

Parentline

Client Satisfaction and Outcomes Report 2011-2016

“It would have been a complete fight – but this call meant it was not. It was radically different.” - Parent 2016

CREDIT: Strategy and Research, **yourtown**

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Parentline Client Satisfaction and Outcomes 2011-16

Parentline is a confidential telephone 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 and is available to residents of Queensland and the Northern Territory.

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 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. The purpose of the survey is to assess the overall effectiveness of and satisfaction with the service. In addition, the survey measures the perceptions of parents regarding Parentline's assistance with specific areas of parenting effectiveness, such as:

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

These parental/family factors are common protective factors that may prevent or reduce child abuse and neglect (Counts, Buffington, Chang-Rios, Rasmussen, & Preacher, 2010; AIFS, 2013).

Each year, the results form part of a feedback loop to Parentline management and service delivery staff to continuously improve the effectiveness of the service. This report focuses on the results of the client satisfaction and outcomes survey over a five year period from 2011 to 2016.

Method

Participants

From 2011 to 2016, 774 participants responded to a survey about client satisfaction and outcomes. In total of those that participated in the survey, 86% were female and 14.0% were male. In relation to ethnicity, 4.9 % identified as Indigenous and 10.9% were from a Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) background.

The majority (88.1%) of respondents were aged between 26 and 55 years. Specifically:

- 3.7% were aged between 16 and 25 years,
- 20.7% were aged between 26 and 35 years,
- 43.5% were in the 36-45 year age group,
- 23.9% were aged 46-55 years, and
- 8.1% were aged over 55 years.

More than half (52.5%) had contacted Parentline once, 11.2% had contacted the service twice, 16.1% had contacted 3-4 times, 11.2% had contacted 5-10 times, and 9% had contacted the service over 10 times.

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 review of clinical literature relating to parenting interventions including an audit of standardised parenting outcome measures. The questionnaire was

designed to capture client satisfaction with the service and also self-reported effectiveness of Parentline in assisting with a broad range of parenting support needs. Minor adjustments to the survey were made in 2011. This report is based on the data from this survey which was utilised from 2011 to 2016.

Design and procedure

The study used a mixed method design. The quantitative component came from Likert scale items in the survey and the qualitative component was formed from open-ended questions incorporated in the survey. Parentline counsellors recruited participants by inviting them to participate. 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 would then contact the participant by telephone to complete the survey which usually took 5-10 minutes.

Results

Overall satisfaction and effectiveness

The majority (96.3%) of respondents provided positive ratings regarding their satisfaction with the service provided by Parentline. Specifically, 80.6% were 'very satisfied' and 15.7% were 'satisfied'. Of the remaining respondents, 1.6% was 'neither satisfied nor dissatisfied', 1.7% were 'dissatisfied', and 0.5% were 'very dissatisfied'.

The majority (96.2%) of respondents also gave positive ratings regarding Parentline's effectiveness. Specifically, 69.5% of respondents rated Parentline as 'very effective' and 26.7% rated it as 'effective'. Only 2.0% rated Parentline as 'not effective' while 1.8% were unsure about their answer or said the question was 'not applicable' to them.

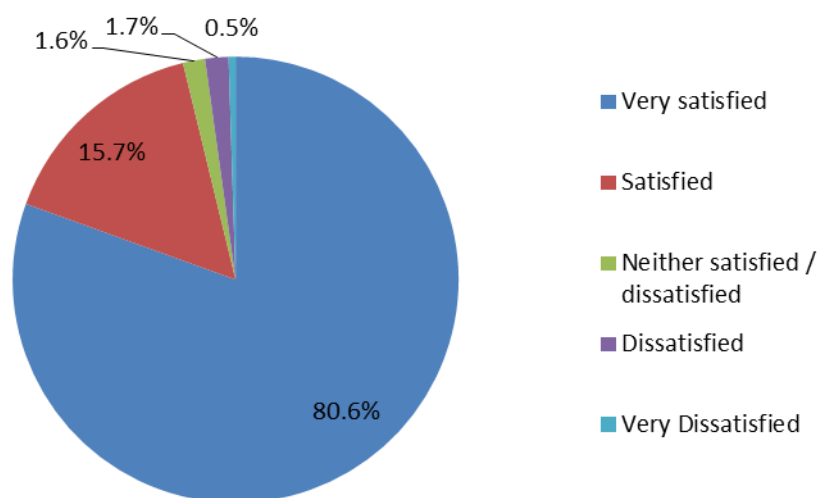


Figure 1: Respondent's ratings about their level of satisfaction with Parentline (n=772)

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 carer's, the main benefit of Parentline was that it gave them unbiased, non-judgemental support and someone to turn to when or if others weren't available.

