



Singapore Children's Society Tinkle Friend: Year in Review 2020

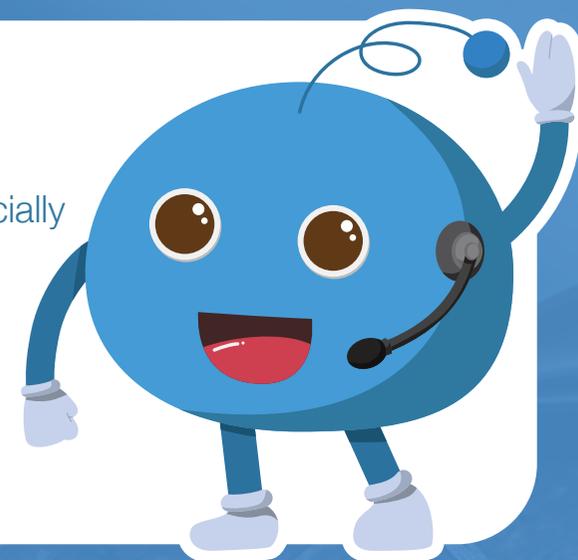
About Tinkle Friend



Tinkle Friend provides services in three main areas:

Helpline and online chat for children

- Serves all primary school students in Singapore.
- Provides support, advice, and information to lonely and distressed children, especially in situations when their parents or main caregivers are unavailable.
- Manned by trained volunteers and staff members who engage children in a non-directive and caring approach.
- During Tinkle Friend's operating hours, children can call the toll-free helpline number, while online chats are available through the Tinkle Friend website.
- All calls and chats are kept anonymous.



Resources for children

Tinkle Friend website publishes curated resources such as social-emotional learning articles and quarterly e-Buzz magazines.

Outreach to schools

Tinkle Friend conducts complimentary assembly talks to primary schools in Singapore to enhance children's mental well-being and emotional intelligence.

