

## **HELPLINES IN POLAND AS INTERVENTION HELP FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN CRISIS SITUATIONS**

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**ABSTRACT:** *Children and young people brought up in dysfunctional families often encounter crisis situations. Non-governmental organisations (henceforth referred to as NGOs) trying to meet social needs, have started a number of helplines for children and young people, which provide professional help by way of intervention. The first helpline for children and young people was created in Poland on 1 October 1970, thanks to an initiative of the Polish Society of Mental Hygiene, as well as that of the regional Educational and Vocational Clinic in Warsaw, under the name of the Warsaw Youth Helpline. The most popular ones among children and young people now are helplines from the 116 group, reserved for EU countries. In addition to typical telephone or internet assistance, NGOs are trying to publicise and solve important problems for children and their families in the form of social campaigns.*

**KEY WORDS:** *children, young people, crisis situations, intervention, helpline*

Children and young people brought up in disturbed, dysfunctional environments are often exposed to crisis situations. A special susceptibility to crises of various kinds is found in adolescence, i.e. in a period of manifold changes connected with reaching sexual maturity as well as personality and identity shaping of a young person. The characteristic features for that period are as follows:

- perceptible changes in the emotional sphere (increased emotional excitement, emotional fickleness, fearfulness, emotional ambivalence, tendency to aggressive behaviour and suicidal thoughts);
- changes in cognitive processes (hypersensitivity of the senses, the development of logical thinking, top-down attention, increased observation skills);
- activating sex drive;
- shaping one's own value system and world view;
- increased need for freedom and autonomy in taking independent decisions and in action<sup>1</sup>.

With no interest on the part of parents or guardians in this important period for a young person, they try to solve their problems on their own, coping with difficulties and their own weaknesses. The natural need for acceptance not satisfied in the family can result in young

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. [www.portal.wiedzy.onet.pl/38669...adolescencja,haslo.html](http://www.portal.wiedzy.onet.pl/38669...adolescencja,haslo.html) [online: 15.07.2014].

people looking for it with the peers. Adolescent people are easily affected by peer groups, joining subcultures. A growing need for independence makes them rebel against the parents and ignore their decisions, hinders interpersonal communication, pushes to asocial and antisocial behaviour, including pathological acts, threatening at the same time the child's further development and functioning. Young people pass through this period all the easier if they get support from their parents or guardians. However, it is often the case that children lack the faith in their capabilities, and with no communication or good relations with the parents, they feel lonely, which makes their adolescent problems rise to the level of dramas and lead to crisis situations, which without adequate help they are unable to get out of.

In the literature on the subject, there have been various definitions of the notion of a *crisis*. According to Belkin, "crises are personal difficulties or situations which take away from people the ability to act and make it impossible for them to consciously control their lives"<sup>2</sup>. Brammer, in turn, emphasises that "a crisis is a state of disorganisation in which a man faces a frustration of important life's objectives or a deep disturbance of his life cycle and his methods of coping with stress factors. The notion of *crisis* customarily refers to the feeling of fear, shock and difficulties of going through a disturbance, and not to the disturbance itself"<sup>3</sup>. Defining a *crisis*, what Marino found essential was the stages of its progression: "(a) there arises a critical situation in which it is determined if normal mechanism of dealing with difficulties will be sufficient; (b) a growing tension and disorganisation accompanying this situation exceed the ability of the person affected to cope with difficulties; (c) getting out of the situation requires resorting to extra resources (such as professional counselling); (d) it might become necessary to direct such a person to a specialist who will help in removing a serious personality disturbance"<sup>4</sup>. As a rule, a crisis is of temporary nature, but children and young people are not mature enough to properly evaluate its size and consequences. If a child does not get adequate support in time, the crisis may disturb its further development in various areas of functioning. It can also happen that a crisis becomes an opportunity to look for help in overcoming it, and then intervention actions undertaken in order to solve it support the child's further development. Crises that children are going through are usually of a developing nature (as in the case of adolescence and the changes felt in it), or situational (arising from sudden events leading to the child's helplessness), or existential (e.g. connected with a feeling of lack of freedom or independence), or environmental (when problems affect whole groups or communities, e.g. as a result of an economic crisis, a natural disaster, etc)<sup>5</sup>. One of the ways to help children and young people in critical situations is helplines.

## BEGINNINGS OF HELPLINES IN POLAND

The establishment of the first Polish helpline had been preceded by British experience. The initiator of the first helpline in the world was Chad Varah, a pastor of the Anglican Church, who in this way wanted to stop the number of suicides growing in Great Britain. The direct reason for taking up this problem was a suicide by a fourteen-year-old girl, who took the first menstruation symptoms for a fatal disease and personal tragedy. Lack of knowledge on the physiology of reaching sexual maturity, along with no help or support from the adults, brought the girl to the point of a nervous breakdown and, as a result,

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<sup>2</sup> G. S. Belkin, *Introduction to counseling*, Dubuque 1984, p. 424.

<sup>3</sup> L. M. Brammer, *The helping relationship: Procces and skills*, New York 1985, p. 94.

