

# Navigating Trauma and Abuse & Online Safety

## CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES AND VULNERABLE ADULTS



*Building resiliency and reducing trauma in children affected by abuse, one family at a time.*

# HARD TOPIC

Please when sharing stories do not use names.

This topic can trigger emotional reactions and personal trauma.

## Abuse and other forms of trauma are common.

Nearly half of all U.S. children—some 34 million—have experienced at least one type of childhood trauma, while 16 million have experienced two or more types of trauma.<sup>1</sup>



### Forms of Child Trauma

- Physical Abuse
- Sexual Abuse
- Psychological Abuse
- Community Violence
- Domestic Violence
- Bullying
- Natural Disaster
- Bereavement

# HARD TRUTH

1. Children with disabilities are 3 times more likely to be victims of child abuse than typically developing children.
2. 64% of the children who have been maltreated have a disability, and children with communication disorders are more likely to be physically and sexually abused.
3. Estimates suggest that up to 68% of female children and 30% of male children with a disability will be sexually abused before they are 18 years old.
4. Of reported sexual abuse cases 48% of the perpetrators were caregivers.
5. Only 1 out of 30 cases of sexual abuse or assault of persons with disabilities are reported as opposed to 1 in 5 of nondisabled populations, and even when it is reported the charges are rarely investigated.

Child with disabilities experience higher rates of all forms of abuse as compared with their typically developing peers. There are many reasons for this, including their vulnerabilities, their presumed inability to retaliate, and an incapacity to determine abusive behaviors.”

–Emily Martinello



# NUMBERS CLOSE TO HOME

## 2017-Present:

264 Child Interviews

51 Disabled Children and Vulnerable Adults (19%)

567 Identified Types of Abuse (Physical, Sexual, Neglect/Maltreatment, Torture, Etc.)

Disabled Children: 79 Identified Types of Abuse (14%)

\* Physical Abuse: 16

\* Sexual Abuse: 39

\* Witness to Violence: 5

\* Pornography: 4

\* Neglect/Maltreatment: 15



# THREE CORE ISSUES IN THE VULNERABILITY OF DISABLED CHILDREN - 1

DEPENDENCY: “The dependency of disabled children on a wide network of caregivers and other involved adults increases their vulnerability.”

This dependency is often lifelong and disabled children grow up with people touching them in a private way as a part of daily life.

# THREE CORE ISSUES IN THE VULNERABILITY OF DISABLED CHILDREN - 2

## INSTITUTIONAL CARE:

New York Times: “Of 13,000 claims of abuse only 5% of the accusations were forwarded to law enforcement, and employees who physically or sexually abused the disabled were often transferred among group home instead of being fired.”

- 1) Conflicting regulations
- 2) Lack of oversight
- 3) Disagreements over what constitutes abuse

# THREE CORE ISSUES IN THE VULNERABILITY OF DISABLED CHILDREN -3

COMMUNICATION: The issue of communication is central to the protection of disabled children and vulnerable adults.

Aspects of abuse which make it difficult to disclose:

- Fear


- Guilt or shame

- Need to protect the abuser because of emotional ties

- Confused and ambivalent about how they feel

“Disabilities may render children unable to understand or verbalize episodes of abuse.”





**WHAT CAN WE DO AS PARENTS,  
PROFESSIONALS, AND AS A  
COMMUNITY?**

## AS PARENTS:

### Sex Education:

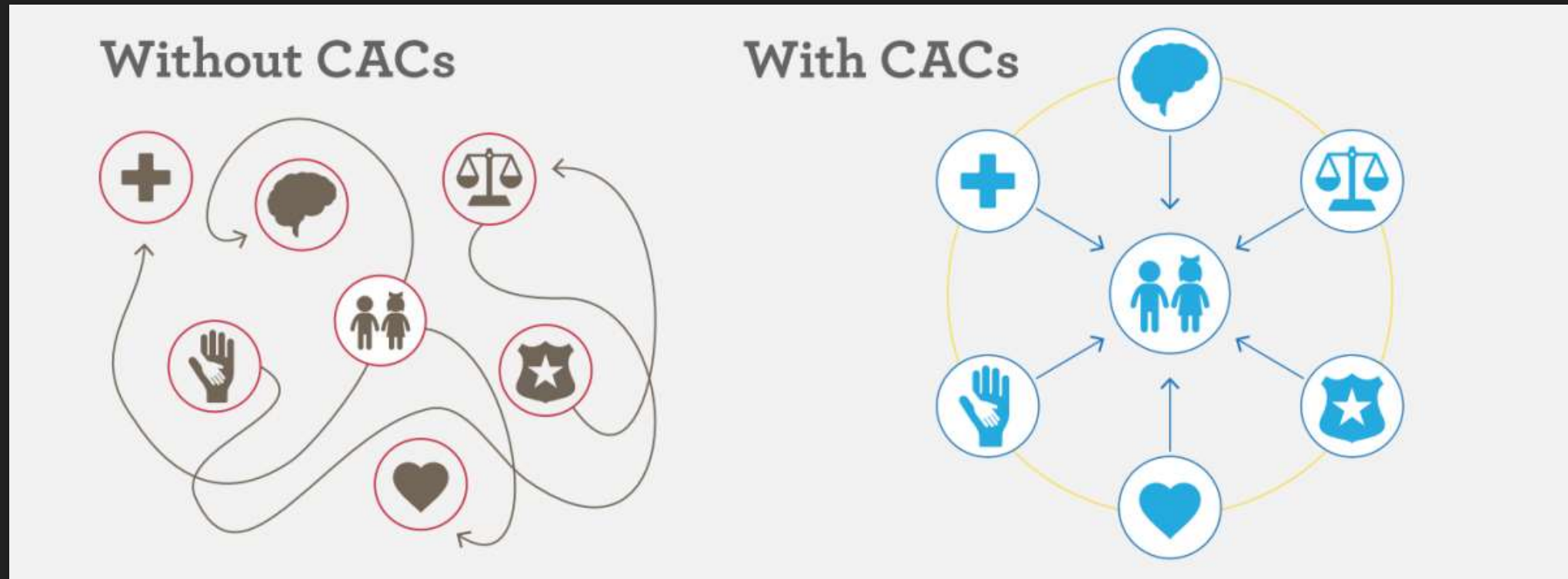
“ Many people refuse to acknowledge that all people have sexual feelings, needs, and desires, regardless of their physical and/or mental abilities and as a result many young people who live with disabilities do not receive sex education, either in school or at home.” – Advocates for Youth

