



Parentline Satisfaction & Efficacy Report 2008

Understanding Client Satisfaction and the Service's Efficacy in Increasing a Parent's Ability to Cope

BACKGROUND TO THE SERVICE

What is Parentline?

Parentline is a confidential telephone counselling service providing education, guidance and support to parents and carers of children in Queensland and the Northern Territory. It is a shared initiative of BoysTown, the Queensland Department of Communities and the Northern Territory Department of Health and Community Services.

Parentline is available between 8am and 10pm, seven days a week. Counsellors assist callers to develop strategies and skills, which enable them to manage their lives and families more effectively.

Each week, counsellors respond to more than 200 calls about a range of issues including parenting strategies for challenging behaviours, parent-child relationships, custody and access, and the emotional well-being of children.

Parents, carers and family members have direct access to counsellors and can choose to speak with either a male or female counsellor.

Who uses the service?

Parentline predominantly receives calls from parents and carers, plus a small number of grandparents, foster carers, other relatives, family friends, neighbours and professionals involved with children (e.g. teachers).

While the age range of callers is broad, ranging from teenagers to 85 year olds, the average age is 37 years. Consistent with national help-seeking trends, females make up the majority of Parentline clients (87%).

In 2008, 97% of calls were from Queensland, of which 71% were from the southeast region. The remaining calls came from Northern Territory (2%) and other Australian states (1%).

Callers come from a variety of cultural and linguistic backgrounds (CALD), although English-speaking backgrounds consistently dominate. Across the years, the proportion of callers identifying as Indigenous has been stable at around 1%. In contrast, the proportion of CALD clients has varied from year to year. The majority of Parentline callers (80%) phone with concerns about a child ranging from newborn babies up to adult children. Most families have one, two or three children (35%, 36% and 18% respectively).

A significant proportion of contacts to Parentline are from first-time callers (60% in 2008). That said, Parentline is unique in its ability to provide ongoing counselling and support and allow parents to reconnect with the same counsellor over a time.

WHY IS SUCH A SERVICE IMPORTANT?

The need for a parental telephone counselling service was identified through Kids Helpline. A significant number of parents were contacting the service (approximately 15,000 during 1993-1996). These parents highlighted the need for an anonymous, confidential and easily accessible telephone counselling service, which suited the demands of parenting. Empirical evidence also demonstrated the benefits parenting support and education services can have for the parent, the child, their relationship, and society as a whole.

Parent education has been recognised as offering the potential to address pressing issues such as child abuse, adolescent social problems, school failure and youth violence. Therapist-led parent training in particular, has proven effective in promoting positive changes in parent and child behaviours and been found to improve parent-child communication, increase parenting self-esteem, alleviate maternal depression and parenting stress and reduce child behavioural problems^{1,2}.

Inadequate parenting creates an enormous toll on society, not least the financial burden it places



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on the various government and non-government health, support and legal services. Offering early intervention support to families helps not only children and their families but has wider implications for preventing violence in society³.

THE NEED FOR RESEARCH

BoysTown is committed to ensuring that all their services are evidence-based and effective in addressing client needs. Research enhances organisational accountability and procurement of funding, as well as providing valuable information to inform strategic planning and decision-making.

Research into Parentline’s efficacy is undertaken annually. The 2008 research assessed client outcomes and satisfaction levels through the following specific measures:

- number/percentage of clients surveyed who are satisfied with the quality of service provision;
- number/percentage of clients surveyed reporting an increased ability to care for their child(ren); and
- number/percentage of clients surveyed reporting increased ability and confidence in parenting strategies and skills.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology involved short (5-10 minute) telephone surveys, conducted by BoysTown senior researchers. Participants were recruited by Parentline counsellors at the end of counselling sessions. On calls where counsellors considered it appropriate to do so, they introduced the research project, explaining its nature and purpose. Contact details were sought for all callers who expressed a willingness to participate. Researchers then recontacted clients within a few days of their counselling session to conduct the survey.

A five-item oral self-report scale was developed to measure the main constructs of parenting capacity. Its design was based on the Brief Capacity to Parent Scale (BCPS). Additionally, the works of Miller, Duncan, Brown, Sparks and Claud were considered in the validity, reliability, feasibility and design of the outcome rating scales^{4,5}.

Of the 102 clients approached by counsellors, surveys were conducted with a total of 77. Ten clients declined to participate up-front. A further 15 were unable to be recontacted after initially accepting to participate.

Participants included a mix of genders, age and both first-time and repeat callers. Numbers for these were achieved through natural fall-out rather than set quotas.

Table 1: Breakdown of Final Sample

	Male	Female
First time callers		
26-35 years	0	9
36-55 years	3	19
Over 55 years	0	1
Repeat callers		
26-35 years	0	9
36-55 years	2	29
Over 55 years	2	3
Totals	7	70

All interviews were conducted between 24 Sep and 16 Oct 2008.

