

Stockholm, February 28th 2014

**Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC)
Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)
UNOG-OHCHR
CH-1211 Genève 10
Switzerland**

Dear Sirs/Madams

Bris are pleased to submit Bris alternative report for consideration. The report represents Bris comments on Sweden's fifth periodic report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, on the implementation of the Convention of the Rights of the Child.

As a national child helpline, Bris alternative report is based on Bris support services for children through calls, emails and chats. Bris hopes that this information will be useful in the coming discussions with the representative of the Swedish government. Bris would also like to participate in the pre-session meeting.

Bris gives consent regarding putting this alternative report on the electronic database runned by Child Rights Connect. Bris also gives the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child consent in naming Bris at the hearing with the representatives from the Swedish government.



Kattis Ahlström
Secretary General

Alternative report 2014



28th of February 2014

Comments from Bris (Children's Rights in Society) on Sweden's fifth periodic report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, on the implementation of the Convention of the Rights of the Child 2007 – 2012

BRIS
BARNENS RÄTT I SAMHÄLLET

Summary

Bris – Children’s Rights in Society – is an NGO working for the rights of the child. The United Nations’ Convention on the Rights of the child form the basis and guide Bris work. Bris activities are planned and carried out based on the best interest of the child. Bris works for the right of every child to an adult, who sees, understands and acts for the best interest of the child. Bris is a voluntary organisation with no political or religious affiliations, to which children can turn for advice and support.

Bris’ alternative report is a comment on the Swedish Government’s fifth periodic report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child regarding the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Bris’ alternative report is a compilation of Bris unique knowledge of talking with children and from our reports based on Bris support services in 2008 – 2012.

This is a summary of Bris main findings:

The right of every child to receive information about their rights

I have divorced parents and really want to live with my dad. Mum has sole custody of me and she says that I have to live with her, but I’m much happier with dad. I don’t want to live with mum!! Does my dad have any rights although he doesn’t have custody of me? Do I have any rights? I’ve tried to search online, but it’s hard to find anything.

Girl, age 13

Each child has the right to receive information about their rights. Children who contact BRIS often say that they are unaware of their rights or where they can find readily available information on what they are entitled to. Children, who are in need of the support and care that is society’s responsibility to provide for. Bris is deeply concerned that children in Sweden lack basic knowledge of their rights.

Bris believes that professionals in the public sector need more knowledge about the relationship between the child’s human rights and the Internet as a tool in the child’s daily life, in part to ensure that the child’s rights are not violated online and in part to be available to a greater extent for providing information and support online.

The right of the child to be protected in his or her participation, not being protected from participating

Among the calls Bris receives from children who are in contact with authorities, children do not feel that they have the opportunity to express their opinions. Nor do they feel that their opinions have been taken seriously. The child’s right to be heard in contacts with authorities in Sweden is strongly limited and the children who contact Bris bear witness to this.

From what children tell Bris, the children believe that what society offers in the form of help and support does not always match what children need and ask for. Bris sees how it affects the children when society organises care, support and other efforts based on an adult perspective, without the child’s right to participation in all decisions concerning them being ensured.

It is every child’s human right to have adequate access to his or her human rights regardless of where they reside

When Bris conducts a dialogue with public sector employees and children, it bears witness to the fact that municipal autonomy leads to the child’s situation and need for support possibly being assessed differently in different municipalities. Bris sees that the prioritisations in individual municipalities differ and that the child has to live longer under inappropriate conditions.

The principle of non-discrimination (art. 2) clearly states that it is every child's human right to have adequate access to their rights without difference of any kind, but Bris sees that municipal autonomy takes priority over the national intentions, which by extension can lead to the protection that a child who is subjected to abuse is entitled to varying based on where in the country the child resides.

An adult child rights perspective

Bris looks seriously on the fact that children say that they do not receive good personal treatment in the interaction with authorities. Being treated with dignity and respect for their person is the right of every child. An unprofessional and inappropriate treatment can lead to the child's trust being seriously damaged and the child's opportunities of getting the support the child is entitled to be limited.

Children who contact Bris have met adults who are lacking a child rights perspective and who are not able or willing to take on full responsibility for ensuring each child their human rights. Children, who are being harassed online in school where it is clear that the school does not always see what happens online as its responsibility - since it is not "in school" or children, in contact with social services who expresses a powerlessness and disappointment and is often surprised by how he or she has been treated and how the case has been handled.

When children contact Bris, they say that they have a very hard time in being taken seriously when they try to get adults to take their responsibility and act to keep the child from being offended or violated. The child says that he or she has had to tell adults about the violation several times before the adult has acted. Children who are living in economically disadvantaged families' bears witness of an unwillingness and an ignorance among adults in school for understanding the child's situation.

Bris encourages the Swedish Government to respect the views of the children who contact Bris and to give them due weight.

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Introduction

Bris – Children’s Rights in Society – is an NGO working for the rights of the child. Bris works based on the United Nations’ Convention on the Rights of the child and Bris activities are planned and carried out based on the best interest of the child. Bris works for the right of every child to an adult, who sees, understands and acts for the best interest of the child. Bris is a voluntary organisation with no political or religious affiliations, to which children can turn for advice and support.

At the core of Bris services are the support channels Bris 116 111, the Bris-mail and the Bris-chat, to which children and young people up to the age of 18 can turn anonymously and free of charge when they need the support of an adult. Bris was founded in 1971 and is organised into one national association with five regional offices. The offices are in Umeå, Norrköping, Stockholm, Göteborg and Malmö. Bris activities are funded by financial contributions and donations from both private and public donors. Since 2013, Bris support services have been staffed by 17 full-time professional counsellors who are based centrally in Stockholm.

Bris works as an advocacy and referral organisation for the full application of the rights established in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in the life of every child. Bris uses its collective knowledge of the child’s situation to inform, influence and shape opinion in children’s rights issues at various levels.

Bris also has a site offering support to adults (Barnperspektivet.se) and a helpline for adults (077150 50 50) who need someone to talk to about their own or children in general.

Bris alternative report is a comment on the Swedish Government’s fifth periodic report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child regarding the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Bris alternative report is a compilation of Bris unique knowledge of talking with children, from Bris reports based on Bris support services in 2008 – 2012, with an appendix with Bris support services and documentation from 2013. The objective of Bris alternative report is to depict the living conditions of the children who contact Bris. Bris does not claim to present a representative picture of all children in Sweden. Bris alternative report together with reports from other children’s rights organisations can jointly present an illustration of the living conditions of children in Sweden.

Children turn to Bris because they are in need of support and these are their voices. Bris always removes any identifying information from children’s voices and converts quotes into accounts to protect the children. This means that these are not direct quotes, but rather they have gone through an adult perspective rooted in expertise in child development, children’s rights and needs and with a child perspective well rooted in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

1. General measures of implementation (art. 4, 42 and 44, para. 6 of the Convention)

Legislative compliance with the CRC

The Committee invites Sweden to take all necessary measures to ensure that national legislation is brought into full conformity with the Convention and recommends that Sweden continues to strengthen its efforts towards formal recognition of the Convention as Swedish law. It further recommends that the Convention should always prevail whenever domestic law provisions are in conflict with the law enshrined in the Convention.

The Government has chosen transformation as a method for the incorporation of the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child into Swedish law.

In Sweden, a discussion is again under way that incorporation should entail a stronger protection for children's rights, a method that the Committee on the Rights of the Child promotes and that Bris actively works for. Bris believes that an incorporation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child would strengthen the protection of the rights of the child and normalise the Convention's child rights perspective. Bris believes that incorporation would further strengthen the child's position in society as a bearer of rights.

Co-ordination

The Committee recommends that Sweden continues to strengthen its efforts to improve the coherence and coordination of efforts on behalf of children so as to ensure adequate cooperation among central and local authorities as well as cooperation with children, parents and non-governmental organizations. The Committee also recommends that the State party strengthen its measures to monitor and follow-up on decisions taken at the municipal and regional level to address the remaining disparities and to ensure implementation of the Convention at all levels, including through the country administrative boards.

Bris does not believe that the coordination between central and local authorities functions satisfactorily. In talks with children and adults, Bris notices that there are major differences in the availability of support and the quality of the support that is offered to children in Sweden's different municipalities. Bris believes that the Government must continue to strengthen its efforts to improve the coordination of the work for children's rights.

Independent monitoring

The Committee recommends that:

a) The State party consider providing the Children's Ombudsman with the mandate to investigate individual complaints;

Bris does not believe that the Government has implemented the Committee's recommendation on the mandate of the Children's Ombudsman. Bris believes that the child's possibilities of being heard in contacts with public institutions are strongly limited. Bris therefore believes that it should be investigated whether the Children's Ombudsman should be given authority to represent individuals if the matter is of particular importance to adjudication or if it is otherwise of interest to the implementation of the Convention.

Bris also recommends that Sweden adopt the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a communications procedure.

- **Bris recommends that the State party consider providing the Children's Ombudsman with the mandate to investigate individual complaints.**

- **Bris recommends that the State party ratifies the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a communications procedure.**

Dissemination of the Convention and training

The Committee encourages Sweden to strengthen its measures to ensure that all children are aware of the Convention and its two Optional Protocols and can use such instruments to defend their rights. The Committee further recommends that the State Party ensure systematic and ongoing training programmes on human rights, including children's rights, for all persons working for and with children (e.g. judges, lawyers, law enforcement officials, civil servants, local government officials, teachers, social workers, health personnel and especially children themselves).

