

When You Offer Help, People Take It: Exploring Help-Seeking by Teens with Problematic Sexual Behaviors and Interests

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THE HELP WANTED PREVENTION INTERVENTION

www.helpwantedprevention.org

THE HELP WANTED PROJECT

Intervention Developers

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Collaborators

- Karen Baker, Director, National Sexual Violence Resource Center
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- Geraldine Crisci, Therapist, Geraldine Crisci and Associates
- Gerald Hover, INTERPOL Crimes Against Children
- Jill Levenson, Therapist and Associate Professor, Barry University
- Kieran McCartan, UVW, Bristol
- Michael Miner, Professor University of Minnesota
- Daniel Rothman, Psychologist, Forensic Psychological Services
- Joan Tabachnick, President, DSM Consulting

THE HELP WANTED PREVENTION INTERVENTION BACKGROUND

- Sexual interest in children is a clear risk factor for child sexual abuse perpetration that few resources directly address
- Many people with sexual interest in children do not offend against children *and* often look for help
- *Help Wanted* is an online self-help curriculum with two primary goals
 - Prevent child sexual abuse
 - Reduce psychological stressors of help-seekers

HELP WANTED: THE PATHWAY TO PREVENTION

- **Phase 1: Qualitative Interviews** to develop well-grounded understanding of the needs of youth attracted to children.
- **Phase 2: Intervention & Outreach Materials** designed to destigmatize asking for help and providing help.
- **Phase 3: Initial Evaluation and Feasibility Study** to pilot the intervention.
- **Phase 4: Randomized Clinical Trial** to rigorously evaluate intervention efficacy.

HELP WANTED: MAJOR THEMES IN INTERVIEWS

- Recognition of attraction occurs in adolescence
- Difficulty in dealing with the meaning of their attraction, not necessarily keeping oneself from acting on attraction
- Need for resources for adolescents
- Scared of or unsure of how to find help/therapy
- Online community support is very important

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ELSEVIER

Research article

Help wanted: Lessons on prevention from young adults with a sexual interest in prepubescent children

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:
Child sexual abuse
Prevention
Pedophilia
Adolescent
Young adult

ABSTRACT

Background: Adolescents and young adults with a sexual interest in young children represent an underserved population. The needs of this group, and their implications for child sexual abuse prevention program development, are not well understood.

Objective: The objective of this research is to advance knowledge about adolescents and young adults with a sexual interest in children to better inform the development of effective prevention and mental health efforts.

Participants and setting: The sample consisted of 30 young adults, ages 18–30, from North America, South America, Europe, and Australia.

Methods: Researchers conducted telephone interviews with participants, and asked about when their interest in children emerged, how they responded to this sexual interest, and what resources could have been helpful during this process. Participants also completed a brief, online survey. Interviews were transcribed and analyzed using Dedoose software.

Results: Participants reported that their sexual interest in children emerged during adolescence, and as part of that process, they experienced a variety of emotions, including fear, shame, and feelings of isolation. Participants also noted the need for role models who are sexually interested in children and successfully navigating life, positive messaging, and support from families and the community.

Conclusions: Young people with a sexual interest in children are largely hidden, vulnerable, and looking for help. Findings from this research can be used to direct the development of the prevention and mental health programs that are responsive to the needs of this community.

