



Stop It Now!®

# Helpline Report Special Preview

## 22,000 Conversations about Sexual Abuse and Prevention

The Helpline service of Stop It Now! provides 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 about preventing child sexual abuse.

The shame and secrecy around child sexual abuse leave many unsure of their own observations and experiences, and the validation of talking with Helpline experts can motivate them to appropriate action based on the facts of a situation. The core of the Helpline's success is the personalized care, attention and resources we provide. We take a journey with our callers\* as they tell their story, and we offer expert insights, coach them on next steps and guide them through the information, resources and tools we and others provide.

When the Helpline first opened in 1995, the Stop It Now! staff wondered if anyone would really call – especially adults who were abusing or at-risk to abuse, the initial target audience. But then the first call, prior to any direct advertising, came in and a voice on the other end of the phone said, "Hello, my name is John. I am a child molester, and I need help." The Helpline responded with support and resources, as we have provided to every person since then.

The saying "If you build it, they will come" proves accurate in the case of the Helpline. We have watched the numbers of people contacting the Helpline grow, and in 2018, we responded to 1,672 requests for personal help – more inquiries than in our first five years combined. Since that first phone call, we have responded to 22,384 requests for help, and we have grown from a single phone line to access points through email, chat, social media and letters.

**"Stop It Now! has helped me to not only find the information I needed, but has also helped me with how to use it – how to talk with my family and how to approach this in a positive way."**

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 shared with permission, with all identifying details altered to protect confidentiality.

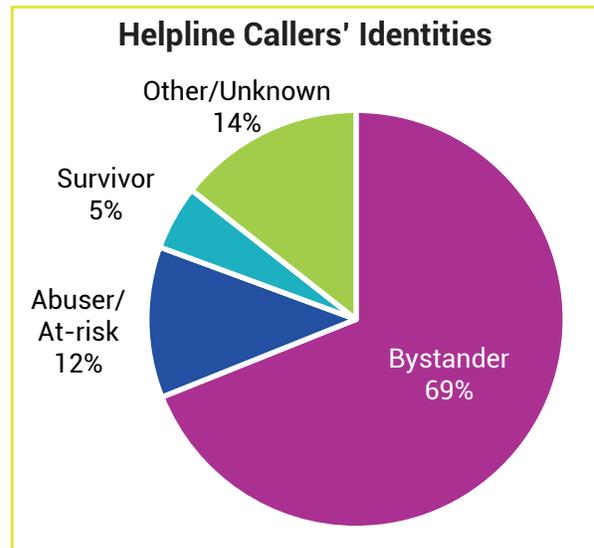
\*Throughout this report, "callers" is used to identify anyone who contacts the Helpline, regardless of contact method.

# 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.

When the Helpline began, the objective was to provide a resource for motivated adults, those at risk to sexually harm children and those who had offended, to get help to manage their own behaviors in order to protect children. Over time, we began receiving calls from all varieties of adults with questions and concerns about children's sexual safety.

Today, this Helpline is the only one of its kind in the U.S., and it has been a model for similar services around the globe. The people who contact us fall into four primary identity groupings: bystanders, people who have abused or are at risk to do so, survivors and others.



December 2012 to March 2018 (n = 7,122).

## BYSTANDERS

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, siblings, neighbors, church members, employees, teachers, friends and many other community members who are concerned about a child, adolescent or adult they know and care about.

A vast majority of bystanders (70%) know the child at risk of being abused and the adult who may be or is hurting them. These personal relationships contribute to the complexity of sexual abuse and often prevent the bystander from taking any action. They are worried about protecting the child, and they care about the person with concerning behaviors. The decisions are difficult.

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

### How We Help

- Direct them to resources to learn more about keeping children safe.
- Explore protective actions they can take, identifying barriers and challenges.
- Practice and model effective conversations with the person they are concerned about.
- Emphasize the importance of support and allies to reduce the isolation.
- Provide information about the reporting process, if needed.

"You are my first link to anything positive happening for my family. I have talked to so many people, and this is the first time somebody understands and is trying to help."

