



# Children with Problematic Sexual Behavior

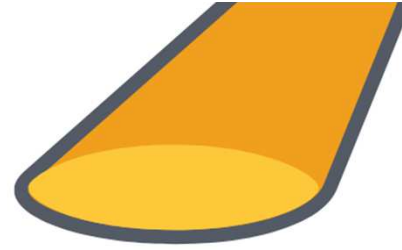
Presenter: Melissa Bernstein, PhD

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# Speaker SPOTLIGHT



MELISSA BERNSTEIN, PHD  
Evidence-Based Practices  
Rady Children's Hospital-San Diego

 @drmelbern

- Advancing California's Trauma-Informed Systems (ACTS)
- Trauma-Informed Licensing Team (TILT) Initiatives
- Research centers around supporting systems in planning for, implementing, and sustaining Trauma-Informed change that aligns with best practice and science



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# CHILDREN WITH PROBLEMATIC SEXUAL BEHAVIOR

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## TERMINOLOGY

### Children with Problematic Sexual Behaviors (**CPSB**)

- Developmentally sensitive
- Focuses on the behavior(s)
- Separates behavior of children from delinquent or criminal acts of adolescents and adults

## GENERAL DEFINITION

Sexual behavior problems (**PSB**) are defined as child(ren)-initiated behaviors that involve sexual body parts (i.e., genitals, anus, buttocks, and/or breasts) in a manner that is developmentally inappropriate and potentially harmful to themselves or others.

~Silovsky & Bonner (2003)

# TYPICAL SEXUAL BEHAVIOR

- Infancy (0-2)
  - Curiosity about their body
  - Self touch in public and private
  - No inhibitions around nudity
- Early Childhood (2-5)
  - Self touch to self-sooth, attention
  - May occur publicly or privately
  - May ask questions about sexuality or reproduction
  - Curious about adult bodies
  - Continued lack of inhibition around nudity
- Middle Childhood (5-8)
  - Maybe self touch for pleasure, in private
- Late Childhood (9-12)
  - Interest in relationships
  - May express curiosity about adult bodies
  - Self touch for pleasure in private

# SEXUAL PLAY

- Exploratory
- Spontaneous
- Intermittent
- By mutual agreement
- Between children of similar age, size, and developmental level
- Not accompanied by anger, fear, strong anxiety, etc.

Bonner (1999); Chaffin et al. (2006); Silovsky (2009), Silovsky & Bonner (2003);  
Rutter (1971); Lamb & Coakley (1993); Larsson (2001); Reynolds, Herbenick, & Bancroft (2003)



# GUIDELINES FOR DETERMINING IF SEXUAL BEHAVIORS ARE A PROBLEM

Frequency	Developmental Considerations	Harm
High Frequency	Among Youth of Significantly Different Ages/ Developmental Abilities	Intrusive Behaviors
Unresponsive (i.e., does not decrease) to Typical Parenting Strategies	Longer in Duration than Developmentally Expected	Use of Force, Intimidation, and/or Coercion
	Interferes with Social Development	Elicits Fear or Anxiety in Other Children

Bonner (1995); Davies, Glaser, & Kossoff (2000); Friedrich (1997); Johnson (2004); Larsson & Svedin (2001)

## RARE SEXUAL BEHAVIORS

- Touches other children's private parts after being told not to
- Plans how to sexually touch other children
- Forces other children to do sexual acts
- Puts finger or objects in other child/ren's vagina or rectum
- Puts mouth on sex parts
- Tries to have sexual intercourse with another child or adult



## POLL

- The majority of children with PSB are male?

## CHARACTERISTICS OF CHILDREN WITH PSB

- Relationship issues
  - Peer relationship problems
- More likely to present with psychological problems
- Learning and Language Delays

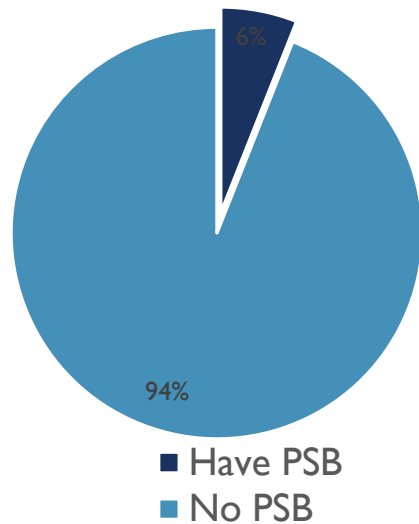
## HOW DO CHILDREN DEVELOP PSB?

- What Factors Increase the Likelihood of Children Developing PSB?

# SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN

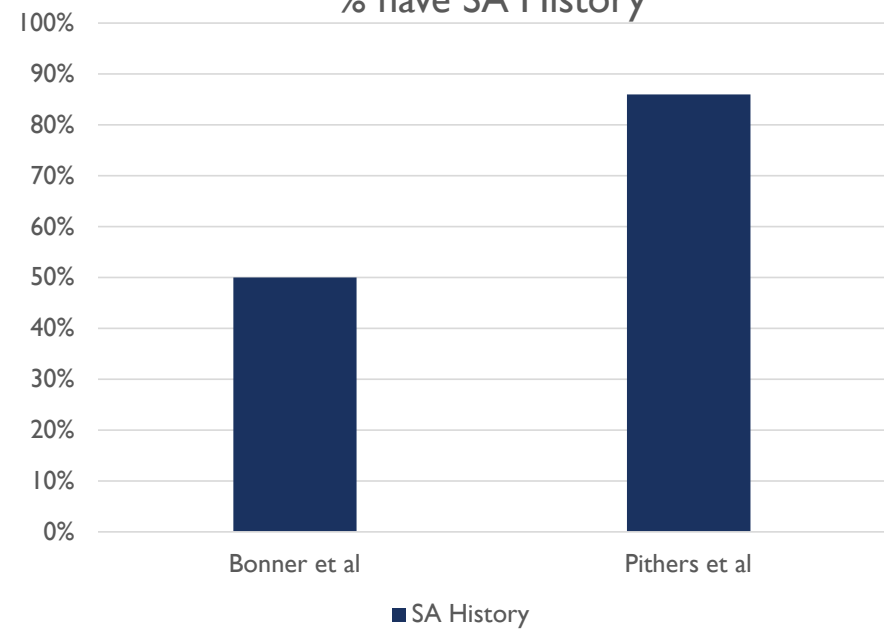
Of children who have been sexually abused

Kendall-Tackett, et al.



Of children with PSB

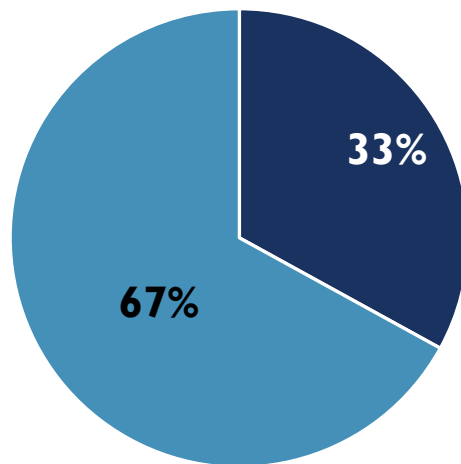
% have SA History



## PRESCHOOL CHILDREN

Of children who have been sexually abused

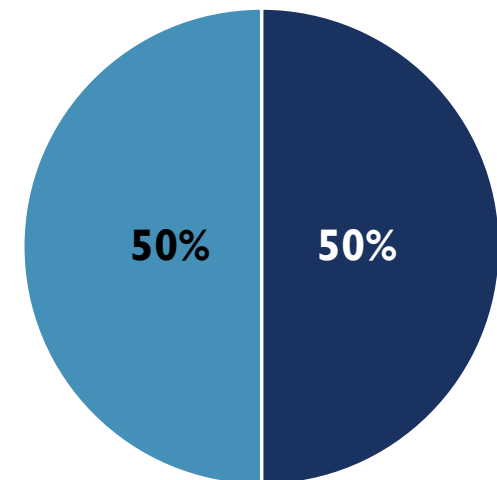
PSB – Kendall Tackett et al.



