



# Kids Helpline

## 2018-2019 Annual Client Survey

Direct Counselling Support Outcomes

June 2019



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## Kids Helpline 2018-2019 Annual client survey

### Direct Counselling Support Outcomes

#### Introduction

The following report outlines the findings of the 2018-2019 annual survey of Kids Helpline counselling service recipients. The survey is designed to enable Kids Helpline to track changes that occur for children and young people as a result of their contact with the counselling service, and to gather feedback from recipients about program elements that are working well, as well as ideas for program improvement.

The purpose of Kids Helpline is to enhance the social, emotional and psychological wellbeing of children and young people in communities across Australia. The following objectives support this purpose and all service activities are designed to progress their achievement:

1. To provide a safe, inclusive space for children and young people to explore self-concept and engage positively with their own life and with others;
2. To support children and young people to understand the factors affecting their wellbeing and plan for a brighter future;
3. To empower children and young people to take appropriate action to support their safety and wellbeing;
4. To support children and young people to acquire or develop the skills, attitudes, knowledge and personal resources necessary to sustain wellbeing; and
5. To improve policy responses to the social, emotional and psychological needs of young people.

#### Program activity/ service model evaluation strategies

The activities required to achieve these service objectives are diverse, and their elements are described in the program's Service Model. Each element necessitates appropriate measurement methods to ensure accurate evaluation of success factors.

Kids Helpline, through its program theory, has a clear line of vision towards the outcomes the service expects to see occurring as a result of the program's activities. A range of evaluative activities are conducted in order to collect evidence of the degree to which the service has achieved each of these outcomes.

Measures incorporated into the annual Kids Helpline client survey conducted during December 2018/January 2019 were designed to measure the effectiveness of two types of interventions:

1. indirect support through digital resources on the Kids Helpline website, and
2. direct counselling support to clients with both high and low levels of distress at entry, and whose needs require either brief counselling interventions (1-6 sessions) or ongoing case management (7+ sessions) for more complex needs.

## Who were the respondents?

A total of 1,246 individuals provided complete responses to the full annual survey. Nine hundred and seventy eight (978) of these experienced direct counselling with a Kids Helpline counsellor. Four hundred and seventy nine (479) of this sub-group received both direct counselling and indirect self-help support from the website's digital resources offering information on a range of youth related issues.

The remaining 268 people read articles on the Kids Helpline website only, and did not experience counselling. Feedback and success factor results relating to the effectiveness of the Kids Helpline website digital resources are reported in the 2018 Kids Helpline National Statistical Overview.

The following report provides results for the 978 clients receiving direct counselling support.

## Demographics

- The 2018-2019 survey sample over-represented 13-18 year old service users (73% c.f. 56%) and under-represented 19-25 year olds (13% c.f. 31%). Thirteen percent (13%) were aged 5-12 years while less than 1% were 26 years or older.
- 83% of respondents were female, 11% were male and 6% described themselves as gender diverse. This compares to gender segments of counselling service recipients of 77%, 21% and 2% respectively.

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were represented in the survey sample in higher proportions than all clients receiving counselling services (7% c.f. 4%); however those from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds were comparatively under-represented (13% c.f. 37%). Respondents from neither cultural backgrounds were comparatively over-represented (79% c.f. 59%).
- Survey respondents were represented from every state and territory in close proportion to state breakdowns for counselling and support service contacts in 2018.

### **Recency and duration of contact over time**

- The majority (57%) of respondents had contacted Kids Helpline recently (almost one in two respondents spoke to a counsellor on the day of completing the survey). Twenty eight percent had not spoken to a counsellor in more than one month.
- Forty four percent (44%) of respondents had only contacted a counsellor one or two times prior to completing the survey. A further 29% had contacted between three and six times. Twenty seven percent had contacted more than seven times at point of survey.

### **Distress levels at first contact**

- Levels of feeling distressed or anxious at time of first contact with a Kids Helpline counsellor were high for the majority of survey respondents, with 72% reporting feeling upset or anxious “All” or “Most” of the time.

