



*SEXUAL VIOLENCE TOWARD
NEURODIVERSE PEOPLE*

- Dr. Jamie Edgin, Professor and Chair, Department of Psychology
Lab: Memory Development and Policy Lab

“Anything that’s human is mentionable, and anything that is mentionable can be more manageable.....The people we trust with that important talk can help us know that we are not alone.”

— Fred Rogers

Sexual abuse includes the coercion of individuals to engage in sexual acts, and can include behaviors such as fondling, penetration, or exposing the vulnerable individual to other sexual activities or materials

My work is across neurodiverse groups, so I will switch between populations a bit

Outline of Talk

What do we know about sexual violence rates in these groups?

Autism specific findings

Sexual abuse policy change in Arizona: an example for change

Our new work at VT

Autism specific findings- sexual abuse

Rates 3-4 times more likely than the general population, although findings are inconsistent (US Dept of Justice, Dike et al., 2022)

More likely to develop symptoms of PTSD and long-term mental health issues after abuse (Dike et al., 2022).

Evidence suggests that they are not more suggestible, or creating “false reports” (Griego et al., 2019), with a meta-analysis showing this group displayed fewer false memories on average

But they are still less likely to progress through the court system, as misconceptions regarding their ability to report are found across professionals



HEALTH

Hacienda HealthCare investigating abuse claim made at Phoenix facility in rape case



[Stephanie Innes](#)

The Republic | azcentral.com

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AZ Governor's
Sexual Violence
Task Force

School Abuse
Prevention Report

Evaluation of
Implementation of
Task Force
Recommendations
in Medicaid System

PREVENTING SEXUAL ABUSE IN ARIZONA SCHOOLS



2021

Suggested Protocols for Students
with Intellectual, Developmental, and
Other Disabilities

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Policy Recommendations- Arizona Schools (2021)

1

ADOPT COMPREHENSIVE
AND INCLUSIVE HEALTH
EDUCATION
CURRICULA,POLICIES,
AND MATERIALS

2

STRENGTHEN DUTY TO
REPORT STATE LAWS AND
DISTRICT/CHARTER
SCHOOL POLICIES

3

CREATE AND IMPLEMENT
POLICIES THAT PROMOTE
SUPERVISION

4

SET STRICT
COMMUNICATION
POLICIES FOR
PROFESSIONAL STAFF

5

SUPPORT STUDENTS WHO
REPORT

Sexual education across the states

- 27 states plus DC mandate sexual ed.
- 16 are abstinence only.
- Erin's law– to provide education toward abuse prevention in the schools (38 states)
 - **TEACH BOUNDARY VIOLATIONS AND ABUSIVE FORMS OF CONTACT**
 - **BOLSTER REPORTING RESPONSE AND CONSISTENCY**