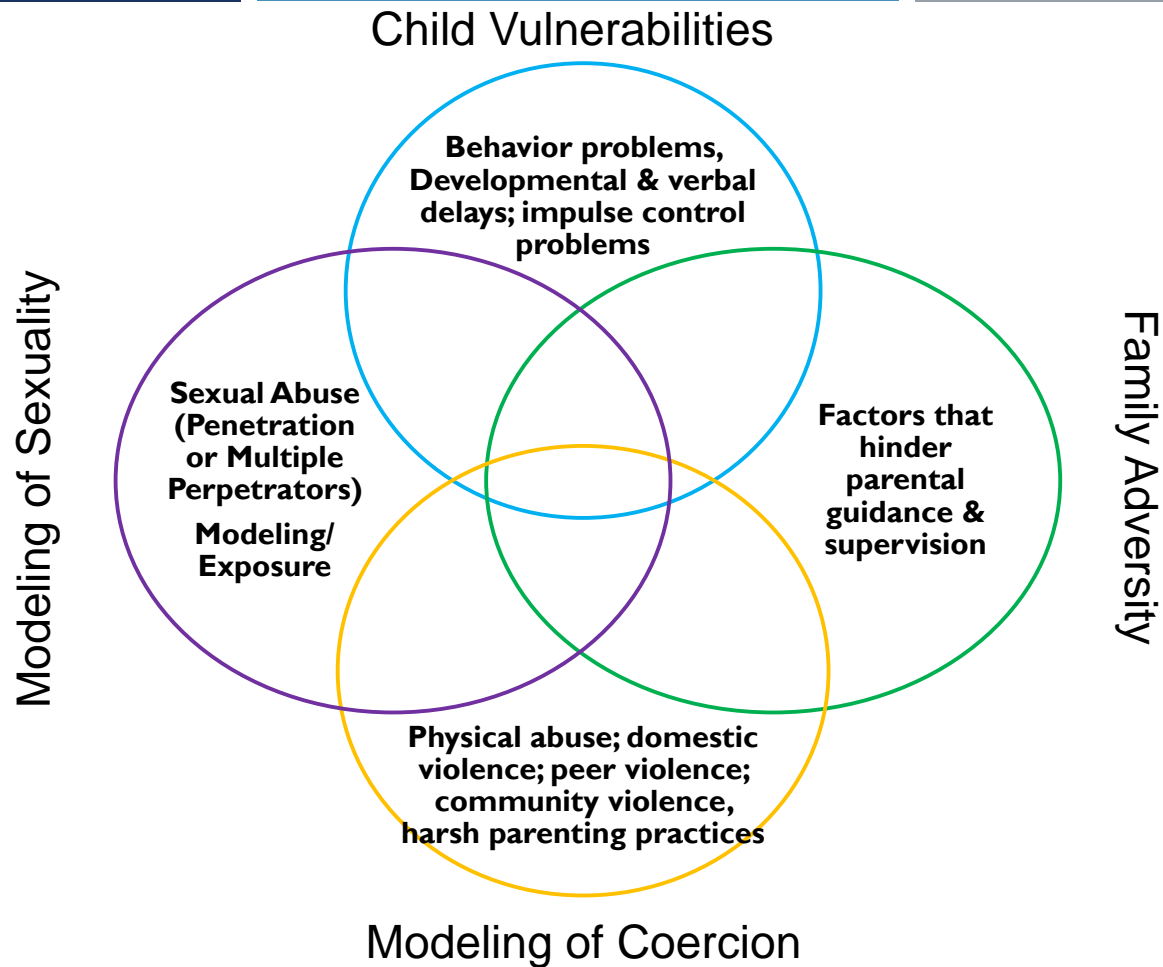
■ PSB   ■ No PSB

Of children with PSB

CSA History – Silovsky et al.



