Community of Practice: How can child helplines best support children with disabilities?

Call for Participants for Community of Practice starting August 2020


**Background**

Children with disabilities are at particular risk of violence\(^1\), compared to the general population. They face a higher risk of discrimination and exclusion in society, and children with a psychiatric or intellectual disability are almost five times more likely to be victims of sexual violence than children who do not have disabilities\(^2\). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the vulnerability of children with disabilities has increased\(^3\), for example due to an increased risk to health, exclusion from education, less access to key health resources and lack of accessible information.

We are convening a Community of Practice to exchange knowledge on how child helplines can best support children with disabilities, with a specific focus on the current context of COVID-19 – please continue reading below.

**Child helplines and children with disabilities**

Our data from 2019 (before the start of the pandemic) shows that the number of children and adults who contact child helplines with issues relating to disabilities is relatively low\(^4\). In 2020, we conducted a survey with 13 child helpline members in the European Union on their support for children with disabilities. The results indicated that child helplines in the European Union are confident that the support they are providing to children with disabilities is accessible and of high quality.

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\(^1\) [https://www.who.int/disabilities/violence/en/](https://www.who.int/disabilities/violence/en/)

\(^2\) [https://www.who.int/disabilities/violence/en/](https://www.who.int/disabilities/violence/en/)


\(^4\) Please note that this can depend on the child helplines' categorisation system for contacts. There children with disabilities who contact a child helplines with an issue which is not directly relating to their disability.
Child helplines are arguably well placed to bridge some of the support gaps for children with disabilities, due to their accessibility and expertise. During this pandemic, when many services are not able to provide support and protection due to lockdowns, distancing rules and financial crisis, the role of child helplines have become increasingly important. We aim to explore how child helplines can be a key resource for children with disabilities in the European Union now, and in the future. We will, therefore, convene a Community of Practice to exchange knowledge on how child helplines can best support children with disabilities, with a specific focus on the current context of COVID-19. This project is funded by the European Union’s Rights, Equality and Citizenship programme (2014-2020).

**Aim and Objectives**

- To explore and exchange good practices on supporting children with issues relating to disabilities between child helplines and experts, including data collection.
- To explore and discuss how child helplines can become a key resource for children with disabilities in the context of COVID-19, currently and in the aftermath.
- To build working partnerships between child helplines and expert organisations for ongoing discussion and knowledge exchange.

**The Format of the Community of Practice**

Communities of Practice are a form of peer-to-peer learning, held together by a shared concern or passion for a specific topic\(^5\) – in this case children with disabilities. This community of

practice will be multi-sectoral in order to harness and share knowledge from different perspectives.

Due to the current travel restrictions, the discussions will take place online. The main language of communication will be English. We will do our utmost to ensure that our communications meet the needs of all participants. Please let us know what you might require.

**Timeline**

All dates will be confirmed with the participants, but expected timeline is bi-weekly calls of 90 minutes from August to November 2020.

**The Thematic Discussion**

The core of communities of practice is the ownership and leadership of the participants. Therefore, only the overall topic, *child helpline support for children with disabilities*, is established beforehand, not the details of the discussion. The tasks of the participants together with Child Helpline International are as follows:

- Identify a set of core issues relating to children with disabilities and child helpline services.
- Exchange practices, experiences, theory and thoughts on how to approach the identified issues.
- Document and define ideas and discussions as a basis for upcoming capacity-building initiatives (webinars, training resources, advocacy reports).
The discussions and outcomes from these communities will be shared with the rest of the child helpline network through webinars, training resources and advocacy reports/campaigns in order to create impact across our network and the European community.

**Call for Participants**

We are seeking participants who:

- Have a strong interest in tackling issues facing children with disabilities.
- Have a strong interest in learning and sharing good practices.
- Have knowledge and experience relating to promoting the rights of children with disabilities, or come from a child helpline that has a keen interest in learning more about these issues.
- Live and work in an EU member state. However, because this Community of Practice is online, we also invite experts from other parts of the world.
- Are able to commit to bi-weekly online meetings, plus possibly additional preparation time (Approx. 1 hour a week, on average).

**Contact information**

- To register your interest and ask further questions please contact ronja@childhelplineinternational.org
Every child has a voice.
We believe that no child should be left unheard.
childhelplineinternational.org