1. Introduction

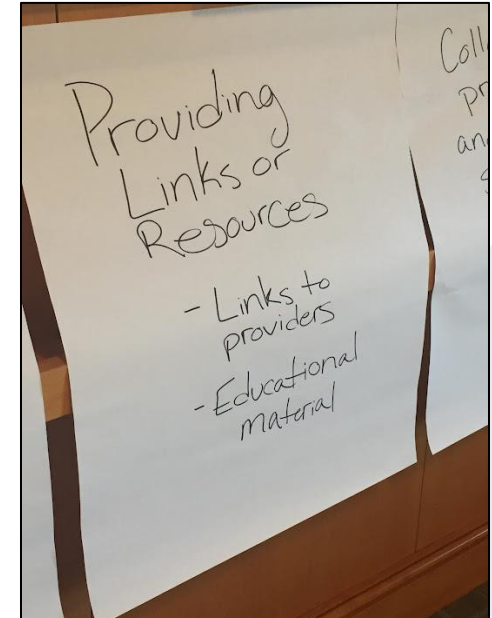
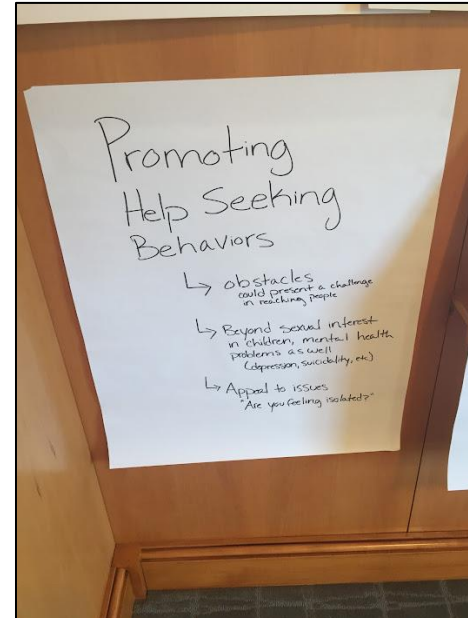
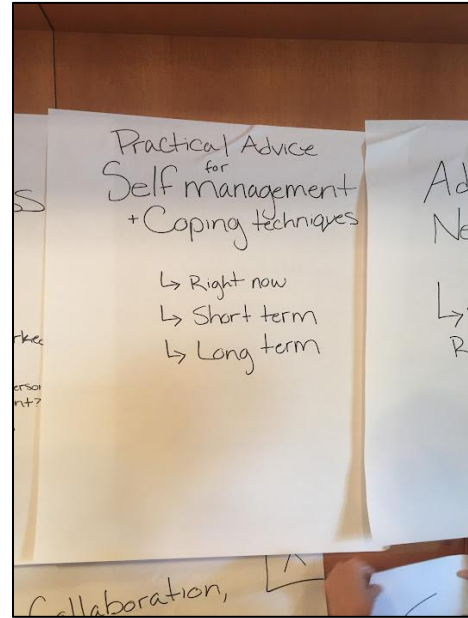
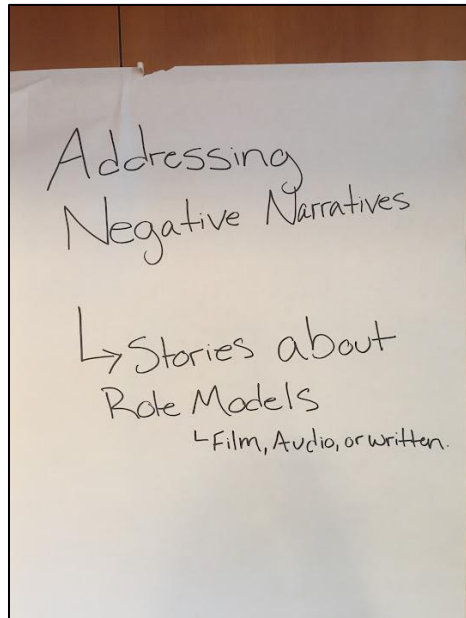
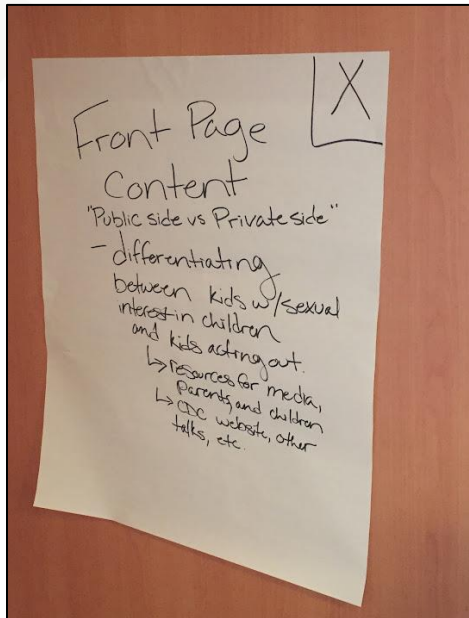
Child sexual abuse remains a significant contributor to the global burden of disease (Krug, Mercy, Dahlberg, & Zwi, 2002; Mathers, Stevens, & Mascarenhas, 2009). In the United States (U.S.), approximately 15–25 % of girls and 5 % of boys experience child sexual abuse (Finkelhor, Shattuck, Turner, & Hamby, 2014), and the consequences of these experiences can be substantial. Child sexual abuse increases the likelihood of severe physical, mental, and behavioral health problems across the life course, as well as

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0145-2134/ © 2020 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

BUILDING HELP WANTED

- Our qualitative study served as the foundation to the remaining project phases
- Using the knowledge gained from these interviews, our team set to identify our initial areas of focus



Welcome to Help Wanted

Help Wanted is an online course to provide help to people attracted to younger children.

