

# Parentline 2016

## Satisfaction and Outcomes Report

*"Parentline are amazing and have given me confidence and strength. Amazing advice - I didn't think I was going to make it through at times but I will now"*

Written by  
Margaret Harley  
Research Officer  
**yourtown**

## Background

Parentline is a confidential telephone, email and web chat service providing professional counselling, education and support to parents and others who care for children and young people. The service operates from 8am to 10pm seven days a week. The service provides a mix of assistance through counselling, information and referral that is tailored to meet individual client needs. Callers to Parentline can choose to speak with a male or female counsellor and can arrange to speak with the same counsellor in the future.

**yourtown** is committed to ensuring that all services meet client needs and are evidence-based in their practice. In line with this, a survey of client satisfaction and outcomes regarding Parentline is conducted on an annual basis. In addition, the survey measures the perceptions of parents regarding Parentline's assistance with specific areas of parenting effectiveness, which are:

- Parenting confidence
- Parenting strategies and skills
- Relationship with child/children
- Understanding child/children
- Capacity to cope
- Ability to care for child/children

These parental/family factors are common protective factors that guard against child abuse and neglect (Counts, Buffington, Chang-Rios, Rasmussen, & Preacher, 2010; AIFS, 2013). Each year the results are part of a feedback loop to Parentline managers, service delivery staff and to Parentline funding bodies. This report focuses on the results of the 2016 annual client satisfaction and outcomes survey.

## Method

### Participants

Between August 8 and October 26, 2016, 118 participants responded to a survey of client satisfaction and outcomes. In total, 81% were female and 19% were male. In relation to ethnicity, 6% identified as Indigenous and 19% were from a Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) background.

The majority (89%) of respondents were aged between 36 and 55 years. In specific detail:

- 1% were aged between 16 and 25 years
- 22% were aged between 26 and 35 years
- 44% were in the 36-45 year age group
- 20% were aged 46-55 years
- 13% were aged over 55 years

Just under half (47%) contacted Parentline once, while 14% had contacted the service twice, 11% three to four times, 10% five to ten times, and 14% had contacted over 11 times <sup>1</sup>.

## Survey tool

The survey contained quantitative and qualitative items. The semi-structured questionnaire was designed internally at **yourtown** in 2007. It was based on a definition of service impact as defined by staff, a review of clinical literature relating to parenting interventions, and an audit of standardised parenting outcome measures. The questionnaire was designed to capture client satisfaction with the service and self-reported effectiveness of Parentline to assist with a broad range of parenting support needs. After minor adjustments were made in 2011 this survey continues to be used every year to gather data for the annual client satisfaction report.

## Design and procedure

The study used a mixed methods design. The quantitative component came from the Likert scale items in the survey and the qualitative component was formed from the open-ended questions. Parentline Counsellors recruited participants by inviting them to participate in the survey. Counsellors used their professional judgement about whether to recruit participants and did not try to recruit clients who called to discuss sexual abuse or suicide concerns. Clients who agreed to participate would give their contact details and their preferred time of contact. A researcher or experienced staff member would then contact the participant by telephone. The survey took 5-10 minutes to complete.

Due to the confidential nature of the Parentline Service, some individual users of the service may not feel comfortable providing their personal name and contact phone number for a **yourtown** Researcher to interview them. It may also be possible, that due to the need to identify Parentline users for the evaluation process, individuals that were not happy with the service may have chosen not to participate. These limitations in this evaluation while unfortunate are unavoidable when conducting client satisfaction for any confidential telephone service.

After the survey data was collected and collated, frequencies were conducted on the Likert scale items to ascertain the more common responses. The responses to the open-ended questions were analysed to determine the main themes.

## Results

### Overall satisfaction and effectiveness

The majority (90%) of respondents gave positive ratings regarding their satisfaction with the service provided by Parentline. Specifically, 70% were 'very satisfied' and 20% were 'satisfied'. Of the remaining respondents, 5% were 'neither satisfied nor dissatisfied', and 5% were 'dissatisfied' to 'very dissatisfied'. Figure 1 shows respondents' rates of satisfaction with the Parentline service.