## Results

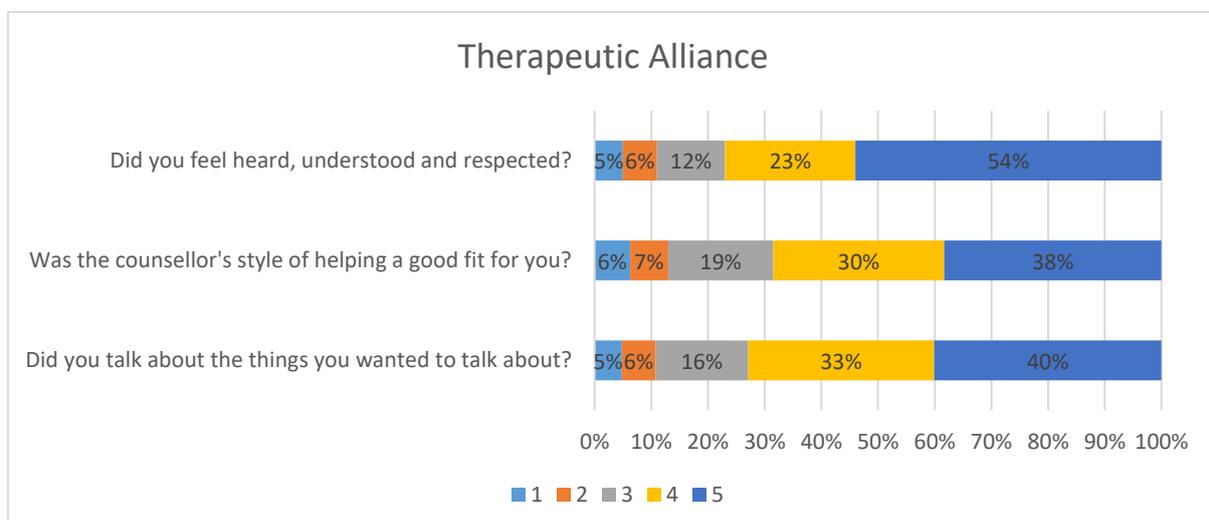
### 1. What level of therapeutic alliance was formed between client and counsellor?

Research into the impact of counselling points to the therapeutic alliance between counsellor and client as a key element in supporting clients to make changes in their thinking and actions (Bickman et al., 2012) (Bohart, 2002). Respondents to this survey were asked to complete the following three questions derived from the Session Rating Scale (Miller, Duncan, & Hubble, 2004) elucidating the degree of client satisfaction with the counsellor/ client relational alignment.

1. Last time you talked to a Kids Helpline counsellor (by phone, email or web chat) did you feel heard, understood and respected?
2. Last time you talked to a Kids Helpline counsellor was the counsellor's style of helping a good fit for you?
3. Last time you talked to a Kids Helpline counsellor (by phone, email or web chat) did you and the counsellor talk about the things you wanted to talk about?

Each question was scored out of 5, with 1 meaning "Not At All" and 5 meaning "Completely". Overall, survey respondents were generally satisfied with each of these elements, with 77% selecting 4 or 5 for question one (N= 978), 68% selecting 4 or 5 for question two (N= 942) and 73% selecting 4 or 5 for question three (N= 940). However considerable proportions of clients also reported a lack of therapeutic alliance with 11% scoring low on question 1, 13% on question 2, and 11% on question 3.

**Figure 1 Therapeutic Alliance**



## 2. What improvements did counselling make to levels of distress and anxiety?

The following analysis suggests that clients in this study with high levels of distress or anxiety receiving larger numbers of counselling sessions were more likely to improve than clients with similar levels of distress and anxiety receiving lower numbers of counselling sessions.

The study also suggests that even when clients report continuing high levels of distress and anxiety post counselling, the experience of counselling may assist clients to subjectively “feel better”, regardless of the number of counselling sessions undergone.

Respondents were asked three questions relating to the impact of counselling on levels of distress and anxiety. The first two:

- a. How often were you feeling upset or anxious when you first decided to contact a Kids Helpline counsellor? and
- b. How often have you felt upset or anxious since you last spoke to a counsellor?