Tinkle Friend Service Statistics

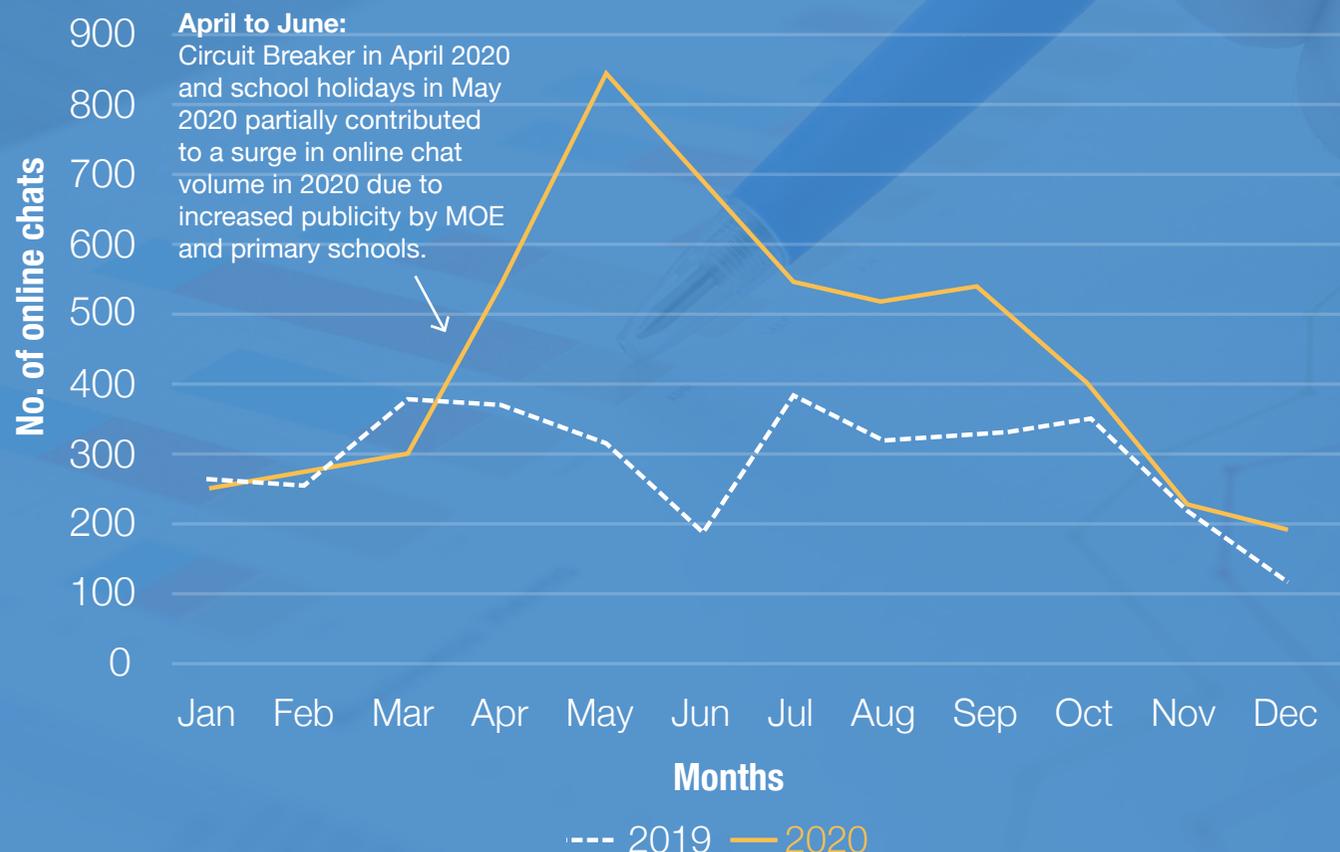
Number of Phone Calls

In 2020, there was an overall decline in helpline calls received as children increasingly communicated with Tinkle Friend via the online chat.



Number of Online Chats

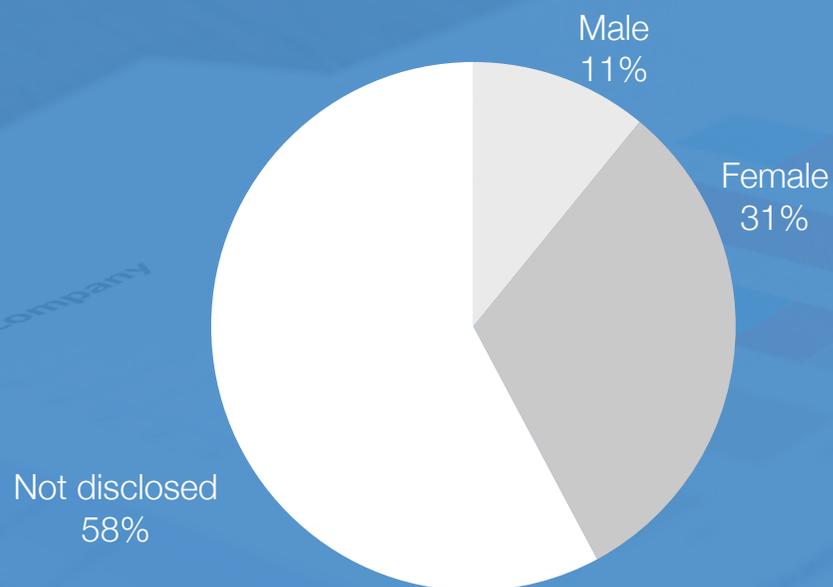
In 2020, Tinkle Friend saw a surge in online chats as compared to 2019.



Compared to 2019, Tinkle Friend received 19% more calls and online chats in 2020. The overall trend of increasing chat numbers may signal that children prefer this mode of connecting with Tinkle Friend. We will continue to monitor this trend.

