

Developmental Issues

14



Definition

Problems regarding any aspect of physical, emotional or sexual development. Includes adjusting to body changes, development of secondary sex characteristics, bed wetting, thumb sucking, dream/nightmares.

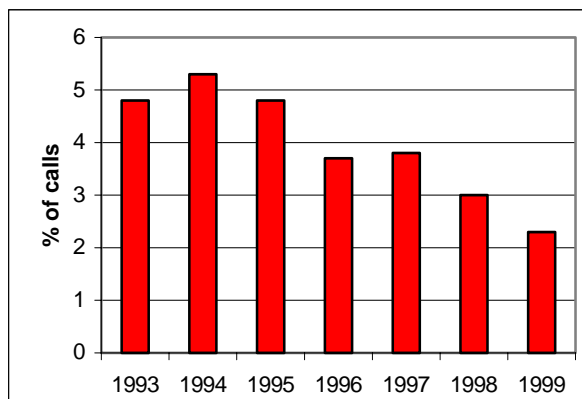
When individuals go through the transition from childhood to adolescence, the changes that characterise their development during this time are more pronounced than at any time since infancy. During this time, the individual is truly aware of the physical changes occurring, primarily involving their sex organs and secondary sex characteristics. The young person sees, feels and experiences bodily changes that are quite different from the sensations of childhood. These changes may be experienced as exciting, gratifying, embarrassing, confusing, wonderful and frightening.

Is anxious about the transition from childhood to adulthood. She dislikes change and wishes she could be very young again to avoid having concerns and fears. She doesn't want to get older and have the responsibility that goes along with it.

Female aged 18

Caller Information

Since KHL began nationally in May 1993, the proportion of counselling calls relating to developmental issues have decreased considerably. The graph below details this trend.



This averages to around 4,100 calls per year for this particular issue, which is 4% of all calls.

Almost two-thirds of callers are from metropolitan areas, with the remainder from regional Australia.

Nationality of the caller was recorded for a quarter of calls - 92% are Anglo-Australia, 1% Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, and the remainder from other backgrounds.

Age and Gender

Females made the majority of calls concerning developmental issues, representing 77% of the callers. The table below provides a breakdown of the age and gender of the callers who phoned concerning developmental issues.

AGE	FEMALES	MALES
5-9	4%	1%
10-14	63%	15%
15-19	10%	7%

Gender ratios at different ages also indicate some interesting trends. In the 10-14 year old age group approximately four times as many females call KHL as males. Developmental issues are the 5th most common reason females from this age group phone KHL.

Similarly, the largest proportion of male callers were aged 10 to 14. These figures suggest that developmental issues are of greatest concern for this particular age group. This data supports developmental research which indicates that puberty generally begins in this age bracket.

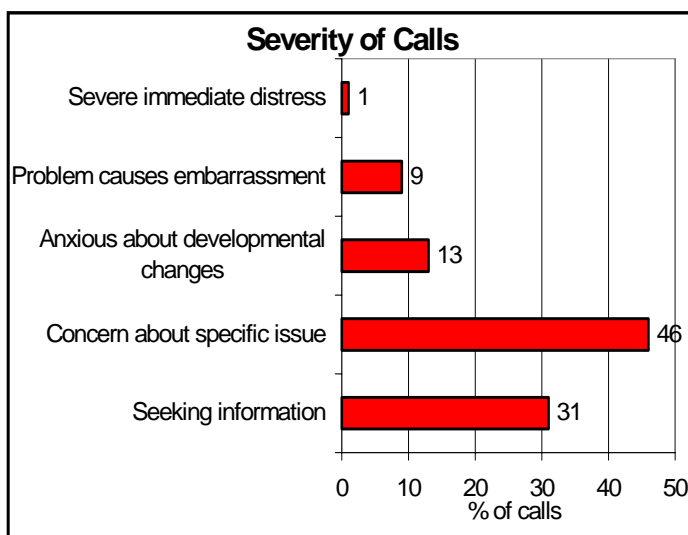
Getting moody and crying about stuff that she never used to worry about...confused as to what's happening to her

Female aged 12

As shown in the graph below, 31% of such calls are from callers seeking information about puberty and development. A further 46% of callers are concerned about a specific issue such as menstruation, wet dreams, ejaculation, breast development and other body changes.

Thirteen percent of callers reported they were anxious about the developmental changes they were experiencing. Examples of such concerns include early or late development, breast size, penis size and shape, masturbation, sexual drive, and emotional changes associated with hormonal changes.

Another 9% of callers stated they were embarrassed about their developmental changes. A very small proportion (1%) of callers ring in a state of severe immediate distress about their developmental concerns.



Caller asking all about 'puberty' i.e. what does it mean, what does it involve? Started health classes at school recently.

Male aged 13

Across all five levels of severity, the majority of female callers were aged 10 to 14, and similarly for males, with one exception. Males who called with severe immediate distress tended to be older (15 to 18).

KHL plays an important role for any young person with developmental concerns. Counsellors accept the legitimacy of each child's reality and fully explore their developmental concerns while normalizing the caller's experience. The anonymity and confidentiality of the service allows young people to freely and openly discuss issues about their development in a safe environment whilst gaining accurate information.

Has been spending a lot of time considering the meaning of life, who he wants to be, what he wants to do etc. Has also been experiencing paranoia about his friends and family and whether they are trustworthy, that is, true friends.

Male aged 17

Outcome of Calls

KHL counsellors are supported by an extensive database of relevant welfare and support services. Counsellors have the option of referring callers to another service if they feel the support would be beneficial.

In 1999, 3.6% of calls where developmental issues were discussed required referral to other support services. The most common referrals were to community health services.

References

- Clarke-Stewart, A., Freidman, S., & Koch, J. (1985). *Child Development: A Topical Approach*. USA: John Wiley & Sons Inc.
- Schell, R. E. (1979). *Developmental Psychology Today* (3rd Ed.). USA: Random House Inc.

Updated: June 2000

For more information

© This information may be re-used, copied or distributed as long as it is sourced to Kids Help Line and is not used out of context. For up to date information, current events and what's on the drawing board, visit our website.

www.kidshelp.com.au

NATIONAL OFFICE:

PO Box 376, Red Hill, Qld, 4059
 Ph (07) 3369 1588 Fax (07) 3367 1266
 Email admin@kidshelp.com.au
 24 hour telephone counselling line: 1800 55 1800