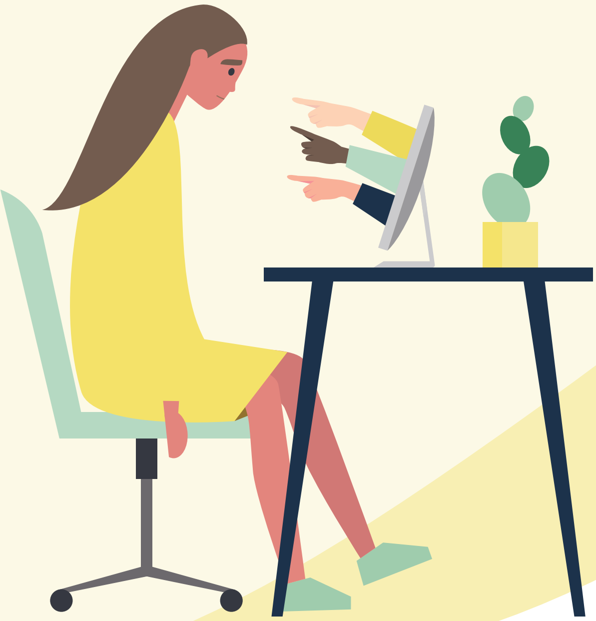
eSafety research

‘How bad should it be before I tell someone?’

Online abuse experiences of adult Australians with intellectual disability – implications for resource development

October 2022



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Content warning

This report describes and discusses online abuse experiences of adults with intellectual disability. Some people may find the material distressing.

If you or someone you know is at risk of immediate harm, please call Triple Zero (000). For counselling and support, please contact:

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eSafety research program

The eSafety Commissioner (eSafety) supports, encourages, conducts and evaluates research about online safety for Australians. eSafety research tracks trends and collects, analyses and interprets data, providing an evidence base to develop eSafety resources and programs. eSafety also works closely with domestic and international non-governmental organisations as well as government agencies to proactively identify and explore current and emerging online safety issues.

eSafety research is available at: esafety.gov.au/about-us/research.

For any enquiries about the eSafety research program, please contact research@esafety.gov.au.

eSafety Education Prevention and Inclusion Branch (EPI)

The EPI Branch of eSafety provides leadership, guidance and evidence-based resources to educate Australians and raise awareness about online safety. The Diverse Communities team is part of the EPI Branch. It works closely with communities that are most at risk to understand their online experiences and co-design with them the support they need to engage confidently online.

Acknowledgement of Country

eSafety acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia and recognises their continuing connection to lands, waters and communities. We would like to acknowledge and pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging.

Acknowledgements

eSafety acknowledges the damaging effects of online abuse on individuals, families and communities. In particular, we acknowledge the people who participated in this research and generously shared their experiences and opinions with us.

We also thank the Expert Advisory Group convened to guide this research, which included people with intellectual disability and representatives from the National Disability Insurance Scheme Quality and Safeguards Commission, Disability Advocacy Network Australia, Inclusion Australia, First People's Disability Network, the Turner Institute for Brain and Mental Health, and Deakin University's School of Health and Social Development.

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About this report

The internet provides instant access to information and entertainment. It allows people to connect, establish friendships and form communities of interest that are unrestricted by either location or time. For people with disability, the internet offers ways to overcome many barriers, making life richer and more expansive. Yet, there are risks in fostering these online connections, including the risk of experiencing online abuse.

In 2021, eSafety commissioned research to better understand the online experiences of people with intellectual disability and to identify how to support them to have safe, empowering experiences online. It explored how people with intellectual disability use the internet, and how they experience and deal with online abuse. It also identified gaps in support and resources. The research was conducted in stages between May and December of 2021 and comprised 28 interviews and four focus groups with adults with intellectual disability, their carers and service providers.

This report starts with an overview of the online activities of people with intellectual disability. It then examines their understanding and experiences of online abuse. Finally, it explores their information and support needs and identifies guiding principles for resource development.

Findings from this research will inform eSafety's ongoing online safety programs, including future interventions to assist people with intellectual disability, their carers and service providers, to better identify and look for help for online harms.

The research found that people with intellectual disability use the internet in a variety of ways and that being online can be a positive and enjoyable experience for them. However, they can also experience or witness a range of online harms. Despite this, many adults with intellectual disability reported that they didn't feel inherently at risk when they went online and so they didn't seek and access online safety information. Carers and service providers expressed concern about the online experiences of those in their care and reported a range of challenges in supporting people with intellectual disability to stay safe online. These included balancing harm minimisation with the principle of 'dignity of risk'[1], limited problem recognition and engagement with online safety by people with intellectual disability, and a lack of resources appropriate to the diverse needs and experiences in this community.

Overall, the research found there is need for a range of information and support resources. Carers and service providers are seeking best practice guidance on how to teach and support online safety, while people with intellectual disability expressed an interest in learning how to

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[1] 'Dignity of risk' refers to the concept of individuals having the right to take risks, and that if they are prevented from doing so, this impedes their human rights and can limit their personal growth, learning, self-esteem and, potentially, their overall quality of life.

recognise inappropriate behaviours and activities and how to handle online abuse experiences ‘in the moment’.

Key findings

Online abuse

- **People with intellectual disability understand the concept of online abuse, even if they are not familiar with the specific phrase**. Carers and service providers felt that the definition of online abuse could also refer to the idea of being ‘exploited’ and incorporate the intention to hurt others financially.

- **People with intellectual disability spend considerable time online. For some, it is their primary interface with the world.** They used the online environment in broadly the same ways as the wider population. According to service providers and carers, the main activities people with intellectual disability undertake online are gaming and watching videos. Some participants with intellectual disability shared that they had used online dating sites, including community-specific services such as Glimmer and prescription4love.com. Those who lived in independent accommodation also appeared to spend more time online and were more likely to be engaged in social media.

- **Adults with intellectual disability didn’t feel especially at risk online and didn’t feel a need to seek information about online safety.** They tended not to identify any deficiency in their knowledge of how to stay safe online and were very unlikely to spontaneously seek or engage with resources aimed at enhancing their online safety. However, experiences of online abuse appeared to be widespread among people with intellectual disability. These included online bullying, trolling, doxing and sexual extortion. Service providers also noted that their clients struggled to recognise online abuse while it was happening.

- **People with intellectual disability can unintentionally perpetrate lateral abuse[2].** While people with intellectual disability didn’t easily acknowledge this issue, service providers and carers saw it as a common aspect of being online and one that required their regular intervention and support.

- **Carers and service providers reflected on the perceived vulnerabilities that made online interactions riskier for people with intellectual disability.** People with intellectual disability were thought to be vulnerable because of their varied ability to comprehend, critically assess or interpret online content or communications, including the tone of written communication, and because of their often-reduced self-regulated impulse control.

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[2] Abuse directed at one’s peers rather than adversaries

Resource needs

- **People with intellectual disability struggled to describe their online safety resource needs.** However, there was interest in understanding what sort of behaviours and activities are not appropriate online, and in being able to determine when people are not just being unpleasant but are being abusive. There was also interest in knowing how to respond to and handle online abuse experiences.

- **Carers and service providers varied in their attitudes to supporting the independence and personal agency of people with intellectual disability when they went online.** Those who took a ‘dignity of risk’ perspective tended to be more active in verbally reinforcing online safety messages and referring the people they cared for to resources that could help them increase their online safety skills. Other carers and service providers were more focused on providing safety through the operation of online settings and by restricting access to the internet. This choice was often based on the nature of the person’s intellectual disability.

- **Despite not actively looking for them, carers and service providers were interested in a range of information and resources intended to help people with intellectual disability stay safe online**. Aside from expressing an interest in improving their own knowledge of online safety, carers and service providers were interested in best practice guidance on how to teach and support online safety. They also thought that it would be useful to have access to resources focused on supporting people with intellectual disability to process negative experiences, to avoid having situations escalate, and to understand when and how to report online abuse.

- **Simple, visually appealing content that draws on real-life scenarios is critical for more effective engagement with people with intellectual disability.** For people with intellectual disability, their carers and service providers, online safety resources need to be in Easy Read format, with minimal, simple, straightforward text. They also expressed a preference for resources that use audiovisual information, are visually appealing and include online safety scenarios that are based on real life. In addition, developed resources need to feel mainstream and ‘cool’ in order to overcome the observed lack of interest in online safety advice and the prospect of feeling ‘singled out’ when it came to actually using those resources for people with intellectual disability.

Methodology

The research was conducted in three stages.

- **Stage 1: Desktop review.** To identify existing resources in English relating to online safety and online abuse that target adults with intellectual disability in Australia and worldwide.
- **Stage 2: Needs identification.** To understand the needs and experiences of adults with intellectual disability and to identify resource gaps. This stage comprised 10 in-depth interviews with people with intellectual disability, 5 in-depth interviews with carers and 5 in-depth interviews with disability service providers. The fieldwork for Stage 2 took place between September and November 2021.
- **Stage 3: Concept ideation.** This stage took the findings from the 'needs identification' phase and explored potential concepts for online abuse resources. It comprised 8 in-depth interviews with people with intellectual disability and 4 focus groups with service providers and carers. The fieldwork for Stage 3 took place between late November and early December 2021.

The achieved sample for Stages 2 and 3 included participants with intellectual disability with varying support needs. As a result, the experiences of online abuse reported as part of this study were quite varied. Participants were recruited from across Australia and included people from binary and non-binary gender categories and a range of ages.

More detailed information about the methodology, including the participant demographics, is provided in Appendix A.

Interpreting the report's research findings

It is important to note that this research is qualitative and doesn't provide a large representative sample upon which to draw conclusions about the broader population of people with intellectual disability in Australia. Instead, it provides a detailed snapshot of the range of attitudes, behaviours and experiences in the population.

Where possible, terms such as 'a few', 'some', 'many' and 'most' have been used to give the reader a sense of the proportion of participants who held a certain view or undertook a behaviour. While these terms are indicative of the relative prevalence of issues among participants, readers should be cautious in making assumptions about the population based on these descriptions.

It should be noted that participants had varying levels of intellectual disability; however, all participants were able to provide informed consent to participate and could respond to the interview questions (to varying degrees). This means that the findings are reflective only of those people who are capable of participating in this sort of research and don't reflect the experiences of a wider range of people with intellectual disability.