Our goal is to give you some tools to support your commitment to strengthen your overall well-being and keep kids safe.



Help Evaluate New Help Wanted Content!

We are seeking research participants to evaluate a new version of the Help Wanted course, developed with feedback from help seekers.

If you are a man (cis or transgender) who is 18 or older and attracted to children, have never had a contact offense with a child, and have not accessed the Help Wanted course in the past, we would love to hear from you. ***Your opinion matters!***

What's Involved:

- Complete a series of anonymous, online surveys about your thoughts, feelings, and behaviors (about 30 minutes each).
- Review and provide feedback on the new Help Wanted course.

Compensation:

Between \$120 and \$140 USD

If you are attracted to younger children, there are a few things we want you to know before you explore this site:



You are not defined by your attraction.



You deserve good health and happiness.



You can help keep children safe from being harmed.



You are not alone.

HELP WANTED

Help Wanted was developed by the faculty and staff at the Moore Center for the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. However, the resources on this site are not endorsed by the Moore Center or Johns Hopkins Institutions, and they are not a substitute for professional medical advice or treatment. Please take the steps to get the help you need. You matter.

Dear Friend, the COVID-19 crisis affects every aspect of our lives, including our physical, mental, and sexual health and well-being. We are making this early version of our Help Wanted intervention available ahead of schedule as one way to help during this crisis. We will continue to evaluate and refine Help Wanted and update this site until it meets our high standards for form and function.

What Is Child Sexual Abuse?

VOCABULARY

Click on each word to see a definition.



Child sexual abuse

Person with pedophilia

Sex offender

Grooming behaviors

Consent

Involving a child in sexual activity



Back

Continue

Telling Someone About Your Attraction

WHAT TO SHARE?

Drag each information statement to the best person to share it with.

You don't want to get together with family and friends because you're feeling depressed and ashamed about your attraction.



COUNSELOR

You're having fantasies that concern you, and you're feeling really anxious. You could really use someone to talk to.



FAMILY MEMBER OR
FRIEND



ONLINE FORUM

You're wondering how other people manage their attractions, if they tell their parents, and what strategies they use to not offend.



Back

Continue

Coping with Your Sexual Attraction

RIGHT-NOW COPING STRATEGIES

Click on each item to learn more about strategies you can use to deal with strong sexual feelings about children. Please click on at least 3 items.



Don't be alone
with children



Change it up



Use positive
self-talk



Exercise



Take some
deep breaths

Back



Continue

Building a Positive Self-Image

LIVING A HAPPY, HEALTHY,
AND FULFILLING LIFE

Click on each item to hear a personal statement of someone with a sexual attraction to children living a happy, healthy, non-offending life.



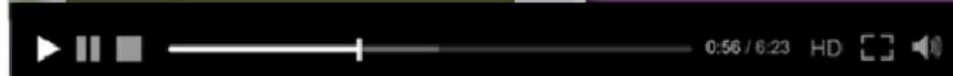
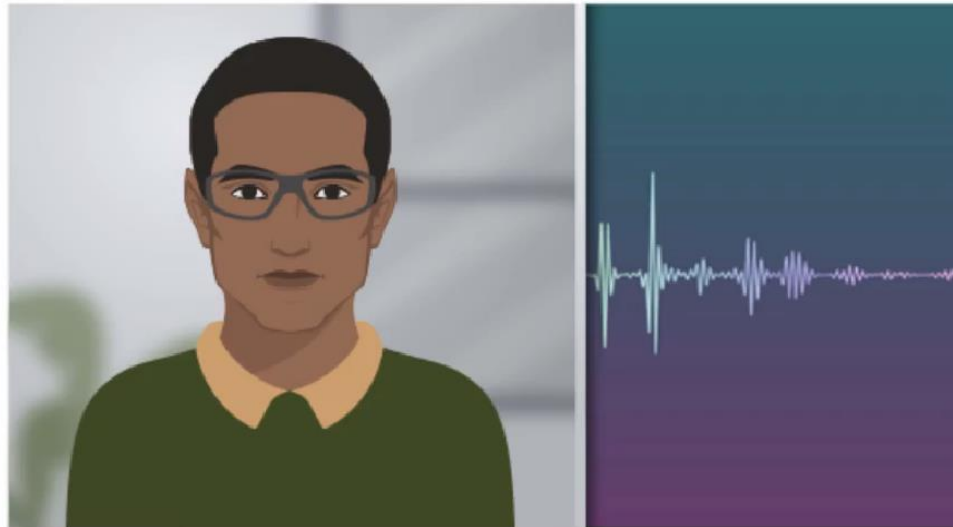
Interview #1



Interview #2



Interview #3



Back



Continue

Building a Healthy Sexuality

BUILDING A HEALTHY SEXUALITY

Click on each menu item to learn more about building a healthy sexuality. Please click on at least three items.



