Staying Safe in our Communities

What stops people with a learning disability feeling safe - and what they can do about it.

SpeakEasy N.O.W.

People's Parliament Report 2026

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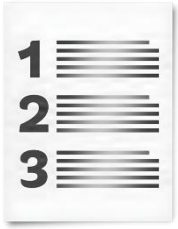

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1. Introduction

SpeakEasy N.O.W. Expert Members write a report every year about an issue that affects people with a learning disability.

This year we decided to look at staying safe in our communities. This is one of the themes of Worcestershire's Learning Disability Strategy and something members have told us is an important issue.

We have talked to lots of people with a learning disability about this. We have discussed it at –

- Monthly Forum meetings
- Our SpeakUp groups: Malvern Comet Group, Speakers Corner in Droitwich, Reddi-to-Talk in Redditch and Severn Source in Worcester.
- At regular pop-up group sessions we run at day opportunities across Worcestershire:

  Choices in Evesham, Wildgoose in Hallow, Reach in Bewdley, Branches in Malvern, Odell in Kidderminster, Amber and Amber Urban in Bromsgrove, Where Next in Redditch and Reddi Support in Redditch.

The things they told us are all in this report.

Whether we live on our own or with others, it's important that we feel safe, both inside our home and when we go out.

But we know that many people don't feel safe and this can have a bad effect on their lives.

It can make people feel anxious and afraid.

They may not want to go out on their own or leave their home at all.

'I feel safe only when I am with someone'

Pop-up group member

Some people don't feel safe inside their own home.

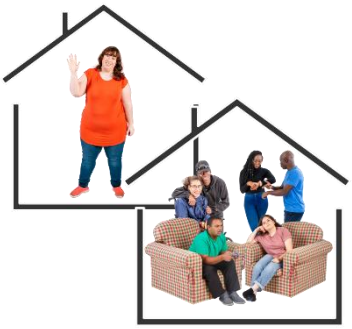
There are things that happen there that make them feel worried.

'I live in shared accommodation and the person I live with left the oven on. He could have caused a fire. Sometimes I don't feel safe if the support workers aren't there'

Pop-up group member

2. Feeling safe at home

Our home is the place where we should feel safe, wherever we live and whoever we live with.



People we live with and our neighbours

Some people live alone in their own homes. Some live with their families. Some live with other people in shared houses and homes.

A lot of people with a learning disability live in places where there are paid staff who help them.

Some people might need a lot of support. This could include washing, dressing, eating and drinking.

Some people need 24-hour care. That means they need help all the time.

Others might get paid help for just a few hours a week with things like shopping and paying bills.

If you depend on help and support from others, it should be provided by people who understand about people with a learning disability and how to support them.

‘I have 6 hours support a week, but my support worker changes all the time. I don’t always know who is going to come.

Some of them are nice and help me but they don’t always understand what I’m saying.

If the same person helped me every week they would be able to understand me.’

Forum member

If you live with other people, it’s important that you get on with them and can trust them.

If they are unkind to you or treat you badly in some way, it will make you unhappy, and you might not feel safe. You need to talk to someone about this and ask them to help you.

Richard’s story

Richard lives in a supported living service that has 10 individual flats. There’s a shared community room on the ground floor where people can sit together, talk, watch TV or just relax with others.

Richard likes to spend time there but one of the other people living there used to pick on him.

He would make fun of the Marvel comics that Richard likes to look at and snatch them off him. He'd pretend to throw them away or rip them up. He always did this when there were no other people around.

Richard got angry with him once and shouted at him. The other man told a member of staff about this and Richard got into trouble.

The man continued to make fun of Richard and call him names. It upset Richard and he started to keep away from the community room and stayed in his room alone.

Richard talked to his sister about what was happening when he next saw her. She told him he was being bullied and he needed to stand up for himself and tell the staff what was going on.

Richard was nervous about doing this but did what his sister said.

He told a member of staff he was being bullied by the other man and described what had been happening.

They spoke to the other man and told him to stop.

The next few times Richard went into the community room a member of staff stayed in there with him.

Now Richard uses the community room regularly and enjoys spending time with other people in there. He often shows them his comics and talks about all the characters in them.

If you live alone you can still have problems with other people.

Your neighbours might not be nice to you or the way they live might cause you problems.

Sam's story

Sam lives alone in a first floor flat. There is a keypad to enter the flats and visitors have to press the buzzer to be let in.

One of Sam's neighbours who lives across from him uses drugs.