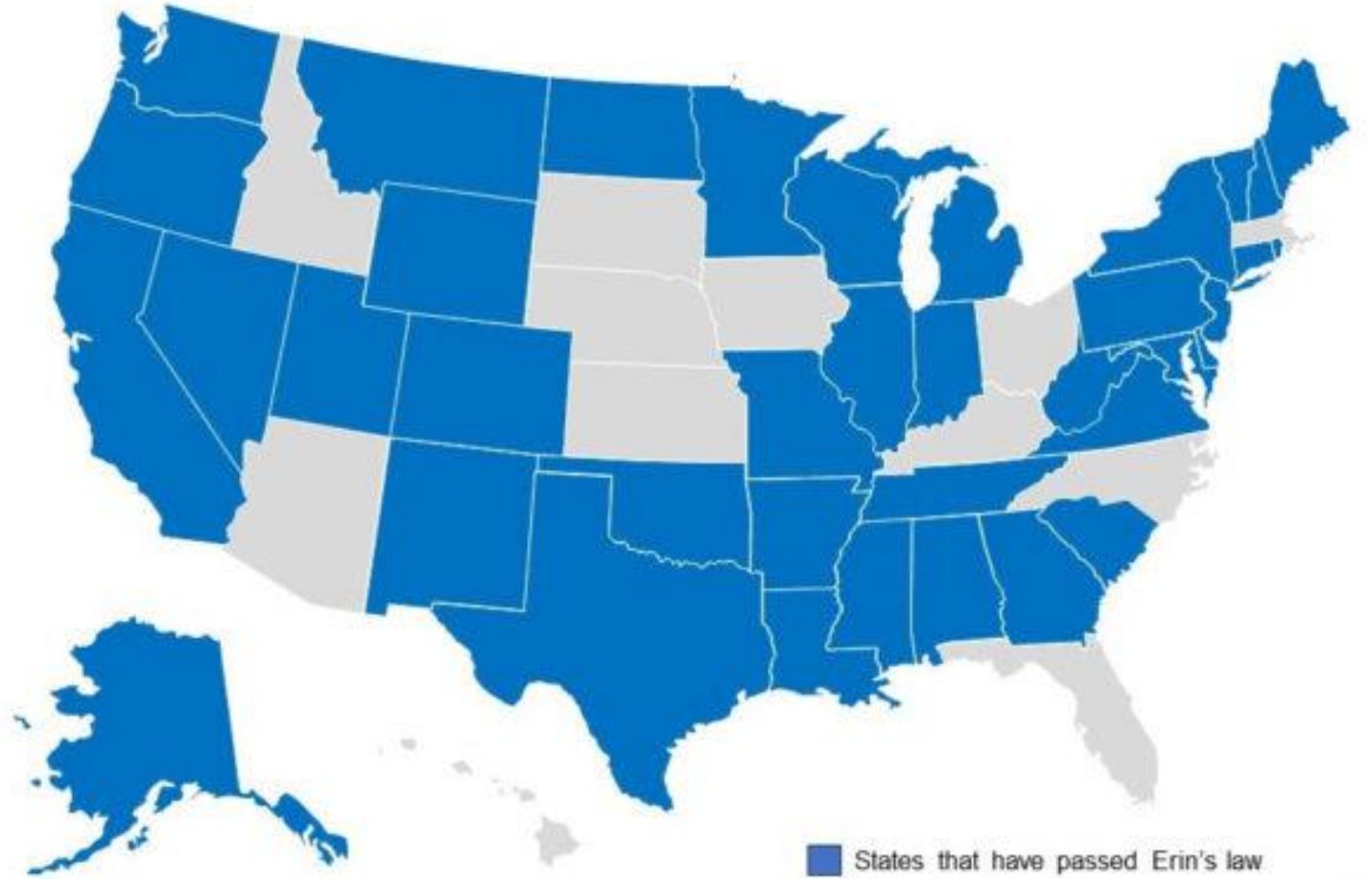
Sample Learning Standards for Grades K-2 and Grades 3-5, National Sexuality Education Standards, (Located here on pages 13 and 15: <https://siecus.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/National-Sexuality-Education-Standards.pdf>)

Core Concepts CC	Analyzing Influences INF	Accessing Information AI	Interpersonal Communication IC	Decision-Making DM	Goal Setting GS	Self-Management SM	Advocacy ADV
PERSONAL SAFETY							
<p>By the end of the 2nd grade, students should be able to:</p> <p>Explain that all people, including children, have the right to tell others not to touch their body when they do not want to be touched PS.2.CC.1</p>		<p>Identify parents and other trusted adults they can tell if they are feeling uncomfortable about being touched PS.2.AI.1</p>	<p>Demonstrate how to respond if someone is touching them in a way that makes them feel uncomfortable PS.2.IC.1</p>			<p>Demonstrate how to clearly say no, how to leave an uncomfortable situation, and how to identify and talk with a trusted adult if someone is touching them in a way that makes them feel uncomfortable PS.2.SM.1</p>	
<p>Explain what bullying and teasing are PS.2.CC.2</p>							

ERIN'S LAW ACROSS THE US

Erin's law died in the AZ legislature 3 weeks ago.