Where differences have been identified between the subgroups of participants, these are highlighted throughout the report.

Quotes have been used extensively to illustrate findings. A larger collection of quotes emerging from the consultations is available in Appendix B as a verbatim bank. Quotes are attributed to the main subcategories of participants (person with intellectual disability, carer or service provider).

Findings

Online activities

People with intellectual disability use the internet in a wide variety of ways

People with intellectual disability use the online environment in broadly the same ways as the wider population. They watch content (TV, videos and music), play games, interact on social media, and transact and manage their affairs (including online banking).

Differences were noticed in the volume of time spent online and in the balance of online activities. Carers and service providers indicated that those they cared for with intellectual disability spent lengthy periods of each day online, with a few describing the lives of those they cared for as essentially housebound, with the online environment being their primary interface with the world. Those with intellectual disability living independently also appeared to spend more time online and were more likely to be engaged in social media than those in other living arrangements. This was particularly the case for those in independent accommodation who were younger.

A small number of people with intellectual disability who participated in this research spent very little or no time online. This was the result either of personal choice, or restrictions to access by carers, or barriers relating to their disability. Those in residential settings were more likely to have restricted access to the internet than people in other living arrangements, as time spent online was scheduled in among other activities. However, in those settings, residents with their own devices tended to have more autonomous access than those that did not.

> ***'We're not checking his search history [in a residential care setting] … On a Friday, you clean your room then [have] an hour on the iPad in the afternoon, just so he's not glued to it all the time. Sometimes he gets bored with it and puts it back in the office – so we can charge it and keep it clean and look after it. I work in behaviour … he might smash it up if he [were to lose his temper].'*** **– Service provider**

People with intellectual disability who were interested in and capable of engaging with the online world gained immeasurable benefits from these interactions, including feelings of normalcy and equality. Those who care for them described this engagement as a rich and pleasurable part of the person's life.

> ***'… I was talking to [one of my clients] about listening to music on YouTube and he writes comments all the time and he said to me he just feels like everyone else when he writes comments on YouTube, which is kinda nice to hear.'*** **– Service provider**

When asked how they spend their time, people with intellectual disability shared details of enjoying YouTube, and of interacting on social media platforms or communities. For some, this involved significant time spent watching video content, with a focus on specific subjects or themes.

> ***'[I do] Skype, YouTube to watch videos – any that're good for me – music videos, internet reviews, random stuff. I use Discord – it's like Skype, chat, play games, but better than Skype. [I join] different kinds of groups, groups that are good for me and safe – depends on the rules they apply, and the attitudes they have. If I found a group and they were sending slurs, I'm not part of it.'*** **– Person with intellectual disability**

Carers and service providers acknowledged some of the social benefits derived from online activities such as gaming.

> ***'I've noticed online gaming – a lot of my patients have an interest in that … they have a good sense of community, connected to their peers, especially important in lockdown.'***
> **– Service provider**

However, they were more likely to comment on, and sometimes bemoan, the amount of time those in their care spent doing so. They worried that the extra time spent online increased the person's potential for experiencing or perpetrating abuse. People with intellectual disability also identified specific activities where they needed active support from family or service providers. This tended to include banking and personal administration (such as arranging and/or attending appointments with support workers online). Some also sought support for interactions on platforms such as Facebook, where they found it difficult to understand the intent and tone of communications and had previously experienced negative interactions.

> ***'A computer man set up my banking online for me. Mum helps. She shows me how she does her banking [online]. I need someone to show me a few times, then it clicks.'*** **– Person with intellectual disability**

People with intellectual disability are establishing social connections and are dating online, but few opened up about this

Some participants with intellectual disability shared that they had used online dating sites. These included services targeted at people with disability, such as Glimmer and prescription4love.com.

It was more common for participants with intellectual disability to have heard of friends having negative online dating experiences (including attempted financial exploitation) rather than recalling direct experiences of this themselves. Those who knew of a friend's bad online dating experience were especially wary. Some participants (regardless of direct or indirect experience) could easily relay the potential pitfalls of connecting with someone online, and this either made them cautious users of online dating sites or they avoided online dating altogether.

> ***'[There are] so many things [to look out for when online dating]. Are they showing the right photos? Are they wanting a real relationship? Perhaps you should have the right to see their records [to prove they are who they say they are]? The internet has opened the whole world up, they could be anywhere in the world, they could be overseas but calling on a local number. It's more than trying to be safe [just] on a computer; it's the phone as well''* – Person with intellectual disability**

> ***'Before I met my husband I was on the online sites, and basically all [the men who approached me] wanted was to move over here and [supposedly] buy a house, do all that weird stuff! Asking for sex and stuff [giggling].'* – Person with intellectual disability**

> ***'I've been caught [on dating apps] there, too. They ask you for money and stuff like that. I just moved on [when they asked for money]. [Did you report them?] No.'* – Person with intellectual disability**

> ***'Facebook, Instagram – the two majors. Being part of the LGBTI community, I'm also on Grindr, Scruff – [there's lots of] scams and phishing. Being younger and more wary, I delete or report it … If I was someone who didn't know or understand, it would be easy to be led down the wrong track.'* – Person with intellectual disability**

Service providers are concerned that those with intellectual disability looking to make friends or to find romantic connections are especially vulnerable online

While many people with intellectual disability didn't mention that they used dating sites, feedback from carers and service providers highlighted that this was an aspect of their online lives. Their disability, combined with an interest in potential romantic relationships (and, to a lesser extent, shared interest connections), made them particularly vulnerable. Service providers believed that reduced self-regulated impulse control and the struggle to understand or interpret different communication tones made it extremely difficult for some people with intellectual disability to navigate online personal relationships.

Some carers and service providers recalled that the enthusiasm and excitement generated by the prospect of a potential new online friendship or relationship meant that some people with intellectual disability no longer listened to their advice or words of caution. In these situations, the person's pursuit of the new friendship or relationship could at times become obsessive, these carers and service providers believed. They were also worried that those with intellectual disability would withhold details to avoid anyone challenging or forcing an end to the relationship, rather than face difficult questions about the appropriateness or safety of these encounters.

> ***'[My son] is always on Facebook … A few years ago, I had to ring the house [residential care facility] because there was [supposedly] some girl from overseas coming – from the Philippines or somewhere – saying she was going to come and live with him at the group home. So, we had to put a stop to that … He was vulnerable … He was saying, "You can't tell me what to do", but we had to step in. [He] just does things behind closed doors in his unit.'*** **– Carer**

> ***'I had one client [who] was very lonely and isolated because of his disability. He wasn't interested in socialising with anyone in the group home … and he was very vulnerable to [exploitation from] the online sex workers. He had money, so sometimes you'd walk into his room and he was saying [to a sex worker he had connected with online], "Don't worry. I get paid tomorrow. I'll send you some money."'*** **– Service provider**

And it wasn't just dating that could result in people with intellectual disability encountering problems when connecting with others online. Special-interest groups, including online gaming platforms, were also virtual settings where those with intellectual disability could find themselves susceptible to forming connections that resulted in friendships that service providers were concerned about.

> ***'Gaming … they have people they'll call their best friends that they've never ever met before. They'll game for six to eight hours per day. Some have got pretty heavy, to the point of false meetups, loss of money, potential sex trafficking.'*** **– Service provider**

Knowledge and behaviour relating to online safety

Many people with intellectual disability feel comfortable with the basics of online safety; few feel at risk when online

There was great diversity among those with intellectual disability in terms of their familiarity, confidence and comfort with using the internet. Most of the research participants with intellectual disability were familiar with basic online safety protocols, such as:

- Only 'friend' someone online who you know well in real life.
- Block anyone who is nasty to you.
- Manage your settings.
- Turn off your location.

Those who required less support had a high level of confidence in their own ability to stay safe (or to at least seek assistance when needed).

> ***'I'm computer tech savvy. I know how to watch out for trolls or bad people … I look out for the red flags. [What red flags would you look out for?] Racism, sexism, LGBTI phobia, … If I see a Twitter message of a guy saying a slur, I might block him. QAnon stuff or antivax stuff … I have to block that person. [They're] very deranged … I watch out for bad language.'*** **– Person with intellectual disability**

Those people with intellectual disability whose participation in the online world was more limited (e.g. mostly confined to streaming TV, watching YouTube content, doing occasional internet searches or using mainstream social media accounts) appeared to fall into two mindsets regarding online safety. For one group, their limited online activity meant that they may not come up against any risky situations or challenges and therefore didn't perceive a significant, if any, risk to their safety online. For the other (smaller) group, their limited online activity was in part a result of their concern about the internet. For this group, their concern seemed to be driven more by a fear of their ability to engage online (technological competency) than by fear for their safety online, but online safety was also a factor to some extent.

> ***'You can change your Facebook settings in security so no [strangers] can add you. You should make sure you turn off your location on Snapchat.'*** **– Person with intellectual disability**

> ***'[My approach if I came across someone abusing me online would be] don't reply, just leave it. Don't retaliate, block them. Or, if you're scared to block them, mute them. If it gets to a point where you're scared, you should tell the police if you need to. I think I would wait until my safety was threatened, but we need more exposure to know [what] is not okay.'*** **– Person with intellectual disability**

With this core knowledge of online safety – and the ongoing experience they gained day-to-day online – most people with intellectual disability didn't feel they were particularly at risk. Those who were more cautious about their ability to protect themselves online often had previous negative experiences. This group tended to involve carers or service providers to support their online activities (e.g. using Facebook or carrying out online financial activities).

Carers and service providers observed that people with intellectual disability are vulnerable online

Some participants saw themselves as being at risk online due to their disability, which was in line with some of eSafety's previous research findings;[3] others did not. In contrast, carers and service providers were consistently clear that, from their perspective, intellectual disability meant that the people they cared for were particularly vulnerable online due to the specific aspects of their disability.

Service providers spoke about the challenges for people with intellectual disability in comprehending and processing their online communications and information. The emotional tone of written online content was challenging for some with intellectual disability to decipher (i.e. interpreting what the person behind that content was trying to communicate). This made it particularly challenging for many people with intellectual disability to quickly understand what was being said, and to respond appropriately.

