



NSPCC

Children living in families facing adversity

NSPCC helplines report

EVERY CHILDHOOD IS WORTH FIGHTING FOR

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This report was produced by the NSPCC Knowledge and Information Service.
For more information about this report, please contact us at help@nspcc.org.uk

All names and potentially identifying details in this report have been changed to ensure they are anonymous. Quotes are created from real Childline counselling sessions, message board posts and NSPCC helpline contacts but are not necessarily direct quotes.

Where the data comes from

This report has been written using data gathered from our Childline and helpline services in 2016/17. These services not only provide support to those who contact us, they also help to give us a picture of the issues facing children and young people today.

NSPCC helpline

Our helpline is a national service where anyone can report or seek advice about their concerns for a child by phone, email, text or online form. It's available 24/7 and is run by child protection professionals, including social workers, teachers and health specialists. In 2016/17, we received over 66,000 contacts from adults concerned about the welfare of a child.

0808 800 5000
help@nspcc.org.uk
nspcc.org.uk/helpline

Childline

Our Childline service provides a safe and confidential space for children and young people to work through a wide range of issues. Our trained volunteer counsellors are available 24/7, and in 2016/17 we delivered over 295,000 counselling sessions. Childline can be contacted online, over the phone, or through our app *For Me*.

0800 1111
childline.org.uk
download our app For Me: childline.org.uk/for-me

About the data

Data from helpline contacts and Childline counselling sessions provide valuable insight and can be analysed to help us identify patterns and trends. However it's important to bear in mind the limitations of the data.

- Our recording systems are designed to allow counsellors, practitioners and their supervisors to respond appropriately to the concerns being raised. They are not designed for more controlled collection and analysis of data designed around a specific research framework.
 - Because Childline is an anonymous service and people contacting the helpline can choose to remain anonymous, we can't always know if people are contacting us multiple times. Therefore we report on data about Childline counselling sessions and helpline contacts rather than the number of individuals who contact us.
 - Information drawn from helpline contacts and Childline counselling sessions isn't necessarily representative of the UK as a whole. Children contact Childline, and adults contact the NSPCC helpline, when there is something that they are worried about. They are self-selecting groups coming to us in times of need.
 - We can only record information based on what people contacting the helpline or Childline choose to talk to us about. If a young person does not wish to talk about something with their Childline counsellor, we will not prompt them to do so. Similarly, adults can decide what they do and don't tell us when contacting the helpline.
 - Sometimes people may choose to discuss more than one concern when they contact us about a family facing adversity and other times they may only mention one. So it's not possible for us to know how many of the children and families referred to in helpline contacts and Childline counselling sessions are experiencing more than one adversity.
 - For this report, we've looked at helpline contacts and Childline counselling sessions where concerns were raised about a parent or carer experiencing domestic abuse, substance misuse or mental health problems – and where this was having an impact on their child's wellbeing. Our reporting tools don't allow us to easily identify where concerns about more than one of these adversities were raised in the same helpline contact or Childline counselling session. This means our data is likely to under-represent the prevalence of these issues in our helpline contacts and Childline counselling sessions.
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Introduction

Many parents or carers who are going through challenging circumstances are able to provide safe and loving care for their family. But if problems mount up, everyday situations can become harder to cope with. This can leave children more vulnerable to abuse and neglect.

Domestic abuse, substance misuse and/or mental health problems are some of the most significant risks which can lead to child abuse and neglect. An analysis of 175 serious case reviews¹ from 2011–14 found:

- 54 per cent of cases featured domestic violence
- 47 per cent of cases featured parental substance misuse
- 53 per cent of cases featured parental mental health problems.

(Sidebotham et al, 2016).

Because of this, the first of our five strategic goals for 2016–21 is to prevent child abuse in families experiencing domestic abuse, substance misuse and/or mental health problems. We refer to families experiencing these challenges as ‘families facing adversity’.

Families don’t always experience each adversity in isolation; many are interlinked. They also have a cumulative effect – the more of them that affect a family, the greater risk of children becoming vulnerable to harm (Cleaver, Unell and Aldgate, 2011; Parliamentary office of science and technology, 2018). If families also experience additional difficulties – such as financial problems, housing issues and social isolation – this can lead to extra stress, resulting in parents finding it more challenging to keep their children safe (Cleaver, Unell and Aldgate, 2011).

The NSPCC helpline receives contacts from people who are concerned about the risks to children living in families facing adversity. In 2016/17 we responded to 15,032 contacts concerned with children living in families where parents are experiencing domestic abuse, substance misuse and/or mental health problems. This was a 27 per cent increase from 2015/16 (11,804 contacts)².

Growing up in a family facing adversity can affect a child’s physical and mental health. Our Childline service delivered 12,099 counselling sessions to children and young people who were worried about living in families facing adversity in 2016/17. They told us about the impact it has on their lives – causing anxiety, insomnia and making it difficult for them to concentrate at school or build friendships.

But it’s possible to reduce the risk of harm to children whose families are affected by these adversities. This can be done by helping parents to understand things from their children’s point of view, improve their family relationships and learn new parenting skills; and by helping children build resilience and cope with the challenges they face.

We want to help professionals support children who live in families facing adversity more effectively. So we’re sharing what we’ve learnt from our helpline contacts and Childline counselling sessions about children’s experiences of the challenges their families are facing. We’re highlighting how it affects their wellbeing, how they get support and what we can all do to help them get back on track.

¹ Case reviews are carried out when a child dies or is seriously injured and abuse or neglect are suspected. They identify lessons that could help prevent similar incidents happening in the future.

² There was a 21 per cent overall increase in contacts responded to by our helpline over the last year from 54,865 in 2015/16 to 66,218 in 2016/17.

Definitions

Children and young people

A child is anyone under 18, but Childline supports anyone up until their 19th birthday. So throughout this report we'll often refer to 'young people' to include the full age range of those who contact Childline.

Families facing adversity

When we talk about 'families facing adversity' in this report, we're focusing specifically on families who are experiencing the following difficult situations:

- parents involved in domestic abuse
- parents misusing drugs and/or alcohol (substance misuse)
- parents with mental health problems.

Although many parents or carers who are experiencing these challenges are able to provide safe care for their families, research shows that these adversities increase the risk of harm to children. Adversities often occur together and they have a cumulative effect – the more of them that are present in a family, the greater the risk to the child (Cleaver, Unell and Aldgate, 2011). Even if a child isn't being abused, growing up with adversity can have a long term negative impact on their life (Public Health Wales, 2018).

Domestic abuse

Domestic abuse is defined as any type of controlling, bullying, threatening or violent behaviour between people in a relationship. It includes:

- emotional abuse
- physical abuse
- sexual abuse
- financial abuse
- psychological abuse.

Domestic abuse can occur in any relationship and affects men and women. In this report we're focussing on the experiences of children whose parents or carers are involved in an abusive relationship.

Witnessing domestic abuse is harmful to a child, and it can have a serious impact on their behaviour and wellbeing. Around one in five children have been exposed to domestic abuse (Radford et al, 2011).