<sup>4</sup> R. K. James, B. E. Gilliland, *Strategie interwencji kryzysowej. Pomoc psychologiczna poprzedzająca terapię*, Warszawa 2006, p. 25-26.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *ibidem*, p. 28-29.

to committing suicide. Starting the first helpline in the world (in London, in November 1953), was a reaction to a huge social demand of the lonely, helpless with their problems and close to committing suicide.

Based on the experience of Chad Varah, in 1967, on the initiative of psychiatrist professors A. Bukowczyk and T. Kielanowski, the first two Polish helplines came into being, in Wroclaw and Gdansk. Others followed, among others in Warszawa, Bydgoszcz, Krakow, Olsztyn, Czestochowa. Inspired by the experience of the Samaritans organisation, founded by C. Varah, they started to involve volunteers of various professions in serving the helplines, among others doctors, psychologists, university teachers, lawyers, artists, etc. After a three-year operation of helplines in Poland, on 1 October 1970 the first helpline for children and young people was started in Europe, under the name of the Warsaw Youth Helpline. It was created thanks to the attempts of the Children and Young People Psycho Hygiene Section of the Polish Society of Mental Hygiene and the regional Educational and Vocational Clinic in Warsaw. The concept of the Youth Helpline was worked out based on the experience of long standing and an insight into the needs of children and young people of the vice-director of the regional Educational and Vocational Clinic in Warsaw, Jadwiga Zalecka. Initially, the helpline operated four hours every day on one line, but shortly the number of serving consultants, both volunteers and those working full time, was increased, which made it possible to raise the number of working hours to ten on two telephone lines. Due to a large range of problems about which young people were asking for help, contacts with specialists (doctors, teachers and therapists) were widened. They gave extra support to children and young people in crisis situations. In 1972, the Coordination Council was set up in Poland, with Alina Skotnicka as its director, as an organ representing Poland internationally and popularising telephone assistance and starting new helplines as demanded socially in other cities. In 1973, A. Skotnicka represented Poland at the international congress IFOTES<sup>6</sup>, in Berlin. In 1982, the Coordination Council was renamed to the Coordination Committee, whose chairwoman was Grazyna Swiatecka, the initiator of the Gdansk helpline, with the next chairman Adam Klodecki, the organiser of the Warsaw helpline for people with alcohol problems<sup>7</sup>. Because of the economic depression and martial law, the 80s were not a favourable time for developing helplines. The international conference, which was held in Gdansk in 1988, served to exchange experience for telephone assistance and prevent a stagnation in its evolution in East European countries. In 1990, the Polish Society of Telephone Assistance was established in order to not only represent Poland internationally, but above all to coordinate national activities for increasing the level of telephone assistance, the effectiveness of the assistance provided, and experience exchange through various kinds of training, conferences, seminars for consultants. In 1999, helplines stopped being under the authority of the then Health Insurance Fund, since there was no financing to keep them running. Gradually, they have been taken over by NGOs.

#### THE DEVELOPMENT OF POLISH HELPLINES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

In new political conditions, helplines for children came into being in reaction to Poland ratifying on 1 July 1991 the Convention of the Rights of the Child, which was an international constitution of children's rights, and became also an inspiration to introducing favourable

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<sup>6</sup> IFOTES – International Federation of Telephonic Emergency Services -Międzynarodowa Federacja Pomocy Telefonicznej.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. L. Kicińska, *Historia telefonów zaufania w Polsce i na świecie*, „Dziecko Krzywdzone” 2010 no. 2 (31), p. 9-12.

changes in the country, improving the situation of children. A reaction to change in legislation was initiating on 20 November 2008 the Children's Helpline of the Ombudsman for Children (800-12-12-12), on the initiative of Marek Michalak. The helpline works on weekdays, from 8.15 am to 8 pm, and provides emergency intervention help by way of counselling, conversations with children, their parents or guardians. When the rights of the child are violated, decisive intervention forms are taken, including notifying such services as the police, emergency ambulance service or the Polish Ombudsman for Children himself. Interlocutors usually report problems in peer, teacher and guardian relations at institutions, as well as problems arising from adolescence. In addition to the Ombudsman for Children helpline, there is another one operating at 22/626-94-19 and 22/831-24-29, run by the Committee for Protecting the Rights of the Child, annually serving about one thousand people. As a rule, interventions are related to treating children like objects, using mental and physical violence, sexual abuse and abusing authority over children<sup>8</sup>. The justification for continuing the helpline is the fact that in 2010 there were over thirty thousand calls, and in 2011 over 20 thousand. The role played by the helpline with reference to children who are in helpless situations was stressed by the Ombudsman for Children as follows: "It does happen that the youngest ones, living with their family and friends, feel lonely, and that's why it's good there is someone they can call. Sometimes all they need is a warm word. There are regular callers already, who at the other end have found a person they have trusted"<sup>9</sup>.

