



**VCU**

School of Education



# You Didn't Deserve That! Healthy Relationships for Adults and Teens with IDD

2023 APBS Conference  
Molly Dellinger-Wray, MS Ed.

With: Party Dinora, Caitlin Matyon, MSW, Elizabeth Cramer, PhD, Allison D'Aguilar, PhD. Kayla Diggs Brody

# Objectives

1. Participants will learn at least **two practical strategies** that can be immediately implemented to promote healthy relationships.
2. Participants will learn about **initiating conversations about potentially unhealthy relationships** with teens and adults with IDD in both face-to-face and online situations.
3. Participants will discuss **future considerations** to further promote positive outcomes for people with IDD and the staff who support them

THANKS!!



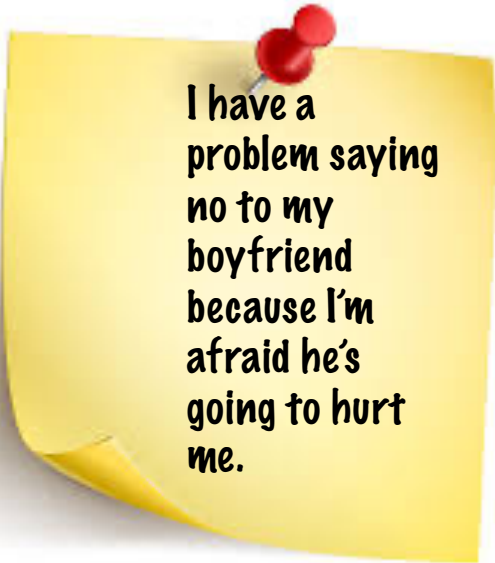
# Our agenda

- *Quick*: The scope of the problem
- *Quick*: The LEAP Intervention and it's outcomes
- Teaching Teens about healthy relationships
- Lessons learned and Challenges moving forward
- Practical Tips

# Everyone sees the world differently...



# Bethany's story



**I have a  
problem saying  
no to my  
boyfriend  
because I'm  
afraid he's  
going to hurt  
me.**

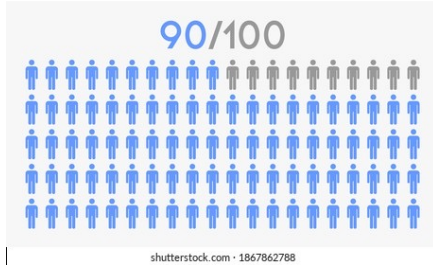
# Unhealthy, Abusive, Maltreatment

- Physical abuse
- Emotional abuse
  - bullying, exclusion, institutionalization
- Controlling access to family, friends, escape
- Engaging in sexual acts without consent
- Financial abuse
- Neglect
- MATE CRIME

This does not include all of the other ways that people are marginalized by lack of choice and opportunity.



# Abuse, violence, neglect of people with IDD



## 90% women 86% of men

90% of women and 86% men have experienced abuse



## Intellectual Disability

- People with **intellectual disabilities** had highest **victimization rate** among the disability types measured for total violent crime. (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2017)

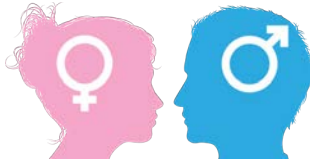


## Children with Disabilities

Children with disabilities are **at least three times more likely** to be abused or neglected than their peers without disabilities (Jones et al., 2012), and they are more likely to be **seriously injured or harmed** by maltreatment (Sedlak et al., 2010).



# Epidemic of Sexual Violence for people with IDD



**83%**

**32%**

83% of women and 32% of men are victims of sexual assault at some point in their lifetime. (Johnson & Sigler, 2000)



**49%**

49% of people who are victims of sexual violence will experience **10 or more incidents** (Valenti-Heim & Schwartz, 1995)



Sexually assaulted at a rate 7 times higher than the typically developing population. (US Dept. of Justice data by NPR, 2017)

# Children with disabilities are



**2x as likely**

experience abuse in  
their lifetime

US Dept. of Health &  
Human Services



**4x as likely**

to be victims of crime

Sedlick et al., 2010



**10X more likely**

Children with **behavioral health conditions** who were maltreated before age 3 were **10 times more likely** to be maltreated again

