



A Five-Year Look at the Boys Town National Hotline: The Top Issues, Trends and Implications

Executive Summary

Over the last five years, the percentage of young people contacting the Boys Town National Hotline® with mental anguish has jumped 12 percent - an increase of over 900 contacts from 2012 to 2016.

Reports of suicide ideation alone have spiked 8 percent. This recent growth, which includes phone calls, texts, online chats and emails from children under the age of 18 across the country, is both alarming and encouraging. While children appear to be having more thoughts of suicide, as well as depression and mental anxiety, they also are reaching out for help and support at a higher rate.

This finding is part of a new report released by Boys Town as part of its Centennial celebration, marking 100 years of providing hope and support to at-risk children and families.

Key Findings

- ❖ Over the past five years, problems involving internal anguish, such as suicide ideation, depression and anxiety, have all increased - with an overall growth of 12 percent.
- ❖ During this same time period, problems created by external relationships, including boyfriend/girlfriend issues and issues with parents, have decreased significantly - an overall drop of 51 percent.
- ❖ In 2016, the top presenting problems included: Suicide Ideation, Anxiety, Depression, Boyfriend/Girlfriend Problems, Parent/Child Relationships, Friendships and Self-Injury.
- ❖ Females consistently contacted the Hotline more than males for each form of contact since 2012 - with an average of approximately 79 percent of contacts made by females versus 21 percent made by males in 2016.
- ❖ A new Hotline Texting Service started in 2014 has been widely used, with 4,454 young people texting issues to the Hotline in 2016 alone.

Overview

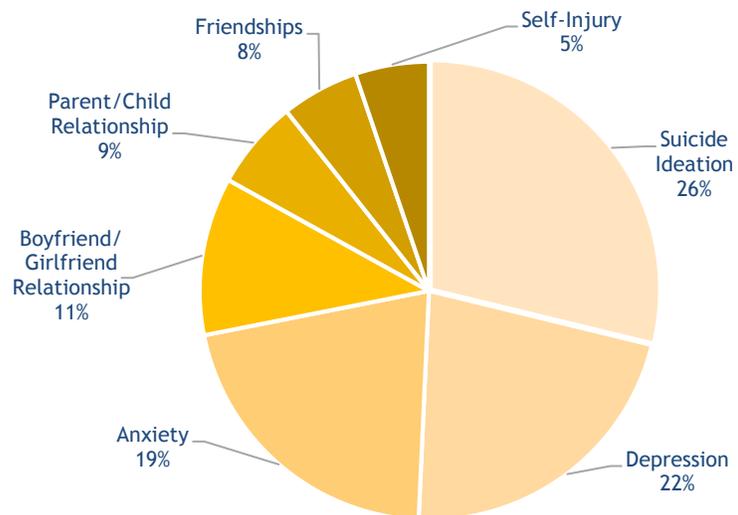
For nearly 30 years, the Boys Town National Hotline has been addressing the issues facing young people and families in need. This report analyzes five years of contact data - from 2012 to 2016 - and the most common presenting problems affecting thousands of youth over that time period. An analysis of phone calls, emails, text messages and online chat conversations shows clear trends in the rise and decline of certain categories of presenting problems.

Across the country, problems such as anxiety, depression and thoughts of suicide have increased by 12 percent overall. Among these, anxiety had the highest jump of 24 percent. At the same time, reported problems concerning external relationships, such as family, friends and boyfriend/girlfriend issues, have dropped by approximately 51 percent overall.

What's more, since the Hotline began offering its services via text in 2014, thousands of teens have chosen texting as their preferred method of asking for help.

Using data from decades of hearing concerns and offering support, Boys Town Crisis Counselors - highly trained experts who truly care - are able to provide young people and their families with lessons and additional help. Boys Town encourages individuals to reach out and voice their problems, no matter what the cause. Help is available from people who care, and those who need help are never alone.