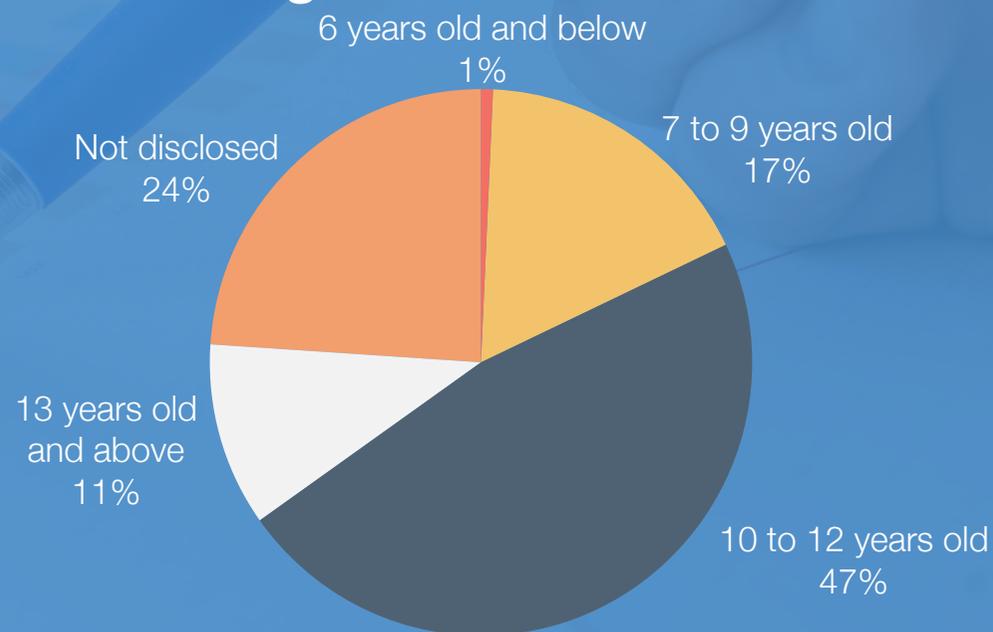
Demographics

Gender



Since Tinkle Friend is an anonymous online chat and helpline, slightly more than half of the children (58%) chose not to disclose their gender. Among those who disclosed their gender, more girls (31%) contacted Tinkle Friend as compared to boys (11%).

