



ACTing against abuse



Young people with learning disabilities: Understanding risk and safety

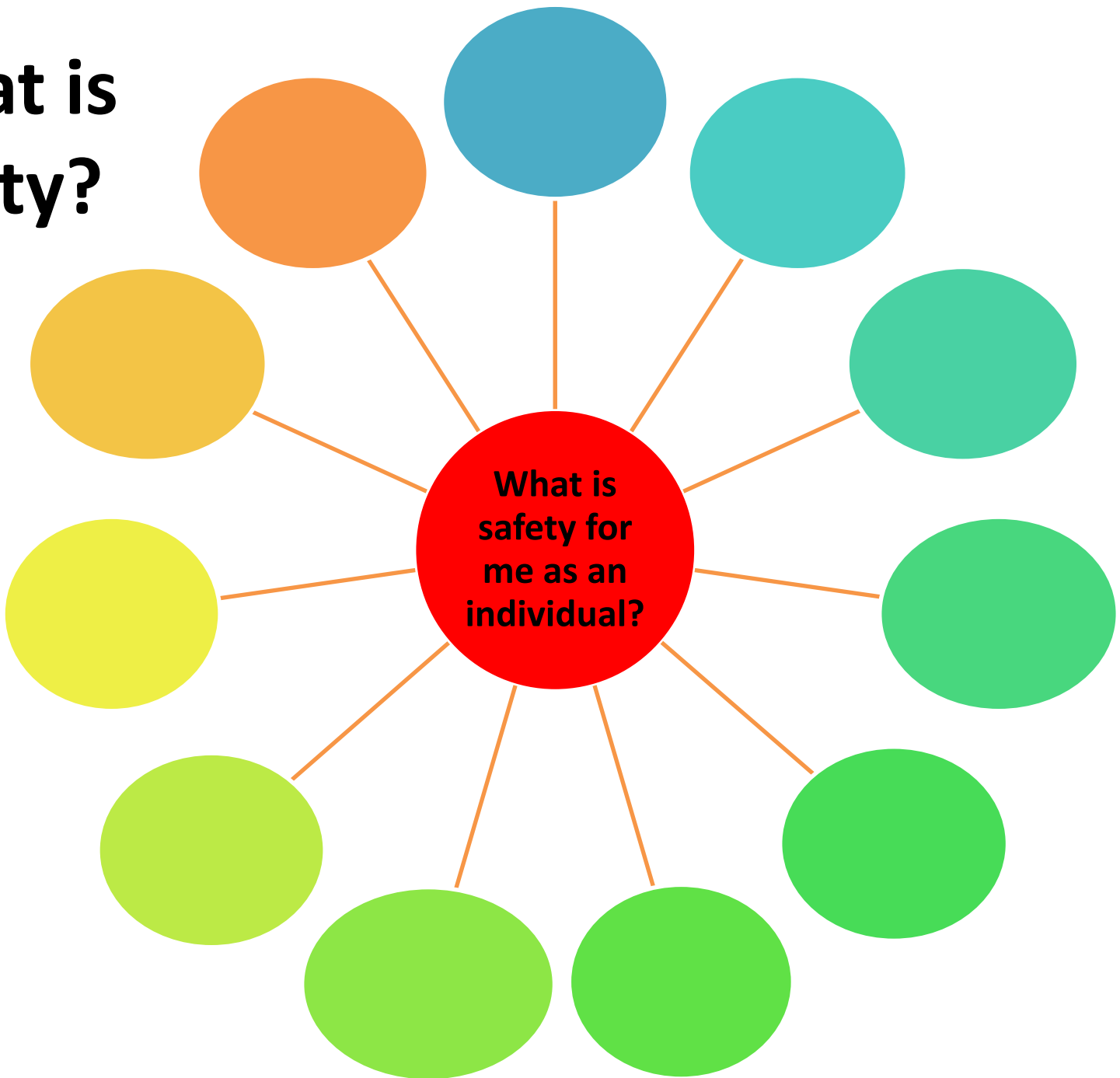
Sarah Goff, Safeguarding Disabled Children Manager, Ann Craft Trust.

Dr Anita Franklin, Reader, Coventry University.

What is safety?

- What does it look like and feel like for you as an individual?
- In small groups complete a safety star....

What is safety?



What is safety?



How did we learn and what did we need to learn

About....

- How to make choices
- How to take risks, make mistakes
- About what are friends
- About who are safe friends
- About safe touch
- About trust in self and ability to try things
- About trusting others
- About sexuality

Does current practice support young people with learning disabilities to learn about....

- Choice
- Risk
- Healthy relationships and sexuality
- Voice/empowerment/expression
- Coping and decision-making strategies
- Capacity to consent?