---

<sup>1</sup> 4% of respondents could not recall how many times they had contacted Parentline

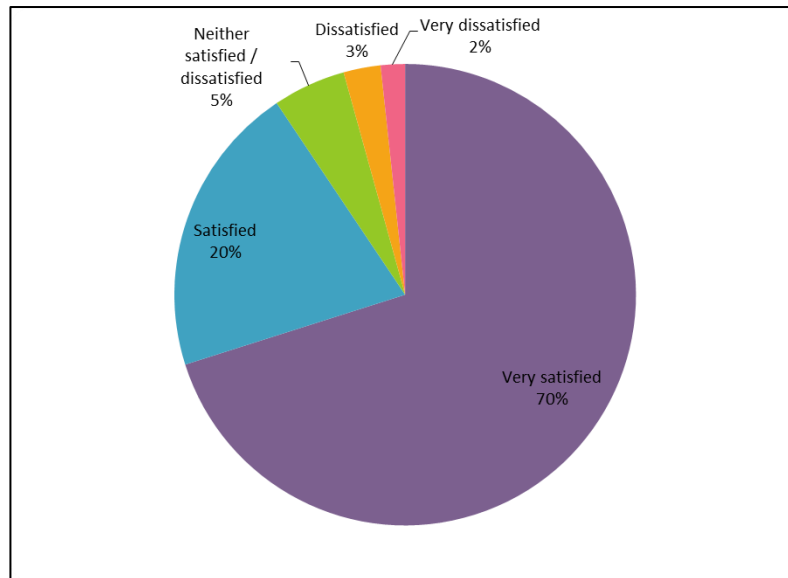


Figure I: Respondent's ratings of their level of satisfaction with Parentline

The majority (92.5%) of respondents also gave positive ratings regarding Parentline's effectiveness. Specifically, 34.8% rated Parentline as 'very effective' and 57.7% rated it as 'effective'. Only 2.5% rated Parentline as 'not effective' while 5% were unsure about their answer or said that the question was 'not applicable' to them.

High levels of satisfaction and positive feedback regarding Parentline's effectiveness were also evident in the qualitative feedback given by respondents. For some parents and carers, the main benefit of Parentline was that it gave them a counsellor who they could talk to, who offered them good support and which helped them in their situation.

*"Gave me some facts - she was clear and gave me the information needed. The Counsellor was very empathic, encouraging and helpful. I was extremely grateful I could get the knowledge I needed"*

*"As a single parent, without Parentline I would have no other avenue for accessing up to the minute research based strategies or advice in dealing with behavioural phases and challenges I am facing with my boys. I fear that for parents in my circumstance it would be easy to react inappropriately in front of or with the children if immediate over the phone assistance was not available"*

*"Great that they are always there - no need for an appointment, being able to talk and get reassurance that I am on the right track. My child has behavioural problems and I wasn't sure where to go for advice. It's reasonable advice outside of family"*

*"Helped me understand that my daughter has her own journey and I'm just helping her along the way and it's shown me how to handle this better"*

Some parents also expressed satisfaction because of the empathy and understanding shown by Parentline Counsellor.

*"I already had an idea of what to do. I just needed to run it past someone else. I was amazed at how quickly the CR picked up on what was going on"*

*"I was given different options to explore for parenting. Gave me an understanding and to be able to try things. Good to have confirmation that you're doing the right things as a parent. My feelings were validated"*

*"Made me surer and more confident and validated that I am on the right track. Has given me new ideas. Also was calming in a time of stress"*

*"My son has autism (8 year old) - the Counsellor was very good she had a lot of information. Felt like a weight was taken off my shoulders. I felt empowered afterwards"*

*"I felt calmer and more in control after the call and I could control my own anxiety. I felt I had better insight into my teenager. I also felt that the person I spoke to was concerned for not only my parenting but also for me as a person as well"*

While the overwhelming majority of qualitative feedback was positive, a few respondents did offer suggestions for ways that the service could improve, including an expansion of Parentline's hours of operation, some concern about the lack of depth in Counsellor life skills and difficulty in locating details of the service.

*"Only one issue was one night I called - it was an hour before it was going off line. It was about to finish - and I wanted to be able to get some support - and no one would take a call. And that was hard. I'm a single Mum and have none else to talk to. The Counsellor who explained to me did try to find a Counsellor who was working past 10pm who would have time to take my call - but there was no one available"*

*"Overall the call was fantastic. But when I called and initially mentioned my baby was having sleeping issues I was immediately told to contact someone else. I had to push back and say that I was the one who needed help - I already had a strategy for dealing with the sleep issue for my child. The first opening line was difficult to take - I had to push past that and a less experienced parent may not have done so. It turns out the Counsellor recommended that I see a GP - and I have now been diagnosed with post-partum depression"*

*"Lack of consistency with the quality of therapists (lack of experience-life)"*

*"It's a really great service - but I had to search for it. I googled "struggling with a teenager" and found the number. It was nice to know that at that time of night (8pm) I could actually call and not wait till business hours next day. A calmer parent ultimately leads to a better situation - and for me that's where the most help came from but not easy to find"*

*"It should be available widely to people. It's a fantastic facility. I don't think enough people are aware of it. People struggling with children should be aware that it's there"*

In summary, it is evident in both the quantitative and qualitative feedback received from Parentline survey respondents during the 2016 survey that overall satisfaction levels are high and that Parentline is an extremely effective service. The next section of this report will examine the quantitative and qualitative feedback regarding the effectiveness of the service in more detail.

