SPEAK UP AND BE SAFE FROM ABUSE
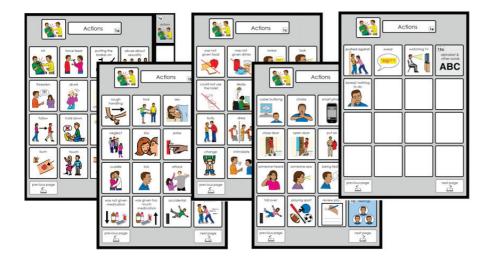
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When it comes to reporting abuse and neglect, people with communication difficulties are "highly victimized because perpetrators believe they will not be able to successfully tell anyone about the crime" (Wilczynski & Connolly, 2014,p.10). The Speak Up and be Safe from Abuse project was developed in response to a recognition that people with little or no speech are at increased risk of physical, mental or sexual abuse as compared to others in the community due to barriers associated with their communication (Collier, McGhie-Richmond & Odette, 2006). The project involved training for frontline staff supporting adults with intellectual disability and the development of a communication toolkit.

Over the duration of the project, Scope's Communication and Inclusion Resource Centre delivered training to 352 frontline disability staff across Victoria. The one-day workshop addressed the unique risk factors for those with communication support needs in relation to abuse and neglect, as well as a guide to the different kinds of communication support needed. A large component of the Speak Up and be Safe from Abuse training consisted of practical experience using communication tools and strategies. Those who attended the training were offered opportunities to practice using communication books and boards to assist a conversation. Practical activities also addressed how to use the tools in a way that enabled the person with communication support needs to lead the conversation, and how to facilitate a conversation without making judgements about what was being reported.

The toolkit has been created with the understanding that those with communication support needs require appropriate vocabulary to describe their thoughts and experiences relating to abuse and neglect. See www.speakupandbesafe.com.au for free downloads of communication aids. Much of the vocabulary in the communication resources are rarely seen in mainstream communication resources and relate specifically to abuse and neglect.

The Speak Up and be Safe from Abuse project included a research component to evaluate the outcomes of the training program. The study involved qualitative interviews with 16 frontline disability workers from across Victoria who had attended the training. Research participants were interviewed over the phone three months following their training. The results revealed that frontline workers recognised that the potential for the resources in the Speak Up and be Safe toolkit to be used, however the toolkit was not actually used in practice to identify abuse, even if abuse was suspected. This research identified that frontline disability staff required more support than a single day of training in order for them to feel confident enough to share what they had learnt during the training with their colleagues, and to use the resources with the people with communication support needs with whom they worked. Although the first iteration of the Speak Up and be Safe from Abuse training has been a promising start in terms of providing safeguarding resources, building expertise in staff in supporting people with limited communication skills requires a different approach.

In recent months Scope's Communication and Inclusion Resource Centre has been offered an opportunity to trial the delivery of the Speak Up and be Safe training using a different model in Scope's

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accommodation services. This presents an exciting opportunity to address the gaps identified in the research. The updated delivery model involves on-site group home training for staff members followed by eight weeks of support for staff to practice the skills addressed in the training. In addition, strategies to individualise the ways the tools are used will address the unique communication support needs of each resident. It is hoped that this training model will not only allow frontline workers to gain confidence in using safeguarding strategies in a real world scenario, but also allow them to process how to adapt the skills and resources for the individuals with whom they work.

Most of the communication resources in the Speak Up and be Safe from Abuse toolkit are available for free download from the Speak Up and be Safe website, www.speakupandbesafe.com.au. Information about upcoming training dates can be accessed through this website, including dates for an upcoming Speak Up and be Safe national tour in partnership with AGOSCI.

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References

Collier, B., McGhie-Richmond, D. & Odette, F. (2006) Reducing the risk of sexual abuse for people who use augmentative and alternative communication. Augmentative and Alternative Communication, 21, 62-75.

Wilczynski, S. M., Connolly, S., Dubard, M., Henderson, A., & Mcintosh, D. (2015). Assessment, prevention, and intervention for abuse among individuals with disabilities. Psychology in the Schools, 52, 9-21.