Table 1. Problems reported to the Ombudsman for Children Helpline as per 2011 data

No	Problems reported	Number of reports
1.	Infringing the right to be brought up in the family	3 600
2.	Children's emotional problems	1 906
3.	Family problems	1 668
4.	Peer relations	1 177
5.	Emotional problems	1 079
6.	Violence by adults against children	1 771

Source: [rodzina.wiara.pl/doc/1012678.Telefon-Zaufania-RPD-dziala-od-trzech-lat](http://rodzina.wiara.pl/doc/1012678.Telefon-Zaufania-RPD-dziala-od-trzech-lat) [online: 15.07.2014].

The greatest number of reports, as many as three thousand six hundred, concerned the right to be brought up in the family, which was closely related to abusing parental authority over the child and taking no responsibility for their upbringing. Feeling lonely, children often called to talk about their emotional problems (1960 calls), or emotional problems typical of adolescence (1079), which often become the cause of more serious mental crises for children and young people. Other problems, like trouble in the family (1668) and violence by adults against children (1771), in most cases were the result of family dysfunctions and conflicts arising in them. Children left alone in the family and feeling helpless with a situation existing there, found mental support in the consultants answering the telephone. Observing daily wrong attitudes in their nearest environment, children were also in conflict with their peers (1177 calls). Adolescent people have a special need for support from their family

<sup>8</sup> Cf. J. Szymańczak, *O przestrzeganiu praw dzieci w Polsce*, [in:] *Dziecko i jego prawa*, ed. E. Czyż, Warszawa 1992, p. 62.

<sup>9</sup> [www.rodzina.wiara.pl/doc/1012678.telefon-Zaufania-RPD-dziala-od-trzech-lat](http://www.rodzina.wiara.pl/doc/1012678.telefon-Zaufania-RPD-dziala-od-trzech-lat) [online: 15.07.2014].

and friends, but very often they feel alone and left with no support at a time which is difficult for them.

That is why a lot of other helplines for children and young people have been started in recent years on the initiative of NGOs, among others:

- Teenage (988) – open from Monday to Friday from 1pm to 6 pm;
- Teenage (and more) Helpline (19288) – open on weekdays from 10 am to 8 pm;
- Helpline of the Society of Help for Young People (22/635-54-67) – open from 2 pm to 6 pm;
- Schoolgirl and Schoolboy (71/372-04-86) – open on Mondays from 5 pm to 7 pm and on Wednesdays from 7 pm to 9 pm;
- For children, adolescents and adults – helpline of the Better World Foundation (22/672-52-26);
- For sexually abused children and teenagers whose parents have a drinking problem – the OPTA Society helpline (22/827-61-72) – open from Monday to Friday from 3 pm to 6 pm;
- The “Stop Violence” Helpline for Children and Young People and their parents (42/682-28-37);
- Youthful and Family Clinic of the Family Development Society (22/828-61-92) – open from Monday to Friday from 3 pm to 8 pm;
- Don’t run away – for young people who either ran away or want to run away from home (801-24-70-70 and 22/654-40-41) – an all-Poland helpline open round the clock;
- Helpline for Children and Young People (116-111) – open every day round the clock, free of charge;
- The internet Helpline “Anonymous Friend” (085-92-88) – open every day from 6 pm to 4 am<sup>10</sup>.

The Youth Helpline (19288), as the oldest line of this type for the youngest, modifying its work adapted it to the present needs of young people using it by introducing online counselling [mtz@mtz.waw.pl](mailto:mtz@mtz.waw.pl), as well as a possibility of getting connected by Skype ([mtz 19288](https://www.skype.com)) and using a website.

Another suggestion on how to solve young people’s problems is an offer of the informal volunteer group “Ponton”, which came into being in the Federation for Women and Family Planning and is taking care of educating young people sexually. The educational idea is based on cooperation between young volunteers with young people who are only a little younger, which shortens the distance, facilitates communication and knowledge transmission. Daily work of the volunteers during the school year consists in giving telephone advice at 22/635-93-92, on Fridays, from 4 pm to 8 pm, by email as well as organising talks in secondary schools and grammar schools on personal hygiene, contraception, sexually transmitted diseases, and responsibility in partnership contacts. An important part of holiday work is running daily the Holiday Rubber Dinghy, a helpline open every day from 6 pm to 9 pm, which answers questions related to sexuality and contraception. The number of those interested in this kind of assistance is constantly on the increase, which on the hand justifies the need to continue it, but on the other hand proves the level of knowledge in this field is still low. An additional reason for the existence of this type of intervention assistance is the number of children and young people affected by cyberbullying<sup>11</sup>, including the sexually

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. H. Bejger, S. Borysiuk, *Robota w telefoni dowiri*, Lublin-Niżyn 2013, p. 76.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. L. Wojtasik, *Peer violence using electronic media – introduction to the subject*, “Abused Child” 2009 no.1(26), p. 7.

-originated type. Among the problems for children and young people the dominating ones are as follows:

- “seducing children on the Internet;
- peer violence using electronic media;
- contact of young Internet users with harmful content;
- data stealing, unauthorised access to Internet accounts;
- the child getting addicted to the computer and/or the Internet;
- questions connected with young Internet users safety”<sup>12</sup>.

