

The Importance of Having Someone to Talk To

A report about childhood experiences and teenage suicide and accidental death

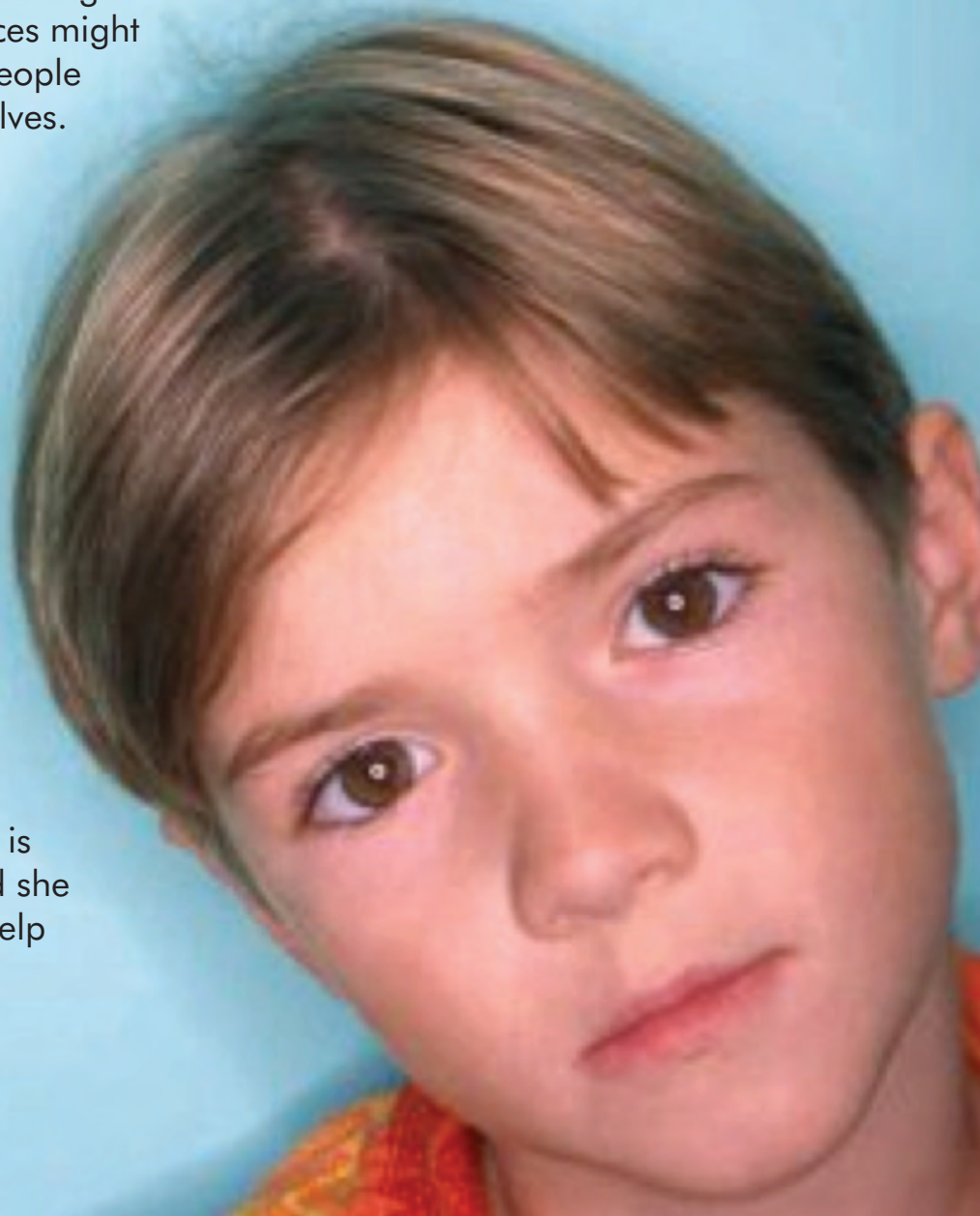
What is this report about?

This report is about the challenges some young people face in their life, the impact these challenges have on their wellbeing and how professionals and services might get involved before young people think about harming themselves.

What is NICCY?

The Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (also known as 'NICCY') promotes and safeguards children's rights and best interests.

NICCY's job is to make sure Government respects children's rights and best interests. The Commissioner is Patricia Lewsley-Mooney and she has a team of people who help her in her work.



In reading this report if you are worried about yourself or a friend then please talk to someone.

Young people who want to harm themselves need someone who will talk with them privately in an open and honest way, who will listen to them and help them find the help they need.

If you feel you can't speak to an adult you trust like a parent or teacher, then please contact ChildLine or Lifeline. They both offer confidential advice and support to young people, are open 24 hours a day and it won't cost you anything to contact them.