(Parent/Carer 2013):

"Parentline is a really good service and I think it's a really good tool - in my situation - my parents have both passed away so I don't have any other family to ask advice from. It's really good to have someone else to have as a sounding board".

(Parent/Carer 2014):

"When your really struggling to get advise more than your friends can give you it's helpful to get a neutral perspective. It gives support and the confidence to see a way forward. It's the only line I know of that deals with parents. My parents are not here and it gives me someone I can talk to for an objective perspective".

(Parent/Carer 2015):

"It was great to talk to another man about the situation. As a single parent of a boy it's nice to talk to someone. I just needed to know the laws as a parent. It gave me someone to talk to who understood what I was going through. He really got it. We live in a small one horse town and there's just no help".

(Parent/Carer 2016):

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

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

(Parent/Carer 2013):

"They didn't lecture or push - just gave advice for me to take on myself - and it really worked. Other services don't even have kids and they don't know where you're coming from. The Counsellor I spoke to was apparent of a teenage boy - and it really helped me".

(Parent/Carer 2014):

"It is non-judgemental - they listen - they can give advice if you want. YOU are in control of the call - and you will feel better after. Everyone knows when I've phoned Parentline because I'm so relaxed afterwards".

(Parent/Carer 2015):

"Just the empathy that I was able to sense from the person I spoke to was appreciated. His understanding and ability to respond was excellent. He gave me a lot of common-sense stuff which I needed to hear. His knowledge of my particular needs meant he had a very good background. He was also concerned about our own self-care (my husband and myself) and that of our child".

(Parent/Carer 2016):

It helped me to have someone to talk to deal with my emotions and to have someone to bounce ideas off. Someone asking very insightful questions was very useful. She got a really good understanding of my situation and was able to give insights and able to personalise the questions - she was very skilled.

While the overwhelming majority of qualitative feedback was positive, some respondents did offer suggestions for ways the service could improve, including an expansion of Parentline's hours of operation and wider advertising to make it easier to find.

(Parent/Carer 2014):

"The thing that infuriates me is that I can't ring after 10 pm - that has been over the years the most difficult. If you're having a bad night as a parent and getting angry and frustrated you can't ring Parentline after 10 pm. Even if open till midnight - as I am so busy as a parent in the evenings (as well as working all day) and so ringing any other time is too hard. Families are not just stay at

home mums these days - I work shift work ...and ringing Parentline in the morning is hard. I like to resolve issues so I can sleep at night".

(Parent/Carer 2012):

"I love that it's non-judgemental and confidential. I just wish it could be 24/7".

(Parent/Carer 2015):

"It's a great service that needs to be extended (the hours). The times you can ring can be a bit hard as you don't want to ring when your kids are up. It's really hard to sometimes be talking about stuff and you don't want the kids to hear it or be around. Even if you could extend through to midnight and cut mornings back a bit and extend the evenings. They really are a fantastic service. They are wonderful and have got me through some hard times. I wouldn't be alive it was not for my Counsellor with Parentline"

(Parent/Carer 2016):

It's a really great service - I had to search for it. I googled "struggling with a teenager" and found it.

(Parent/Carer 2016):

You need more advertising because I was never aware of such an amazing service I just found it on Google.

(Parent/Carer 2016):

It should be available widely to people. It's a fantastic facility. Don't think enough people are aware of it. People struggling with children should be aware.

One respondent who was satisfied with the service overall, highlighted that the cost of calling Parentline from a mobile phone is an issue while another was seeking more breadth in the topics covered.

(Parent/Carer 2011):

"(Parentline counsellors are) very well trained. More behaviour management tips would be good (and) the cost from mobiles is an issue, (but its) great for people in small towns, especially in the Northern Territory".