More information about domestic abuse is available at: nspcc.org.uk/domesticabuse

Parental substance misuse

Most parents and carers who drink alcohol or use drugs do so in moderation, which doesn't usually affect their child's safety. When we refer to parents or carers who misuse substances we're talking about those who:

- are dependent on drugs
- use drugs regularly and excessively
- are dependent on alcohol
- consume harmful amounts of alcohol (for example if their drinking is leading to alcohol-related health problems or accidents).

We're also including parents whose use of substances means they aren't able to supervise their children appropriately.

When parents misuse substances, it can make them less able to recognise or meet their children's needs. This may result in their children being at risk of significant harm. Substance misuse is identified as a concern for at least one fifth of children in need in England (Department for Education, 2017) and around two fifths of children on a child protection register in Scotland and Wales (Scottish Government, 2017; Welsh Government, 2017).

More information about parental substance misuse is available at: nspcc.org.uk/parentalsubstancemisuse

Parental mental health problems

Approximately one in four people in the UK will experience a mental health problem each year (McManus et al, 2009) and over 2 million children are estimated to be living with a parent who has a common mental health disorder (Manning et al, 2009).

By using the term 'parental mental health problems' we mean a parent or carer has or is thought to have a diagnosable mental health condition, such as:

- depression
- anxiety disorders
- schizophrenia
- bipolar disorder
- personality disorders.

Mental health problems can arise for a wide range of reasons. They may be the result of, or made worse by, stressful life experiences such as poverty, unemployment, physical illness, disability, social isolation, relationship breakdown or childhood abuse and neglect (Cleaver, Unell and Aldgate, 2011).

With the right support, parents with mental health problems are able to manage their condition and minimise its impact on their children. But sometimes it can affect their ability to cope with the challenges of family life. In some cases, children whose parent or carer has a mental health problem can become anxious, distressed, socially isolated or be at risk of harm.

More information about parental mental health problems is available at:

nspcc.org.uk/parentalmentalhealth

Parents

In this report we're using the term 'parents' to cover people referred to in helpline contacts or Childline counselling sessions as:

- parents
- step-parents
- foster carers
- adoptive parents.

Young carers

A young carer is someone aged 18 or under who helps look after a relative who has a condition, such as a disability, illness, mental health condition, or a drug or alcohol problem (NHS, 2018).

Key messages

- Young people living in families facing adversity, where parents are experiencing domestic abuse, substance misuse and/or mental health problems, can be at risk of abuse and neglect.
 - When families are experiencing more than one adversity, this can have a cumulative effect on children's welfare.
 - Living in a family that's facing adversity has an impact on young people's wellbeing. Effects can include:
 - mental health problems
 - poor performance at school
 - self-harm
 - suicidal thoughts and feelings
 - struggling to build and maintain relationships with friends or partners.
 - Some young people living in families facing adversity take on caring responsibilities for themselves, their siblings, and/or their parents. However many do not see themselves as young carers, and are unaware of the support available to them.
 - Young people living in families facing adversity can struggle to talk to their parents about how things are affecting them.
 - Young people living in families facing adversity can experience difficulties getting the support they need.
 - Many young people living in families facing adversity are reluctant to tell others about their concerns. They may worry:
 - about themselves or their siblings being taken into care
 - that their parents will be unable to cope if the family is separated
 - that their parents' problems will get worse if the family is no longer together.
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Contacts to the NSPCC helpline about children living in families facing adversity

- In 2016/17, we responded to 15,032 contacts to our helpline from adults who were concerned about children whose families were facing adversity. This was a 27 per cent increase from the previous year (11,804)³.
- Of the 15,032 contacts:
 - 68 per cent (10,207) were about parental substance misuse
 - 18 per cent (2,690) were about parents being involved in domestic abuse
 - 14 per cent (2,135) were about parental mental health problems.
- We didn't see any increase in the number of contacts about parental mental health problems in 2016/17, but contacts about domestic abuse increased by 63 per cent compared with 2015/16 (1,649 contacts) and contacts about parental substance misuse increased by 30 per cent compared with 2015/16 (7,874 contacts).

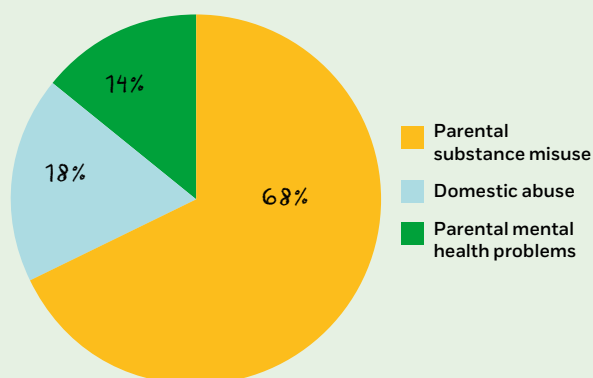
In 76 per cent (11,452) of the contacts about families facing adversity our helpline practitioners assessed that a child was at risk of harm, and made a referral to an external agency such as children's services or the police. Once we have made a referral, the external agency will consider how best to respond to the concerns being raised and decide what support to give the family.

Information about the age of children who are the subject of helpline contacts is only available when we make a referral – and even then we don't always know how old the child is. Of the 23,913 children who were the subject of referrals about living in a family facing adversity, we knew the age of 20,431 children (85 per cent).

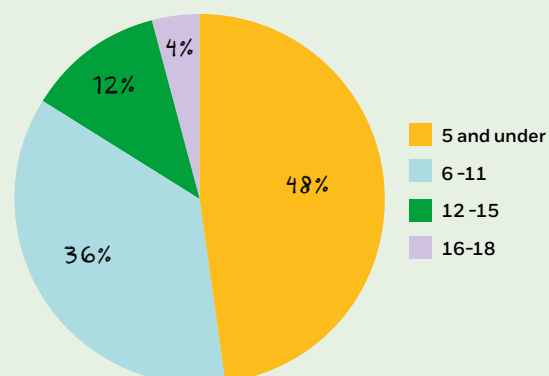
Overall, the majority of helpline referrals (84 per cent) were about children aged 11 and under in 2016/17. Of the referrals about children living in families facing adversity (where age was known):

- 48 per cent (9,852) were aged five and under
- 36 per cent (7,339 children) were aged 6-11
- 12 per cent (2,508) were aged 12-15
- 4 per cent (732) were aged 16-18.

Helpline contacts about families facing adversity 2016/17



Helpline contacts about families facing adversity 2016/17



³ There was a 21 per cent overall increase in contacts responded to by our helpline over the last year from 54,865 in 2015/16 to 66,218 in 2016/17.

Domestic abuse

- In 2016/17, there were 2,690 contacts to the helpline from adults who were concerned about children and young people whose parents were involved in domestic abuse.
- Of these contacts, 1,587 (59 per cent) resulted in our practitioners making a referral to another agency.
- These referrals involved 6,963 children. The child's age was known in 85 per cent of referrals (5,943), of which over half (3,067) were aged five and under. This includes concerns about unborn babies.
- Over a third of contacts we received about domestic abuse (38 per cent) were from neighbours or members of the public.

People who contact our helpline about parents being involved in domestic abuse may have seen or heard parents fighting, smashing objects and screaming at each other. Knowing that there is a child in the family, they are worried about the impact these abusive incidents will have on them. This is particularly the case when they realise the child has witnessed the abuse.

