



Stop It Now!®

Helpline Report Executive Summary

23,000 Hopeful Conversations about Sexual Abuse and Prevention

The data used here was collected for a study, "I Didn't Know Where To Go: An Examination of Stop It Now!'s Sexual Abuse Prevention Helpline" published in the *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, Sept, 2019. The report and this summary share additional insights and stories from our callers.

Stop It Now! was founded in 1992 to take a different approach to preventing child sexual abuse. The Helpline service was created to provide accessible, confidential information, guidance and support to anyone who is worried that a child could be sexually harmed, is concerned about their own or someone else's sexual feelings or behaviors toward children, has survived sexual abuse, or is simply seeking information to keep children safe from harm.

Over the past 24 years, people have reached out to Stop It Now! because they have a feeling but are not sure what to look for and unsure about what to do. Talking with Helpline experts helps them figure out what they need to do based on the facts of a situation.

The core of the Helpline's success is the confidential, personalized care, attention and resources we provide. We take a journey with our callers* as they tell their story. We help them move past their shame and secrecy. We offer expert insights, coach them on next steps and guide them through the information, resources and tools we and other organizations provide.

Since our first Helpline call in 1995, we have responded to 23,682 requests for help, and we have grown from a single phone line to access points through email, chat, social media and letters. Our Helpline is the only one of its kind in the United States, and it has been so successful that it has served as a model for similar services around the globe.

"Thank you so very much for your excellent advice and resources! With the swirl of emotions that often accompanies these challenging situations, it's hard as a parent to think objectively about things. I am very grateful for the help Stop It Now! provides." – Mother concerned about warning signs of sexual abuse in her family

The quotes and testimonials used here have been collected throughout our years of service through follow-up surveys, emails and social media. Because the Helpline is confidential and anonymous, all sample contacts, scenarios and other examples are only those shared with permission, with all identifying details altered to protect confidentiality.

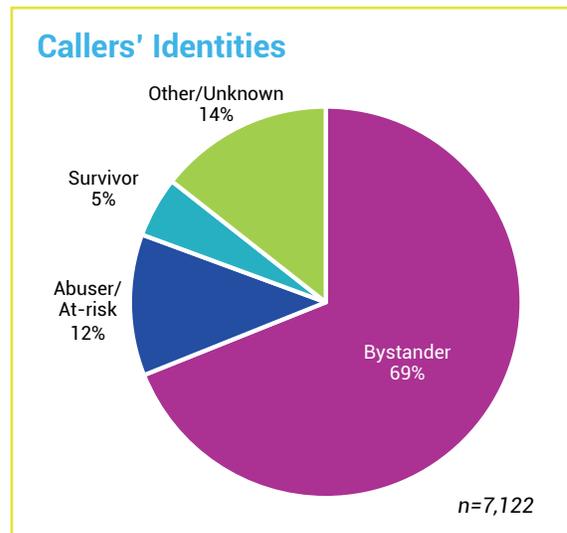
*Throughout this report, "caller" and "callers" are used to identify anyone who contacts the Helpline, regardless of whether they contacted Now! by phone, email, chat, letter or through social media.

Our Audience

Our callers' concerns and questions cross the wide spectrum of child abuse prevention, but every contact has the same goal: protect a child.

The people who contact us fall into four primary identity groupings: 1) adults in bystander roles, 2) people who feel they may be at risk to abuse or have done so, 3) survivors and 4) others, such professionals seeking information for students or clients.

More than half of callers reach out with a suspicion or concern about abuse, asking for more information on whether there is a child being abused, how to prevent possible abuse and/or how to respond to warning signs. Forty-four percent of callers reach out with certainty of abuse. Three percent of our callers reach out with questions about preventing abuse before there are concerns.



ADULTS IN BYSTANDER ROLES

Adults in every role with children are in a position to act preventatively, intervene during concerning situations and respond to sexual abuse. Bystanders are parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, neighbors, employees, teachers, friends and many other community members who are concerned about a child, adolescent or adult they know and care about.

Most people in bystander roles – 70% – know **both** the child at risk of being abused **and** the person whose behavior concerns them. They share with us that their personal relationships create fear and uncertainty about what impact their actions will mean for everyone involved. They talk about caring for both, and their concern that if they are right, how can they take next steps without creating more pain.

70% of bystanders know both the child and adult in a concerning situation.

Most (64%) of these bystanders, if they have become aware of a child being sexually abused, had never spoken to any professional or out-of-family supports before their call to the Helpline. Calling us gives them a chance to talk about these decisions with someone and begins to break them out of their own feelings of isolation. We recognize the fears and confusion that come along with wanting to help both people, and we guide every interaction with a clear focus and priority on protecting children.

