



TALKING FAMILIES
TALKING COMMUNITIES



FOREWORD

As a dad of three girls I was surprised by the results of the research we have recently commissioned into parent/child communication. These showed that children were in some cases twice as likely to talk to friends if they had a problem or were unhappy about something than their parents – and especially their dads.

In fact, even more disturbing is that 1 in 10 children don't feel that they can talk to anyone at all if they are unhappy or have a problem.

'Talking' or 'chatting', having a face-to-face conversation, whatever we may want to call it, is so important if we are to pick up the hidden signs of an unhappy child. And, more than this, developing a 'community of friends' around them that they feel they can talk to has never been more important.

This report highlights the need for us to understand when is the right time to talk to our children, how to initiate a conversation and how to spot the tell-tale signs of an unhappy child. It gives advice from the experts at ChildLine for parents, like me, on how to get more out of chatting to our children.

There are also enlightening examples of how, when adults and children do get 'talking', it has a really positive effect on families and communities.

Ensuring that children will always have someone who they can talk to is why Calor is supporting ChildLine through its year long 'Gift of the Gas' fundraising campaign. When I first met with ChildLine I was dismayed to discover that each day they receive 2,300 calls from children who need someone to talk to – but the enormous demand for the service means that hundreds more are unable to get through.

Calor aims to raise awareness of the importance of 'talking' to our children, our friends, family, neighbours and even our wider communities, and to raise funds to ensure that, should a child have nowhere else to turn, they can always talk to ChildLine.

Paul Blacklock

CALOR



IS TALKING LOSING OUT IN OUR HECTIC LIVES?

“The cement of all relationships is talk. If you are not talking to each other you are not involved in each other’s lives and that’s what ties you together.”
(Pat Spungin, www.raisingkids.co.uk)

It’s good to talk. Right from the day they’re born, children communicate their needs and feelings. Through talk and play, they learn vital social skills: how to listen, how to share and how to negotiate. Even during teenage years, when a cloud of grunts and sulks may have descended, talking and listening are vital.

Talking is not just good for families – it’s also the glue that keeps communities together. Knowing your neighbours and having the time to stop for a chat helps create a strong neighbourhood, as much in the inner city as in rural areas.

But is talking losing out nowadays? Have we lost the ability to just sit and have a chat, or spend a few minutes gossiping with our neighbours in the street? Is there evidence that we do really lead such high-octane lives that we have no time to talk?

On the face of it, the evidence suggests yes. A combination of pressures has changed the way we communicate – with our families and with our neighbours.

WORK, WORK, WORK

- More parents are working. Over half of women with a child under two, and around 80% of women with dependent children, now work. More parents working means less time at home and also less time available for shopping, chatting and volunteering locally.¹
- People are working longer hours. Britain has the longest working hours in Europe – an average of 44 hours a week, compared with a European average of 40.5 hours.² And as many as one in five British workers is regularly working at least 49 hours a week.
- The growth of the 24/7 economy means that far more parents now work evenings, weekends and shifts. One in five mothers is now at work before her children go to school.³

TALKING OR TECHNOLOGY?

Children are spending more time sitting inside and far less time playing outside. But when they are inside, they are not necessarily talking to their family:

- One survey estimates that young people spend over 50 hours a week in front of computer screens, either on the internet, watching DVDs or playing video games.⁴
- Three quarters of children between 11 and 14 have a TV in their bedroom; 25% have their own computer and 66% have their own computer game console. In a Mintel survey, 51% of children said they preferred to spend time on their own, and three out of five young teenagers said that everyone at home was free to get on with their own lives and interests.⁵

ARE CHILDREN NO LONGER SEEN AND HEARD IN THEIR COMMUNITIES?

- More than one third of children never play outside (but two thirds of parents worry about letting their children play outside).⁶
- Fewer children walk or cycle to school than in the past. In 1971 over 90% of ten year olds walked to school. In 2002, 54% walked to school.
- Research from the Children’s Play Council asked more than 2,500 children what stopped them playing outside.⁷ The answer? Being told off by adults and threatened for activities such as riding a bike in the street.

