

August 2008

Keep door to communication open

Each year an estimated 35,000 people are reported missing in Australia and, worryingly, more than half are under the age of 18.

This National Missing Persons Week (3 – 9 August) Kids Helpline is urging the community to understand the importance of communication in helping to prevent young people from going missing and reconnect if they have become a missing person.

Kids Helpline General Manager Wendy Protheroe said a young person going missing can have a devastating effect on a family but in some cases it can be prevented.

"The young go missing for a variety of reasons including mental illness, escaping from violence, bullying, drugs/alcohol abuse, and rebellion," she said. "Our counsellors are speaking to young Australians about these issues everyday."

Last year forty-one percent of Kids Helpline counselling sessions were with children and young people who were experiencing homelessness, mental health issues, child abuse, bullying, domestic violence and contact with the criminal justice system.

"Mental health issues alone have more than doubled since 2002 and now account for 10 per cent of all counselling sessions," Ms Protheroe said.

"These figures show how vitally important it is that parents make the time to have meaningful communication with their children."

Kids Helpline recommends the following four tips for connecting with children and young people:

1. Ask their opinions and show you value them by not only listening to but, as often as realistically possible, acting on them. Young people will be more likely to respect rules if you respect their opinions about non-critical issues.
2. If you suspect something is worrying them, ask "what do you need from me or others right now?" Be prepared for any response from "I don't want you to do anything – just listen" or "I want you to tell me what to do" to "I need space right now, I need to work this out for myself" or "I need to not think about this for a while".
3. If they don't want to talk or say they want space – keep your end open, and don't stop offering opportunities for time and activities together with incidental listening and talking.
4. These together times will be different to those that worked before they became a teenager. For example, it could be during a drive to school, at meal times, a shopping trip, on the way home from a sports game or going camping.

Kids Helpline is Australia's only free 24 hour, seven day a week counselling service for young people aged 5 to 25 years of age.

BoysTown also operates Parentline in Queensland and the Northern Territory, providing telephone counselling, education and support to parents and carers. Counselling is available seven days a week for the cost of a local call on 1300 30 1300.

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