"Thank you so much for taking on this task. Sometimes families think they can do this on their own, but they do need help."
– Grandmother seeking help for her grandchildren

What Bystanders Tell Us They Need

The Helpline views these callers – often in unwanted and difficult roles – as heroes. They are bravely willing to act to keep a child safe. They have taught us that they need us to:

- Direct them to relevant materials and resources both on our website and through other expert sources.
- Explore protective actions they can take, identifying potential barriers and challenges.
- Provide information and support about the reporting process, when needed.
- Practice conversations with other adults about what they can do to keep children and teens safe.

● ● ● SUBJECT: HELP FOR MY DAUGHTER

TO: HELPLINE@STOPITNOW.ORG

I'm not sure if my daughter's coach sexually abused her, and I am so terrified of what to do next.

My daughter is almost 10, and she told me last week that her tennis coach pushed the end of her tennis racket to make it touch her private parts. She said she was shocked and just stared at him, and he said "That was an accident, but this one is on purpose," and "booped" her again on her private parts!!!

I am trying so hard not to freak out. But now I remember that her coach once told me that her pink socks were "sexy" (SHE IS 9!!!!!!!), and I'm just running through my mind some other stuff that, in retrospect, isn't right.

I know I have to do something. But what do I even do? Should I talk to the coach alone? Or call the manager of the program? Should I ask other parents? Please help!!

Our Helpline acknowledged first how wonderful it was that this daughter told her mom what happened and that she was taking this so seriously. We confirmed that these behaviors were warning signs that absolutely required a strong response, and that it was reasonable that his actions be reported and investigated. Very likely, his actions were in violation of the tennis program's policies and code of conduct.

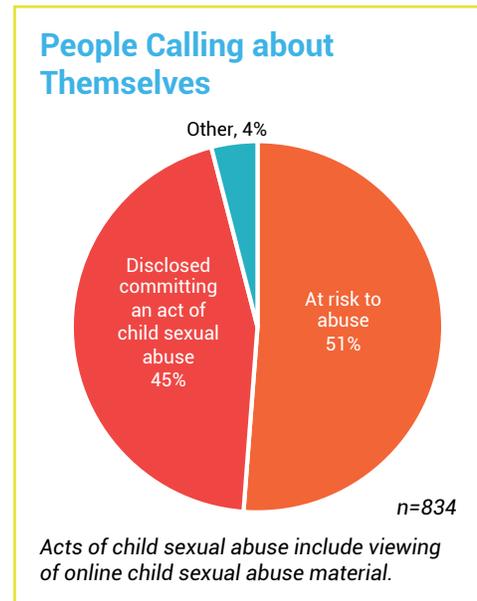
We recommended that mom speak to the manager, informing them of this coach's behaviors and asking about the program's policies and their response.

We provided her resource guides to help her feel prepared, and we talked about her own support system, encouraging her to bring an ally to the meeting. Finally, we checked in on how her daughter was doing, identifying possible supports if needed.

PEOPLE WHO ARE AT RISK TO OR WHO HAVE ABUSED

Our Helpline is available for anyone who is worried about their thoughts, feelings and behaviors about a child. These callers represent 12% of our contacts. 51% of these callers say they are at risk to abuse, and 45% say they have committed sexual abuse in the past.

The Helpline recognizes what both research and experience tell us: there is no such thing as a “typical sex offender.” Some callers have never harmed a child but are completely isolated in their fears – this includes being too afraid of being reported if they call a therapist for help. Our goal is to help each person be accountable for their behaviors and responsible for doing all they can to keep children safe, and this includes recommending specialized counseling.



What They Tell Us They Need

The Helpline offers people a safe place to ask for help with feelings and behaviors that they perhaps have never talked about before. Research suggests that without a source of help, these people experience increased isolation, depression, anxiety and hopelessness – all increasing the risk for abuse. To support living harm-free, action steps most often include:

- Seeking professional, specialized help.
- Creating a safety plan to ensure safe everyday living.
- Identifying supports and other resources.

If abuse has been perpetrated or a child is in danger, reporting is strongly encouraged.

SURVIVORS

Survivors at all stages of healing contact the Helpline to disclose, find resources and seek action to protect children. Survivors who are specifically looking for help for their own experiences of sexual abuse represent 5% of the inquiries to the Helpline. Additionally, we hear from survivors who are now in a bystander role; parents seeking help protecting their child or addressing concerns that the person who abused them may still pose a risk to others.

