



BoysTown

Fresh start.
New hope.

2013 Parentline Overview

SUPPORT, COUNSELLING
AND PARENT EDUCATION



“It [Parentline] helped me to gain the confidence that I didn't realise I already possessed. It confirmed a lot of things for me. Self-doubt had been hindering my way forward. She gave me the confidence I needed and the tools.”

Parentline client feedback



Parentline 1300 30 1300
www.parentline.com.au

Parentline provides education, guidance and support for parents and other individuals who care for children in Queensland and the Northern Territory.

Our counsellors are able to talk with you about your family and any parenting challenges.

We can assist you to:

- understand the way your family works
- believe in your own skills and strengths
- change how things are done in a way that suits your family
- access information on services and resources in your local community
- increase your parenting skills through over-the-phone or online education.

Parentline is a joint initiative of:



Northern
Territory
Government



Queensland
Government



BoysTown

The telephone and email service operates between 8am-10pm, seven days a week.

Web counselling is available
11am-2pm, Tuesday and Thursday.

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Introduction



Parentline is a confidential telephone and online counselling service providing professional counselling, education and support for parents and carers of children and young people. It began in Queensland in 1996 and expanded to the Northern Territory in 2004. Parentline receives funding from the Queensland Department of Education, Training and Employment (Office for Early Childhood Education and Care) and the Northern Territory Department of Children and Families.

The telephone* and email service operates between 8am-10pm, seven days a week. Web counselling is available 11am-2pm, Tuesday and Thursday.

On average, counsellors respond to 211 contacts each week about issues that include:

- parenting strategies for challenging behaviours
- parent-child relationships
- custody and access
- mental health/emotional wellbeing of children and young people.

Parents, carers and family members have direct access to counsellors and can choose to speak with either a male or female counsellor. They are also able to call back and speak with the same counsellor to work through issues.

Parentline provides counselling, information and referrals that are tailored to meet individual client needs.

The service aims to help callers to:

- obtain a better understanding of the way their family works

- believe in themselves and their own skills and strengths
- reflect on and develop strategies for changing how things are done in their family in a way that suits their individual family's needs
- identify their information needs – counsellors can provide callers with relevant tip sheets regarding more than 100 topics.

Parenting relationships are the focus of discussions, with three main considerations:

- concerns in relation to the child (parenting strategies and skills related to behaviour management or concerns for the child's emotional wellbeing)
- relationship concerns (relationship with children or relationship between parents/carers)
- concerns in relation to the caller's role as a parent or carer.

*Cost of a local call from landlines. Mobile phone charges apply.



Summary and highlights >>

In 2013, Parentline counsellors engaged in 10,986 individual sessions, providing counselling, support, information and/or referral services across telephone, email and web. This Overview details the diversity of Parentline clients, their main concerns and the nature of those concerns.

Individual sessions were made up of 8,348 incoming telephone calls, 2,420 outreach/

outgoing calls, 142 email responses and 76 web counselling contacts.

There were 11,468 attempts to reach the telephone counselling service with counsellors responding to 73% of these calls.

Parentline counsellors spent an average of 31 minutes with clients in telephone and online counselling sessions, with sessions ranging from one minute to more than two hours.

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Diversity of clients

Parentline reaches a diverse range of clients, including:

- custodial and non-custodial parents
- grandparents
- two-parent and blended families
- single parents
- extended family members
- parents and carers from regional areas
- parents and carers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- parents and carers who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

Problem types

The main problem types reported have remained consistent over Parentline's 16 years of operation. These relate to:

- children's challenging behaviour
- parenting strategies
- enhancing relationships
- mental and emotional wellbeing
- infant care
- custody or family law issues
- child abuse.

This year has seen an increase in the number of contacts about child abuse, child mental health/emotional wellbeing, parent mental health/emotional wellbeing, child drug or alcohol use, sexual behaviour of a child and bullying compared with 2012. There were decreases in the number of contacts about challenging behaviour and discipline issues, infant care and development concerns, family law issues, parent-child relationships, relationships between parents, parenting strategies, concerns about children running away or leaving home and child relationships.

Men, grandparents, single parents, non-custodial parents and clients receiving ongoing support from Parentline sought help at different rates on a number of issues compared to people from two parent families:

- Men were more likely than women to seek help from Parentline about family law concerns, contact and access issues, child abuse and relationships between parents.
- Grandparents were more likely than parents or carers to seek help about child abuse and family law issues.
- Single-parent families were more likely than two-parent families to seek help about family law, contact and access, parent-other relationships, their own mental health and emotional wellbeing and issues related to their parenting role or self-concept.
- Non-custodial parents were more likely to seek help about relationship issues of their child with others, when compared to parents with shared custody.
- Non-custodial parents and those with shared custody were more likely to seek help about contact and access issues, family law issues and child abuse concerns, when compared to custodial parents.
- Clients engaging in ongoing counselling support were more likely than first-time and occasional clients to seek help about their own mental health and emotional wellbeing, family law issues, contact and access concerns, parent relationships with others and issues related to their parenting role or self-concept.

Parents' concerns often changed with the age of their children. For example:

- Help-seeking about parenting strategies and infant care and development was more prominent for families with children aged up to 5 years.
- Concerns about contact and access, child abuse and parent mental health/emotional wellbeing were predominant issues for parents of children under the age of 15 years.
- Concerns about behaviours and discipline were most prominent for families with children aged between 5 and 18 years. There was also an increase in the concerns about parent-child relationships as children get older.

Parents and carers from a culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) background were proportionally more likely to seek help about parent-child relationships, child relationships with others and the violent behaviour of a child compared with other clients.

Clients who identified themselves as Indigenous were proportionally more likely to seek help about their own mental and emotional wellbeing, contact and access issues, family law concerns and contacts about children running away or leaving home.