Age Breakdown

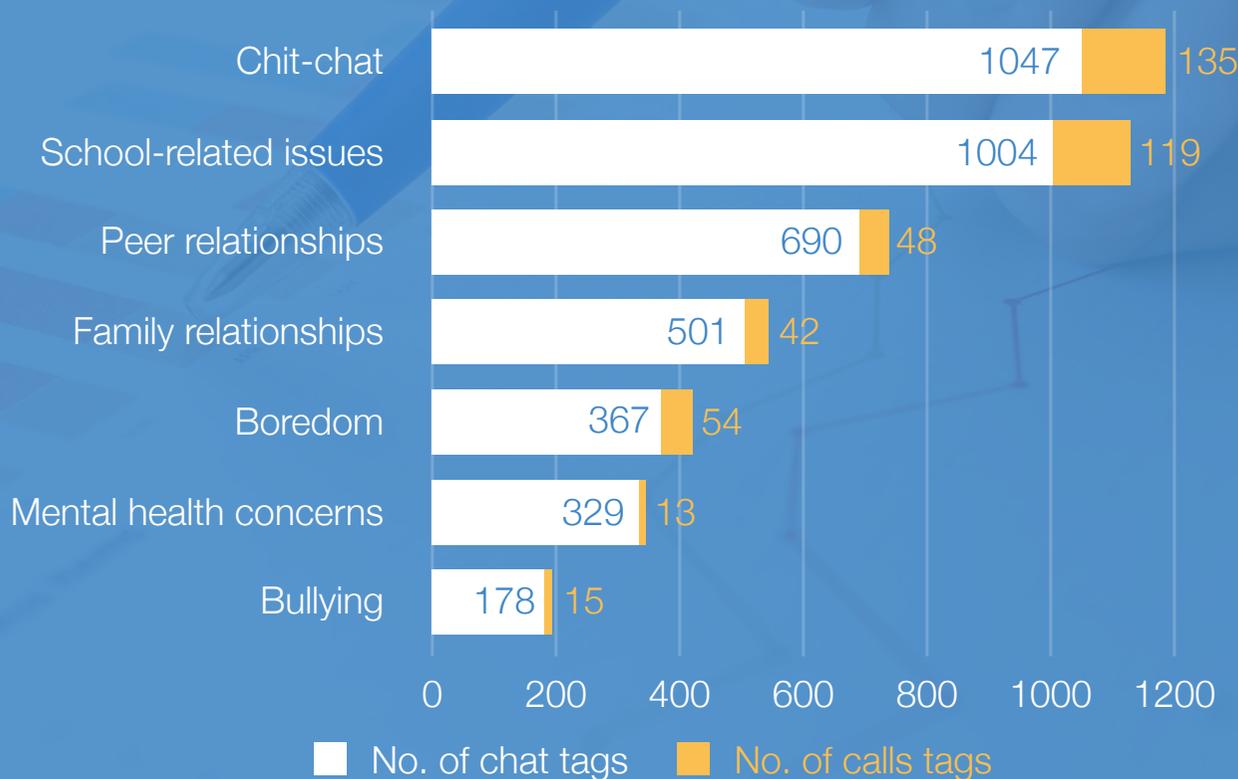


76% of users shared their age with Tinkle Friend. More upper primary school children (47%) utilised Tinkle Friend as compared to lower primary school children (17%).

Trends: Presenting Issues

Some children engaged in chit-chat with Tinkle Friend, and did not mention any specific issues or difficulties they were facing. Many other children also talked about the issues they faced and sought advice from Tinkle Friend.

To identify the nature of children's call and chat content, each chat and call was tagged to at least one category. In 2020, some of the top categories that children talked about include the categories indicated on the right.



Listening to children's voices during the COVID-19 pandemic: A qualitative analysis of online chats

In this document, the quotes are reported
as received from children.

Issues that children faced



We conducted an analysis on the online chats from April to July 2020 to understand children's difficulties with social support when COVID-19 first hit Singapore. Children reflected that they faced several challenges as a result of safe-distancing measures and school closures.



Parent-child relationships

During the circuit breaker period, many parents worked from home, and experienced increased stress and work demands. These blurred the boundaries between work and family, and also affected the way they interacted with their children.

“Although my parents are working at home, they’re often too busy to spend time with me... My father is on endless phone calls... She (my mother) ends work at 5.30pm (really early), but she always works extra hours like her workmates.”
10-year-old girl

Friendships

Children expressed a desire to connect with others as they missed their friends. They wanted to remain in contact with their friends and they did not want to feel left out.

“During the CB, I was not in contact with my friends, so when we were back at school, I guess I felt out of the loop and left out.... I also didn’t dare to talk to my friends anymore... it’s like I forgotten how.”
11-year-old child

Issues that children faced

Restricted access to social support figures

Children could not seek help or support from their friends, teachers or school counsellors due to safe distancing measures i.e home-based learning.



"I feel kinda worried. Because a lot of things haven't been cleared up or talked about with my friends. I don't really have access to any direct help anymore."

13-year-old girl

"I have 2 friends actually, but i can not visit them. 1 is in Malaysia and 1 is in Singapore, but the parents don't allow us to visit somehow."

10-year-old girl

Academic-related stress

We observed that many children also faced other issues and challenges that were not related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Academic-related stress came up as one of the most prominent issues that children faced. From the chats, some sources of academic stress shared by children included:

High expectations from adults

Adults such as parents and teachers had high or unrealistic expectations of children's academic performance, and this contributed to stress amongst children.