*A while ago, I got together with my girlfriend and my parents have behaved badly towards me since I told them. They say that I am evil and abnormal. I have already talked with the counsellor and the school nurse, but get no help! What can I do? Do you really not have the right to love who you want?
Girl, age 17*

It is the right of every child to receive information about their rights. Children who contact Bris often say that they do not know what rights they have or where they can find readily available information on what they are entitled to. The child knowing about his or her rights is a prerequisite for the child to be able to influence his or her situation. Bris believes that all public institutions must become better at conveying information on children's rights and making information available in a manner suited to the child.

*If there is a gang of boys who are late without an excuse and get punished for skipping, and then later in the day a gang of girls who are late without an excuse, but DON'T get punished for skipping, does it count as discrimination? Can you report it to somebody or something?
Boy, age 14*

- **Bris encourages the State party to strengthen its measures to ensure that all children are aware of the Convention and its three Optional Protocols. Bris recommends that the State make sure that the principle of respect for the views of the child form the basis and guide the process of making sure that these measures are available for children of all ages.**

2. General principles (art. 2, 3, 6 and 12 of the Convention)

Non-discrimination

The Committee recommends that the State party monitor and ensure full compliance with article 2 of the Convention and ensure the implementation of existing laws guaranteeing the principle of non-discrimination with respect to all children within its jurisdiction.

*My pretend dad is nice to my sisters, but he's awful to me! Don't I have the right to the same respect as them?
Boy, age 16*

My parents have always said that they are for fairness and that they will treat me and my brother EQUAL. What went wrong? My brother and I have entirely different curfews, but for once I don't intend to accept being discriminated because it's wrong! I won't accept being treated differently! What the hell happened to my parents? Help me.

Girl, age 15

I saw a doctor because I'm so tired. I thought it was really hard to meet the doctor today because I've been depressed before and it will be in my medical records for ever. When I go to the doctor, it feels like I have a stamp on my forehead! The doctor asked me if he needed to be worried about me killing myself!? How can he just ask me something like that? I'm actually just like anyone else, but am treated differently. Can't I be treated based on how I feel instead of how I felt??
Girl, age 17

How can I have the courage to be myself? Where can I get help? I know my mum love me and would support me if I came out as a transsexual, but I don't know how the rest of my family would react. I know how other transsexuals are bullied and discriminated and it scares me. How can I get the courage to tell??
Boy, age 15

The best interest of the child

The Committee recommends that the State party strengthen measures to raise awareness about the meaning and practical application of the principle of the best interest of the child and ensure that article 3 of the Convention is duly reflected in its legislation and administrative measures. It also recommends that the State party take appropriate and effective measures to ensure that the principle of the best interest of the child form the basis and guide the process and all decisions, especially in asylum cases involving children, including by providing regular training to staff at the Migration Board and the social welfare authorities.

My big brother will be sent back to the war in our home country because he can't get a passport in Sweden. I'm so worried. I have absolutely no idea what I should do. Only God knows how bad I feel, I just want to die.
Girl, age 14

The principle of the best interest of the child is one of the four fundamental principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and shall guide the interpretation of the Convention. Bris looks positively on the Swedish Government emphasizing the importance of taking human rights into consideration in all decisions concerning children in its strategy¹ for strengthening children's rights. But based on what Bris hears from children in Bris support services, neither the Government's strategy nor the introduction of the principle of the best interest of the child into Swedish legislation is enough to ensure that the principle has an impact in practice and in the handling of all decisions concerning the child.

Bris is concerned that children who contact Bris feel that the social authorities do not see to their best interest. The principle of the best interest of the child is closely tied to the respect for the views of the child; when the child's best interest is investigated, the child *must* be given the opportunity to be heard in formats that suit the child. The right to not participate is the child's and shall not be used as a reason for authorities to exclude the child from processes that concern the child. This is something the Committee on the Rights of the Child has clearly emphasized, that there shall not be any contradiction between Articles 3 and 12, but rather only a supplemental role where Article 3 establishes the objective of achieving the best interest of the child and Article 12 contains the method for being able to achieve that objective. In actual fact, Article 3 cannot be correctly applied without the child being heard.²

¹ Government Offices of Sweden (2011). *Strategy for strengthening the rights of the child in Sweden*. 2010.

² CRC/C/GC/12

Among the calls Bris receives from children who are in contact with authorities, children do not feel that they have the opportunity to express their opinions. Nor do they feel that their opinions have been taken seriously.

I am in short-term foster care since I'm both mentally and physically abused at home. Now, the social services say that I have to move back home because my parents don't consent to me being in placement and the social services say that the abuse isn't a strong enough reason to cover me by the care of young person act. But I don't intend on moving home. I don't plan on agreeing to more punishment. Is this right? Can social services move me home without having done an investigation? Don't they have to file a police report? What should I do? What can I do?

Girl, age 18³

I have divorced parents and really want to live with my dad. Mum has sole custody of me and she says that I have to live with her, but I'm much happier with dad. I don't want to live with mum!! Does my dad have any rights although he doesn't have custody of me? Do I have any rights? I've tried to search online, but it's hard to find anything.

Girl, age 13

Respect for the views of the child

The Committee recommends that Sweden continue to promote and facilitate, including through legislation, respect for the views of children and their participation in all matters affecting them, ensure that adults who work with children are trained to effectively ensure that children capable of expressing their views are provided with adequate opportunities to do so and ensure that all municipalities meet the requirements for active participation by children and regularly review the extent to which children's views are taken into consideration, including their impact on relevant policies and programmes.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child establishes the view of the child as an individual with his or her own human rights. Children are competent, equal to adults. The child's right to be heard in contacts with authorities in Sweden is strongly limited and the children who contact Bris bear witness to this. The starting point appears to be to protect the child from his or her *participation*, which is different from being protected *in* his or her participation. The right of the child to participate in decisions concerning him or her include the child's right to not participate, but that right is the child's and not a reason for authorities to respect the views of the child.

In the Swedish legislation, such as the *Aliens Act*⁴, it says that the child shall be heard if it is not *inappropriate*, which is not found in Article 12 in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The respect for the views of the child is not limited in this way in the Convention.

I have been removed from home by law and am doing really bad where I've been placed. The social services don't listen to me and I've begun thinking about killing myself when things are rough. But i don't want to feel like this! Please help me because I can't handle any more.

³ Under the Care of Young Persons (Special Provisions) Act (1990:52), the Social Welfare Committee can decide that a person under the age of 20 shall be immediately placed into care. Bris has therefore chosen to include accounts from children over the age of 18.

⁴ Chapter 1 Section 11 of the Aliens Act (Utlänningslagen SFS2005:716)

Girl, age 17

I am placed at a foster home and I'm wondering what my rights are?

Boy, age 16

If a child needs contact with an authority to get support and help, Bris refers the child further. Bris looks seriously on the fact that children say that they do not receive good personal treatment in the interaction with authorities. Being treated with dignity and respect for their person is the right of every child. An unprofessional and inappropriate treatment can lead to the child's trust being seriously damaged and the child's opportunities of getting the support the child is entitled to be limited. Bris is accustomed to talking about children who live in victimisation and Bris believes it is disconcerting that children who contact Bris about authorities have little trust in the authority and the competence of the personnel to listen to them in issues that concern them.

I've been removed from home by the law and live at a treatment home. I don't like it here, but neither the people who work here or the social services listen! I've been promised to be allowed to go home on the weekends if I'm good, but sometimes I don't get to anyway. Who is listening to me and who can I trust?

Girl, age 17

Social services have really let me down. I live at a foster home and have everything there: my friends, school, everything. It's my only security. Now they won't let me stay. What should I do?

Girl, age 16

Children who contact Bris often feel abandoned and what children want most of all is to be listened to. When time passes and nothing happens, they feel that they cannot get help from social services. This leads to them falling silent and resigning themselves to their situation, which may have become even worse. In the contact with Child and Adolescent Psychiatry Services, some children are afraid that nobody will understand how they feel. The children want more discussion sessions, but say they only get medication.⁵

Some children who get in touch with Bris and who in various ways are subject to intervention under the Care of Young Persons (Special Provisions) Act (LVU)⁶ say that they have very little influence over their situation. They are not aware of what rights they have. They call Bris and ask about basic information, such as why a certain decision has been made or how a review can work.⁷

What should you do when life feels hopeless? Nothing works and nobody listens now that social services has moved me from the short-term foster home to a foster home. What can I do to fix my life? Who is listening and who can I trust?

Girl, age 18

I'm under placement at an interim home where I don't get on well and is far from good. I just want to go home, but social services says I have to stay in care. There is nobody who will listen to me more than mum and my sister and they fight to get me home everyday. But what should I do?

Girl, age 15

⁵ Bris (2010) The Bris report. Stockholm. Bris.

⁶ Care of Young Persons (Special Provisions) Act (1990:52),

⁷ Bris (2010) The Bris report. Stockholm. Bris

Social services has placed me at a P12 home and I hate it. It feels like they are ruining my life, and I don't even know why I ended up here. What should you do when life has let you down so many times that you don't want to give life a chance?