"I am becoming increasingly concerned about my neighbours' ability to care for their children. Just the other day I saw them arguing and screaming hurtful things at each other directly in front of their children. They weren't paying any attention to what their child was doing and the child almost walked into a busy road." (Neighbour)



A fifth (20 per cent) of contacts about domestic abuse are from parents. They may be concerned about the other parent's abusive behaviour, or about the behaviour of the other parent's partner. Some tell us that domestic abuse is an ongoing problem, but others say incidents have increased recently due to financial problems, relationship problems and relationship break-ups.

In some cases, adults who are physically abusive towards their partners are also physically abusive towards their children. We've heard concerns about parents and their children having visible injuries, including unexplained bruises, cuts, missing teeth or black eyes. The people contacting us want to help the family, but aren't sure of the best way to do so:

"I really worry about my nephews. Every time I talk with them, they tell me increasingly worrying stories about their parents' hostile relationship. I have always suspected domestic abuse but I didn't realise how bad it was. The boys overhear their parents arguing and screaming at each other constantly even though the parents lock them in another room to stop them hearing. One of my nephews even stated that he hated his father. I have tried to talk to my sister about their family problems but she becomes hostile and won't listen. These issues have gone on for years. What should I do?" (Relative)

Parental substance misuse

- In 2016/17 there were 10,207 contacts to our helpline from adults who were concerned about children affected by parental substance misuse.
- Of these contacts, 86 per cent (8,793) resulted in our practitioners making a referral to another agency.
- These referrals involved 15,215 children. The children's age was known in 85 per cent of referrals (12,870), of which nearly half (5,979) were aged five and under. This includes concerns about unborn babies.
- 48 per cent of contacts about parental substance misuse were from members of the public or neighbours, and 12 per cent were from relatives.

People contact our helpline if they are concerned that a parent's use of alcohol or drugs is affecting their ability to provide a safe, supportive, and stable environment for their child. We also receive contacts from people who have seen pregnant women using alcohol and drugs excessively, and are worried about the effect this could be having on the health of the unborn baby. Very young children can be particularly vulnerable if their parents are unable to provide appropriate care, so it's vital for any concerns to be reported to the NSPCC helpline or other child protection agencies.

Adults who contact the helpline about parental substance misuse may have witnessed a parent drinking excessively and frequently (either in person or on social media), or noticed that the parent's drinking is having an impact on their children's wellbeing – for example if their school attendance has decreased or if a child's behaviour has changed.

"The children were meant to see their mum, but she had been drinking and was not in a suitable state for the children to see her. This isn't the first time and the children usually stay with a friend of the mum when it happens. However, recently they've become very withdrawn and emotional about their mum leaving them at a friend's. They become distressed, saying they don't know when they'll see her again. I'm worried that she's unable to give them the care that they need." (Relative)

We often hear concerns that substance misuse leads to parents being unable to meet their children's needs. Children are described as being unclean and wearing dirty clothes or we're told the home environment is unclean and appears unsafe. Concerns are also raised when parents have been drinking or using drugs and their children don't seem to be adequately supervised.

"Both parents drink heavily (around two or three bottles of wine a night). This leads to arguments, fights, upheaval and upset in front of the child. Sometimes the father kicks off and storms out and the mother passes out drunk on the sofa. This has been going on for the last two or three years but things have worsened in the last six months. People have tried to talk to the parents about their alcohol use but both deny it is a problem." (Anonymous helpline contact)

In some cases we're told there is a court order in place to stop a parent from using substances whilst supervising their children. However, the person contacting us is worried that these rules aren't being followed and is therefore concerned about the child's welfare.

"As part of the court order the child's father is not allowed to drink excessively whilst the child is within his care... However, I have evidence that the father and his girlfriend have been under the influence of substances whilst the child was in their care." (Anonymous helpline contact)

Sometimes we're told about parents who use substances as a way to cope with other problems. For example we've heard about those who turn to alcohol after discovering an affair or when going through a divorce. But rather than helping them cope with the situation, in many cases it can make them more volatile, aggressive and even abusive. In some cases, we hear that parents who are using drugs or alcohol as a coping strategy have expressed thoughts of suicide and self-harm.

When concerns about domestic abuse are reported to our helpline they are often accompanied by concerns about substance misuse. The adults contacting us are often worried that an abusive parent is drinking large amounts of alcohol and that this makes their anger worse, increasing the risk to the child.

Parental mental health problems

- In 2016/17 there were 2,135 contacts to the helpline from adults who were concerned about children whose parents had a mental health problem.
- Of these contacts, half (1,072) resulted in our practitioners making a referral to another agency.
- These referrals involved 1,825 children. The child's age was known in 89 per cent of referrals (1,618), of which half were aged five and under. This includes concerns about unborn babies.
- 31 per cent of contacts about parental mental health were from members of the public or neighbours, and 27 per cent were from parents.

In contacts about parental mental health problems, adults often say they think parents have depression (this includes postnatal depression). We're told that parents seem to have withdrawn into themselves and in many cases this prevents them from being able to care for their children. Often these reports mention differences in a child's appearance, for example wearing dirty clothes or appearing to be malnourished; or signs of neglect within the house, including dirty or unsafe environments.

"I'm really starting to worry about my sister and her baby boy. She has struggled with depression for years and occasionally has these moments in which she self-harms and loses track of time. During these periods, she'll often forget to feed, change and bathe her son. I have found him in a full nappy on several occasions and now he has nappy rash. I don't think things can continue like this any longer. What should I do?" (Relative)



We also receive contacts from people whose partner has been diagnosed with or is showing symptoms of mental health problems including depression, personality disorders and bipolar disorder. They're often worried about how this might affect their family relationships and the impact it might have on their children.

"I would like some advice on how to look after my son. His mother has depression and doesn't respond well to offers of support and doesn't take any medication. She has problems with her anger and easily becomes angry towards me and other people. I don't think there's a risk that she's aggressive towards my son, but he sees this happening and I'm worried about the impact it's having on him." (Parent)

Families' involvement with other agencies and professionals

Many of the adults contacting the helpline about families facing adversity tell us that the family is already known to agencies such as the police or children's services. They may have contacted an agency directly, but haven't had any news about what's been done to support the family. The confidential nature of the work agencies carry out with families means they aren't always able to give feedback to members of the public. As a result, the people contacting us don't always know what's being done to support the family, or feel that the agencies aren't taking appropriate action.

Common concerns include:

- the person contacting is aware that an agency was previously working with the family, but they don't think that the agency is still involved and believes the situation has worsened
- the person has previously been in touch with children's services to raise concerns about a family's situation, but they don't think children's services took appropriate action
- the person has previously made a report to the police, who dealt with the immediate situation, but they are unaware of any follow up or further involvement with the family.

"My son has just told me about a conversation he had with his friend at school. My son asked his friend why he hadn't been at school. The friend said he had a nose bleed, because his dad had thrown him down the stairs. He said he had to have a long time off school because his body was hurting. My son told me he has seen bruises on his friend but he didn't know how they were caused. The mother regularly comes to the school to drop off or collect her son under the influence of alcohol. There is a strong smell of alcohol on her breath and I believe she drinks alcohol daily. The child has poor attendance at school, he appears thin and his clothing is terrible. Previously the police were at the family home due to drugs, but I don't know what action they took." (Member of the public)

In some cases, people tell us they have reported concerns about domestic abuse to the police or children's services, but were told there wasn't enough evidence for the agency to take action. In these situations, the person contacting us can be quite distressed because they are worried about the safety of the children involved.