Client feedback

Feedback from Parentline clients during 2013 continued to report high levels of satisfaction with the effectiveness of the service to create positive change for parents and children. For example:

- 95% of parents reported satisfaction with the service and 94% rated the service as effective overall.
- Almost 90% of parents rated the service as effective at increasing parenting confidence, parenting strategies and skills; understanding of children's needs; and parents capacity to cope as well as being effective at improving relationships with children.
- Parents' reports of observed changes in their children suggest that Parentline enhances children's social and emotional wellbeing, behavioural adjustment and improves the relationships between parents and their children.

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Online support

The Parentline website continued to offer access to information and support to parents and carers. The site provides 24/7 access to parenting information and tip sheets. During 2013, there were 40,809 visits from 33,811 unique visitors, with 87,130 pages viewed. This is an increase of 24% (32,987), 23% (27,587) and 9% (80,176) respectively, on the previous year. There were 15,683 views of the tip sheets, which provide information on key areas of concern about children and young people. This represents an 85% increase in views of tip-sheets on the previous year (8,485).



Email and web counselling provide an alternative method of help-seeking. Real-time web counselling is available between 11am and 2pm on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Parents are also able to email a message, query or request to counsellors. Email counselling often works for those clients who need to take longer to compose their message or express their thoughts and feelings. It also benefits individuals who feel confronted by phone and web counselling.

Table 1
Top 10 tip sheets

	Topics	Number of unique page views
1.	Exam stress	1,720
2.	Cross-cultural-differences	1,684
3.	Self-harm	1,135
4.	Cyber-bullying	1,007
5.	Anxiety	869
6.	Alcohol and other drugs	684
7.	Sleep	629
8.	Respectful relationships	576
9.	Transitioning	411
10.	Peer pressure	405





Who contacted Parentline? >>

Of the 10,986 telephone, web and email interactions during 2013, Parentline counsellors recorded detailed information for 10,887 sessions. The remainder of this Overview is based upon counsellor’s data from these 10,887 interactions with parents and carers across Queensland and the Northern Territory.

Age, gender and cultural background of callers

Parentline clients ranged from teenagers to 85 year olds, with 94% aged 21 to 59 years. The average age was 40 years.

Females made up 83% of contacts and males 17%. These proportions are consistent with the tendency for mothers to take a primary caring role for children in our community. They are also consistent with male help-seeking tendencies in general, especially in terms of their use of counselling services.

The cultural background of callers is provided in Table 2. More than 12% of sessions were with parents and carers from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds, while almost 6% were with Indigenous parents and carers. Given the cultural background of clients was recorded in only 55% of contacts, it is likely these figures under-represent the actual number of counselling sessions provided to Indigenous and culturally diverse clients.

Table 2
Cultural background of callers

Cultural background	Proportion* 2013 (n =5,982)
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander	5.6%
CALD	12.4%
Other	82.0%
Total	100%

* Proportions based on numbers of sessions where the cultural background of the client was known.

Are callers parents, carers or other family members?

The majority (71%) of contacts were from custodial parents. A further 13% were parents with shared custody and 7% were non-custodial parents. These proportions have been mostly consistent since Parentline began.

Contacts from grandparents accounted for almost 5% of sessions, of which more than a third had full or shared custody of their grandchildren. Parentline also received a small number of contacts (4%) from foster carers, other relatives, family friends, neighbours and professionals involved with children (e.g. teachers and social workers).



Diversity of family structures

Clients were mostly concerned about children residing in single parent families (50.5%) or two-biological parent families (30%). A smaller proportion of clients were from two-parent blended families (17%). The remaining 2.5% of clients were extended family members or had another relationship to the family. These proportions demonstrate an increase in contacts from single parent families during 2013 as compared with the previous year (48% from single parent families during 2012).

Most families had one (39%), two (32%) or three (16%) children. However, having four or more children was not uncommon (13%). Information about families recorded in 44% of cases suggested there were more than 10,000 children between them. If this data is extrapolated to account for all contacts, it is possible the service impacted up to 23,000 children throughout Queensland and the Northern Territory.

Most Parentline clients (56%) phoned with concerns about a child – 48% regarding a female child and 52% concerning a male child. Ages ranged from newborn babies to adult children. Table 3 demonstrates the spread across age ranges.

Table 3
Age of client's children

Age group	Proportion of Contacts (n = 5,821)
0-4 years	20%
5-9 years	19%
10-14 years	30%
15-18 years	26%
Adult offspring	5%
Total	100%





Parentline clients ranged from teenagers to 85 year olds, with 94% aged 21 to 59 years.

Where did they phone from?

Ninety-four percent of sessions (9,655) with Parentline counsellors during 2013 were with Queensland residents, and 4% with Northern Territory residents (400 contacts). The remaining 2% of sessions were from other States – New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, Tasmania, Australian Capital Territory and Western Australia. This was consistent with previous years.

All Parentline calls, emails and web counselling sessions are directed to BoysTown’s counselling centre. Of contacts from Queensland, 79%* were from the South East region including Brisbane, the Gold Coast, Ipswich, Toowoomba and the Sunshine Coast. Sixty-eight* per cent of Northern Territory contacts were from Darwin or its satellite city of Palmerston. The remaining contacts were from regional areas (see Table 4).

*Where location by region was known/recorded.

Table 4
Geographic location of contacts

Queensland (n = 4,794*)		Northern Territory (n = 138*)	
Brisbane	50%	Darwin	63%
Gold Coast	6%	Palmerston	5%
Toowoomba	7%	Alice Springs	21%
North Coast	5%	Top End	2%
Ipswich	10%	Katherine	2%
Sunshine Coast Region	6%	Tennant Creek	7%
Cairns/Cape York	5%		
Rockhampton	5%		
Mackay	4%		
Townsville	2%		
Mt Isa	<1%		

*Where location by region was known/recorded.

Main concerns >>

Parents and carers were directly seeking help about their issues or concerns during 7,655 interactions. The other 3,232 interactions included clients seeking information about Parentline; contacting their regular counsellor; recontacting to give feedback about the service; and when counsellors contacted clients to schedule a counselling session.