FINDINGS

Overall, results suggest that most parents and carers contacting Parentline service find it effective. High levels of satisfaction and successful outcomes indicate a high quality counselling service.



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Client Satisfaction

The Parentline telephone interview contained two indicators of client satisfaction:

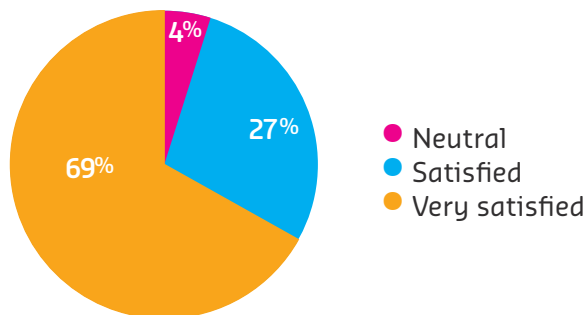
- overall satisfaction; and
- likelihood to recommend the service to a friend.

A significant amount of the 77 clients surveyed reported satisfaction, including:

- 96% expressing overall satisfaction with the service, of which 69% claimed to be 'very satisfied'; and
- 98% claiming they would recommend Parentline to a friend, approximately half of whom gave unsolicited feedback that they had already done so.

No clients surveyed reported dissatisfaction with the service.

Figure 1: Overall Client Satisfaction



Perceived effectiveness in increasing parenting confidence and ability

Participants were asked to rate the overall effectiveness of their most recent call to Parentline in terms of its ability to help them address their issue(s). Results showed a high number of clients (89%) rated their call as being either 'effective' or 'very effective'. A further 7% rated the call as 'satisfactory', with the remaining 4% claiming the call was 'somewhat effective, but inadequate'. No clients surveyed rated the call as 'ineffective'.

Participants were also surveyed on Parentline's efficacy in assisting them to improve on a range of specific outcome measures, including: parenting confidence; parenting strategies and skills; understanding children's needs; personal capacity to cope; and parent-child relationship.

As Parentline provides a broad range of assistance to clients presenting with a diverse range of needs, it was not expected that every outcome measure would apply to each call. Particularly where callers had contacted the service only once, or were contacting about a specific area that may not involve other measured aspects. While all clients found at least one measure applied to their call (often more), each measure had an average of 22% clients for which it was not applicable.

Overall, 92% of participants surveyed rated Parentline as either 'effective' or 'very effective' at assisting them with at least one of the measured outcomes. When the 'satisfactory' rating (i.e. the mid-point) is also grouped with this pair, findings show that the number reporting efficacy on each applicable measure is considerably high, including:

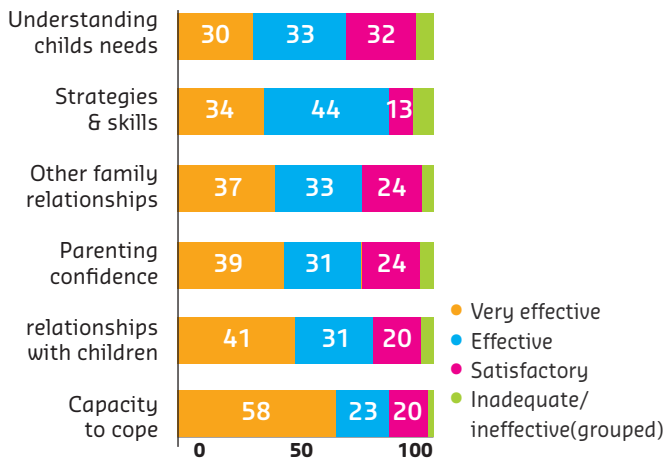
- 94% for increasing parenting confidence
- 92% for increasing parenting strategies and skills
- 94% for increasing their understanding of their children's needs
- 92% for improving their relationships with their children
- 97% for increasing their personal capacity to cope; and
- 94% at improving other relationships in their family.

The following graph shows a more detailed breakdown of responses to the specific outcome measures. Participants for which the measure did not apply have been excluded.



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Figure 2: Efficacy in Specific Outcome Measures (%'s)



DISCUSSION

This research highlights Parentline’s efficacy in increasing parents’ and carers’ ability and confidence to care for their children. The high level of client satisfaction suggests that the service model is in line with the needs and desires of callers. Moreover, it suggests a high level of expertise with the counselling.

The findings of this research echoes other contemporary research findings which suggest that providing a parenting support and education service can have numerous benefits not only for the parent, but also the child and society as a whole. Findings similarly supported past research showing that effectively providing therapist-led parent education and training can improve parent-child relationships, increase parenting confidence and reduce parenting stress.

This research also found outcomes of additional benefits not highlighted in past research. Beyond the short-term impacts of a parenting support and education, contemporary research suggests that increasing a parents’ effectiveness can also have positive longer-term effects on a parents’ identity and level of social inclusion.

The success of Parentline, as evidenced by this research, supports the continued funding and quality assurance practice of the service.

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