

NSPCC launch text helpline

✘ The NSPCC has launched a text service to drive ‘on the spot’ reports of child abuse to its Helpline from adults in Edinburgh and the rest of the UK. The text number – 88858 – is free and available 24 hours a day.

The launch comes as an NSPCC poll reveals people are unlikely to report child abuse unless they act immediately. One in five (22 per cent) polled in Scotland said they had been concerned a child was being abused or neglected, but almost half (47 per cent) of those who didn’t report their fears immediately took no action later.

The NSPCC is also announcing TV psychologist Dr Linda Papadopoulos as its first ever Helpline Ambassador today. She is backing the NSPCC call for people to act when worried about a child.

Dr Linda Papadopoulos says: “Most people want to help children. Four in five people in the NSPCC poll said they would report abuse later if they didn’t do so straight away. But the reality is very different – the longer people wait, they less likely they are to act.

“As a psychologist I know how easily people talk themselves out of doing anything. They may think it’s none of their business, or they’ve made a mistake, or they simply can’t decide what to do. But procrastination can be fatal for an abused child. Tomorrow may be too late.

“Sending a text is quick and immediate, whether you’re at home or out shopping. It’s good to know you’ve taken action. So if you’re worried about a child, the message is simple. Don’t delay, text the Helpline today.”

In the NSPCC poll, almost half of adults – 47 per cent – in Scotland who had been concerned about a child had not acted immediately because they didn’t know what to do or who to

call. Some said they were worried about being overheard (9 per cent). Others feared retaliation or were anxious about making a mistake.

Joanna Barrett, NSPCC Scotland policy and public affairs manager, said: "We must pick up on the signs of child abuse as early as possible. Social workers cannot be in the community all the time. By texting the Helpline the public can help be their eyes and ears.

"Our new text service – 88858 – is discreet and only takes a few seconds but it could be the difference between life and death for a child."

Anyone sending a text to the NSPCC Helpline on 88858 will receive an immediate response confirming that their message has been received. This message will also encourage them to call the Helpline on 0808 800 5000, or to contact the police if they think a child is in immediate danger.

A trained NSPCC Helpline counsellor will reply to a text message within three hours, and offer advice, information and assistance. They may ask for additional information about the person's concerns, or confirm that a referral has been made to the police or social services.

The new text service makes the NSPCC Helpline more accessible, and adds to the existing ways that people can get in touch, by 24-hour freephone (0808 800 5000), by email help@nspcc.org.uk, or by making a report online at www.nspcc.org.uk/helpline.

Joanna Barrett says: "245 people in Edinburgh called the NSPCC Helpline last year because they had concerns about a child. Some people may prefer texting to talking when reporting abuse or seeking advice and information about keeping children safe. However you contact the Helpline, it's about choosing the right option for you."