The reaction to the growing phenomenon of cyberbullying was a common project of the Nobody’s Children Foundation and the Orange Foundation, thanks to which the Helpline.org.pl (800 100 100) came into being, and the LiveChat online assistance was started at [www.helpline.org.pl](http://www.helpline.org.pl). The project was planned as a kind of help for children, and also for their parents and guardians, as well as for people who professionally take care of, bring up and educate children and young people. Between 2007 and 2012 the helpline had one hundred and twenty eight thousand calls, eleven thousand of which concerned the direct threat to children on the Internet.

Table 2. Problems reported by children and young people to the Helpline.org.pl as per 2012 data

No.	Problems reported	% of all reports
1.	Cyberbullying	43
2.	Dangerous content	7
3.	Safety rules on the net	32
4.	Addiction to the computer /Internet	6
5.	Seducing children on the Internet	5
6.	Data theft	7

Source: data from a press conference at the Ministry of Internal Affairs of 17.05.2012.

The data presented in the table show that dominating problems with which children turn to the Helpline are various kinds of cyberbullying (43% of all reports) and safety rules on the net (32%). The callers were not only children, e.g. afraid to meet a stranger known from the Internet (5%), the content transmitted to them electronically (7%), but very often also their parents worried about their child’s addiction to the computer (6%). Consultants’ conversations with the children asking for help meant diagnosing the problems, the legal issues as well as finding the right type of intervention and mental assistance for the victims of cyberbullying. Cases of illegal websites propagating content harmful to the child’s development or discriminating against children in any way are directed to [Dyzur-net.pl](http://Dyzur-net.pl) and checked on there in detail.

## POLISH HELPLINES FROM THE 116 GROUP

In 2007, Poland became a member of the Child Helpline International, with the Nobody’s Children Foundation representing Polish lines. Since 6 November 2008, the first free Helpline for Children and Young People 116 111 has been operating under the auspices of CHI and the Foundation. The 116 telephone group is European helplines whose job it is to provide

<sup>12</sup> ”Abused Child” 2010 no. 2 (31), p. 103.

help

to those in need. The helpline operates thanks to the partnership of the Nobody's Children Foundation, government representatives, telecommunication companies and sponsors. The Ombudsman for Children, Marek Michalak, expressing his support for starting the 116 111 helpline, said: "We have a guarantee that children who find their way to the telephone consultants will get adequate support"<sup>13</sup>.

The helpline accomplished its mission in the very first years of its operation receiving:

- in 2009 – 89 577 calls,
- in 2010 – 105 285 calls,
- in 2011 – 150 330 calls,
- in 2012 (first half) – 89 201 calls<sup>14</sup>,

which testifies to a large interest on the part of children and young people in this kind of assistance, showing also a great demand for support. The helpline can carry out six calls at the same time. A website was started for children interested in Internet contact ([www.116111.pl](http://www.116111.pl)), where assistance is also provided round the clock. The helpline not only answers the children's and young people's questions when they ask for it, but also undertakes definite interventions along with the police, health service, courts etc. In the period under study, i.e. between 2009 and 2011, there were four hundred and ten thousand calls, ten thousand and five hundred questions were answered online, and one hundred and ninety eight interventions were undertaken. According to the data of the Nobody's Children Foundation, the demand for helplines is not declining. The problems reported by children most frequently are shown in the table below.

Table 3. Problems most frequently reported by children and young people on the 116 111 helpline in 2009

Subjects mentioned (by frequency)	Telephone line 116 111	Messages online <a href="http://www.116111.pl">www.116111.pl</a>
I	Peer relations	Peer relations
II	School	Mental and social health
III	Family	Family
IV	Violence	Request for information
V	Sexuality	Sexuality
VI	Mental and social health	Violence
VII	Request for information	School

Source: *data of the Nobody's Children Foundation*; [www.116111.pl](http://www.116111.pl) [online: 15.07.2014].

The data included in the table show that there are subjects children prefer to mention during the call, while others some callers would rather discuss online, probably due to the desire to be more anonymous, and maybe through fear of direct contact. According to the Foundation's data, children expecting help from the helpline most frequently take up the following subjects:

<sup>13</sup> The opinion was expressed at the press conference at the opening of a helpline for children and young people, which took place in Warsaw at the Zacheta Gallery, at 3 Malachowski Square.

<sup>14</sup> [www.116111.pl](http://www.116111.pl) [online: 15.07.2014].

Table 4. Subjects taken up by children and young people using the 116 111 helpline assistance

No.	Subjects of calls	%
1.	Family	15,3
2.	Violence	12,1
3.	Difficult emotions	6,0
4.	Health	5,0
5.	Addictions	4,0
6.	School and peers	35,3
7.	Sexuality and maturity	23,4

Source: data from a press conference of the 116 111 helpline representatives on 17 May 2012.