Jaudes & Mackey-Bilaver, 2008

# Are we talking about Positive Behavior Support?



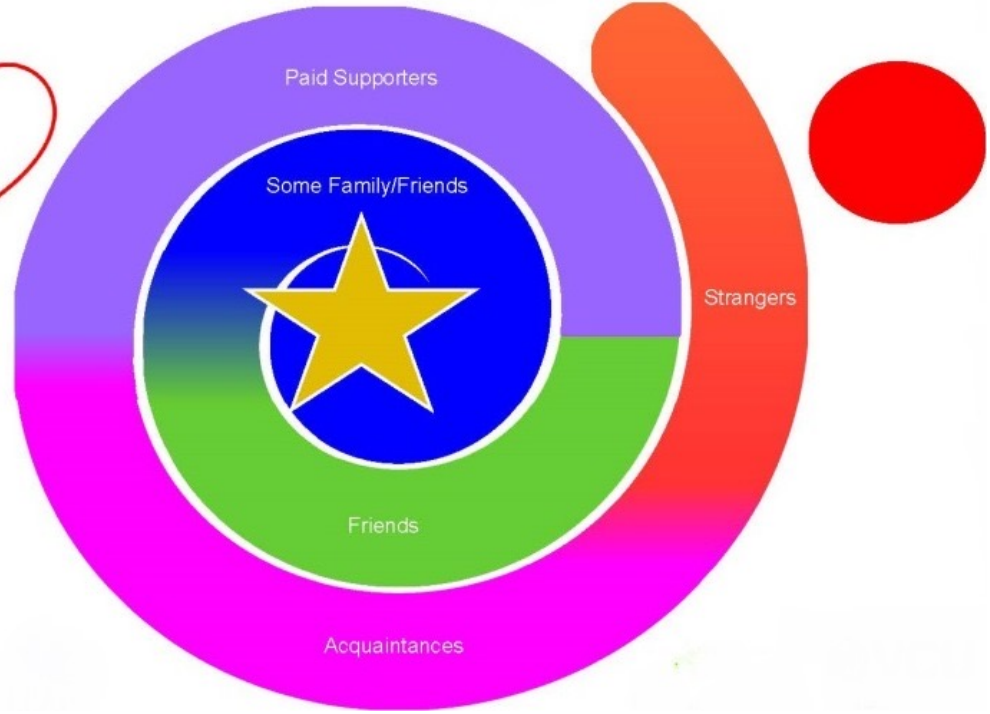
# Findings of LEAP: Leadership for Empowerment and Abuse Prevention