Girl, age 16

Bris believes that the child's possibilities of being heard in contacts with public institutions are strongly limited. Bris therefore believes that it should be investigated whether the Children's Ombudsman should be given authority to represent individuals if the matter is of particular importance to adjudication or if it is otherwise of interest to the implementation of the Convention. In addition to strengthening the national complaints mechanisms for the child in Sweden, Bris are positive to the possibility for the individual child to complain, in that the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution in December 2011 on a Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a communications procedure.

Bris believes that Sweden, as one of the pioneering countries for the rights of the child, can contribute to strengthening the child's rights by ratifying the optional protocol.

3. Civil rights and freedoms (arts. 7, 8, 13 – 17, 19 and 37 (a) of the Convention)

Access to appropriate information

The Committee encourages the State Party to continue to take all necessary measures, including by enforcing appropriate legislation, providing parental education, education in schools and awareness-raising of children to ensure the protection of the child from information and material harmful to his or her well-being in conformity to article 17 (e) of the Convention.

I wonder if we teenagers don't have the right to say what we think and feel in the family? Here at home I'm not allowed to really say what I want because they will take away both my mobile and computer, and they can be gone both a little while and a long time. Mum and dad say that I can come and talk with them about anything, but how can I do that? Once I do try to talk to them, they just say that the discussion is over!

Boy, age 17

Since 2007, BRIS has published seven reports under the title "The Children, BRIS and IT".⁸ These reports are a part of the "Safer Internet" project, which is funded by the European Union and run by the Swedish Media Council in cooperation with BRIS and is about the safer use of the Internet among children and young people. Bris is continuously increasing the knowledge of children's everyday activities online and the range of support services for children includes chat, e-mail and a forum, which is moderated by personnel, where children can offer each other advice on important matters in life, as well as the helpline Bris 116 111.

For Bris, it is a given that a children's rights organisation of today has a place in the middle of the virtual day-to-day of children and young people by being a resource for the children in exactly that part of their day. Today, support is offered by many NGOs, with varying degrees of quality assurance, but few authorities offer support. Bris' evaluation of the support offering to young people indicates that greater availability online is just as important to children as availability offline. *Bris believes that public actors should be available to a greater extent where children and young people are.*

⁸ Bris (2011). The children, BRIS and IT. Stockholm: Bris.

It stands to reason that the main part of everyday online life for most young people is very mundane commonplace, but is also filled with all the joys and worries of life. However, when Bris summarises its contacts on this topic between 2008-2012, it is unavoidable that it will more concern that which is difficult and serious. Nonetheless, even in the contacts with Bris, it is clear that young people in particular use the Internet and mobile phones to do something as commonplace as managing their relationships.

Bris believes that there is reason to remind people that the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child also applies to children's and young people's everyday life online. Because according to Article 13, the child has the right to the freedom of speech, which includes the right to search, receive and spread information and ideas of all kinds independent of territorial boundaries. It is the state that is responsible for the compliance to the child's rights, even online.

Bris believes that there is a gap between what happens in the child's everyday life online and what adults are worried about. Bris believes that professionals in the public sector need more knowledge about the relationship between the child's human rights and the Internet as a tool in the child's daily life, in part to ensure that the child's rights are not violated online and in part to be available to a greater extent for providing information and support online. In Sweden, there is the *Contact with Children for Sexual Purposes*⁹ Act, a law that has not achieved the results the legislator desired¹⁰ and has led to very few convictions.

In order to satisfy every child's right to life and development (Article 6) and right to be taken seriously and listened to (Article 12), it is every adult's responsibility to ensure that all children have somewhere to turn to get help and support, even online. Just as important is the responsibility of ensuring that every child is aware of his or her rights online and offline and the Internet is a very important part of this work as a tool for conveying knowledge to children and young people.

I just read about a law that children have the right to a private life. It said that parents don't have the right to pry, or read your diary and so on. Does that apply to mobile phones too? is it ethically right for your parents to go into your mobile while you're sleeping, and read every text, about private thoughts, fantasies, problems - about MY life? my mobile is like my diary. I want information on the law, I really feel violated and used. (e-mail from an 14-year-old girl - 2009)

In the work on preventing and addressing violations, professionals have to work with evidence-based methods that involve the child's everyday life on- and offline. In Bris' contacts with children, it is clear that the school does not always see what happens online as its responsibility - since it is not "in school". Bris wants to emphasize that the school is responsible for ensuring that the child is not subjected to insult and injury both offline and online.

Today, the Internet and mobile phones are absolute givens in everyday life for most children in Sweden. Here, there is a huge difference between the approach to IT between children and adults. *This difference can also be expressed by the claim that adults use the Internet in various ways, while young people live it.* This difference creates alienation and obstacles. Consequently, there is a great need for different ways of increasing adult knowledge about what the young Internet is about.

The average age of the children who contact BRIS is 14 years. In Bris' contact with young people, Bris can note that the combination of the Internet and sexuality is an area in which young people and adults stand the furthest apart and it is extra important for adults to get information on actual

⁹ Chapter 6 Section 3 of the Penal Code

¹⁰ National Council for Crime Prevention (2013) Regulation on contact with children for sexual purposes - a follow-up of the law from police reports to convictions. Report 2013:14.

experiences on this topic in particular. But online sex is hard to talk about and therefore something that widens the gap, but this is also true of sex in real life and abuse there.

A guy has faked a profile with my address, phone number and pictures from my facebook on a website where women sell sex. Loads of people have phoned and texted me and I'm scared. What should I do? Will something happen?
Girl, age 15

The child who is subjected to violations and contacts BRIS can tell about an online life filled by victimization, just like it is for many children offline as well. Adult awareness and management of the child's victimisation online is, however, so much worse and less developed than it is of the child's victimisation offline. The experience from Bris' contacts with the child - and adults - about the child's daily life online is that adults are not on hand in the way that the child needs.

- **Bris recommends that the State Party encourages all public actors at central and local levels, in particular the social service, increase their accessibility for online support systems for children.**
- **Bris recommends that all staff in public agencies working for and with children for at central and local levels (e.g. judges, lawyers, social workers and school personnel, are provided regular training on the everyday online lives of young people.**
- **Bris recommends that the State Party ensures that private online actors are working actively to combat harassment (bullying) online.**
- **Bris recommends that the State party take all necessary measure to ensure that all children are aware of their rights online and the support and services available for them online.**
- **Bris recommends that the State party pay special attention to online harassment (bullying) when strengthening and developing evidence based measures to combat bullying in schools.**

Combating violence and other abuse

The Committee recommended that Sweden take all necessary measures to implement the recommendations of the United Nations Study on violence against children and especially to prioritise prevention and promote nonviolent values and awareness-raising. The participation of children shall be ensured, and accessible and child-friendly services and methods for reporting violence against children are to be created (cf the Committee's concluding observations 2009 paragraphs 33 a and b).

Bris began its activities in 1971 to stop violence against children. For 40 years, physical and psychological violence has been one of the most common reasons for the child to contact Bris. Since 2006, Bris has noticed a marked increase in the contacts about physical and psychological violence.

A child subjected to violence and other abuse has the right to protection. For this right to be realised, the interaction between the Government, parliament, municipalities and county councils must be of high quality. Bris sometimes sees that municipal autonomy takes priority over the national intentions, which by extension can lead to the protection that a child who is subjected to abuse is entitled to varying based on where in the country the child lives or is. It is every child's human right to have adequate access to protection without difference of any kind. No regional differences should exist that mean that the town the child lives in is crucial to how the child is protected from violence. When Bris conducts a dialogue with public sector employees and children, it bears witness to the fact that municipal autonomy leads to the child's situation and need for support possibly being assessed differently in different municipalities. Bris sees that the prioritisations in individual municipalities differ and that the child has to live longer under inappropriate conditions.

*My dad has abused me ever since I was little and now I feel like I've had enough. I don't want to live here any more. It's enough that I have to live with these memories the rest of my life. But if I contact social services to get a new home, do I have to report him? I really don't want to do that because whatever he's done to me, I love him. But I really don't want to live here any more.
Girl, age 14*

Bris are concerned that, although it was 35 years ago that a ban on violence to children was established in the Parental Code¹¹ and 25 years ago that Sweden ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child, few of the victimised children are aware of their rights. Based on an in-depth reading of Bris' contacts with children subjected to violence in 2011, it is often parents who inform their children of the child's rights. A child who is subjected to violence in the family often lacks this knowledge. This may be one of the reasons that the child, in the contact with Bris, seeks affirmation that what he or she is experiencing is wrong. However, seeking help or telling an outsider is an almost insurmountable task for a child subjected to violence. The child chooses to not bring outsiders home, which leads to insight in the child's life decreasing and the isolation from the surroundings increasing. One of the only ways forward may be to contact Bris anonymously.