(Parent/Carer 2016):

The service was not suitable to me, the counsellors may benefit from being able to answer a more wide variety of scenarios, as my particular situation wasn't really addressed

Finally, one respondent requested the creation of a Parentline Application (app), where notes from the call can be passed from Counsellor to the caller and used to start discussions and remind parents and carer's of the strategies discussed during their contact.

(Parent/Carer 2014):

"It 'd be great to have smart -phone apps with Frequently Asked Questions and/or some brief breakdown of what we talked about so we can use it as a tool, as a couple. The information would be more accessible to both the person who phoned and their partner".

It is therefore evident in both the quantitative and qualitative feedback received from Parentline survey respondents between 2011 and 2016, that overall satisfaction levels are high and that Parentline is a highly effective service.

The next section of this report will examine the quantitative and qualitative feedback received regarding the effectiveness of the service with respect to key parenting competencies identified in contemporary research as being important in enhancing the care of children and protecting them from harm.

Areas of effectiveness

Increasing parenting confidence

In total, 774 participants were surveyed about their parenting confidence and 127 stated that the question was 'not applicable' to their situation. Of the remaining 647, approximately 85.4% provided positive ratings for Parentline in relation to increasing their confidence as a parent. Specifically, 51.6% rated Parentline as 'very effective' and 33.8% rated the service as 'effective'. The ratings about parenting confidence are shown in Figure 2 below.

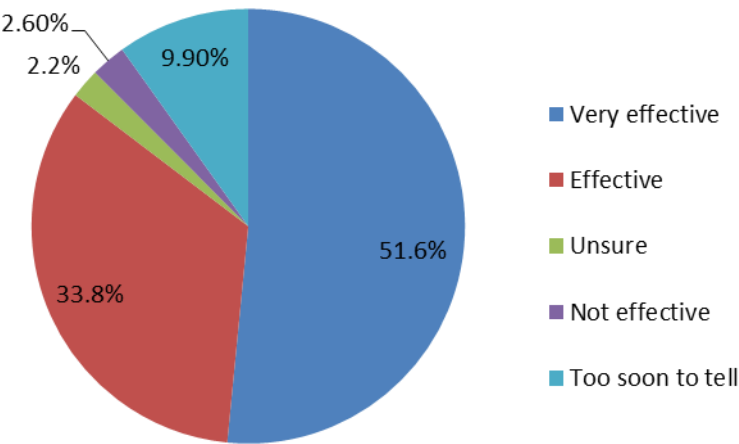


Figure 2. Respondents' ratings about Parentline increasing their parenting confidence (n=647).

When respondents were asked at the end of the survey to describe their experience of calling the Parentline service, a number of parents and carer's described the empowerment and confidence that came following their conversation with a Parentline Counsellor. Often, respondents spoke about the reassurance they received and how this impacted on their confidence in parenting or caring for their child.

(Parent/Carer 2012):

"I felt confused and inadequate. Afterwards, I felt very empowered, and knew how to help. It was great for me. I'd never called before and it was exactly what I needed".

(Parent/Carer 2012):

"(Parentline gave me) information and reassurance. The call increased my confidence and calmed me after my son was being aggressive... I was given tips for helping to manage his developmental stages – more options and ideas".

(Parent/Carer 2011)

"It's a very good service. (The counsellors) are very well trained. They're very up-to-date and knowledgeable. They give you confidence and reassurance".

(Parent/Carer 2015):

"Parentline works for me. I like to seek advice, take it away and make my own choices. It's fantastic. They make you feel confident and validated. Even in my case my issues are complex but still they don't tell me what to do or what to say. It's very good and not judgemental".

(Parent/Carer 2016):

He 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

Developing parenting strategies and skills

In total, 774 participants were surveyed about developing parenting strategies and skills and 151 stated that the question was 'not applicable' to their situation. Of the remaining 623 respondents, 81.6% provided positive ratings for Parentline developing their parenting strategies and skills. Specifically, 45% rated Parentline as 'very effective' and 36.6% rated the service as 'effective'. The remainder of the responses indicated that 9% were unable to tell of any changes because the survey was conducted soon after the Parentline session, 4% gave a rating of 'not effective', and 5.1% were unsure. The ratings about parenting strategies and skills are shown in Figure 3 below.