> ***'With intellectual disability you don't necessarily notice things [like other people do], or you might forget an interaction happened, but you might have a [vaguer] memory of someone being bad … and because you're vulnerable they know you might not respond and they get to feel good.'*** **– Person with intellectual disability**

Carers, service providers and those with intellectual disability also recognised the need to contend with reduced self-regulated impulse control. By being more likely to click through to a dangerous environment, rather than consider, evaluate and refrain from doing so, people with intellectual disability were more vulnerable online.

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[3] eSafety Commissioner (2022), Adults' negative online experiences. Melbourne: eSafety Commissioner

> ***'One of my friends is really kind-hearted and would fall for anything. She likes to help everyone out, but she has her own issues to deal with. I try [to help], but it's tricky because with her disability she finds it hard to say "no".'*** **– Person with intellectual disability**

> ***'[People with intellectual disabilities are at risk of] clicking on pop-up ads or looking up stuff that's potentially illegal and getting into strife. They might have a bankcard linked to a computer and if there're things flashing up saying "Buy this!" – bright flashy ads – [they risk] getting drawn in.'*** **– Service provider**

People with intellectual disability, their carers and service providers described several scenarios where those with intellectual disability were uncritical when it came to taking stock of their online interactions. This positive presumption that the online world is safe, or that the individuals they 'meet' online have good intentions, was seen as making people with intellectual disability vulnerable in a range of online settings.

> ***'The main thing is [what I would call] a naïve mindset; the way that they think that people are all good, having that naivety that everyone is doing the right thing and aren't up to something they shouldn't be.'*** **– Carer**

> ***'It's because of trust. Having a disability, you get to trust people and sometimes it turns out to be a bad case.'*** **– Person with intellectual disability**

> ***'There's a vulnerability to being a bit gullible or falling for a trap they don't comprehend, something that's too good to be true: a pop-up saying you've won a million dollars and enter your bank details here.'*** **– Service provider**

Several participants reflected that this interpretational tendency with respect to online communications made people with intellectual disability an 'easy target' for those wishing to scam or abuse others.

> ***'She can be seen as an easy target because she's kind, easy-going, a sweet, nice girl. She won't fight back; she'll internalise and cry [instead].'*** **– Carer**

Those with intellectual disability may be less likely to report online abuse for a variety of reasons

When asked, some people with intellectual disability reflected that they were less likely to report online abuse than other members of the public (whether that be to a trusted person informally, or to an online platform such as Facebook, or even to the police). They weren't sure what was serious enough to warrant reporting and had little faith that a complaint would be taken seriously or acted on (e.g. by a large global company such as Facebook). In addition, they were unsure of how to report online abuse. These participants reflected on whether being less likely to report online abuse meant they were more likely to be abused than other people. The frequency, or level, of abuse also meant they were more likely to be tolerant or accepting of it.

> ***'People know they can get away with it easier [picking on a person with intellectual disability]. You [as a person with intellectual disability] might freak out and not want to tell anyone about it.'*** **– Person with intellectual disability**

> ***'When you've experienced a lot of bullying or trauma, you build a tolerance and you think "How bad is this? What is the level of cyber attacking – what's the level, where's the bar?" Nobody has an understanding, a shared idea, of how bad it has to be before you tell someone.'*** **– Person with intellectual disability**

Parents and carers are eager to protect those with intellectual disability from online abuse but are not confident they have the resources to do so

Carers and parent carers of adults with intellectual disability were anxious about the person's vulnerability to negative online experiences and were eager to protect them. Their knowledge of online safety, and how best to support someone with intellectual disability when online, varied hugely. While carers were relatively well engaged with the issue, their approach and use of available resources was largely dependent on their personal knowledge. Even carers who felt reasonably informed of the risks of the internet in a general way felt that they might have benefited from some reminders of the basics, especially when it came to supervision of internet use.

> ***'I don't know [how you help people with intellectual disabilities stay safe online]. It depends on [the] severity of their intellectual disability. You may be able to have some sort of parental lock on some apps. We do random checks of [our daughter's] phone, and if we see something inappropriate, we have a chat [with her]. Whether it works or not, I'm not sure.'*** **– Carer**

Carers tended to adopt a range of protective approaches. These included:

- repeated verbal reinforcement of core online safety messages, and ongoing communication and discussion of online activities
- ensuring any devices were set up with a range of protective measures, via management of settings
- open active management of online experiences, both in-the-moment and following it
- covert active management of online experiences – that is, without the knowledge or consent of the person with intellectual disability.

The use of these approaches varied with the individual carer, the level of intellectual disability of the person they cared for, and their recognition of and response to the concept of 'dignity of risk'. Parent carers shared their apprehensions about defining the limits of control and respecting the autonomy of people with intellectual disability when it came to being safe online. Navigating the boundary between protection and interference was something they frequently had to negotiate with themselves.

> ***'It's tricky, because [of her age]. It's an invasion of privacy. She wouldn't be keen on me looking through her phone and there's probably nothing [online abuse] going on. So [I approach it by] asking her how things are going, who's fighting [in her social group], who's being a bitch … coming at it as a gentle approach, as a friend rather than a mum. She reacts better that way. I can't just go and look at her phone.'* – Carer**

> ***'[My brother has] Fragile X and the mental capacity of [a] six year-old ... Mum is his [main] carer and she has no real knowledge of computers ... [My brother] has my YouTube account. I registered [it with] a child setting. He [had accessed] rude, dark [content]. I had to fix that and monitor [him] a bit. He uses an iPad … I check the search history about once a month … I'm worried [that] he might present himself in a way he shouldn't [and get into trouble, especially something sexual], but I don't think he will because he's a bit reserved. I'm worried he could do that, or [that] someone might ask him. It does cross my mind.'* – Person with intellectual disability who is also a carer for their brother with more severe intellectual disability**

Carers were especially concerned about online situations or risks they may not be familiar with themselves (such as online gaming communities). Carers who considered themselves to be 'digital natives' (i.e. they had experienced their teenage years and young adulthood with the internet) seemed more confident of their skills to safely navigate the internet and, in turn, to provide advice and support to those they cared for. Participants who were more confident of their online safety skills struggled to pinpoint any particular sources of education (although younger carers did sometimes mention school). They felt that they had accrued this knowledge and skill naturally, through experience, by hearing about scam stories and by using common sense.

> ***‘[How do you stay safe online?] Just things like keeping my account safe from hackers. If random people try to add me, I don’t accept them. It’s mostly men ... Some of my friends accept [requests] from people they shouldn’t. [Why do you think those friends accept?] They say things like “I love you, and I want to be your boy/girlfriend” and sometimes that’s all they want. They hope they genuinely like them and think they’re hot. Or they might send you a message and say you’ve won all this money [but it’s not real].’*** **– Person with intellectual disability**

Service providers also want to protect people with intellectual disability from online abuse but are more likely to strive for a ‘freedom to fail’ approach where possible

While service providers shared parent and carer concerns, they were more likely to speak about actively working with their adult clients with intellectual disability regarding online safety. As with parents and carers, service providers varied considerably in terms of their personal knowledge and confidence in relation to this subject.

A couple of service providers raised the idea of ‘healthy habits’ in terms of using the internet. These habits included not spending too much time online and having a variety of offline interests. But this idea also included the ability to avoid getting too fixated on negative comments and then caught up in critical conversations online that could deteriorate into online abuse situations.

> ***‘[Clients are] more susceptible to getting invested in those troll conversations and it’s harder to detour them away from it if they’re fixated on it.’*** **– Service provider**

Some service providers working with people with only limited intellectual disability tended to see their role as supporting their clients’ online activities. This was likely to include technical support navigating the internet and acting as a sounding board for the management of online communications. This often related to social media interactions (particularly Facebook) and other spaces where people with intellectual disability were managing personal relationships (e.g. dating sites).

Those service providers working with clients who had a more significant intellectual disability tended to adopt a more interventionist approach. A significant aspect of their professional role tended to involve behavioural support and management, and their approach to online safety reflected the service providers' wider approach to their clients. Within this context, some service providers were very cognisant of 'dignity of risk' and would develop a range of strategies to support their clients' self-determination as much as possible. They acknowledged the inherent dangers of this approach but felt strongly that their role was to maximise their clients' self-esteem, independence and dignity. These service providers mentioned working with clients to support knowledge and skills around appropriate text and social media interactions and developing online safety-related resources (e.g. personalised posters) informed by a 'social stories'[4] approach.

> ***'We have a conference – we try and teach people about not accepting [friend requests from] people you don't know, the scam emails: we let people know about those – not to respond. There are some settings you can change on Facebook.'* – Service provider**

> ***'When they're on YouTube, they look through the comments … and they get a lot more hooked on the negative comments … [W]e sit down and [I have to explain that] on the internet, anyone can say anything … They react a lot more to those comments.'* – Service provider**

Some service providers working with clients with more significant intellectual disability were less concerned with 'dignity of risk'. Instead, they were more focused on ensuring their clients' safety and minimising the potential for lateral abuse regardless of other concessions made in achieving this. These service providers were less active in providing regular verbal advice and were more likely to advocate for parental controls and for restricting access to devices.

On the other hand, service providers working with people with milder intellectual disability found navigating this protection–risk balance generally easier. They placed importance on their clients' opportunity to have 'freedom to fail' (albeit as safely as possible). However, some mentioned they would like clients' families to restrict some internet-related behaviours (especially when they felt the client would have benefited from this). They believed it was appropriate for families to intervene (and to restrict or limit clients' online behaviours) where it was unacceptable for services to do so. Although not ideal (i.e. overriding clients' preferences and freedoms), they thought these restrictions could lead to better outcomes for clients.

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[4] 'Social story' describes a situation, skill or concept in terms of relevant social cues, perspectives and common responses in a specifically defined style and format. The goal is to share accurate social information with a patient in a reassuring manner that they can easily understand: C.A. Gray (1994), *The New Social Story Book*. Arlington, TX: Future Horizons.

