, low self esteem, hopelessness and isolation. This can lead to thoughts of suicide. Groups particularly at risk of suicide include unemployed or homeless young people, young gay men and women, and young people who have problems with drugs.

Depression and despair can also be caused by specific events, such as the death of someone, parents splitting up, unwanted pregnancy, a relationship ending, or a violent incident such as rape. Sometimes young people, like adults, can feel deeply unhappy for no obvious reason at all, and believe that they will feel that way forever.

What do young people tell ChildLine about feeling suicidal?

Some young people who talk to ChildLine about feeling suicidal have actually made an attempt – such as an overdose – just before calling, and need immediate medical help. Others are feeling so unhappy about problems in their lives that they say or imply they are thinking of killing themselves. Some have

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felt depressed for a long time, while others are reacting to a recent event. Some have only just started thinking about suicide, but others have already made suicide attempts in the past. Although, deep down, many of the young people who call ChildLine feeling suicidal may not really want to die, they tell us that at the time death feels like the only way of dealing with their problems. They find it hard to look at other options, and often feel that no other solution will work. Their self-esteem may be so low that they believe they are a burden, and that their family, or the world, would be happier and better off without them. They may believe that people around them will be 'punished' by their death.

How do ChildLine counsellors help young people who feel suicidal?

Just picking up the phone and ringing ChildLine is an important step for a young person to take. Talking, being listened to and being taken seriously can make all the difference between a young person choosing to live or die. Callers often tell ChildLine how important it was for them to have someone who took the time to listen, to try to understand how they are feeling, and to be there for them at a time of crisis in their lives. While taking seriously the young person's thought of suicide, ChildLine counsellors also help them to work out what has contributed to their depression, and look with them at ways of changing or coping with their situation. Callers are

encouraged to talk about any feelings of pain, loss, anger and unhappiness, without being judged. Counsellors help callers feel valued, and build up their confidence and sense of self-worth. Thoughts of suicide may take time to subside, or reoccur later, so callers are encouraged to call back, or get support from someone close. Counsellors can also offer practical help, like giving information about support available in the young person's area, such as face-to-face counselling. If a caller's life is in immediate danger, for example from an overdose of tablets, counsellors will get help from the emergency services.

Some more facts about suicide

- People who make suicide attempts or threats are not just "attention seeking", but are at risk of harming themselves.
- Anyone who talks about killing himself or herself, or tries to do it, is deeply unhappy, and needs help.
- Most suicidal people are undecided about living or dying, and try beforehand to let others know how they are feeling, or give clues and warnings.
- Talking about suicide with someone will not make them more likely to harm themselves.
- Every year around 2,000 children and young people talk to ChildLine about feeling suicidal.

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How ChildLine can help

ChildLine takes children and young people's problems seriously, giving them a chance to talk in confidence about their concerns, however large or small. ChildLine counsellors can also tell them where to go for more information including local sources of help and advice. This service is free and available 24 hours a day, seven days a week on:

Further information and advice

ChildLine

Freephone: **0800 1111**

or

ChildLine,

Freepost NATN1111

London E1 6BR

or

ChildLine Minicom: **0800 400 222**

Monday to Friday 9.30am - 9.30pm

Saturday to Sunday 9.30am - 8.00pm

Other sources of help

The Samaritans

Telephone **08457 909090**, a national number with calls charged at local rates or

Email: jo@samaritans.org

Website: www.samaritans.org

Young Minds

Information on mental health issues and young people is available from Young Minds,

102-108 Clerkenwell Road,

London EC1M 5SA

Telephone: **0207 336 8445**

Email: young.minds@ukonline.co.uk

Website: www.youngminds.org.uk

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ChildLine is a service provided by the NSPCC.

Registered charity numbers 216401 and SC037717.

Please note – all names and identifying details have been changed to protect young people's identities.

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CONTACTING CHIDLIN E

Children can call ChildLine on **0800 1111** (all calls are free of charge, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year).

Or write to us at ChildLine, Freepost NATN1111, London E1 6BR; or visit www.childline.org.uk

Children who are deaf or find using a regular phone difficult can try our textphone service on **0800 400 222**.
Monday to Friday 9.30am to 9.30pm
Saturday to Sunday 9.30am to 8.00pm

We have a special helpline for children and young people living away from home in places such as refuges, boarding schools and young offenders' institutions called The Line on **0800 88 4444**.

Monday to Friday 3.30pm to 9.30pm
Saturday to Sunday 2.00pm to 8.00pm

ChildLine in Partnership with Schools (CHIPS) helps schools set up schemes to encourage children and young people to support each other. For more information call **020 7650 3230**.