The top five concerns of parents and carers were:

1. Challenging behaviour and discipline
2. Parent-child relationships
3. Child mental health/emotional wellbeing
4. Parenting strategies
5. Parent mental health/emotional wellbeing

These have remained mostly consistent since Parentline began.

Figure 1 outlines the 15 most frequent concerns for parents, carers and family members who contacted Parentline, with comparison data for 2012.

Help-seeking increases

Increasing significantly compared with 2012, were the number and proportion of contacts from parents and carers about:

- parent mental health/emotional wellbeing
- child mental health/emotional wellbeing
- child drug or alcohol use
- child abuse
- sexual behaviour of a child
- bullying.

Help-seeking decreases

The number and proportion of contacts declined in relation to:

- challenging behaviour and discipline
- infant care and development
- family law
- parent-child relationships
- relationships between parents
- parenting strategies
- concerns about children running away or leaving home
- child relationships with others.

Help-seeking trends

Table 5 on page 14 outlines trends over the last six years.

When compared to the previous five years, help-seeking rates increased significantly for child mental health/emotional wellbeing, parent mental health/emotional wellbeing, contact and access issues and drug or alcohol use by a child. In contrast, there were decreases in concerns related to family law, and infant care and development.





Figure 1
Main concerns 2013

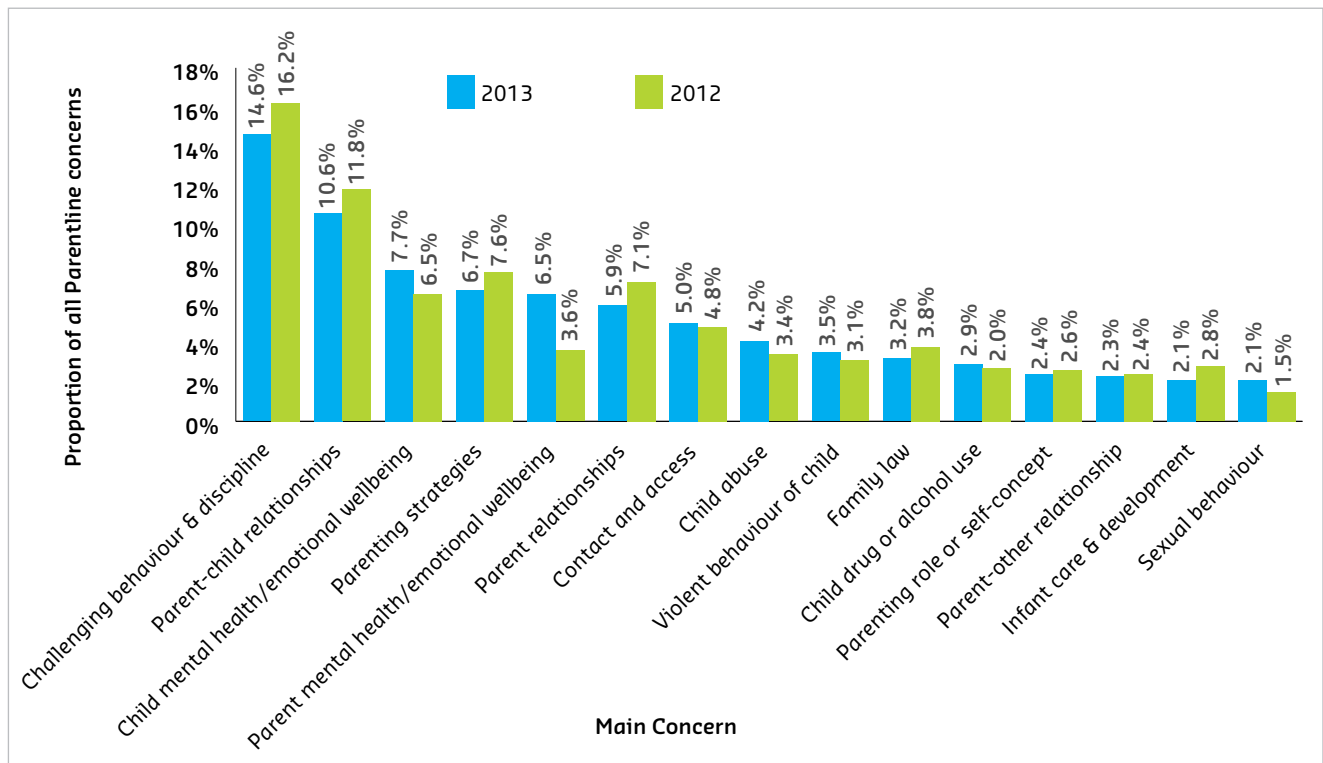


Table 5

Problem type yearly trends – proportion of Parentline concerns by year

Primary Concern	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
BEHAVIOUR MANAGEMENT	24.6%	25.2%	26.8%	28.4%	26.5%	23.3%
Challenging behaviour/discipline	13.6%	16.8%	17.8%	18.4%	16.2%	14.6%
Parenting strategies	8.3%	6.3%	6.6%	6.5%	7.6%	6.7%
Child runaway and/or left home	2.7%	2.1%	2.4%	3.5%	2.7%	2.0%
INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS	26.1%	24.5%	21.5%	23.4%	23.5%	20.7%
Child-other relationships	2.2%	2.3%	1.5%	2.2%	1.9%	1.4%
Parent-child relationships	13.5%	12.3%	10.9%	11.7%	11.8%	10.6%
Parent-other relationships	2.6%	2.5%	2.1%	2.0%	2.4%	2.3%
Parent relationships	7.4%	7.1%	6.7%	7.1%	7.1%	5.9%
Sibling relationships	0.5%	0.4%	0.2%	0.4%	0.3%	0.5%
HEALTH/WELLBEING OF CHILD	7.4%	7.5%	8.8%	9.2%	9.0%	10.2%
ADD/ADHD	0.6%	0.6%	0.4%	0.5%	0.5%	0.3%
Mental and/or emotional health of a child	4.6%	4.6%	5.5%	6.4%	6.5%	7.7%
Child physical health or disability	1.5%	1.8%	2.3%	1.8%	1.3%	1.4%
Risk-taking or suicidal behaviours of child	0.6%	0.4%	0.6%	0.5%	0.7%	0.8%
RESIDENCE/CONTACT	7.0%	8.7%	8.9%	8.1%	8.7%	8.2%
Contact and access	3.2%	3.2%	3.9%	4.0%	4.8%	5.0%
Family law	3.8%	5.5%	5.0%	4.2%	3.8%	3.2%
HEALTH/WELLBEING OF PARENT	8.2%	8.0%	7.8%	6.7%	6.7%	9.7%
Parent physical health or disability	0.7%	1.0%	0.5%	0.3%	0.3%	0.5%
Mental and/or emotional health of a parent	4.8%	5.0%	4.7%	3.3%	3.6%	6.5%
Parenting role/self concept	2.4%	1.8%	2.5%	3.0%	2.6%	2.4%
Suicide-related issues of parent/ significant other	0.2%	0.3%	0.2%	0.1%	0.2%	0.3%
VIOLENCE	3.1%	2.9%	3.8%	4.7%	4.2%	4.3%
Domestic violence	1.0%	1.1%	0.8%	0.8%	0.9%	0.7%
Physical/sexual violence	0.3%	0.3%	0.2%	0.3%	0.2%	0.2%
Violent behaviour of child	1.8%	1.5%	2.8%	3.7%	3.1%	3.5%
SCHOOL RELATED	2.8%	3.3%	2.9%	4.5%	3.6%	4.3%
School authority	0.7%	0.6%	0.7%	0.8%	0.7%	0.8%
Bullying	0.9%	1.1%	1.0%	1.6%	0.9%	1.4%
School adjustment	0.8%	0.9%	0.9%	1.6%	1.2%	1.5%