In the opinion of the children calling, most problems concerned school and peer relations (35,3% of the total), and with adolescents, problems flowing from reaching sexual maturity and sexuality (23,4%). Other heightened problems frequently mentioned in the conversations with the helpline consultants were family conflicts (15,3%) and violence (12,1%) against children. Devoid of support of significant people, they become helpless with problems which are beyond their capabilities of being solved on their own. Here are some examples of what the callers said:

- words connected with peer violence at school:  
“I don’t want to go to school. The older boys have had it in for me. They threaten they will beat me up, they call me names, take my money. I’m scared ...”(Karol, aged 10);
- words that show that school situations are a source of stress for the child:  
“I’m afraid I will fail the school leaving exam ... I didn’t go to a class test ... I ran away ... I am good for nothing ...” (Wojtek, aged 14);  
„Last year, I was ill, in hospital, and then almost another two months at home. I wasn’t able to catch up at school and now I am repeating the year. I wasn’t a brilliant student before, but now the teachers are treating me like a total dunce, when I get a good grade for a class test, they say I must have been cribbing. Nobody likes me at school.” (Bartek, aged 14);
- words that show that the child is not managing emotions after losing a close person:  
“Last year, my brother got killed in an accident. I can’t get over it, I miss him. I am cutting myself every day.” (Maja, aged 15);  
“I have no more strength to carry on ... I swallowed medicine, I drank some wine ... I feel like sleeping more and more ... “(Marta, aged 15);
- words confirming the existence of family violence, often very difficult to identify:  
“My parents got divorced when I was seven. I lived with my mother only, but recently her fiancé moved in with us. He’s been acting weird lately. A few days ago, when my mother went on night duty, he came to my room again. He sat down close to me and asked if I heard him making love to my mother at night. He asked me to touch him on the thighs and intimate areas. I’m afraid he will come again and will go further. I’m terribly ashamed and won’t talk about it to anyone. Maybe he’ll stop behaving like that?” (Kasia, aged 14);

„When I was eleven, my father’s brother raped me a few times. Finally, I found the courage to tell my mum. First, she didn’t believe me and was angry. She took me to a gynaecologist, and then she called the police. My uncle denied everything, and started to tell horrible things about me where we lived. My life changed into hell. My father left my mother, all of my father’s family turned away from us. I have tried to kill myself three times already, I am taking medicine recommended by the psychiatrist. People keep gossiping, they say I wanted to kill myself because I am ashamed of thinking it all up. I don’t want to live on, really” (Agnieszka, aged 17)<sup>15</sup>.

All these utterances show that children do not look for help or constructive solutions to their problems immediately. However, professional help from helpline consultants can prevent further developments from affecting the child’s personal situation. “Our role (as said by L. Kicińska, the coordinator of the 116 111 helpline – author’s note) is to restore hope, to soothe sorrow, and to help with coping with the most difficult situations. All it takes is often a quiet conversation, looking for solutions to problems along with the child, turning their attention to positive adults around. Sometimes it is enough to hear somebody out to save their life”<sup>16</sup>.

Help provided to children and young people demands great patience and recognising the fact that the problem with which the child is coming is extremely important to them. To ask for help, the child must overcome internal resistance and shame. The consultants make it a rule that what the child is saying is true, and while giving advice, they must try and use such phrases and explanations that will be understandable to the child. In order to understand the child’s intentions, in turn, during the conversation it is necessary to return to the facts discussed previously. While giving telephone assistance the rule is that parents cannot be badly spoken of because they are significant people to the child, even if they harm the child. According to this rule, what should be evaluated is behaviour, and not the person as such, as that would be an extra problem for the child leading to frustration. It is understood that children experiencing their parents’ alcohol addiction should hear that:

- it is good they have decided to talk about their experiences;
- they are not to blame for their parent’s drinking problem;
- many children are in a similar situation;
- they no longer have to hide their parent is drinking;
- they have the right to get help – they can look for it with their loved ones, with the school psychologist, at church, at a clinic, etc.<sup>17</sup>.

Jaroszewska formulated procedures for children who are victims of sexual abuse as well, which show that the consultant’s task is to make them believe that:

- “it is good they have decided to talk about their experiences;
- they are not to blame for what happened to them;
- their symptoms (feeling bad, irritation, apathy, nightmares, etc) in this situation are quite natural and will pass with time;
- if they felt pleasure while touching intimate parts of the body, it is normal (...);
- despite what has happened, their bodies remain innocent;

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<sup>15</sup> [www.116111.pl](http://www.116111.pl) [online: 15.07.2014].

<sup>16</sup> [www.psychologia.wszkole.pl/a,11408,Telefon\\_Zaufania\\_dla\\_Dzieci\\_i\\_Młodziezy\\_116\\_111\\_ma\\_juz\\_5\\_lat.htm](http://www.psychologia.wszkole.pl/a,11408,Telefon_Zaufania_dla_Dzieci_i_Młodziezy_116_111_ma_juz_5_lat.htm) l. [online: 15.07.2014].

<sup>17</sup> Cf. M. Jaroszewska, *Telefon zaufania dla dzieci. Cztery funkcje telefonicznego pomagania*, [in:] *Telefony zaufania dla dzieci*, „Dziecko Krzywdzone” 2010 no. 2 (31), p. 30.

- they are not the only children who have had it happening to them – unfortunately similar things do happen to other children too;
- such behaviour on the part of a adult is breaking law;
- it would be good to find a trusted adult whom they could tell about their experiences”<sup>18</sup>.