People with intellectual disability see no need to disclose their disability online but are at risk of oversharing other personal details

People with intellectual disability didn't share with others that they had an intellectual disability when interacting online. However, it was clear both from people with intellectual disability and from their service providers that the challenges many face in interpreting the tone of online communication and in self-regulating their impulses meant that, in the course of repeated online communications, they freely shared many, often intimate, personal details. This suggests that while they didn't specify that they disclosed their disability, their general openness with personal information means that it is likely this information is sometimes disclosed.

Understanding and experience of online abuse

People with intellectual disability have a basic understanding of what online abuse is

All participants with intellectual disability had at least some understanding of what online abuse involved. At a minimum, it was described as negative ('nasty', 'horrible', etc.) interactions between people online. Across the participants, there was very varied comprehension of the different types and scope of online abuse. Although very few participants felt confident to give a 'full' definition of online abuse, most were able to give some examples of what would fall under the umbrella of the term (e.g. bullying online).

> ***'I don't know because I don't get into it – probably being nasty online, and bullying online, which I don't understand.'*** **– Person with intellectual disability**

> ***'[How could you tell if someone might be a threat online?] Perhaps if they were lying about something? I'm not sure.'*** **– Person with intellectual disability**

> ***'I'll be making it up [what online abuse is], but I think it could be bullying, phishing … I'm just guessing. I don't know.'*** **– Person with intellectual disability**

> ***'I think of stalking, data breaches, people being abusive online to other people – they'd be my top three … [I've] heard of [online abuse], but [I] don't know exactly what it applies to.'*** **– Person with intellectual disability**

Most of the participants with intellectual disability could describe the sorts of behaviours online that they considered inappropriate or harmful. Most described these behaviours as treating someone in a way in which you wouldn't want to be treated yourself. They felt the eSafety definition[5] presented to them during the research sounded correct and comprehensive (although engagement with the read-aloud statement appeared to vary).

Carers and service providers readily understood and agreed with eSafety's online abuse definition. Using the word 'harm' was noted as a way of distinguishing between once-off impact (hurt) and consistent abuse (harm). They identified a number of aspects that weren't currently within the definition but that reflected their lived experience of online abuse, their experience of working with people with intellectual disability, and their awareness of the challenges this community faced online:

- They would add 'financially' to the range of ways someone may be hurt.
- They would add 'exploit' to the ways in which technology may be used.

The suggestion of 'exploit' within the online abuse definition reflects service providers' perception of common 'traps' and scams that were aimed at those who were more vulnerable. Consequently, some service providers believed that the idea of exploitation was missing from the definition of online abuse.

A number of service providers were aware of clients who had lost – or almost lost – money through online interactions. Examples cited included being asked to fund the Australian-bound flight of an overseas girlfriend and helping to financially support an online sex worker. This meant that they felt the financial aspect of online abuse should be explicitly included, even if money had been offered willingly in some of the anecdotes they shared.

> *'I have another client who's a prolific gamer and has met a couple of guys online. The last was someone from Bangladesh with a whole family … and she's sending some of her Centrelink money to him because they had no food.'* – **Service provider**

Service providers noted that while their clients may be able to give a general definition of what online abuse is, this was at odds with their clients' ability to recognise online abuse when it was happening. They consequently suspected it was far more prevalent than the few instances where it came to their attention or that of carers.

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[5] Research participants were read the eSafety definition of cyber abuse: *Cyber abuse is behaviour that uses technology to threaten, intimidate, harass or humiliate someone – with the intent to hurt them socially, psychologically or even physically.*

The experience of online abuse appears to be widespread among those with intellectual disability

Nearly all participants with intellectual disability were able to describe negative online experiences, most of which fell within a broad definition of online abuse. Negative experiences online were considered commonplace – almost as an inevitable and ‘normal’ risk or aspect of online life for anyone using the internet. However, many were also aware that they were personally more susceptible to online abuse because of their disability.

The sorts of online abuse examples described by participants spanned a wide range and included bullying, trolling, attempted extortion, financial scams and lateral abuse (please see Appendix C: Glossary for more information on these terms). In addition, participants recounted many anecdotes where people with intellectual disability didn’t appear to feel taken advantage of, but where it did seem they were being exploited in some way (e.g. by being asked to provide money to people they didn’t know very well that they had met online).

> ***‘… I had an encounter with a troll. He was trolling away on other people, he was blocked and then banned from the platform – a forum, a pop culture forum, for movies, comics. He alienated me and other contacts. He got in trouble, then got banned. He was a troll. It was general [trolling], not personal … I reported him [to the forum operator] but [he didn’t get banned for the reason I reported him. He eventually] got banned for different reasons … The forum owners probably had other things to look out for [to bother acting on the participant’s reason for reporting]. [He was] probably not inappropriate “enough”, but he was an emotionally bad person.’*** **– Person with intellectual disability**

> ***‘A friend of [a] friend thought I was sleeping with his boyfriend. He was picking on my disabilities, said he’d tell everyone on social media [that I had a brain injury]. [He] threatened to tell everyone … that I was a horrible person … [I felt] hopeless, bullied. I was kinda scared and worried I’d be embarrassed in public for something I didn’t do, and [I] didn’t want him to talk about my individual disabilities. [I felt] degraded, worried, belittled, a lot of bad things … Thinking back now, he [must have been] so furious with his partner he couldn’t see clearly and lashed out. He believed what he wanted … He was angry. He knew his boyfriend liked me, so he assumed it was true … You can hide behind a screen, [where there are] no consequences, and make someone feel shit, chicken shit. [But now] I feel bad for him.’*** **– Person with intellectual disability**

> ***'Sometimes it's stressful [being online] – especially the mothers' groups – not so nice people in the groups I joined … I've stayed in them but not built connections because when I've shared my opinion I've not had the nicest responses. There's been backlash for me sticking up for somebody else, so I've decided not to say anything at all … I was the one everyone was attacking. [There was a sense of] "Why can't you take a joke?" but those kinds of things aren't jokes; they're making fun of other people.'*** **– Person with intellectual disability**

Service providers felt it was extremely common for people with intellectual disability to encounter (and sometimes to perpetrate) abuse online. It was noted as something that they, as care professionals, were helping to support their clients through, sometimes on a daily basis. They believed their clients were particularly vulnerable to a range of types of online abuse due to the nature of their disability. Observing their online behaviour, they felt their clients opened up to people online far too quickly, rapidly moved forwards in relationships on an unproven assumption of trust, were quick to share both personal information and images, and at no point questioned the motives of the person they were interacting with.

> ***'He's very tech literate but he can't see when they're pulling the wool over his eyes … [He] dismisses any pop-ups that are warning something may be a scam. He just can't process when it's a warning situation.'*** **– Service provider**

> ***'If they really like someone, they will share almost everything … [We] had to go to the bank and change all the details because he'd shared everything.'*** **– Service provider**

Some service providers felt their clients had misplaced perceptions of what were online social norms. In a wish to be accepted by others online, clients shared images, as they believed this was a normal and appropriate way to behave in an online environment.

> ***'If the phone's out they're happy to tell you everything that's going on … they assume that's what you do … "I'm on Snapchat. We've been chatting for four days. I think we're in love." Have you been sending him pictures? "Yes, that's what you do." They think that's what the rest of us are doing.'*** **– Service provider**

> ***'We had one [experience] where the police were involved and a court hearing and a jail sentence [with our eldest daughter with intellectual disability who is in their early twenties]. Someone she'd met online. The first we knew about it was when the police***

> ***knocked on my door, two years after it happened. This person had been arrested for a different reason and they'd confiscated his laptop and phone [which led to discovering the daughter had been involved as a victim]. She didn't want to discuss it. The only people she discussed it with was the police officer and we found out details via the court hearing … She doesn't understand the consequences of what she does online [and in so doing was vulnerable] … She doesn't have [a] typical mind; she doesn't see the risks in [the] same way.'*** **– Carer**

A few people with intellectual disability shared their experiences of sexual extortion.

> ***'I was travelling once, and I got an email from someone, trying to insinuate I had been online watching porn with children and they had videos and if I didn't give them money they'd share them. I was freaking out, but then I realised, "What am I worrying about? They have no video!" But I was scared.'*** **– Person with intellectual disability**

A number of people with intellectual disability and service providers shared details of a range of scenarios involving financial risk or danger. While some may fall short of a strict definition of online abuse (and weren't scam situations), the people with intellectual disability found themselves in financially vulnerable situations due to their failure to critically assess a situation, to question the additional fees or the appropriateness of the price being asked for a product, or to successfully manage negotiations. This included scenarios such as querying additional fees being charged by an online service, overpaying for products, and finding it challenging to arrange the mechanics of online sales and purchases.

> ***'He sells a fair bit of stuff on online marketplaces. He has a bit of trouble dealing with people on there. He doesn't pick up on cues or text ... This other person wasn't aware he had a disability and made some rude comments.'*** **– Service provider**

Scams are a form of online abuse that people with intellectual disability encounter online

Less frequent were examples where people with intellectual disability had suffered direct, substantial financial abuse. This tended to be due to entering fake competitions, responding to scam phone calls or emails, clicking on pop-up ads, gambling and being subject to fraud.

> ***'I've been scammed twice. The first time was [by] a bookmaker, I lost about $4,000 and the second time I practically lost all my super … [The first one] started with a phone call – they led me to a website ... I went to the police, but they didn't really care because I couldn't really explain myself. I talked to [Disability Service and care organisation]; I knew them before. [Were they helpful?] Not really, no. Their resources***

> *are all taken up. [The second time] I drew out some super and they put it into shares for me and then they were doing some trading with it and the stocks went down, but the person who set it up went into my account and withdrew a whole heap of money. I didn't know where to go [to report it].'* – **Person with intellectual disability**

> *'I fell for an ATO [impersonation] scam. I lost $2,000, but ANZ refunded my money. I'd shared my bank details, password and email.'* – **Person with intellectual disability**

Some of those with intellectual disability felt they were reasonably savvy about the strategies scammers employed, but this had come about from learning from past negative experiences.

> *'I feel like I'm on top of it [being safe online], but you never know … There's always some way of getting through the barriers – even things I'm becoming more aware of – like people copying and pretending to be brands, entering competitions and providing your details [when they] might not be the actual brand. I downloaded an app that was free, and that I thought my daughter would like, and later I found four spyware things and they came through that. There are little things here and there [you have to watch out for].'* – **Person with intellectual disability**

On the other hand, service providers were particularly concerned about their clients' susceptibility to falling for scams, especially those exploiting a desire for romantic connection.