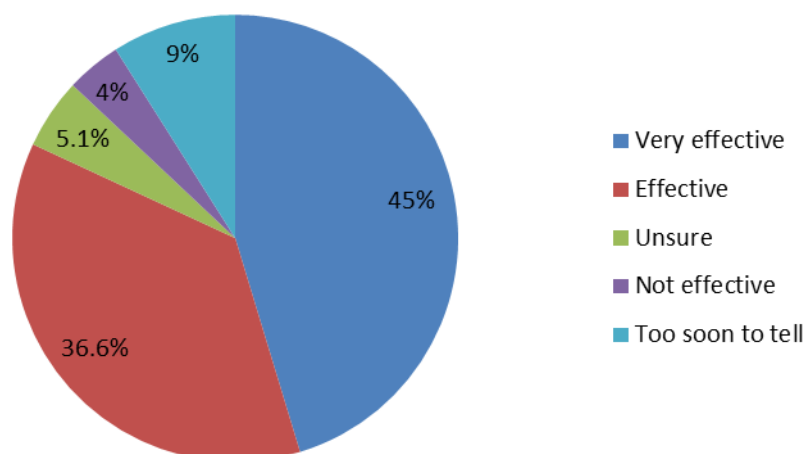


Figure 3. Respondents' ratings about Parentline developing their parenting strategies and skills (n=623).

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 carer's 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.

(Parent/Carer 2011):

"It allows me to have another view, in particular with (my son). As a single mum, it was great to have another view, to talk without judgement or criticism and get some ideas".

(Parent/Carer 2014):

"It reduced my stress levels. It helped me understand three children at diff ages and how I should interact with them given their ages but in the same situation. Also gave me peace of mind and strategies on how to interact with my children when I can't get to see them very often -just to let me children know I care".

(Parent/Carer 2011):

"The Counsellor was very thoughtful and compassionate. She gave pointers on what I could do and what I needed to do regarding myself and my son. Overall, it was a worthwhile phone conversation".

(Parent/Carer 2015):

"We started a course of action; implemented it and the outcome was effective. Between me and my child we implemented the suggestions and it was good".

(Parent/Carer 2016):

Still early days. Have put in place a household contract to be abided by which is working at the moment.

(Parent/Carer 2016):

Yes - I implemented a few techniques and the instructions [that the counsellor sent] in the mail - more about changing the way I am reacting than my son so that now he is listening to me. It has made a noticeable difference at home.

Improving the parent-child relationship

In total, 772 participants responded to a measure of Parentline's impact on improving their relationship with their child or children, and 193 indicated that the question was 'not applicable' to them. Of the remaining 579, 23.3% stated that it was too soon to tell if there were any changes, however the remaining responses were largely positive. For example, 34.7% of respondents rated Parentline as 'very effective' and 31.1% provided a rating of 'effective' in improving their relationship with the child or children. The ratings about improving parent-child relationship are shown in Figure 4 below.

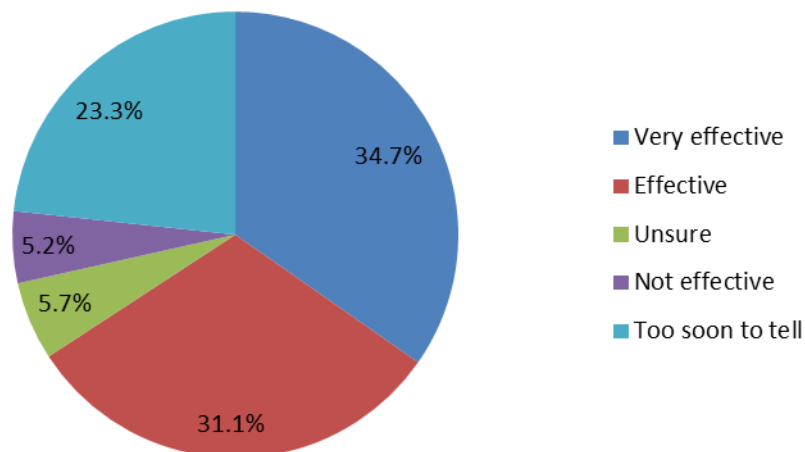


Figure 4. Respondents' ratings about Parentline improving the relationship with their child (n=579).

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

(Parent/Carer 2015):

"[I've] Noticed some huge changes in my son already. He is much more receptive to our help".