Talking about the way a consultant should approach such strong experiences on the part of the child asking for help, L. Kicinska, the coordinator of the 116111 Helpline for Children and Young People, in one of her statements emphasised the following: “Then we advise what to do; we recommend taking the next step and reporting it to the police. If in our view the situation is dramatic, we can intervene ourselves. We have the right to do so when there is a direct threat to life or health. Then we notify the police, too, and social aid”<sup>19</sup>.

#### THE 116 000 HELPLINE FOR A MISSING CHILD AND A TEENAGER

The 116 000 helpline came into being in Poland on 5 March 2009, according to the Union directive of 15 February 2007, being the sixth one in Europe. The number is common to EU countries and at present operates in ten countries: Belgium, France, Greece, Holland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Poland, Hungary and Italy. The number undertakes intervention actions for missing children, is free of charge and open round the clock. The line is served by the Centre Searching for Missing People ITAKA, which provides comprehensive assistance to missing people and their families. Additionally, ITAKA serves a 24h helpline 22/654-7070 for adults that went missing, as well as an internet base of missing people. As understood by law enforcement bodies, a case of missing is “a sudden event making it impossible to find out the whereabouts of a person and to provide them with life, health and freedom protection”<sup>20</sup>. According to the Missing Children Europe<sup>21</sup> data, the reasons for children going missing are: escaping from home, parental kidnapping, kidnapping by third parties, deprivation of custody over immigrants’ children, etc. According to the police statistics, about three thousand five hundred children go missing in Poland, including one hundred cases of children up to seven years of age, four hundred children between seven and thirteen, and about three thousand between thirteen and seventeen years of age. Children up to seven years of age usually go missing as a result of inattention and inadequate care on the part of adults, or they are kidnapped by parents due to conflicts existing between the spouses in connection with competing for direct care of the child, e.g, after a divorce. In such cases parents reporting kidnapping are provided with psychological aid. Independently, the standard search procedures are carried out. The reason for teenagers going missing usually is running away from home resulting from a mental crisis due to a young man’s helplessness with a difficult situation which they cannot overcome on their own. The time spent on the run and desperate search for support exposes young people to undesirable contacts with criminal circles, violence, early sexual initiation, prostitution, drug addiction, alcohol abuse, etc. Parents of such children get psychological support and counselling connected with the need to evaluate their own attitudes toward children and the willingness to change them in order to prevent their children running away from home in the future. Children’s returning home from the runs is also connected with the need

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<sup>18</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>19</sup> [www.116111.pl](http://www.116111.pl) [online: 15.07.2014].

<sup>20</sup> [www.policja.pl/palm/Pol/229/4649/Poszukiwanie\\_osob\\_zaginionych.html](http://www.policja.pl/palm/Pol/229/4649/Poszukiwanie_osob_zaginionych.html) [online: 15.07.2014].

<sup>21</sup> Missing Children Europe is an association of 23 NGOs from 16 EU countries and Switzerland, acting for the prevention of children going missing and their sexual abuse. A Polish member of the MCE is the ITAKA Foundation.

of overcoming the child's fear, preparing parents for appropriate reactions when the child returns, and frequently definite mediation becomes necessary along with actions aiming at family integration. The greatest number of missing cases happen in big cities, including Warsaw (10%), and the Silesia district (12,7%). Various people interested in the problem make calls about missing children, which annually add up to one hundred and seventy cases in Poland.

Table 5. People calling about missing children between 2009 and 2011

No.	Callers	% beneficiaries
1.	Family of a missing person	82
2.	Mentally disturbed person	7
3.	Journalist	4
4.	Policeman	3
5.	Runaway	2
6.	Missing	1

Source: data presented by the ITAKA representative at the press conference on 17 May 2012.

The 116 000 annually receives about five thousand calls, of which straight majority (as much as 82%) is made up of family members of missing children worried about them going missing. The missing ones and runaways themselves constitute only 3% of the total helpline beneficiaries. Mentally disturbed people and journalists and policemen professionally dealing with similar problems make up 7% of all beneficiaries. The ITAKA statistics show that of the total number of people looked for, children make up 14% of all looked for by the helpline. The 80% effectiveness in finding missing children is related to the cooperation with police institutions<sup>22</sup>. The ITAKA Foundation operates based on standards mutually worked out for organizations centred around the Missing Children Europe, so in addition to typical search actions, it provides psychological support to parents and guardians of missing children. Part of the ITAKA Foundation structure is not only the Centre Searching for Missing People, but also the Search and Identification Team, which in its work uses the procedures established. While looking for children up to twelve years of age, the Team uses the so called first hour procedure, part of which is:

- reporting the missing child to a police unit and providing full details about the child, putting the child's picture on [www.zaginieni.pl](http://www.zaginieni.pl), in the Base of Missing People, printing posters and placing the picture in the current news of [www.zaginieni.pl](http://www.zaginieni.pl);
- passing the information about the missing child to the media, news bulletins and greatest web portals;
- informing the following services about the missing child: the nearest municipal guards, the fire brigade and a search group with tracking dogs;
- passing the information about the missing child to public transport and taxi corporations in the nearest city or town;
- getting in touch with the child's school staff, arranging for putting up posters with the picture of the missing child;
- getting in touch with the volunteer centre, engaging volunteers to hang up extra posters with the picture of the child;

<sup>22</sup> The agreement between Itaka and the Police Headquarters was made on 25 May 2009. It concerns cooperation in establishing the identity of the missing people and actions preventing cases of going missing and their results.

