

# Kids HELP PHONE

1-800-668-6868

[kidshelpphone.ca](http://kidshelpphone.ca)



## A safe place for kids to get help anonymously!

Kids Help Phone was started in 1989 as a toll-free help line that youngsters throughout the country could turn to for assistance with their problems. The service has grown bigger and better every year, and in 2006 their professional counsellors handled approximately one-and-a-half million contacts with kids from across Canada!

KidSafe recently spoke with Madhu Sood, the Northern Alberta Manager for Kids Help Phone. She tells us that “the line provides immediate support, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, in both English and French. Youths between the ages of 5 and 20 can call the line toll-free from anywhere in Canada. The calls are answered by pro-

fessional counsellors with a wide variety of backgrounds, including social work, psychology, sociology and child & youth services.” The type of counselling they offer is what is referred to as *‘in the moment’* counselling. Children talk about all that is happening in their lives, and counsellors will work to identify what is affecting the youngster, and identify positive options and support in the child’s life so that the child is able to help themselves.

What kinds of issues do the counsellors deal with? That depends entirely on what kids need to talk about. Some of the more common issues include:

What are you calling about?

friends/family relationships



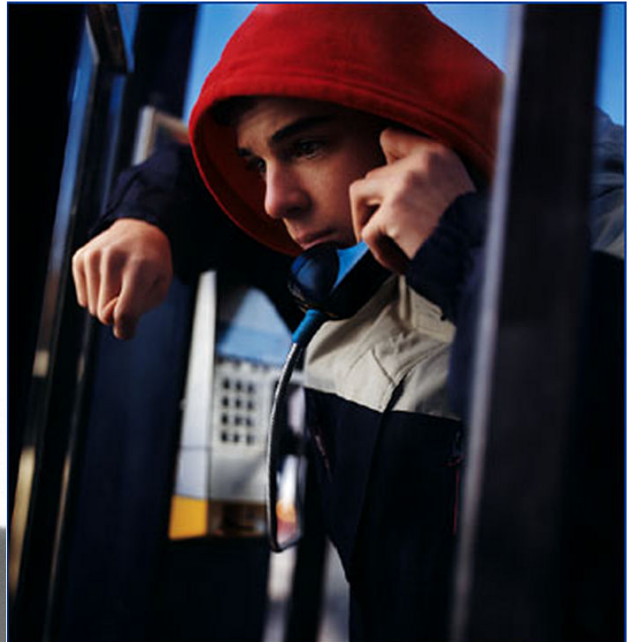
bullying  
addictions loneliness  
loss/bereavement  
physical, sexual, verbal abuse

In addition to the phone line, kids can also get online counselling by visiting the website at [www.kidshelpphone.ca/en](http://www.kidshelpphone.ca/en) Madhu notes that "these days, kids have grown up with computers and feel very comfortable with the medium. In fact, the majority of our contacts with young people are now through our website." Users can leave a message for counsellors describing the issue they need help with. They aren't asked to leave their real name, or even their e-mail address - they simply assume a username on the message board. Counsellors then provide a response online, usually within 24 hours. Online counsellors may encourage a child to call the Kids Help Phone line if they feel the child would benefit from more immediate and interactive counselling.

One of the most popular features of Kids Help Phone is the fact that youths are guaranteed complete anonymity. This applies to all contacts - whether they are using the phone or the internet. Whatever kids say when they call Kids Help Phone is safe and confidential. Counsellors at the phone line don't trace calls, they don't use call display, and they never call callers back. Counsellors who respond to internet messages do not ask youths to provide their real e-mail address. If a child is in imminent danger (perhaps threatening a suicide attempt) staff may encourage the youngster to allow a conference call with a third party agency in their area that can provide them with further assistance. But, once again, it is up to the child to

divulge their personal information. Madhu stresses that “counsellors do everything they can to build a sense of trust with the kids they are helping.”

The busiest hours for Kids Help Phone are from 4:00 p.m. to 2:00 a.m. Eastern Standard time. Madhu points out that “prior to this, kids are usually in school, and the school acts as their safety net. For many youngsters, Kids Help Phone provides an additional safety net they can turn to once school lets out.”



