



PEER RELATIONSHIPS

Definition

Problems between caller and friend/s. Includes concerns for a friend's well-being, peer group pressure, making friends, jealousy, friendship breakdowns. Excludes: bullying, pregnancy, drug and alcohol use, suicide, mental health, and physical health.

Relationships with peers and friends play an important role in the social and psychological development of young people.

The proportion of counselling calls to What's Up relating to peer relationship issues is around 22%. This is the most common single problem raised by callers to What's Up across all ages and varies little from year to year. There is no evidence of a trend to the proportion increasing or decreasing since What's Up began collecting data in 2001.

Concerns about peer relationships steadily rise in importance with age. This is the primary reason for calls to What's Up from 11 to 14 year olds. From 15 onwards, concerns about relationships with partners take over first place from relationships with peers in general.

Specifically, children tend to depend mainly upon parents during middle through late childhood. This is followed by increasing dependency upon peers during early to middle adolescence.

During late adolescence, individuals begin to resist peer pressure and have a greater capacity for autonomous behaviours.

A few months ago the caller's friends became skinheads after watching a movie. They shaved their heads and got swastika tattoos. It started out with just a few of them but gradually more became involved. At the weekend now, all they do is drive around town and hassle people of other races. He is not keen on doing this but still wants to be their friend.

Although the influence of peers increases with age, most research shows that this influence is situation specific. Peers provide adolescents with a reference group for information and also with opportunities to explore new roles. Dating, social events, types of dress, drinking, drug use, sport, and hobbies all take place largely in the company of similar aged mates.

Peers are a critical part of the adolescent's transition to independence outside of the family. As such, issues of friendship consistently receive high

ratings of importance from teenagers.

Parents are more typically consulted for important decisions such as educational or occupational plans. For many adolescents, the move towards a peer social orientation does not necessarily involve a rejection of parents opinions and values.

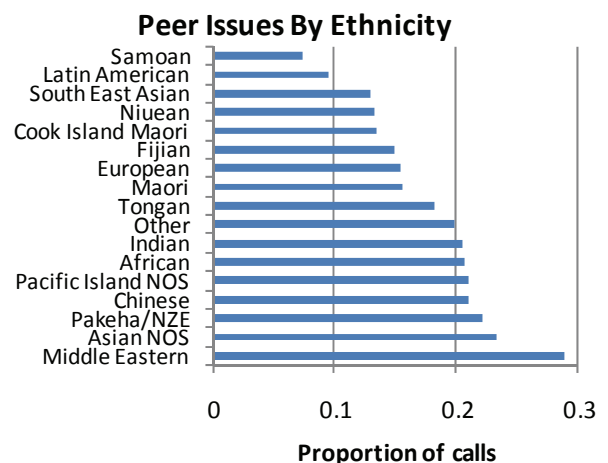
Caller's parents have said she is not to hang out with a friend because they get into trouble together. She said they were continuing to see each other secretly.

Caller Characteristics

The largest proportion of these callers (86%) are aged between 9 and 15 years of age and they are predominantly female (85% compared with 76% across all problem types). The table below provides a breakdown of the age and gender of callers who phoned concerning relationships with their peers.

AGE	FEMALES	MALES
5–9	10.75%	1.69%
10–15	68.67%	10.92%
16–18	5.78%	2.20%

There is some indication that peer relationship issues vary in importance with a caller's ethnicity. The bar chart below shows the calls about peer relationships problems as a proportion of all issues presented by each ethnic group.



Themes

Concern about a friend's well-being is a common theme in these calls.

Caller said her friend was being mean to everyone and she thinks that something might be wrong with her. Caller told her teacher but he said she will come right. She has asked her friend what is wrong but she won't say. Said she will give her friend the What's Up number.

Another common theme is problems with choosing friends, making friends, and feeling shy, lonely or excluded. Some of these callers have moved to new areas or changed schools.

Caller has moved to a new school and thought she had made friends through sport but they have started being mean to her. Said they do not want her in their sports team because they would be better off without her. She is feeling left out and isolated.

Others: friends are changing or finding new friends and these callers are dealing with feelings of rejection and jealousy.

Some of her friends are spreading rumours about her and don't want to be her friend anymore. Is going to call up one of the girls who is nice to her and try and find out what is behind everything that is going on.

Sometimes callers phone about being teased, humiliated or being the brunt of hurtful comments



(instances of bullying are classified separately by What's Up and not included in this data).

Called because some of the kids that he was friends with last year are now mocking him. They got jealous because he started going out with a very pretty girl in school. He is going to try talking to the one guy in the group who is less abusive.

Peer pressure to conform to various activities such as smoking, drug and/or alcohol use, running away from home, dangerous play, or sex are common problems in calls concerning relationships with friends.

Friends make her do things, like kiss boys. They want her to smoke but she thinks that's going too far. Explored how she could go about making new friends who will accept her just the way she is.

Trust and communication are also significant issues for young people in their friendships with each other. Honesty and openness are highly valued - lies, betrayal of trust and breaking of confidences are regular aspects of these calls.

Rang because she told her friend that she liked a boy in their class and the friend told everyone. She is really upset that she can't trust her. Everyone in her class is now laughing at her.

What's Up plays an important role for young people wanting to explore problems in relationships with their peers. Counsellors support and encourage callers to fully explore issues which enable them to make informed decisions about their situation. The anonymity and confidentiality of the service provides a safe environment for young people to freely and openly discuss their concerns. Frequently, counsellors work with the caller to develop and practice clear communication and assertiveness skills that may be used to improve the situation.

Updated October 2009

For more information:

0800WHATSUP
PO Box 56642
Dominion Rd
Auckland

Tel: 09-630-4144 Fax: 09-630-4840

Email: info@whatsup.co.nz