What They Tell Us They Need

While not our primary audience, survivors who reach out to the Helpline are vitally important. We learn from them – what they need, what they've experienced and what might have helped them when they were children. To support survivors, the Helpline:

- Provides a safe, confidential place to get the support and resources they deserve
- Validates their experiences.
- Focuses on their needs.

We believe survivors.

What We've Learned

The Stop It Now! Helpline has a lasting impact. Children are safer because adults have reached out for expert support and guidance to protect them.

By talking to all varieties of people, we have a 360-degree view of child sexual abuse, and we use every conversation to build our resources for future callers. For example, our Helpline conversations informed the creation of *Let's Talk*, a brochure about talking with someone when you are concerned about their behaviors. Our family safety plan resources were created because families wondered what they could do, whether or not a report needed to be made. The other resources that our callers consistently need are:

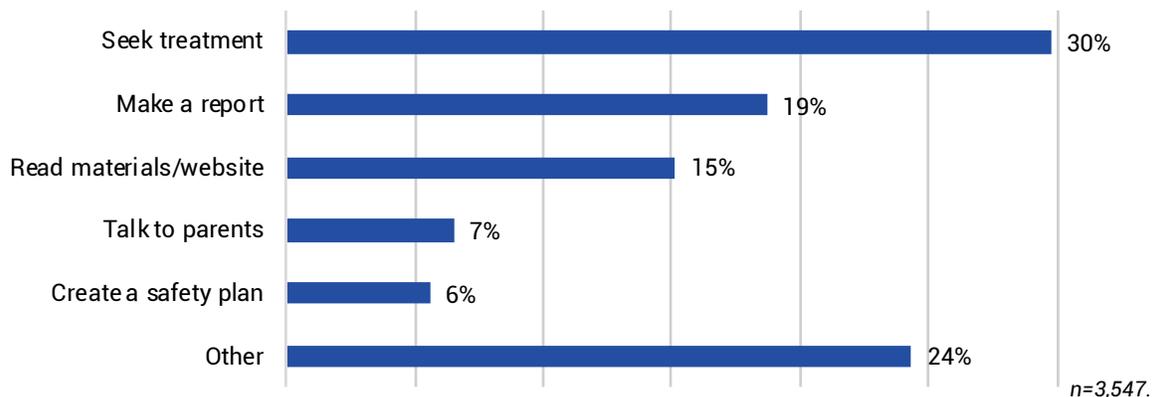
- Affirmation that their concerns are valid, and that they can take preventive and intervening actions safely
- Strategies and tools to keep children safe
- Information about sexual abuse, warning signs and healthy sexual development
- Help and guidance to have difficult conversations with adults we care about

While measuring efficacy is difficult in a program that offers a confidential service and addresses such a sensitive and personal issue, callers tell us that they **and** a child benefited because they contacted the Helpline. They take the time to write us back or they share their experience in our confidential follow-up survey:

- 84% feel better prepared to take action; found the resources and links they received helpful; and feel that they had their questions answered.
- 89% would recommend Stop It Now! to a friend who had a question or needed help regarding child sexual abuse.

Surveys collected Jan 2017 to Feb 2019, n = 202. The Helpline provides email and chat contacts with a link to our follow-up survey. Surveys are confidential and are not matched to email addresses or chat IPs.

Helpline Callers' Intended Action Steps



Other Action Steps Identified n=574. In many cases, especially via email, action steps are not identified.

Talk to adult at risk/abusing	Seek an ally	Seek legal consultation	Talk to child at risk/abusing	Talk to child at risk/survivor
31%	26%	20%	14%	9%

IN CLOSING

Stop It Now! maintains the only helpline in the U.S. focused exclusively on sexual abuse, and we are only one of a few global resources dedicated to preventing sexual victimization of children and youth by empowering the adults in their lives to speak up and take action. The ripple effect of the actions taken by those who have contacted our Helpline is immense, and every action and every person speaking up to protect a child activates our hope that one day, all children will experience safe childhoods.

Stop It Now!'s full Helpline report is available on our website. Learn more about our callers, lessons learned and vision for the future: stopitnow.org/helplinereport

SPECIAL THANKS

Stop It Now! offers special thanks to our founder, Fran Henry, and to Joan Tabachnick, the first Now! employee, a national sexual violence prevention expert and a consultant on this report. Their inspired vision and commitment to ending child sexual abuse created this Helpline. Additional thanks to Billie-Jo Grant, PhD, for her data analysis.

Thank you to the Klingberg Family Centers, Inc. for their operational support and guidance. And a special appreciation to every Helpline staff member who shared their expertise and insights over the years with thousands of concerned individuals who needed someone to talk with and needed the hope and encouragement from the unique Stop It Now! Helpline.



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