(Parent/Carer 2014):

"That night I was able to communicate with my son rationally. We agreed to just take it from here one step at a time".

(Parent/Carer 2013):

"Combined with some other strategies things are improving. As a result of that phone call I took time off work and it was what I needed to do - to check my priorities. I had been working hard and long hours. I just rang my boss and said I needed to take 3 days off".

(Parent/Carer 2016):

It would have been a complete fight - but this call meant it was not. It was radically different

Increasing the understanding of children

Five hundred and seventy one (571) participants completed a measure asking if they thought that the contact with Parentline increased their understanding of their child or children and 203 responded that the question was 'not applicable' to them. While 6.7% stated that it was too soon to tell if there were any changes, the remaining responses were mostly positive. For example, 34.5% of respondents rated Parentline as 'very effective' with an additional 38.7% of respondents stating that Parentline was 'effective' in increasing their understanding of their child or children. The ratings about increasing a parent or carer's understanding are shown in Figure 5 below.

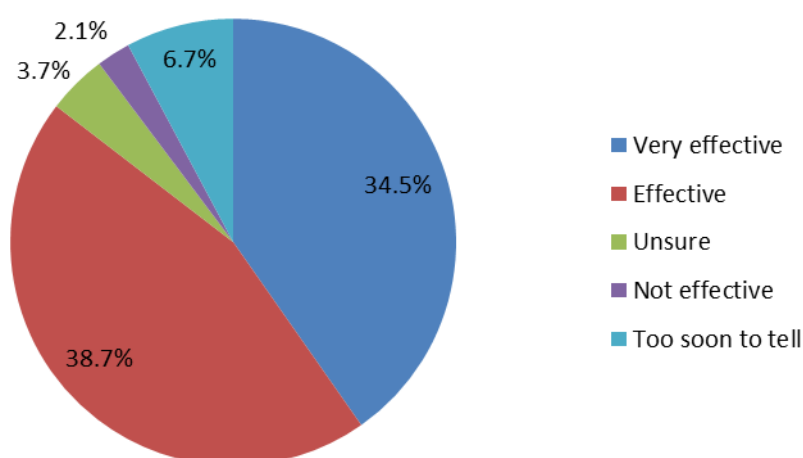


Figure 5: Respondents' ratings about Parentline increasing their ability to understand their child/children (n=571).

For many parents, calling Parentline is done 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.

(Parent/Carer 2014):

"When I called I was very anxious and worried, and unsure. During the call I became more confident and realised I was doing the right thing for my daughter. I realised what was happening was normal for her - and I needed to be there for her and not give up".

(Parent/Carer 2013):

"Knowing there is support there - convenient and easy to access. They have insight into the stage of the child and what they're going through to help you understand the situation more. And then you can reflect on how you're behaving yourself in the situation and then you can be more effective".

(Parent/Carer 2012):

"I could understand better. (It's helpful to talk to) someone that is not involved in the situation. (Makes you feel like) you can carry on".

(Parent/Carer 2015):

"It gave me insight to the needs and cognition of my son compared to my own and understanding his capabilities and my expectations".

(Parent/Carer 2016):

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.

Increasing the parent's capacity to cope

In total, 772 participants were surveyed about their capacity to cope and 63 stated that the question was 'not applicable' to their situation. Of the remaining 709, close to 90% of respondents (89.7%) provided positive ratings. Specifically, 58.7% rated Parentline as 'very effective' and another 31.0% rated the service as 'effective' in increasing their capacity to cope. The remainder of the responses indicated that 4.2% were unable to tell of any changes because the survey was conducted too soon after the Parentline session, 3.4% gave a rating of 'not effective', and 2.7% were unsure. The ratings about increasing a parent's capacity to cope are shown in Figure 6 below.