A lot of people come to his flat at all times of the day and night. It makes Sam feel unsafe to have so many people coming in and out all the time.

Sam has complained about this to his housing association.

One night at 2.30am Sam's door buzzer went off. It rang several times and Sam was worried.

He answered his buzzer and asked who it was. A woman answered. She said she needed to get into the building to see Sam's neighbour.

Sam told her it was very late and she should not have rung his buzzer for someone else.

He was angry to be woken so late, but it made him feel very vulnerable too.

Since then, Sam's neighbour has been evicted.

Sam wasn't the only person who had complained about him and both the housing association and the Police acted on these complaints.

Making our homes safe

Staying safe at home is also about making sure our homes are safe to live in, and we do things to keep us safe.

'I live in a bungalow on my own. Every night I lock the doors and check 3 times before I go to bed so that I feel safe from anyone breaking in.'

Pop-up group member

'You should never answer the door to strangers and people you don't know'.

Pop-up group member

Things to think about to stay safe at home

- Having fire alarms installed
- Having good lighting so we can see to get around

- Having handrails at the entrance and in the bathroom if we have mobility problems

- Being careful with electric appliances

- Making sure carpets and rugs are securely fitted.

- Being careful if we use lighted candles- where we place them and making sure we blow them out when we leave the house.

- Having a torch nearby if our electric supply goes off

- Checking use by dates on food and medication.

- Locking our doors when we go out

- Leaving a spare door key with a trusted person

- Disposing of rubbish carefully

People and organisations that can help

If you live alone in a rented property you can contact your **landlord or housing association** about things like fire alarms, mobility aids and lighting.

Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service can do home visits for people to check on safety issues.

If you meet the criteria they can have free safety equipment installed in your home.

Contact Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service -

Phone: 0800 032 1155

Website: www.hwfire.org.uk

You can ask for an **occupational therapy assessment** to see if there are aids and adaptations that could help you remain independent in your home.

Herefordshire and Worcestershire Health and Care NHS Trust provide an occupational health assessment service in Worcestershire.

They will complete an assessment with the person and their carers looking at their health, abilities, occupations, and environment.

People on benefits or a low income may be eligible for a **Disability Facilities Grant** (DFG). Approval for grant funding is made by the District Councils.

The Occupational Therapist can apply to the **Home Improvement Agency** on the person's behalf to assess their eligibility.

More information can be found at: [Disabled Facilities Grants: Overview - GOV.UK]

Adults over the age of 18 can contact Worcestershire's occupational health service by contacting the Single Point of Access on **0300 123 7593** and following the options to select your local Neighbourhood Team.

3. Feeling safe going out into the community

Getting out and about and meeting people is good for us. It helps us with both our physical and mental health.

Some people find it easy to do. Others may get anxious or worried and try to avoid doing this. Some people with a learning disability need help and support to go anywhere.

'I never go out on my own. I would be too frightened, especially in loud, busy places.'

Pop-up group member

‘As a blind person, I need my stick at all times to help me get around. People still bash into me and push me. I wish they respected me more and realise how hard it is to do things without the ability to see’

Pop-up group member

Going out in our communities can create problems for both able-bodied people walking, and those in wheelchairs or using mobility aids.

Things to think about when you go out

- Roadworks
- Potholes
- Uneven or broken pavements
- Poor lighting
- Cars parked over dropped kerbs, on yellow lines, on pavements and in front of doorways.
- Overgrown trees and bushes that hide road signs or make you have to walk in the road.
- Obstacles blocking paths and crossing points
- Finding accessible taxis, buses and trains
- Having to book ahead for assistance at railway stations
- Accessible venues when they arrive at their destination

‘I make sure I go out when it’s light. I use a mobility scooter, so I need to be careful with pavements and look for drop down kerbs. Some people still stand in my way even though they can see I’m on a scooter’.

Pop-up group member

Poor street lighting affects many people. They’ve told us they don’t like to go out at night in winter months because it’s too dark and they don’t feel safe.

Taking a torch out with them would help them to see their way around better.

Places people like to go out to

- Shops, cafes and restaurants
- Pubs and social clubs
- Theatres, cinemas, and music venues
- Visiting family and friends in their homes
- Libraries
- Colleges
- Gyms and sports halls
- Sports venues like football and cricket matches

- Places of work both paid and voluntary
- Going for walks in parks, woods and local countryside.
- Hospitals and GP practices for health appointments
- Car boot sales, craft fayres, street markets and farm shops.
- Events like carnivals and fairgrounds.