PRESSURE TO BE THE PERFECT PARENT

Parents are under pressure. They are expected to be far more involved parents than even a generation ago. The old pattern of children playing in or out of the house while the parent (usually the mother) did domestic chores has been superseded by a faster, more timetabled family life – quality time with the children is just one more job to be squeezed in. But, as parenting skills come increasingly under the spotlight in public policy, parents often find themselves blamed for all sorts of problems, from truancy and youth crime to obesity and fitness.

1. Social Trends 33, The Stationery Office, 2003

2. The Social Situation in the European Union, Eurostat, 2002

3. Happy Families? A typical work and its influence on family life, Ivana la Valle, National Centre for Social Research, 2002

4. Youth TGI Data, BMRB, www.bmrb.co.uk

5. Mintel consumer report, reported in Daily Telegraph, 05.11.2004

6. Children and Play, Royal Bank of Scotland, September 2004

7. Research released by Children’s Society and the Children’s Play Council, August 2003

ChildLine counsellors spoke to over 141,000 children and young people last year about all kinds of problems. Many of these children told ChildLine that they felt unsure about how to talk to their family or friends about a problem. In such situations, ChildLine’s counsellors work with children to identify someone in their lives who they can talk to – such as a family member, teacher or other trusted adult – and rehearse with them the kinds of things they could say. For some children, talking to ChildLine is the key that unlocks the door to better communication with their friends, family and wider community. Here is what some children say to ChildLine:

“I’d like to talk to my mum but she’s a workaholic and goes straight up to the study when she comes in.” (Curtis, 14)

“I try to talk to him but he won’t listen to what I have to say.” (Zoe, 12)

ARE PARENTS AND CHILDREN TALKING?

A CALOR SURVEY

Have families really become a group of individuals going about their business in the house on their own, with little shared time together? Is there really as little communication going on as some of the evidence suggests? Should we as parents be worried about reports that suggest our children may be losing interest in communicating face to face?

Calor, the company behind BBQ and Patio Gas, commissioned research with YouGov over a two week period in March 2005, to look at the quality of parent/child communication today. They also wanted to see how well families were connecting with their local communities.

939 parents, 324 young people aged 12-15 and 375 young children aged 7-11 were asked a series of questions about face-to-face conversations.



KEY FINDINGS

DO CHILDREN LIKE TO TALK TO THEIR PARENTS?

- Young people (aged 12-15) are almost twice as likely to enjoy talking to people their own age than their parents (89% vs 47%). They would rather watch television (88%), play video games (58%), eat sweets (50%) and even read books (50%) than talk to their parents!
- Younger children (aged 7-11) are almost twice as likely to enjoy watching TV (82%) to talking to their parents (46%).
- But, it's not all bad news; on average, young people aged 12-15 talk to their parents about five times on a school day. Younger children (aged 7-11) are more frequent 'chatters' with 38% of them saying they talk eleven times or more to their parents on a school day and even more (47%) saying they talk more than this at weekends.
- 6% of young people (aged 12-15) said they never have chats with their parents on a school day. This figure was even higher (11%) for 14 year olds.

HOW LONG DO THEY CHAT FOR?

- Over half (52%) of children aged 12-15 chat to their parents for less than 10 minutes on average. Only 2% of chats are over half an hour.
- In general, the younger the child the longer the chat – 20% of nine year olds say they have chats that are over half an hour in length compared to just 2% of fifteen year olds.
- Whatever the age, parents and children agree that they are most likely to talk about each other's news and what happened at school.
- Both age groups were in agreement that they don't want to chat more frequently. 62% of young people (aged 12-15) thought they talked just about the right amount with their parents. Whilst just over half of younger children (53%) agreed with this.
- Younger boys (aged 7-11) wanted less talking (19%) compared to just 5% of younger girls.

WHEN DO THEY CHAT?

- Family mealtimes are the most commonly cited time for chatting. 57% of young people (aged 12-15) said that this is when they tend to talk most to their parents. 36% say their parents just come and talk to them, whilst for 28% it's during car trips. For younger children (aged 7-11), bedtimes and holidays are also times for chats.

