

Thursday, 15 March 2018

Behaviour to blame – not the device says Kids Helpline

Kids Helpline is calling for an increased focus on 'why' kids bully rather than technology used this National Day of Action Against Bullying and Violence.

According to **yourtown**/Kids Helpline CEO Tracy Adams the focus of the anti-bullying debate has often skewed to smart phones and social media instead of a better understanding of what's causing the bullying behaviour and addressing this at its grass roots.

"Banning smart phones from children's lives does not mean bullying behaviour will stop. While there is no doubt digital devices play a part in bullying, in reality it's not where most bullying takes place," Ms Adams said.

"Seventy-three (73) percent of contacts to Kids Helpline about bullying in 2017 said it did not include a 'cyber' online or texting component.

"We need to acknowledge that regardless of how the bullying is done the bullying behaviour is the same and look at ways to unpack, understand and mitigate this."

New Kids Helpline data released today showed that more than 3,500 (3,523) contacts from children and young people to the national helpline service in 2017 were about bullying with seven out of 10 experiencing bullying directly.

"Most kids talking to us about bullying were aged 5-12 with 83% of contacts telling us that bullying related to school," Ms Adams said.

"The majority of bullying experienced by children and young people involved verbal abuse (26%) or exclusion, isolation and/or spreading of rumours (13%).

"Alarmingly, one in 20 said they endured intimidation, extortion or threats of personal harm (6%) and in 5% of cases physical aggression or assault. Twenty-two (22) percent faced more than one type of bullying at the same time.

"Clearly these statistics are unacceptable with some bullying having devastating effects on young lives now and into the future."

Ms Adams said that it was important to remember that kids that bully are not 'bad kids' but often kids facing their own challenges.

"Kids Helpline conducted an interim survey on cyberbullying in February which found the line between bully and bullied blurred with 52% of those who said they engaged in cyberbullying being cyberbullied themselves. Some said they bullied in retribution," she said.

"Bullying behaviours can be due to complex and diverse reasons, including underdeveloped emotional tools and coping mechanisms, limited parent interaction and peer pressure.

"It's also worth remembering it's not just children and young people that bully. Some children can pick up on the behaviours of parents and other adults.

“There’s not just one solution to this issue and it’s time we put the energy into delving into the many reasons young people bully and how we as a community can guide positive relationships and behaviours.

“A good first step is thinking of ways to effectively help children and young people resolve conflicts, recognise and manage feelings associated with being confronted and learn how to embrace differences.

“Teaching kids about the positive use of digital technology and social media will ultimately be way more effective than attempting the impossible task of removing digital devices completely or in school environments.”

Ms Adams said Kids Helpline during its 27 year history had found that early intervention was the key to addressing behavioural issues before they escalated.

“Our **Kids @ School program** offered free to all primary schools nationally works with children from an early age to help them understand respectful relationships and behavioural boundaries both when face to face and online,” she said.

“We need more programs like this and discussion about the importance of mutual respect to stem the wave of bullying, which we all agree is crucial to ensuring the wellbeing and safety of children and young people across Australia.”

The **Kids Helpline – Bullying Fact Sheet** including case studies is attached.

Kids Helpline is Australia’s only free, private and confidential 24/7 phone and online counselling service specifically for children and young people aged 5 to 25 years. **FREE call 1800 55 1800** or www.kidshelpline.com.au

To find out more about **Kids Helpline @ School – Wellbeing** supported by Bupa and Optus Digital Thumbprint with Kids Helpline see <https://kidshelpline.com.au/schools>

Kids Helpline would like to remind media to include [Kids Helpline](http://www.kidshelpline.com.au) contact details at the end of broadcast coverage and articles where children and young people may need support.

-ENDS-

INTERVIEW/PHOTO OPPORTUNITIES

Tracy Adams, CEO **yourtown**

Tony Fitzgerald, Kids Helpline Virtual Services Manager

Louise Davis, Kids Helpline Clinical Practice Manager

Kids Helpline counsellors

Kids Helpline and Kids Helpline @ School VNR available

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Kids Helpline - Bullying – Fact Sheet

- In 2017, 3,523 counselling contacts (5%) to Kids Helpline were about bullying.
- 83% of these related to bullying at school and 17% concerned bullying in other contexts.
- In 27% of contacts about bullying, the child or young person was assessed as 'at risk of bullying' because it was not established whether the behaviour they were subject to was deliberate or ongoing in nature.
- Seven out of 10 (72%) bullying contacts were from children and young people experiencing some form of direct bullying according to the Kids Helpline definition. Types of bullying behaviour reported include: verbal abuse, exclusion, isolation and/or spreading of rumours, intimidation, extortion or threats of personal harm, and physical aggression or assault.
- In 22% of contacts about bullying, the child or young person indicated that they were experiencing a number of types of bullying at the same time.
- In 27% of contacts about bullying responded to, the child or young person indicated that the bullying included online or texting elements. 73% of bullying contacts said the bullying did not include online or texting elements.
- Bullying is discussed primarily in contacts from 5-12 year-olds, with 16% of these contacts being about bullying. Concern with bullying decreases to 5% of contacts from teenagers and to 1% of contacts from young adults. However, teenagers are a major audience for bullying-related self-help content on the Kids Helpline website, with 'sexting' the most popular topic.
- 3% of bullying contacts were about concern for someone else and 2% were for the purpose of gathering information.
- Contacts from Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children and young people were more likely than contacts from children and young people of other cultural backgrounds (either CALD or Caucasian Australian) to focus on bullying (8% c.f. 4% or 3%).

Kids Helpline Case studies – those that bully:

Case study (Sophie, 15)

Over the last few years, Sophie has high anxiety, occasionally self-harms and has thoughts of suicide. She doesn't feel she has anyone who she can really talk to and that really understands her. As a result, she often feels frustrated and angry about her situation and when she feels like that she lashes out at her friends. Sophie has started to recognise that her behaviour to her friends is not acceptable and that she is causing them a lot of upset by saying such mean things. Sophie wants to try and be a better person but doesn't know how to deal with her anger.

Case study (Jack, 14)

At the weekend, Jack was bored and was playing around on Snapchat. He found the new Snapchat app, Saraha, which lets you post anonymously on Snapchat users' links. For fun, Jack decided to wind up some of his friends and started to post derogatory comments about them and the things he knew they were sensitive about. But Jack was too caught up in the moment and pleased with the jibes that he was making to notice he wasn't posting anonymously.

When he did notice, other people had added nasty comments to his posts and he could see his friends had seen what he'd said. Although he has now deleted the posts, Jack now has to go back to school on Monday to face his friends. Jack feels so bad that he wishes he could die.

Info & tips:

Kids Helpline's website has tips for kids, young people, schools, parents and carers about bullying at www.kidshelpline.com.au

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