‘I like going to the pub with my partner. The pub is a safe place for me to go to because loads of people go there and many of them know me now.’

Pop up group member

People and organisations that can help

The Safe Spaces scheme was set up to help people when they feel anxious or unsafe when out in their towns and cities.

Places like shops, restaurants and cafes can sign up to the scheme. They have a Safe Spaces sign in their windows and you can go there for help and support if you are anxious, scared or lost.

Our Way Self Advocacy in Kidderminster support this scheme, which has been rolled out to all main towns in Worcestershire.

It includes Pubwatch, a community of nighttime places that work together to provide safe and enjoyable nights out in town.

For more information contact Our Way

[Home | Our Way Self Advocacy, Worcestershire, England, Learning Disabilities]

Or telephone 01562 820262.

Transport

People with a learning disability also need transport to get to places.

Many will walk or use public transport. Some have to rely on others like family and support staff to transport them.

Public transport is not always available, especially if you live in small villages and other rural areas. Even people who live in bigger towns tell us that bus services may only run 2 or 3 times a day and the service stops altogether after 6pm.

Some people don't feel safe using public transport.

'I've had people say nasty things to me. Someone once started on me when I got on a train. He was saying very offensive things. No-one stood up for me. I just had to take it.'

Pop up group member

Sam's story

Sam used to catch the same bus regularly.

A boy from the local college got on the same bus and started picking on Sam, which made him feel very uncomfortable. Some ladies on the bus told the boy to leave Sam alone and stop being so cruel.

Taxi services are expensive and not always available.

People living in Worcester have told us they can't get taxis to pick them up from the place where they live or to take them back there when they need to go home. They don't know why, but they feel this is discrimination.

Discrimination is when someone is treated unfairly because of their race, disability, sexuality, or something else about their identity.

Other people

Many people have told us it's other people that worry them most when going out.

'I don't like going into town on my own. People stare at me and judge me. I am always looking behind me to see who's there. If people are wearing hoodies and I can't see their faces it makes me scared.'

SpeakEasy Expert Member

People talked about a big increase in the number of rough sleepers (homeless people) in our towns, sleeping in places like shop doorways.

Many felt uncomfortable walking past them. Sometimes they were asked for money and didn't know what to say.

Some people told us they changed the route they took. They would go a longer way round to avoid having to talk with them.

Walking around towns can be scary if you're trying to avoid people on bikes, scooters and skateboards.

‘I was with my mum in town and a boy on a bike swished past us. He was going very fast and we only knew he was there because he rang his bell when he was nearly on top of us. It scared me and my mum was angry.’

SpeakEasy Expert Member

People said there should be more Police presence in our communities. This would stop a lot of people doing things like this. It would also reassure us knowing they were there.

4. Staying safe online

Many people with a learning disability use mobile phones, iPads, laptops and computers.

These devices help us to access things online. We can do things like order groceries, buy clothes, pay bills, make appointments, as well as make friends and talk with people.

If we have these skills it can make our lives easier and give us more choices and opportunities.

But many of us can feel left out if we don’t have access to computers or know how to use them.

More often these days we are asked to go online to do things that we used to do face to face or by telephone.

And more and more people are becoming victims of online scams where thieves are trying to trick people into giving them money.

A scam is when someone tries to take your money by pretending to help you, or by offering you something which they are not going to give you.

You can get scammed by people over the phone, online and by email.

If someone pretends to help you, they might ask you for information which can help them to try to take your money.

They might ask for your:

- name
- date of birth
- address
- bank account details
- card details
- passwords
- passcodes

This can happen to anyone, but people with a learning disability can be especially vulnerable.

Beth's story

Beth has a smartphone which she uses a lot to stay in touch with friends, buy things and make appointments.

She gets lots of messages and emails every day from the companies and organisations she uses.

One day she had a message to say a parcel was to be delivered to her but there was an extra delivery charge to pay. They needed her bank details to get this money so it could be delivered.

Beth was waiting for some things she had recently ordered online and thought it was one of these. She replied to the message with her bank details.

Later on, she tried to pay for something in a shop using her phone. The payment was declined because she didn't have enough money in her bank account.

She was puzzled because she thought she had enough money in her account. When she checked she saw that a payment had been made from her account for over £100.

Beth learned a very hard lesson that day. She managed to get her money back from the bank, but it made her realise she needed to be much more careful in future.

Now Beth will never give her bank details to anyone until she makes sure it's safe. If she's not sure she'll check with her Mum or Dad or ask her support worker to help her.

