Be Safe Online: Resourcing young people with communication disability, cognitive impairment, and low literacy levels

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Short Abstract

Scope's Be Safe Online project targets the specific needs of children and young people with communication disability, cognitive impairment and low literacy levels that are at higher risk of online abuse by building on the current suite of safety resources available and translating them into a format that is more easily accessible and understood.

This project was made possible by a grant issued by the eSafety Commissioner and concluded in 2024. Developed through a discovery phase with people with lived experience including those with a communication disability and their support networks, the eSafety Commissioner's Office, and advisory group members from national online safety organisations, a suite of tools and resources to support communication were co-designed.

The *Be Safe Online* resources developed by Scope to better protect young people living with disability online include:

- A suite of Easy English documents designed for people with communication disabilities and low literacy covering topics such as staying safe from scams, providing online consent and maintaining a healthy online balance;
- A Communication book and key word sign resource designed to facilitate effective conversations about online safety and make reporting to the eSafety Commissioner more accessible and;
- An eLearning module developed to support educators and trainers to provide more communication accessible content to their audiences.

This presentation will outline the project, showcase the deliverables and present the evaluation findings.

Long Abstract

Scope's Be Safe Online project targets the specific needs of children and young people with communication disability, cognitive impairment and low literacy levels that are at higher risk of online abuse by building on the current suite of safety resources available and translating them into a format that is more easily accessible and understood.

Children and young people who have communication disabilities who don't use speech to communicate, or those who have difficulties reading and writing are often unable to access existing online safety education information in the appropriate format. This puts them at higher risk of potential abuse as they are unable to understand standard complex written information and rely on information being translated into plain language and Easy English, which simplifies language and the use of images to increase understanding. These children may also require specialised vocabulary (eg: a communication book) to talk about these issues in a way that is accessible for them.

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The project outcomes were as follows:

• Increased protection for children and young people with communication disability, cognitive impairment, and low literacy levels

• Safe access to digital technologies for all children / young people

• Provide resources for parents and carers to educate children / young people regarding safe access to digital technologies

The project stages were as follows:

1. Establishment Phase: establishment of the project team and Advisory Group with key stakeholders nationally to oversee the project outcomes and monitor and report on the project including timeline; project plan; roles and responsibilities; stakeholder groups.

2. Consultation Phase: inclusive of a desktop mapping exercise, and focus groups with people with lived experience and subject matter experts to identify gaps that currently exist and priortise topics of need.

3. Development Phase: this phase included the co-design and development of resources, including a Picture Communication Symbol library of 680 symbols covering more than 90 online safety concepts in partnership with Tobii Dynavox.

4. Evaluation: aligning with the evaluation framework issued by the eSafety Commissioner's Office, a formal evaluation was conducted which revealed positive outcomes related to participant learning and participant perceptions of the initial quality, value, and current/future applications of each resource set.

Scope also received important, practical suggestions for improving the communication tools and eLearning package, which will further enhance their utility.

This presentation will outline the project, showcase the deliverables and where to find them, including the freely available downaloads, and present the evaluation findings.