KEY FINDINGS

WHO DO CHILDREN TURN TO WITH A PROBLEM OR A WORRY?

- Three in five (60%) of young people (aged 12-15) would turn to a school friend if they had a bad day at school.
- Even when young people (aged 12-15) have a problem or are unhappy about something they are almost as likely to turn to a school friend (30%) as they are to their mum (34%). Not surprisingly younger children are more likely to go to mum (51%) as their first port of call though other members of the family, siblings, aunts, grandparents and cousins also feature with young children.
- Sadly, dads didn't feature very highly as confidantes with the 12-15 year olds. Only a quarter of young people said they would talk to their dad if they had a bad day at school and only 3% if they had a problem or were unhappy about something.
- The situation is not much rosier for dads with younger children – just 12% said that they would go to dad if they were unhappy or had a problem. The percentage decreases as children get older, from a high 21% of seven to eight year olds to just 10% of 11 year olds.
- 7% of 12-15 year olds and 5% of 7-11 year olds said they would not talk to anyone if they were unhappy.


DOES CHATTING MAKE CHILDREN FEEL BETTER?

- Half of young people aged 12-15 (51%) said that chatting to their parents was 'helpful' and 64% of younger children agreed with this statement.
- Interestingly, girls become far more negative towards the usefulness of chatting as they get older. Girls aged 12-15 are more likely than boys to find chats 'boring' (34% vs 22%); a waste of time (20% vs 15%) and unhelpful (14% vs 8%).
- And yet, the situation is the opposite in younger children aged 7-11. Here, 15% of boys compared to 9% of girls thought chats with their parents were a waste of time. 72% of younger girls vs 56% of younger boys thought chats were 'fun' and 70% of younger girls vs 54% of younger boys said that chats with their parents made them 'feel better'.
- Parents think they reprimand their children infrequently. Only 11% said a conversation usually involved a reprimand. Whereas 25% of children aged 7-11 say that a face-to-face chat usually involves them being told off. Whilst for 12-15 year olds, this percentage increases to 39%.
- Younger children are far more likely to feel that their parent is praising them (56%) than telling them off (25%) – unlike the older children. However, boys in this age group are far more likely to feel told off (30%) than girls (19%).

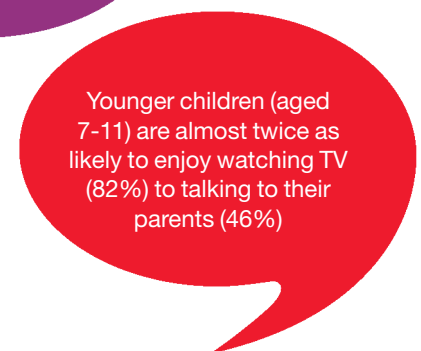
DO THE CHILDREN'S ANSWERS REFLECT ADULT PERCEPTIONS?

Adults are generally more enthusiastic and optimistic about communication with their children:

- Virtually no adults say they never chat on a school day, compared to 6% of young people (12-15 year olds) who believe they never talk to their parents on a school day.
- A huge 85% of adults think that they communicate well with their children. The message from the young people (12-15 year olds) is less straightforward: two out of five respondents from this group felt that their parents usually listened to them (40%), 24% thought they sometimes did and 14% thought they didn't listen very much or at all.
- Both mothers and fathers believed that if their child has a bad day at school or is unhappy about something they would discuss it with their mother (89%), followed by their father (55%), followed by friends from school (42%). The actual picture from young people (12-15 year olds) was very different. For this age group mum is on a par with friends from school and only 3% would talk to dad if they were unhappy about something.
- Mums are making more of an effort to initiate conversations, 75% of mums say they initiate a conversation every day, compared to 59% of dads.
- Over half (55%) of dads would like to talk more than they do now with their children, compared to 45% of mums.