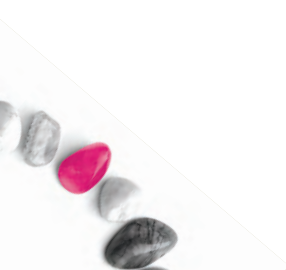
www.childline.org.uk

You can contact ChildLine by calling, emailing or chatting online



www.lifelinehelpline.info

You can also contact Lifeline by textphone on 18001 0808 808 8000



What is the UNCRC?

Children's rights are listed in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, also known as the 'UNCRC'.

The UK Government signed up to this in 1990. This means it has promised to respect the rights of children and young people and to make sure that all children enjoy their rights equally.

The UNCRC protects different rights which are important for children. This includes the right to:

- Be heard and have their views taken seriously
- Be healthy
- Get a proper education
- Be supported in their family or wherever they live.

Most importantly, the UNCRC says that the best interests of children should always be considered when adults are making decisions about them.

The UNCRC and this report

The UNCRC says that children and young people should be protected from all forms of harm, abuse and violence and that they should get the help and support they need to cope with any problems they have.



Why we have written this report

Being a teenager should be a great time in life. For example young people can:

- Be more independent of family, such as going out without needing a parent
- Have more of a say, such as choosing subjects to study
- Develop new important relationships.

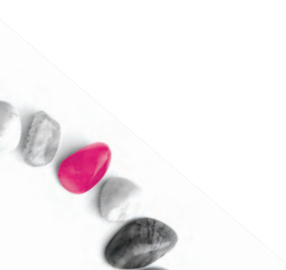
But we also know that this isn't the case for every young person.

NICCY is concerned that a small number of teenagers who have had very difficult experiences in childhood can continue to be affected by these when they are teenagers and young adults.

This can leave them feeling unhappy or that they can't cope and sometimes this may lead them to harm themselves.

NICCY asked researchers at Queen's University Belfast and the NSPCC to find out more about this.

To write this report the researchers read reports and research studies as well as looking at cases in Northern Ireland where young people had harmed themselves or died by suicide.



Young people in Northern Ireland

In Northern Ireland most young people find adolescence a very enjoyable time in their life, even if it is a time of change – moving school, going through puberty, starting to do new things and taking greater responsibility.

This can be exciting and scary all at the same time. Teenagers usually find that they get support from their friends and their family with any problems they might face.

However, for some young people the problems they experience are more significant. Examples of this include having to cope with family changes due to separation or divorce, bereavement, living with domestic violence or being bullied. Some teenagers may experience emotional, physical or sexual abuse or neglect.





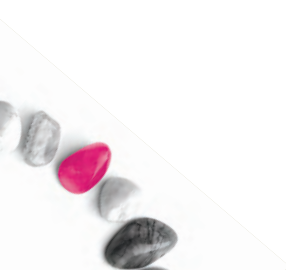
In Northern Ireland each year a small number of teenagers and young adults die by suicide – that is, they cause harm to themselves with the purpose of ending their life.

During 2011, 25 young people aged under 20 years died in this way.

Some teenagers and young adults who have faced serious problems do not harm themselves but feel unhappy and worry that things won't get better.

Sometimes adults such as parents and professionals like teachers, youth workers, doctors or social workers are able to offer support and a chance to talk about what is going on. We know that this helps and makes a positive difference.

But some teenagers and young adults don't feel they can talk to anyone and feel lonely and isolated. To escape these feelings and problems some young people might drink, take drugs or sniff solvents and this can put them at greater risk of harming themselves – either accidentally or deliberately.





What we found out

There has been a lot of research undertaken to try and understand why some young people harm themselves.

Studies show that they usually had to cope with a lot of serious problems early in their life.

Even though some of these things may have happened in the past, they can still affect the young person and how they are able to deal with issues as they become older. This is because experiences in childhood affect how we learn to cope with difficult problems.

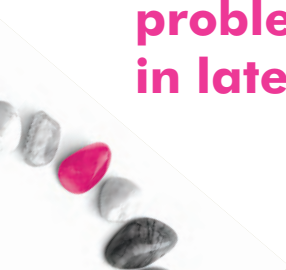
Young people can be more affected by what has happened if they have experienced lots of problems and these problems have lasted for a long time.



Examples of problems include:

- Being bullied by peers
- Experiencing abuse or neglect
- Living in poverty
- Living in a family where there is domestic violence
- Having a parent who has mental health difficulties
- Living in a family where a parent is in prison
- Experience of a parent dying
- Living in a family where alcohol or drugs are misused.

It is important to remember that every young person will be affected differently so not all young people facing these problems will have difficulties in later life.



How support for young people should be improved

While it is very hard to stop some of these problems in childhood, teenagers have told researchers that it is possible to help them to deal with these issues through providing support and someone who can be trusted to talk to.