Argument: Too labor intensive for teachers already struggling with current demands



Virginia: Erin's law passed in 2018, IEPs just introduced accommodations for curriculum

■ States that have passed Erin's law
■ States that have introduced or have pending Erin's law legislation

Autistic individuals' view of sex education

- McKenney et al. 2024:
- Combined sample of 284 autistic adults suggested they were more likely to have experienced sexual trauma
- Were generally less satisfied with the sexual education they received, calling it brief, cursory, and unable to support their future decision making.
- *'My senior year health teacher, she made it a point to do a consent topic. And she had a whole slide of what is considered consent and what's a gray area, and then what's not consent. I think it definitely helped in just generally being like, "okay, so even just not saying anything, that's not consent. Like, even if you don't do anything to stop it, that's still not consent. Because they're supposed to ask."' (Autistic, cisgender woman, age 18.)*



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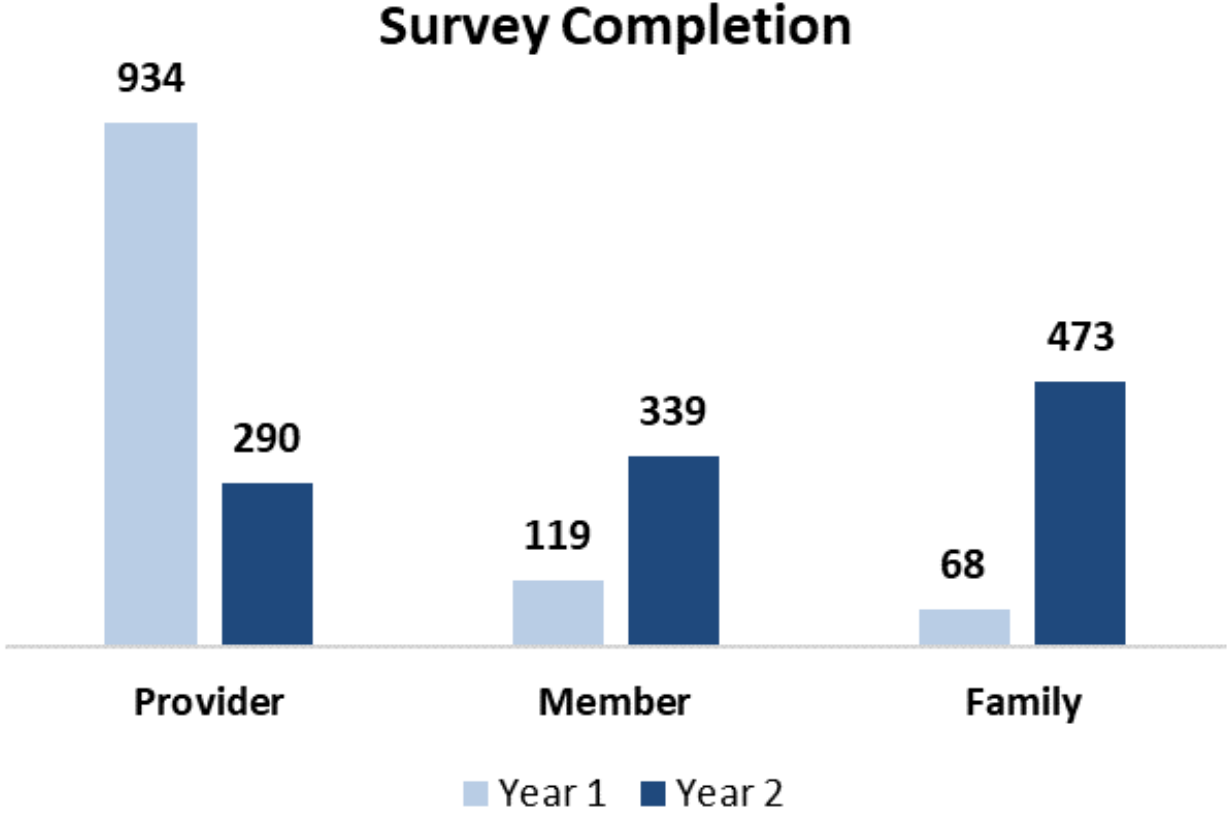


