

## **Not all wounds are visible – Parentline shares three signs parents shouldn't ignore**

**Child abuse doesn't always leave a mark you can see. As a community, we often focus on physical and sexual abuse, the more visible kinds of harm, yet emotional abuse and neglect can be just as damaging, with lifelong impact on how children see themselves, form relationships, and grow into adulthood.**

Parentline Manager Kim Harper said Child Protection Week (7-13 September) is a reminder that abuse can happen within the home, through a trusted adult outside the family, or even between children themselves.

"Parents don't have to wait until they're certain something is wrong. Picking up the phone and saying, 'I've noticed these changes, and I'm worried', is one of the most protective things you can do for your child," Ms Harper said.

"Asking for help is an act of love and courage, not weakness."

Over the last year, more than 4,400 parents and carers received counselling support through Parentline. Of those, 180 sessions focused specifically on child abuse, while half related to sexual abuse, one in three involved emotional abuse or neglect — hidden forms of harm that can be just as damaging as physical abuse.

Parentline also responded to nearly 90 sessions where bullying was a primary concern, highlighting that harm can also come from peers.

Three signs parents should look out for:

1. Sudden withdrawal or silence – A child who becomes unusually quiet, avoids eye contact, or stops talking about friends and activities may be signalling distress.
2. Heightened fear or hypervigilance – Flinching at touch, appearing anxious about making mistakes, or seeming constantly "on edge" can suggest something deeper than everyday stress.
3. Changes in how they see themselves – Comments like "I'm stupid," "no one likes me," or "I can't do anything right" may point to ongoing emotional harm or manipulation, not just low mood.

Ms Harper said recognising and responding to these subtle signs is one of the most important things adults can do to protect children.

"Children need secure, nurturing connections to grow into confident, healthy adults. When abuse or neglect disrupts that bond, the consequences can last a lifetime — but with support, parents and carers can make an enormous difference," she said.

Parentline counsellors use a strengths-based approach, walking beside parents and carers on their journey. The free and confidential service is available via phone or webchat, seven days a week from 6am to midnight, and parents who need ongoing support can even reconnect with the same counsellor.

"Parenting doesn't come with a manual, and it can be really tough, but strong parenting isn't about having all the answers, it's about knowing when to seek support," Ms Harper said.

“That’s why Parentline exists — to give families a safe place to talk through challenges and find the guidance they need.”

### Fast facts

- Parentline is available to parents and carers across Queensland and the Northern Territory, seven days a week, from 6am to midnight.
- The service is free, confidential and accessible by phone 1300 30 1300 or webchat at [parentline.com.au](https://parentline.com.au).
- Professional counsellors provide support on a wide range of issues, including child safety, online behaviour, family conflict, parenting stress and relationships, and mental health.
- In 2024–25, 4,430 parents and carers received counselling support.
- Of those, 180 counselling sessions focused on child abuse:
  - Half related to sexual abuse
  - 35 related to emotional abuse
  - 25 related to neglect
  - 29 related to physical abuse.
- Bullying was the focus of 89 additional counselling sessions.

Parentline provides confidential guidance and counselling to parents and carers in Queensland and the Northern Territory, 6am to midnight, seven days a week.

For more information, visit [www.parentline.com.au](https://www.parentline.com.au) or phone 1300 30 1300.

### Media Contact

For more information or to arrange a media interview, please contact Jessica Tatzenko, **yourtown** Media & Communications Specialist.



0423 843 786



[jtatzenko@yourtown.com.au](mailto:jtatzenko@yourtown.com.au)