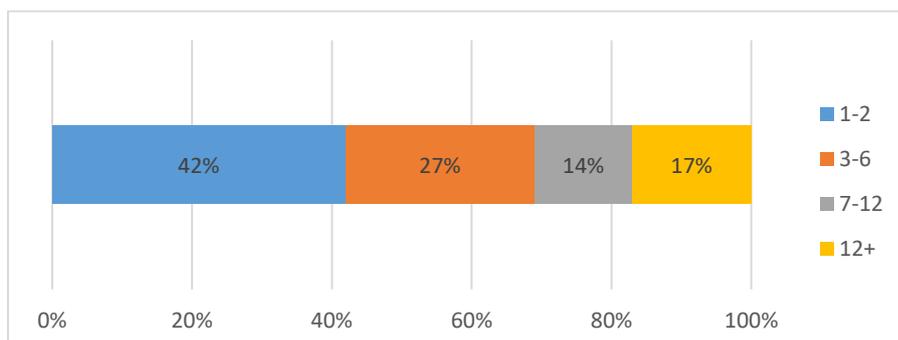
required retrospective self-selection from a scale offering:

Never / A little of the time / Some of the time / Most of the time / All of the time.

Overall results for these two questions demonstrated that 54% (n=525) of all 958 respondents reported a decrease in frequency of feeling upset and anxious after their most recent counselling session compared to the period prior to their first counselling session.

Of the 525 clients with improved scores, the majority (42%) had received only 1-2 sessions, while 27% had received between 3 and 6 sessions. The remainder of improved scores had received either 7-12 sessions (14%) or more than 12 sessions (17%).

**Figure 2 Number of counselling sessions experienced by those with improved distress or anxiety (N=525)**

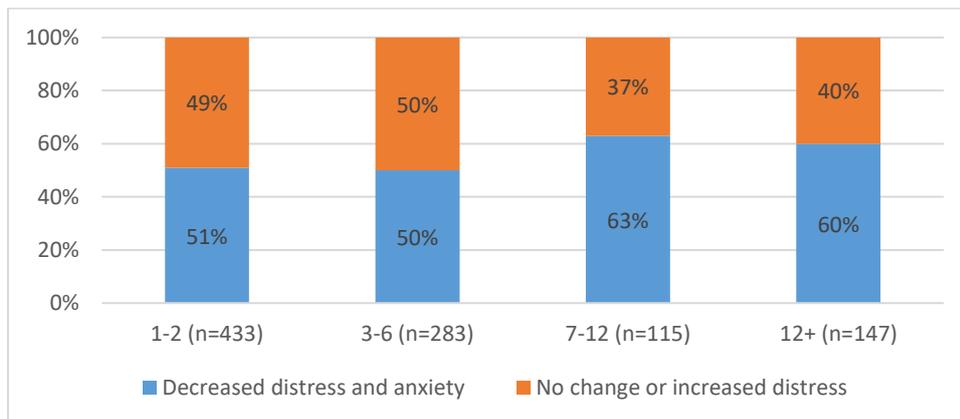


However when all responses were further analysed within their number of counselling sessions groups, results suggested those clients receiving larger numbers of counselling sessions were \*significantly more likely to reduce their frequency of feeling upset or anxious compared to those that had less counselling sessions:

- 51% of clients receiving between 1 and 6 sessions (N=716) improved
- 62% of clients receiving more than 7 sessions (N=262) improved