"I also feel down as sometimes I do quite good in my studies, but they say that I'm a failure and makes me sad because I expected maybe just a praise from them."
10-year-old child

Parental Control

Parents exerted excessive control over children's access to leisure activities, friends and other life choices. The lack of free choice over one's activities could have led to high stress.

"I can never hang out with friends or facetime them or WhatsApp them. My WhatsApp, email and phone history and google history and all is traded (traced) by them and if I don't get anything related to study I will get scolded."

13-year-old girl

Suspected bullying

Some children also reported that they did not share a good relationship with their friends. Based on their accounts, we suspect that children may have been experiencing verbal and relational bullying.

Verbal Bullying

Children's friends used unkind words to hurt and shame them.

"They have been mean and talking behind my back recently. When I decided to ignore and leave them, they would talk bad things in front of me since we are sitting near each other."
12-year-old boy

Relational Bullying

Children's friends damaged their friendships and excluded them from their social groups.

"I think some of my friends said bad things about me which is not true and (I) told her....then she does not want to be my friend..."
8-year-old child



Barriers to social support

When some children encountered challenges, they were unable to seek help from adults or peers in their social network. This was due to various reasons, such as having unhealthy parent-child interactions and negative experiences with help seeking. As a result, the children would turn to Tinkle Friend instead.

Unhealthy parent-child interactions

Poor communication, trivialisation of children's difficulties, and lack of parental affection prevented children from seeking support from parents.

"I don't really dare to tell my mum... she is very strict. She won't listen to me and start scolding me."

12-year-old girl

Negative experiences with support seeking

Children approached adults or friends for support or help and were met with negative outcomes. This prevented children from seeking further support from them.

"They (teachers) will still contact my parents, and that will make it worse...I trusted them no to call my parents, they did anyways so what's the point."