- informing drivers using CB radio about the missing child;
- passing the information about the missing child to embassies and consulates (if a child was kidnapped to be taken abroad);
- checking systematically information from sources and people who may know something about the missing child's whereabouts;
- initiating international search in touch with organizations associated in the Missing Children Europe;
- cooperating with the People Search and Identification Department of the Police Headquarters;
- provides information related with the search to the family and friends of the missing child<sup>23</sup>.

When a teenager is looked for, the Team undertakes to:

- search on social networks like nasza klasa, facebook, grono, puls;
- get in touch with the teenager's friends by Internet;
- get in touch with the teenager's friends by telephone;
- put up a message about a given missing teenager on portals meant for teenagers;
- carry out mediation, organize social aid and psychological support for the teenager who gets in touch with ITAKA<sup>24</sup>.

Separate procedures are followed when it comes to parental kidnapping. These are cases when one of the parents, not deprived of parental rights, without consulting the other parent takes the child without notifying the other parent about their whereabouts. It is sometimes the case, however, that a kidnapping is done by the parent deprived of parental rights, or not possessing them. Then, ITAKA thinks it proper to start a legal examination of the child's and both parents' situation, in addition to the typical search procedure adopted for children below twelve years of age. Legal aid includes:

- examining the exercise of parental power over the child and legal factors directly connected with the child's kidnapping;
- cooperating with the parent reporting the child's kidnapping for legal solutions suggested for a given situation;
- help with editing court letters;
- proposals for specific legal solutions suitable in a given situation;
- assistance with finding the person representing the parent in court<sup>25</sup>.

Psychological aid, in turn, covers individual help for parents of missing children, taking part in meetings of support groups and conversations with other people who have had similar problems. A guide has been prepared for parents whose runaway children return home, "When the child runs away from home", supporting the process of normalising the relations between the parents and the child on their return. When a runaway ends up dead, the parents can rely on psychological aid during the mourning period in coming to terms with the grief after losing the child. Social aid for parents of missing children focuses on:

- acquiring information about the types of financial help they are entitled to at the centres of social assistance and regional family help centres;
- providing information about benefits and criteria of granting them;
- helping the centre where the missing child was brought up;

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<sup>23</sup> Cf. [www.zaginieni.pl](http://www.zaginieni.pl) [online: 15.07.2014].

<sup>24</sup> Cf. *ibidem*.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. *ibidem*.

- undertaking interventions at centres where the missing child was staying before<sup>26</sup>.

The activities of the ITAKA Foundation and the efficiency of its work was highly evaluated by the Missing Children Europe. The representative of MCE, Margarida Barroso, expressed her recognition in the following words: “I have had a chance to meet a team and I am greatly impressed by the professionalism and involvement of all the workers. The high level of the team deserves special mentioning in the face of current challenges connected with financing activities, with which ITAKA, like most NGOs, must be coping. (...) As a representative of the Missing Children Europe federation, forming an association of European organisations dealing with the problem of missing children, I would like to stress how proud the federation is that the ITAKA Foundation, our member organisation, is one of the first few organisations in Europe to have started the 116 000 service, i.e. the Helpline for the Missing Child”<sup>27</sup>.

### THE 116 123 HELPLINE FOR PEOPLE IN EMOTIONAL CRISIS

The third helpline to be started in Poland from the European group 116 was the 116 123 helpline, created as the Telephone Counselling Clinic for People in Emotional Crisis. It started operating on 18 January 2010 and was a reply to a social demand from people with emotional problems. The Institute of the Health Psychology of the Polish Psychological Society took the factual supervision of its operation and provided specialists to serve it. The line is usually used by adolescent people going through emotional crises with which they cannot cope without professional aid. The clinic’s assumption is that an early psychological or psychiatric help intervention may prevent the crisis from deepening and the arising of disturbances which later on may require longer therapies. Also, the clinic has expanded its operation by running a website [www.116123.edu.pl](http://www.116123.edu.pl) and a Support Forum, [forum.116123.edu.pl](http://forum.116123.edu.pl), on the social network Facebook, making an effort to meet young people’s needs, who are now using the computer more often than any other media.

Since helplines have enjoyed much interest on the part of children and young people, 17 May has been chosen as the Day of the Helpline, whose coordinator is the Nobody’s Children Foundation, a NGO running the 116 111 helpline for children and young people. An important part of the Foundation’s activities is social campaigns concerning the problem of harming children. Part of the campaign was preparing TV spots dealing with violence against children, printing posters, leaflets, billboards, calendars, etc., publicising among wide social circles knowledge about a ban on using violence against children, its influence on the development of the child’s personality, the child’s rights included in the Convention of the Rights of the Child, making the public sensitive to a widely-understood injustice done to the child. In recent years there have been:

- in 2006, “Childhood without violence”;
- in 2007, “The Child, the Witness of Special Care”, “Your Lordship! I am scared”;
- in 2008, “See – Hear – Say”;
- in 2009, “The Child on the Net”;
- in 2010, “The Child - the Witness of Special Care”, “Your Lordship! I have the right to be scared”;
- in 2011, “Bad Touch” – a campaign directed at parents, guardians, teachers, psychologists, ,\*[www.zlydotyk.pl](http://www.zlydotyk.pl);

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<sup>26</sup> Cf. *ibidem*.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibidem*.