*Sitting here and am really sad because my mum hit me. Does she have the right to do that? What should I do? Should I report her?
Boy, age 13*

I know that child abuse is illegal so I didn't want to tell the counsellor the truth about my situation at home. So I just told a little, something mild, like having my hair pulled and that we argue a lot. But then the counsellor said that she could get fired if she didn't report it to the social services and then I just feel so much

¹¹ Chapter 6 Section 1 of the Parental Code

pressure that I don't say anything. So I don't know who I can talk to, I need an adult. Should I go to confession with a priest to be sure of secrecy?
Girl, age 15

During Bris' more than 40-year history, there are several common denominators for the children subjected to violence and sexual abuse. The perpetrator is primarily the biological father, followed by the mother and stepfather. The abuse takes place in the home and is often related to the parents' alcohol consumption, which also means that the violence is worse on the weekends when the parents drink more. In Bris' experience, the deep feelings of powerlessness and insecurity are significant to the child's experiences.¹²

When the National Council for Crime Prevention¹³ investigated child abuse in 2012, the Council arrived at the same conclusions that Bris discovered in contacts with children subjected to violence. In 2012, 3,230 crimes of abuse of children ages 0-6 years were reported and 8,810 crimes of abuse of children ages 7-14 years were reported. Abuse of 7-14 year-olds is often committed by perpetrators of the same age who the victim knows. It is difficult to identify the actual scope of child abuse because the violence is often not reported to police when small children are involved. With respect to abuse of children between the ages of 0 and 6 years, compared with other crimes, there is an unusually high proportion of female perpetrators here.

Violence against children is an incredibly complex issue that requires coordination, civil courage and social competence and knowledge among adults who encounter children. The child who contacts Bris has commonly had contact with a number of authorities, such as the social services and child and adolescent psychiatric services – almost at the same time. The child's perceptions of the authority contacts are often disheartening. The child expresses a powerlessness and disappointment and is often surprised by how he or she has been treated and how the case has been handled. The child's hope of being taken seriously and getting help has been dashed, and for the child who has lived in a vulnerable living situation, further deceit from the adult world can be too much to bear. Even if many professionals today have knowledge about how to discover that a child is subjected to violence, Bris believes that the knowledge of how they themselves should act, whether they should report it or not for instance, is deficient. Bris therefore believes that the Government should introduce a provision in the Higher Education Ordinance that qualifications in a profession that comes in contact with children will require the student to have knowledge of the rights of the child and how to discover if children are faring poorly and the reporting obligation for their profession.

Another reason that the child does not seek help is that he or she has been threatened by his or her parents that they will hurt or kill the child if he or she tells. The child may also feel responsible for his or her parents and does not want them to be subject to an investigation. The one parent also often knows that the other is abusive, but chooses not to say or do anything. For the child, this is a signal that the parent that hits him or her is not doing anything wrong, which makes it difficult for the child to seek help although he or she feels that the abuse is not right. When the parent fails in the parental role, it is the state's responsibility to ensure that the child gets the help he or she is entitled to.

Two years ago, dad beat me and I've been afraid of him since then. I think about whether I should report him to the police or not all the time, but if I do and it ends up with a punishment, he'll surely hate me for ever! Please help me!
Girl

¹² BRIS (2011) The BRIS Report. Stockholm: BRIS.

¹³ National Council for Crime Prevention (2011) *Police-reported child abuse – development until 2009*.

My mum usually grabs me hard and sometimes hits me. Dad says that if it gets too bad we can report her, but how far does it have to go to be able to report her? But how can I change my mum?

Girl, age 14

When I argued with my stepfather, he got so angry that he grabbed me by the throat. Mum was in another room, but when I called for her, she came after a while and tried to come between us. Mum says that we can't report him cause she has to get her finances in order before she can leave him. But what should _I_ do?

Boy, age 15

I'm beaten by my family. I don't know what I should do because I don't dare report it. If I report it, there will be an investigation of my family and then they'll stay calm a while when social services is here, but then chaos breaks out when social services has given up. Even if they don't do an investigation, I don't want to fight with my family. I'm afraid the family will cut off all contact if I'm put in placement.

Girl, age 16

Children placed in care often contact BRIS about problems with authorities. The child has often had contact with various authorities over an extended period of time and feels abandoned by society. The child says that after placement, the contact with the social services has decreased or ended and it happens that the child does not know why he or she is placed or how long it will last. There are children who have contacted BRIS and said that the situation after the placement has gotten worse and that they have been subjected to abuse by peers at the institution, or by adults at the institution or the home.

- **Bris are concerned that the State party's efforts to reduce the abuse and neglect of children have not been successful and that the high level of child abuse and neglect and other forms of violence is still a part of the everyday lives of children in Sweden.**
- **Bris recommends that the State party ensures that all municipalities have the resources to provide around the clock social services with professional staff.**
- **Bris therefore believes that the Government should introduce a provision in the Higher Education Ordinance that qualifications in a profession that comes in contact with children will require the student to have knowledge of the rights of the child and how to discover if children are faring poorly and the reporting obligation for their profession.**

4. Family Environment and Alternative care (arts. 5, 18 (paras. 1 – 2), 9-11, 19-21, 25, 27 (para. 4) and 39 of the Convention)

Abuse and neglect

The Committee recommends that the State party continue and strengthen its efforts to provide adequate assistance to children who are victims of child abuse, including through:

- a) early detection and treatment of cases involving child abuse;
- b) specific parenting programmes for families at risk of abusing children;
- c) ensuring that all victims of violence have access to counselling and assistance with recovery and reintegration;
- d) providing adequate protection to child victims of abuse in their homes;
- e) supporting the Swedish Children's helpline so it can provide a 24-hour helpline service for children (...)

For children who are victimised, it can be crucial to have rapid contact with an adult after physical or sexual abuse, but on-call social services are not always available in every municipality.¹⁴

Bris is concerned that, according to the National Board of Health and Welfare 2012 report, only 62% of Sweden's municipalities say that they have on-call social services that are staffed around the clock with qualified social workers. It is the Government's responsibility to ensure that a child who is faring poorly or at risk of faring poorly must also have the possibility of registering and reporting it to a responsible agency and be given immediate protection. *A helpline does not have this responsibility or capacity.*

Bris wants to be able to offer every child individually adapted support that is based on the child's needs and functional level. All support at Bris is *adult led*, which means that a curator is always involved in children's contact with Bris. All support is *qualified* with a child perspective. Bris is an NGO and not an authority. Bris is an NGO that relies on the good will of private individuals and businesses. Bris is an organisation with no party political or religious affiliations that assists children in distress. Bris shall be seen as a complement to the state support to which every child is entitled and which is the state's responsibility to provide. A helpline to which children can turn for support and advice is important. Today, Bris has capacity to keep the support services open between 10 a.m.-10 p.m. For Bris to be able to keep the support services open, Bris needs financial support. In 2012, the grant from government authorities was 7, 8 percent of Bris' total revenues.

I've been physically abused by my pretend dad, but I don't have anyone to talk to because I don't want to get either of them in trouble! And everyone has to report things in this context! I can't cope with school and can't sleep.. I hate this so much!
Girl, age 14

Soon I won't be able to take it any more. My pretend dad is basically a bastard to me and I really get shit for everything here at home. I'm supposed to have respect for adults and not speak back and all that, but does he have respect for me? Don't I have the right to the same respect as him? If I speak my mind, he thinks that I'm being sarcastic and he has an awful attitude, but I'm just saying what I think and he says that he couldn't care less about what I think. I really feel like a slave without rights. Does he really have the right to treat me like this?
Boy, age 16

My parents don't listen to me and don't let me make decisions. I am tired of feeling like a nobody, I've always listened to them and have done what a normal kid would do. It really bothers me that I don't have any rights, but instead have to take it all. How can I get them to listen to me?
Boy, age 16

My mum is so controlling and mean! She has control over my entire life and I can't say anything about it because she threatens me constantly and I am afraid of both her and what she can do to me! I have tried to fight against her, but then she just makes my life worse. I don't want her to have the power over me any more, maybe the state can have the power over me instead?
Girl, age 15

- **Bris recommends that the State party increases its financial support to Bris in the capacity of a Swedish Children's helpline.**

¹⁴ BRIS (2012). The BRIS report, Theme Mental Illness. Stockholm. Bris.

- **Bris recommends that the State party ensures that all municipalities have the capacity to provide on-call social services that are staffed around the clock with qualified social workers.**

5. Basic Health and Welfare (arts. 6, 18 (para. 3), 23, 24, 26 and 27 (paras. 1-3) of the Convention)

Standard of living

The Committee recommends that the State party take all necessary measures to ensure that all children are not living below the poverty line. The Committee also recommends that the State party take adequate measures, including special support measures, to ensure that children, in particular those from socially disadvantaged families, including single-parent households and of non-Swedish ethnic origin, are not living in poverty, regardless of where they reside. The State party should consider drawing up a plan of action for combating child poverty in times of economic crisis.