> *'We had a young man in a situation with a woman who said, "I want to be [your] girlfriend." [We need to] stop friend requests from other countries. That's the biggest killer – Snapchat friend requests … International ones are the risk. And scamming emails. A lot of people with intellectual disability want a partner [and that puts them at risk].'* – **Service provider**

Understanding and experience of lateral abuse

People with intellectual disability recognise lateral abuse when provided with an example of it, but aren't familiar with the term

People with intellectual disability were generally unfamiliar with the term 'lateral abuse'. However, when it was explained, and an example was given of how it could take place, they easily understood and recognised the types of negative experiences it encompassed. They could recall some instances where friends may have behaved in this way, but none believed that they had been perpetrators of lateral abuse themselves.

> *‘Yeah. A [person with intellectual disability] friend was having issues with her siblings at home and they were calling her names and she would call them names back. I told her to ignore them, but she doesn’t know how to ignore them. They do that to her a lot. They do it on [Facebook] Messenger. I think [this type of online abuse, where people are being nasty to each other] is probably more likely with people who know each other. You don’t really see it much between people who don’t know each other [online].’* **– Person with intellectual disability**

> *‘[I’ve seen people with intellectual disabilities who were] learning how to apply for work and had to go online and look for jobs and network and they would get a lot of abuse and bully each other – people who haven’t gone out into the world [who don’t have much experience with appropriate ways to behave].’* **– Person with intellectual disability**

> *‘I reckon, yeah, sometimes they [people with intellectual disabilities] can [be the perpetrators of online abuse]. [It] depends on their personality … on how they [react] if they’re scared or insecure.’* **– Person with intellectual disability**

‘Lateral abuse’ was also not a term familiar to all carers and service providers, although, again, the concept was clear when explained. Carers who were parents of people with intellectual disability aged 18+ were aware of their children suffering this type of abuse but tended not to be aware of their child perpetrating it (whether intentionally or unintentionally). However, knowing how their children behaved and communicated online also meant they recognised that online interactions could deteriorate to the point where their children’s communication could be experienced as lateral abuse.

Service providers acknowledge lateral abuse as a significant issue

Service providers were quick to identify that this type of abuse was being regularly perpetrated by their clients. They saw this as a very significant and almost constant issue, absorbing significant amounts of their time in supporting their clients and helping them to manage the consequences as both victims and perpetrators.

> *‘There’s definitely bullying. The place I work at, they have group programs and they all have lunch together and … I hear of online and group arguments that happen … [The*

> ***internet] lowers the barrier for our clients to insult and abuse each other. And that's hard to deal with [because you don't know exactly what's going on online between them].' –***
> **Service provider**

Service providers felt that their clients were mostly unintentional perpetrators of lateral abuse due to their lack of understanding of behavioural and communication standards online. They saw their clients struggling to interpret or understand online communications in a balanced way, and to successfully manage the tone of their replies so that they didn't come across as antagonistic. They also felt that the reduced self-regulated impulse control of some of their clients made it very difficult for them to successfully handle more challenging situations. They made inappropriate or aggressive comments 'in the heat of the moment' without the ability to reflect or to realise that their words would remain on the relevant online space or platform.

> ***'I generally find it's the fallout part, not understanding that their words [when interacting with others with intellectual disability] have consequences until it reaches boiling point … There's no tone in text. When they're doing these things online, they don't realise the repercussions.' –*** **Service provider**

Service providers, and some carers, also commented that lateral abuse often relates directly to 'real-life' friendships, where existing anger or differences of opinion are played out and amplified online.

> ***'My older girl [22 years old with intellectual disability] has had a lot of fights with her friendship circle and a lot of quite nasty things [have been] said over social media. It [originally] started at school and carried over to social media and text messages and it got to the point where I said "Enough's enough! You have to block them, all the things – Facebook, and Instagram. Block them on the phone, then you don't have to have the stress!' … She's very strong-willed and tough. They were teasing her and saying nasty things and her response was to threaten them back with violence, so as much as they started it, I don't want her to threaten them back ...' –*** **Carer**

Information and support needs

Few participants search for information or use educational resources about online abuse in relation to people with intellectual disability

Despite the interest in knowing more about the topic themselves, or in supporting people with intellectual disability, few participants reported having searched for or utilised any resources or general information about online safety or online abuse.

Some service providers had tried to address online safety directly as a topic with their clients. One service provider described an annual ‘conference’ for clients where they disseminated guidance on staying safe online. This guidance was centred on not accepting friend requests from strangers and on being aware of scam emails and the risks of online dating. Where they were actively communicating with clients about online safety, service providers appeared to be creating their own advice (using ‘common sense’, not external resources) and delivering this face-to-face (or virtually), mostly in ad hoc conversations, rather than producing training materials/resources.

When asked to reflect on any useful sources of information about online safety (even in a general sense), or where they had acquired their knowledge of the topic, participants were most likely to refer to their own schooling (for those who had encountered the internet at school) or general accumulation of knowledge through use combined with common sense.

There was low awareness of eSafety among participants (with the exception of those participants in the research who had been recruited directly via their connection with eSafety); a handful were aware of the organisation in name only. One service provider mentioned having come across useful resources about online safety (video and PowerPoint) a few years ago on eSafety's website and came to this via a general web search.

Participants unanimously agree there is not enough tailored information available about online abuse

Overall, participants from across the different cohorts that were consulted felt there was insufficient information available about online abuse. Almost every participant expressed interest in finding out more and being better informed. However, as noted above, few service providers and carers had actively searched for information, and none of those with intellectual disability reported having done so. So, while all participants felt there ought to be more information and education about the topic, this sentiment was likely the product of having participated in research about online abuse and getting to reflect in detail on the issue.

> ***'There needs to be more education about [online abuse], more awareness, but I don't know where you would actually put it. I think the police need to enforce it a bit. It's hard.'*** **– Person with intellectual disability**

> ***'[Having] interactive things for people who may not necessarily be able to sit down and concentrate [would be good] … play a game or [do] an activity. But having things available in different formats [or] read aloud [is important]. Some might have trouble putting words together. And there's a lot of concentration [challenges for those with] intellectual disabilities. It has to be quick, has to be entertaining.'*** **– Person with intellectual disability**

People with intellectual disability tend not to see the need for education or support regarding online abuse; any interest was focused on straightforward information

As noted above, time spent taking part in the research caused participants with intellectual disability to express an interest in learning more about online abuse. However, it was clear that without these in-depth discussions, people with intellectual disability generally didn't see the need for education about online safety. Given this, there is a significant risk that those with intellectual disability will be unlikely to spontaneously engage with any online safety education campaigns or resources. Reliance will instead have to be placed on trusted services, friends and family to prompt any engagement with these types of resources.

When pressed, those with intellectual disability were most interested in straightforward information about online safety and online abuse that discussed:

- what constitutes online abuse (given that many weren't confident they knew precisely what it was)
- what to do if you encounter online abuse, including who to reach out to and how to report it.

Some of the participants with intellectual disability also highlighted a general need for 'better behaviour' in terms of people needing to know not to bully others. (This wasn't confined to online environments.) To this end, in order to identify online abuse, people with intellectual disability would also benefit from having a better understanding of the sorts of behaviours and activities that are not appropriate online, and of the fine line between people being unpleasant and being abusive.

The people with intellectual disability who participated in the research mostly didn't seem confident about what they might do if they came across online abuse. A few seemed to think they would seek out information or other sorts of resources if they encountered it. For some, it was very much dependent on the nature of the type of abuse. If it was someone being nasty or threatening, those able to imagine this situation thought they would most likely just try and ignore the person. Some considered that if things escalated they might need to report it, or tell a trusted person, but none were able to describe where this line was drawn, or what sort of trigger would be needed to make this a more serious situation.

Carers and service providers want information about how to support people with intellectual disability to stay safe online and information about reporting online abuse. They also want access to resources they can share with people with intellectual disability

For carers and service providers, there was less interest in information about defining online abuse for themselves. Instead, they were especially interested in:

- general information about best practice guidance in staying safe online (including how-to information about blocking people, changing passwords, etc.)
- how to educate and support people with intellectual disability to stay safe online (including how to explain the importance of not sharing personal information or images)
- how to help those with intellectual disability process negativity online to avoid situations escalating (and avoiding retaliation)
- when and how to report online abuse
- real-life online abuse scenarios to share with those with intellectual disability to help illustrate the potential dangers online (especially among parent carers).

Despite the research being focused on the resource needs of those with intellectual disability, carers and service providers felt there was a gap in the information and resources available to help them support the people they cared for. Carers advised they would appreciate information specifically for themselves, as well as being interested in information they could share with people with intellectual disability.

> ***'I'd like some hints and tips about online abuse – dot points. Then you can go and do more research if you want.'*** **– Carer**

Resources will need to be suitable for an audience with a wide range of communication and cognitive abilities

Carers, service providers and those with mild intellectual disability were quick to acknowledge the great diversity of communication and cognitive abilities and preferences of those with intellectual disability. This means they thought a similarly diverse selection of support resources would be optimal. Despite the need for a diversity of styles and formats of resources, there were some common resource preferences:

- Easy Read, simple and straightforward
- as visual as possible, minimising reliance on text
- use of short videos where possible to support the information.

Some service providers felt that education about online safety could only take their clients so far, and that some clients would hit a glass ceiling in terms of becoming informed and being able to protect themselves in online settings. For these clients, service providers (reluctantly) considered that specific measures to protect people with intellectual disability from risky online situations would be better than educational approaches. They saw restricting independent use of the internet, using child-settings (that restrict access to more violent, sexual or mature content), not having any credit cards linked to online accounts, and limiting time spent online in general, as ways of mitigating harm online for clients where education was insufficient.

A few carers and service providers noted that some people with intellectual disability could be highly engaged (even to the point of obsession) with certain topics or mediums. (Cartoons, superheroes and celebrities were the most commonly mentioned ones.) They noted that these ‘hooks’ would be a very motivating and engaging way for those with specific interests to engage with the topic of online abuse. Unsurprisingly, they noted that the bespoke nature of these interests would make it challenging to cater to so many niche interests.