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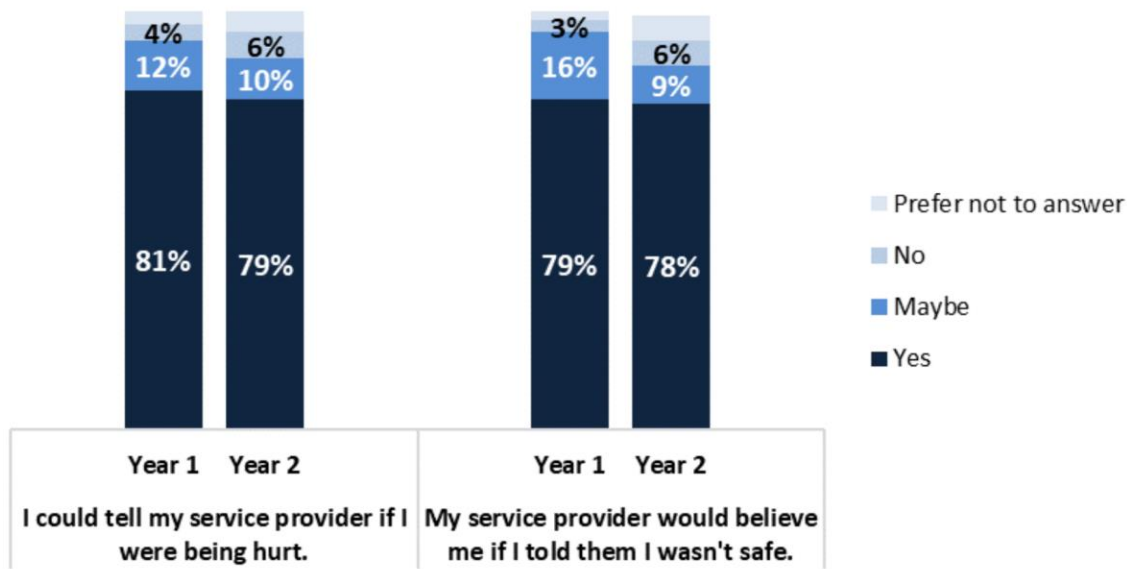
Evaluation in the Medicaid System – 2 year follow-up (Sonoran UCEDD)



(de la Rosa et al., year 1, Duncan et al., year 2, Sonoran UCEDD)

Evaluation in the Medicaid System – 2 year follow-up (Sonoran UCEDD)

Member's Thoughts on Reporting



STATE OF DENIAL

After a Violent Crime, Arizona Promised Reforms for People With Developmental Disabilities. It Has Yet to Deliver.

After a woman with developmental disabilities was raped and gave birth to a child in a state home, a task force recommended changes to improve care for some of Arizona's most vulnerable residents. Only a third of them have been fully implemented.

by Amy Silverman for Arizona Daily Star, Dec. 28, 2020, 5 a.m. EST

Outline of Talk

What do we know
about sexual abuse
in neurodiverse
groups?

