

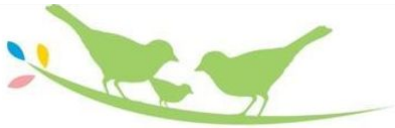
**Supporting the  
Development of  
Personal Safety  
Skills in Children  
and Adolescents**

**May 14, 2024**

# Nice to meet you!

## Dr. Paige Blankenship, Licensed Psychologist

- Clinical Director of the Audra Walsh Psychology Group in Florida
- PhD in Combined Counseling and School Psychology from Florida State University
- Completed internship and residency at the UC Davis CAARE Center in Sacramento
- Experience in various settings: private practice, hospitals, academic health centers, schools, juvenile detention facilities, and community mental health
- Specialization in posttraumatic stress and trauma-informed care



# Disclaimers

This presentation is for educational purposes only. Dr. Blankenship will not be providing mental health services, and this presentation does not constitute a therapist-client relationship of any kind.

This presentation will focus on themes including sexual education, sexual development, and sexual abuse. Please feel free to take care of yourself as needed. You are welcome to step outside to take a break or mentally disengage if you need to.



# Objectives

- Discuss the importance of safety enhancement skills
- Review important components of safety skills training
- Learn skills to teach to children and adolescents of varying age ranges and developmental levels
- Review ways to respond to children's disclosures as well as next steps