Accepting your
sexuality and
attraction

Masturbation

Getting and
giving consent

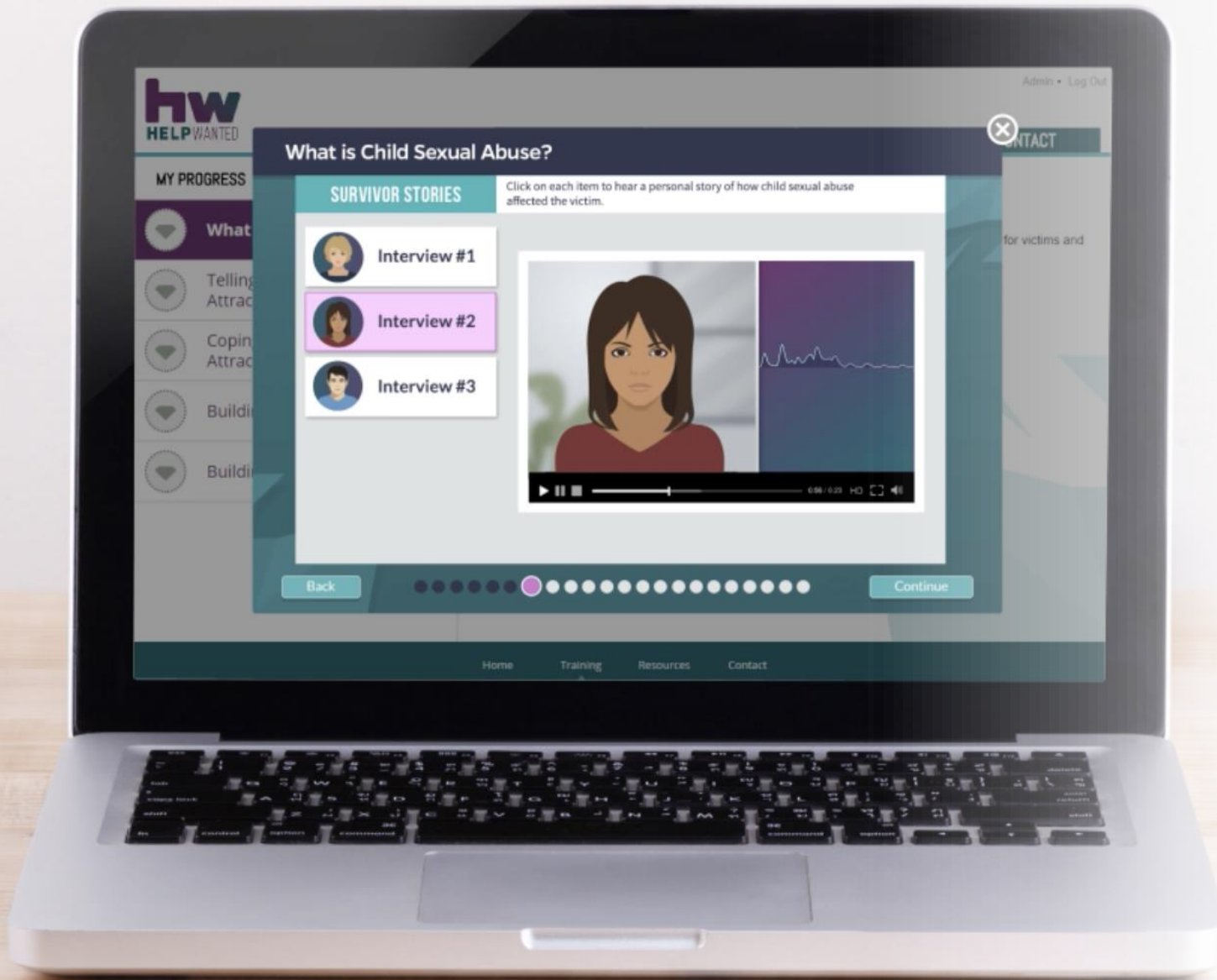
Practicing
safe sex

Loving yourself

Back



Continue



- Beta version of intervention released in May 2020
- Approx. **1,350,624** page visits (as of Jan 2025)
- Selected by **Facebook** and **Google** as a featured child sexual abuse prevention resource
- Selected for **CDC** funding in September 2020 to conduct a randomized waitlist-controlled trial

