

HELP FOR CHILDREN IS JUST A TOLL-FREE PHONE CALL AWAY



As part of an overall focus on women and children, the Foschini Group assists Childline S.A in the provision of a toll-free telephone service to children.

Children and adults, with concerns about children, can telephone this number (080055555) at any time of the day or night in order to obtain help in a situation of distress, potential or actual danger, or simply to explore a problem or difficulty they may be having in order to find or discuss a solution.

At present there are 8 provincial call centres that assist children who telephone when in need of help. They can talk to a counsellor who is able to direct the child to available resources that can further help the child, as the counsellors have a great knowledge of the resources available to the child and families in their province. The child is also able to speak to a counsellor in their preferred language. As Health, Welfare and Education services are provincially managed, resources do vary on occasion, from province to province. The call centres receive anywhere from 60 000 to 90 000 calls each month and calls on just about every problem and concern imaginable are received.

The counsellors on the Childline Crisis and Counselling line are all trained. The call center counsellors try to maintain a high standard of response to children through the call centres and in this regard the Foschini donation has been of enormous value. Telkom Foundation donates the toll-free portion of the child's call, the response cost to Childline averages at about R7,00 per call – so with thousands of calls to the crisis line, the Foschini donation has been vital.

Types of calls received at Childline?

• A child has been abandoned in a toilet in a metro railway station and found by a concerned citizen who telephones Childline. The caller is immediately linked to the Child Protection Unit of the South African Police Service who with the further assistance of Childline or a partner organisation such as Child Welfare, places the child in temporary safe care whilst the parents of the child are located and the circumstances of the child's abandonment are investigated.

• Thandi telephones Childline. She is 12 years of age and had been approached by a boy at her school, a known gang member, who wants to be her boyfriend and have sex with her. She is scared to say “no” fearing that the boy and his fellow gang members will follow her home from school and rape her. Her Mom works and often she is alone at home after school. The counsellor explores the problem with the child, helps her look at various options that could assist her in keeping safe and also offers to put her in touch with a resource person in her community. The counsellor offers to call back to make sure that Thandi is safe.

• Rian telephones Childline. He is writing Matric. He is so scared he is going to do badly and disappoint his parents who have made so many sacrifices for his education. He can't concentrate when he is studying, he is not sleeping well and feels depressed and tired. Sometimes he just thinks about taking some tablets and sleeping forever. He and the counsellor talk about his concerns and depression. Rian is encouraged to talk to his parents and ask for more support during this difficult period. He and the counsellor look at his study programme and how to organise it so that it suits his study needs. He rings off sounding much brighter and says he will phone back and let the counsellor know if any of the ideas discussed were effective.

• Nokuthula telephones. She is an only child, of 9 years living with a single parent – her Mom. She sounds very distressed – she has come in from playing and cannot wake her mother up. Emergency services are contacted whilst Nokuthula is on the line, but there seems to be a delay in their reaching the child. A counsellor is despatched to the home and finds that Nokuthula's mother is dead. She stays with the child until relatives and the ambulance service arrives and comforts and counsels the child.

The case histories above give just a glimpse into the service provided by Childline and its counsellors on a daily basis and the Foschini Group is happy to be part of providing funding for a useful service such as this.

THE CHILDLINE S.A NUMBER IS 0800055555

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