

The Lone Parent Helpline

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We all need to make choices in life. To make the best choices for ourselves and our children, we need information and knowledge that is up-to-date, accurate and given at the right time. Never has this been more important for lone parents in Scotland. As Welfare Reform is changing the choices that lone parents can make, there is an enormous need for parents to get it right from the start.

The Lone Parent Helpline is in a unique position to reach out to lone parents throughout Scotland. Our approach is holistic, offering a blend of emotional support and appropriate information delivered in a timely fashion. Our helpline is accessible as it is free of charge from both landlines and most major mobile phone providers – a vital ingredient for our users as many have pay as you go mobiles. Our helpline has a caller-led allocation of time per call: we know that many of the complex and multiple issues that present cannot be adequately dealt with on the back of a 10 or 15 minute conversation. Parents need time to digest what is often convoluted information, time to ask difficult questions or the opportunity to explore painful feelings.

Our helpline is a one-stop-shop. How many times have I heard “I wish I had known about you earlier! I’ve been round the houses looking for this information and it was there at your fingertips all along!” Our primary aim is to meet a lone parent’s information needs as quickly and as efficiently as possible. What makes us distinctive is that our dedicated Rights Workers can deal with the full gamut of topics that present from benefit and tax credit entitlement to housing options to maternity rights to child contact and maintenance arrangements to funding for further and higher education, getting back to work, or parenting problems. We carry out benefit calculations over the phone; we signpost to appropriate local services. And what we don’t know, we will go away and find out and ring the caller back within an agreed timeframe. And when there is too much information to take in, we can provide back-up in the form of free factsheets so no need to scribble endless pieces of information on a piece of paper.

This year, a new addition to our armoury of services for lone parents has been the introduction of our callback service. This service is designed to offer more long-term support to lone parents in transition – those who are experiencing relationship breakup, those who are facing a first pregnancy on their own, those moving into education or employment. These callers to the helpline are offered a callback on a weekly or fortnightly basis for a period of up to three months from the same Rights Worker who took the original call. This allows for the building of a trusting relationship where a caller can gain on-going emotional support and assistance with more tenacious problems. Although early days, the signs are very positive with lone parents emerging from the other end in a better place than when they started off.