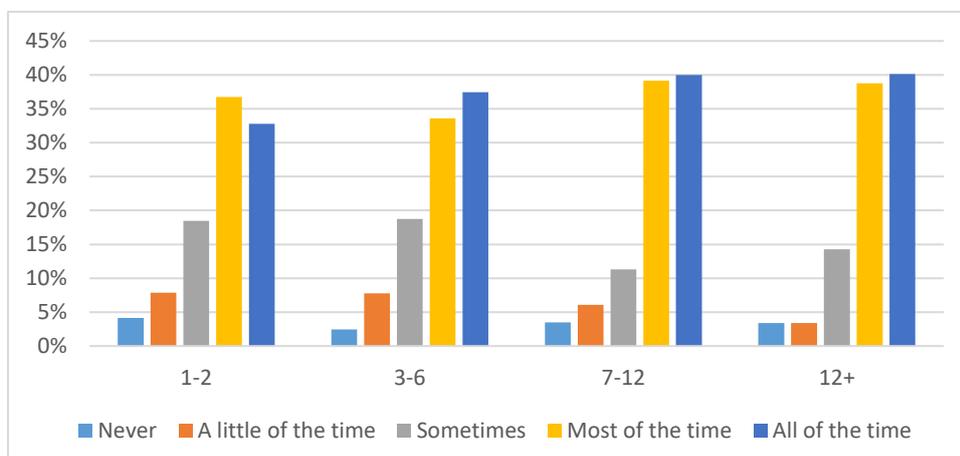
\*A chi squared test was conducted to test statistical significance

**Figure 3 Distress and anxiety impact x proportion of clients receiving varying numbers of counselling sessions (N=978)**



For comparative purposes, an analysis was also conducted which showed all groups reported similarly high proportional levels of frequency of distress and anxiety at point of entry to counselling.

**Figure 4 Proportions of entry levels of distress and anxiety by number of sessions**



The third question:

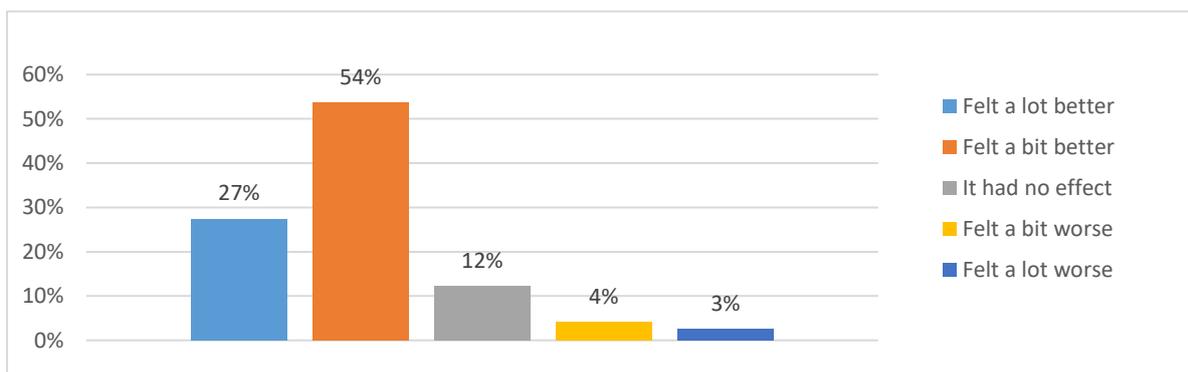
- c. Has the counselling you received from Kids Helpline had any impact on how you feel?

offered the following scale:

It made me feel a lot better/ It made me feel a bit better/ It had no effect/ It made me feel a bit worse/ It made me feel a lot worse.

When all respondents were asked to rate the impact they felt counselling had on how they felt, 81% reported it had made them feel either “a lot” or “a bit” better.