We hear concerns that parents are trying to hide the effects of their adversities from agencies. The adult contacting us might feel that parents are misleading professionals about the progress they are making, for example if they have attended a drug or alcohol treatment programme but their behaviour doesn't seem to have changed; or if children are still missing school and the excuses being given seem unrealistic. And people who contact us are often worried that parents have warned their children not to tell anyone about what's happening at home.

In other cases we're told that parents have been offered professional support for substance misuse but that they refused to accept it – either because they didn't think there was a problem or because they were unable to commit to the support on offer.

There are many reasons why parents may be reluctant to become involved with agencies. Some, for example, are frightened about their children being taken into care.

"I'm concerned about the safety of my two children, who live with their mum, my ex-partner. The mum has bipolar disorder and takes medication, however sometimes she still has manic and down days. Recently my youngest child injured themselves and she was reluctant to take them to the hospital because she felt the staff might raise concerns about her mental health issues and ability to look after the children. I only have limited contact with them and I just want to be sure they're not at risk." (Parent)



Childline counselling sessions about living in families facing adversity

In 2016/17, Childline delivered 12,099 counselling sessions where children raised concerns about living in families facing adversity. Of these:

- 79 per cent (9,536) were about parents being involved in domestic abuse
- 11 per cent (1,397) were about parental substance misuse
- 10 per cent (1,166) were about parental mental health problems.

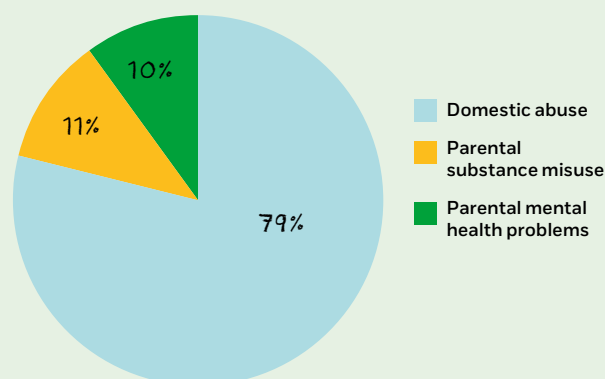
We didn't see any increases in counselling sessions about parental domestic abuse or parental substance misuse in 2016/17. But there was a 4 per cent increase in counselling about parental mental health problems (up from 1,126 sessions in 2015/16)⁴.

Age of young people

Information was available on the age of children in 72 per cent of Childline's counselling sessions in 2016/17. Where age is known, the majority of our counselling sessions are with children aged 12 or over (88 per cent).

- 84 per cent (8,398) of the counselling sessions about living in families facing adversity were with children aged 12 or over (where age was known).
- The youngest age of children who talked to us about parents being involved in domestic abuse and substance misuse in 2016/17 was nine.
- The youngest age of children who talked to us about parental mental health problems was ten.

Childline counselling sessions to young people living in families facing adversity



Gender of young people

We know that girls are more likely than boys to contact Childline. In 2016/17, 67 per cent of all our counselling sessions were with girls (17 per cent were with boys, and in 16 per cent of sessions the child's gender was unknown).

Of the counselling sessions where young people raised concerns about living in a family where there was domestic abuse, parental substance misuse and parental mental health problems:

- 65 per cent (7,813) were with girls
- 21 per cent (2,530) were with boys
- 15 per cent (1,756) did not tell us their gender.

⁴ There was a small decrease in overall counselling over the last year – we delivered 295,202 sessions in 2016/17 and 301,413 in 2015/16.

What young people tell Childline

Families experiencing multiple adversities

Many young people who contact Childline about living in a family facing adversity tell us that domestic abuse, parental mental health problems and parental substance misuse are interwoven in their homes. Reasons given for this include:

- parents with mental health problems are turning to substance misuse as a way to cope
- parental substance misuse leads to increased violence and aggression between parents
- domestic abuse is causing or exacerbating parental mental health problems.

Many of these young people also talk about experiencing physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, and neglect.

Domestic abuse

- In 2016/17, Childline delivered 9,536 counselling sessions to children and young people who were worried about their parents being involved in domestic abuse.

Children and young people who talk to our counsellors about their parents being in an abusive relationship sometimes contact Childline from their bedroom while their parents are arguing, because they're finding it hard to listen to what's happening. At other times they need to discuss how they are feeling directly after having witnessed aggression and violence. Occasionally young people contact Childline because their parent is unconscious after being physically assaulted in a domestic abuse incident.

When young people witness physical domestic abuse they describe:

- parents hitting each other
- blood being drawn
- punching, slapping and kicking
- objects being thrown
- attacks using weapons such as a knife
- a parent being tied up and locked away
- seeing one of their parents trying to strangle the other.

Even when young people don't directly witness violence between their parents, they often know that it is taking place and this affects their wellbeing.

Alongside this, young people also talk about emotional and psychological domestic abuse. For example they may say that one or both of their parents is verbally aggressive, manipulative, or belittles and says harmful things to the other.

Some young people identify potential reasons why abusive incidents take place, such as one or both parents having mental health problems. They may describe their parent as being unable to deal with their emotions and becoming aggressive or violent as a result. Or they might pinpoint the discovery of an affair, stress due to financial problems, or excessive drinking as a trigger for abuse.

"My dad has been drinking a lot since he lost his job. It's really hard because he gets really mean when he drinks and shouts at my mum and fights with her. I find this scary so I go away from him. No one knows what's going on." (Girl, 12)

Young people who talk to us about their parents experiencing domestic abuse mention a range of living circumstances. Some say they're living with their parents and siblings while the abuse is carrying on, and others have gone to live with friends or extended family members after an abusive incident. Some young people find going to school or their friends' houses a welcome distraction. However, they often tell us they don't want to return home for fear of what will happen.

Protecting parents

In some cases young people try to intervene if an incident of physical domestic abuse is taking place, but in doing so they are risking their own safety. Some young people tell us they were hit by their parent when trying to stop a fight.

"Sometimes my dad gets in a bad mood and gets really aggressive. He says horrible things to me and my mum and it scares me. In the past he was threatening to hit my mum, when I tried to get him to calm down he slapped me instead. I feel like neither of them listen to me and they don't understand how upset it's all making me." (Girl, 16)

Young people tell us they feel under immense pressure as a result of the domestic abuse in their family. Some feel they need to protect a vulnerable parent by breaking up fights or putting themselves in harm's way so their parent won't get hurt. They also need to care for their parent when they are injured, including calling for an ambulance or calling the police.

Impact on relationships

Domestic abuse can also cause young people to have confusing relationships with parents. Some young people voice concerns that their parents will get divorced and they won't live together anymore. But others are hoping their abused parent will leave the relationship for their own safety. They may be annoyed or angry that their parent hasn't left a violent partner.

Other young people living with domestic abuse are frightened of their parents. Primary-school-aged children tend to talk to Childline about feeling upset and scared and say they don't understand why their parent is being so mean and violent.

Some young people tell us their parents threaten them with violence as a way of controlling them – for example parents may threaten to hurt them if they tell anybody about what's going on.