## Helping Everybody

Kids Help Phone is there to provide support to all kinds of kids with all kinds of problems. Approximately 30% of the kids who contact Kids Help Phone are “children at risk.” This includes young people experiencing violence, either at home or in their communities; struggling with alcohol and/or drug abuse; and/or dealing with issues related to suicide.

“Approximately 70% of young people who contact us are well-functioning kids,” says Madhu. These kids may be going through some sort of crisis in their lives that they simply don’t know how to handle. It could be that their parents are going through a divorce, or perhaps one of their siblings or grandparents is extremely ill. Whatever the circumstances, staff at Kids Help Phone can help them deal with the issue.

These kids may also be dealing with a ‘daily’ problem. Perhaps a close friend from school isn’t talking to them anymore, and they feel quite upset about it. These issues may not be life

threatening, but they are very important to the kids at the time they call. Madhu says that “I think it’s wonderful that kids can get help with these daily issues. They are able to talk things through and they get ideas and solutions so that the problem doesn’t build!”

## Social Service Agencies

A lot of kids are able to get the help they need over the phone or the over the internet but many others may need supplemental help in their own community. Kids Help Phone has a database of over 36,000 agencies across Canada to which troubled kids can be directed for help. It may be a young boy in Halifax who is suffering physical abuse, or a teenage girl in Edmonton who is suicidal - whatever the circumstances, Kids Help Phone can help them choose the best place to turn for assistance.

## Student Ambassadors

The Student Ambassador program sponsored by BMO Financial Group has volunteers visiting schools and communities across Canada to raise awareness about Kids Help Phone. The volunteers let other kids know about circumstances when they might turn to Kids Help Phone for assistance. All of the volunteers go through a one day orientation training conference, and attend workshops on fundraising, public speaking, and conflict resolution. They also receive training in leadership, team building and citizenship. Madhu tells us that “there are currently approximately 2,000 student ambassadors. Since 1996 over 7,000 students have been trained. It’s a great way for kids to develop valuable skills while helping others at the same time.”

**YOU  
ARE  
NOT  
TRAPPED!**

**KIDS HELP PHONE  
KNOWS 36,000  
PLACES ACROSS  
CANADA THAT CAN  
HELP YOU NOW!**



## Express Yourself!

Sometimes it's nice to "vent", to just let it all out and get things off your chest. Kids Help Phone has an on-line message board where kids can do just that.

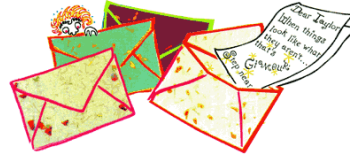
Madhu notes that "the content is presented precisely the way the kids write it - their spelling and grammar aren't edited. The only things that are edited out are foul language or discriminatory comments. Every message that comes in is looked at by a counsellor. If they feel there is a need for a response, they will write one even if the child didn't specifically request a response."

MY  
STORY



My Story is a place where kids are able to share a difficult or inspirational experience.

## Letters Written But Never Sent



Kids write letters that they don't actually send to another person. They know the identity of the person they are writing to, and that's enough. Maybe kids are too shy to talk to this individual personally, maybe they don't know where the person is - or perhaps the person in question has passed away. Whatever the circumstances, kids are still able to share their thoughts and feelings in a public forum, and that can help them to feel better about their situation.

## Fishheads & FLOWERS

Fishheads and Flowers is a site where kids can praise things that are really awesome or vent about things that really suck.



## Fund Raising

In 2005, there were approximately 70,000 youth from Alberta contacting Kids Help Phone for assistance. In 2006, that number more than doubled to over 150,000. As demand for the service goes up, so does the need for fundraising to keep the service going. Kids Help Phone relies on a great deal of corporate support, as well as generous donations from people across Canada. Their major fundraiser is the *Bell Walk for Kids Help Phone* which occurs on the first Sunday in May across Canada in 45 communities.

To find out more about Kids Help Phone, visit their website at [www.kidshelphone.ca](http://www.kidshelphone.ca)