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What are examples of helplines operated by child protection agencies?

Helplines, also known as warmlines, support lines, or care lines, are designed to connect families to community and government services that can prevent safety issues from escalating to the level of child welfare system involvement. Unlike general information or resource lines, helplines are proactive and offer intensive support, making referrals and following up with families to ensure they successfully connect to needed services. Helplines aim to offer families a safe, stigma-free way to seek support and avoid the [trauma of child welfare system involvement](#).

Helplines operated by child protection agencies can benefit from highly trained staff and streamlined access to agency resources. Families may not feel safe asking for help from a child protection agency, however, so building trust is paramount.

This brief details helplines operated by child protection agencies in Washington, D.C., and New York City.¹ A companion to this brief, [How do helplines support children and families?](#), offers an overview on the topic based on the experiences of nearly a dozen different helplines, including some that operate independently of a child protection agency.

Washington, D.C.'s 211 Warmline

The [Office of Thriving Families](#) within the **Washington, D.C.** Child and Family Services Agency (DC CFSA) leads its [211 Warmline](#), which launched in October 2023. The warmline is part of the city's [Thriving Families, Safer Children](#) initiative and extensive prevention efforts with the District of Columbia that include [community hubs](#) (known as Healthy Family / Thriving Families Collaboratives) and [Family Success Centers](#). "Our goal is to better coordinate our non-emergency social services, develop a unifying message, and direct residents to the appropriate services needed to thrive," said Jarvis Turner, program manager.

Service model

There are two ways to access the 211 Warmline. One is direct calls placed by residents in need or community members calling on their behalf, and the other is outreach calls to families who are reported to the child protection hotline but where no investigation is warranted. Calls take one of the following paths, all of which include referrals and follow-up as needed:

1. **Call center staff provide service navigation and referral** for families that have no known child welfare contact. “Our standard goal is to create a warm transfer to make sure that the person is put into the other organization’s hands without losing traction,” said Latoya Allen, 211 Warmline supervisor. “And once that’s completed, we ask the customer if they’d like a follow-up call. Within five days, we’ll follow up to make sure they were connected to services, and we can also track outcomes.” Warmline staff use the [FindHelp database](#) as one key resource for identifying services.
2. **The Community Engage and Connect Unit reaches out to families** that have been reported for child maltreatment but screened out before an investigation (including families transitioning from DC CFSA involvement). After reports are screened out, the team conducts outreach to the residents with the goal to connect them to voluntary services. Staff will make three attempts to reach them, and use motivational interviewing techniques to encourage people to take advantage of services. “When we looked at the data, we saw that about 10,000 calls every year are screened out because there are no maltreatment concerns,” said Sharafdeen Ibraheem, deputy director. “When calls were screened out in the past, nothing happened. But we know that there may be issues and needs to address, so we came up with 211 Connects, a voluntary pathway to services.”
3. **The [Community Response Team](#) provides navigation, referral, and in-person case management** as part of Washington, DC’s [Healthy Families / Thriving Communities Collaboratives](#) (for people experiencing emotional, psychiatric, or substance use emergencies. This pathway is designed to connect and support families with more intensive needs. “Community responders can go out and meet people — in a library, home, social service agency, wherever they feel they need that support,” Allen said. “The community responder can work with them individually on their unique needs and provide additional service navigation.”

Involvement of lived experts

Involvement of lived experts in planning, implementation, and outreach is one way to help address trust issues with helplines operated through a child protection agency. “There are concerns that the warmline could operate as a surveillance tool,” Ibraheem said. “We have to continue building confidence within the public that this is a totally separate endeavor and not a back door to the child protection hotline.”

People with lived expertise who are part of the agency’s Lived Expertise Advisory Council were involved in developing the vision of the helpline, and they chair each of three warmline subcommittees (impact/evaluation; belonging; and warmline community response). “Our lived experience members are our experts,” said Leonora Hansford, program manager. “They help us make decisions that are in the best interest of the community.”

Lived experts also promote stakeholder partnerships and provide publicity for the warmline. “They go into the community to get the word out about 211 and its role, and the differences between that and the hotline, explaining how to utilize it, what are some perks, and building trust in the community,” Hansford said. “They also go to community advisory council meetings at our family success centers.”

Staffing

The 211 Warmline is currently staffed by a core team of four who answer calls, a team lead, and a supervisor. Though employed by DC CFSA, they are physically housed in a different government building, which helps signal a distance between their work and, for example, a child protection caseworker. Training,

a combination of virtual, in-person, technical, and on-the-job, occurs for a month before staff are allowed to take calls independently.

Partnerships

Given that DC CFSA is not able to address concrete needs directly, [partnerships](#) with community organizations and local government agencies are critical. The primary needs of families that call the warmline are assistance with utilities, food, housing and shelter, and benefits navigation. “Any public government agency that has a human services charge, we are trying to partner with them,” Ibraheem said. “We are trying our best to make sure we have the right people in the room. It’s one thing to have figureheads of agencies in meetings, but people who are disconnected from the work can’t necessarily speak to what’s important.”

Marketing and messaging

DC CFSA has begun to focus more heavily on public promotion of the 211 Warmline, including launch of the website. The Lived Expert Advisory Council is helping to spread the word, sharing information and swag related to the 211 Warmline at community centers, schools, and neighborhood events. Though not employees, these council members are compensated for their time and receive training on outreach strategies and key messages. A messaging toolkit was developed to equip staff, community members, and partner agencies to promote the warmline.