## Areas of effectiveness

### Increasing parenting confidence

Of 118 parents who completed this item, 15 respondents indicated that they did not contact Parentline seeking to increase their parenting skills and confidence. Of those for whom the question was relevant 35% rated Parentline as 'effective' and 47.6% rated the service as 'very effective' at developing parenting confidence. Another 6.8% were unable to tell if any changes had occurred with their child because the survey was conducted too soon after the Parentline session; 4.9% gave a rating of 'not effective', and 5.9% were unsure. The ratings about increasing parenting confidence are shown in Figure 2.

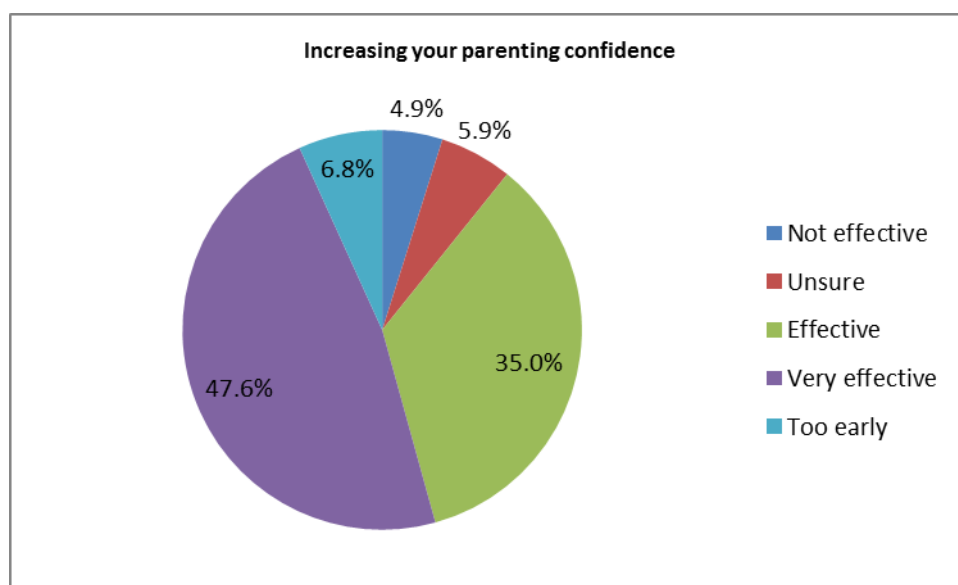


Figure 2: Respondents' ratings about Parentline increasing their parenting confidence

When respondents were asked at the end of the survey to describe their experience of calling the Parentline service, a number described the reassurance from their conversation with the Parentline Counsellor and how this impacted on their confidence in parenting or caring for their child.

*"Gave me confidence that what I was doing was right. It gave me confidence to communicate better with my son. She told me to focus on his positives not the negatives and get down to his eye level and tell him why I'm getting angry so he can understand"*

*"I needed to confirm how I was managing a particular issue. The counsellor listened very carefully - then we moved to solutions. I knew how to manage it, but needed confirmation. What really made a difference was the counsellor was on the same wavelength as me and didn't just give me advice"*

*"It gave me confidence to handle the situation. I also got lots of information for ways to help my daughter - things I didn't know about that I can do to assist with this situation"*

*"Parentline are amazing and have given me the confidence and strength. Amazing advice - I didn't think I was going to make it through at times but I will now"*

*"It gave me the confidence to stick to my guns and had an impact on my relationship"*

### Developing parenting strategies and skills

Of 118 parents who completed this item, 22 respondents indicated that they did not contact Parentline for assistance with strategies and skills development. Of those for whom it was relevant 34.4% rated Parentline as 'effective' and 38.5% rated the service as 'very effective' at developing parenting strategies and skills. Another 11.5% were unable to tell if any changes to the situation had occurred because the survey was conducted too soon after the Parentline session; 5% gave a rating of 'not effective', and 10.5% were unsure. The ratings about parenting strategies and skills are shown in Figure 3.