FEELINGS



TRUST



TOUCH



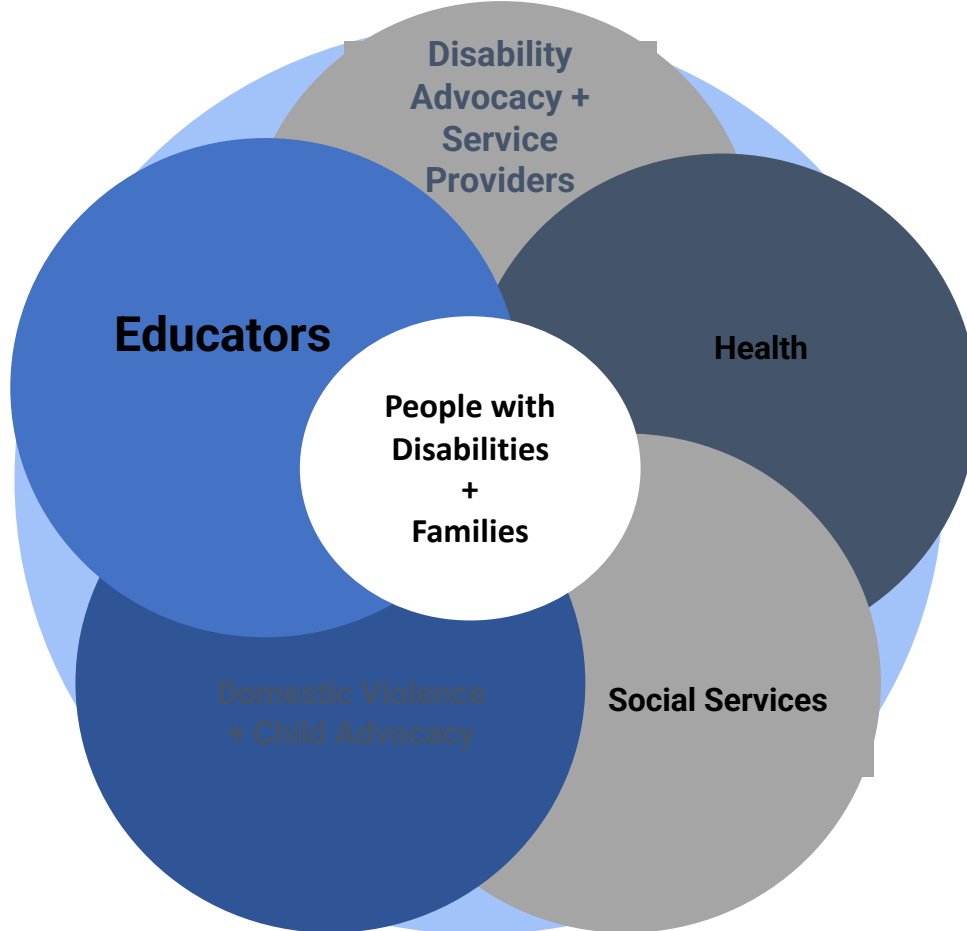
TELL

# Logistics

- 4 sessions, 90 minutes each
- Taught by a person with a disability + a co-trainer
- Designed to meet needs of people ages 18+ with mild, moderate and severe support needs



# Curriculum Team



# Core Concepts of LEAP

## Trust

- You can change your mind about who you trust t

## Respect

**Everyone deserves respect**

## Boundaries

- Paid support
- Friend vs. Staff

## Consent

- Permission to touch
- Choice
- Control

# THIS IS MY TRUST CARD

**IF I NEED HELP,  
I CAN CONTACT THIS PERSON:**