Autism specific
findings

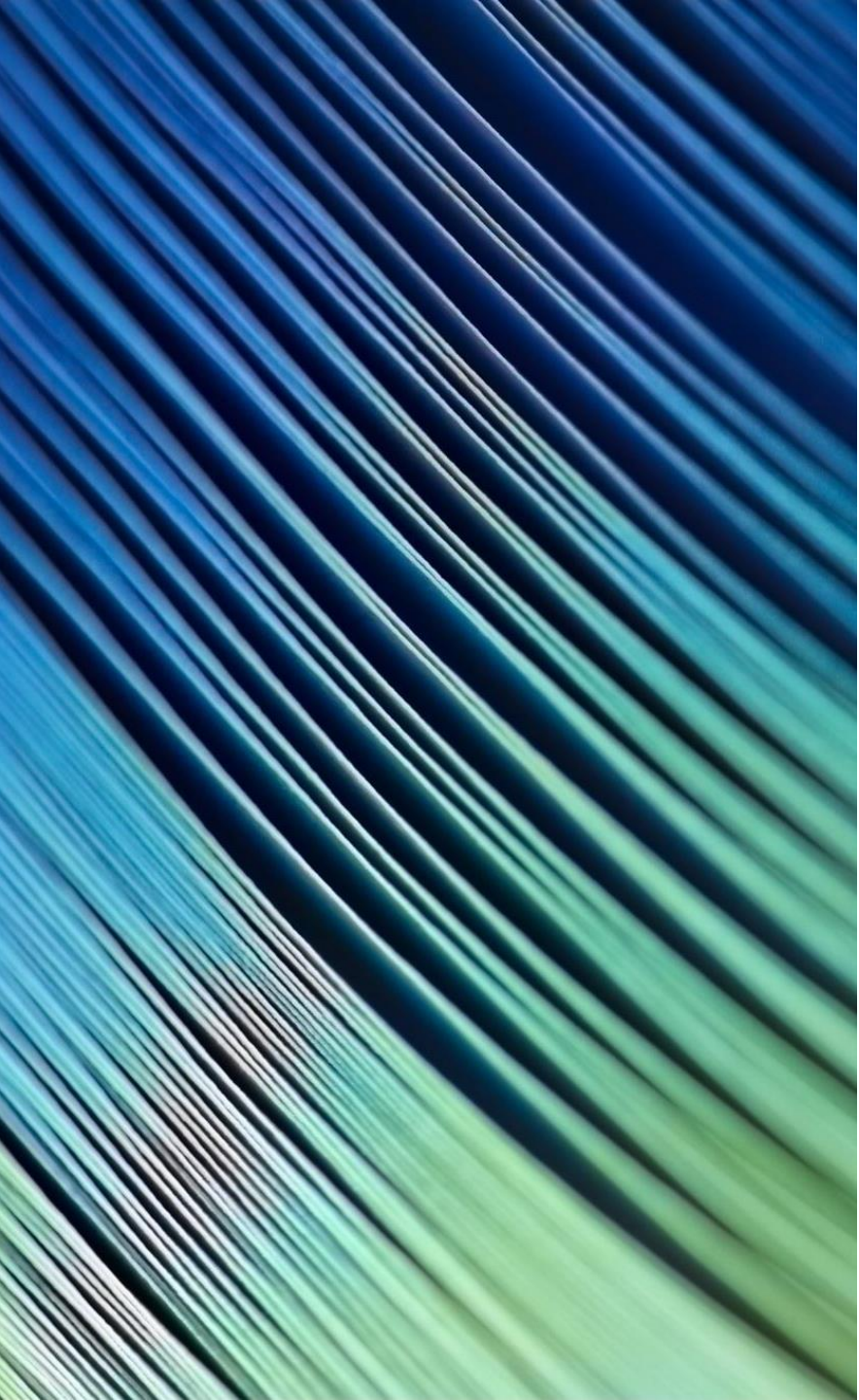
Sexual abuse
policy change in
Arizona: an
example for change

Our new work at VT



It takes a village to build a culture of sexual abuse prevention and appropriate response

- Cross system, cross stakeholders, and co-produced action.
- Parents, professionals, and most importantly self advocates
- Whole Health Consortium Funded Focus Groups



Invited Stakeholders (4 groups)– two topics, education and advocacy, trauma focused forensic response

Self Advocates

Legal professionals

Forensic Interviewers

Medical Professionals (child abuse care specialists)