### Serious Conversations:

Let the people around your children know that you have conversations about touching, body parts, and secrets. Even with communications issues let people know that you listen to your child.

# As Professional's and as a Community:

Children's Advocacy Centers:



# EDUCATION:



## STEWARDS OF CHILDREN®

*Stewards of Children*® is a prevention training that teaches adults how to prevent, recognize, and react responsibly to child sexual abuse. The program is designed for organizations that serve youth and for individuals concerned about the safety of children. It is the only nationally distributed, evidence-informed program proven to increase knowledge, improve attitudes, and change child protective behaviors.





**YOUTH  
ADVOCACY  
CENTER**  
of Lewis County

## Technology addiction: what is happening to our children

Samantha Mitchell

Youth advocacy Child Forensic Interviewer



More than 90% of American children have an online history by the age of two. (Consumer Reports)


One in five youth who regularly use the Internet received sexual solicitations or approaches during a 1-year period.





Habitual exposure to violence created risks for behavioral problems and become desensitized and their bodies become stressed out and it is harder for them to create self-regulation techniques



A cartoon illustration of an adolescent with spiky black hair, wearing blue headphones and a blue long-sleeved shirt. He is sitting in a green office chair, looking intently at a laptop computer. The scene is dimly lit, suggesting a late evening or night. On the floor around him are various electronic devices: a smartphone, a tablet, and a power strip with several cables plugged in. A pizza is also on the floor, partially eaten. The overall atmosphere is one of intense focus and digital immersion.

Adolescents who demonstrated Internet addiction scored higher for obsessive-compulsive behavior, depression, generalized and social anxiety, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, introversion, and many other disorders. (International Center for Media & the Public Agenda)

# Developmental Damage

## SOCIAL:

Creates a state of isolation limiting exposure to human connections and nature. This affects the development of their tactile, praxis, and parasympathetic systems which is what allows child to understand patterns of movement, behave with anxiety, focus, and have attention spans.

## MENTAL/EMOTIONAL:

Compromised creativity, imagination, sensory, literacy, behavioral management. The constant changing of chaotic screens and high-speed gratification limits the ability to learn self-regulation skills and contributes anxiety, depression, ADHD, learning disabilities, sleep irregularities, autism, and sensory processing irregularities.

## PHYSICAL:

There is a need for 2 to 3 hours of physical activity per day to maintain physical and sensory health. Technology is a “sitting sport” leading to increases in childhood obesity and diabetes which is increasing at the same rate as technology and have been deemed national epidemics in the US and Canada.



<b>Drug Addiction</b>	<b>vs.</b>	<b>Technology Addiction</b>
Restlessness		Decline in academic achievements
Personal, family, and school problems		Personal, family and school problems
Failure to manage time		Failure to manage time
Sleep disorders		Sleep disorders
Eating disorders		Eating disorders
Isolation		Reduction in activity
Excessive reactions when cut off		Isolation
Depression		Excessive reactions when cut off
Obsessive-compulsive behavior		Depression
Generalized and social anxiety		Attention deficit disorder
Self-regulation		Bipolar disorder
Decline in academic achievements		Obsessive-compulsive behavior
		Generalized and social anxiety
		Self-regulation
		Restlessness

## **TECHNOLOGY ADDICTION**

Drugs like opioids and technology act on specific areas of the brain known as the limbic system, which controls emotions, to create feelings of pleasure or relaxation and it releases dopamine which offers a rewarding pleasurable sensation that reinforces the drug/technology use behavior that led to the release in the first place, and thereby encourages the person to keep using.



A blog post titled 'Something is wrong on the internet' brought the issue to wider attention, detailing many of worst Eltagate trends such as characters - and occasionally even real children - being forced to consume feces and urine, enduring injections, suicides, drownings, being buried alive, murders, rapes, swapping heads, cannibalism, babies crying and extreme violence.





## Targeted threats in the “safe zones”

Elsagate: YouTube Kids the world's biggest video-sharing site has been flooded with videos featuring child favorites like Spider-Man, Peppa Pig and Elsa from Disney's *Frozen*, combined with violent, sexual and disturbing content.

# Set limitations



At most two hours per day in front of the screen.



Do not allow children under the age of two to engage in any technology use (extreme yes I know.)



Children should not have televisions in their rooms.



Monitor everything they are watching on TV and online.



Talk to them about the issues they may face online. Let them know its ok to share with you the things they find that make them uncomfortable.

# WHAT CAN YOU DO?



1) Understand that *where children play, predators prey.*



2) *Common Sense Media*



3) Consider watching media offline



4) For older kids, teach them to report any videos they see that are scary, weird or just plain inappropriate



5) Share warnings and information on social media.

**THANK FOR YOU BEING HERE!  
KNOWLEDGE IS THE FIRST DEFENSE AGAINST  
ABUSE.**



**QUESTIONS?**



## REFERENCES

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