Name:



Or I can contact any doctor, nurse,  
policeman, firefighter, lawyer, social  
worker, teacher, or counselor.



# POWER STATEMENT

I am strong.

My feelings are important.

I deserve to feel safe.

I deserve respect.



# Evaluation: Pre, Post and 3 Month Postpost

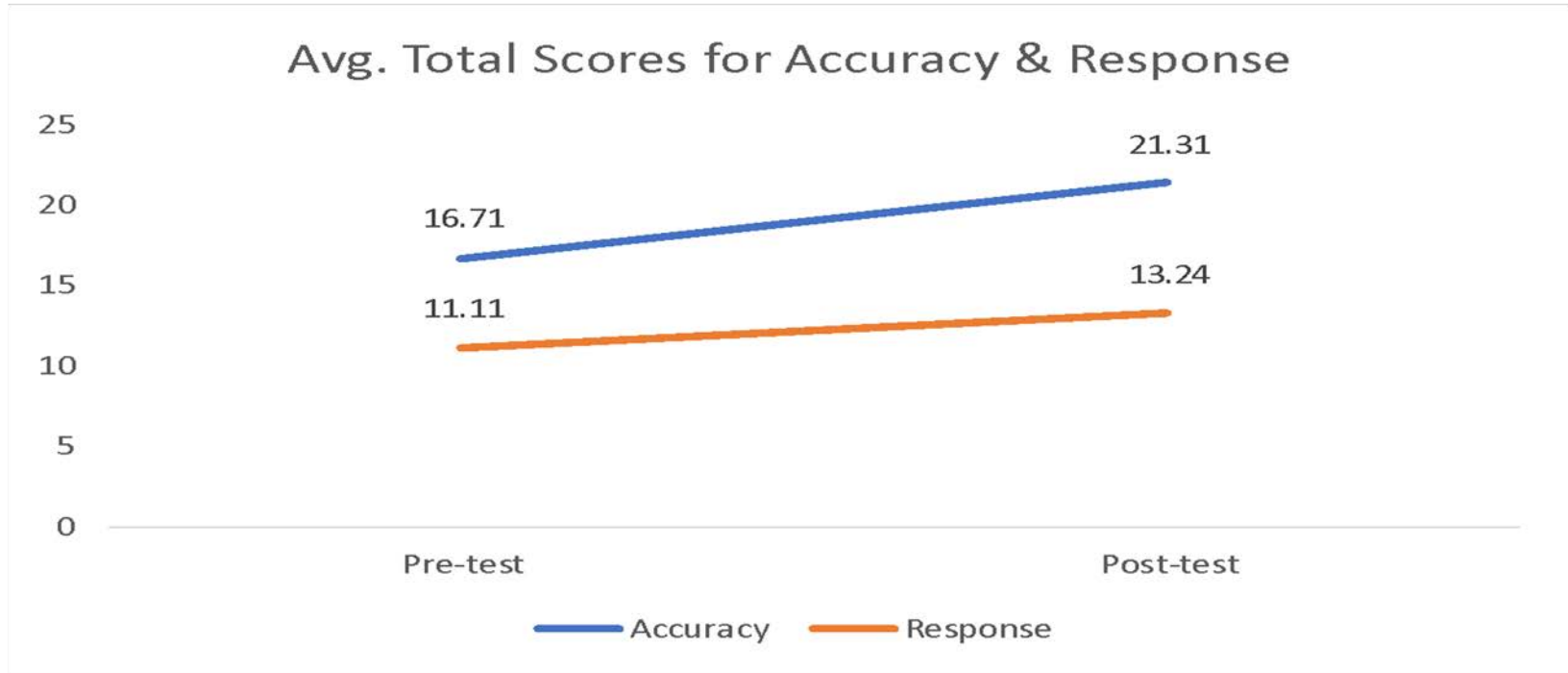
1. Could the participant ***discriminate*** between healthy and unhealthy relationships?
1. Could the participant explain ***why*** a relationship was healthy or unhealthy?
1. If the relationship were unhealthy, could the participant suggest ***what to do next?***