helpwantedprevention.org

IMPLICATIONS FOR HELPING PROFESSIONALS

- Consider **barriers** to therapy:
 - Need for trained therapists
 - Access to therapists
 - Cost
 - Confidentiality
- Structure therapy around **wellness**, not crime prevention
- Avoid **language and perspectives** that assume sexual abuse is inevitable
- Publicize your **willingness** to work with this population
- Think about public **messaging** (and ask for help!)

FURTHER READING/LISTENING



You're 16. You're a Pedophile. You Don't Want to Hurt Anyone. What Do You Do Now?

This American Life

Archive Recommended How to Listen About

522 | April 11, 2014

▶ Tarred and Feathered

This week, stories of people being threatened and punished with public shame. Including the story of someone who was literally tarred and feathered. It happened a lot more recently than you'd guess.

Download Share a clip Transcript

A horizontal illustration showing a person lying down, possibly on a bed or couch. The person is wearing a dark shirt and light-colored pants. The background is a solid yellow color.

THANK YOU!

Ryan T. Shields, Ph.D.
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**When You Offer Help, People Take It:
Exploring Help-Seeking by Teens with
Problematic Sexual Behaviors and
Interests**



1

Stop It Now!

Mission: Prevent the sexual abuse of children by mobilizing adults, families and communities to take actions that protect children before they are harmed.

- Emphasis on modeling social change
- Primary prevention – **before** abuse
- Shift prevention from **children** to **adults**

Our Program Areas

Prevention Education

Help Services
stopitnow.org
whatsok.org
1.888.PREVENT

Training & Technical
Assistance

Prevention Advocacy



2

“

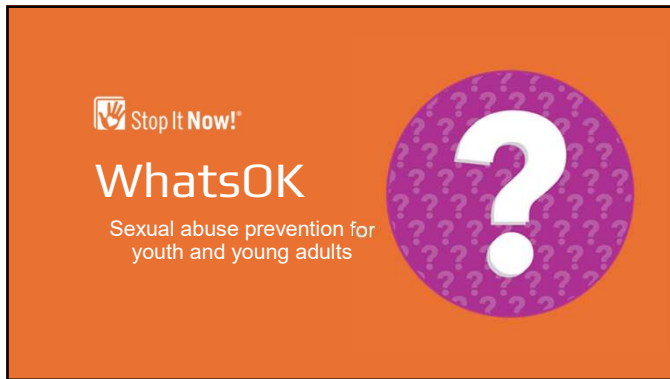
I am 14 years old, I feel a sexual attraction to girls younger than me, even 4-year-old girls. I also have an attraction to older girls.

I have searched the internet for information, but I have not found anything to help me. I do not want anyone to know about this. I hope you can help me.




”

3




4



Help Services: WhatsOK


WhatsOK.org is a website and helpline for young people (ages 14-21) with questions or concerns about healthy sexual behaviors.

- Operated by Now!'s existing Helpline
- Available through email, chat, text, phone
- Age-appropriate information and resources via FAQs, a blog and a confidential helpline.
- Widely shared with youth-serving professionals, our networks



whatsok.org
Text WHATSOK to 1.888.532.0550
Instagram, Snapchat and TikTok: @whatsokofficial

5



WhatsOK Goals


- 1. Provide relevant, engaging support and resources** to youth and young adults with concerns about their own and other's sexual thoughts, feelings and behaviors.
- 2. Increase awareness, accessibility and use** of these resources, encouraging help-seeking behaviors.
- 3. Address need to examine youth's sexual behaviors** through lens other than a criminal justice one

6

Youth-focused Microsite


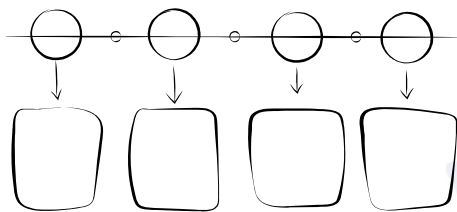
Microsite used to ensure info was trusted by and authentic to our audience. This meant:

- Site and content built for mobile use
- Content entirely focused on target audience
- Bright, youthful, engaging colors
- Diverse faces, genders and relationships




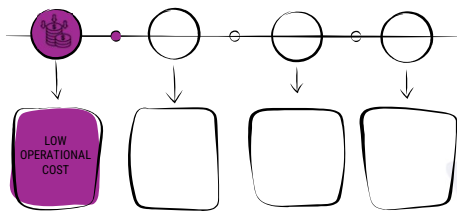
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Why a helpline?