> ***‘Apps would be a good one – with cartoon-y pictures and icons that would be the things you could click on to learn, but with Easy Read design, simple, not too overwhelming. If there’s pages and pages, they’ll switch off.’*** **– Carer**

> ***‘Animations are good, Easy Read information. [The service provider] Speak Out did some Covid animations … one about moving out of home.’*** **– Service provider**

> ***'If you're coming from a place of "You need to learn things/understand this", it might not draw people in as much. It's about finding engaging ways to bring people in, writing a song, a way to learn about it in a way that doesn't feel like going to school, another person telling you what to do. We live in a society with lots of information. If there's a way to make it engaging and relevant, through short videos, it needs to be relevant and captivating.'*** **– Service provider**

Many service providers and carers mentioned that repetition was a critical factor in successfully engaging with individuals with intellectual disability to encourage learning or the adoption of desirable or healthy behaviours. As such, information that was presented in easily digestible units that could be revisited many times was likely to be useful.

A few mentioned the value of interventions or resources that might act as 'circuit-breakers' – to help people with intellectual disability stop and think before posting or sending potentially inappropriate messages. This was of most relevance to those who had tendencies to become fixated with topics or activities.

Participants (and again, especially carers and service providers) regarded that, for many people with intellectual disability, a targeted and tailored communication approach would be required. However, many also noted the universal value of information about online abuse and staying safe online. So, while people with intellectual disability might be especially vulnerable for a range of reasons, all of society would likely benefit from increased awareness of online abuse. They noted that the availability of this general information would overcome another issue: the fact that people with intellectual disability don't necessarily think of themselves as more vulnerable. According to them, having this general information would also mean the risk would be avoided of marketing resources to people who didn't see them as obviously relevant.

Participants were also asked to think about what online safety information was important to convey to people with an intellectual disability. While service providers and carers expressed concerns about what malicious people might do to harass and take advantage of them, many limited themselves to stressing the importance of simple online education, such as the need to change passwords regularly. This perhaps demonstrates that when it came to online safety advice, it felt easier to tackle more straightforward topics than to address the more complicated area of dealing with other people's online behaviour.

When asked about the best way to connect people with intellectual disability with online abuse resources, many of the carers and service providers identified the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) as potentially playing a pivotal role. NDIS support workers were considered a useful way of connecting people with intellectual disability to resources (as well as possibly being the sorts of people who might incidentally come across accounts of online abuse among their clients). Indeed, there were a few anecdotes of support workers providing internet safety advice and related life skills to clients.

> ***'I have known of a few support workers who might do budgeting, cooking, social visits, and others who have done internet safety and creating strong passwords and helping to learn what a scam looks like.'* – Carer**

> ***'Having it as part of social workers' or support workers' courses. If I had a discussion with a support worker, I'd hope they would be able to help me and tell me what to do because they're my main carers.'* – Person with intellectual disability**

> ***'Beyond Blue or Kids Helpline, who can redirect them back to the right space. Training other organisations and sections so they funnel them back to where there is the best help and understanding. Rolling it out to all support coordinators who provide care under NDIS.'* – Service provider**

Assistance was also extended to some clients' parents and carers. A few (mostly younger) service providers reported helping less technologically confident or capable parents with internet basics in order to provide more holistic internet safety support for their clients. This included things like limiting access to iPads with passwords in order to restrict clients' opportunities to make online purchases with a parent's credit cards.

Resource concepts

Following the needs identification stage of the research, four broad concepts were identified and presented in the ideation phase for exploration and refinement. These were: case studies; role plays; factsheets; and an online chat tool. The discussion also extended to some suggestions of other tools from the ideation workshop participants.

Resources need to be seen as relevant and engaging for people with an intellectual disability

This phase of the research project found that the key challenge for any resource is that people with intellectual disability would require an initial reason to engage with the materials or tool. Given that most people with intellectual disability didn't believe they were at risk of online abuse, the concern from participants was that they would be unlikely to seek out these resources in a proactive or pre-emptive way. The inability to perceive these materials or resources as relevant would be likely to impede uptake. Related to this, some service providers felt that people with intellectual disability might need an incentive (e.g. cash prizes, spot vouchers) to encourage engagement.

Regardless of the specific resources under consideration, participants felt that their format needed to be highly engaging. This would help to appeal to the audience and help overcome some of the learning and communication challenges often experienced by those with intellectual disability. While learning preferences vary by individual, using colour, video and personalisation were considered common and useful approaches.

It was also felt that resources that are too 'obviously' targeted to those with intellectual disability would be off-putting (especially for those with milder intellectual disability). Some participants with intellectual disability noted that they didn't enjoy feeling like they were being treated differently, something also noted by some carers. Throughout the research, participants noted the importance of being treated like all other adults and some were especially sensitive to being talked down to. Given the level of confidence and online competence among some of the participants with intellectual disability, there is a risk that resources that appear too tailored could be overlooked and/or not address their needs. Related to this was the reflection that people with intellectual disability wanted to engage with resources that are seen to be mainstream. For example, some service providers noted the importance of developing resources that were perceived as novel and 'cool', such as Public Transport Victoria's *Dumb Ways to Die* railway safety campaign. For any resource, making it 'mainstream' would help to ensure there is no stigma attached to using it.

> ***'For a lot of people I've supported, music was something that's vibed with them – like rap and hip hop. I have conversations about the music they listen to and what it means to them. I saw this as an 'in', a shared experience – not as something trying to tell them something, but as something they identify with. But if it's cheesy and [overtly] trying to educate them, [it could backfire]. [It] needs to feel authentic, needs to come from [an] appropriate message bearer.'*** **– Service provider**

> ***'Make [resources] cool. They want to be accepted … just like everyone does. They are about fun; they don't want to always be told what to do. It needs to feel inviting. They like to do things that feel good.'*** **– Service provider**

Guiding principles for resources

Noted resource development challenges and opportunities aside, the four concepts presented to the participants would likely suit different situations. Some were more passive (factsheets) as opposed to active (role plays); some were more given to general awareness raising (factsheets), while others were better suited to point-in-time assistance (online chat tool). However, regardless of the style, format and type of resource/s developed, the research suggests some guiding principles to follow when developing resources for people with intellectual disability in relation to online abuse.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR RESOURCES

- Resources need to be focused on increasing knowledge and awareness of online abuse among those with intellectual disability so that individuals are better able to identify and address online abuse if and when they encounter it.
- Resources need to be disseminated through trusted channels (service providers, support workers, friends and family) because they are unlikely to be sought out by people with intellectual disability.
- If possible, resources should be accompanied by auxiliary information to help service providers and carers support people with intellectual disability to stay safe online.
- Materials and information need to be bright and visually engaging.
- Where written information is used, it should be used sparingly.
- Any written information needs to be Easy Read and have read-aloud functionality.
- Visual information (illustrations, animations, video) should be used in place of written information where possible.
- Resources should avoid appearing to be specific to those with intellectual disability (although they do need to be targeted to the audience) to avoid stigma.
- Resources need to be delivered in a tone that balances a sense of fun with a contemporary and grown-up tone (not ‘talking down’).
- Any online resources need to be device neutral so they can be easily accessed on smartphones, tablets, laptops and PCs.
- Written and static visual information needs to be easy to download and formatted to be easily printed.
- Information should be succinct and presented as bite-sized topics.
- Where examples are used to illustrate information, these should be based on real-life scenarios to maximise credibility and relatability.
- Where possible, resources should be personalised (e.g. using examples based on a person who shares demographic and recreational interests with the user).

Conclusion

The online experiences of people with intellectual disability are rich and varied. For many, the online world is an invaluable source of connection to others, self-expression, entertainment, and access to information and services. However, going online carries risks.

Individuals with intellectual disability, carers and service providers spoke of a range of online harms, including bullying, trolling, doxing and sexual extortion. Despite this, adults with intellectual disability didn’t see themselves as being inherently at risk when going online and acknowledged that they were unlikely to report negative online experiences. Carers and service providers were concerned about the online experiences of the people they cared for. They suggested that people with intellectual disability were particularly vulnerable to exploitation, identifying reduced impulse control, an inability to judge tone in written communication and an uncritical acceptance of online behaviour as factors contributing to increased risk. They also reflected that people with intellectual disability were unlikely to recognise online abuse as it was happening. Carers and service providers mostly drew from their personal experience to support people with intellectual disability. They didn’t tend to seek out online safety information.

Empowering people with intellectual disability to interact safely online requires a multifaceted approach. Tools and resources should reflect the diversity of needs, interests and experiences in the community and are required for people with intellectual disability, as well as for their carers and service providers. There is a clear need for ongoing online safety education, along with tools and resources that provide ‘in the moment’ support for a range of scenarios. Simple, visually appealing content that draws on real-life scenarios will be critical for engagement. Co-designing resources with people with intellectual disability, their carers and service providers will also be essential to ensure that resources are relevant, contextualised and, ultimately, helpful in supporting efforts to foster safe, empowering online experiences.

Appendix A: Methodology

The qualitative fieldwork was conducted in three stages.

Stage 1 was a **desktop review** of existing online safety and online resources targeting adults (aged 18+ years) with intellectual disability in Australia and overseas that were available in English and published between 2015 and 2021.

Stage 2 was an exploratory **needs identification** stage to understand the experience of adults with intellectual disability with regards to online abuse. This stage provided insight into the current use of online technology, platforms and channels; experience of online abuse (nature and frequency); and the resources needed to support people with intellectual disability in this environment. To gain a holistic understanding of the topic, people with intellectual disability, carers and disability service providers were included in this stage, and the findings from this stage were used to inform and develop the concepts utilised in Stage 3.

Stage 3 was a **concept ideation** stage to further develop the findings from Stage 2 and to explore which resource concepts were most relevant, accessible and likely to be effective as potential resources to support online safety among people with intellectual disability. As a result, Stage 3 included in-depth interviews with people with intellectual disability, and four online community workshops with carers and disability service providers.

The diagram below outlines the methodology for this qualitative research.

Sample design

The table below illustrates the achieved sample.