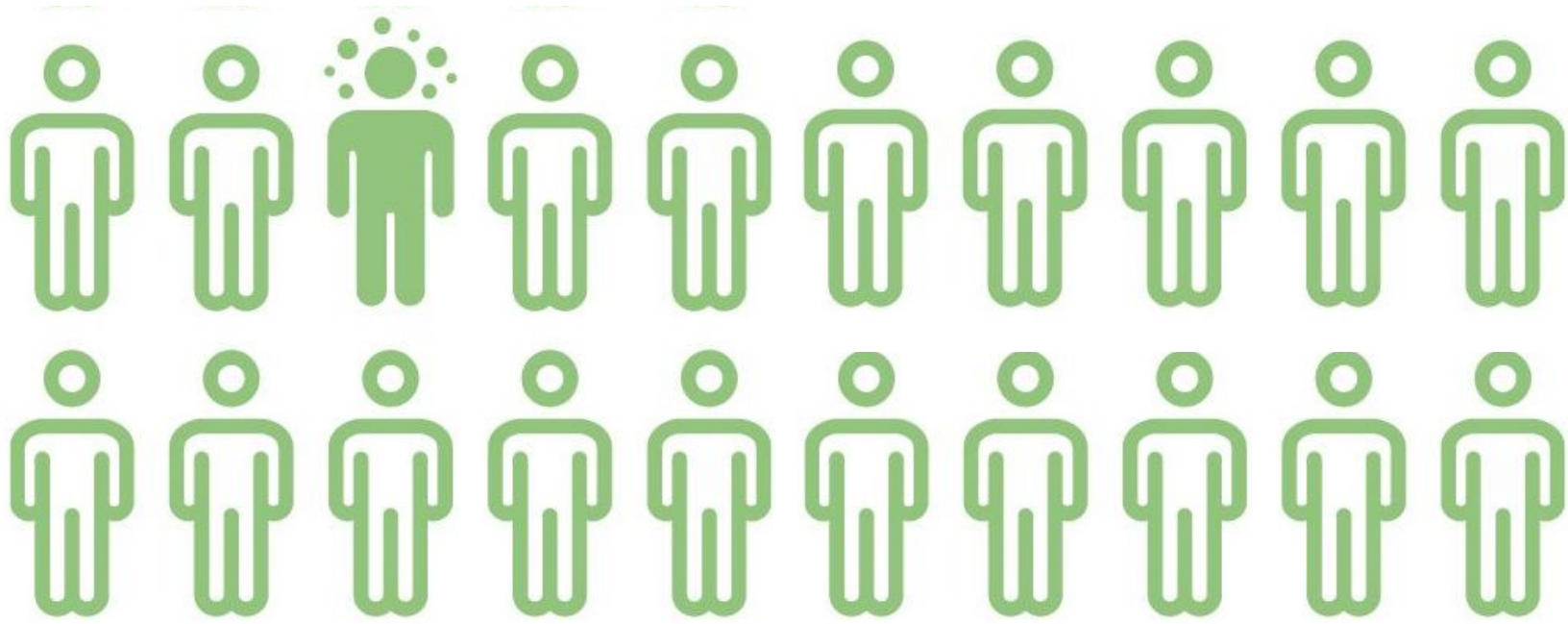
# Safety Enhancement

# Abuse Statistics

- 65,000+ children are sexually abused in the US each year
- 91% of child sexual abuse is perpetrated by someone known and trusted
- CSA can increase risk for:
  - Physical injury
  - Mental health concerns
  - Chronic health conditions
  - Victimization in adulthood
  - Suicidality

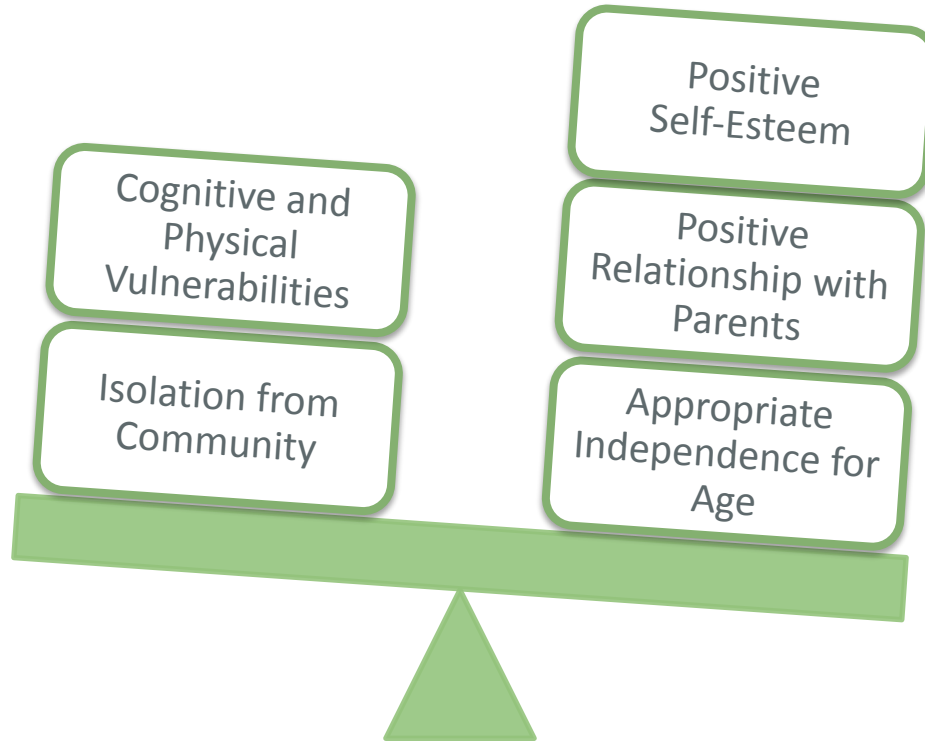






## Risk Factors

## Protective Factors



# Enhancing Safety-Skills

- Leads to increases in safety-skill knowledge in children (Brenick et al., 2014)
- Children who learn specific safety skills are more likely to engage in safe behaviors (Miltenberger, Sanchez, & Valbuena, 2020)

## Important Components:

- Active learning approaches (Miltenberger, Sanchez, & Valbuena, 2020)
- Promotion of generalization (Baruni & Miltenberger, 2022)
- Assessment of skills (Baruni & Miltenberger, 2022)



# Personal Safety-Skills for Sexual Abuse Prevention

## Components of Personal Safety Skills Training (Cohen, Mannarino, & Deblinger, 2017)

- Communicating feelings and desires and openly
- Paying attention to “gut feelings”
- Identifying people and places that provide safety
- Learning body ownership
- Learning the differences between secrets and surprises
- Asking for help *until someone provides help*