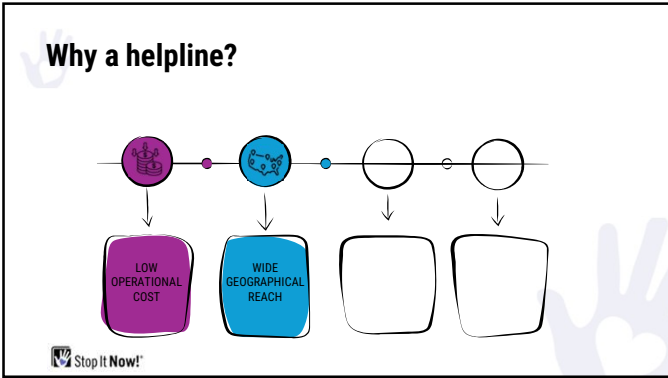


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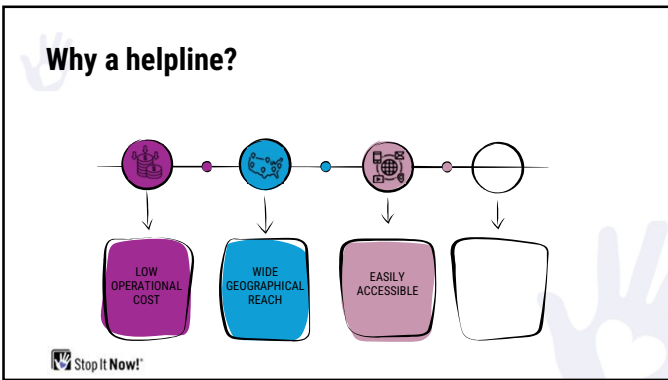
Why a helpline?



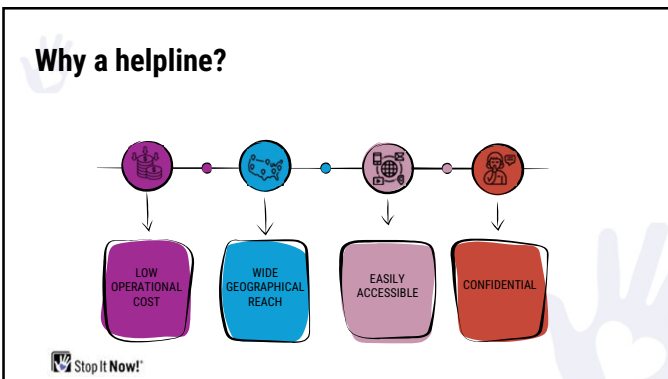
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10




11




12

Website Content – FAQs




What is OK?
Understanding relationships, boundaries and consent

[Get Answers](#)




Am I OK?
Concerned about your own sexual thoughts and behaviors

[Get Answers](#)




Sexual Content
Porn, CSAM, sexting, lolicon, hentai and more

[Get Answers](#)




Concerned about a Friend
Worried about someone else's sexual interests, comments and behaviors

[Get Answers](#)




Finding Help
No matter what, you are not alone. Here's how to find support.

[Get Answers](#)



Something else
Don't see your question somewhere else? Text, chat or email our confidential helpline.

[Contact Us](#)


 Stop It Now!

13

Website Content – Blogs



"I feel disgusting after watching cartoon images of children having sex."



Am I a monster?



I feel like I've abused younger children in my family




 Stop It Now!


14

Reaching Youth

Social ads are an easy, inexpensive way to privately reach our target audience. Whether in relationships or via CSAM, young people engage in concerning behaviors online. And they use their phones to assess their behavior.

We chose apps that youth said they engaged with **multiple times a day**.

 Stop It Now!