Learning/study	0.5%	0.7%	0.3%	0.5%	0.8%	0.6%
POST NATAL	7.5%	6.5%	4.6%	3.9%	3.0%	2.3%
Infant care and development	6.8%	5.9%	4.2%	3.6%	2.8%	2.1%
Post natal adjustment	0.7%	0.6%	0.4%	0.3%	0.2%	0.2%
CHILD ABUSE	3.6%	3.7%	4.1%	3.3%	3.4%	4.2%
Emotional abuse	0.5%	0.4%	0.5%	0.5%	0.4%	0.4%
Neglect of a child	0.7%	0.9%	0.7%	0.6%	0.7%	0.7%
Physical abuse	1.0%	0.8%	0.8%	0.8%	0.8%	1.1%
Sexual abuse	1.6%	1.5%	2.1%	1.4%	1.5%	2.0%
DRUG AND ALCOHOL USE	1.8%	2.1%	2.2%	2.7%	2.4%	3.3%
Child drug or alcohol use	1.4%	1.8%	1.9%	2.2%	2.0%	2.9%
Drug or alcohol use of a family member	0.4%	0.3%	0.4%	0.4%	0.5%	0.4%
SEXUALITY	2.3%	2.1%	2.3%	2.5%	1.9%	2.4%
Sexual behaviour	1.9%	1.6%	1.9%	2.0%	1.5%	2.1%
Sexual orientation	0.2%	0.2%	0.2%	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%
Pregnancy	0.2%	0.3%	0.3%	0.3%	0.2%	0.2%
PRACTICAL ISSUES	1.5%	1.5%	1.5%	1.5%	1.9%	1.9%
Child Care	0.5%	0.3%	0.3%	0.2%	0.2%	0.2%
Employment/financial	0.6%	0.8%	0.5%	0.7%	0.7%	0.6%
Legal/juvenile justice	0.4%	0.3%	0.7%	0.6%	1.0%	1.1%
OTHER CONCERNS	4.1%	4.0%	4.6%	1.2%	5.3%	5.2%
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%



Challenging behaviours

Will* called Parentline because he was concerned about his son's behaviour. Baxter* is 15, and Will has had sole custody since he and Baxter's mother separated. Will has remarried and has more children.

Generally, everyone in the family gets on well. However, Will was concerned about Baxter as he had gone from being a happy, good natured child with lots of friends, to having few friends and upsetting teachers at school. Baxter hates school, has run away a number of times and has stolen things from home, including credit cards he used to top up the credit on his phone and run-up large bills buying things off the Internet. Will said Baxter is a different person when he has been 'grounded' and does help with the household chores, but Will felt he was approaching the point where he could no longer tolerate having Baxter at home.

The counsellor commended Will for reaching out for help and explored the current situation at home and at school. The counsellor normalised testing behaviour, and discussed the importance of boundaries and consequences. Will and the counsellor discussed possible alternatives for Baxter including finding another school, arranging an apprenticeship and completing his education through TAFE. The counsellor suggested that Will discuss the situation with Baxter's school and referred Will to local youth services for help and support.

*Name changed for privacy reasons.

Analysis of the top 10 concerns >>

Challenging behaviour and discipline

The number one reason parents and carers contacted Parentline remained concerns about managing children’s challenging behaviour. This represents concerns about responding to children’s behaviours and seeking help with discipline.

Table 6
Challenging behaviour and discipline

Nature of contacts	% of Contacts (n = 1,120)
Seeking information	5%
Intermittent behaviour/ discipline problems	20%
Ongoing behaviour/ discipline problems	45%
Significant distress and/or severe problem behaviour	21%
Not coping and in need of referral/support	9%
Total	100%

The majority (89%) of callers seeking assistance with managing challenging behaviour and discipline of children were first-time or occasional Parentline clients.

This issue was most prominent for families with children aged 10 to 18 years (67% of all contacts about this issue) and with a male child (57% compared with 52% across all problem types).