# Personal Safety Skills for Children and Adolescents

# Personal Safety Skills

- Consent and Body Autonomy
- Private Parts and Rules
- Assertiveness and Safety Planning
- Tricky Behaviors and Problem-Solving
- Internet Safety
- How to Support Safety Skills as Parents

# Developmental Considerations

- Use strategies appropriate to developmental level for all children
- More advanced knowledge is appropriate for children who have been exposed to adult content or interactions
- Children with developmental disabilities are at greater risk for harm (Lee et al., 2008) due to factors related to their disability as well as parental overprotection (Wiseman et al., 2017)

# Teaching Consent and Body Autonomy

## Young Children

- Build social responsiveness to others
- Teach consent for hugging, cuddling, tickling

## School Aged Children

- Discuss consent for other developmentally-appropriate behaviors
- Encourage independence and autonomy over body

## Adolescents/Teens

- Discuss consent in dating relationships
- Discuss healthy vs. unhealthy relationships
- Allow independence

# Talking About Private Parts and Rules

## Young Children

- Teach body part names and functions
- Teach “private parts rules”

## School Aged Children

- Provide developmentally appropriate sex education
- Talk about bodies and development
- Normalize anatomical terms

## Adolescents/Teens

- Discuss the importance of using anatomical names when appropriate
- Help teens determine their own boundaries

# Teaching Assertiveness and Safety Planning

## Young Children

- Encourage phrases such as “I don’t like that”
- Practice “No, Go, Tell”
- Teach about helping professions

## School Aged Children

- Discuss ways to stand up to peers or bullies
- Teach and practice refusal skills
- Create code words and safety plans
- Identify safe adults

## Adolescents/Teens

- Teach more sophisticated ways to voice concerns/get their needs met
- Continue safety planning together
- Discuss bystander intervention skills

# Tricky Behaviors and Problem-Solving

## Young Children

- Teach about “tricky behaviors” in addition to stranger danger
- Talk about secrets vs. surprises

## School Aged Children

- Encourage critical thinking about why people engage in various behaviors
- Teach about more sophisticated “tricky behaviors”

## Adolescents/Teens

- Apply these concepts to peer relationships, online relationships, and dating
- Encourage critical thinking about others’ motivations

# Internet Safety

## Young Children

- Provide supervision
- Set limits and routines
- Teach respect for the internet

## School Aged Children

- Utilize parental controls
- Use rules-focused strategies
- Respond to content your child has been exposed to

## Adolescents/Teens

- Talk about risks with same-aged peers
- Discuss body safety with pictures
- Discuss lack of privacy in written communications

# How to Support These Skills as Parents

## Young Children

- Start young
- Normalize conversations and questions about bodies and safety
- Respect your child's boundaries

## School Aged Children

- Praise their questions and curiosity
- Answer questions honestly
- Be proactive

## Adolescents/Teens

- Counteract messaging in the media and society
- Ongoing conversations and open-door policy

# How to Navigate Tough Conversations

# Assessing and Discussing Safety Skills

- How to discuss safety without promoting fear
  - Regular, routine conversations
  - Cover all safety topics regularly
    - Sexual and body safety
    - Internet safety
    - Fire and weather safety
- How to assess safety
  - Approach with curiosity
  - Pay attention to your own reaction
  - Follow their lead



# Responding to Disclosures

Initial response to a disclosure can impact long-term outcomes including depression, anxiety, and self-esteem (Hogue, 1992)

- Stay calm
- Avoid assumptions
- Open-ended questions
- Reflect what your child is saying
- Praise them for sharing

## Next steps

- Document what you remember
- Report to CPS
- Seek mental health treatment for your child/family



# Further Reading and Resources

- RAINN National Sexual Assault Hotline: <https://www.rainn.org/resources>
- Darkness to Light: <https://www.d2l.org>
- National Child Traumatic Stress Network: <https://NCTSN.org>
- Amaze.org: <https://amaze.org/>
- Social media educator: @thekathleenhema



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