15

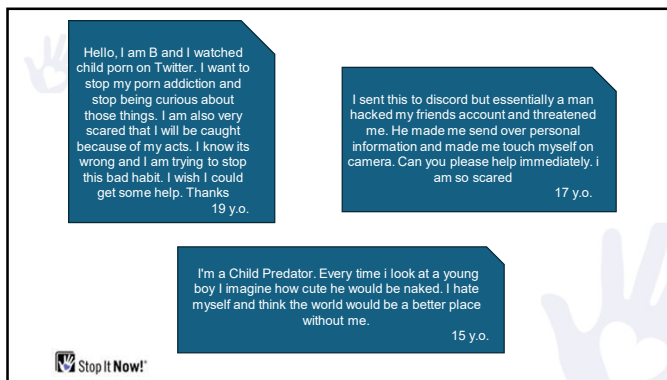
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Slide 15

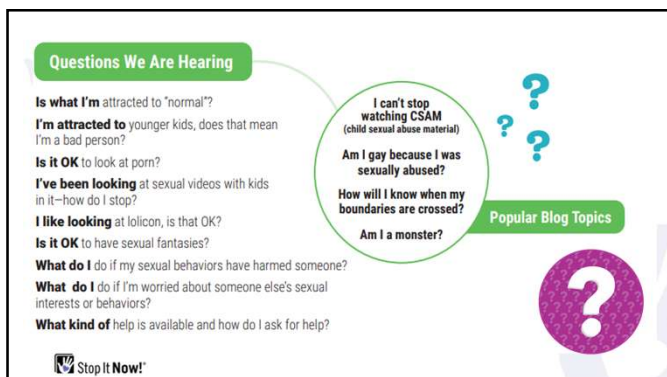
- 12 @jcoleman@stopitnow.org When you are talking about the ads, I will mention the social media paper that Melissa led and how we can directly track website traffic to ads
Csenge Bodi, 3/18/2025
- 13 Also, feel free to interrupt my part at any point. I always like presentations where it's a back and forth more.
Csenge Bodi, 3/18/2025



16



17



18

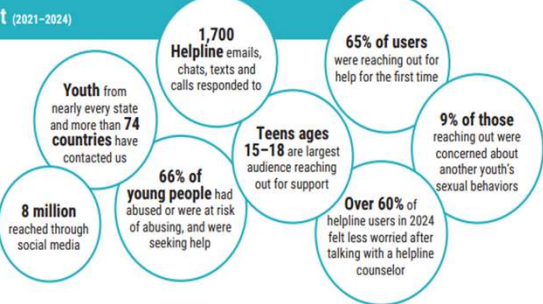
Responding to Needs –
Overcoming Obstacles

Need	Helpline Response – Focus on Accountability
Professional Support	Counseling resources, support groups
Safety Planning	Identify warning signs and risks
Information	Myth-busting, reporting, healthy sexuality education
Witness	Reduce isolation
Connection	Offer respect and compassion
Hope	Affirm that happy, healthy, safe lives are possible
NO JUDGEMENT, COMPASSION, STRENGTH-BASED, ACCURATE	



19

Impact (2021–2024)



20

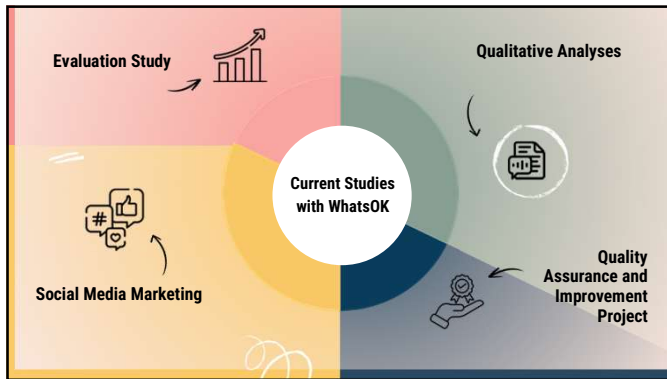
Team Science

Team Science Evaluation graphic featuring a circular flow of arrows and logos for partner organizations:

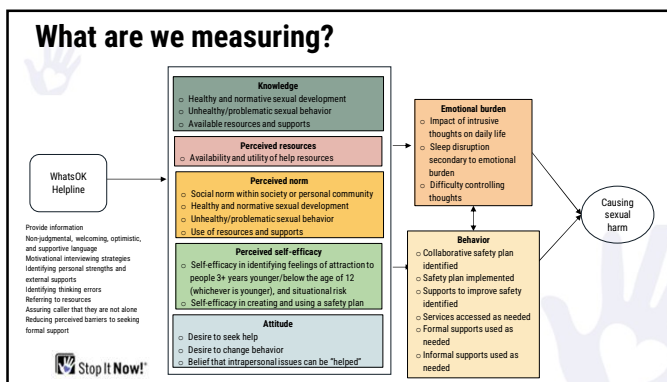
- Stop It Now!®
- CENTER FOR VIOLENCE PREVENTION RESEARCH
- CHILDHOOD WORLD CHANGING INITIATIVE
- OAK FOUNDATION
- JOHNS HOPKINS BLOOMBERG SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH
- Warren Center for the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse
- The Le Royal



21



22



23

14

Quantitative Summary of Help-Seeker Characteristics

Who is contacting the WhatsOK helpline?