Clients were also more likely to be custodial parents (81% compared with 71% across all concerns) and parents from two parent families (57% compared with 47% across all problem types).

Parent-child relationships

The number of parents with concerns about the relationships between themselves (as parent or as prime carer) and their children remained the second most common reason for contacting Parentline. Issues such as communication difficulties, arguments and interpersonal conflict continued to be common themes as did the relationship between a child and the client’s partner/ex-partner.

Table 7
Parent-child relationships

Nature of calls	% of Contacts (n =814)
Seeking information	7%
Occasional problems with communication	16%
Ongoing problems with communication	34%
Conflict causing major concern	30%
Severely distressed with the situation	13%
Total	100%

The number of contacts from parents focused on their relationship with their children increased as children grew older, with 57% about children older than 14 years.

Parents with a female child, non-custodial parents and parents from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (CALD) were proportionally more likely to seek help about parent-child relationships than parents with a male child, custodial parents and parents from other backgrounds:

- 53% of counselling sessions were about a female child, compared with 48% across all problem types

Communication difficulties, arguments and interpersonal conflict continued to be common themes.

- 9% were with non-custodial parents, compared with 7% across all problem types
- 16% were with parents from CALD backgrounds compared with 12% across all problem types.

Parent-child relationships issues were also predominantly presented by single parents (53% compared with 50% across all problem types) and two-parent step/blended families (21% compared with 17% across all concerns).

“The relationship between myself and my child is calmer now – helps me establish a routine – and be more predictable – and it makes the household a bit more stable.”

Parentline client feedback



Child mental health/ emotional wellbeing

Amy* was worried about the mental and emotional wellbeing of her 16 month old son, Andrew*. She and her husband, John*, recently separated and both have 50/50 custody of their son.

Both Amy and John worked full-time and Andrew spent a lot of time with his child care worker, Amanda*. Amanda also cared for three other children (all aged under 3 years) in a private home. She told Amy that Andrew had been presenting with symptoms of separation anxiety since the divorce. He slept a lot more than normal and seemed frightened to be alone even for a moment. Amanda said he was constantly seeking attention and affection from her. She was concerned for Andrew and was unsure how to manage these behaviours and needs when she cared for him.

Amy said she felt guilty that she worked full-time and was concerned that this was impacting on her son's emotional wellbeing and her relationship with him. She was also concerned about Andrew's relationship with his father, as prior to the divorce he would often ignore Andrew and his needs. Amy had also noticed a change in Andrew and felt like he was more anxious and depressed than he had been a few months ago. She did not know how to best help Andrew.

The counsellor validated Amy's concerns for her son and explored the positives and strengths that already existed within their relationship. They reviewed Amy's commitments and goals, exploring strategies that would allow Amy to spend more time with Andrew while also meeting her work and financial commitments.

Amy decided to explore legal options around gaining more custody of Andrew to provide a more stable environment for him. She was referred to legal aid to receive professional advice about options. The counsellor also explored ways for Amy to collaborate more with Amanda and John so they could provide Andrew and one another, with consistent support to get the best outcome for everyone involved.

*Name changed for privacy reasons.



Child mental health/emotional wellbeing

Concerns about children's mental health and/or emotional wellbeing included changes in the child's behaviour, ways of interacting with others or related to issues such as grief, loneliness, eating disorders, psychosis, depression and/or anxiety symptoms.

These concerns tended to be evenly spread across children aged between 5 and 18 years, with 92% of contacts about children older than 5 years. These issues were predominantly presented by custodial parents (79% compared with 71% across all problem types) and first-time or occasional clients (87%).

Table 8
Child mental health/emotional wellbeing

Nature of contacts	% of Contacts (n =592)
Enquiry about child's mental/emotional state	15%
Concern over recent change in child's behaviour	21%
Concern for child with ongoing mental/emotional problems	41%
Difficulties coping with mentally/emotionally ill child	19%
Severe distress, requires urgent intervention/referral	4%
Total	100%

Parenting strategies

These were about the client's need to explore parenting strategies and disciplinary techniques.

Table 9
Parenting strategies

Nature of contacts	% of Contacts (n =514)
Seeking information	18%
Unsure about own strategies	29%
Managing, but seeking new strategies	35%
Major difficulties, current strategies not working	17%
Severe distress, not coping	1%
Total	100%

Parenting strategy concerns were mostly raised by parents and carers under the age of 30 years (40% compared with 30% across all problem types). They featured a male child (61% compared with 52% across all concerns), and young children aged up to 4 years (38% compared with 20% across all problem types).

Ongoing clients were proportionally more likely to seek help about parenting strategies than one-off or occasional clients (26% of these contacts were with ongoing clients).

Parent mental health/emotional wellbeing

This problem type relates to concerns about the mental health and/or emotional wellbeing of the client, another parent or carer.

Table 10
Parent mental health/emotional wellbeing

Nature of contacts	% of Contacts (n =496)
Seeking information	6%
Dealing with issues from own childhood	7%
Coping but needing support or strategies	53%
Problem interferes with parenting	29%
Needs urgent intervention or referral	5%
Total	100%

The majority of these contacts were from single parents (71%) and parents with a female child (63%). Parents and carers with young children aged up to 9 years made up 67% of contacts (compared with 39% across all problem types). Almost two-thirds were with clients accessing ongoing counselling and support from Parentline (63%).

Custodial parents and parents from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds were highly represented, with 76% and 8% contacts respectively about this concern compared with 71% and 4% across all problem types.

Parent relationships

Parent relationships concerns include problems between the client and their partner and/or ex-partner.

Table 11
Parent relationships

Nature of contacts	% of Contacts (n =452)
Awareness of relationship problems	6%
Conflict over children/parenting strategies	18%
Concern about the effect of relationship problems on family	10%
Significant relationship difficulties causing distress	19%
Relationship breakdown/separation/divorce	47%
Total	100%

Help-seeking about relationships between parents was significantly more prominent for families with younger children, with 66% of contacts from families with children younger than 10 years. It was also more prominent for parents with shared custody (25% compared with 13% across all problem types).