Economic disadvantage is something the child who contacts Bris bears witness of. Between 26 April and 13 June 2012, children who wanted to could answer to an anonymous online questionnaire on bris.se about economic disadvantage. 263 children chose to answer the questionnaire. When Bris compiled the results, it indicated an economic disadvantage that affects every aspect of the child's life. A clear topic in the questionnaire was that the child takes considerable responsibility for his or her parents' finances. The child protects his or her parents, does not ask for things he or she needs, accepts that the parents have to work a lot and are not home and do not say if there is something they need. The child also tells about having to comfort his or her parents when they are having a tough time, that they try to help them financially and at home, and that the situation with bad finances extensively worsens the relationship in the family.¹⁵

The child mentions that he or she feels pressure from school to buy materials, that the child cannot get books, but rather has to use loose-leaf worksheets; the child bears witness of the fact that activities within the scope of school cost money and that the food at school runs out and that there is no money to buy their own food. One of the greatest worries that children mention in the questionnaire in terms of activities in school is school field trips and class trips. When the child cannot get money for the activities, the child abstains and stays home or pretends to be sick.¹⁶

In 2012, Bris published a report on economic disadvantage among children in Sweden and in Mozambique; the report was based on in-depth interviews with 14 children in "hearings". Many accounts recur in both countries - they are accounts of exclusion and stigmatisation, of taking more responsibility in the home, of anger and sorrow over not having the same conditions as others. The children said that they perceived that if one does not have money, one ends up in schools that are described as poor by the children. A poor school means that good, healthy lunches are not served. Lunches that are extra important when the food at home does not provide the nutrition growing children need. This also means that the school does not have enough computers that the children can use to manage school assignments. And this group of young people rarely has computers and aids at home that can help them. Without access to a computer at home or in school, they inevitably fall behind. If one attends a poor school, it may mean that one does not have access to a school counsellor or school psychologist. Being able to get help and support from professional adults is important for many. And this should be a long-term support. It is also important that other adults

¹⁵ BRIS (2012) The Bris paper – Theme economic disadvantage. No 3/2012.

¹⁶ Ibid.

who are around the child show trust and patience. Having the courage to tell about their situation at home can take time and it is then important that there is energy, time and resources.¹⁷

Many of the children live in economically disadvantaged areas. They describe anger over the feeling that it is impossible to leave. They cannot afford public transport, to buy a bicycle, get a moped license or buy a moped. The children that Bris met in the "hearings" felt that it was difficult for them to change their lives. They described that they were stuck in the area and could not afford to move to work or study in a different area. Many children that Bris spoke with were well aware of the various forms of welfare available, what is required to get welfare and how the welfare system is structured. They pointed out major injustices and felt that the social services should work more based on each family and see its conditions and needs.

Another aspect of living in economic disadvantage is not being able to afford the rent for one's home. The Ministry of Health and Social Affairs presented a strategy for combating homelessness that was applied in the period 2007-2009 where one of the targets was that "the number of evictions would decrease and no children would be evicted". In 2012, 569 children were evicted from their homes.¹⁸

Dad is two months behind on the rent and if he doesn't pay, we won't be able to keep living here. I don't know what I should do to help him? I can't handle seeing dad like this, he's a complete wreck and I feel awful seeing him like this and having to worry about all this. Everything depends on me, and I really need help.

Girl, age 15

The child who tells Bris about his or her economic disadvantage bears witness of unwillingness and ignorance among adults in school for understanding the child's situation. Bris looks seriously on Swedish compulsory school not being free of charge and children in economically disadvantaged families not being able to participate on equal terms as other children. Being discriminated against in school on the grounds of one's parents' financial situation is a crime against the child's human rights and *Bris encourages the Government to make it clear to school operators that activities must be free of charge.*

Bris believes that the operators of Swedish schools have a very important task in educating everyone that works in Swedish schools of the child's rights in general and in this case how economic disadvantage affects the child.

I get sad from us being so poor. I have to think "save, save and save" the whole time while others can get whatever they want.

Girl, age 16

Both mum and dad are so poor. I have so few clothes. But clothes aren't important are they? Or are they? I wished I lived in a foster family, although only until things work out!

Girl, age 10

We have almost no money cause we only live on dad's salary. Mum gets too little from her sickness benefits. We are really behind in terms of money and have so many debts everywhere. I need help. We need help. It really sucks to have to

¹⁷ BRIS. SOS Barnbyar (2012) När pengarna inte räcker. Stockholm. Bris.

¹⁸ The Ministry of Health and Social Affairs (2013)

return bottles to buy bread. Scratching together coins, but knowing it just gets worse every month. Where can we get help?

Girl, age 16

My mum will move in with my big sister in a different city to try and get a job. I was totally shocked: what about me? I'm still in school, I'm not an adult, I have no money. But mum thinks that I can move in with my boyfriend and he says that it's fine if mum sends him money for food for me. Mum answered "Yeah, when I have a job". But it feels as if my mum is abandoning me somehow. She can't just leave me, can she? I'm scared, I don't know what will happen.

Girl, age 17

Collectors are chasing my dad because he has a huge debt. I don't open the door when somebody knocks on the door, I'm so afraid that they will take my computer and my sofa. But what can the collectors take? Can I write false receipts on my things or do I have to move them out?

Girl, age 17

- **Bris recommends that the State party take active measures to make sure that primary education is compulsory and available free to all, so that children in economically disadvantaged families are able to participate on equal terms as other children.**
- **Bris recommends that the State party pursue its vision under the "Nollvision" to make sure that no children are evicted or homeless.**

Mental health care

The Committee encourages the State party to strengthen its mental health care system, including both preventive and interventional programmes, so as to ensure that adequate treatment and care are provided to all children that need it without undue delay. In addition, the State party should ensure better cooperation between related services, such as schools, social care homes, the juvenile justice system, treatment centres for drug and alcohol abuse, etc. The Committee urges the State party to strengthen the health care resources for people in suicidal crisis and to take measures to prevent suicide among groups that are at risk.

The Government has made major efforts and will continue to prioritise the mental health of children and young people. Since 2010, the Government has decided to introduce a stimulus grant that aims to encourage county councils to shorten their care queues. The care guarantee is a statutory part of the Health and Medical Services Act that states the time limits within which one shall be offered care from the county council. The care guarantee does not regulate what care the patient shall receive, which means that there are differences in the county councils regarding the care that is offered. The criteria for the stimulus grant, which is called "Kömiljarden" [the Queue Billion], form an annual agreement between the state and Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Region (SALAR). The Queue Billion stimulates the county councils to prioritise new visits as they provide economic compensation while return visits are not assessed, which may lead to return visits not being prioritised. All county councils have managed to fulfil some of the criteria, but there are large variations between county councils.

Bris published a study of children's own words about their mental health in 2012. The study is based on a qualitative analysis of 1,530 supportive contacts via chat and e-mail where children have contacted Bris about mental illness.

The compilation shows that the child describes symptoms of mental illness in detail. It is a matter of experience of depression, having anxiety, stress, sleeping difficulties, eating disorders and many say that they hurt themselves. The children's writing is permeated by accounts that they feel alone with considerable pain and that adults are not available. The results of the analysis are a clear connection between various forms of victimisation and mental illness. The children talk about physical, psychological and sexual abuse, deficient materials and, above all, emotional care, and being let down by adults they are dependent on. It can involve chaotic home environments, serious family conflicts and prolonged separations. There are also experiences of bullying and children with clear signs of trauma.¹⁹

They seek help, but have difficulty trusting adults to understand their situation and suffering, and many doubts that adults can help them. The child possesses a great deal of information and knowledge about him or herself, his or her surroundings and his or her relationships that adults need to take seriously. The child is in need of support from adults with information and readily available support. From what children tell Bris, the children believe that what society offers in the form of help and support does not always match what children need and ask for. Bris sees how it affects the children when society organises care, support and other efforts based on an adult perspective, without the child's right to participation in all decisions concerning them being ensured. Building up trust with the child takes time, and it requires professional expertise to understand underlying causes of the child's mental illness in order for the child to get the right and adequate help.

Increasing availability in healthcare is something Bris supports and sees as positive. An important lesson based on Bris' experience is that it takes time for the child to feel trust for adults, which is a

¹⁹ BRIS (2012). *Se hela mig!* Stockholm: BRIS.

prerequisite for the child to have the courage to tell about his or her situation. The child can experience that he or she signals to the surroundings that he or she is not doing well, but that the surroundings do not perceive the signals or do not act. To be able to discover and satisfy the child's needs in time, ensure that the child gets the right and adequate help, requires competent and experienced personnel. For the children who contact Bris, adequate help is about continuity, stability and a safe relationship to the adult.

- **Bris recommends that the impacts of the stimulus grant called "Kömiljarden" [the Queue Billion], is evaluated from a child rights perspective with a specific focus on the principle of non-discrimination concerning the quality of and access to adequate treatment and care in the different country councils, specially the country councils that have not met the criteria.**
- **Bris recommends that the State party ensures equal access to adequate care irrespectively of where the child resides with clear guidelines of the criteria for adequate treatment and care.**

6. Education, Leisure and Cultural Activities (arts. 28, 29 and 31 of the Convention)

The Government's goal is for the school to be a safe place for all students and all staff members. Nobody should be subjected to offensive treatment. In its fifth periodic report, the Government states that the total proportion of students who feel offended or violated in school has remained relatively constant in the past 20 years.²⁰ The fact that the proportion of children who have been subjected to offensive treatment in school has been relatively constant in the past 20 years is unacceptable and a consequence of the steps taken by the Government not being adequate to ensure the human right of every child to be protected from offensive treatment.

One out of five contacts with Bris in 2012 concerned offensive treatment and the number of contacts in the area increased by 25% between 2010-2011. The average age of the children who contact Bris is 14 years. When children contact Bris, they say that they have a very hard time in being taken seriously when they try to get adults to take their responsibility and act to keep the child from being offended or violated. The child says that he or she has had to tell adults about the violation several times before the adult has acted. The child perceives it as if the adult believes that the "problem will go away on its own".