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of 12-15 year olds said they would not talk to anyone if they were unhappy



Younger children (aged 7-11) are almost twice as likely to enjoy watching TV (82%) to talking to their parents (46%)

TALKING ABOUT THE STORY BEHIND THE STATS

Conversations between parent and child appear to be frequent and, with the majority under ten minutes in length, short.

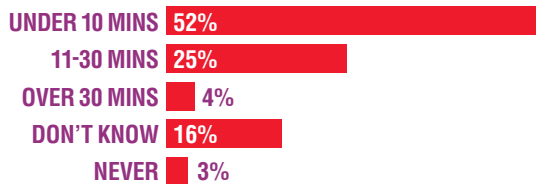
ADULTS

AVERAGE LENGTH OF CONVERSATION



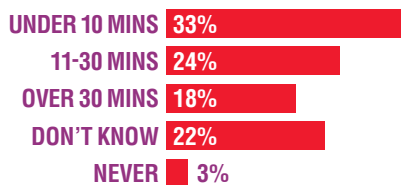
YOUNG PEOPLE (12-15 YEAR OLDS)

AVERAGE LENGTH OF CONVERSATION



YOUNG CHILDREN (7-11 YEAR OLDS)

AVERAGE LENGTH OF CONVERSATION



From the answers given by both parents and children, **the conversations appear to centre around exchange of news and what happened at school.** And, whilst this frequent communication is encouraging, it can be hard to talk to each other about more emotional or difficult subjects in less than ten minutes. Parents may be grateful that their children are talking to them at all, but maybe they should also be aware of what their children are not saying.

Fathers seem to be having a rough time. Despite many fathers being more involved with their children's upbringing than their fathers would have been, and despite the increased recognition that fathers are important in children's development, this survey showed a low level of interaction between father and child. **Only six per cent of fathers have conversations averaging over 15 minutes with their children.** Only three per cent of young people (12-15 age group) would talk to their fathers if they were unhappy – in this age group there were more children who would talk to no-one than talk to their dad. Part of the reason may well be that fathers simply aren't around as much, particularly taking children to and from school, and after school.

Friends from school are almost as important confidantes as parents – especially with younger people (aged 12-15). It is easy to see why when friendships at school break down children can become so unhappy. Girls in the older age group (12-15) are far more likely than boys to talk to their school friends if they have a problem or a difficult day at school (65% vs 50%) – and for girls they are 11% more likely to talk to their school friends than their mum (65% vs 54%).

When 'unhappy about something' 12-15 year old girls are almost as likely to talk to their school friends as they are to their mum, whilst twice as many boys would talk to their mum rather than their school friends (41% vs 22%).

Younger children mirror the responses of the older children to an extent. **Whilst younger children were more likely to talk to their mothers when they were unhappy,** this number was still only just over a half (51%) of all 7-11 year olds.

The survey highlights that face-to-face parent/child communication is valued by both parents and children, but that young people also look to their friends to talk, particularly if something is worrying them. Sometimes children feel unable to talk to their parents about a particular issue, even though they may be happy to chat. **It's very important that they have someone else to turn to.** That person is likely to be a friend, but equally could be a grandparent, sibling, cousin, friend's parent or teacher.

HOW CAN WE COMMUNICATE BETTER?

Parents can help their children talk to them by making sure that they are alert to signs that their child wants to do more than just chat. Different parents have tried different ways of providing opportunities to talk. Many families find that doing something together, from washing up to football to even watching television, can make it easier for the child to speak out.

As part of this research, we talked to some families about what works for them.

Kim, a single working mum, has a son aged 12.

“Now he’s getting older we’ll often sit and watch TV together. I’ll watch the football with him and programmes such as ‘Never Mind the Buzzcocks’ – he doesn’t always get the jokes but it’s a good way to get us talking. It’s quite noticeable how Sam’s attitude towards talking to me changes when his friends are around. Suddenly he’s far ‘cooler’ in both senses of the word!”