"My dad has been hitting my mum badly and there is a lot of blood. I'm now in my room crying. He's crazy and has done some awful things to her in the past. He says if we tell anyone anything he'll beat us up." (Boy, 10)

Many children tell us they have feelings of hatred towards the parent who is behaving abusively.



Some young people whose parents have split up following domestic abuse tell us about having complicated feelings. This is especially the case if they no longer have contact with one parent – for example, if an abusive parent was sent to prison; because it's not safe for them to have contact with an abusive parent; or because they are estranged due to the abuse.

As children get older they develop more awareness of the dynamics of their parents' unhealthy relationship. Some older teenagers (usually aged 17-18) share fears about how being raised in an abusive environment will impact on their own future relationships. They're worried about what sort of partner they will be and ask whether they will develop similar abusive behaviours. Some are scared that they can see patterns of abusive behaviour in their own relationships. One 18-year-old told Childline.

"I have seen my parents physically hurting each other for years. I used to cry every day and self-harm. I feel like I'm really affected by what I've seen. I have a boyfriend now and I feel like he's acting just like my dad. I feel like I can never be in a stable relationship." (Gender unknown, 18)

Parental substance misuse

- In 2016/17, Childline delivered 1,397 counselling sessions to children and young people worried about parental substance misuse.

Some children whose parents are misusing substances tell us about their home situation. They often mention difficult family dynamics, such as living with a step-family or living with one parent after the other has moved out. In some cases young people say they are temporarily living with extended family such as grandparents, aunts or uncles because their parents aren't able to care for them appropriately. Some children whose parents misuse substances tell us their family is struggling financially because their parents are on a low income and spend the little money they have on drugs or alcohol.

Some of the young people who talk to Childline about parental substance misuse say their parents have been drinking or using drugs excessively for as long as they can remember. But others have noticed an increase in their parents' use of substances following a significant event. This includes splitting up with a partner, bereavement, financial problems, or losing a job. Many children talk about their parents' behaviour as being unpredictable, and not recognising that they have a problem.

"My mum is an alcoholic. She started drinking a lot when she lost her job and things have got progressively worse. My mum is up and down – sometimes she is fine and sober – but it can quickly change and she becomes worse again. Recently it's been really difficult. My mum gets abusive when she's drunk and gets angry at me and my sisters. I don't like being at home and feel this will start affecting me at school. I want to help my mum before things get worse again. I think she's in denial and pretends everything is fine to the doctor. My family have had enough of her and don't think anything will help her. They don't know what to do so no-one is addressing the problem anymore." (Girl, 15)

Young people whose parents misuse substances often tell us they want their parents to get better. They find it distressing to see the impact that using drugs or alcohol is having on their parent. Some tell us how it feels to watch their parent coming down from drug use, suffering from an addiction, and becoming ill when they try to stop using substances. Those whose

parents start drinking or using substances again after having been sober for a period of time can find things very difficult to cope with.

Emotional and physical abuse and neglect

Some children contact Childline because they have been left alone by parents who are misusing substances. Others tell us that, although their parents are at home, they aren't being properly cared for because their parents are drinking or using drugs.

Other young people tell our counsellors that their parents say horrible things to them when they are under the influence of alcohol/drugs. They explain that their parents argue with them when they're drunk and get angry with them. These parents can say spiteful, hurtful things including telling their child that they hate them and saying they wish they'd had an abortion when they were pregnant with them. This is very disturbing for a young person to hear.

Other young people discuss being physically abused when their parents are intoxicated. They mention being pushed, slapped, punched, kicked, and having objects thrown at them by their parents when they are drunk.

"My mum hurt me last week. My face is still cut. My mum hurts me when she drinks which makes me upset. I'm scared of her. No one knows what has been happening. My mum told me not to tell anyone. My dad has seen my face but I just told him I fell. I feel bad about lying." (Girl, 12)

Young people also discuss witnessing domestic abuse when their parents have been using drugs or drinking alcohol. Many describe how one parent becomes aggressive and violent towards the other parent.

Several young people tell our counsellors that they have run away from home, or are considering running away, because of their parent's substance misuse. Some tell us their parents have thrown them out of the house when they were drunk, and now they don't know what to do. In these circumstances the young person is often fearful for their safety and verbal and/or physical abuse has occurred.

Sexual abuse

Some young people confide in Childline about their parents sexually abusing them when they're intoxicated. Others tell us about being sexually abused by a sober parent while their other parent is too drunk to notice, or has passed out. As well as coping with the trauma of being abused, these young people often feel angry that their parent wasn't able to protect them.

In some cases, young people discuss being sexually exploited by their parent. Our counsellors have heard about a parent allowing a 'friend' or drug dealer to sexually abuse their child in exchange for drugs; or young people being made to perform sexual acts in front of their parent's friends when they are drunk.

"My dad has a drug and alcohol problem. He makes me sleep with other men so he can get drugs. He's also raped me before by putting drugs in my drink. I don't have anywhere else to go." (Girl, 15)

These young people feel hurt, scared and ashamed about what's happened to them. In some cases the sexual abuse results in physical injuries or pregnancy. They often ask our counsellors what they should do, and wonder what would happen if they reported the abuse to the police.

Young carers

Some young people talk about having to take care of themselves by doing their own cooking and washing, having to look after an intoxicated parent or take care of younger siblings. This can feel like a big responsibility for young people, putting them under a lot of emotional strain and causing them to worry:

"I'm really worried about what's going to happen. My mum has alcohol problems and it's really affecting the whole family. She goes to meetings for her alcohol addiction but she lies to people there about how bad her problem is. She tries to lie to me about it as well. There have been times when she's so drunk that I have to look after my younger siblings by giving them food and then put my mum to bed. I'm always on edge in case she drinks and I have to look after them again, I've had to do it for years. I don't know who can help us. My mum told me if social services know then they'll take me into care." (Girl, 17)

Young people use our peer support message boards to share their experiences and ask for advice from others who are going through a similar situation. Some young people wonder whether looking after a parent with substance misuse problems makes them a young carer, and ask how they can get support:

"My mum is a recovering alcoholic. She's starting to get better now, but for years I would look after my sister. I would do the usual things like taking her to school, reading her a story at bedtime and putting her to bed, hugging her and making sure she was OK. I guess this might make me a young carer? I was also looking out for my mum; I had to do the shopping for us all and would try and stop my mum from drinking and keep her safe. Does this mean I was also caring for my mum, or is this just helping? Is anyone else in my situation too? I feel so alone and need help." (Childline message board post)

Those with younger siblings also raise concerns about their siblings' emotional wellbeing. Many are concerned about what sort of role model their parent is to their brothers and sisters, and worry about keeping them safe from abuse. They worry about whether they will be able to protect them.

"When my parents are working I look after my younger siblings. But the thing is I also end up looking after them when my parents are at home because they drink every day. I hate the way they treat my siblings when they've been drinking and just want to protect them. I feel like a second mum, I do all of the housework and it gets really tiring for me. But what is a young carer? Someone said it to me before but I don't know if this counts." (Childline message board post)

Parental mental health problems

- In 2016/17, Childline delivered 1,166 counselling sessions to children and young people about parental mental health problems.