In Bris' contacts from the first half of 2010, Bris sees four approaches on the part of the adults:

- The child is listened to and the adult acts to stop the offensive treatment.
- The child tells, but nothing happens.
- The child is not taken seriously. The violation is played down by the adult and in some cases, the blame for the violation has been placed on the victim.
- The school staff see the violation and speak with all involved, including the victim of the violation because the staff believe it is a matter of a mutual conflict.²¹

Not being subjected to offensive treatment is every child's human right. It is the state's responsibility to act when a school is incapable of living up to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Bris believes that all forms of discrimination and offensive treatment in school shall be viewed as a work environment problem. Bris demands that the Government take its responsibility and nationally secure resources to ensure that all schools will use evidence-based methods for preventing and

²⁰ Sweden's fifth periodic report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, on the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child 2007–2012. S2012.007. p. 341

²¹ BRIS (2010) *The Bris paper. Theme Bullying*. No 3/2010.

addressing violations in school. Many schools in Sweden today use methods that lack evaluations and the effects of them are consequently uncertain. Being protected from offensive treatment, harassment, abuse, violence and torture is every child's human right. The state has an obligation to the individual and all children have the right to feel safe in school.

The child describes to Bris a daily life of harassment, exclusion and both physical and psychological terror that continues day after day. In the work on preventing and addressing violations, professionals have to work with evidence-based methods that involve the child's everyday life on- and offline. In Bris' contacts with children, it is clear that professionals in school do not always see what happens online as their responsibility - since it is not "in school". Bris wants to emphasize that professionals in school are responsible for ensuring that the child is not subjected to insult and injury both offline and online.

The Education Act is very clear in that "the school operator is obliged to promptly investigate the circumstances around the stated violations"²², there is no space for questioning the student. All professionals that are involved with the school are obliged to be aware of what the law states and what applies to their activities. The child not being violated in school must be prioritised much more clearly and in this respect, the state has not succeeded in implementing the recommendations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child and has not ensured the child's human rights under the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

*Some of the people I met online know who I am and are threatening me. They ring me in the middle of the night and threaten to break in the windows and come in. I don't dare say anything to mum because then I won't get to be online any more.
Girl, age 14*

*Some girls are real mean to my friend. They have written mean things to each other on kamrat.se and now EVERYONE will harass my friend. My friend does not want to report it to the police because she thinks it will just get worse. Do you think _I_ should report it to the police? Please, help me, I don't know what to do!!
Girl, age 13*

*I have posted pictures from my last day of school on Instagram, but now somebody has commented: slut, whore, nobody likes you and all that. I feel so damned bad about it, but if I take down my Instagram account, it's just like they've won. What should I do?
Girl, age 13*

*Two of my friends have posted a picture of me on the online picture diary and written a lot of mean things and stuff that's not true. Now everyone hates me. What should I do? Now nobody answers when I call. I don't understand what I've done?
Girl, age 13*

*Sometimes I'm bullied and sometimes not. My friend is with me one week and not the next. When she is not with me, I have to be alone and then she gives me means looks, whispers and laughs. And then she says real mean things on msn and the online picture diary. What should I do?
Girl, age 12*

²² Education Act (2010:800) Chapter 6 Section 10

I am bullied by four girls who are in a class above me. They send threatening texts to me and write mean things on msn and facebook. Mum says that she would tell their parents, but she never did. I am so scared of them because there are several of them against me! I don't know what I should do to stop this.

Girl, age 12

I wonder what bullying is? I feel like I'm frozen out in class and they just don't want to have anything to do with me. Online they write that I should stop tagging along after them. Could it be my own fault that it's like this?

Girl, age 16

I'm called "nigger" and things like that online, by people who want to seem like cool... So I wonder: is it legal to say things like "Damn nigger"?

Girl, age 14

7. Special Protection Measures (arts. 22, 30, 38, 39, 40, 37 (b)-(d), 32-36 of the Convention)

Protection of witnesses and victims of crime

The Committee recommends that the State Party, through appropriate legislation and regulations, ensures that all children who are victims or witnesses to crimes, such as children who are victims of abuse, domestic violence, sexual or economic exploitation, abduction or human trafficking, or have witnessed such a crime, be given the protection required by the Convention (cf Committee concluding observations 2009 paragraph 72).

The Convention on the Rights of the Child clarifies the society's unconditional obligation to protect every child from all kinds of sexual exploitation and abuse. Since the organisation began in 1971, sexual abuse has been one of the most common reasons that children contact Bris. Between the years 2006-2011, a clear increase was distinguishable in the proportion of contacts that concerned violence and sexual abuse.. At the same time, the majority of the children who contact Bris are teenage girls.²³

My step brother has said that he will rape me and he describes in detail what he is going to do. I don't know what I should do. Should I talk to his dad, or to my mum, or something? I'm afraid of him.

Girl, age 16

It happened this weekend at a party. I just remember that it hurt and they laughed. My boyfriend said that they had filmed everything and if I tell anyone they'll post it all on the Internet!! I don't know what I should do. I just want to die.

Girl, age 15

My big sister lived with us over the summer and she did things with both me and our little brother. Is that rape? Or doesn't it count if it is a girl who did it? And does it count as rape even if it is in the family?

Girl, age 16

From Bris' contacts, it is clear that the child is not aware of his or her fundamental rights. Children who contact Bris with questions about what counts as sexual violence and not are also relatively common in chats and talks with counsellors. Experiences from Bris' counsellors are that violence in

²³ BRIS (2011) *The BRIS Report*. Stockholm: Bris.

close relationships among young people is relatively common, primarily experiences of sexual violence that are otherwise difficult to tell about.

Three themes tied to the area are:

- **Questions about what counts as sexual violence**

My boyfriend and I had sex. I actually didn't want to and said no, but it was like he didn't listen. Now I feel like shit. What actually counts as rape....? It wasn't like he held me down or made me or anything... !?

- **Normalised violence**

I do everything for him, but sometimes he forces me to show my breasts on the web camera on msn. If I don't do as he says, he threatens by saying "no, then I don't want to see you this summer " or "Fine, don't do it, then I'll block you right now!". But I don't want him to get mad so I have to show him my breasts now. I love him so much and can't live without him, so I do everything for him. At the beginning of my life, I didn't know what love was.

- **Violence as a secret**

About three months ago, I was raped, I don't dare report it and haven't told anyone, now it feels like it's "too late" to tell my parents, or is it?

*I go to the same school as the guy that raped me. He's been convicted for it and my parents have tried to get me into another school, but there's no room for me. So now I don't go to school any more. Is there some right I have or somebody I can get help from to switch schools?
Girl, age 13*

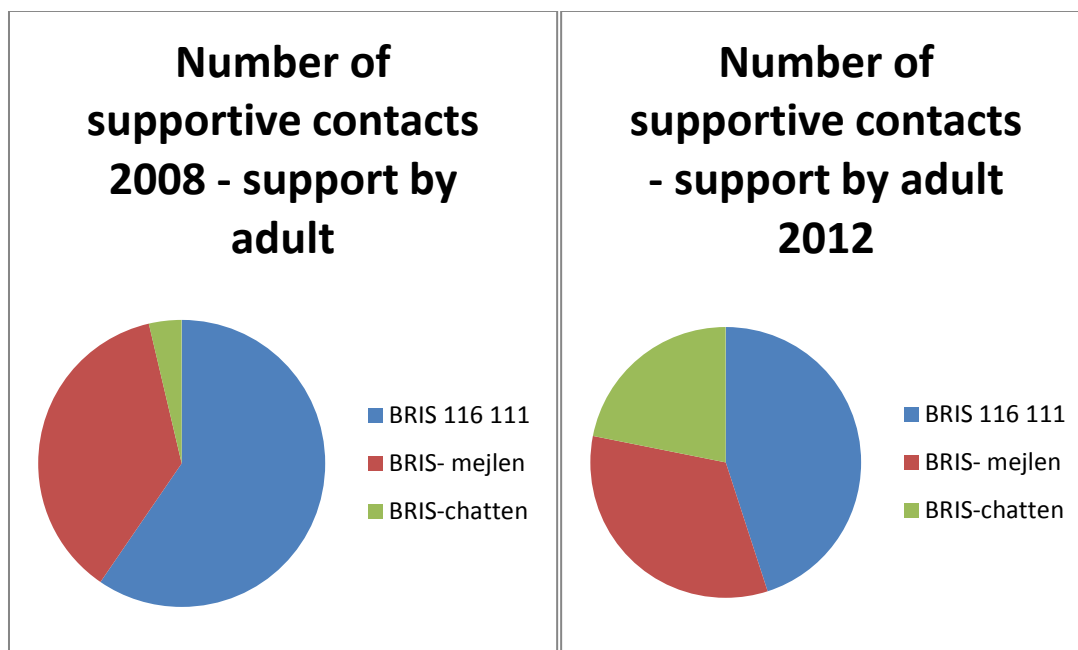
Bris believes that continuous educational efforts are necessary for people in the judiciary system and other authorities that come into contact with children subjected to crime in their work. Every child that has been subjected to crime has the right to be met with a children's rights' perspective in connection with the police report, preliminary investigation and trial. The child has the right to participate in forms that suit the child's age and maturity and in an environment that is especially adapted to the child's needs. Higher demands should be set on knowledge of the child's special victimisation and needs in case of sexual crimes.

Bris also calls for better sexual education in schools based on a clear rights perspective.