# Results: Pre-test Yes/No Questions

Figure 1. Percent Correct at Pre-test & Post-test



Results: Accuracy of “Why is the relationship healthy/unhealthy?” and Response of “What should the person do next?”

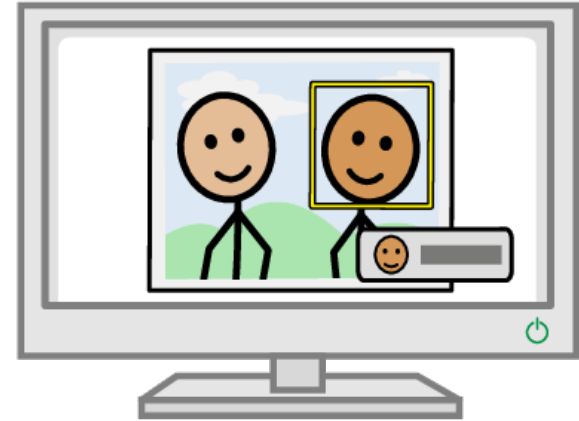


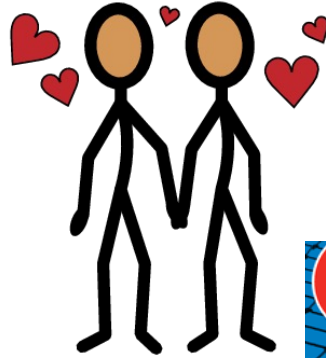
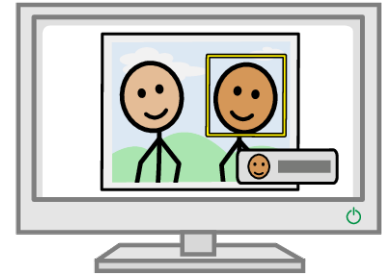
Why Teen LEAP?



# TEEN LEAP

- Face to Face vs. Online
- Taught online with live trainers
- 3 sessions of 90 minutes
- Logistics
  - Materials need to be mailed to home
  - Trainers must have current technology





HEALTHY  
RELATIONSHIPS



## We learned:

- Virtual sessions work!
- Family Life Education often excludes kids from Special Education Classes
- Healthy relationships are the foundation of sex education and violence prevention (mate crimes, bullying, etc)
- Teens may feel more anonymous without peer group present
- Teens can follow up with questions afterwards

## We still wonder about

- Who is participating with the teen?
- Can teens with more significant support needs manipulate technology without support?
- How can this be taught in school?