Data

Since its soft launch in October 2023, the 211 Warmline has received more than 600 calls monthly, and the number of monthly calls has increased over time to an average of 760 calls by the end of 2024. Through follow-up calls, DC CFSA will be able to track whether callers are successfully getting connected to services.

An outcome evaluation is underway for 211 Connects (which focuses on families screened out from the child protection hotline), which began in April 2024. From April to September 2024, the hotline sent 161 referrals to the 211 Warmline, with service needs related to mental health, housing, and utility assistance, and other needs such as clothing and household goods. Of all 161 referrals, 48% of the families engaged with 211 Connects. Of those who engaged, 55% received service referrals.

New York City’s Support Line

In **New York City**, the Administration for Children’s Services (ACS) staffs the [Support Line](#) to meet the needs of families seeking assistance with challenges such as food, housing, childcare, and behavioral health. Previously a resource for prevention service providers, the Support Line has evolved into a resource that families as well as staff from schools, homeless shelters, and healthcare settings contact directly. The Support Line is an integral part of ACS’s prevention strategy to provide voluntary services throughout the city.

Service model

As a result of the Support Line being situated within the child protection agency, staff are able to make quicker connections with other service areas within ACS, such as the adoption subsidy unit and developmental disabilities unit. “We are able to connect families with resources — internally and externally — that will meet their needs,” said Lisa Bolling, assistant commissioner.

Maureen Peters, Support Line director, provided an example of a need the helpline can address: “A mom in a homeless shelter may be going through an emergency medical procedure. She’s going to need someone to support her children while she’s in the hospital. The shelter staff will contact us. We don’t want them to call the Statewide Central Register [hotline] or put the children in foster care because of something that’s out of the mom’s control. That shouldn’t warrant disrupting the family.”

Ensuring that families are successfully connected to services (not just referred) is a core component of the Support Line. “We’re not going to just say, ‘Here, just call this number,’” Bolling said. “We’ll connect the caller.”

Maureen Peters noted, “Now, families and community partners are calling ACS not just regarding a child welfare investigation, they are calling the Support Line to access direct services from our contracted prevention providers and resources available in their neighborhoods.” In addition to accessing contracted community providers, Support Line staff use the FindHelp database to identify additional services.

Staffing

The Support Line is staffed by four licensed social workers who have experience in child protection, prevention services, and family counseling. As Maureen Peters said, “Exceptional customer service is our standard. We want to ensure that every individual feels heard, valued, and supported with an outcome that meets their family's needs.” One supervisor manages escalations to the hotline and other complex situations, as well as addressing staff fatigue. Staff need to be able to have that vent session, to be able to say, ‘You know, I’m tired, that call was hard,’” Peters said. “We want to make sure that staff are supported.”

Partnerships

Staff have developed partnerships with numerous service providers to address the needs that come through the Support Line, such as food insecurity, housing, domestic violence, and mental health. Support Line staff present regularly at schools and community partnership meetings and touch base with providers.

Focus on mandated reporters

An examination of child protection hotline data showed that 87% of the more than 50,000 reports originating from New York City schools in 2024 did not result in findings of maltreatment. New York City has made efforts to educate mandated reporters — especially in public schools — about the Support Line.

In partnership with New York City Public Schools, ACS’ Family Services Division staff revised the annual training for the city’s designated liaisons for child abuse prevention, including a slide deck for the liaison to share with school staff and a [video](#). The training’s core message is, “**You can support a family without having to report a family**” if no safety issue warrants CPS investigation. The Support Line is a key component of this strategy.

As many reports from schools are unfounded allegations of child neglect due to poor attendance, the training also focuses on strategies to support better attendance and distinguishes poor attendance from child neglect.

Marketing and messaging

Staff have focused on marketing the Support Line, presenting to more than 13,700 people in more than 200 sessions since January 2023. “Whatever space we’re in, if we’re presenting, our flyer is out there,” Bolling said. “We’ve even made T-shirts with the Support Line number on the back. When our teams are out in the community, we are doing as much marketing as possible to make sure that the Support Line information is there.”

ACS has presented about the Support Line at schools of social work, the Department of Homeless Services, and to mental health providers. The Support Line also has been promoted through testimony at the City Council, in meetings with elected officials, and at community outreach events. The ACS commissioner has mentioned the helpline on local news programs.

Data

Data from New York City suggests that families are becoming more comfortable calling for help, with an increase from about 30 per month in early 2023 to now over 330 monthly inquiries. In addition to more families calling directly, calls from school personnel are also increasing, with 1,740 inquiries from schools between mid-2024 and mid-2025. At the same time, hotline calls from schools and childcare centers, decreased by 20% between early 2023 and early 2025. “When we look at the decrease in calls to the State Central Register (hotline) from the schools and see that it correlates with the increase in number of calls coming into the Support Line from schools, that’s great,” Peters said.

¹This brief is based on interviews with:

- DC Child and Family Services Agency staff, February 26, 2025: Latoya Allen, Supervisor, 211 Warmline; Isaiah Branton, Supervisor, 211 Warmline and 211 Connects; Christian Gineste, Data Scientist; Leonora Hansford, Program Manager; Sharafdeen Ibraheem, Deputy Director; Jarvis Turner, Program Manager; and Morgan Welch, Management Analyst.
- New York City Administration for Children’s Services staff, February 28, 2025: Lisa Bolling, Assistant Commissioner; Maureen Peters, Director, Support Line; and Crystal Pond, Senior Planning Manager.

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