

Where to turn when you're worried about a child

"You'd be surprised how often we hear it," said Andy, "people worry so much about getting it wrong, or about causing offence or being identified as a troublemaker. They forget that the most important thing they can think about is the child."

Andy is one of a team of advisors who works for the NSPCC Helpline, a free service provided by the NSPCC to help adults speak out if they are ever worried about a child's safety or wellbeing.

We caught up with Andy as he was busily preparing for promotional work to make sure everyone knows the service is there.

"If you're ever worried about a child, you should get in touch with the NSPCC Helpline, freephone 0800 800 5000, or email us on help@nspcc.org.uk" Andy continued. "That's what we're here for – and we're asking everyone to save the number to their mobile phone, so that they have it if they ever need it."

Relaxed and friendly, Andy doesn't exactly conform to the stereotype you might have about the face of the NSPCC. In fact, it's actually this approachable quality that the Helpline really wants to bring to the fore. That's because you can contact them about any aspect of a child's safety or wellbeing.

"We get some calls from parents who feel they can't cope or who just want a bit of advice about the best thing to do for their child. Other people may have seen something they feel a bit uneasy about and just want to talk it through," Andy said.

When the more serious types of call come through, an NSPCC Helpline advisor will take some details.

If, having spoken to you, they decide a child is at risk, they will refer it on to children's services or to the police for them to take it further.

"Basically, you can think of it as putting your worry into the hands of experts," Andy explained. "Lots of people care about children, for lots of different reasons. But very, very few have the knowledge or experience to understand when a child is at risk. And just by having a chat, we're quickly able to understand whether there might be something seriously wrong."

Andy was quick to point out that callers can remain anonymous if they want to, and that the Helpline never passes on any details that might identify a caller to the families concerned.

"Just as important, we want to make sure that no one worries about whether they are doing the wrong thing," Andy said. "If you ever have concerns, we're the people to talk to. It doesn't matter if it's a false alarm or a worry that we can easily dispel. The most important thing is to let us know. You never know, it could be the important missing piece of a jigsaw."

"So remember, you can contact the Helpline at any time, day or night, 365 days a year," Andy said. "Just call us on **0800 800 5000** or email help@nspcc.org.uk."

To find out more about the NSPCC Helpline, visit www.nspcc.org.uk/helpline



Andy takes another call from a concerned adult

NSPCC Helpline factfile

- You can contact the NSPCC Helpline free and anonymously on **0800 800 5000** or help@nspcc.org.uk.
- In 2008/09 the Helpline counselled 29,346 callers with worries about a child's safety or wellbeing.
- The NSPCC Helpline is an important source of information for local children's services teams. They estimate that one in three serious referrals they make to local authorities are about children they didn't already know about.
- The NSPCC Helpline provides a service for everyone, no matter their background or ability. Some Advisors on the Helpline speak multiple languages, while others speak Welsh. Deaf and hard of hearing can email help@nspcc.org.uk, or use the British Sign Video service on 020 8463 1148.

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HELPLINE
0800 800 5000
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