Research evidence: Factors in care and home environments (Hollomotz (DATE))

- 29 adults of varied ages and both sexes
- Fear of being in trouble for having relationships
- Sex education presented in very limited ways
- Fear of masturbation as rude or naughty
- Lives very programmed and managed
- Lack of open dialogue increasing risk
- Need positive approach and access to appropriate privacy
- Dangers of absorbing key information via media with gender and sexual stereotyping
- E.g. Sam had got main info re sex from watching Bond films.

Examples

- Tyler had not reported sexual assault by an older young man because he did not know that men could assault other young men.
- Keisha did not realise that being shown sexual material by staff on his phone was not ok; when he asked her to let him take pictures of her at first clothed, then with her top off she did not say no because he was a member of staff and she did not know that people she knew could harm her; she thought abuse was by strangers.
- *'I didn't know it was wrong for an adult to have sex with a child. I didn't think to say no when someone told me they wanted to have sex with me.'* Female aged 15.
- *'He told me not to tell anyone that we were together because they would stop us being together. [...] 'Cos of my autism, I often take things literally, so if someone says to me to do something or not to do something, I will do it in the way they tell me. [...] I didn't really get on with my social worker. [...] She was alright and everything, but I didn't know her; I didn't trust her. She wasn't the kind of person you talk to about sex and boyfriends.'* Female aged 14.

Factors increasing risk to young people with learning disabilities

- Not understanding social cues
- Taking literally what is said – ‘he said he was 15’,
- Young people’s understanding of consent.
- Bullying and its impact on being able to say ‘no’
- Not feeling valued enough to have safe relationships.
- Grooming process; making sense of being given things, attention, money, affection; making sense of intention.
- Not knowing the child well enough to query changes in behaviour, pick up on sexualised behaviour
- Not believing it happens to disabled yp, not identifying a learning disability.
- Yp with learning disabilities are often invisible to services
- Transitions and vulnerable care leavers.

Impact of ASC on understanding consent

- Social understanding
- Social communication
- Social interaction
- Obsessive behaviours

Tom, aged 15, was sexually exploited by an older male who groomed him via Facebook. The older male told Tom that he loved him and wanted to be his boyfriend. He also told him that he was 18, when he was actually 37.

‘He said he loved me and wanted to be my boyfriend. Why would he say those things if he didn’t mean them? I wanted a boyfriend so why would I not have someone as my boyfriend who said he wanted to be my boyfriend?’ (Taken from Franklin et al.,2015)

Sex education and developing sexual assertiveness (Hollomotz date)

- More than just knowing about body parts – 80% could name body parts of self but not opposite sex – implications for reporting abuse
- A third believed sex was bad or rude increasing risks of guilt and shame
- Sex as pleasurable but may also be painful; need to be able to recognise differences
- Need to learn about gay and lesbian as well as straight identities
- May be factually knowledgeable but not yet have skills to recognise unwelcome events or say 'no'
- Etiquette or social behaviours e.g. men's loos
- Condoms but not just to prevent pregnancy
- Many in the study were able to develop strategies with help, to ward off unwelcome or uninvited sexual advances and 33% had acted to do so

What works

- Making sense of what child's behaviour is telling us
- Recognising that there could be a learning need
- Making sense of how and whether the child is hiding their learning need; pretending to have understood
- Develop trust so young person feels able to say
- Ask the young person...
- Check out and make sure the young person does not just feel they have to say things are ok, they have understood; ok for child to disagree with the adult
- If child not used to being asked about their views - develop their confidence to say, ask, voice, express
- Finding out about the young person's history
- Apparent street wise behaviour may be hiding real vulnerabilities (Derby, Rochdale reviews)
- Start from learning need and making sense of learning disability on child's day to day life and ability to make sense of social cues

Parents need for information, guidance and support

- Life course approach – starting from childhood.. Building resilience, empowerment, knowledge.
- Importance of very early developmentally appropriate work on safety, touch, choices and being supported to express and communicate wishes and feelings.
- Many parents do not appreciate internet risks, and would not often know where to go for help and advice.
- Parents may not have the time, while managing day to day needs, to consider risks in the future.
- Lack of knowledge and awareness about CSE.
- Need for recognition that all young people face risks.
- Some parents may be relieved to see their child spending time on social media, playing on the computer or X- box etc. - a break and some quiet time.

