Speaking up for Safety program

A Southern Cross Healthcare (SCH) wide programme to build a culture of safety by empowering staff to support each other and raise concerns.

Who is this program for?
For everyone working at SCH.

Why is Speaking up for Safety important?
Developed by the Cognitive Institute, the **SUFS program** helps create a workplace where everyone feels comfortable speaking up about safety issues. It also teaches staff how to listen to and address concerns from their colleagues to prevent harm to patients, staff, and visitors.

To build a safe and supportive culture, it's important for everyone to use the same language and approach. This means moving away from blaming each other and instead looking out for one another.

The training covers the ethical reasons for speaking up about safety and the consequences of staying silent. Staff learn a communication model called the **Safety C.O.D.E.** (Checks, Options, Demands, and Elevates) to help them raise concerns effectively.

SUFS aligns with SCH values, Connected Care and Connected Leaders and provides staff with the skills they need to empower them to communicate their concerns about safety. By doing so, the program aims to prevent unintended harm to staff, patients and visitors.

Frequently asked questions
Where to from here?
Turning this training into normal habits is going to take a bit of practice. All of us can lead by example! Some tips to start Speaking up and Listening up: • Make it clear within your team that you want people to speak up if they see that you are going to make an error • Practice the Safety CODE with a colleague who you know well, with whom you feel "safe to fail" to build your confidence • Discuss with a colleague or a team leader how you could speak up for a specific situation: it's easier to speak up if you have prepared your words before • Ask somebody in the room to support you as you try to speak up • Ask some feedback on how you spoke up At handover, share your story if you spoke up or if somebody spoke up to you – particularly if it had a positive outcome for the patient or the team! It's also a good time to share what could have worked better.
How does Speaking up link with SBAR?
Situation, Background, Assessment, Recommendation (SBAR) is a great method to clearly communicate clinical information. Communication is more effective in teams where there are standard communication structures in place. Just like the Safety CODE, SBAR can add real value as it prevents the hit and miss process of 'hinting and hoping' when communicating effectively. If you realise that somebody is trying to speak up to you and you are not clear about their concern, showing that you are willing to better understand and suggesting to use the SBAR framework could also make the communication easier.
Should we speak up if someone is displaying a behaviour that doesn't agree with our values?
The Safety CODE can be used when we have a concern about the safety of our patients or our colleagues. The CHECKS step could be used to defuse the situation: intervening, asking "is there anything I can do to help?" could give a chance to the aggressive person to breathe and adopt a better behaviour. OPTIONS could be "I am worried we are not communicating in a way that will help our patients, could we use another tone / take 5 minutes to calm down and start again then?" This kind of situation will benefit from a debrief later on, once emotions have settled down on both sides, to agree on ways forward to build a better working relationship. And of course the People & Culture team can help, the Workplace conflict policy is also a great resource.

Frequently asked questions

What can I do if I need to de-escalate a conversation?

Useful for Speaking up and for a number of other situations, have a read at this resource with de-escalation techniques

How can I express my concern?

- Practice the Safety CODE, prepare your words before you speak up
- Communication is not easy, what you want to express may be interpreted differently: how can you clearly express your concern? Try to put yourself in the shoes of the person you are talking to: how could they interpret what you say?
- Make sure you balance your expressed concern with respect for your colleague

Ask the team around you to support you

I tried to speak up and I was dismissed. What can I do?

Well done for trying, it's not easy and the person you spoke up to may not have realised that you tried to use the Safety CODE.
A few things you could do:

- The Safety CODE is a step wise method that enables your to progressively escalate your concern, so even if your CHECKS are dismissed, keep expressing your concern using the OPTIONS, then DEMANDS, up to ESCALATES
- Debrief with a team leader or a colleague what went well and what could have gone better
- Try to write the words you could have used for every step of the CODE
- Make a plan to have an informal discussion with the person you tried to speak up to: it may be easier to have a chat once the stress and the emotions have reduced.

Do we step in when the person speaking up is wrong?

If the person is speaking up to you and you know their concern is not valid, respectfully explain them why you think so. They could learn from this, or be more specific about what is worrying them.
If you witness a colleague speaking up and you have more background information that would reassure them, you are welcome to share it with them! Don't forget to thank them for expressing their concern.

When should I use the "Safety CODE" wording?

Only use the "Safety CODE" wording when you get to the ESCALATE stage: this is an informal discussion, the "Safety CODE" wording shouldn't be used as a threat, but it can act as a clue that you have actually tried to express a concern in a few different ways and that you need to be listened to. You could also, at the ESCALATE stage, come back on the steps you have just been through: "I have checked with you, I have given you options, I have demanded that we take action, now I think it's time to escalate".

How can we support staff who have spoken up?

- If you witness that they try to speak up, encourage them or intervene to support them if the person speaking up to doesn't realise what is happening
- Thank them, whether you are the person who was spoken up to or not
- Take the time to take action or to provide explanations to reduce the person's concern
- Discuss with them what they did well when they spoke up
- Suggest opportunities for better speaking up - we can all do better!

Do we need to document when we have spoken up?

Speaking up and listening up are informal discussions aimed at getting a safer and better outcome for the team and the patient. Most of the time, only the CHECKS and OPTIONS steps will be required, and the person who is talked to may respond to the concern without realising that the Safety CODE was used.
The conversations will be documented:

- If you have a great story to share that others can learn from – share it with the team, the managers, your local trainers
- If the event should be documented as per our usual rules – e.g. if there was any harm or if it was a near miss that we can learn from as an organisation.

For more information please reach out to Speaking up for Safety program Lead Julia Abbott or one of our accredited trainers

Speaking up for safety handout 5-12-2024
708KB pdf

Some additional resources to learn about Speaking up

Creating a climate for speaking up

Influence of Surgeon Behaviour on Trainee Willingness to speak up

Critical human factors: the need to speak up to improve patient safety

Improving verbal communication in critical care medicine

Crew resource management and its applications in medicine

Speaking up for patient safety by hospital-based healthcare professionals: a literature review

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