**Figure 5 Impact of counselling on self-reports of well-being (n=897)**



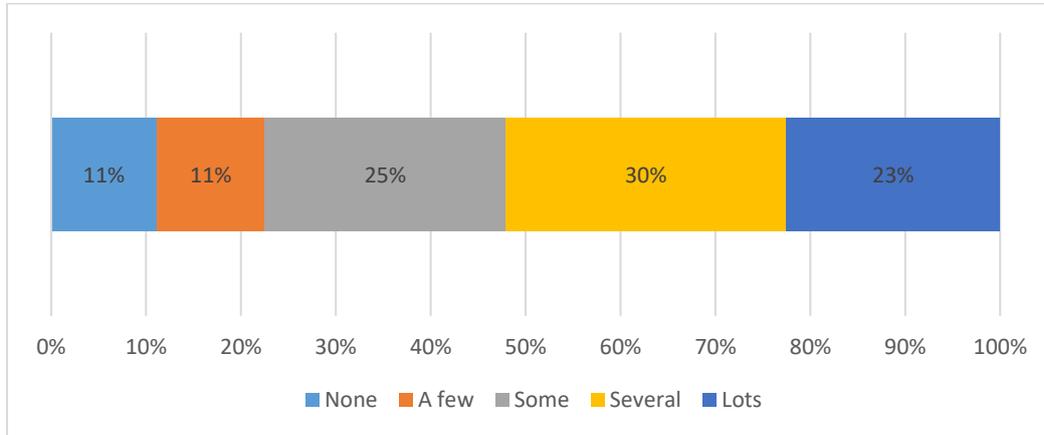
Interestingly, of the 453 respondents who reported either no reduction, or an increase in frequency of feeling upset or anxious since their last counselling session, 71% (n=292) also reported that counselling had either helped them to feel “a lot” or “a bit” better. This suggests that although young people may continue to experience chronic feelings of anxiety or distress, counselling nevertheless is likely to create positive impact on other aspects of their well-being.

### 3. What other client outcomes were achieved?

#### New Ideas

Respondents were asked to score out of 5 the degree to which they gained ideas about how to deal with their problem/s, with 1 = No ideas and 5 = Lots of ideas. Eighty nine percent (89%) reported gaining at least a few ideas with more than half reporting scores of 4 or 5.

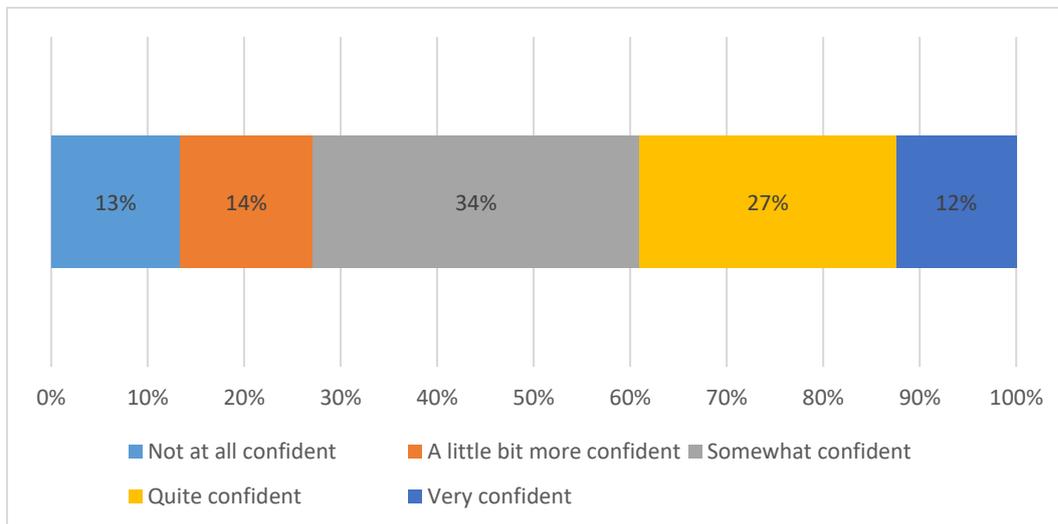
**Figure 6 Gained ideas to deal with my problem/s (N=950)**



### Impact on Confidence

Respondents were also asked to score out of 5 the degree to which they felt confident to deal with their problem/s after talking to their counsellor. 87% of respondents reported feeling some level of confidence, with 39% scoring themselves at either 4 or 5.

**Figure 7 Post session confidence to deal with my problem/s (N= 956)**



## Overall Satisfaction with Kids Helpline

Respondents were asked two questions to gauge overall satisfaction with the service:

- How satisfied are you with Kids Helpline? (five-point response scale)
- Would you recommend Kids Helpline to a friend (Yes/No)

Ninety percent (90%) of those who experienced counselling were satisfied at moderate or better levels and 92% would recommend Kids Helpline to a friend.