# Challenges for the Future



# Outcomes: Qualitative Responses

1. Agency to solve the problem
2. Unhealthy Relationship
3. Healthy Relationship
4. Staff are not always my friend
5. Blame the victim

Agency to solve a problem situation



# Lesson learned: Increased Agency to Solve the Problem

- Confront the person. *“Slap him.” “Tell him to back off. She doesn’t like it.”*
- Leave the situation. *“Run away.”*
- Tell Someone. *“Tell his supervisor (parents, police)”*
- End the relationship. *“Not everyone is going to be your friend. Some people will and some people won’t. And we can change our minds [about being friends]”*
- Problem solve. *“Hide in the back.” or “Hire another DSP”*

Challenge: How can we promote agency to get out of dangerous situations?



# Lesson Taught: Staff are not *Always* my Friend

- Situation depends on different factors. *“Sometimes staff can be friends.”*
- Staff have the ability to be bad/mean. *“They could break trust and not treat people as they should be treated.”*



## Lessons Learned: Most people can identify an unhealthy relationship

- Bad, wrong immoral behavior. “He can’t do that!” or “He’s bad.”
- Injustice occurred. *“That’s not fair. He told her to sit in the front seat”*

Challenge: What are safe options to report unhealthy behaviors?





# Lesson Learned: Blaming the Victim

General Victim Blaming. *“She didn’t do anything to stop him from kissing her.”*  
or *“She should not have sat in the front seat.”*

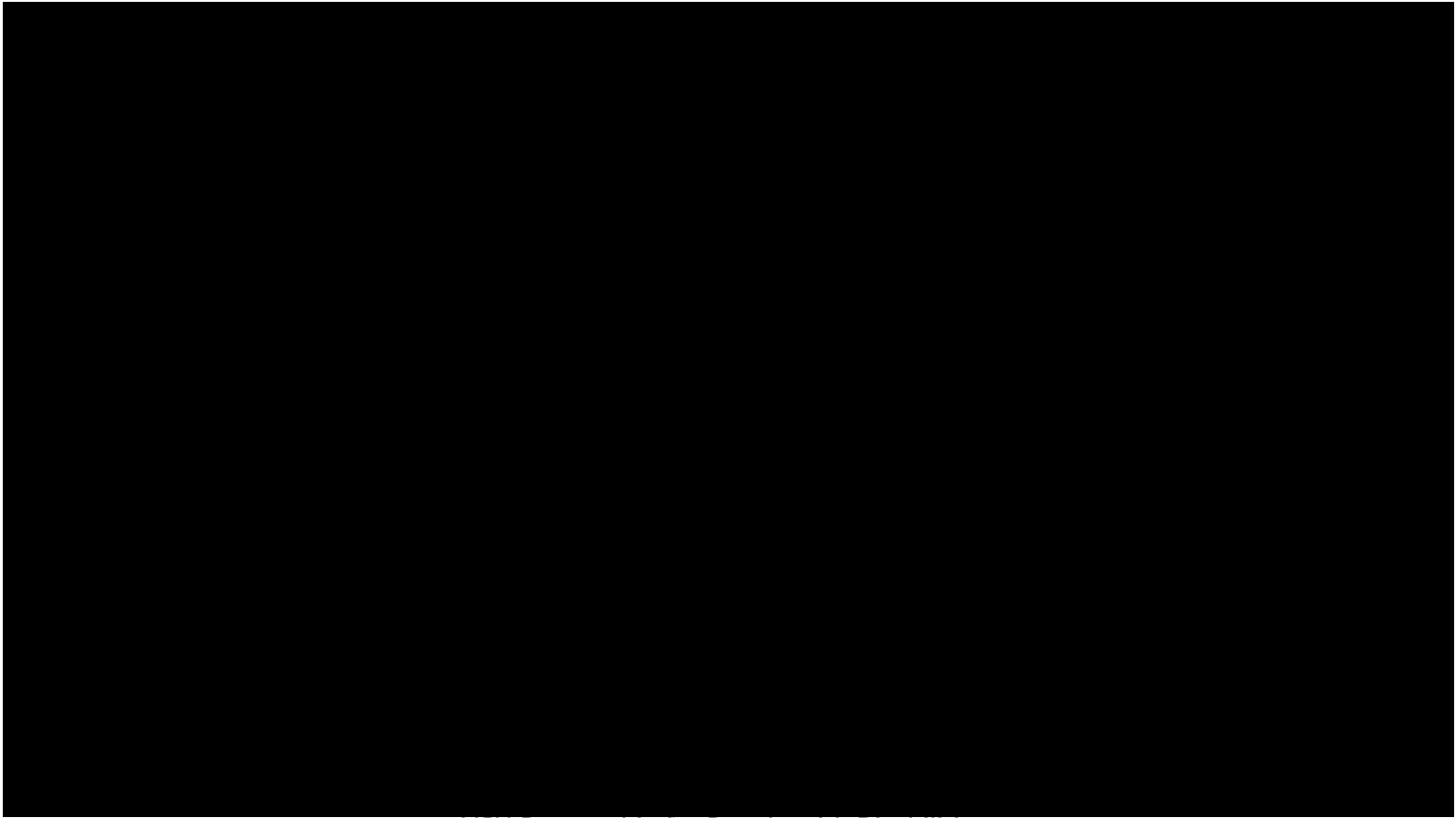
Tolerating Unhealthy Behavior. *“It’s her fault she trusted him. She should just go to his house so that he can do what he wants with her.”*

