

September 2008

Child abuse more than physical

This Child Protection Week (7-13 September) Kids Helpline has urged the community to understand that no form of abuse is ever right or acceptable.

Kids Helpline General Manager Wendy Protheroe said it is estimated that more than half a million Australian children are being abused or neglected every year.

“It is shocking to think that so many of our vulnerable young people are suffering. So it’s vital we increase awareness that abuse is never OK,” Ms Protheroe said.

“While, as a society, we publicly express our abhorrence of violence, it appears that many people do not understand exactly what actions are abusive.”

Kids Helpline defines child abuse as anything that significantly harms a child or damages their chance of a safe and healthy life. This includes physical, sexual and emotional abuse, neglect and witnessing family violence.

“While most people recognise physical and sexual abuse, many don’t understand that the absence of affection, love, kind words and attention is also a form of child abuse,” Ms Protheroe said. “Constant criticism, teasing, ignoring, yelling and rejection are emotional abuse.

“Witnessing family violence or being aware of it happening between adults in the home is also extremely damaging and can make it difficult for young people to understand and form healthy relationships.”

Child abuse can have devastating long-term effects; it is a contributing factor towards behaviour and learning difficulties, homelessness, suicidal thoughts, mental illness and self-injury.

“Last year Kids Helpline held 2,769 counselling sessions with children and young people regarding child abuse,” Ms Protheroe said.

“Of these, 14 per cent of the young people were engaged in deliberate self-injury, 4 per cent reported current thoughts of suicide and almost half were experiencing current or ongoing abuse or neglect.

“A third of the counselling sessions were about unresolved issues regarding past abuse, which clearly shows the long-term impact of abuse on young lives.”

According to Ms Protheroe Kids Helpline has one very simple message for parents.

“Kids Helpline would encourage all those who have contact with children and young people to remember how important it is to model non-violent and respectful behaviours to the smallest and most vulnerable members of our society,” she said.

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.

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