8. BRIS' support services and documentation

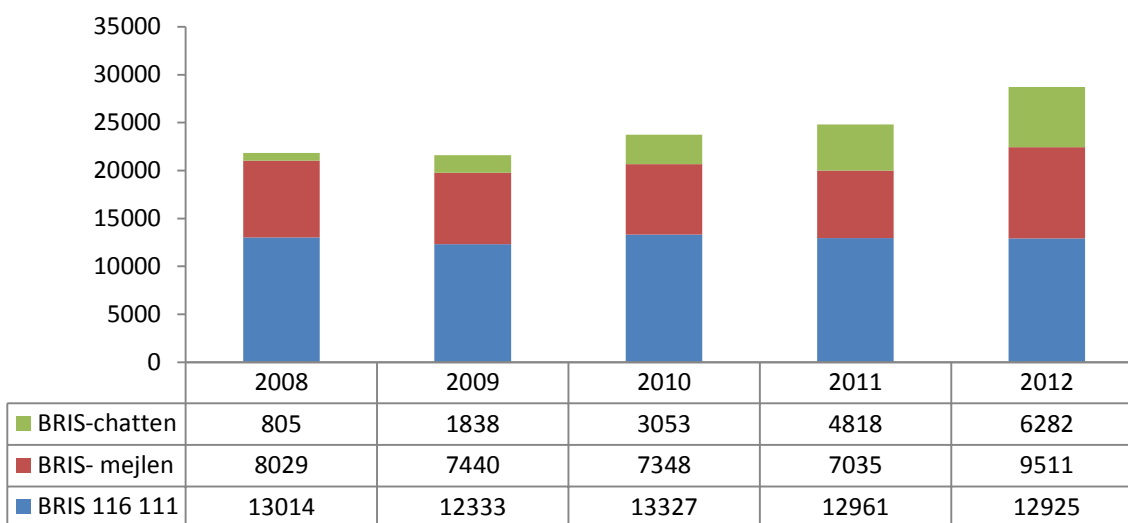
A large part of Bris' activities is comprised of the support services to which children anonymously and free-of-charge can turn when they need support. Children who turn to Bris because they need support from an adult can choose to either phone BRIS 116 111, e-mail to the BRIS-mail or chat with the BRIS-chat. Historically, it has been the most common that the children have chosen to phone Bris because from the beginning it was the only alternative to contact. In pace with other possibilities being offered, such as e-mail and chat, the choices have changed.

The diagrams below show this change in how the children have chosen to contact Bris. The change is related to the availability of these channels increasing every year by the opening hours being extended and the waiting times decreasing. The fact that Bris has chosen to prioritise the Internet-based channels is based in some part on the evaluation of Bris' Internet-based supportive contacts, e-mail and chat, that was conducted by Linköping University in 2011. The evaluation indicated that the children who participated in the study would have chosen to chat more if the chat had been open and that they secondarily chose to e-mail to the BRIS-mail. In the same evaluation, the children said that the reason that they preferred chat over other contact alternatives was that they think the chat is easier to use, they dislike talking on the phone, they get answers quickly, many feel more anonymous since nobody can hear them talk and because it is also harder for the person answering at Bris to recognise the child's voice.



Every time a contact is made, the Bris counsellor who received the contact documents certain data about the contact. This documentation of the contact is done if the counsellor has assessed that the contact is of a supportive nature. This means that the counsellor deems that the child who contacted Bris intended to establish a seriously meant meeting with an adult at Bris in order to get support, advice or information. When a contact is deemed to be of another nature, which means testing, pranks or for example silent calls, no data is saved about the contact in Bris' documentation database, but the only thing noted is that the contact took place. The majority of the contacts with Bris are of the "other" nature and these contacts are just as important as the supportive contacts. It can often be the child's way of gathering courage to test what it is like to contact Bris, test how it works and who the people answering the contact are.

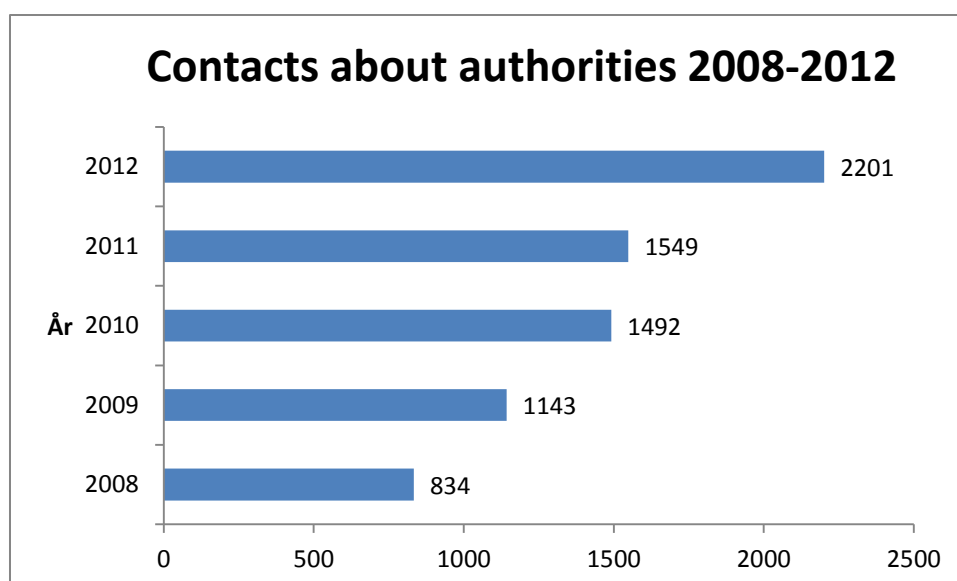
Bris' supportive contacts by telephone, e-mail and chat 2008-2012



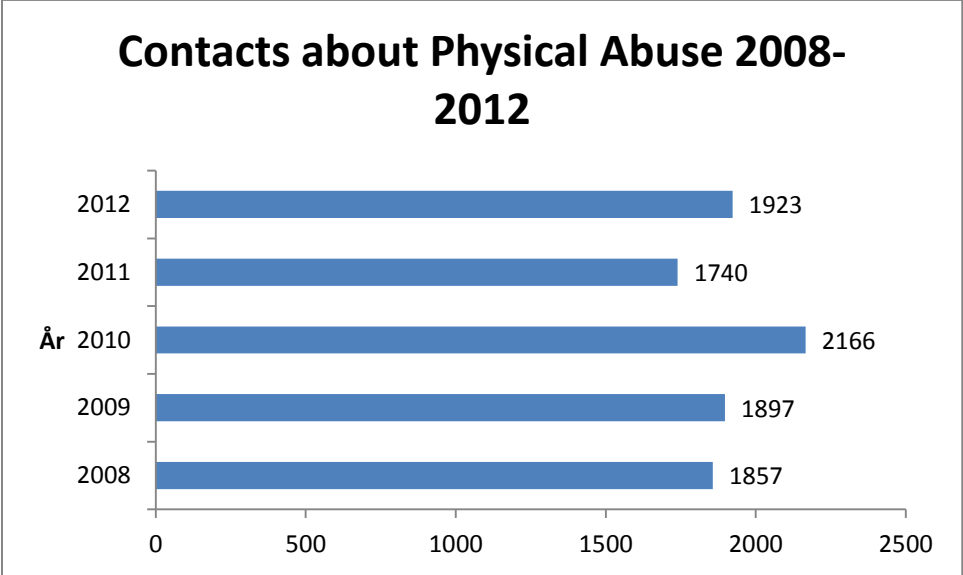
In terms of the supportive contacts, it is the content of the contact that is documented. This means that all of the topics the contact touches upon are stated, and if age and gender of the child the contact concerned has come forth, that information is also saved. It is the most common that the supportive contacts with Bris are about school and friends. It is also common that they concern fear and worry, bullying and family conflicts.

In terms of contacts concerning various authority contacts, the number is steadily rising, which has been the case since the topics were introduced to Bris' documentation in 2003. It is common that these contacts are about children who are placed either in family homes or treatment homes, and it is also common that they are about questions about the social services, child and adolescent psychiatric services, other parts of the healthcare sector or about various bodies in the judicial system.

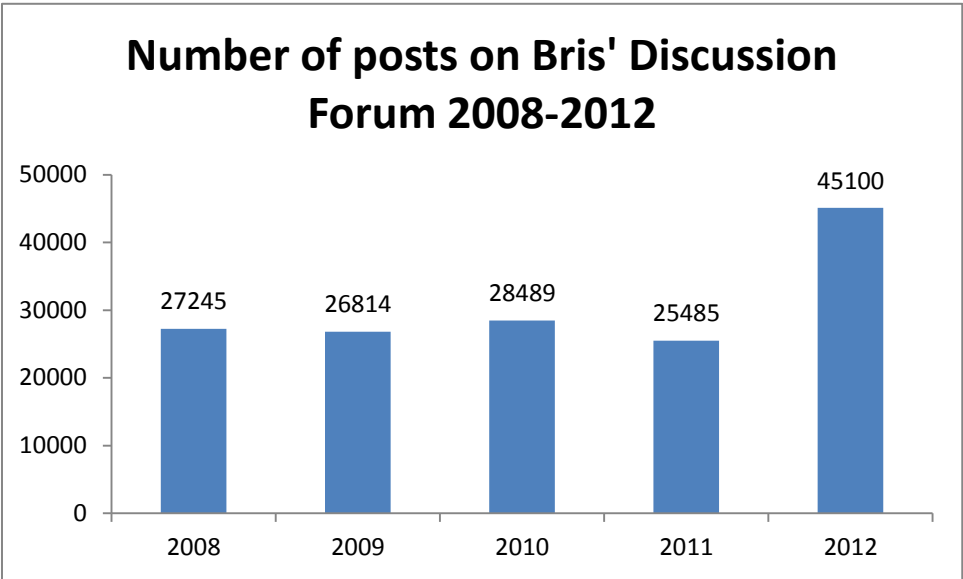
Contacts about authorities 2008-2012



In terms of contacts that somehow concerned the topic of physical abuse, the contacts were among the more common in all 40 years that Bris has provided support service. In many cases, it is about children who need help in understanding what a good home environment is and who want to know more about their rights in terms of being beaten. The children tell Bris about various forms of physical violence, from blows with the hand to blows with various implements.



