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## Plain English Summary

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# Preventing abuse and promoting personal safety in young people with disability.

This project was about what helps young people with disability to feel safe and be safe. A group of researchers from Southern Cross Uni did the project.

### Why is this important?

There has not been much research done about what helps to keep people with disability safe. Young people have not been asked what they think will help make their lives safer.

### Who was in the project?

We visited 4 states in Australia and went to 6 different cities and towns.

We talked to young people who were 16 – 30 years old.

**40** young people with disability talked to us in small groups

**12** young people with disability talked to us on their own

**16** young people with high support needs showed us how safety was part of their lives

**30** support workers and managers talked to us in small groups

We also made 2 surveys. People filled them out online.

**35** young people with disability finished the survey for young people

**138** family members, workers and advocates finished the survey for supporters



Most of the people in this research lived at home with their families. Some people lived in their own home, with friends, or in group homes. A few people were homeless or in out of home care.

Lots of people worked. Most people had did things they did for fun. Some people had been to TAFE or uni. Young people with high support needs were not as involved with other people or places.

Most people were connected to disability services. People with higher support needs had more to do with services. People with physical disability did not have much to do with disability services. Everyone had been to school, most often in special units within their local high schools.

1 person out of every 5 talked about bad experiences of violence or abuse.

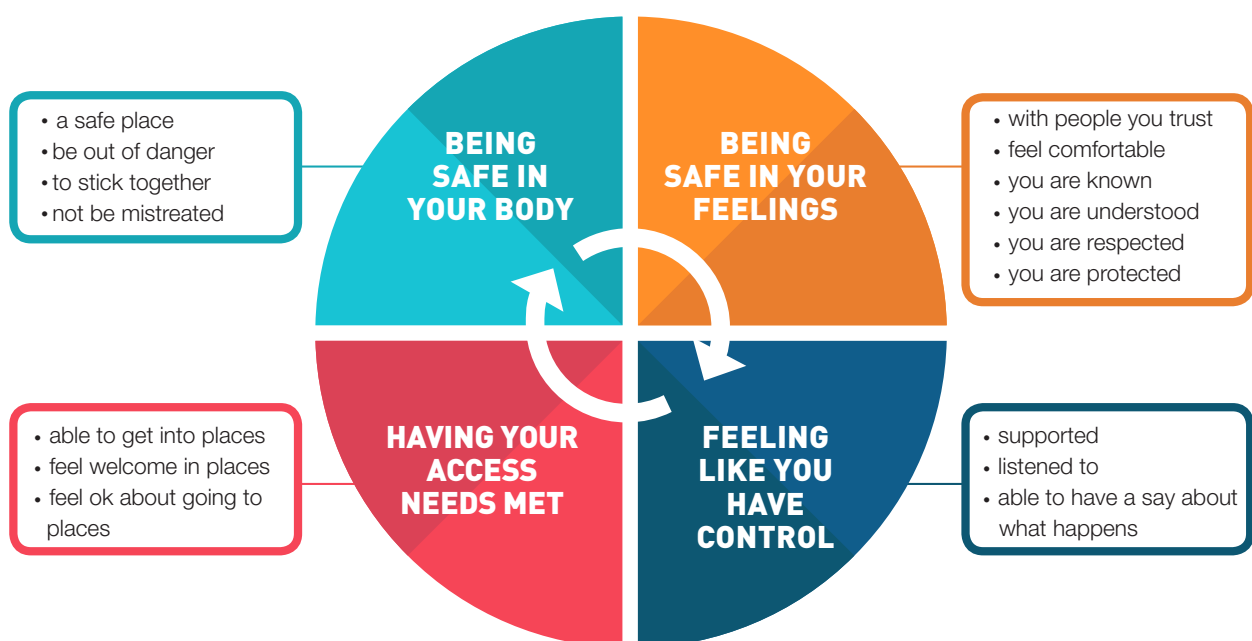
It was very important to hear young people's stories.

Young people had a lot of ideas about how services and systems can change to improve their lives.

## WHAT DID WE FIND OUT?

### What does 'being safe' mean to young people?

To be safe, young people said that they needed to have all these things.



## WHAT HELPS YOUNG PEOPLE TO BE SAFE?

### What makes it hard?

Young people said places were safe because they had people in them who kept them safe or who would protect them.

What mattered the most to young people was being known and being treated well.

Home was a safe place for most young people. This was because they had some control over what happened there and because people there knew them and cared for them.