Mark says: *“When my first wife and I split up I made a decision to ensure that every night at 6pm I would call my sons – wherever I was, whatever I was doing. It didn’t matter if they had nothing to say... it was my way of ensuring that I stayed very much in touch with what was going on in their lives each day. I think it was one of the best decisions I’ve ever made.”*

Darren, who has a 15 year old daughter, says: *“I’ve always found that comedy is a great way of breaking down the barriers to a difficult subject, that, and talking at their level. I try not to reprimand my children but to talk with them rather than at them.”*

Liz talking about her son, Oliver aged 9: *“When he was younger we got into the habit of creating a bedtime story based all around a little boy called Oliver James Wright (that’s Oliver’s full name). Either Paul or I, would start it off and get Oliver to fill in the gaps... so for example we’d say ‘Oliver James Wright had had a busy day at school doing... the people who were nice to him were... and those who were not so nice were...’. It was a really fun way of eliciting information and finding out how Oliver was feeling.”*

The techniques used by ChildLine’s helpline volunteers can also be useful for parents to think about when they are talking and listening to the children in their lives. Natasha Finlayson, ChildLine’s Director of Policy and Communications, offers some talking tips for parents.

Talking and listening are two sides of the same coin.

Just hearing the words a child is saying to you isn’t the same as truly listening and understanding what they need from you. Why not try to make sure they have your full attention, even if only for a little while, so you can really focus and listen?

Sometimes the best conversations are the unexpected ones.

A young person – or you for that matter – might be more comfortable talking about tricky stuff while doing something else. Maybe the TV’s on, or you’re playing a game, or even washing up. If you’re in an everyday situation, talking about something difficult or embarrassing might be easier.

Don’t blind them with science.

It can be tempting to give too much information – especially if you feel your child has put you on the spot about a difficult subject, like sex and relationships. Try to keep your answers short and sweet – that way your child will have the opportunity to think about what you’ve said and come back with more questions.

Keep your emotions steady.

If you have a disagreement with your child remember to keep control of your own emotions. Ask for your child’s opinion and really listen to what they have to say, even if you don’t agree – they are more likely to talk about what is really bothering them. Let your child know what effect their behaviour has on you, and keep them involved in making things better – maybe you could ask how they can help to keep any agreements that have been made.

Dads – don’t despair!

Many dads want to be more involved with their children. You might find that it’s easier to talk if you are doing something with them. Taking them to the park, or playing sports with your children will give you more opportunities for chat. Don’t worry if the chat stays casual – you are showing that you are there for them, and they won’t forget it.

Can a parent be a friend and a parent?

It’s great to have an open and close relationship with your children. Whether it’s exciting news or something they need help with, listening when a child turns to you can bring you closer together and make for a happier family. You won’t lose out as a parent by taking time to listen to the children in your life – in fact they will probably respect you and listen to what you have to say even more.

ChildLine can help children and young people talk to their parents or other adults. Sometimes children feel unable to talk – they feel their parents are not interested, or too busy, or will be angry if they talk to them about the problem. ChildLine can help by talking things through with the child, and rehearse with them the kind of things they could say when they are talking to their parents.

“After I talked to you (ChildLine counsellor) last week, I told my mum about the bullying. She went into school and sorted it out. Everything’s okay again, and I’m not scared to go to school any more. I’m really glad I rang ChildLine.”

TALKING FAMILIES HELP TALKING COMMUNITIES

Does encouraging children to talk help develop family links with the wider community? Neighbours and the wider community are very important to family life. People often depend on their neighbours for acts of kindness like holding a spare key or feeding the pets. But the wider community also plays a vital role in providing a safe and secure place for children to grow up, from playing in the street when they are young, to gaining independence in their teenage years. Knowing and trusting neighbours can help parents and children feel more secure when their children start going out on their own.

Helping children to develop a 'community of friends' who they can turn to is one of ChildLine's aims when a child phones. In 2003/04, 166 children phoning ChildLine spoke to their neighbours about a worry they had – they talked about bullying, being hit and physically abused, and about problems within their families. Although this is a small proportion of ChildLine's total number of calls, it illustrates that for some children, neighbours are important people in their lives.

WHAT DO WE THINK ABOUT OUR NEIGHBOURHOOD?

Do we really know our neighbours any more?