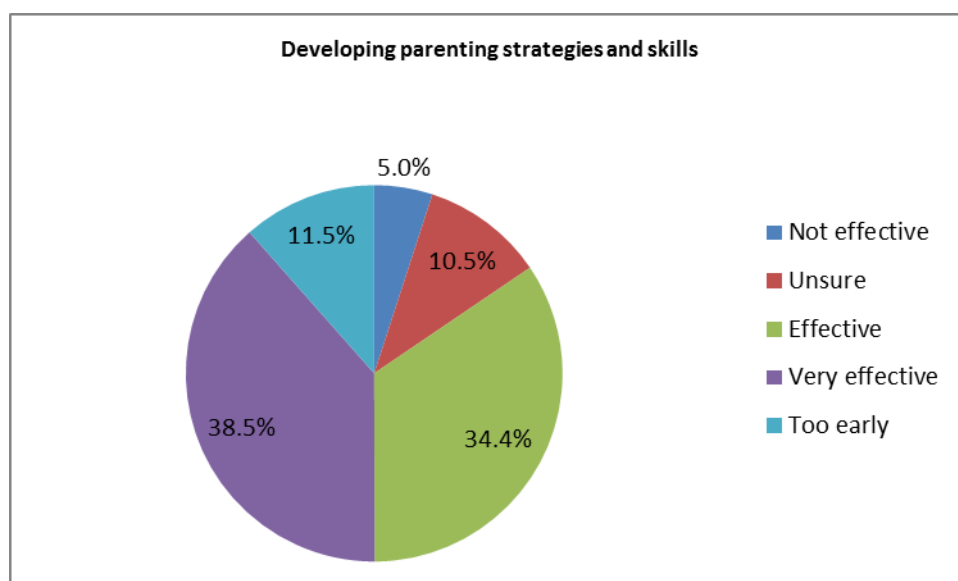


Figure 3: Respondents' ratings about Parentline developing their parenting strategies and skills

Qualitative feedback from the survey respondents also highlighted the importance of discussing strategies, skills and tools with a Parentline Counsellor. From this feedback it is evident that encouraging parents and carers to view the situation from their child's perspective, and giving them new strategies and ways of communicating, was helpful for parents dealing with stressful situations.

*"Highly effective service. I have had counselling since 1982 nothing has helped or been more valuable than this. The constant improvement in my daughter is so beautiful. It is so important as a parent to improve ourselves and gain new skills to be the best parents we can be"*

*"Explained some facts about teenagers (hormones) I had forgotten. Gave me some strategies. Normalized the situation"*

*"It was reassuring that what I was experiencing is not unique - there are other parents experiencing this too. I am not alone and I am doing the best given the situation I am in. She then gave me some strategies to get me through this time. She made me feel very comfortable that I can ring back and contact her for more help around my parenting issues"*

*"The strategies I was given helped take the heat out of the situation. He was very good - when I initially called I was a little bit overwhelmed -"*

*talking quickly and going off on tangents. I really appreciated him summarising it for me and reflecting back the dominant concerns. It gave me an opportunity to further clarify. It made me feel heard, able to clarify and getting to where I needed to be. And we developed a strategy”*

### Improving the parent-child relationship

Of 118 parents who completed this item, 23 respondents indicated that they did not contact Parentline about improving their relationship with their child. Of the 95 for whom the question was relevant 34.5% rated Parentline as ‘effective’ and 42% rated the service as ‘very effective’ at improving the parent-child relationship. Another 9.5% were unable to tell if any changes had occurred in the parent-child relationship because the survey was conducted too soon after the Parentline session; 8.5% gave a rating of ‘not effective’, and 5% were unsure. The ratings about improving the parent-child relationship are shown in Figure 4.

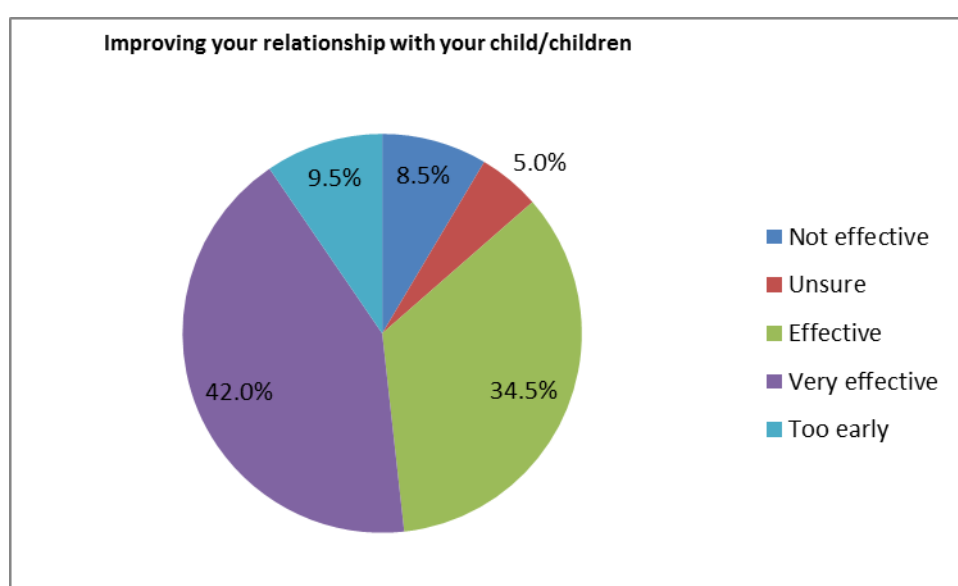


Figure 4: Respondents' ratings about Parentline improving the relationship with their child

One of the most common qualitative responses from survey respondents was feedback regarding improvements that they had noticed since contacting Parentline. While for some parents and carers it was sometimes too early to tell whether the relationship improvements would last, a number of respondents however saw change in their relationships with their child or children. For some, this change was evident in the hours immediately following the call to Parentline.