- in 2012, “Words harm for all life” – a campaign against verbal violence against children;
- in 2013, “Words give power” – a campaign directed at parents and guardians helping them realise how important it is for the child to have positive messages, which remind children that they are accepted, loved and can rely on the dear ones’ support;
- in 2014, “Don’t look away” – an international campaign against sexual abuse of children in the context of tourism and travelling, i.e. the so called sex tourism, carried out since June 17 in cooperation with the Police Headquarters, with the support from ECPAT – an international network of NGOs, and Europol and Interpol also in other countries: Luxemburg, Germany, Austria, France, Belgium, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Italy, Romania, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and Great Britain<sup>28</sup>.

In addition to the Nobody’s Children Foundation, other organisation running helplines also carry out social campaigns publicising this type of assistance, at the same time making the public or its definite groups sensitive to the problems which the helplines are trying to solve. An important activity in this respect is carried out by the Polish Group of Sex Educators “Ponton”, which in addition to serving a helpline also organises social campaigns. In 2012, a street campaign “Infect with Love, don’t infect with HIV” was held on Valentine’s Day, i.e. the Lovers’ Holiday<sup>29</sup>. The need to expand sex education among young people is confirmed by phone calls and text messages, especially frequent during summer holidays from teenagers, proving they do not possess the knowledge about contraception, early pregnancy, responsibility for the partner, sexually transmitted diseases, etc.

The ITAKA Foundation chose 25 May as the day of the social campaign – the Day of the Missing Child<sup>30</sup>, which is an opportunity to publicise the problem of missing children and the reasons thereof, and also to popularise the rules favourable to the prevention of children going missing. The campaigns made it a point that:

- “a little child can never be left alone, unattended (an example of an unacceptable situation is leaving a child in a pram in front of the shop);
- a child should know their first and family name as early as possible, which is also true of the parents’ names;
- children under ten should not play alone in the yard (looking out of the window once in a few minutes is not proper care);
- on a walk, in a supermarket, at an event it is the parent who should take care of the child, the child should not follow the parent;
- a child should know they should not talk to strangers or accept any presents or sweets from them”<sup>31</sup>.

In the campaign “Don’t run away”, directed at young people and their parents, attention was drawn to the reasons for running away, solving conflicts, improving communication, understanding the role of the parent for satisfying the child’s mental needs. Campaigns emphasise how the following things are important to the child’s mental balance:

- daily conversations, devoting time to matters of importance to them;
- listening carefully, without criticising;

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<sup>28</sup> Cf. [www.gostyn.policja.gov.pl/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=1312&Itemid=22](http://www.gostyn.policja.gov.pl/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1312&Itemid=22) [online: 15.07.2014].

<sup>29</sup> Cf. [www.ponton.org.pl](http://www.ponton.org.pl) [online: 15.07.2014].

<sup>30</sup> 25 May was announced as the Day of the Missing Child by the US president in 1983. On that day, a six-year-old boy went missing on his way to school, and has not been found to this day.

<sup>31</sup> [www.dgpr.pl/tag/zaginiecie-dzieci/](http://www.dgpr.pl/tag/zaginiecie-dzieci/) [online: 15.07.2014].

- emotional ties, expressing emotions, telling the child they are loved;
- showing interest in their matters, devoting time to them, no presents as a recompense for having no time for them;
- creating a friendly home atmosphere (peace, acceptance, safety);
- treating them with respect and respecting their dignity;
- showing appreciation to the child;
- accepting the child (both when they are successful and when they lose);
- showing them love, supporting all their activities and belief in their capabilities;
- even when they run away, analysing the reasons and an attempt to understand the motives as well as repairing the mutual relations with the child;
- the parent should not evade problems, but try to solve them along with the child”<sup>32</sup>.

The activity of NGOs for the development of helplines in Poland favours the implementation of the child's rights guaranteed in 1989, in the Convention of the Rights of the Child. Children and young people have a chance to turn to anonymous specialists for help in the atmosphere of discretion and trust. The organisations running helplines systematically modify their work according to the children's changing needs. They expand assistance types to Internet contacts so that the greatest number of children in a state of crisis can make use of the assistance, being protected from reckless decisions, suicidal thoughts, etc. After years of experience, helplines want to comprehensively solve problems of present-day families and children that are being brought up in them. They hold extensive social campaigns serving to inform the public and look for constructive methods of solving problems for the XXI century children and young people.

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<sup>32</sup> [www.nieuciekaj.pl/dlaczego\\_dzieci\\_uciekaja.php](http://www.nieuciekaj.pl/dlaczego_dzieci_uciekaja.php) [online: 15.07.2014].