Male clients and parents from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds were proportionally more likely to seek help about parent relationships than female clients and parents from other backgrounds. Of the contacts about parent relationships:

- 15% of these counselling sessions were with parents from CALD backgrounds compared with 12% across all problem types
- 24% were sessions with male clients compared with 17% across all concerns.



Contact and access issues

This represents concerns about arrangements for contact or access with children, including difficulty agreeing on or maintaining access arrangements with the other parent, family members, or a child protection agency.

Table 12
Contact and access issues

Nature of contacts	% of Contacts (n =380)
Seeking information	15%
No contact/access arrangements in place	13%
Occasional difficulties with access	17%
Ongoing difficulties	37%
Continual lack of contact	18%
Total	100%

Contact and access concerns in 2013 were most prominent for families with children younger than 10 years (65%). Fathers, single parents, non-custodial parents, parents with shared custody, ongoing clients and clients from an Aboriginal background had a greater representation in concerns about contact and access:

- 35% were males (mostly fathers), compared with 17% across all concerns
- 72% were single parents, compared with 50% across all problem types
- 57% were non-custodial parents (24%) or parents with shared custody (33%) compared with 20% across all problem types
- 33% were sessions with clients accessing ongoing support from Parentline compared with 22% across all concerns
- 9% were clients from an Aboriginal background, compared with 4% across all problem types.

Violent behaviour of child

Concerns about children’s violent behaviour include any concerns about the violent behaviour of a child, including intimidating, harassing or threatening behaviour.

Table 13

Violent behaviour of child

Nature of contacts	% of Contacts (n =265)
Seeking information	8%
Concern related to an incidence of violence	33%
Client fearful for safety of self/family	30%
Frustration, no intervention works	24%
Injury to client or others from violence	5%
Total	100%

The vast majority of callers seeking assistance with the violent behaviour of children were custodial parents (83%) and first-time or occasional clients (92%). Most of the contacts were about children aged 10-18 years (82% compared with 55% across all problem types) and a male child (69% compared with 52% across all concerns).

Clients from two-parent step/blended families and parents from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, were proportionally more likely to seek help about the violent behaviour of children than families and parents from other backgrounds.

Of the contacts about violent behaviour of children:

- 19% of counselling sessions were with parents from CALD backgrounds compared with 12% across all problem types
- 25% were sessions with clients from two-parent step/blended families compared with 17% across all concerns.

Family law

Family law concerns include family law matters, the process or outcomes of family court action or other issues related to family court decisions.

Table 14

Family law

Nature of contacts	% of Contacts (n =244)
Enquiry about family law	34%
Concerned about the process or outcomes of mediation/counselling	17%
Difficulties with receiving or paying child support/maintenance	3%
Ongoing family law matters	40%
Unresolved, dissatisfied with court decision	6%
Total	100%

The majority of family law contacts were from single parents (74%) and parents concerned about children younger than 10 years (73%). Males, grandparents, non-custodial parents, parents with shared custody, and ongoing clients also had a greater representation in family law concerns:

- 31% were males compared with 17% across all problems types
- 44% were non-custodial parents (13%) or parents with shared custody (31%) compared with 20% across all problem types
- 33% were sessions with clients accessing ongoing support from Parentline compared with 22% across all concerns
- 12% were with grandparents compared with 5% across all problem types.

Parents and carers from Aboriginal backgrounds as well as clients from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, were proportionally more likely to seek help about family law than parents from other backgrounds (9% and 16% compared with 4% and 12% respectively across all problem types).



Child abuse

Contacts about child abuse issues related to sexual abuse (47%), physical abuse (26%), neglect (16%) and emotional abuse (11%). Concerns mostly related to children younger than 10 years (63%), with 90% about children younger than 15 years. These concerns were predominantly presented by first-time and occasional clients (91%).

Table 15
Sexual abuse

Nature of contacts	% of Contacts (n =150)
Enquiry or suspected abuse	43%
Unsure how to support an abused child	35%
Concern for child currently at risk of abuse	17%
Distress over ongoing abuse	3%
Severe distress, urgent intervention or referral required	2%
Total	100%

Table 16

Physical abuse, emotional abuse or neglect

Nature of contacts	% of Contacts (n =167)
Enquiry or suspected abuse	38%
Concern over evidence of physical abuse, emotional abuse or neglect	36%
Concern about own behaviour in relation to physical abuse, emotional abuse or neglect	4%
Concern about ongoing abuse	20%
Severe distress, urgent intervention or referral required	2%
Total	100%

Parents younger than 30 years made proportionally more contacts about this issue (40% compared with 30% across all problem types) as did parents of step/blended families (27% compared with 17% across all concerns).

Most contacts were about a female child (57% compared with 48% across all problem types). Grandparents also made proportionally more contacts about child abuse (14% of these contacts) compared with their help-seeking across other problem types (5%).





Parent-child relationships

Emma* was concerned for her 14 year old son, Steven*. Although they had once been close, she was finding it difficult to communicate with him. Steven had recently been caught stealing.

Steven had changed from a caring and open boy, who shared everything with her, to being secretive and withdrawn. His grades had fallen drastically and on several occasions he had lied to her. As a teacher, Emma felt that she was normally good at communicating and understanding young people. However, her attempts to talk with Steven about what was going on for him had not gone well. Emma was concerned and wished Steven would confide in her. She was frustrated and overwhelmed and asked for ideas on how to improve her communication with him.

The counsellor validated Emma's concerns and normalised age appropriate behaviours, such as wanting more privacy. Emma and the counsellor discussed techniques and strategies to communicate with Steven on his level, rebuild trust and offer him support. Emma was also given referrals to services that could offer Steven individual support and counselling, such as Kids Helpline.

*Name changed for privacy reasons.