## What children and young people most value about Kids Helpline

Each year, children and young people are asked to share qualitative feedback about the reasons why they value Kids Helpline. Consistently, the reasons given predominantly fall into the key areas of:

### 1. **Staff qualities** of caring, non-judgemental attitudes:

“I like that I can talk about my feelings and problems to someone who wouldn't be biased in any way. A lot of the time, people around me have different views of things because of who they are to me or what role they play in my life. With KHL I can be heard and helped by someone who focuses on the issue directly”

“Generally I liked many things about Kids Helpline. But one thing that stands out was how open and understanding the counsellors were. Of course I was anxious and my problems were something that no-one has ever helped me with. Yet I felt like I was normal and being given the right amount of respect and attention. They listened. They cared. They were there”

### 2. **Operational components** of open access 24/7 for any issue, multiple media platforms, continuity of care under same counsellors, fast response compared to other helplines, personalised or tailored interventions:

“No matter how big or small your problem is they treat you equally”

“24/7 access to talk to someone when you need. Always helpful. Always listening. Safe space. Free. Give you someone to talk to when you feel alone”

3. **Emotional impact** of improved mood, consistency of response, feeling safe, heard, valued, normalised and feeling like they “belong”:

“I like the availability and the sense of understanding that the counsellors have. It creates a comfortable environment to express and blow off some steam and emotions”

4. **Impact on client cognition** referring to increased knowledge and ideas, positive perceptual shifts, improved thinking patterns:

“When I talk to someone they can put things in a different light”

“I like how the counsellors unpack the situation and help you understand what’s going on more than in your head usually. I have found they all have similar techniques of helping me travel along with my issues”

“The counsellors don’t pretend to understand (our) emotions, but instead ask how we feel and want us to explain it rather than make assumptions”

“I like how you can tell they really want to fix the problem not only for the short-term but also long term. They also ask questions to help understand more about the problem, but they also ask questions that I have never thought of before and they help me understand more about myself”

“The web counselling services helps with piecing together all my thoughts and helping me figure out and understand what’s at the root of the problem”

**Additional valued elements of the service referred to:**

5. **Choice:**

“I like how it’s set up with various options (like) read up on things or talk to people”

6. **Welcoming of diversity:**

“I really enjoy talking to (counsellor’s name) as she understands what it is like to be Aboriginal and the affects (sic) that a loss in the community has on one’s self”

“Always respectful to people of different cultures, religions, sexualities and genders”

“I like that it includes “trans” along with the “male” and “female” selection (questions)”

## 7. Integration with the broader mental health system:

“I liked how it is extra counselling time because I feel I don’t see my therapist enough”

“It gives me extra support in times of crisis where my regular therapist isn’t available”

## What could KHL do to improve?

Over the many years that Kids Helpline has asked young people for feedback on the service, most key areas of dissatisfaction have remained consistently operational in nature:

- a. **Wait times on all three platforms** (including a wait calculation for webchat)
- b. **Requests for webchat transcripts**
- c. **Concerns over requests for post-midnight webchat identifying information:**
- d. **Requests for additional engagement platforms such as SMS and online groups**
- e. **Improved website resources including more specific and detailed information in articles**
- f. **Expanded and more targeted advertising to teenagers and young adults.**

Additional qualitative feedback offered suggestions for additional skills training in micro-counselling, advanced counselling models and mental health specialisation.

## Conclusion

Kids Helpline continues to provide a service generally valued by the majority of highly distressed and anxious children and young people who contact it for direct counselling support. This overall valuing occurs regardless of duration over time of counselling contacts, although more highly distressed clients report greater improvement in distress and anxiety levels when counselling continues beyond six sessions.

The majority of clients report strong therapeutic alliances with their counsellors, subjective perceptions of improved well-being and increased confidence and ideas about how to deal with their issue.

Overall satisfaction with the service remains high year on year, and children and young people report very high likelihood of recommending the service to their friends.



Kids Helpline consistently reviews feedback from clients to inform continuous service innovations and improvements.

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