12-year-old girl



User Satisfaction Survey

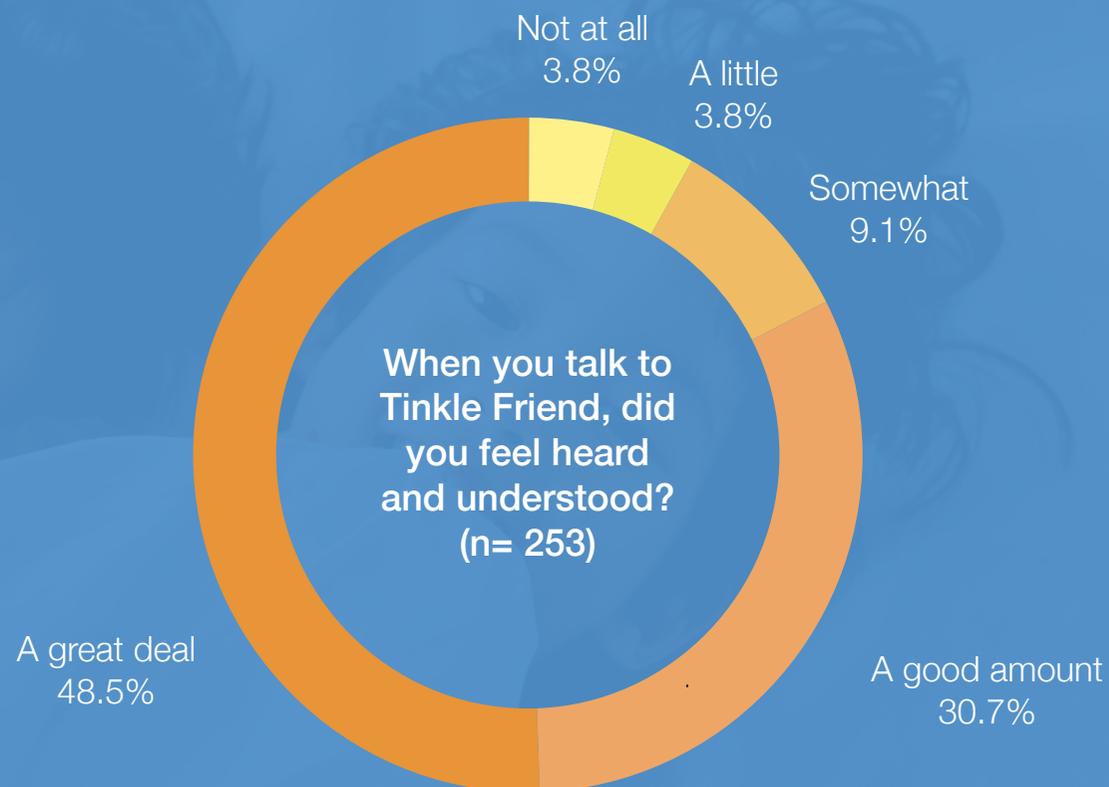
User satisfaction survey



In August 2020, we launched a survey to find out if users of the online chat felt supported after chatting with Tinkle Friend.

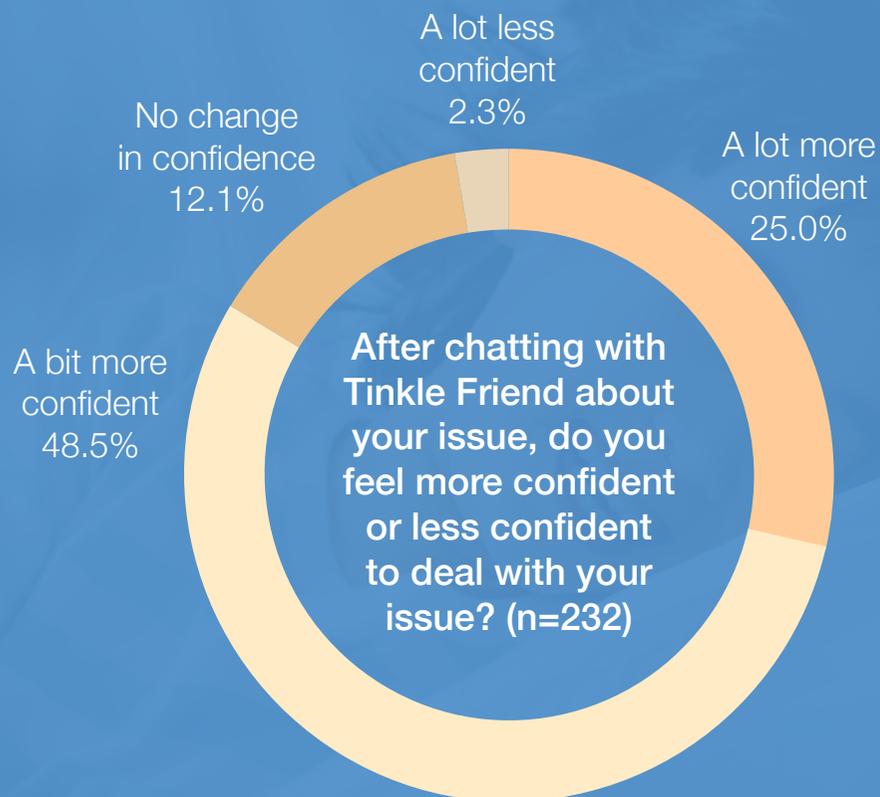
To examine children's satisfaction and gather feedback on the Tinkle Friend service, they were given the option to fill up the satisfaction survey at the end of each chat.

Between August and December 2020, 264 responses were received.