Challenge: How do we encourage victim blaming?  
How can we stop it?



# Lessons Learned: Social Isolation promotes tolerance for abusive relationships





3/30/23

VCU Partnership for People with Disabilities-  
Dellinger-Wray

Challenge: How can we promote healthy community connections and relationships?



# Behavior Changes that Support Healthy Relationships

What are rules are we taught to stay safe?



# Using Fear and Punishment to Prevent Abuse

## Ask open ended questions

Is there anything that made you uncomfortable?

How did you feel about that?

What would you like to do differently next time?

Some secrets were not meant to be secrets.

It's my job to help keep you safe.

Let me know when you are ready to talk about it.

## Avoid Silencing the victim

~~Don't let anyone touch you there.~~

~~Don't get in a car with anyone.~~

The bathing suit rule

Tell someone *right away*



# Do you still love me? Are you still my friend?

“I am not your friend but I love working with you.”

“You don’t know me well enough to hug me.”

“I’m not your boyfriend/girlfriend, but let’s talk about what you can do to find one.”

“I love everyone in the world and you are part of that world.”

“Thank you. What a sweet thing to say.”



# Body parts! They have names!





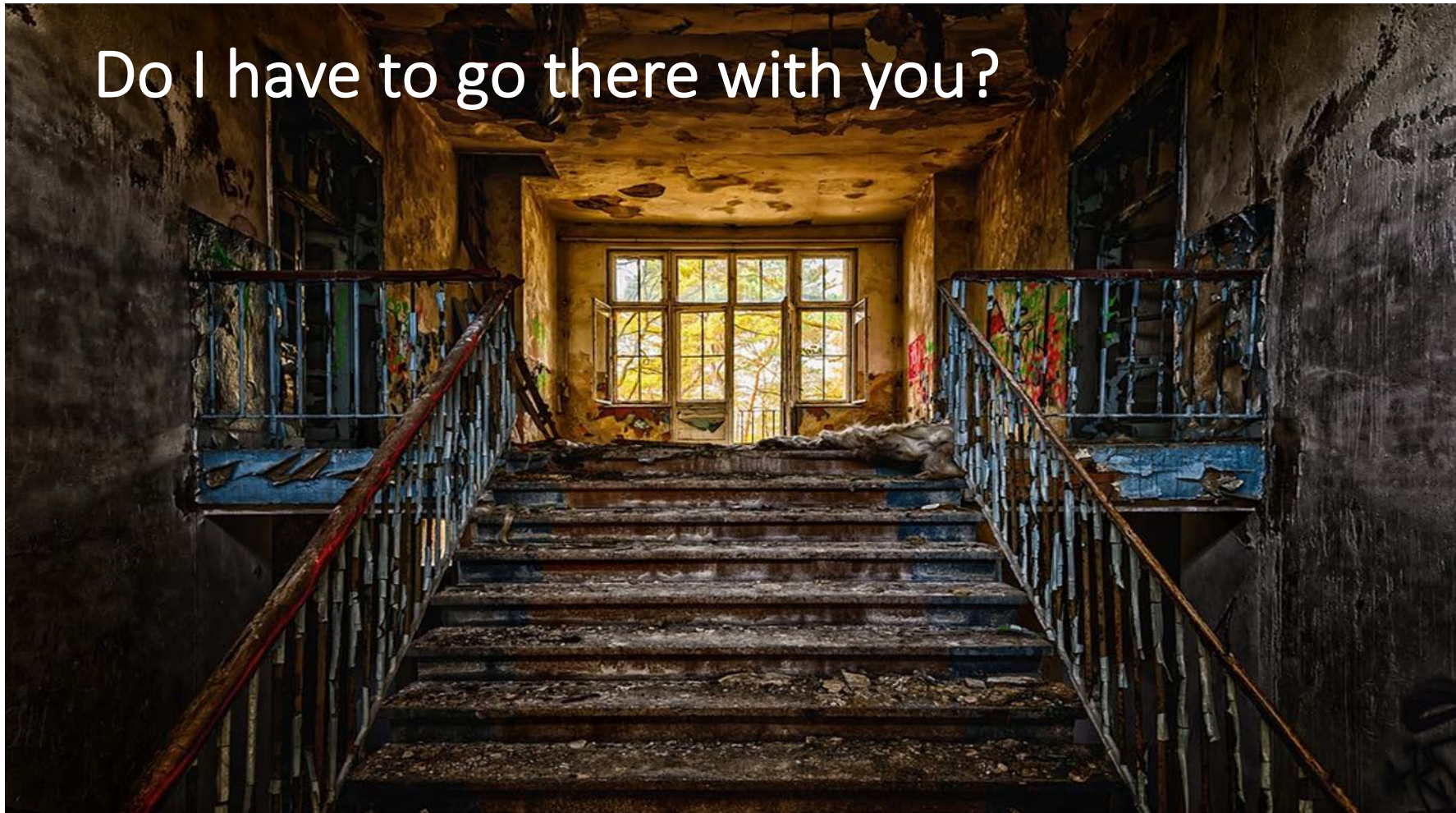
Resilience



If someone discloses abuse



Do I have to go there with you?



# Disclosing Abuse



# Validate without minimizing

- "It's not your fault. You didn't deserve that"
- "You seem really upset about that."
- "Tell me about why you are sad/mad/upset/angry?"
- "It doesn't seem fair: what else could you do?"
- "It's okay to be sad/mad/upset/angry"



# Secondary Trauma: It's real



THANK YOU!



Molly Dellinger-Wray [mdwray@vcu.edu](mailto:mdwray@vcu.edu)

# References:

Burke-Harris , N. (2018). The ACE Antidote . In *The Deepest Well* (pp. 155–163). essay, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

Dinora, P., Schoeneman, A., Dellinger-Wray, M., Cramer, E. P., Brandt, J., & D’Aguilar, A. (2020). Using video vignettes in research and program evaluation for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities: A case study of the leadership for empowerment and abuse prevention (LEAP) project. *Evaluation and Program Planning*, 79, 101774.

Harrell, E. (2017). *Crime against persons with disabilities, 2009-2015 - Statistical tables*

(NCJ 250632). U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics.  
<https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/capd0915st.pdf>

Hughes, K., Bellis, M. A., Jones, L., Wood, S., Bates, G., Eckley, L., McCoy, E., Mikton, C., Shakespeare, T., & Officer, A. (2012). Prevalence and risk of violence against adults with disabilities: A systematic review and meta-analysis of observational studies. *The Lancet*, 379(9826), 1621-1629. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(11\)61851-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(11)61851-5)

Mayton, Caitlin & Dellinger-Wray, Molly & Cramer, Elizabeth & Dinora, Parthenia & D’Aguilar, Allison. (2021). “You Can Change Your Mind About Who You Trust”: People with Intellectual Disability’s Understanding About Healthy and Unhealthy Relationships. 8. 10.