*“My little one feels safe now; our relationship is constantly improving now”*

*“I shared the outcome with husband and we’ve both agreed we’ll back off and let our son work out some of his own issues. I told my son I’d called Parentline so he knows I am not a perfect parent and to also give him permission to seek help as well. His attitude and tone have changed a lot”*

*“I sought advice for a behavioural problem with my child and they provided me with advice on what to do and it has made a huge difference”*



*"I started to implement things straight away. I only had a day though as we do shared parenting. I've done the things she suggested and straight away he shifted to being happier. But it was me not him - I have limited skills as a mother - and this call gave me great skills"*

*"I have done courses as suggested by Parentline and have developed insight and wonderful skills to connect with my children and help them connect with one another"*

### Increasing the understanding of children

Of 118 parents who completed this item, 23 respondents indicated that they did not contact Parentline seeking to improve their understanding of their child's needs. Of the 95 for whom the question was relevant 41% rated Parentline as 'effective' and 43% rated the service as 'very effective' at increasing their understanding of their child's needs. Another 3% were unable to tell if any improvement had occurred because the survey was conducted too soon after the Parentline session; and 5% gave a rating of 'not effective'.

The ratings about increasing understanding of their child's needs are shown in Figure 5.

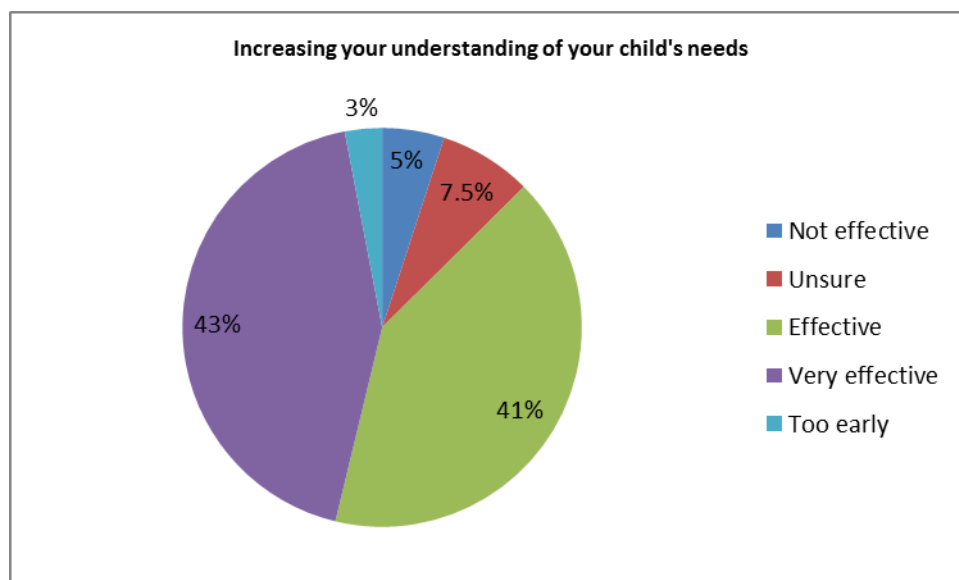


Figure 5: Respondents' ratings about Parentline increasing their ability to understand their child's needs

For many parents, calling Parentline is carried out with the aim of increasing their understanding of their child, specifically their child's developmental stage, perspective and behaviours. Qualitative feedback from a number of parents demonstrated how their call to Parentline had increased their understanding of their child, and how in turn, this had improved their relationship with their child or children.