Young people's solutions (Franklin et al, 2015)

➤ Education and information

'They should teach kids what it is and what they can do to make sure it doesn't happen to them.' (Lizzie, aged 17)

➤ Early, child-centred support

'They [social workers] shouldn't let it get so bad that they go missing ... They should give them something to do and be nice and calm and talk to you and spend time with young people' (Sophie, aged 14)

➤ Access to more CSE services

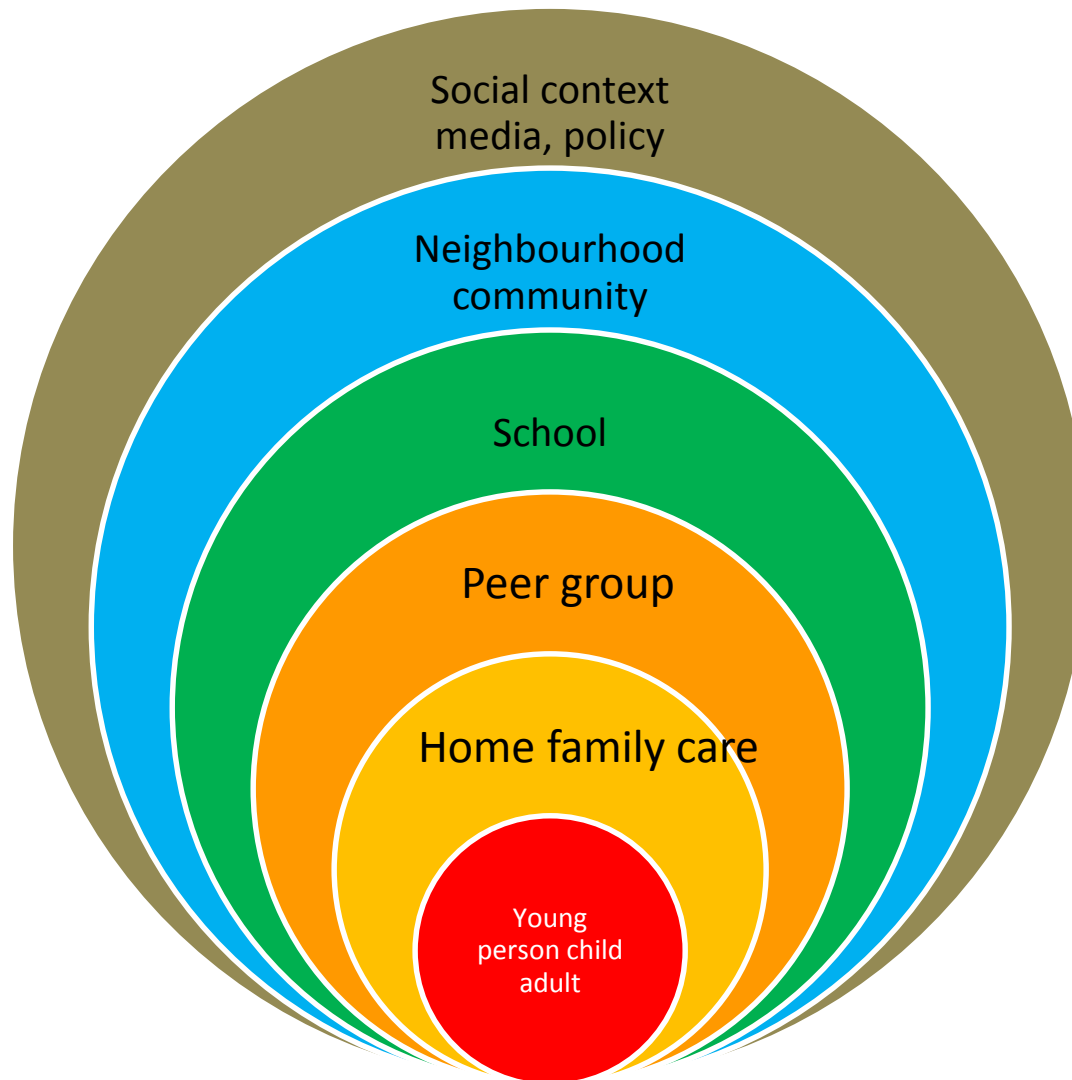
'We need more projects like the [name of] project, as they are the best people for children to go to. They are so helpful and there would be no more runaways or girls going missing.' (Chantelle, aged 14)

➤ Improved generic support to meet their impairment needs

'Young people with learning disabilities want the same things as young people who don't have learning disabilities.' (Sophie, aged 20)

Understanding social context – what can you do to help in each area depending on your work?

based on Firmin's model for understanding peer on peer abuse and exploitation



Thank you

Sarah Goff, Safeguarding Disabled Children
Manager, Ann Craft Trust
(Sarah.Goff@Nottingham.ac.uk)

Dr Anita Franklin, Reader, Coventry
University (anita.franklin@coventry.ac.uk)