Is it a myth that people living in rural areas are friendlier than their inner city counterparts? Do suburban dwellers have a sense of neighbourhood?

Everyone is very interested in how communities work because the Government and others realise that they don't just live in families, they live within a community too. The better people feel about their neighbourhood, the less likely there is to be a high rate of crime, vandalism, neglect and fear. When asked what makes a good neighbourhood,⁸ people listed a friendly community, quiet area, low crime and access to town and shops. They also pin-pointed decent public transport, clean streets, low level of traffic, access to leisure and open spaces.

In the same research, 74% of people thought that their neighbourhood was a good place to live. The longer people live in a neighbourhood, the more likely they were to enjoy it and the more likely to trust their neighbours.⁹ Surveys suggest that whilst there seems to be little difference between urban and rural dwellers, people living in the south tend to be more mobile, with less interest in neighbourhood issues, whereas people living in the north are likely to move around less and to have friends and family living nearby.¹⁰

So, are we chatting with our neighbours?

We wanted to find out how important the neighbourhood is for parents and children. Do children and young people know their neighbours, do they still play out with local children, and do their parents also have a relationship with people in their area?



BRINGING A FRESH LOOK TO THE PLAYGROUND IN TALYBONT, GWYNEDD

8. Making Britain Family Friendly, National Family and Parenting Institute, 2003
9. Citizenship Survey, Home Office, January 2004
10. British Household Panel Survey, 2002

KEY FINDINGS

KNOWING YOUR NEIGHBOURS

There was a positive and reassuring message about neighbours from both adults and children:

- A large majority (73%) of adult respondents knew the neighbours on both sides of their houses, and almost 40% knew the neighbours living opposite.
- The majority of young people (12-15 year olds) and young children (7-11 year olds) knew their neighbours on either side of their house, and almost half of 12-15 year olds who responded knew the neighbours opposite.
- If their neighbours are their own age, 12-15 year olds mostly hang out together, go to the park or watch television.
- Younger children are mostly likely to go to each other's birthday parties, and play in the street or the park. They also play in each other's houses. They were slightly more likely to play out if they lived in the inner city (52%) than in rural areas (48%).
- Fewer adults under 35 (62%) knew neighbours on either side of them than over 35 – the proportion increased with the age of the respondent.
- Adults living in the inner city knew their neighbours slightly less well. 71% of those living in urban areas knew their neighbours on both sides, whereas 77% of adults living in rural areas knew their neighbours on both sides.

TALKING TO YOUR NEIGHBOURS

- Nearly seven in ten adults speak to their neighbours at least once a week. However, 20% thought they only talked about once or twice a month, and 15% thought they talked only a handful of times a year or not at all.
- Adult respondents did do things with or for the neighbours, but none of the activities scored very highly: most common was having a spare key to the house (30%) and looking after pets whilst their neighbours were away (26%). Less common were social get togethers – only one in five invited their neighbours over for dinner or barbecues.
- There was some variation between those who live in rural areas, and those who live in towns or the inner city. Generally, people in rural areas are more likely to help out, with looking after pets, having a key or baby sitting their children. They are also more likely to socialise with their neighbours, 25% would have them over for a barbecue, compared to 19% of inner city dwellers.
- Almost half of all adults (46%) said they 'did nothing' with their neighbours.



46%

Almost half of all adults (46%) said they 'did nothing' with their neighbours

15% of adults thought they talked to their neighbours only a handful of times a year or not at all



15%

WHY IT'S GOOD TO NATTER WITH THE NEIGHBOURS

Whilst adults appear to be doing a reasonable amount of talking with their neighbours, there would seem to be less social interaction amongst adults than perhaps there is with their children. The survey suggests that parents' sense of neighbourhood is limited to their children's friends, rather than seeing neighbourliness as a social good in its own right. Whilst it's great to pass the time of day on the street, there seems to be some reticence in taking the relationship further. Could people be shy about developing closer friendships with their neighbours? What can be done to encourage people to reach out and make connections in their own neighbourhood?