2016 Hotline Top 7 Presenting Problems



Case Study: Boys Town National Hotline Prevents School Shooting

In 2014, the Hotline rolled out a special pilot "peer-to-peer" program specifically for teens and young people attending a number of schools near Anaheim, California. The Hotline worked with students in each school to provide messaging, activities, and materials to spread the word that the Hotline and its online -platform, YourLifeYourVoice, were available, and that it's okay to ask for help.

Shortly after the pilot program kick-off, a student reported hearing of a peer threatening to engage in a school shooting. The school administration notified local authorities, who discovered that the student indeed had a serious plan to harm - if not kill - fellow students at the school.

The reporting student said they came forward because they heard the messaging about speaking out and not being afraid to reach out and ask for help.

Trends in Data

Five-Year Trend Analysis - Change in Number of Contacts*

Presenting Problem	2012	2016	# Change	% Change
Suicide Ideation	3,215	3,465	250	8%
Anxiety	2,081	2,577	496	24%
Depression	2,374	2,532	158	7%
Boyfriend/Girlfriend	3,508	1,490	-2,018	-58%
Parent/Child Relationship	2,097	1,159	-1,063	-48%
Friendships	1,963	1,064	-899	-46%
Self- Injury	775	638	-137	-18%

*The totals here represent reports to the top seven categories, not the total number of contacts to the Hotline.

Top 7 Presenting Problems - Male vs. Female Contacts

Contact Method	2012		2016	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Calls	37%	63%	31%	69%
Texts	Service Not Offered		15%	85%
Chats	15%	85%	21%	79%
Email	17%	83%	18%	82%

Reaching Out

Thanks to years of data gathered by the Boys Town National Hotline, we are able to see an image of today's youth: More kids are openly discussing suicide, anxiety and depression than they were five years ago. And while these numbers do not point to the reasons behind this trend, the implications are positive. Young people have a platform to reach out to trained professionals for help where they otherwise might not have.

"When we receive a text or chat with suicidal themes, we work overtime to try to get that child on the phone. It's not just about the content; it's about hearing that voice inflection and building a relationship that these kids often do not have."

Ginny Gohr, Boys Town National Hotline Director

Boys Town encourages people to contact the Hotline by phone if they have questions or are in any danger. Talking on the phone can provide more immediate help, but the

organization knows that sometimes a person might be more comfortable connecting via chat, text or email. No matter the problem, those in need of help are not alone. Boys Town encourages anyone who is having these thoughts to call, talk and get help from people who care.

“Families are talking together less, and social media and technology are big contributors. Kids are becoming less competent at intimacy – and not seeing that their mental anguish is being caused by things they may be seeing online.”

Dr. Dan Daly, Boys Town Child Psychologist

Dr. Dan Daly, a leading child psychologist and child welfare expert, hypothesizes that the drop in externally-caused problems can be attributed to children’s increasing trouble at connecting to the external causes of their angst. With the rise of technology - and increasing avenues to glimpse into the lives of others - communication has become less intimate, and kids struggle to identify why they feel increasing anxiety, depression, and even thoughts of suicide.

Hotline History

Now more than ever, young people and teenagers have access to different outlets and methods of communication -phone calls, text messages, social media, chat rooms, message boards - 24 hours per day, 7 days per week. And while communications technology has developed and grown, the problems affecting young people at such a vulnerable time in their lives are changing as well. The Boys Town National Hotline is a resource that is changing and growing right along with them.

The Boys Town National Hotline first launched on October 22, 1989, as an extension of the organization’s mission to help troubled children, young adults and parents. The Hotline was created as a way to provide Boys Town’s care and expertise to those who need it in locations without a physical Boys Town site, expanding our footprint and reaching as many children around the country as possible. By the end of 1989, the Hotline was already processing approximately 200 calls per day.