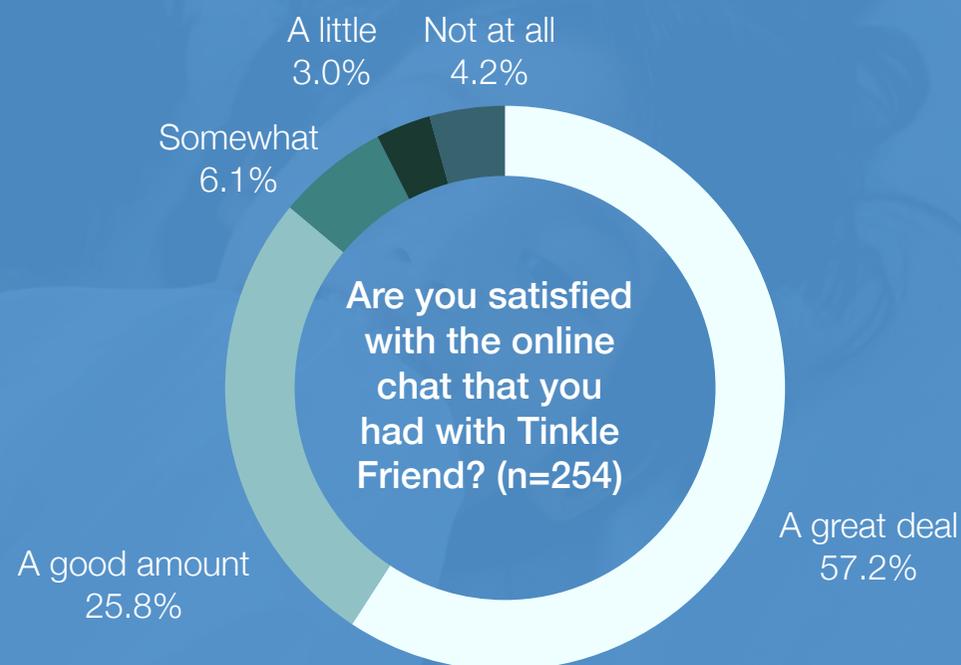


79.2% of children felt heard and understood when they chatted with Tinkle Friend.

User satisfaction survey



73.5% of children felt more confident to manage their problems after chatting with Tinkle Friend.



83% of children were satisfied with the Tinkle Friend service.

User satisfaction survey



We also asked children to indicate what they learned after talking to Tinkle Friend by choosing from a list of items. The most common things that children learnt were:

- Thinking more positively
- Expressing their emotions
- Using a method suggested by Tinkle Friend to overcome the issues raised
- Identifying reasons for feeling a certain way
- Seeing things from another point of view



User satisfaction survey

The survey also gathered additional feedback from children. Many children provided positive feedback on the service. Some of the children reflected that:

Tinkle Friend provided help and good advice on how to resolve their issues

“ I have used Tinkle Friend 2 times and I always feel comforted and assured after the chat. The methods and strategies given by Tinkle Friend Works! Thank you :)”
11-year-old girl

Talking to Tinkle Friend made them feel better

“ I want to thank tinkle friend for making my day better.”
11-year-old girl

Tinkle Friend is kind, friendly, and nice

“ Tinkle friend gives answer when I ask a question to her and she is kind too. I like so much.”
9-year-old girl

Conclusions

Reviewing the data from the year, here are some of our main takeaways.

1 Tinkle Friend as a source of support for children

- Based on our Tinkle Friend service statistics, although many children continue to engage in chit-chat with Tinkle Friend, many others sought support for issues they faced in school, as well as in their peer and family relationships.
- In 2020, we saw a decline in helpline calls and a surge in online chats compared to 2019. This may be due to restrictions in helpline operations and the redirection of calls to online chats. It is also possible that online chats afforded greater privacy whilst family members worked from home. We will continue to monitor this trend.

2 Letting the children's voices guide our work

- Our analysis of the chats regarding children's social support during COVID-19 reflected that many children who spoke to Tinkle Friend expressed their hesitation in seeking support from their social network. They cited reasons like not wanting to burden their parents or friends further, thinking that their parents would not understand their issues, and not knowing how to communicate with them.
- Parents and teachers can check in with children regularly and encourage open communication so as to reduce barriers in children's help seeking behaviour.