*"I feel calm about talking to my daughter tonight. The counsellor was great at putting things in perspective and giving me information about teenager's needs. Also helped me to separate out my emotions (experiences as a young person) from my daughter's"*

*"I'd recommend it because - compared to what you might think a free counselling service would be therapeutically they are so much better than I would have imagined in terms of their therapeutic knowledge and skills. It's not just a*

*chat - they're really good at what they do. The support is good and based on what's good for the children - but they still focus on assisting the parent as well"*

*"I liked getting the confirmation on a situation that wasn't very common"*

*"Because of the unbiased opinion and the operator has heard this stuff before and is nonjudgmental, they provide advice based on training, they helped give me perspective on the bigger picture and helped me understand it's not just me"*

*."I think it's a great service for parents to be able to go to for guidance"*

*"Basically it's a really good service. It's not a bad thing to ring to check what you're doing and checking what they are doing. Having reassurance that what they are doing is ok"*

*"She told me some things I didn't know - my little boy can also call KHL and get some help. I have put the KHL number on the board for him to call and talk to someone whenever he needs to"*

### **Increasing the parent's capacity to cope**

Of 118 parents who completed this item, 14 respondents indicated that they did not contact Parentline seeking to improve their own capacity to cope and manage their stress. Of the 104 for whom this question was relevant 41% rated Parentline as 'effective' and 47% rated the service as 'very effective' at increasing their own capacity to cope. Another 2.9% were unable to tell if any changes had occurred because the survey was conducted too soon after the Parentline session; and 4.8% gave a rating of 'not effective' while 3.9% were unsure. The ratings about increasing the parent's capacity to cope are shown in Figure 6.

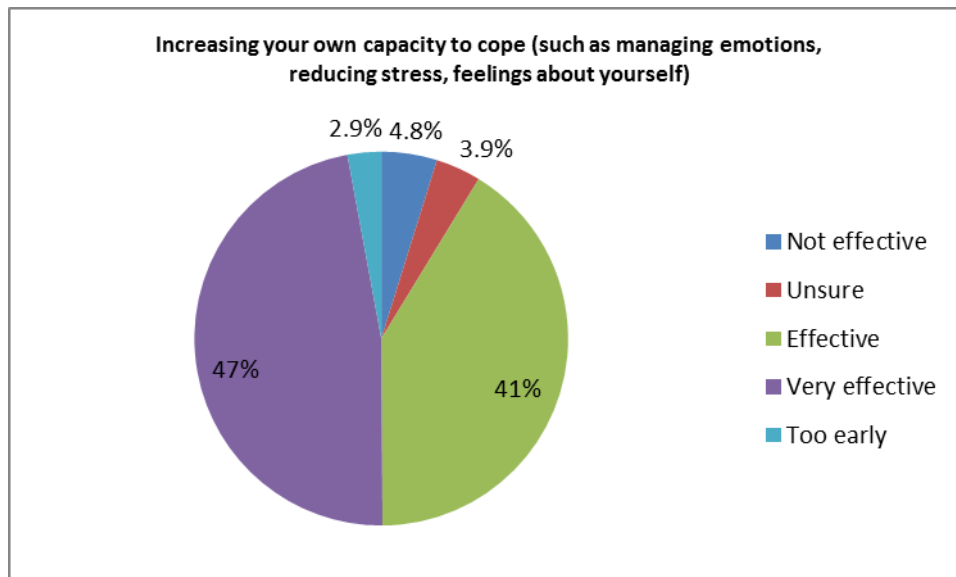


Figure 6: Respondent's ratings about Parentline increasing their capacity to cope

A number of survey respondents also spoke of the significant impact Parentline has had on their ability to cope. Parents and carers spoke about the impact of Parentline sessions and how the Counsellors had helped them to manage their stress, to deal with specific parenting situations reasonably immediately, and/or gave them support that family or others were unable to provide.

*"When I talk to them it really settles me down and I can work things out again. I can gain control"*

*"Because it's immediate and the Counsellors have the ability to get to the crux of the issue - they cut through the overwhelming stress of the moment and get to the crux"*

*"I was stressed when I called - but by the end I had some pretty helpful advice and I was in control of the situation again".*

*"Children don't come with a handbook. In our culture we don't have adequate support for mothers - we don't have extended families. And family units are breaking down. Mothers need all the help they can get as we don't have the network of support for mothers and women that other cultures have"*

*"Parenting is a hard job - and Parentline is less subjective than others can be (such as parents or other relations). The Counsellors are strangers and can think just about solving the problem - they have no agendas"*

#### **Increasing the parent's ability to care for children**

Of 118 parents who completed this item, 23 respondents indicated that they did not contact Parentline seeking to increase their ability to care for their children. Of the 95 for whom this question was relevant 42% rated Parentline as 'effective' and 39% rated the service as 'very effective' at increasing their ability to care. Another 8.5% were unable to tell if any changes had occurred in how they cared for their child because the survey was conducted too soon after the Parentline session; and 5% gave a rating of 'not effective' while 5% were unsure. The ratings about increasing parents' ability to care for their child or children are shown in Figure 7.

