

# Sex & Intimacy

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Sex and intimate relationships are prime issues for Australian young people, as evidenced by the number of calls Kids Help Line receives about partner relationships, pregnancy, sexual activity and contraception. Together these problems account for 20% of the 100,000 counselling calls received each year.

Partner relationships are consistently the third most common reason children and young people contact the service, exceeded only by relationships with family and friends. Kids Help Line counsellors respond to almost 10,000 calls concerning partner relationships each year, accounting for just over 10% of calls.

Consistently rating as the 6th and 7th most common problems, pregnancy (4,500 calls each year) and sexual activity (4,200 calls each year) together account for nearly 10% of all problem calls. To a smaller extent, contraception issues account for around 1% or 1,000 calls each year.

All sex and intimacy issues are of greater concern to older callers aged between 15 and 18 years. Pregnancy is more of a concern for females while sexual activity is more of a concern for males.

The tables below show the top 5 problems, in rank order, for each gender and age group:

Female 5-9 yrs	Female 10-14 yrs	Female 15-18 yrs
Family Relationships	Peer Relationships	<b>Partner Relationships</b>
Peer Relationships	Family Relationships	Family Relationships
Bullying	<b>Partner Relationships</b>	Peer Relationships
Child Abuse	Bullying	<b>Pregnancy</b>
Grief	Child Abuse	Child Abuse

Male 5-9 yrs	Male 10-14 yrs	Male 15-18 yrs
Family Relationships	Family Relationships	<b>Partner Relationships</b>
Bullying	Bullying	<b>Sexual Activity</b>
Peer Relationships	Peer Relationships	Family Relationships
Child Abuse	<b>Partner Relationships</b>	Leaving Home/ Homelessness
Grief	<b>Sexual Activity</b>	Peer Relationships

Consistent with gender ratios across all problem types, females are responsible for 75% of partner relationship concerns and 77% of contraception concerns. Differing from overall trends, females are responsible for 88% of pregnancy calls while males are responsible for 53% of sexual activity calls.

## Partner Relationships

Partner relationship concerns are the most frequent reason young people aged between 15 and 18 years seek help from Kids Help Line. This category includes problems between caller and their partner or intimate friend as well as sexual issues in significant or established relationships.

Young people phoning about intimate relationships are most likely (61%) to be concerned about establishing or negotiating a relationship. Qualitative data reveals that the most common issues involve uncertainty about telling someone they 'like' them; trust issues; and uncertainty about what to do after having an argument with their partner.

Partner relationship concerns are also often related to significant relationship difficulties or relationship breakdowns (32%). Qualitative data reveals the most common reasons for seeking help include:

- The need to process and understand why a partner has broken up with them
- Uncertainty about how to break off a relationship
- Coping with a partner who has cheated
- Discussion of trust and faithfulness issues
- Violence or the fear of violence in the relationship
- The effect that their partner's drug or alcohol use has on the relationship.

A small proportion (7%) of concerns are from young people feeling uncertainty or pressure to have sex in a significant or already established relationship.

## Pregnancy

There has been a steady decrease in the number and proportion of pregnancy-related calls received by Kids Help Line. Counsellors responded to around 4,000 calls in the year 2000, a 40% decrease since 1995.

Of the young people who phone about pregnancy, 57% are seeking pregnancy-related information or are unsure if they are pregnant.

Young people are often confused or indecisive about pregnancy options (12%), while a further 16% report distress about telling significant people such as their partner or parents. A small proportion (2% or 90 calls per year) are from young females requiring urgent medical or emotional support.

The remaining pregnancy-related calls (13%) are from young people worried about a pregnant friend or partner. Young males make almost 40% of these calls.

## Sexual Activity

Although sexual activity remains the 7th most common reason children and young people contact KHL, there has been a steady decrease in the number and proportion of calls about this issue. Accounting for 4.1% of calls in the year 2000, sexual activity concerns have decreased by 43% since 1995.

Almost half (47%) of all sexual activity concerns are from young people seeking information about sex. Young people also phone with concerns about beginning sex (15%) or specific sexual activities (26%). Needing to talk about a sexual experience or finding sex to be difficult, uncomfortable or unsatisfying are less common issues.

Sexual activity is more of an issue for male callers (53%) and callers aged between 15 and 18 years, making this issue the second most common reason older males contact KHL.

## Contraception

Information and concerns about contraception and safe sex practices account for around 1% or 1,000 call per year. This category does not include concerns directly related to STDs or HIV/AIDS. (see information sheet 17 for information about HIV/AIDS concerns).

The majority (66%) of contraception calls are from young people seeking information about contraception and safe sex practices. A smaller proportion (18%) are experiencing worry about possible risk while 5% have no understanding of safe sex practices. 1 in 10 calls are from young people requiring specialised contraception information.

Females are responsible for 77% of calls concerning contraception while 75% of callers are aged between 15 and 18 years.

## Ethnic Background

Young people from Indigenous and non-English speaking backgrounds contact KHL less often about pregnancy, sexual activity and contraception concerns when compared to their Anglo-Australian counterparts. Indigenous young people are also less likely to contact KHL with partner relationship concerns.

The table below shows the proportion of calls from Indigenous, NESB and Anglo-Australian young people for each of the problems (represented as a percentage of all problem calls from each group):

	ANGLO	NESB	INDIGENOUS
Partner Relationships	11.4%	11.5%	7.3%
Pregnancy	4.8%	2.0%	3.9%
Sexual Activity	3.4%	2.2%	1.2%
Contraception	1.1%	0.3%	0.2%

## Geographical Location

Young people from both rural and remote areas make a higher proportion of calls concerning partner relationships and sexual activity. Pregnancy issues are also less of a concern for callers in remote areas of Australia. Young people from metropolitan locations make a higher proportion of calls concerning contraception.

The table below shows the proportion of calls concerning each problem from young people located in metropolitan, rural and remote areas (represented as a percentage of all problem calls from each group):

	METRO	RURAL	REMOTE
Partner Relationships	7.9%	8.9%	10.7%
Pregnancy	5.2%	5.2%	4.5%
Sexual Activity	1.7%	1.9%	2.4%
Contraception	1.2%	1.0%	0.8%

## Counselling and Outcome of Calls

Given the information-seeking nature of sexual activity and contraception calls, KHL counsellors spend (on average) 8 minutes and 6 minutes respectively talking to young people each time they phone. When compared to an average of 17 minutes across all problems, the duration of counselling for these two issues is significantly shorter.

In comparison, when callers have partner relationship concerns, KHL counsellors spend (on average) 18 minutes talking to the young person. KHL plays an important role for young people wanting to explore problems in relationships with their partners. Counsellors support and encourage callers to fully explore issues which enable them to make informed decisions about their situation. Frequently, counsellors work with the caller to develop and practice clear communication and assertiveness skills that may be used to improve the situation.

The nature of pregnancy concerns range from information-seeking to callers experiencing significant confusion and distress. Counsellors spend (on average) 11 minutes talking with these young people. Often the anonymity and confidentiality of the service provides a safe environment for young people to freely and openly discuss their concerns.

Kids Help Line is also able to provide young people with information about other agencies in the community which can provide additional support. Only 2% of young people with partner relationship concerns are referred to other support services. Similarly, only 5% of sexual activity concerns require referral. In comparison, 32% of pregnancy calls and 31% of contraception calls are referred to another support service (including doctors and other health professionals).

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## For more information

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