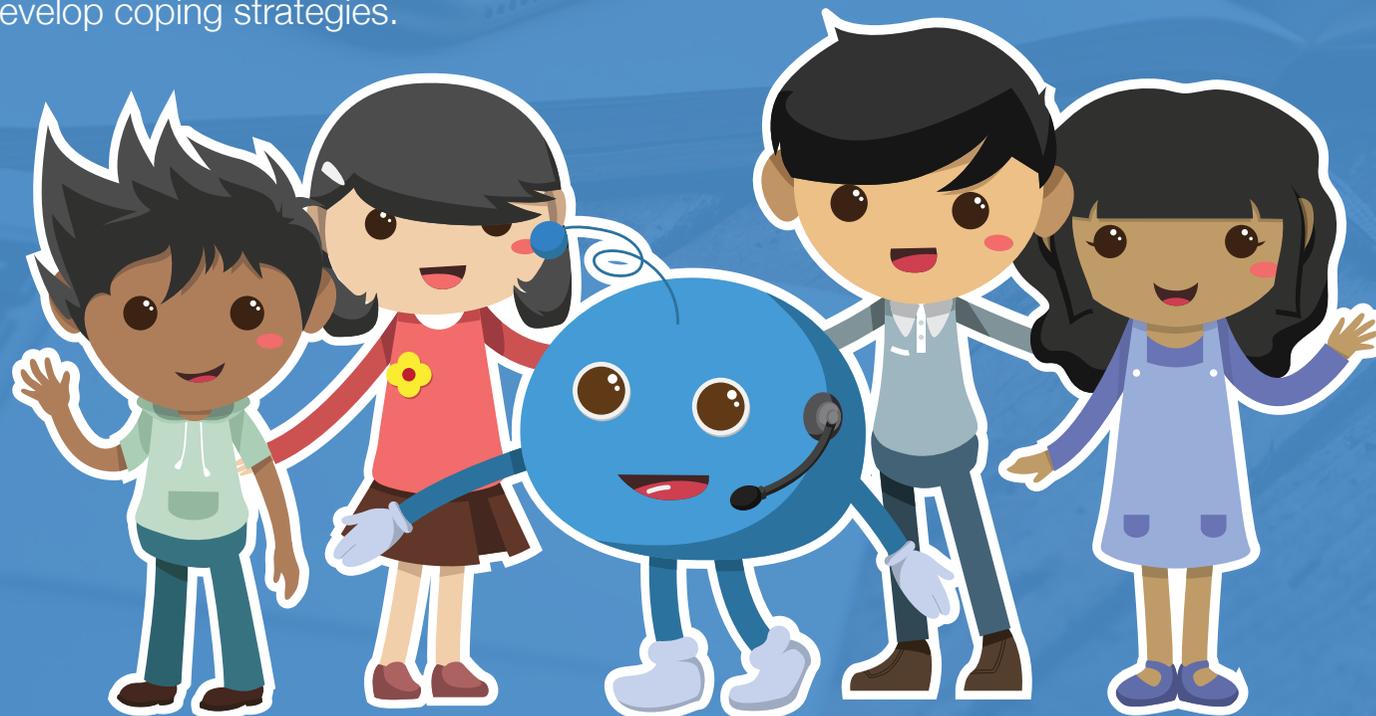


Conclusions



3 Children who contact Tinkle Friend feel heard and supported

- Children talk about a wide range of topics with Tinkle Friend. They would chit-chat, share happy events, and talk about their issues. From our user satisfaction survey, we found that children who spoke to Tinkle Friend were satisfied with the service and felt heard and supported.
- Trained volunteers and staff at Tinkle Friend who are attuned to children's needs assisted these children to feel better and develop coping strategies.





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