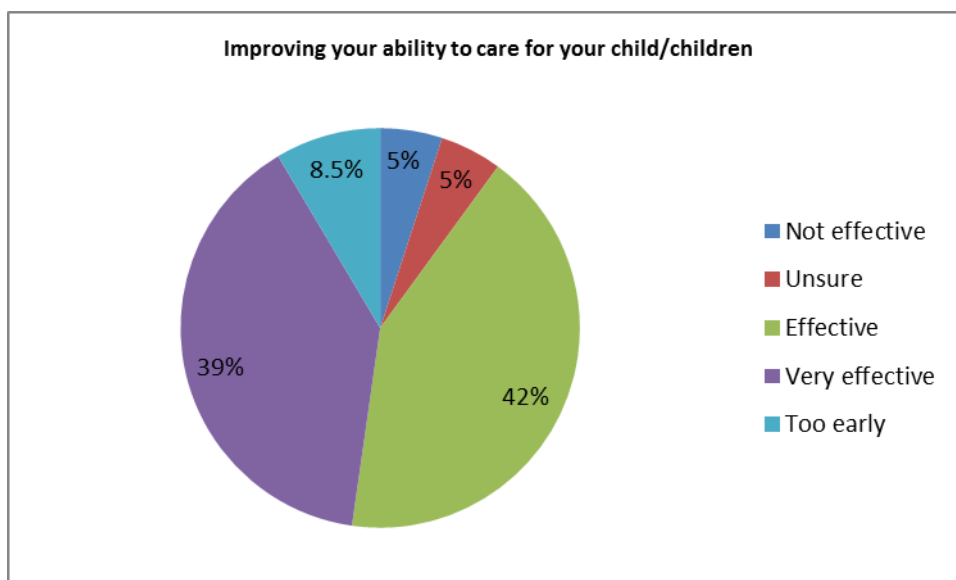


Figure 7: Respondent's ratings about Parentline increasing their ability to care for their child or their children

Parents and carers reflected on how their contact with the Parentline service had increased their ability to care for their child/children. From this qualitative feedback it is evident that their increased ability to care for their child was often the result of them implementing a new strategy or skill that they had gained during their contact with a Parentline Counsellor. In some of this feedback, respondents also spoke of the impact of realising that they needed to change their own behaviours first.

*Took the emotion out of a situation that was really boiling up. The situation was getting tense. It helped me get a different perspective. He gave me some possibilities to consider and he also helped me see that my son is close to being an adult and that my husband and I could consider adjusting our parenting style accordingly"*

*"Helped with information, knowledge & support. Helps to stay child focused which is important. Don't know what I would have done without it"*

*"Can always rely on them, I haven't had a bad counsellor, always rely on someone always being there, at any time with non-judgmental support. It makes me feel better after the call and prepared for the next step"*

*"They help me get by, keeps me more grounded, not so angry, helps keep me centred, having someone to speak to, especially being able to talk to the same person all the time instead of having to talk to different people each time. Which is a really big plus, don't have to restart with everything"*

#### Service users want to recommend the service to others

Finally, survey respondents were asked if they would recommend the Parentline service to a friend. Since 2011, when the recommendation rate was at 100% the proportion of respondents stating 'yes, I would recommend Parentline to a friend' has remained consistently high. In 2016 it was recorded at 95.7%. Figure 8 shows that in 2016, 112 of 117 respondents would recommend Parentline to a friend.