Concerns for client groups >>

The top concerns for both male and female callers to Parentline were managing children's challenging behaviour and enhancing parent-child relationships.

Differences between genders

Top five concerns of male clients

1. Challenging behaviour and discipline
2. Contact and access issues
3. Parent-child relationships
4. Parent relationships
5. Parenting strategies

Males (mostly fathers) were proportionally more likely than females to seek help about family law concerns, contact and access issues, child abuse and parent relationships issues.

Men were more likely to be experiencing shared parental custody or to have no custodial rights at all. Fifty-three percent of males reported being a custodial parent compared with 75% of females, 24% shared custody of their child versus 11% of females, and 16% reported a non-custodial relationship with their child compared with 5% of female clients.

Top five concerns of female clients

1. Challenging behaviour and discipline
2. Parent-child relationships
3. Child mental health/emotional wellbeing
4. Parent mental health/emotional wellbeing
5. Parenting strategies

Females were more likely than males to seek help about challenging behaviour and discipline concerns, child mental health/emotional wellbeing, parent mental health/emotional wellbeing issues, infant care and development, and parent relationships with others.

Men were more likely to be experiencing shared parental custody or to have no custodial rights at all.

Concerns for single parents

Top five concerns of single parents

1. Challenging behaviour and discipline
2. Parent-child relationships
3. Parent mental health/emotional wellbeing
4. Child mental health/emotional wellbeing
5. Contact and access issues

Single-parents were significantly more likely to seek help about family law concerns, contact and access issues, parent-other relationships, their own mental health/emotional wellbeing and issues related to their parenting role or self-concept.

Concerns for grandparents

Top five concerns of grandparents

1. Challenging behaviour and discipline
2. Child abuse
3. Family law
4. Parent-child relationships
5. Contact and access issues

Grandparents were significantly more likely than parents or carers to seek help about child abuse concerns and family law issues.





Concerns for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients

Top five concerns of Indigenous clients

1. Challenging behaviour and discipline
2. Parent mental health/emotional wellbeing
3. Contact and access issues
4. Family law
5. Parent-child relationships*
Parent relationships*

*These two issues were ranked equal fifth.

Indigenous clients were proportionally more likely to seek help about their own mental health/emotional wellbeing, contact and access issues, family law concerns and contacts about children running away or leaving home.

Concerns for clients of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds

Top five concerns of CALD clients

1. Parent-child relationships
2. Challenging behaviour and discipline
3. Parent relationships
4. Parenting strategies
5. Violent behaviour of child

CALD callers were proportionally more likely to seek help about parent-child relationships, child relationships with others and violent behaviour of a child (when compared with all other clients).

Concerns for non-custodial parents

Top five concerns of non-custodial parents

1. Contact and access issues
2. Parent child relationships
3. Parent mental health/emotional wellbeing
4. Family law
5. Child abuse

Non-custodial parents were significantly more likely to seek help from Parentline about their child's relationships issues with others (when compared to parents with shared custody).

Both non-custodial parents and those with shared custody were significantly more likely to seek help about contact and access issues, family law issues and child abuse concerns (when compared to custodial parents).

Concerns for children of different ages

Issues differ according to the age of the child:

- Concerns about behaviours and discipline were most prominent for families with children aged between 5 and 18 years.
- As children get older, there was a significant increase in the concerns about parent-child relationships – it is the number one reason for contacts about children 19 years and older.
- Help-seeking about relationships between parents and parents' relationships with others was significantly more prominent for families with children aged up to 9 years. Parents of children in this age group were also more likely to make contact about family law issues.
- Virtually all contacts about infant care and development were from parents with children aged less than 5 years. Parenting strategies was also prominent for families with children younger than 5 years.
- Child mental health/emotional wellbeing concerns and issues regarding the violent behaviour of a child were significantly greater for parents with children older than 5 years.
- Child abuse concerns, contact and access issues and parent mental health/emotional wellbeing were significantly higher for parents calling about children aged up to 14 years.
- Parents of older children (10 years and above) were significantly more likely to have concerns about a child's drug or alcohol use as well as a runaway child or children leaving home.

The top five concerns for each age group

Children 0-4 years

1. Parenting strategies
2. Infant care and development
3. Parent mental health/emotional wellbeing
4. Parent relationships
5. Challenging behaviour and discipline

Children 5-9 years

1. Challenging behaviour and discipline
2. Child abuse
3. Parent relationships
4. Child mental health/emotional wellbeing
5. Contact and access issues

Children 10-14 years

1. Challenging behaviour and discipline
2. Child mental health/emotional wellbeing
3. Parent-child relationships
4. Violent behaviour of child
5. Parenting strategies

Children 15-18 years

1. Challenging behaviour and discipline
2. Parent-child relationships
3. Child mental health/emotional wellbeing
4. Child drug/alcohol use
5. Violent behaviour of child

Adult children

1. Parent-child relationships
2. Child mental health/emotional wellbeing
3. Child drug/alcohol use
4. Challenging behaviour and discipline
5. Parenting strategies

Parentline provides counselling, information and referrals that are tailored to meet individual client needs.



Ongoing counselling >>

A unique feature of Parentline is the ability to provide ongoing counselling and support, and allow clients to reconnect with the same counsellor over a period of time. Twenty-three per cent of interactions were with clients engaged in ongoing counselling.

There were differences in the issues that parents sought help about once or twice and the issues that were likely to involve ongoing counselling support.

First-time and occasional clients were significantly more likely than ongoing clients to seek help about challenging behaviour and discipline, child mental health/emotional wellbeing, child abuse, drug or alcohol use by a child, infant care and development, sexual behaviour, violent behaviour of a child and contacts about children running away or leaving home.

Clients engaging in ongoing counselling support with Parentline were significantly more likely than first-time and occasional clients to seek help about their own mental health/emotional wellbeing, family law issues, contact and access concerns, parent relationships with others and issues related to their parenting role or self-concept.