## A Bystander's Story

Monica's mom emailed the Helpline, very concerned about the behavior of her daughter's tennis coach. Monica, who is almost 10, told her mom that her tennis coach had pushed the end of her tennis racket so that it came in contact with her private parts. When mom asked her to tell her more, Monica said the coach said, "That was an accident, but this one is on purpose," and "booped" her again on her private parts.



The coach had earlier told her that her neon pink socks were "sexy," and she described a few other concerning incidents. Mom knew that she had to respond, but she wasn't sure whether to "confront the coach alone" or talk to others, like the manager of the tennis program. She asked us what steps she should take.

Our Helpline acknowledged first how wonderful it was that Monica 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 him or her 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.

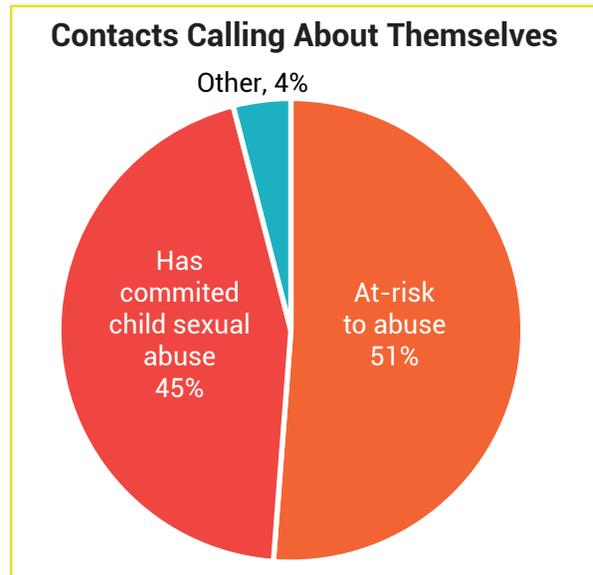
**69% of Helpline  
contacts identified  
as bystanders.**

## PEOPLE WHO ARE AT RISK TO OR HAVE ABUSED

Our Helpline is available for anyone who is worried about his or her own thoughts, feelings and behaviors that could result in the sexual abuse of a child. This includes those who have abused.

The Helpline recognizes what both research and experience tell us: there is no such thing as a “typical offender.” Our goal is to help each person be accountable for their behaviors and responsible for doing all they can to keep children safe.

**More than half of all people calling with concerns about themselves describe being afraid of their own thoughts that put them at risk to harm a child.**



December 2012 to March 2018 (n = 834).

### How We Help

The presence of the Helpline is a beacon of hope for the people who seek a safe place to ask for help with feelings and behaviors that they perhaps have never talked about before. This isolation fuels sexual abuse, and without a source of help, these people experience increased depression, anxiety and hopelessness – all increasing the chance that abuse will happen.

To support living harm-free, action steps reviewed most often include:

- Seeking professional, specialized help.
- Creating a safety plan.
- Identifying supports and other resources.

“The Helpline made me feel that I wasn't alone with my problems. You assured me that there is help, and people are willing to help me change my life.”

## SURVIVORS

Survivors at all stages of healing contact the Helpline, including disclosing abuse for the first time and seeking resources for support. Often, survivors seek information to protect their own children now that they are in a parenting role .

### How We Help

The Helpline provides survivors a safe, confidential place to talk and find the support and resources they deserve. We validate their experiences. We focus on their needs. We offer information on creating a family safety plan to decrease the possibility of abuse in future generations. 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.