What is their age?

When are they contacting the helpline?

Original Research
Early Findings of Helpline Inquiries From Youth and Young Adults With Concerns About Their Sexual Thoughts, Behaviors, and Experiences
 Melissa A. Bright¹, George Bodi², Brittnay Gordon³, Diana Ortega⁴, and Jenny Coleman⁵
Abstract
 These self-reported victims of child sexual abuse are harmed by peers or...
Keywords
 Child sexual abuse, Helpline, Youth, Young adults, Sexual thoughts, Behaviors, Experiences
 © 2024 by the author(s). Published by SAGE.

24

Slide 23

- 14 @jcoleman@stopitnow.org Sometimes I have a hard time descitbing exactly how the helpline counselors touch on all these different aspects. Feel free to chime in here.
Csenge Bodi, 3/18/2025

Quantitative Summary of Help-Seeker Characteristics

Who is contacting the WhatsOK helpline?

What is their age?

When are they contacting the helpline?

RESEARCH BRIEF
Helpline Inquiries from Young People with Concerns About Their Sexual Thoughts, Behaviors, and Experiences

Key Findings

- The national 24/7 helpline for the 100+ largest cities for youth with concerns about their sexual thoughts, behaviors, and experiences.
- 38% of inquiries were from youth seeking help at risk to cause sexual harm.
- 27% of inquiries were from youth seeking help who had already caused sexual harm.
- Most contacted the helpline before seeking help elsewhere.

Background: Over 100 cities in the United States have a 24/7 helpline for youth with concerns about their sexual thoughts, behaviors, and experiences. These helplines are a critical resource for youth seeking help with sexual concerns, but little is known about the youth who contact them. This research brief provides a quantitative summary of helpline inquiries from youth seeking help with sexual concerns.

Methods: This study included a retrospective review of all inquiries to the WhatsOK helpline from January 2022 to April 2023. Demographics of the helpline inquiries were analyzed for identifying patterns in the types of inquiries, the time of day, the day of the week, and the geographic location of the inquiries.

Results: Most inquiries to the WhatsOK helpline for youth with concerns or questions about their sexual thoughts, behaviors, and experiences were from youth aged 14-17 years. Slightly more than half of inquiries (55%) were from youth seeking help with sexual concerns, and most contacted the helpline before seeking help elsewhere.

Conclusions: As the WhatsOK helpline continues to grow, it is important to understand the youth who contact them. This research brief provides a quantitative summary of helpline inquiries from youth seeking help with sexual concerns, and highlights the need for continued research in this area.

25

↩

What should researchers know about doing research with youth with potential PSB?

“I believe researchers should be understanding to the people in this situation, as it's an extremely difficult and embarrassing topic to talk about.

There's a level of vulnerability that is given away by us for the greater good, and they should know that many of us struggle daily with these feelings and many of us feel totally disgusted with ourselves.”

26

Next Steps

- Continued evaluation
- Support development of youth prevention resources globally
- Share, Share, Share
- Collaboration and Partnerships
- Sustainability

WhatsOK

Defining the Problem

- Over 100 cities in the United States have a 24/7 helpline for youth with concerns about their sexual thoughts, behaviors, and experiences.
- These helplines are a critical resource for youth seeking help with sexual concerns, but little is known about the youth who contact them.

Our Solution

- Provide a safe, confidential, and non-judgmental space for youth to seek help with sexual concerns.
- Offer support and resources to youth seeking help with sexual concerns.

Our Goals

- Increase the number of cities with a 24/7 helpline for youth with concerns about their sexual thoughts, behaviors, and experiences.
- Increase the number of youth seeking help with sexual concerns.

Questions We Are Asking

- What are the barriers to helpline use?
- What are the needs of youth seeking help with sexual concerns?
- How can we better support youth seeking help with sexual concerns?

What We Know

- Helplines are a critical resource for youth seeking help with sexual concerns.
- More research is needed to understand the youth who contact helplines and the barriers to helpline use.

27