Young people who contact Childline about their parents' mental health problems mention schizophrenia, bipolar, personality disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD), anxiety, depression and severe phobias. Some young people describe a significant life event which led to their parent's mental health deteriorating, such as their parent becoming depressed following a divorce or job loss. Or they may have noticed differences in their mother's behaviour since a younger sibling was born (suggesting post-natal depression). But some children have never known a time when their parent did not have mental health problems.

Childline gives these young people a space to discuss their own mental and emotional wellbeing.

Those whose parents have mental health problems often tell us they don't want to share their worries with their parents because they feel they would be creating an extra burden for them:

"I've been feeling really low recently and I just need to talk to somebody about it. My mum has depression and sometimes she overreacts and gets angry at little things, then she gets really upset and apologises but I know that it's not her fault. She makes me feel bad about myself but I don't want to tell anybody, I feel like I'm being selfish by thinking of myself because she has her own problems. I want to be strong to support my mum, but sometimes I feel like a little girl who just wants her mummy to get better and be happy." (Girl, 15)

Young people whose parents have mental health problems often describe their home as a sad place to be. Some tell us about whole days when their parents aren't able to get out of bed.

Young carers

Many children talk about having caring responsibilities. They describe carrying out tasks including:

- making dinner
- running baths
- doing household chores such as cleaning
- taking care of their siblings
- making sure parents take their medication
- attending medical appointments with their parents
- comforting their parents when they are stressed or crying.

These young carers are often worried about their parent's wellbeing and feel they need to look after them. Some feel pressured into taking on this role and don't see any alternative. They rarely think about their own needs, because they are so focused on their parents' needs.

When young people are taking care of a parent, it can mean they have little time for a life of their own. Some tell us they are unable to maintain a social life or invite friends into their home, which can make them feel isolated. Others tell us their parents have obsessive behaviours, for example not letting them talk to anybody else.

When a young person's parents have mental health problems, their family relationships can be confusing. If a parent has mood swings they may find that sometimes the family is happy and everyone gets on well together, while at other times the parent behaves irrationally and there is a lot of tension in the home. Not knowing how a parent will react can make children feel anxious or scared. Young people tell us about being called names or being shouted at by parents with mental health problems, and having to care for their parent even though the parent isn't being very nice to them.

"My mum has bipolar disorder, sometimes she gets really down and spends days in bed and other times she gets really angry and shouts at me – in the past she's been so angry she's hit me. I've tried to help mum before but I find it really hard, when I try and get her to take her medication she gets really mad. She drinks a lot to cope with what's happening and has tried to overdose before; I had to make her throw up after she did it." (Girl, 16)



How living in a family facing adversity affects young people

Children and young people tell us how the challenges their family is facing affect their emotional wellbeing. They often feel stressed, upset, depressed, worried, anxious and scared about what is happening at home.

“There are a lot of depressed people in my family. I feel like I’m the only one who’s not but I’m really struggling to stay positive. I look forward to being at school or going out with my friends as being home is really stressful.” (Girl, 15)

Some young people turn to self-harm as a way to cope with the emotional impact of their family problems. Others talk about experiencing suicidal thoughts and feelings.

Young people often tell us they’re having problems sleeping. Some explain this is because they can hear their parents fighting or having parties where drinking and drug use is taking place. Others are too scared to go to sleep. This might be because they’re scared that one of their parents will get hurt in a fight; they’re worried that an abusive parent will come into their room during the night; or they’re having nightmares or flashbacks after witnessing domestic abuse.

Other young people struggle to pinpoint where their insomnia comes from, although it’s likely that the anxiety and stress they describe as a result of their family situation is a contributing factor.

Children and young people tell our counsellors that all aspects of their lives are affected by what’s happening at home – including their social life and their time at school. Many say they don’t feel able to invite friends to their home because things are so unpredictable there. Because they find it hard to be honest with their friends about their home life, it’s very difficult to get close to people and build lasting relationships.

Some young people find it hard to concentrate at school and say their school work is affected by what’s going on at home. Some contact Childline because their parents had a fight the night before an important exam and they are worried about how they performed. Others find their education is affected because they are spending so much time looking after their parents, themselves or their siblings. They talk about having more urgent or important tasks to do than homework, or being unable to attend school because their parents rely on them so much.

“Since my parents got divorced I have been looking after my dad and brother. My dad is unable to work and sometimes doesn’t get out of bed all day. I get really stressed about my school work as I’m only able to do it late at night, but then I get really tired as I haven’t had enough sleep. Sometimes I fall asleep in class. It’s really embarrassing but I can’t help it.” (Girl, 13)

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Some young people living in a family facing adversity feel unloved and unwanted. They may consider or fantasise about running away from home so they can escape their situation, but don't know where to go. In 2016/17, Childline delivered 3,419 counselling sessions to young people who either wanted to leave home or be taken into care. There were a further 1,564 counselling sessions with young people who had run away.

"My mum doesn't show me any affection; she won't even hug me when I ask. When she gets home from work she drinks a bottle of wine and gets angry at me. The other night my mum was drinking and got angry with me again, then my dad pinned me to a wall. I was terrified. I want to know where I can stay; I'm scared to go home. I don't want to get my mum into trouble though in case she loses her job, I don't know what to do." (Girl, 16)

These young people often worry about the future of their family. Although they're concerned about their own safety and wellbeing, they are also anxious about how their parents will cope if the family is separated and wonder what will happen to their younger siblings if they aren't there to protect them.

"My parents have been arguing a lot lately and it has got worse and worse. Now my dad hits my mum. When they aren't fighting everything just feels quiet and sad. The police have even come to the house a few times when it was really bad. I feel like it's all my fault and I've been feeling suicidal. My sisters don't really understand what is happening but I try to protect them because they get upset and scared. I've thought about running away from it all but I wouldn't want to leave my sisters behind." (Boy, 15)

Young people's experiences of seeking help and accessing support

Reluctance to speak out

Children whose families are facing adversity can be concerned about what will happen if they talk to a teacher or professional. Many are reluctant to ask for help because they're afraid that telling someone will result in their family being split up:

"I'm not getting on with my mum at the moment. She drinks loads, stays in bed and doesn't get up. She also shouts at me for no reason, it makes me really sad seeing her like this. My mum married a different man to my dad after I was born and they split up a few years ago. I feel like that's when things got worse. I once even saw him hit my mum. My nan told me that she's depressed. I can tell when my mum's not well because when I come home from school the curtains are closed so I know she's been in bed all day. I don't want to be split up from my mum, I just want her to get better." (Girl, 12)

Young people also worry about how speaking out will affect their parents. They may not want to talk to their parents about how they are feeling for fear of making their parents feel worse about the situation. Depending on the situation, the young person may feel their parents aren't able to provide the emotional support they need.

Some share concerns that their parents might go to prison if they tell anyone what's being going on:

"My parents are caught up in drink and drugs. It's pretty bad at home and they've been violent towards me for years. I really want to leave. I'm scared of telling anyone about what's happening because I don't want them to go to prison and I don't want to go into care, I just want to get out of this situation." (Boy, 16)

As well as this they may be worried about the stigma associated with being in care, or not want their family to be 'labelled' in the local community.