Top five concerns of first-time and occasional clients

1. Challenging behaviour and discipline
2. Parent-child relationships
3. Child mental health/emotional wellbeing
4. Parenting strategies
5. Parent relationships

Top five concerns of clients engaging in ongoing counselling support

1. Parent mental health/emotional wellbeing
2. Parent-child relationships
3. Challenging behaviours and discipline
4. Parenting strategies
5. Contact and access issues

Referral to other support services >>

Parentline counsellors have access to an extensive database of support services for parents and children. These include child health services, family counselling services, clinical services for behaviour management, child care and parent support groups. The database allows counsellors to quickly identify relevant services within the caller's local community.

Counsellors were able to assist 53% of Parentline clients without referring them to another agency. Twenty-two percent of counselling sessions resulted in the client being referred to another service for ongoing support.

A further 19% of Parentline clients were referred to their doctor, counsellor, mental health worker

or other non-specific referral. In 6% of sessions, counsellors were unable to provide a referral because no appropriate service was available or the client finished the session before a referral was recommended.



Client satisfaction and counselling outcomes >>

Parentline conducts an annual survey amongst parents and carers from Queensland and the Northern Territory who use the telephone counselling service. The survey measures the effectiveness of Parentline in empowering parents and carers to overcome their concerns, assist with parenting support needs, as well as evaluating their level of satisfaction with the service.

In 2013, 150 parents and carers were surveyed and included males, females, first-time and repeat callers from a diverse range of ages and cultural backgrounds. Ninety-five percent of clients reported satisfaction with the counselling service, of which 84% claimed to be 'very satisfied'.

95% of clients said they would recommend Parentline to a friend.

Clients rated Parentline as 'effective' or 'very effective' in assisting with specific issues including:

- increasing parenting confidence
- increasing parenting strategies and skills
- improving their relationships with their children
- increasing their understanding of their children's needs
- increasing their personal capacity to cope
- improving their ability to care for their child/children.

Comments included:

"I found that they were understanding and supportive and their knowledge of similar situations was really applicable to my situation – so I could apply what they were suggesting to my own family."

"It helped me get through the emotional situation and once I got over that I could be a better parent – things got a lot clearer. Clearer about what I needed to do – and more focussed."

"They are very gentle, but insightful, and met my needs in terms of trying to understand where my daughter was coming from and what was important for me as well. Which strategies to try – a mediation idea – and supportive follow-up to seek out as well for myself."

"Just reassuring I'm doing the right things. It helps with advice and helps you bounce ideas off someone – especially when you're on your own like me."

Parentline client feedback

Feedback from Parentline clients during 2013 continued to report high levels of satisfaction with the effectiveness of the service to create positive change for parents and children.

The impact on children and young people

Feedback from parents about changes they have observed in their children suggests Parentline contributes to children's social and emotional wellbeing, behavioural adjustment and improves the relationships between parents and their children. Key themes from parents' reports included:

- 'Improved/better behaviour and attitude': child is more 'responsive', 'cooperative' and 'calmer'.
- 'Improved communication and quality of relationships': greater degrees of understanding, openness and closeness between children and their parents and more 'engagement' with the family.
- 'Feeling better': the child feels reduced 'stress', greater 'calmness' and 'happiness'.
- Coping better with different issues and situations.
- Feeling more 'supported' and 'understood' by the parents as well as 'secure' and 'safe' with the parents.
- Increased 'confidence'.
- 'Improved school attendance and challenges at school' due to issues being resolved.

Comments included:

"I'm stricter and better at drawing boundaries (sometimes) and sometimes they respond well to this."

"Yes - my child is now more confident that she knows that what this other child is doing is not right - so it has made a difference that I have been able to give my daughter some good information that backed her up and she understands what's happening now. After I've now talked to the principal a few things have been put in place now at the school to help her."

"Overall a happier child - as he also has strategies now for coping with his emotions."

"My son is a lot happier because I'm a lot less stressed."

"Advice I put into play immediately - and it did seem to reduce the children's stress."

"The relationship between myself and my child is calmer now - helps me establish a routine - and be more predictable - and it makes the household a bit more stable."

"I don't get so upset with the child because I understand more so why she is doing these things and I spend more time with her."

"Effective at getting my child to school today - and reinforcing that the approach I was starting to look at, which is to be firm and clear, was reinforced."

"This assistance will assist seven people - it's a great outcome. The young person is today in an appointment as we speak - the school's been dealt with and the challenging mother is on board as well - they're all on board today."



Data collection and limitations

Parentline counsellors record non-identifying information at the end of every telephone session. There are a maximum of 38 different fields where data may be logged, however, only eleven are mandatory. They are: date, time, length of session, state/territory, main concern, problem severity, referral given, type of client – first-time, occasional or ongoing, whether the client had thoughts of suicide, whether the Triple P Parenting Program was involved in the call and whether the counsellor made the call to the client.

Ideally, counsellors enter information for each field however, the amount of information recorded can vary due to:

- Anonymity – Parentline promotes itself as a confidential service – frequently clients choose not to reveal details about themselves particularly those that, in their view, might lead to identification.
- Sensitivity of information – the nature of some contacts is such that direct information gathering is either contraindicated or proves difficult.
- The length or nature of the call – is such that sometimes even basic data collection is impossible or irrelevant.

Other issues to be considered regarding the data within this report include:

- Repeat contacts – data reported may include repeat contacts made by individuals across a period of time.
- Multiple problems – many parent's issues are multifaceted, spanning across more than one of the 40 problem types. Counsellors record the one problem type that was the main concern for the client on that day.
- Missing data – Parentline has adopted a policy of recording data in each field in such a way as to identify incomplete or blank responses. All information reported here is based only on those instances where the field has been completed.
- Statistical significance – all stated data comparisons have been assessed against a 95% confidence interval.

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The telephone and email service operates between 8am-10pm, seven days a week.

Web counselling is available 11am-2pm, Tuesday and Thursday.

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Parentline is a service of BoysTown.