Bris also offers children the possibility of getting support from and giving support to each other. This is done through BRIS' discussion forums, which are on Bris' website, Bris.se. To be able to use Bris' forums, the child has to create a user profile and then it is possible to begin their own discussion threads or respond to other children's threads. In order for Bris to be able to offer the children an environment that is supportive and an environment where every child's anonymity is guaranteed, all posts are moderated by adults at BRIS. BRIS' discussion forum constitutes the largest part of Bris' support services.



In Bris' forums, it is possible to post under various topic categories that have been decided by Bris in advance. These categories have changed over the years that the forum has existed; some have been

added and others taken away. Both physical abuse and authority contacts are areas where children and discussed and supported each other and this is what such a contact between children looks like:

AUTUMN 2010

From the website's
Discussion Forum

Main submission

Theme: Violence and abuse

My parents beat me and I don't dare do anything about it. Every time I try to talk with mum or dad about it, it ends up with me getting hit again. I don't dare tell anyone and I try to be happy when I'm with my friends, but they are beginning to wonder since I never want to do things with them that involve showering. When we plan to do something of the like, I might not have bruises, but when it's time to go, I am just black and blue all over and have a hard time to come up with a good excuse. Please, I don't know what I should do, I need some good advice!
Girl, age 15

RE:

You are so brave to talk with them! I think you should talk with someone you trust, like a friend maybe? Then you can go and talk with an adult, like a counsellor or a nurse at your school? A friend could go with you if you don't want to go alone. It is illegal to hit your kids so you shouldn't have to live like this. Good luck!
Boy, age 16

RE:

When I am with friends and am supposed to do something, but can't, I usually make up some excuse. One of my friends also knows my situation, so she usually helps me with excuses or she says that she doesn't want to do anything today either. But I think the best would be to tell an adult, but I wouldn't dare to do it myself! Hugs.
Girl, age 18

RE:

When parents or somebody else systematically hurts somebody else, like with abuse in your case, it is a crime regardless of who does it and why. Go to a counsellor at your school and tell her what's happening at home, and you'll see, it will work out for you.
Boy, age 19

Main submission

Contacts with authorities

I am in touch with the social services and will hopefully be placed in care soon. I wonder if there is anyone here who lives in a foster home or in a more temporary on-call family? What's it like? Do you feel like an outsider compared with the biological children? Do the adults in a foster or on-call home know that some of the children they take in can be a real wreck and have had experiences in their past?
Girl, age 16

RE:

I don't think they act different towards their biological children and us foster kids! All people are equal and people are real nice, you feel good after just a few hours. Good luck!
Girl, age 15

RE:

If you're lucky, you'll get a good foster family. There aren't many who are cool these days, most foster homes are just in it for the money and power over the child. It is tough to do what you're doing, but it's probably best that your parents find out otherwise, there will be even more trouble. Let them know that you're moving and that they cannot do anything about it. Good luck!
Girl, age 19

RE:

You learn an incredible amount from their normal homes when you couldn't have things that way in your own home. I became calm and stable and learned loads. I still keep in touch with them. I hope you end up with a good family. It's usually good people you get to go to and they most often receive information about you before hand so the family is chosen based on your needs.
Girl, age 19

RE:

I wish I didn't have my foster family. I want to go home to my mum again. But if you end up in a good family, of course it's better than home. Hope everything goes well for you.
Girl, age 16

9. Supplement: BRIS' support services and documentation 2013

During 2013 Bris has restructured several parts of the organization. One of the parts that have been reorganized is the supportive services. Up until September of 2013, the supportive services have been operated by volunteers. The volunteers have been located at all five regional offices and their work has been supervised by a group of employees at Bris.

Since 2013, Bris' support services have been staffed by 17 full-time professional counsellors who are based centrally in Stockholm. This comprehensive modification of the support services has vastly affected the possibilities of extending the opening hours of the support channels.

During this reorganization Bris has also implemented a new technical platform in order to improve and secure the digital channels of the supportive services; voice over IP, the Bris-mail, the Bris-chat, and Bris' Discussion Forum. In conjunction with this, Bris developed a new online system for documenting all contacts.

These extensive changes to the support services have had an affect on Bris' possibilities of producing statistics of children's contacts with Bris, for the full year of 2013. During the shift from volunteers to professional counsellors, the inserting of data from the supportive services was assigned a lower priority than regularly. Hence, the reliability of the data from this period, which extends from June to August of 2013, has been estimated to not correspond to the quality standards set by Bris.

As a result of this, Bris statistics for the supportive services have been separated into two different time periods for the year of 2013; January to May and September to December. The statistics from these two periods are not fully comparable, since some elements of the data collection has been altered during the development of the documentation system. For instance, the different topic areas the contact has touched upon have been altered in the new system.

Number of supportive contacts

In the documentation, every contact is assessed to belong to one of two possible categories, either supportive or other. A contact is assessed to belong to the category of "other" when the person contacting Bris, is silent and no conversation takes place. When the child clearly wants to joke with or test Bris, it also counts as an "other" contact.

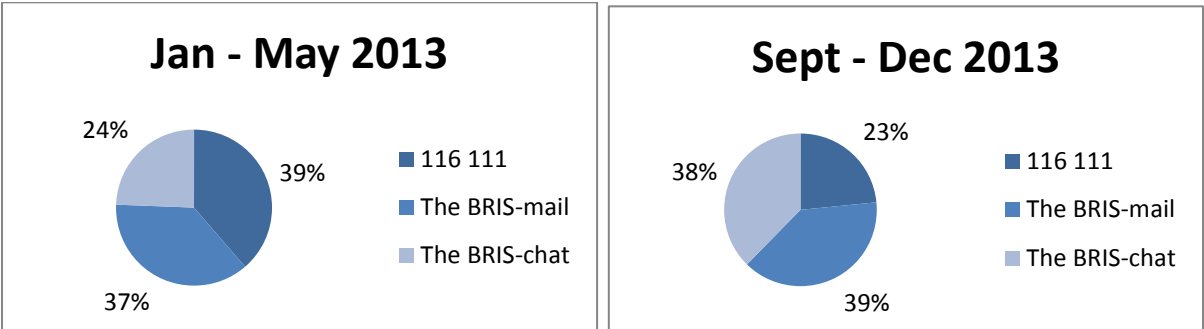
A supportive contact is a contact in which the recipient deems that the child intended to establish a seriously meant contact with an adult at Bris in order to get support, advice or information.

During the first period of 2013, the number of supportive contacts amounted to 10 669. During the second period of 2013, the number of supportive contacts was 8 504. Do notice that the two periods that are used here, are not the same length, therefore it is not suitable to make a strict comparison between the two.

Number of supportive contacts by channel

The pie charts below illustrate the distribution of contacts on account of which channel the child has chosen as their mean of contact. These charts clearly demonstrate how the Bris-chat has increased greatly, from making up 24 percent of the total number of contacts during the first period, to 38 percent during the second period. The increase in chats seems to correspond to a decrease in telephone calls made to Bris 116 111. The Bris-mail however, has a fairly similar frequency during both periods.

This development is, partly, a consequence of the extended opening hours of the Bris-chat. Since September, the Bris-chat is offered as a choice to the same extent as the helpline, Bris 116 111 and the preferences of the children contacting Bris is clear in the numbers below.



n = 10 669

n = 8 504

The most common contact topics

As described earlier, the different topic areas the contact has touched upon have been altered in the new system. Some of the topics have been removed from the system but more prominent is the fact that a large number of topics have been added. The adding of topics is motivated by the intention to making the collected data give a more complete illustration of the contacts. Whereas the number of topics used to be 40 up until September, it has now been expanded to 57 alternatives.

These two tables show the most common topic areas during the two periods of 2013. Some of the topics are among the five most common topics during both periods, as for instance *friends*, and *family conflicts*. The topic mental illness in children has been listed as a choice for documentation before as well as after the development of the system in 2013, but it has never before been as common as it has been during the second period of 2013.

January - May 2013	
Contact topic	Number of contacts
Friends	3437
Fear/anxiety	3042
School	2947
Family conflicts	1886
Bullying/offensive treatment	1842

n = 10 669

Sep – Dec 2013	
Contact topic	Number of contacts
Mental illness	1988
Friends	1270
Love	1139
Family conflicts	1123
Family in general	578

n = 8 504