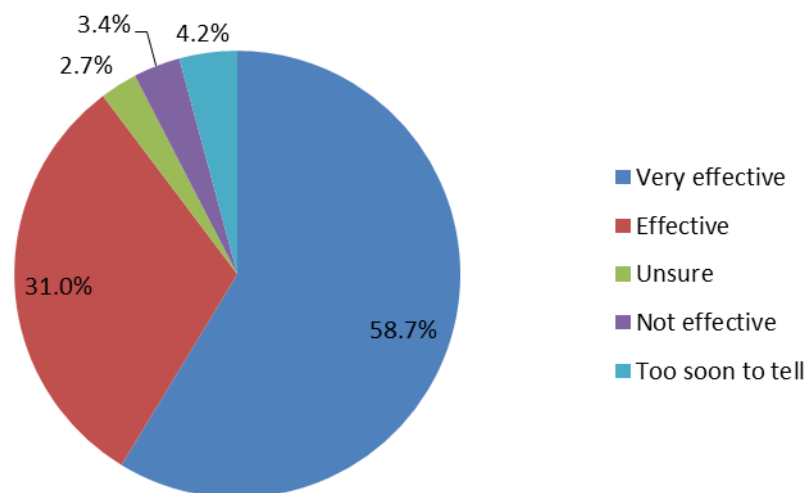


Figure 6: Respondent's ratings about Parentline increasing their capacity to cope (n=709).

A number of survey respondents also spoke of the significant impact Parentline has had on their ability to cope. Parents and carer's spoke about the impact of Parentline sessions and how the counsellors had helped them to improve their coping strategies and how to deal with a specific parenting situation or in supporting them with external factors affecting their ability to parent.

(Parent/Carer 2013):

"If it weren't for Parentline I would not have coped with my daughter in the last 5 or 6 years. I needed Parentline because my husband had cancer - he died 4 years ago... You can just grab the phone and ring when emotions are running high you need someone. You get off the phone and you see it differently and can put things in place that you wouldn't have thought of. It's so helpful to have that as sometimes you have no one else to turn to for help".

(Parent/Carer 2014):

"It's a service that's available for anybody who's a parent or grandparent - it's confidential - supportive - you can have the same counsellor- and nothings too stupid a question to ask. It's just wonderful. You can ring up even if you've just had a very bad day - they are really, really supportive".

(Parent/Carer 2013):

"It was a change in me that was needed. I had been wound very tight. The heaviness in my chest was gone. I could face what I needed to face that evening".

(Parent/Carer 2015):

"It increased my ability to cope - it is the best decision for her. It helped me to make decisions when I had no clue what to do".

(Parent/Carer 2016):

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.

Increasing the parent's ability to care for children

In total, 772 participants were asked to provide a rating concerning any increased ability to care for their child or children and 225 of these stated that the question was 'not applicable' to their situation. Of the remaining 547, over 80% of respondents provided positive ratings for Parentline. Specifically, 40.0% rated Parentline as 'very effective' and another 43.1% rated the service as 'effective' in regards to increasing their ability to care for their child or children. The ratings about whether Parentline is effective in increasing a parent's ability to care for their child or children are shown in Figure 7 below.

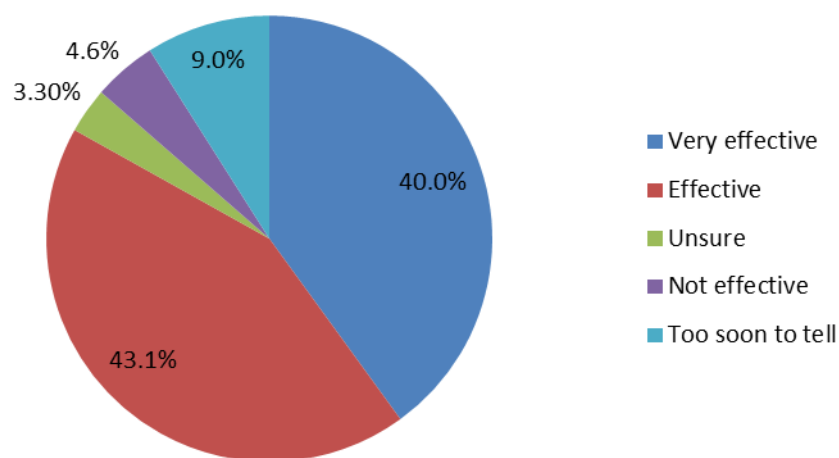


Figure 7: Respondent's ratings about Parentline increasing their ability to care (n=547).

Parents and carer's also 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.

(Parent/Carer 2014):

"I was able to talk to my son with ideas for how he can get his needs met, including admitting how he is feeling and recognising his emotions".