To help this:

- **There should be better information for children and young people about self harm and suicide**
- **Young people should be supported to talk to adults like parents, teachers and social workers about how they are feeling. This is very important when adults know that young people are dealing with big issues in their lives**
- **Professionals should remember that even though they are becoming adults, teenagers still need help and support. It is very important that adults remember this when young people might be using alcohol or drugs or are seen by professionals as being hard to help and support.**

What Government should do

To help young people who are experiencing difficulties Government should:

- Make sure professionals and services think about the impact of childhood experiences when supporting young people as teenagers
- Make sure someone coordinates the help a young person gets when lots of organisations are involved in their life
- Provide more training for professionals such as teachers, doctors and social workers to look for signs of depression in young people
- Make sure services working with families get involved as soon as help is needed and stay involved for longer in order to reduce the problems that cause teenagers to be worried and unhappy
- Make sure services for young people are better designed and easy to use
- Undertake research to make sure children and young people are provided with the most effective help.

What NICCY will do

NICCY will talk to Government and other organisations that support children, young people and families about this report and what it recommends Government should do.

NICCY will check if the recommendations have been carried out so it is easier for young people to get the help and support they need.





northern ireland commissioner
for children and young people

We have also written a bigger report about this research. You can find out more about this and NICCY's work by contacting us:

**Northern Ireland Commissioner
for Children and Young People**

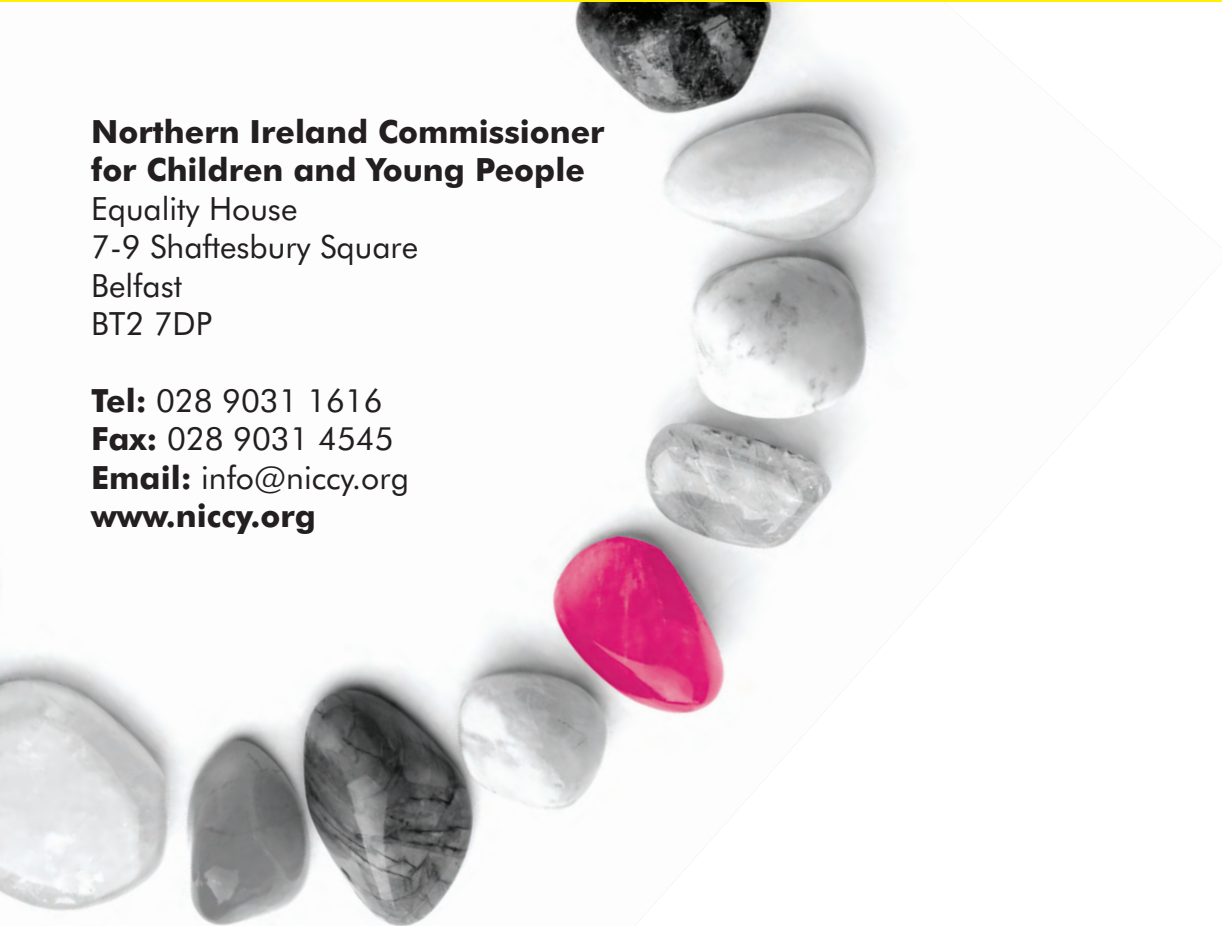
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You can also contact us by Minicom on **028 9031 6393**, or by using the Relay Services to contact NICCY's telephone number (**028 9031 1616**)

Please contact the Communications team at NICCY if you require alternative formats of this material.

This report was written for NICCY by Queen's University Belfast and the NSPCC.

ISBN: 1905719167



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