Stage 2: Needs Identification						
	Age		Gender		Location	
People with intellectual disability	Aged 18–35	6	Men	5	NSW	1
	Aged 36–55	4	Women	5	VIC	3
	Aged 56+	0	Other	0	QLD	4
					SA	1
					TAS	1
Carers	Aged under 55	5	Men	0	NSW	3
	Aged over 55	0	Women	5	QLD	2
			Other	0		
Service providers			Men	2	NSW	2
			Women	3	VIC	1
			Other	0	SA	2
Stage 3: Concept Ideation						
People with intellectual disability			Men	5	NSW	2
			Women	2	VIC	3
			Other	1	QLD	2
					ACT	1
Service providers and carers			Men	8	NSW	7
			Women	9	VIC	4
			Other	1	QLD	3
					SA	3
					WA	1

The participants with intellectual disability ranged from low-functioning to high-functioning, with varying levels of support needed. As a result, the experience of online abuse was widely varied.

Fieldwork

The recruitment of participants for Stage 2 was undertaken by Ipsos. eSafety provided Ipsos with contacts to various disability service providers and members of the eSafety expert advisory group. The eSafety expert advisory group members were recruited by eSafety and included people with a lived experience of intellectual disability, academic institutions, and representatives from disability services and advocacy organisations. All contacts were provided with a primary approach letter and a plain language statement to explain the purpose of the research to aid recruitment. Working through these connections, Ipsos was able to recruit people with intellectual disability, their carers and some service providers. A specialist recruitment agency, The Human Network, assisted with recruitment in Stage 3. Whenever possible, and when convenient for participants, fieldwork took place online in a video call. A small number of interviews took place via phone, due to participant preference. In-depth interviews for both Stages 2 and 3 took between 30 and 60 minutes and the focus groups for Stage 3 lasted 90 minutes. All in-depth interviews and focus groups were recorded, with participants' permission.

Discussion guides were developed for each audience and each stage of the research. For participants with intellectual disability, these were developed in Easy Read format. (These guides are available on request.)

The fieldwork for Stage 2 took place between September and November 2021, while the fieldwork for Stage 3 was undertaken from late November to early December 2021.

Since the fieldwork was concluded, eSafety has revised its use of the term 'cyber abuse' and has opted instead to use 'online abuse' as an umbrella term for all abuse facilitated by online connectivity. While the discussion guides developed for this research project used 'cyber abuse' as part of its terminology, the term 'cyber' has been replaced with 'online' for consistency throughout this document. This has happened in all circumstances except when 'cyber abuse' is used in direct quotations from the interview and focus group participants and in the description of the definition for online abuse given to research participants.

Participants were provided with an incentive to thank them for their time; participants in Stage 2 received $100 and participants in Stage 3 received $120, reflecting the longer time commitment. All participants completed informed consent forms prior to participation.

Appendix B: Verbatim Bank

Online activities

What’s happening online

‘I use the [internet on the] phone to pay the bills, do email. Communication with the school [the participant has a daughter in grade 4] on email ... With bills, I feel safe [paying them online] because there’s a bit of paper first and … and it’s better on the phone: I can enlarge it. I have eyesight problems, but with the big computer I have to use my glasses … I need to concentrate [when I’m online]; I can’t be out and about.’ – **Person with intellectual disability**

‘As long as it’s Easy Read, I’m okay [feel comfortable being online]. Email is a big challenge for me – it can be too technical or not Easy Read ... More about young kids and friends saying bad things about them, or predators, or getting into the wrong crowd. I feel like my kids would be easily led.’ – **Person with intellectual disability**

‘I just go on Zoom with my support coordinator. If it wasn’t safe, I wouldn’t do it.’ – **Person with intellectual disability**

‘There’s just one guy [in the residential setting who uses the internet] and it’s just straight up YouTube. We’re trying to work on interactive stuff online for communicating, but he’s not interested at all! ... [He] gets on to watch Power Rangers. Ultimately, it’s his time, using the iPad. He’s early fifties; he can do whatever he wants, but it’s just superheroes.’ **– Service provider**

Knowledge and behaviour of online safety

‘People with disabilities – some are [too] nice and have good hearts and they get abused and bullied. On Instagram there’s very evil stuff that goes on. I’ve completely gone off [it, and] won’t have anything to do with [social media] now.’ – **Person with intellectual disability**

‘People with disabilities, young children, old people, people with complex disabilities are vulnerable [online].’ – **Person with intellectual disability**

‘I would say be careful going online, because some guys – or women – can be really … not nasty, but they might try and push you into things and stuff [you don’t want to do].’ – **Person with intellectual disability**

‘They should have a logo [on websites], to show people with disabilities it’s bad.’ – **Person with intellectual disability**

'[There are] so many things [to look out for with online dating]. Are they showing the right photos? Are they wanting a real relationship? Perhaps you should have the right to see their records [to prove they are who they say they are]? The internet has opened the whole world up, they could be anywhere in the world, they could be overseas but calling on a local number. It's more than trying to be safe [just] on a computer; it's the phone as well.' – **Person with intellectual disability**

'Ignoring people who are bullying you online, keeping your account safe.' – **Person with intellectual disability**

'If I had a problem with someone [online], I'd talk to them in person and not online because you never know what the other person is thinking on the other end. I would probably talk to my husband or [the service provider] Speak Out.' – **Person with intellectual disability**

'My second oldest [18 years old] is autistic and is a stickler for the rules. [Because I've told him not to share personal details online,] he simply won't do it. I told him if people annoy him online, he should block them, and that's what he does. He'll walk away, and not fight it; I don't think he's had any issues [as a result].' – **Carer**

'I don't like a lot of stuff [on social media and the internet]. There's a lot of evil stuff on Facebook. Some of my friends with disabilities have bad experiences – it's not safe; they've been bullied and stuff. The government shouldn't let Facebook happen. It's very bad for people with disabilities; [people you come across] could be racist, a paedophile … scary business, not a nice thing.' – **Person with intellectual disability**

'You don't know who you're speaking to [online]. People are very manipulative.' – **Person with intellectual disability**

Role of carers, parents and service providers

'This young lady I support liked to play games and word searches on her iPad. Because it was a free app it had all those ads in it and she always used to click no matter how many times I would say, "No, no, no, that's just an ad, ignore it!" and it would ask for payment and she would get very confused by it. So it was something [playing games] you had to do with her so you could tell her not to click on the ads … It was beyond her capacity to understand … it was supervising … Her parents were a bit older, so they weren't well versed in the technology. I frequently had to help them with their mobile phones.' – **Service provider**

'Being [an adult], it's hard to put parental locks on, but she's learning [the] consequences of what she puts online.' – **Carer**

'And it's beyond the scope of the job [to be aware and supervising all internet activity that happens outside of the service provider parameters]. You're not their parents, so it's tricky. There's a fine line

between when it goes bad and when it <u>really</u> goes bad.' – **Service provider**

'There're not many examples [of our clients doing online dating], but we warn people about internationals [who might try and financially exploit people].' – **Service provider**

'He's only made a little bit of progress [in becoming more internet safety savvy] but still, [at least] he's aware now [of some of the potential pitfalls] … But I wonder what they get up to when no one's there [supervising]? It's probably very different usage, but that sounds more like I'm being a parent!' – **Service provider**

'[When the daughter had experienced online abuse, unbeknown to her parents,] her dad was a stay-at-home dad, [so there should have been] more supervision about what she can and can't do on her laptop, [and using] parental locks at certain times.' – **Carer**

'You can't wrap them up in cottonwool, can you? I'm very lucky. They [16 and 19 year-old children with intellectual disabilities] have special needs, so they're very protected. They're not out and about much [online,] so I haven't really had that problem. There's a bit of bullying at school, but we soon put a stop to that.' – **Person with intellectual disability**

'[After being read the definition of online abuse] It's pretty full-on! How do you handle that? [My Grade 4, daughter living without an intellectual disability is] very open if someone has hurt her in the playground, but how would I explain that? She had playdates online in Covid – it was nasty, with girls, and they muted her and by the end of it she was in tears. It was awful. I was walking past and noticed.. Her friends' parents need to deal with that. [She] gets frustrated with me because I can't connect. I'm not sure what I'm doing [online]. They get annoyed and mute her.' – **Person with intellectual disability**

'My partner and I are pretty strict with time online and what she's [13 year-old daughter] allowed to do. She's had some weird experiences where she's had abuse online. She had an experience where somebody else videoed something but blamed her … and she brings it up all the time. She's lost trust. It was posted online and the police were called, but she doesn't even know how to use that kind of thing. She's been pretty lucky … She's tall and slim, so not as targeted [for bullying]. I'm scared for her. Social media is crazy. We've discussed the dangers over and over again.' – **Person with intellectual disability**

'I don't know [how you help people with intellectual disabilities stay safe online]. It depends on [the] severity of their intellectual disability. You may be able to have some sort of parental lock on some apps. We do random checks of [daughter's phone], and if we see something inappropriate we have a chat. Whether it works or not, I'm not sure. If something is on the news about online bullying, we use that as a way to talk then. Talking is as important as locks. I try scare tactics, too. I google stories about bad things. It might seem over the top, but I come from a police family … There's a couple of examples I've shown the kids: in America there was a group of friends who dared each other and one ended up dying. I told them, "It's okay to joke around, but someone might take it seriously and you need to know when to stop. If [someone who doesn't get that it's a joke] shows the conversation to [their] parents or tells [the] police, then it could escalate." [You] need to be really careful with

interpreting: what they might see as joking, someone else might [take] seriously.' – **Carer**

'With one client we spent four weeks on a text etiquette sheet with what's appropriate to send or receive … He'd text me every 30 seconds till I replied, so I'd get 140 messages … "If someone asks for a photo of you with no clothes on, you say no."' **– Service provider**

'I don't want her [Grade 4, daughter living without an intellectual disability] to go there [because of sexual content/risk of exploitation]. I just want her to be safe. I don't know anything [about] apps and stuff, so it's guiding her and getting [apps] off [the iPad] straight away if they're not suitable. I don't do iPads. Occasionally, she has seen horrible pictures and I don't know how to get rid of them – sexual and violent images. She was doing that [YouTube?] for a while. We had to clean out that [unsuitable content], but now [there's a] kid-friendly version. [How did you find out about the child-friendly version?] Through my sisters.' **– Person with intellectual disability who is a parent**