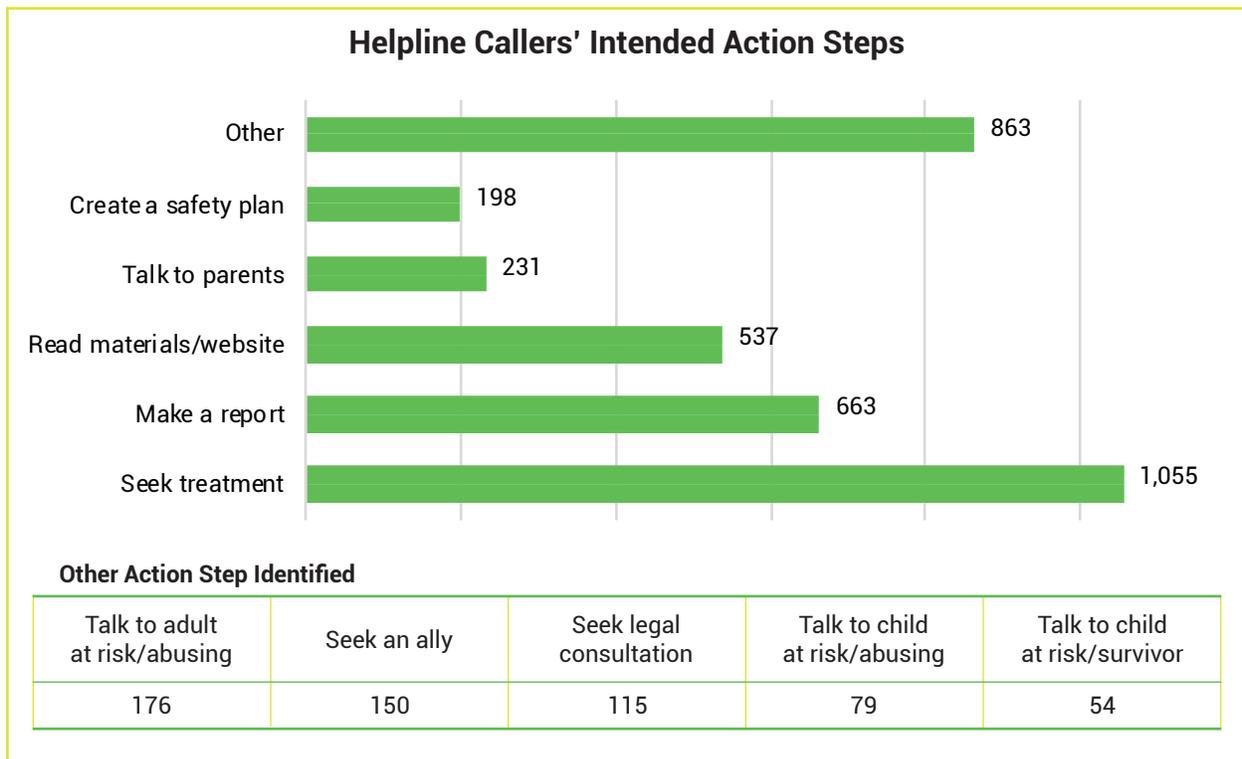
While measuring efficacy is difficult in programs that offer a confidential service, callers tell us that they and a child benefited because of their contact to the Helpline. As a result, we know:

- Adults need information about child sexual abuse.
- Adults are willing to take action to protect children.
- Adults with unwanted sexual thoughts and feelings towards minors want help to live harm-free.

**84%** are satisfied with resources given.

**85%** feel better prepared to act.

**89%** would recommend the helpline.



December 2012 to March 2018 (n = 3,547).

"Talking to Helpline staff changed my life. There was someplace to go where I could tell my story to people who were experienced and knowledgeable about child sexual abuse. Helpline staff told me about steps I could take to interrupt a situation that worried me. I am very close to the people involved in the situation, and the Helpline helped me to proceed in a loving way."



*Stop It Now!'s full Helpline Report will be released later this year with more insights, actions and expert recommendations for the future.*

## 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 huge thank you to every Helpline staff member who shared hope with thousands of fearful people who needed hope and encouragement.



**THORN**



351 Pleasant Street, Suite B-319  
Northampton, MA 01060

### Ways to Contact The Helpline



1.888.PREVENT



[stopitnow.org](http://stopitnow.org)



[helpline@stopitnow.org](mailto:helpline@stopitnow.org)



[facebook.com/stopitnow](https://facebook.com/stopitnow)



[stopitnow.org/get-immediate-help](http://stopitnow.org/get-immediate-help)