Other young people talk about not wanting to be seen as different from their peers, or be singled out for special treatment. They see the world outside their family as a place to escape to, and they don't want to lose the opportunity to do 'normal' activities. This means they're unwilling to share their experiences with anyone other than Childline.

"Mum's not getting any help for what's happening because she hides it from people. I'm doing really badly at school because sometimes I can't go in, but I don't want to tell anybody because going to school is my escape from what's going on at home, I don't want people there to start treating me differently." (Girl, 16)

Often young people who contact Childline believe that the challenges their families face are going unnoticed by other people in their life. This can especially be the case when their situation is kept secret from the outside world. It makes it very difficult for a young person to seek support and tell others because they are worried they won't be believed.

Challenges accessing support

Some of the young people who contact us mention they're receiving support from extended family members, such as grandparents, aunts and uncles. If parents aren't able to provide the support and protection children need, extended family relationships can be particularly valuable. We're told about relatives liaising with professionals, for example children's services, to work out what's best for the child and decide whether parents are able to look after their children safely. Sometimes young people talk about staying with their extended family when their parents aren't able to look after them due to domestic abuse, mental health problems or substance misuse.

But where children's services are involved, we sometimes hear that children are warned by their parents not to share too much about what goes on at home. This can make the child feel very isolated.

“My mum’s boyfriend is violent towards my mum, he’s hit her in the past. She forgives him every time and he promises not to do it again, but he always does. I really don’t like him, even though he’s not hurt me I’d be much happier if he wasn’t here. I’ve not told the social worker what’s happening, my mum said she’d be angry if I said anything. I don’t have anyone I can talk to.” (Girl, 13)

Although some young people who contact us about living in a family facing adversity talk about receiving support from child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) or a school counsellor, most tell us they aren’t receiving help. Reasons for this include:

- not knowing who to seek support from or how to ask for it
- not meeting the threshold criteria for support
- being on a waiting list for support.

Some young people tell us their parents are receiving support from medical professionals, for example for mental health problems. However, they don’t always feel these professionals fully understand their parent’s situation, particularly if their parent isn’t sharing the full extent of the family’s problems. This can mean that professionals aren’t aware of the impact things are having on the young person, and the young person isn’t offered appropriate support.

Young people rarely talk to our counsellors about asking the police for help. This may be because they have had a previous bad experience with the police, or because they’ve grown up with negative stereotypes. Many young people perceive that nothing will change if they speak to the police. Some children tell us that the police have visited their house on numerous occasions – for example, when their parents have been fighting or if parents have been caught drink driving. These children may hope that police involvement will be an opportunity for their parents to improve their behaviours, but if little changes in the long term it can be very disappointing.

Others worry that their situation will get worse if they involve the police. This is especially the case for young people whose parents are physically or emotionally abusive, because they are frightened about being punished for speaking out.

Young carers

Although many young people are taking on caring responsibilities at home, it’s rare for them to recognise that they might be considered a young carer. This means they rarely mention receiving young carers’ support. Some young people have heard the term ‘young carer’ from a counsellor or other professional, but they and their parents don’t know how to access support or what help they’re entitled to. And parents don’t always respond well to the idea of their child being a young carer.

“My mum suffers with depression and anxiety. She smokes weed to help, but I don’t like it when she does. She says a lot of hurtful things to me and makes me feel really bad about myself, I have an eating disorder so often what she says makes that worse. She’s threatened to kill herself before. My counsellor told me about support for young carers recently but when I mentioned it to my mum she flipped.” (Gender unknown, 17)

What helps young people who live in families facing adversity?

Young people often want to find positive coping strategies which will help them build their resilience. They want to support their parents and siblings, but also need to take care of themselves. Things that can help include:

- finding an outlet for their emotions, for example writing a diary or drawing
- taking time to do something they enjoy, for example listening to music, playing games or participating in a sport
- creating a haven where they feel safe and can be themselves, for example their bedroom or a trusted friend's house
- talking to other young people in a similar situation through Childline's peer support message boards
- remembering it's not their fault.

Although many of the young people who contact us about living in a family facing adversity are reluctant to talk to professionals about their situation, some say that it helps to speak to a teacher or social worker and recognise that professionals are there to help. They recognise that the support those services can offer will be helpful.

Young people may also need support with the practical considerations of caring for family members. For example, they might want to make a schedule for their daily routine. They might find it helpful to plan social activities in advance so they are able to fit their caring responsibilities around seeing their friends – and so they'll have something to look forward to.

It can be scary for young people if their parents have a condition they don't understand. So it's important for professionals to be aware of young carers, listen to their concerns and give them the information they need in a format that's appropriate for their age.

Things they may find helpful include:

- understanding what their parent's diagnosis means
- knowing what medication their parent needs to take and when
- understanding the side effects of medication and how to cope with them
- knowing what to do if they notice their parents' wellbeing is getting worse
- knowing the dates and times of medical appointments (if the young person needs to go to these, it's helpful if they can be outside of school time).

Many young people whose families are facing adversity tell us that they're anxious about what they would do if things get worse at home. For some this means they're considering leaving home. It may help to put together an emergency plan for themselves and their siblings. Depending on their age and situation this might include:

- making sure they have contact numbers for people who can help, for example the GP, a relative or emergency services
- details of any medication their parents may be taking
- having a safe place to go, for example a family member or friend's home, and knowing how to get there safely.

It's also important to consider which events might trigger the use of the emergency plan.

Childline's website offers several resources which young people living in families where there is domestic abuse, parental substance misuse or parental mental health problems might find helpful. These include:

Tools

- **Art box** – a tool to help young people express their feelings creatively.
childline.org.uk/toolbox/art-box
- **Childline image galleries**
– Home and families image gallery.
childline.org.uk/image-gallery-home-families
- **Coping with stress** – three short films from Childline's YouTube channel sharing mindfulness techniques that can help with stress.

Breathing tips

youtube.com/watch?v=4-DG2ZYEfIA

Grounding yourself

youtube.com/watch?v=qgpWCf0HSFs

Calming exercises

youtube.com/watch?v=WUNztDH7PSI

- **Mood journal** – a tool for young people to record and express their feelings as a diary (this forms part of a young person's locker when they register for an account on the Childline website).
childline.org.uk/locker

Information and support

- **Acholism [sic] (my mum)** – a letter to Childline's Ask Sam from a young person whose parent has alcohol problems.
childline.org.uk/ask-sam-alcoholism-my-mum

- There are many more letters which young people might find helpful in the Home and Families section of **Ask Sam**.
childline.org.uk/ask-sam-home-families/
- **Alcohol** – information about alcohol and its effects.
childline.org.uk/info-advice-alcohol
- **Coping with stress** – information and resources for coping with different types of stress.
childline.org.uk/info-advice-coping-with-stress
- **Coping with suicidal feelings** – support for young people who have suicidal thoughts and feelings.
childline.org.uk/cantcope
- **Domestic abuse** – support for young people experiencing domestic abuse.
childline.org.uk/info-advice-domestic-abuse
- **Emotional abuse** – support for young people experiencing emotional abuse.
childline.org.uk/info-advice-emotional-abuse
- **Getting through a tough time** – support for young people who have experienced or are experiencing trauma.
childline.org.uk/getting-through-tough-time
- **Help! My parents keep arguing** – a short film on Childline's YouTube channel offering advice for young people whose parents argue a lot.
youtube.com/watch?v=LkwOzOS_wos
- **Living in care** – information, support and advice about living in care.
childline.org.uk/info-advice-living-in-care

- **Message boards** – Childline’s peer support message boards cover a range of topics, including family difficulties.