Some people did feel scared or unsafe at home. This had a big effect on them.

Almost everyone said that being close with someone else was important to them in feeling safe. This helped them to feel good about themselves and feel like they could do things. Being close to more than one person helped people to feel safe and strong.

It was hard for some people to meet new people.

Family helped most people to feel safe. They trusted them and felt like they were understood by them.

Some people had a hard time in their family life and this made it hard for them to feel safe in their families. This was because of fighting or feeling like their family did not understand them.

Friends were important in helping some people feel safe. Friends were good back-up and helped people feel good.

A lot of people had problems with friends not treating them well.

Not many people with high support needs talked about friends.

Support workers, teachers and managers helped some people to feel safe. They did things that made young people feel like they mattered. When young people had a problem, they did something about it.

A lot of young people told us some workers did not help them when they told them about bullying or abuse. This made them feel scared.

It also made them feel like no-one would protect them.

In the community, some people felt that being in clubs and groups helped them to belong. This helped them to feel safe.

Sometimes people felt judged by people in the community, and this made them feel scared and unsafe.

Lots of people were scared of what might strangers might do to them. They thought they might get attacked on buses or trains, or that they might be robbed.



## Making life safer

Young people had lots of ideas about how their lives could be more safe.

The most important thing for everyone was

- to be listened to.
- to be treated well.
- to have something done when they had a problem.

Young people said they could keep themselves safe by learning about what to do if they did not feel safe.

They said that other people can help them to be safe. Other people can make sure that every young person has someone in their life to support them.

Services can help young people to be safe by treating problems about safety and abuse seriously.

All young people should have a safe life. Young people said it is everyone's right to be safe.



## WHAT DID OTHER PEOPLE THINK HELPED YOUNG PEOPLE TO BE SAFE?

We also asked families, workers and advocates about what helps young people to be safe. We called this group of people supporters.

These people thought that the safety issues young people talked about were very important.

They agreed with most of the things that young people said. There were a few things they thought that were different:

- Supporters thought that young people did not know very much about being safe outside of their home
- They felt that services needed more skills so they could help young people who had very hard lives because of abuse.
- Paid workers said they did not know enough about how to help young people to be safe.

Supporters had ideas about what would help to make young people safer. Some of these ideas were:

- helping young people to get to know people they can trust
- doing more to protect young people
- helping young people learn how to look after their own safety as much as they can.

## WHAT WILL MAKE THINGS BETTER?

All of this new information helped us to find some ideas about how to make young people's lives safer. Four things we found out were new and important.

1. People who were hurt physically were more likely to get help.  
BUT some people hid away to keep safe, or they didn't go out. This was not so good for them.
2. The thing that bothered young people the most was being hurt emotionally - in their feelings. They did not feel like other people cared a lot about this kind of pain.
3. Young people thought in lots of ways about having access to the community. It was not just ramps. It was also about feeling welcome and like you belong.
4. Young people felt like they could do more to keep themselves safe when other people supported them.



We came up with some ideas that might help. These are based on what young people and supporters told us.

### **To make young people's lives safer**

- Help young people to be close to people they can trust. This sets people up to be safe.
- When someone does not have anyone they can trust in one part their life, work hard to help them find someone they can trust in another part of their life. This will help them have someone to help them if they need it.
- Help young people to be in charge of their own safety as much as they can. Learn their ideas for being safe, and help them put them into action.
- Find out what young people want to learn about safety. Help them learn about these things.

### **To make support safer**

- Teach workers how to work with young people in ways that build them up. This helps young people to feel like they can be in charge of their safety. It helps them to feel ok about asking for help if they need it.
- Make sure everyone knows the rules about what is safe in services.
- Be quick to help young people if they tell you or show you something is not right.
- Teach workers and managers more about safety and how to stop abuse from happening.

### **To make services safer**

- When people do not have good support in their family life, they need help to get it from someone else. To make this work well needs careful help. Sometimes it needs funding.
- Safety planning is needed to help young people to be safe and grow strong. This needs to start from when they are small, and keep going until they are grown up.

### **To make communities safer**

- Governments need to make plans so that young people can feel welcome in their communities.
- We need new ways to get people in the community to speak up if they are worried about the safety of someone with a disability.
- Young people need to be part of deciding how we can make life safer and more inclusive for young people with disability.

**If you want to read more, you can find the full report on the research at:**  
**[www.rcypd.edu.au/safety](http://www.rcypd.edu.au/safety)**

