

Helping Kids Be Healthy Inside and Out

A lifeline for kids

by Rona Maynard



Kids Help Phone counsellors like Duane help callers reframe their problems by listening to what kids are – and aren't – saying.

Every time the phone rings on Duane's desk at Kids Help Phone[‡], he knows a young person needs help. Broken heart, divorcing parents, abusive home... he's heard it all and more, countless times.

Callers share their secrets with Duane because they trust him not to judge them or tell anyone without their permission. Duane talks with every kid as if he's got all the time in the world. He says what he likes best about his job is "leaning back in my chair and really listening, and also listening to what kids are not saying."

Kids Help Phone is Canada's only free, confidential, counselling service for youth, available in English and French. Close to 100 full time, part time and relief counsellors have a DJ's grasp of the latest pop-culture trends, yet every one is professionally trained. They're on call where kids want to find them — on the phone, via email and more recently live chat (instant messaging on a computer or smartphone). A child who's not ready to talk can find a wealth of kid-friendly, age-appropriate advice on Kids Help Phone's interactive website. Every page on the site has been vetted by subject-matter

KIDS HELP PHONE: THE NUMBERS

Founded: **1989**
 Weekly contacts with phone counsellors: **5,000**
 Age group served: **5 to 20**
 Communities served: **2,600**
 Days open per year: **365, 24/7**
 Phone number: **1-800-668-6868**

experts, plus kids themselves. If they say the language is "lame," it gets changed in a flash. Says President and CEO Sharon Wood, "We are at the pulse of what kids really think."

The heart of Kids Help Phone is counsellors like Duane. With his guidance, kids reframe their problems.

When a teen called about bullying at

school, he asked, "Do you think you deserve to be treated with respect?" She didn't think so — until Duane convinced her that she'd been made to feel that way by people who didn't know her.

Next, he helped her identify supports in her life.

"I was feeling sad when I called, and now I feel amazing!"

– caller, age 12

Her parents had told her that the bullying would pass, but a sympathetic aunt could be her advocate with them. She also had several trustworthy classmates, and staying close to them would discourage the bullies.

Growing up is harder than it used to be as the Internet turns high-school fads and Hollywood meltdowns into worldwide obsessions. Take fear of fat: more boys suffer from eating disorders now. Or self-injury — celebrities have admitted to it, so kids are starting to think it's cool. The counsellors at Kids Help Phone are hearing more these days about addictions, eating disorders, self-injury and other serious issues that collectively account for more than 30% of all contacts — up from 19% in 2004.

When a young person is in danger, Kids Help Phone is ready. Counsellors can use three-way calling to connect them with local police, child welfare or other emergency services. Duane remembers one such conversation with an abused, suicidal teen, who later wrote to tell him, "This will change my life."

Even in the most loving families, there's a place for Kids Help Phone. You might not be around when your child feels anxious or scared.

Says Wood, "Think of each child as having a circle of trusted adults — parents, teachers, coaches. We're part of that circle, and we're there when others aren't available." Here's how to make the most of Kids Help Phone:

- **Start early** Teach your child three phone numbers: home, 911 and Kids Help Phone: 1-800-668-6868.
- **Help your child fill out the safety planner** at kidshelpphone.ca. Then print out a handy card for your child's wallet.

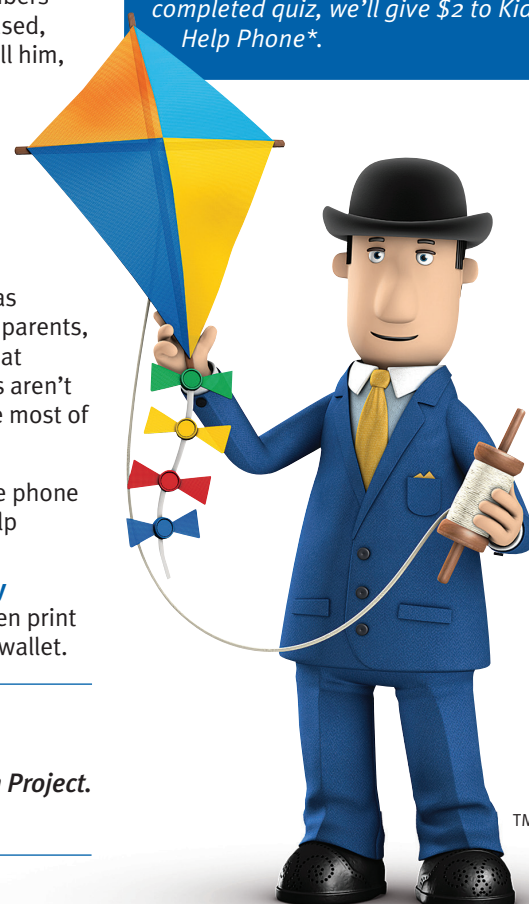
- **Bookmark kidshelpphone.ca** and make it your family's go-to resource for emotional issues. Not sure how to start a conversation about what's troubling your child? From the death of a beloved pet to dating violence, you'll find everything you need and then some.

Rona Maynard is an author, speaker, mental health advocate and former Editor of *Chatelaine*

HOW RBC® SUPPORTS KIDS HELP PHONE

When Kids Help Phone introduced live chat as a pilot project in January 2012, young people came flocking. There was just one catch: how would counsellors meet demand? To close the gap, the RBC Children's Mental Health Project, funded by the RBC Foundation, recently announced a \$1 million donation. Now Kids Help Phone can ramp up live chat and continue its long tradition of staying in step with young people.

Since 2008, the RBC Children's Mental Health Project has donated over \$16 million to more than 200 organizations across Canada, including Kids Help Phone. You can help us help children. Visit www.rbc.com/childrensmentalhealth and test your knowledge of children's mental health. For every completed quiz, we'll give \$2 to Kids Help Phone*.



RBC Children's Mental Health Project

This is a special feature brought to you by the RBC Children's Mental Health Project. Visit www.rbc.com/childrensmentalhealth to view the entire series.

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