

When You Don't Know Where to Turn, Call the Parent Helpline at 1-800-CHILDREN

From child care woes to childhood illnesses, screaming infants to defiant teenagers, parenting is the toughest job in the world. The more support families have, the better prepared they are to meet these challenges. Supporting families is what Prevent Child Abuse New York's **Parent Helpline** at **1-800-CHILDREN** is about.

Support comes in all shapes and sizes. "We don't provide direct services to families," said Rosanna Lucero, Parent Helpline Associate. "The support we provide is more in terms of listening to the callers, taking the time to digest the information they provide, and connecting them to resources in their community where they can find help."

"We want parents and kids to know that it's OK to ask for help," said Rosanna. "When a family asks for help and learns about available resources, they are taking a huge step toward solving their problems."

Recently, Rosanna answered a call from Tina, a mom living in a homeless shelter in New York City. Tina's young son lived with her mother while Tina worked to get her life back on track. Tina learned that her mother was using drugs. She feared for the safety of her son and knew she needed to get him away from her mother.

"I don't know what to do," she sobbed. "We had a fire and I don't have his birth certificate or social security card. The people at the shelter said I couldn't bring him here without those documents. What can I do?"

Rosanna suggested several places where Tina could find help. She found phone numbers to other shelters in the city and suggested Tina call

them and explain her situation. "Ask them what papers they need from you to admit both you and your son. If you don't have those documents, ask if they can accept something else, or how you can go about replacing your lost documents," Rosanna said.

Helpline staff often brainstorm different options for callers. If nothing immediately comes to mind, they'll take a number, think for a while, and get back to the caller. They are trained to provide information and referral services on family issues involving child abuse and neglect, custody and visitation, parenting education and support, family court and the child protective system. Often, callers are struggling with many or all of these issues.

"It's important to take the time to analyze the caller's situation," said Rosanna. "A parent may call with a question about an out-of-control teenager and from talking with them I'll realize that they also need some help finding housing or respite care or resources for a special needs child."

Rosanna followed up with Tina a couple of weeks later. She found a shelter that helped her get the documents she needed and accepted her son. "Thank you for helping me find what I need" she said. "To know that there are people out there who really do care gives me hope. I'm so happy to be with my son again."

The Parent Helpline provides information and referral services everyday from 9 a.m. until 10 p.m. After 10 p.m. calls are forwarded to an answering service and returned the next day. Although the Helpline focuses on services available in New York State, Specialists can refer callers from other states to their Prevent Child Abuse chapter.



Rosanna helping a parent in need.

Parent Helpline Fast Facts

Founded
1986

Service Provided
Information and referral

Number of Calls Last Year
3,305

Who Calls
Parents: 50%
Professionals: 33%
Others: 17%

Where They Call From
New York City: 72%
Outside of NYC: 28%

Calls about At-Risk Families
81%

Most Common Requests
Parenting Education Programs
Preventive Services
Services for "Out of Control" Teens
Information about Navigating the Child Protective System
Information about Custody and Other Legal Issues

"We want parents and kids to know that it's OK to ask for help," said Rosanna. "When a family asks for help and learns about available resources, they are taking a huge step toward solving their problems."