Training Professionals

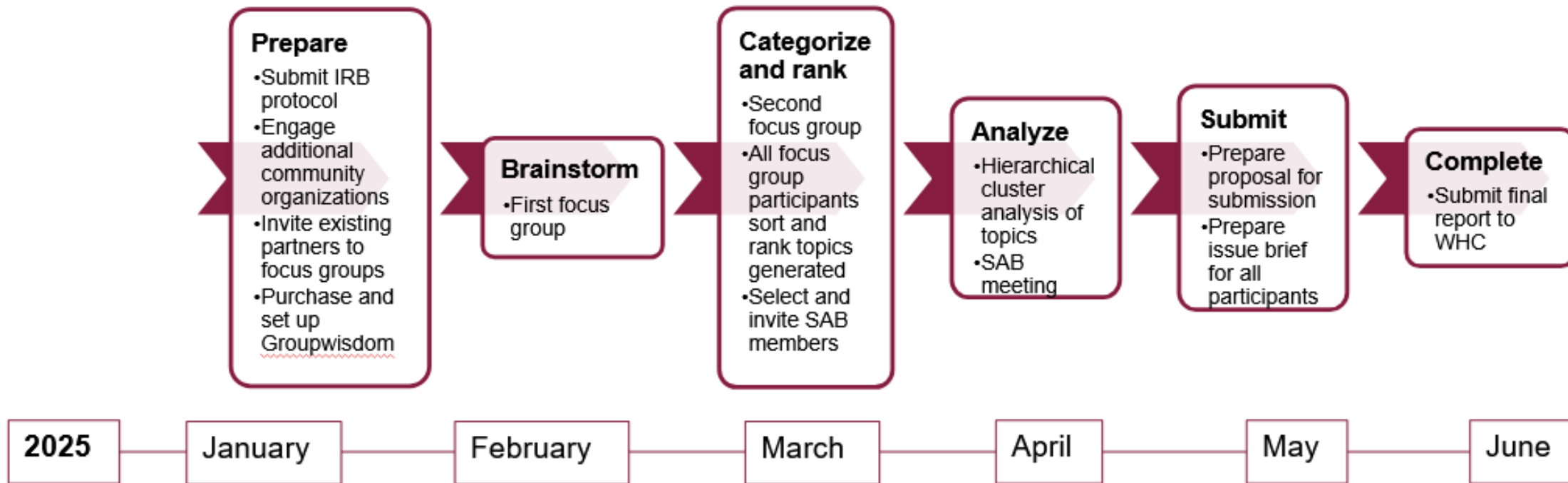
Advocacy Organizations (local and national)

Researchers- Disability and Abuse Expertise

Law Enforcement

School Professionals

Work at Virginia Tech (ongoing, Edgin, PI)



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Thank you

The Morris Udall
Foundation

My UCEDD
collaborators,
collaborators on
school abuse brief

National Down
Syndrome Society

VT Whole Health
Consortium



Lab Co-Director
Chelsea Armour, Kati
Parti, Associate
Professor of Sociology



And to VTCAR for this wonderful
event!

Parents

- Demand Safety
- Demand Inclusion in Training
- Demand Appropriate Training
- Model Consent and Boundaries
- Know role as Mandated Reporter

and Professionals

- Demand more Training on Neurodiverse groups
- Model Consent
 - ARC materials for Medical Providers
- Know role as Mandated Reporter
- Provide Access for reports

Believe Reports, provide access to systems, respond responsibly

Conclusions from ARC 2023 report



*For people with intellectual
and developmental disabilities*



Kecia Weller

- As mandated reporters, please report!
- Learn about the signs of possible sexual assault; believe us.
- Work with agencies that have abuse prevention campaigns.
- Develop inclusive train-the-trainer models.
- Be aware of implicit bias against people with disabilities.
- Advocate for sex education of youth and students with IDD.
- Learn about ableism and the impact it has on patients with IDD.

Finally, we call on every person reading this report to commit to listening, believing, supporting, and offering hope to any sexual violence survivor you meet. You may be their only hope.

Starford, M., McKingsley, L.A., Weller, K., & Meadours, J. (2023). Transforming Health Care to Prevent Sexual Violence of People With Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities:
Talk About Sexual Violence Final Report. The Arc of the United States, Washington, DC.

Talk About Sexual Violence

▶ FINAL REPORT (2017–2023)