

# Tinkle Friend chat service a hit with troubled kids

## Nearly 600 chats done on online site since its soft launch six months ago

By PRISCILLA GOY

AT SCHOOL, “Tammy” was often bullied, with classmates calling her names.

But the 10-year-old felt better after she told someone from Singapore Children’s Society about this through its online chat service and together they thought of ways

to solve the problem.

“It was great to have someone to talk to about the situation,” she wrote in an online feedback form after the chat.

Nearly 600 chats have been done on Tinkle Friend Online, since its soft launch six months ago, according to figures obtained by The Straits Times.

Mr Chong Ee Jay, assistant manager at Touch Cyber Wellness, a centre which educates students and parents on online safety, said this was a “good start”.

The online service offers support, advice and information to lonely and troubled pupils, especially when their parents or main caregivers are unavailable.

The children’s society added the chat service, the only one for distressed children here, to its 30-year-old phone helpline.

The chat service has seen a significant share of cases involving

peer relationships (21 per cent) and school issues including study stress and bullying (23 per cent).

In comparison, boredom has been the most commonly cited reason – making up about as many as four in 10 calls – for calling the helpline every year since 2008. But it accounts for fewer than two in 10 chats.

“With anonymity and the lack of verbal exchange, children tend to be bolder to share about deeper issues online,” said Mr Taufiq Salehoodin, a counsellor at the society.

While the online service and phone helpline have similar functions, the former may better cater to those who are not “as communicative” over the phone.

Mr Chong said it is “common for kids to vent their anger and frustrations on social media”.

He said the chat service gives children “an extended platform in an already familiar environment (the Internet) that they can turn to, to seek help... if they are not comfortable in sharing with their parents or teachers”.

In the first five months of this

year, more than 660 calls were made to the helpline, which has seen a drop in calls in recent years.

Last year, 1,701 calls were made to the toll-free Tinkle Friend helpline, down from 2,508 in 2012, and 4,662 in 2008.

The chat service, at [www.tinklefriend.com](http://www.tinklefriend.com), is available from 2.30pm to 5.30pm on weekdays, and the helpline (1800-274-4788) from 9.30am to 11.30am and 2.30pm to 5pm on weekdays.

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