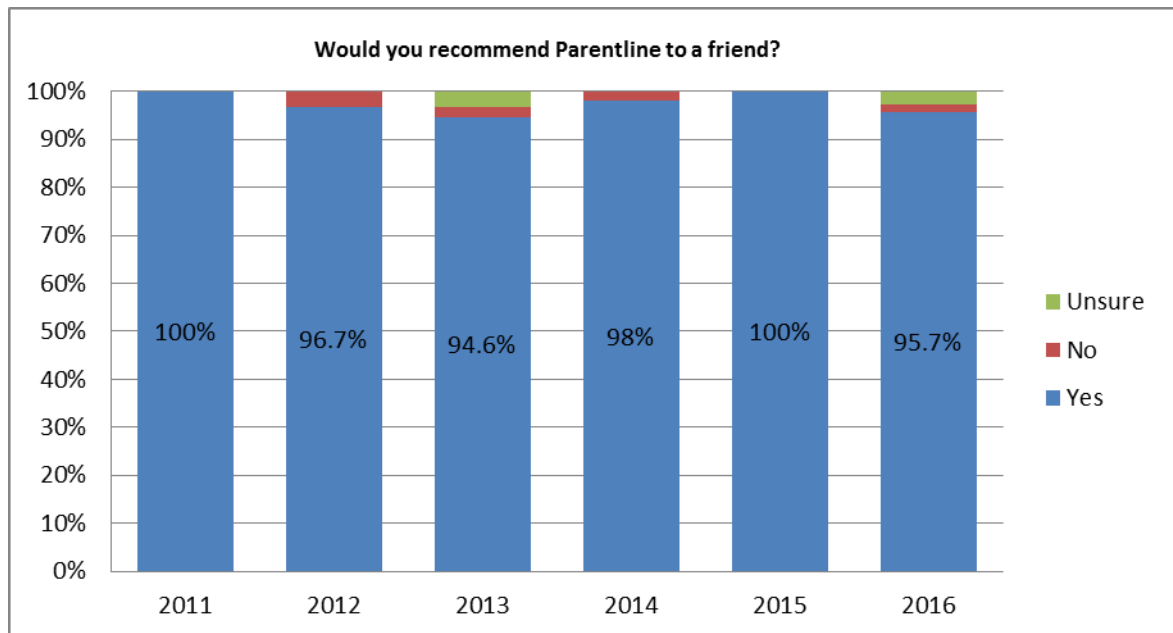


Figure 8: Respondent's ratings about whether they would recommend Parentline to others

A number of survey respondents offered positive qualitative feedback regarding the Parentline service, and spoke of their past experience recommending Parentline to friends or family members. Additionally, a few parents and carers directed their recommendations to the Government, requesting that the Parentline service be continued into the future. It was evident in this feedback that many respondents are grateful for Parentline's existence.

*"I would recommend it because I've had success I guess and I know that parents struggle with the same things I do. The Counsellors are good at asking questions relevant to your situation"*

*"Please keep up the good work, and I hope Parentline gets the funding they need. It's amazing being able to speak to an experience operator at the drop of a hat. The Counsellor was welcoming and professional"*

*"Parentline was there when there was no one else. I'd recommend them because of having a professional to talk to and the convenience of being able to contact them on the phone"*

*"Thanks for providing the service- it's great. I would have been in a lot worse shape if could not speak to someone when I did"*

*"The service Parentline fills is such an invaluable resource. I know as a parent and as a friend to other parents that it has stopped many children slipping through the cracks. If government or other funding bodies are looking at cutting funding, please, please, please don't let this be Parentline"*

*"You're doing a wonderful job - you were there when I needed to talk to someone"*

## Conclusion

Parents and caregivers rated Parentline highly in relation to providing support for parental/family protective factors against abuse and neglect. While there was a subset of participants who stated that these issues were not applicable to them or that not enough time had passed for them to see improvements, the majority of the remaining group rated the service as either “very effective” or “effective” at assisting them. Where the question was relevant to the service user:

- 88% of participants rated Parentline as *very effective* or *effective* at assisting them with their capacity to cope. Parents and caregivers found Parentline to be particularly effective in helping them with specific parenting situations, as well as supporting them with external factors that impacted on their parenting.
- 84% of participants rated Parentline as *very effective* or *effective* at assisting them to gain a better understanding of their child/children. Parents and caregivers found the information about their child’s developmental stage, perspective and motives for behaving in ways to be particularly helpful.
- 82.6% of participants rated Parentline as *very effective* or *effective* at assisting them to improve their confidence in parenting. Parents and caregivers who saw improvements in their parenting confidence indicated that they gained reassurance and empowerment from discussing their concerns and potential strategies with a Parentline Counsellor.
- 81% of participants rated Parentline as *very effective* or *effective* at assisting them with their ability to care for the child/children. Parents and caregivers explained that their improved ability to care was often the result of enhanced self-awareness of their parenting style and approaches, as well as the implementation of a new strategy or skill that they had gained from discussions with a Parentline Counsellor.
- 76.5% of participants rated Parentline as *very effective* or *effective* at assisting them to enhance the quality of their relationship with their child/children. These improvements stemmed from the service providing parents and caregivers with new methods of communicating with their child/children.
- 73% of participants rated Parentline as *very effective* or *effective* at assisting them with their parenting strategies and skills. Specifically, parents and caregivers stated that Parentline enabled them to view situations from their child’s perspective. Furthermore, the service provided them with new strategies to deal with stressful situations.

The majority of participants in the 2016 client satisfaction and outcomes survey provided positive ratings in relation to their satisfaction with Parentline and their perceived effectiveness of the service. During this time, the quantitative and qualitative data indicated that a high majority of the participants would recommend Parentline to their friends and family. Overall, the findings from the 2016 survey indicate that parents and caregivers view Parentline to be a valuable and highly effective service that assists them with their parenting.

## References

- Australian Institute of Family Studies. (2013). *Risk and protective factors for child abuse and neglect: CFCA resource sheet*. Viewed at 27 February 2015  
<https://www3.aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/risk-and-protective-factors-child-abuse-and-neglect>
- Counts, J., Buffington, E., Chang-Rios, K., Rasmussen, H., & Preacher, K. (2010). The development and validation of the protective factors survey: A self-report measure of protective factors against child maltreatment. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 34, 762-772.