Understanding and experience of online abuse

Understanding of online abuse

'To me it's about bullying in an online situation. [It] could be through Facebook or any social media sites. Laughing at other people's photos, making nasty comments, making someone feel bad about themselves in an online environment.' – **Carer**

'If it would be hurtful in person [then it's not okay], that's the golden rule: if you don't want it done to you, don't do it to other people. It's just coming back to basics. There are all these online platforms and different ways to communicate, but if you wouldn't want someone saying that to your sister or brother, or if you're going to have a dig or be hurtful, you shouldn't be doing it. If someone makes you uncomfortable, upset or hurt, you need to block them, or say it's not okay – like in preschool [you're[told to say, "Stop! I don't like that." It's simplistic, but it's about having a relevant conversation [with a person with intellectual disability].' – **Carer**

'Threatening, frightening, scary things [happen] online. [They include] getting bullied on the internet … I know people who have been stalked on the internet.' – **Person with intellectual disability**

'[Online abuse] that's why I try and keep my [intellectual disability] kids off Facebook and that.' – **Person with intellectual disability**

'[Online abuse is] saying not true things over the internet or [in] text messages … [Is there anything missing from the definition?] Yes: discrimination, blackmail.' – **Person with intellectual disability**

Experiences of online abuse

' I told [a friend] it's very scary out there; she should meet someone from church instead, not go on dating websites. I told her "There's crazy people get on there!" I gave her advice and she ended up in a really bad situation and she had to go to court. She got badly attacked, she got followed. I told her

not to go on those things. I was trying to keep her safe. I'm a friendly person – I tried to give advice.' – **Person with intellectual disability**

'[On hearing about impersonation accounts] My dad was like that a bit. My dad had dementia. He had a blank Facebook page with a picture of me.' – **Person with intellectual disability**

'I've definitely experienced that … an ex cheated on me, left me for someone else, and that person was intimidated by me, so she sent messages to me saying she was going to kill me and my family. [She] went into forums online and said nasty things about me and called my phone. I took out an AVO [apprehended violence order] on my ex-partner, but she continued [to attack me]. I didn't know her name, who she was, so I couldn't [easily report her] … She was disclosing information [about me, including health information and my legal name]. I went to the police in the beginning. They took photos of text messages. She trolled me for 12 years … She contacted me again recently … I told her I forgave her … She added me on Instagram – that was weird, I don't use it, so [it was just easier] to accept her.' – **Person with intellectual disability**

'On apps like Grindr [and] scruff, there are people who chose not to upload a profile photo and they attack people who they think are different or don't fit gay stereotypes. I don't know if [this stems] from their own self-doubt. Usually if you don't reply to those messages, or block them, it's fine. Ninety per cent of the time you do that and it goes away, but sometimes they make more profiles and harass you. Some apps only allow you to block a certain number of people and some make you pay for blocking, which is unfair. It causes a lot of mental damage – I know people who have had to go to therapy. On the gay dating social apps, [people] might pick on someone who's fat or thin, [or because of their] ethnic background … A lot of people can be really mean: "[Someone is] too feminine/bearded/hairy to be on here." I am part of a bigger Sydney gay community … many are on the spectrum and they get picked on because they communicate a bit differently… I have a disabled brother. I understand it a lot more: they pick on people because they're different, push limits … The people who are being picked on shy away.' – **Person with intellectual disability and carer**

'I met a gay guy on a dating app. He harassed me, threatened me. I had to block him. He was texting abuse.' – **Person with intellectual disability**

'I've been caught [on dating apps] there, too. They ask you for money and stuff like that. I just moved on [when they asked for money]. [Did you report it?] No.' – **Person with intellectual disability**

Understanding and experience of lateral abuse

Understanding of lateral abuse

'Anyone [with intellectual disabilities] can do it or receive it [online bullying; it depends on how high functioning they are. Anyone can be a bully. You see bullying in disability all the time [in real life, as

well as online]: people giving each other a hard time. That sort of personality. It could be someone getting back at someone.' – **Service provider**

Experiences of lateral abuse

'[Peer abuse between people with intellectual disabilities has] not happened in my household. I'm not saying it doesn't happen, but it [hasn't happened to me] personally … My daughter and her friend, they do some [what you might call] inappropriate things, but it's not bullying. They're best friends, it's nonsense between friends. They tell each other to do stupid stuff, like: "Cut your face with a knife." They wouldn't do it, but … they [say] it in a joking way: "Haha, this would be so funny!" We do tell them they shouldn't do it. [If someone else was involved, they] might take it seriously.' – **Carer**

'Online abuse hasn't been a topic raised [by current clients], but as a disability support worker in residential care [working with complex trauma, etc.] I did … witness online abuse and online conflict, with complex trauma [involved] … a real trigger … Those adults from abuse and neglect [histories] you'd get situations of interpersonal challenges; all were tech savvy – on their phones all the time. Online abuse would manifest … [People with intellectual disabilities] who have issues with self-control and emotional regulation meant that online conflicts could escalate quickly ... Then [the people with intellectual disabilities involved] would smash up the unit or be aggressive to other people like support workers, or destroy their phone and get angrier with themselves.' – **Service provider**

'[It would] go back and forth. They wouldn't see it as online abuse – stalking. [It was a question of] being able to engage appropriately. When online, it's alright there and harder to walk away. A level of anonymity allows bullying behaviour to happen more easily; [it's] a lot easier to say horrible things to another person with the lack of humanness. Not seeing the other person affects the level of intensity in some ways. In the supported accommodation [where I worked,] five adults … [they'd] call the ambulance on each other – psychological bullying. It comes back to challenges with emotional regulation and not being able to de-escalate. It meant those conflicts could really drag out; [the] cycle can become a lot more extended. Situations where some of the clients would harass other people and those people would harass them back; [it] could be with people very removed from the situation. [It] would bring external people into the conflicts. What I witnessed was also phone calls, texts.' – **Service provider**

Information and support needs

'If there's someone [that a more severely impaired person with intellectual disability is] excited to see, that's when they'll click and engage. Visually, [resources] have to look pretty, visually appealing. With higher intellectual disabilities, they might like cartoons, but then perhaps classical music … People are so different.' – **Person with intellectual disability**

'Pictures and easy words to help people understand … Do it in simple form.' – **Person with intellectual disability**

‘[Needs to be] Easy Read, some scenarios. The banks need to educate people as well …’ – **Person with intellectual disability**

‘[Support] groups, self-awareness, the media, the police, some sort of buddy system for people with disabilities so they can be free to talk about it. There’s lots of embarrassment about [being involved in a scam].’ – **Person with intellectual disability**

‘If there was something online, where you could lodge a complaint … like [with] domestic violence. If you could report it and not have to say it face-to-face, that would be good. If you’re in a group setting, like in a day program, someone might see it [so you wouldn’t need to report it in the same way as an online abuse situation].’ – **Person with intellectual disability**

Interviewer: ‘What’s the most important information people need to know about online abuse?’ Participant: ‘People [should be] nicer towards each other.’ – **Person with intellectual disability**

‘Being able to spot what online abuse is and understanding you don’t have to tolerate [it] or what you don’t deserve online.’ – **Service provider**

'They like to talk about themselves, they’re very self-orientated, they’re big sharers, so real-life examples could be good.' – **Service provider**

'[What would be good is] tools to help people step back when tit-for-tat gets out of hand.' **– Service provider**

Resource concepts

‘Browsers like an ad blocker [are] kinda helpful … but some of them don’t work much. Not long ago I got involved in too many telemarketer calls and used a blocker [on my phone] but it didn’t work.’ – **Person with intellectual disability**

Case studies

‘It needs to be relatable – bright colours, not in a “Danger! Danger!” way. Humorous and engaging.’ – **Service provider**

Role play

‘That would be really good in schools. It’s about always being kind, not judging people on how they look.’ – **Person with intellectual disability**

‘Dual functionality – a game where you play to earn, but also another section of the website or app where you can go and do checks or look at information. Not just one thing, a real hub of information

or tools, so it becomes a really well-known resource – not just for people with disabilities. Oldies also fall into these scams.' – **Service provider**

Factsheets

'[I would like to know what online abuse] behaviours are. I don't know how you can draw that, but I like visuals and listening.' – **Person with intellectual disability**

'It's important to educate adults where they can go, and good to tell people it's not just in their heads and it's okay to ask.' – **Person with intellectual disability**

'*Seems great. If you're reading it, then maybe click a button on the website or the app so it'll read it for you or play a video so you can hear it – that'd be sweet.*' **– Service provider**

Online chat

'Simple animations would work for my guys.' – **Service provider**

'Fantastic. I think it's great. They're already online at the time. If they have a concern, they could talk to someone, automated 24/7, who could guide them in real time.' – **Service provider**

'Apps would be good … But you might not download [it] just on the off chance [that one day you might report online abuse on it].' **– Person with intellectual disability**

Other ideas

'"Dhar Mann" video on YouTube – i.e. working through existing channels/influencers, shows they watch ("Alexa & Katie" on Netflix).' – **Carer**

'Web browser add-on, to monitor where they're going or if somewhere is dangerous.' – **Person with intellectual disability**

'Something that presents as mainstream-ish. An app or something that pops up when they're on Facebook or TikTok.' – **Service provider**

'A browser extension … If someone's online and moving through all these different websites and chats, perhaps an extension on Chrome – a sidebar comes out with important reminders or links to a customer service line they can chat with or call.' – **Service provider**

Appendix C: Glossary of terms

- **Dignity of risk**: Individuals have the right to take risks. If a person is prevented from doing so, this impedes their human rights and can limit personal growth, learning, self-esteem and, potentially, their overall quality of life.
- **Doxing**: Private address, name, email and bank details have been shared without consent.
- **Image-based abuse**: Nude pictures have been shared, or threatened to be shared, without consent.
- **Impersonation account**: A fake account is used to get in contact with or humiliate a person.
- **Lateral abuse:** In the context of this report, abuse between members within the intellectually disabled community.
- **Online stalking**: Someone constantly checks and monitors another person's online activity.
- **Sexual extortion**: Nude images or videos are used to blackmail a person.
- **Trolling**: Someone continually provokes another person online to get an emotional reaction.

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