

30 years of PlunketLine – supporting parents and caregivers across the country 24/7

PlunketLine is celebrating a significant milestone today, as the much-loved free-to-call telehealth service turns 30 years old.

Day, night, and in the wee hours of the morning, PlunketLine registered nurses are available to talk to anyone who has questions or concerns about caring for pēpi and tamariki under-five. Parents and caregivers can call free 24/7 on 0800 933 922. They don't need to be enrolled with Whānau Āwhina Plunket.

Chief Executive Fiona Kingsford says there have been around 2.5 million calls to PlunketLine since the telehealth service started – around 300 calls a day.

“As any parent or caregiver knows, there is nothing worse when you're up in the middle of the night with an unsettled child. You're sleep deprived and you're unsure if they are unwell or just uncomfortable.

“Our PlunketLine nurses are available to listen, give advice and reassurance on what to do. They offer support on anything related to caring for under-fives such as sleep, breastfeeding, toileting, child behaviour and development concerns and caregiver mental health support too.”

Mrs Kingsford says PlunketLine nurses advise on when caregivers should seek additional health support from pharmacies, see a GP or go to hospital as well.

“As a 24/7 telehealth service, PlunketLine has a significant role in supporting busy emergency departments and general practice.”

In congratulating PlunketLine on reaching the 30-year milestone, Porirua-based Specialist General Practitioner and Chair of General Practice New Zealand Dr Bryan Betty says, “It's really valuable for parents and caregivers to be able to call PlunketLine nurses day and night for advice on everything related to caring for under-fives.

“Those first five years are critical to healthy development and overall wellbeing, and early intervention is key. Telehealth is an important part of our integrated primary and community care landscape, and I value the role that PlunketLine play alongside general practice in setting our tamariki up for their healthiest futures.”

PlunketLine has seen a lot of digital innovation during the past 30 years.

What started as an after-hours telephone-based service in Wellington, now offers one-on-one video calls with breastfeeding lactation specialists as well as online face-to-face sleep support.

Martinborough based Trish Higginson is one of PlunketLine's registered nurses with a listening ear on the end of the line.

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As well as answering all calls related to raising under-fives, she's part of the team offering online face-to-face specialist sleep support. Sleep or lack of, is one of the top reasons people call PlunketLine. Around 850 specialist sleep support sessions have been done since it started last year.

"It's so important for caregivers to look after themselves and reach out for support. If you're not feeling your best, it's really tough to care for a little one."

Calls relating to maternal mental health increased rapidly during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. Latest data shows they remain high - up 70 percent from the onset of the pandemic.

"Sometimes people need someone to talk to, to figure things out. Having someone to listen and navigate where to go to for support can make all the difference. Sometimes our nurses will call the GP or other support services on mum's behalf – take the load off, make it easier to access the support they need," says Nurse Trish.

For Anna McGuinness, a mum of two little girls, PlunketLine has been a constant support.

After a stressful pregnancy, she was unable to 'shake this constant anxiety' when her first daughter was born.

"I continuously thought there was something wrong with her. I literally called PlunketLine every day for the first eight weeks of her life, for one reason or another.

"PlunketLine was truly incredible. The nurses listened to me patiently and without judgement. They helped me to think rationally and provided the assurance I needed that she was okay."

About PlunketLine

- Call PlunketLine on 0800 933 922 for free 24/7 parenting and health support about your child's wellbeing.
- Calls are also free from mobile phones, and you don't need to be a Plunket client to use PlunketLine
- Calls are answered by Plunket nurses, who can give you advice and information on parenting issues and your child's health and wellbeing. We also have nurses who can speak other languages.
- You can also access free online specialist video support with breastfeeding and sleep through PlunketLine.
- PlunketLine nurses are located across the country in main centres as well as rural areas such as Alexandra, Martinborough, Whitianga and Haruru in the Far North.

