

Bad Things Can and Do Happen...

Ten years ago I was in a terrible car roll-over. It left me with a severe speech impediment which has left me reliant on an AAC device. I also was left in a wheelchair for mobility purposes.

I am more fortunate than others in that I can spell and therefore communicate my needs in writing. I was abused, but I was lucky in that although it occurred at an agency, the culprit wasn't part of the agency. So their name wasn't at risk of being harmed. I called a worker into my room. I thought she was friends with the culprit, so I felt guilty telling her. Immediately after I told her I apologized for telling her. She told me that what he did was wrong, and that the culprit needed to be punished accordingly. The police were immediately called, and they were very supportive of me and disgusted by the abusers actions. They also cleared up some of my misconceptions. He didn't do it because he liked me, and the gifts he was giving me didn't represent that.

At the court house too, they were very understanding and I never got the impression that I wasn't believed. He ended up pleading guilty, which saved me the agony of having to testify and prove my innocence. The judge was also very

supportive and regularly checked my facial expression to see if he was saying the right thing. He let him know that he was disgusted with his behavior and that it wasn't acceptable. After the initial incident a social worker was recommended for counseling. I feel that is difficult for anyone to express the tale of their abuse.

I have a very supportive family. I can not imagine trying to cope without support. It is a myth that abuse does not happen to anyone with a disability. Quite the opposite, I was abused because he thought I wouldn't tell anyone. I am fortunate enough that I could spell and was able to communicate it clearly to someone who believed me. He also was not a member of the agency, so no one was trying to cover it up. I also had the advantage in that he pleaded guilty, so although I have good communication skills I didn't have to get up to the stand and make my case clear and feel doubted.

I feel that all of these issues should be considered when someone who uses an AAC device has to testify. It is important that the AAC user is comfortable enough to communicate, and has the time. Time and understanding is necessary.

¹ Resources for Legal Professionals

Developed by [Augmentative Communication Community Partnerships-Canada 2006](#)