(Parent/Carer 2012):

"I am more in-tune with their needs so they sometimes seem more settled, secure, and happy. Having someone to talk to relieve frustration and increases my ability to deal with issues that arise and therefore limits the chances of the frustration being taken out on the children".

(Parent/Carer 2014):

"It made a difference in how I'm relating to my kids. I took them away for the weekend and we had some time together".

(Parent/Carer 2015):

""The biggest thing was that it relaxed me and by me feeling more confident in my parenting I was less stressed and my son responded well".

(Parent/Carer 2016):

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 more happy. But it was me not him - I have limited skills as a mother - and this call gave me great skills.

Service users want to recommend the service to others

Finally, survey respondents were asked if they would want to recommend the Parentline service to a friend. Since 2011, the proportion of respondents stating 'yes, I would recommend Parentline to a friend' has ranged from 100% in 2011 and 2015 to 94.6% of respondents in 2013. During this period, the proportion of respondents stating 'no, I wouldn't recommend Parentline to a friend' was never higher than 2.0% of the total survey participants. The data concerning recommending a friend to the Parentline service is shown in Figure 8 below.

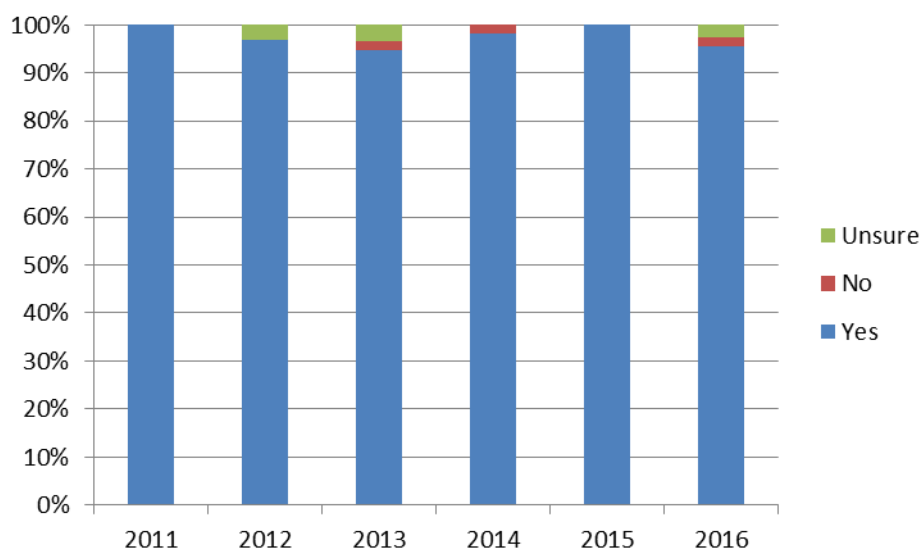


Figure 8: Respondent's ratings about whether they would recommend Parentline to others (n=773)

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 carer's made their own recommendations to the Government, requesting that the Parentline service be continued into the future. It was evident in this qualitative feedback, that a number of respondents are passionate about the Parentline service, and grateful for its existence.

((Parent/Carer 2013):

"I have already recommended Parentline. I've said to others they really help you to get support, ideas and strategies - and they really understand you so you don't feel so bad if you make a mistake".

(Parent/Carer 2013):

"Waiting times are not too long and I really appreciate the service. (I would) encourage the Australian Government to keep this service going. It's vital that the government knows we're keeping families together - giving support. Parentline gave me lots of compassion. And they are very professional - really well trained"

(Parent/Carer 2011):

"It's so important to be able to talk to the same person with no time limit. It's good that I can call late at night. Free Services like this are much needed".

(Parent/Carer 2015):

"It's confidential and easy to access. When you live in a small town it's not always easy to keep things confidential. It can be assessed from home".

(Parent/Carer 2016):

Please keep up the good work, and I hope Parentline get 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.

Conclusion

It is clear that Parentline offers a valuable service to the community. The strong majority of service users self-report benefits across six important areas of parenting effectiveness which are known to contribute to the protection of children and the prevention of child abuse. Furthermore, data collected across the five year

period from 2011-2016 shows that Parentline has consistently produced high satisfaction ratings and strong perceived efficacy scores. These findings are reinforced by the percentage of service users who would recommend Parentline to other parents and carers.

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