BE A GOOD NEIGHBOUR – A FEW TALKING TIPS

Neighbours may play an important role in your child's life, particularly as they grow up. Get to know them. You never know when you might need to call on them, or when you might be able to help them.

Encourage your children to play outside. Not only is it good for their health, but it helps to develop friendships with other local children, and through them, the parents.

As children grow up, it's reassuring to know that there are people you know and trust locally. That's not to say that you should encourage your children to talk with people they don't know, but the more trusted adults your newly independent teenager knows, the safer they will feel out and about... and the more information you'll get about their activities!

It really pays to make time to slow down and take the chance to enjoy being local. Do local activities with your family: the park, the cafes, the swimming pool, local clubs.

HOW TALKING CAN BRING COMMUNITIES TOGETHER

Listening to teenagers in Coaley, Gloucestershire

Coaley, situated near Stroud, is a village with a primary school, church, village hall, pub and community shop. But it is different from many villages because it has worked hard to fulfil the needs of all its residents, young and old. The school runs many after school clubs and the school council is made up of representatives of all ages, who also attend the parish council meeting. However, it is in its attitude and willingness to talk with its young people that Coaley, 2003 Calor Village of the Year® for the South West and Western England, deserves an accolade.

When a bus shelter was vandalised by some local teenagers, the parish council offered them a chance to paint it according to their own design. The bus shelter is now shades of lilac, blue and purple, but since the teenagers were consulted and given 'ownership' of the shelter there has been little vandalism, and a request to the council for the installation of a bench has been agreed.

COMMUNITY SPIRIT IN ACTION, LONG CRENDON, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE





THE GIFT OF THE GAS CAMPAIGN

From 1st May 2005, Calor is encouraging groups of friends, families, neighbours and entire communities to fire up their barbecues as part of its 'Gift of the Gas' campaign – a year-long initiative which aims to fund and train more volunteer counsellors and pay for more phone calls from children to ChildLine. Barbecues are an ideal way to get people together and involved – which as our research shows is a great way to strike up a conversation. To help make it easy for everyone to get involved and to raise as much money as possible, Calor is providing inspiring barbecue recipes, fundraising tips and a downloadable barbecue invitation at its website – www.caloralfresco.co.uk

Esther Rantzen, ChildLine's chair and founder, said:
"Every day calls from around 2,300 children are answered by ChildLine, but the enormous demand for our service means that hundreds more who may be desperate for help are unable to get through.

"Calor is helping to raise funds in aid of ChildLine to ensure that more children reach the vital support, advice and protection our helpline counsellors provide. Please give your support to the 'Gift of the Gas' campaign by hosting a fundraising barbecue this summer and help ChildLine to change more children's lives."

Esther Rantzen



NIKKI, AGED 13, WAS PROMPTED TO CALL CHILDLINE BY HER TEACHER BECAUSE SHE SAID, “SHE NOTICED I WAS A BIT QUIET IN CLASS.”

Nikki told the counsellor she was worried about missing time at school because of a family holiday. ***“I’ve just started at my new school this term. We’re going on holiday soon, and I’m going to miss the first day of next term because we won’t get back in time. I’ll miss getting my timetable so I won’t know what’s going on – I’ll be behind everyone else.”***

The counsellor asked Nikki whether she’d talked to her family about the timing of the holiday. Nikki said, ***“I can’t really talk to my mum about it. She had my baby brother a few months ago and now I don’t really get a look in. My dad works long hours, so he’s not around much either.”***

Nikki told the counsellor she had already tried talking to her mother about wanting to spend more time with her. ***“My mum does know I feel a bit left out because of the baby, and she was trying a bit before. But she’s never on her own for me to talk to her.”***

Together, Nikki and her counsellor worked out a plan for Nikki to try out. She felt her teacher might be able to help and decided to ask if she could have her timetable before the end of term. She was also keen to try again to talk to her mother and the counsellor helped her practice what she wanted to say. They also discussed what might be a good time to talk. At the end of their conversation Nikki said that, while the family was on holiday, she was going to talk to her mother about how left out she was feeling and ask if they could spend some time together, while her dad looked after her brother.

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