Alcohol, smoking and drugs message board.
childline.org.uk/message-boards-alcohol-smoking-drugs

Home and family message board.
childline.org.uk/home-family-boards

- **Neglect** – support for young people experiencing neglect.
childline.org.uk/info-advice-neglect
- **Parents and alcohol** – support and information for young people whose parents drink.
childline.org.uk/info-advice-parents-alcohol
- **Physical abuse** – support for young people experiencing physical abuse.
childline.org.uk/physicalabuse
- **Problems sleeping** – support for young people who have been struggling to sleep.
childline.org.uk/problems-sleeping/
- **Self-harm** – information and support for young people who self-harm.
childline.org.uk/info-advice-self-harm

- **Sexual abuse** – support for young people experiencing sexual abuse.
childline.org.uk/sexualabuse

- **Supporting a family member with a mental health issue** – support for young people whose parents or siblings have a mental health problem.
childline.org.uk/supporting-family-mental-health

- **Supporting someone with their mental health** – a short film on Childline’s YouTube channel about how to support someone who has mental health problems.
youtube.com/watch?v=PzfCVk4LUCM

- **Taking care of yourself** – support for young people on how to cope with problems and feel better.
childline.org.uk/info-advice-taking-care-mental-health

- **What is a young carer?** – explains what a young carer is, gives advice to help young people with caring responsibilities cope, and describes how to access support.
childline.org.uk/info-advice-young-carers
-

Supporting families facing adversity

It's vital for professionals to provide support as soon as they identify that a family is experiencing challenges. This helps build a family's resilience and reduces the risk of harm to children. In some cases it can eliminate the need to make a referral to children's services (although referrals should always be made when appropriate).

Our **Knowledge and Information Service** provides free resources to help anyone working with children and young people keep them safe from abuse and neglect. Our website includes information about the impact of adversities on children's wellbeing and development, as well as factors to consider when assessing risk and supporting children and families.

- Domestic abuse
nspcc.org.uk/domesticabuse
- Parental mental health problems
nspcc.org.uk/parentalmentalhealth
- Parental substance misuse
nspcc.org.uk/parentalsubstancemisuse

Other helpful resources include our **briefings on the learnings from published case reviews** about specific risk factors (case reviews are carried out when a child dies or is seriously injured and abuse or neglect is suspected). These include briefings on:

- domestic abuse
- parents with a mental health problem
- parents who misuse substances.

All our learning from case review briefings can be accessed at nspcc.org.uk/casereviewlearning

The Knowledge and Information Service can also create tailored reading lists, carry out literature searches and keep professionals up to date with the latest research: nspcc.org.uk/info

We work directly with children and families at our service centres across the UK. We provide a range of services, including helping children move on from abuse and helping professionals make the best decisions for children. We also support children and families who are experiencing domestic abuse, parental mental health problems and parental substance misuse:

- **Parents Under Pressure™** helps parents who are on a drug or alcohol treatment programme to improve their parenting skills and build strong relationships with their children.
nspcc.org.uk/parentsunderpressure
- **Pregnancy in Mind** supports parents who are at risk of, or experiencing, mild to moderate anxiety and depression during pregnancy and the first year after birth.
nspcc.org.uk/pregnancyinmind
- **Steps to Safety** supports parents living with domestic abuse who are either expecting a child or have a child aged under five. Many of these parents will have experienced trauma earlier in their lives so Steps to Safety helps them learn to manage their emotions, reduce stress and respond calmly to conflict. It also shares skills so parents can help their child recover from experiencing domestic abuse.
nspcc.org.uk/stepstosafety
- **Young SMILES** works with families to help children who live with parental mental illness cope better with the challenges they face.
nspcc.org.uk/youngsmiles

We're testing all our services so we can be sure we're providing effective support and find out what works best to support children and families. We use this learning to help bring about wider change. So once we know a service works, our Scale-up Unit works with other organisations, supporting them to deliver our services. This means that, with our partners, we can reach more children and families across the UK and make sure as many children and families as possible can benefit from support.

We're scaling up a range of services, but those aimed at families facing adversity include:

- **Baby Steps** – an education programme that helps people prepare for parenthood. It's aimed at new parents who are likely to need extra help, including those who have experienced domestic abuse, misuse substances or have mental health problems.
nspcc.org.uk/babysteps
- **Domestic Abuse, Recovering Together (DART™)** – a service helping mothers and children who have experienced domestic abuse to rebuild their relationship and recover from what they've experienced.
nspcc.org.uk/dart

We believe we can achieve more for children by working together. So we've also been working in partnership with schools, local authorities, health, police, faith, voluntary and community groups, and more to establish **Together for Childhood** centres in some local areas. In collaboration with the local community we're designing and delivering a range of services and activities to help keep children safe. In some areas we're particularly focussing on providing early help to families facing adversity. This approach is enabling us to develop innovative ways to prevent abuse from happening.

More information is available at:
nspcc.org.uk/togetherforchildhood

Children whose families are experiencing challenging circumstances tell us they can feel isolated, struggle at school, develop mental health problems and in some cases experience abuse and neglect. They may be reluctant to speak out about things that are happening at home. But it's important all children know how to share their concerns about anything that's bothering them, so they can get the help they need.

- **Children and young people can contact Childline** about anything that's worrying them. It's available any time, on the phone, online or through the *For Me* app.
childline.org.uk

- **Our *Speak out. Stay safe.* programme** visits primary schools to make sure children know who to turn to if they are ever worried.
nspcc.org.uk/schools
- **The NSPCC website** offers advice on talking to children about difficult topics
nspcc.org.uk/talkingtips

Adults contacting our helpline are often worried that children's needs are being overlooked and that they are at risk of harm. It's vital that professionals support parents to care for their family whilst maintaining a focus on the child's wellbeing. We've developed tools to help professionals make decisions about the level of care parents are able to provide, and our Scale-up Unit is supporting partners to implement these in several areas of the country:

- **Graded Care Profile 2 (GCP2)** is an assessment tool that helps professionals measure the quality of care being given to a child.
nspcc.org.uk/gradedcareprofile
- **The Reunification Framework** provides practical guidance and tools for practitioners who need to make decisions about when children can be safely returned home from care.
nspcc.org.uk/reunification

By providing the right help at the right time, professionals can help parents get things back on track. With support, parents can provide a safe and loving environment for their children, and prevent abuse from taking place.

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Everyone who comes into contact with children and young people has a responsibility to keep them safe. At the NSPCC, we help individuals and organisations to do this.

We provide a range of online and face-to-face training courses. We keep you up-to-date with the latest child protection policy, practice and research and help you to understand and respond to your safeguarding challenges. And we share our knowledge of what works to help you deliver services for children and families.

It means together we can help children who've been abused to rebuild their lives. Together we can protect children at risk. And, together, we can find the best ways of preventing child abuse from ever happening.

But it's only with your support, working together, that we can be there to make children safer right across the UK.

nspcc.org.uk

EVERY CHILDHOOD IS WORTH FIGHTING FOR