1989	Hotline launched on October 22, 1989
1991	1,000,000th call received
1999	First email received, June 15
2009	Hotline launches new YourLifeYourVoice.org website for teens, August 27
2010	Hotline launches Facebook page to adapt to communication trends
	First one-on-one chat, as opposed to group chat room, August 3
2014	Texting Service launched, thanks to grant from Yahoo!, March 3
2017	Over 10 million contacts received since the Hotline launched

Today, the Hotline enables children to reach out via phone call, text message, online chat and email. Every day, specially trained and accredited Boys Town Crisis Counselors hear from hundreds of kids and provide help, advice and resources, lending an ear to

the myriad problems that children, as well as families, face at home, at school and in their own heads.

Boys Town Centennial Celebration

After Father Edward J. Flanagan purchased the Overlook Farm in Nebraska in 1917, schools, churches and homes were built over the decades that followed - and tens of thousands of young, at-risk lives were transformed.

This December 2017 marks the one-hundred year anniversary of Boys Town. For the past century, Boys Town has been teaching troubled boys - as well as girls and families - the skill and values that they need to becoming loving, productive, and successful members of society. In honor of their centennial, Boys Town is celebrating in a number of ways: a newly remodeled Hall of History, a Centennial Anniversary Coin released by the U.S. Mint, and other opportunities for current students and alumni to engage the Boys Town community - and make a difference in the lives of others.

“Now more than ever, young people have more methods of connecting and communicating. What is most important, however, is that kids know they can use these outlets seek help when they need it. Whether they have questions, need support, or simply need to speak to someone who truly cares, Boys Town is always here - and these kids will never be alone.”

Father Steven E. Boes, National Executive Director of Boys Town

Full Data & Methodology

Contact Coding

Upon each receipt of contact, the Crisis Counselor codes the contact by method of communication (email, chat, text or call) and the main presenting problem. The topic of suicide takes precedent over any underlying issues a person may be having, such as a relationship break-up or loss of a job. As a result, a Hotline contact is coded under the suicide category when the primary focus is related to suicidal thoughts or behaviors, and the resulting need for safety planning.

Data Availability

As indicated in the Hotline History earlier, increasing methods of communication were added over the years. As such, certain groups of data are unavailable in the 2006 and 2012 data series. For purposes of comparison between 2012 and 2016, the total number of contacts for each presenting problem category was used, regardless of the type of communication received by the Hotline.

Confidentiality Agreement

Boys Town Hotline policy protects the confidentiality of caller personal information. If you or someone you know experiences mental anguish or other problems, please reach out for help.

2012 Hotline Data - Top Presenting Problems by Number of Contacts

Presenting Problems	Calls # Received Contacts	Texts	Chats # Received Contacts	Emails # Received Contacts
1	BF/GF Relationships 1,821	Services not offered	Depression 389	Suicide Ideation 1,863
2	Suicide Ideation 1,067		Suicide Ideation 285	BF/GF Relationships 1,459
3	Parent/Child Issues 1,029		Anxiety 279	Depression 1,140
4	Anxiety 953		BF/GF Relationships 228	Friendships 869
5	Friendships 909		Parent/Child Issues 228	Anxiety 849
6	Depression 845		Self-Injury 217	Parent/Child 840
7	Bullying/Cyberbullying 425		Friendships 185	Self-Injury 558

2016 Hotline Data - Top Presenting Problems by Number of Contacts

Presenting Problems	Calls # Received Contacts	Texts # Received Contacts	Chats # Received Contacts	Emails # Received Contacts
1	Suicide Ideation 1,485	Depression 773	Suicide Ideation 462	Suicide Ideation 942
2	Anxiety 1,095	Anxiety 606	Depression 320	Depression 709
3	Depression 730	Suicide Ideation 576	Anxiety 252	Anxiety 624
4	BF/GF Relationships 611	BF/GF Relationships 572	Parent/Child Issues 111	Parent/Child Issues 326
5	Parent/Child Issues 454	Self-Injury 323	Friendships 87	Self- Injury 245
6	Friendships 424	Friendships 312	Self-Injury 70	Friendships 241
7	Psychiatric Disorder 336	Parent/Child Issues 268	BF/GF Relationships 69	BF/GF Relationships 238