Beth is proud of the independence she has achieved and wants to do as much as she can by herself. She was upset at first when this happened because she thought it was due to her learning disability. It made her feel bad about herself.

But now Beth has spoken to lots of other people about this. She's learned that online scams are happening all the time and anyone can be fooled.

'Anyone can be tricked by online scams. Always check and make sure. It's better to be safe than sorry'

What to do about scams

If you think you've been the victim of an online scam or fraud contact **Report Fraud** on **0300 123 2040** or call the **Police** on **101** to report it.

It's important to report websites, emails, phone numbers, phone calls or text messages you think may be suspicious.

Do not give out private information (such as bank details or passwords), reply to text messages, download attachments or click on any links in emails if you're not sure they are genuine.

Look at the Mencap guide on scams. It includes romance scams and impersonation scams.

[How to protect yourself from scams | Mencap | Easy Read]

A romance scam is when someone tries to get you to fall in love with them or pretends they are in love with you.

An impersonation scam is when someone pretends to be someone you think you can trust so they can try to take your money.

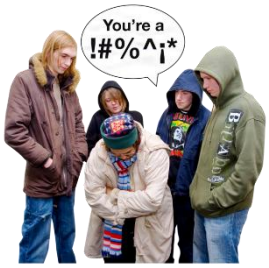
They might pretend to be -

- your bank
- the police
- a delivery company
- a gas, electric, phone or water company
- a government department like HMRC or DWP

5. Hate Crime

SpeakEasy N.O.W. Expert Members have met with Hate Crime police officers from the West Mercia Police Prevention Hub.

We know that Hate Crime is something that many people with a learning disability experience.



Hate Crime is a crime that happens to you because of something like your disability, your religion, where you come from or your sexuality.

Hate Crime can be things like –

- Calling you nasty names and saying horrible things to you
- Hitting, punching or kicking you.

- Damaging your house or your things, like breaking your window or stealing your things.
- Sending you nasty text messages or letters or making nasty phone calls to you.

You can find more information about Hate Crime in the Mencap leaflet at [Information about hate crime | Mencap | Easy Read]

Hate crime is against the law and you should tell someone if it happens to you.

The Hate Crime Police officers told us that a lot of hate crime is not reported.

This is not good. It means the figures for Hate Crimes in Worcestershire do not show what is really happening.

The Hate Crime officers want people with a learning disability to know what they should do if this happens to them.

They offer lots of information and advice and will talk to people about their experience and what they need to do about it.

People and organisations who can help

You can report hate crime to **West Mercia Police** online How to report hate crime | West Mercia Police or by calling 101.

VS VICTIM SUPPORT

People who are victims of crime, including hate crime, can get help from an organisation called **Victim Support**.

This help is free and confidential.

They are independent from Police and can be contacted at any time. It doesn't matter when the crime took place, or whether you've reported it to the Police.

Contact Victim Support for Herefordshire and Worcestershire by calling **01905 726896** (8am - 8pm)

Out of hours call their free 24/7 support line **08 08 16 89 111**

VictimSupportGateway@victimsupport.org.uk

or their live chat service:
Victimsupport.org.uk/live-chat

6. Conclusion

Feeling safe in our homes and out in our communities is important.

It affects the quality of our lives.

People's mental and physical health can suffer if they don't feel safe.

There is a lot many of us can do to help us stay safe.

Some people will have to rely on others to help them do this.

Some people will need others to keep them safe as they will not be able to do this themselves.

The most important thing is to be aware of when and where we may be at risk of harm or danger.

For those who can take steps to help themselves it's important that they have good information.

They need to know what to do and where to go for help.

They need to know how to avoid dangers in both their homes and outdoors.

They need to know how to protect themselves from harm. This could be from online scams or from walking somewhere at night.

This report has provided some information and raised awareness about things that we know affect people with a learning disability.

SpeakEasy N.O.W. Expert Members wanted to do more.

We will be holding a workshop for people with a learning disability called Staying Safe in our Communities.

We will be working with people from Public Health about safety in the home, AbilityNet about online scams, Hate Crime Police Officers and Victim Support.

This will be an opportunity for people with a learning disability to find out more information and to discuss these important topics with these organisations.

Our workshop

Staying Safe in our Communities

Monday 16th November

10am – 1pm

Perdiswell Young People's Leisure Centre

Droitwich Road, Worcester, WR3 7SN.

Places will be limited so please book as soon as possible.

Call us on 01905 774247

Email us on mail@speakeasynow.org.uk