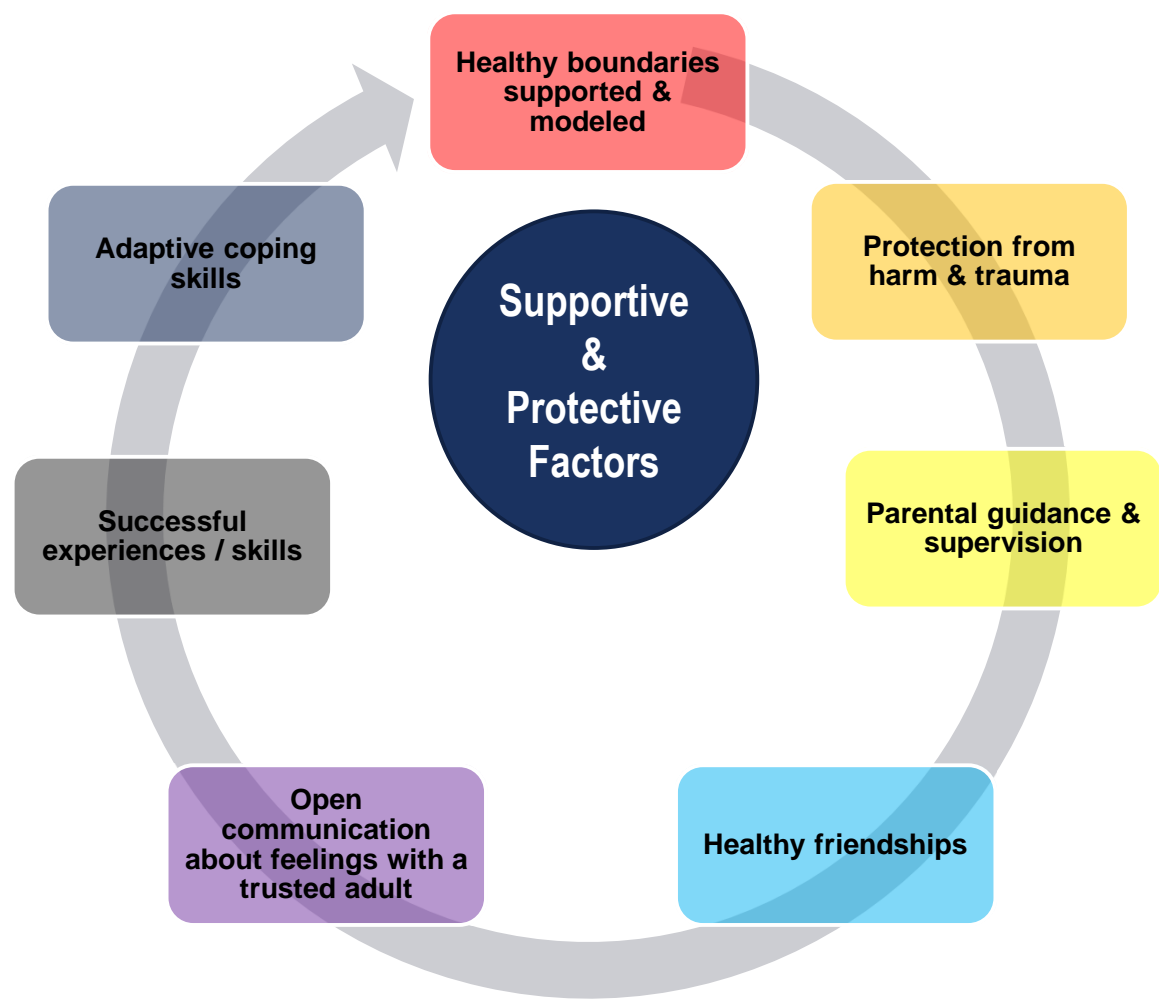
■ No Known SA   ■ SA





## WHAT TRIGGERS THE BEHAVIOR? HOW IS IT MAINTAINED OVER TIME?

- Deviant sexual arousal
  - Very, very rare
- Trauma
  - Re-experiencing symptom
- Curiosity
- Attention seeking
- Self-soothing
- Defiance
- Impulsiveness
- Preoccupation





## TREATMENT OUTCOMES



## CAREGIVERS RESPOND IN A VARIETY OF WAYS

- Feelings of disbelief, shame, guilt, embarrassment, anger
- No to little hope for the future
- Problem is the child; focus on parenting can't help
- Do not understand seriousness of situation
- Impact of own history and experiences
- Divided loyalties

# DOES THERAPY WORK WITH CHILDREN WITH PSB?

## Rates of Future PSB Compared to Children with No Known PSB

**Cognitive-Behavioral  
Therapy  
12 Sessions: Caregiver &  
Child**

**98%**

**Comparison Group**

**97%**

10 Year Follow-Up Data: Carpentier, Silovsky, & Chaffin (2006)

# DOES THERAPY WORK WITH CHILDREN WITH PSB?

## Success Rates

**Cognitive-Behavioral  
Therapy**  
**12 Sessions: Caregiver &  
Child**

**98%**

**Dynamic Play Therapy**  
**12 Sessions: Caregiver &  
Child**

**89%**

10 Year Follow-Up Data: Carpentier, Silovsky, & Chaffin (2006)

## SEXUAL RECIDIVISM RATES FOR ADOLESCENTS WITH ILLEGAL SEXUAL BEHAVIOR

- Meta-analysis by Michael Caldwell (2017)
- Included 106 international recidivism studies totaling 33,000 youth
- Mean five-year sexual recidivism rate for offenses committed over the last 30 years <5%
- Most recent 33 studies since 2000 suggest mean sexual recidivism rate of 2.75%
- The longer one remains offense-free in the community, the lower the risk for sexual offending (Hanson, 2014)

# CHARACTERISTICS OF EVIDENCE-BASED TREATMENTS FOR YOUTH WITH PSB

- Directly involves caregivers
  - Behavior parent training
  - Rules about sexual behavior
  - Caregiver sex education
  - Abuse prevention of children
- Plan for safety and preventing future PSB
- Prosocial peers and positive peer interactions
- Youth with deviant sexual arousal require specialized individualized treatment (no current EBTs known)





## VOICES OF CAREGIVERS OF YOUTH WITH PSB

- Don't judge me, my child, or my family
- PSB doesn't define my child
- Give me reassurance and hope
- Reduce time from discovering behavior and getting into treatment

## VOICES OF CAREGIVERS OF YOUTH WITH PSB

- Tell me what to expect out of treatment
- Be patient with me when at first I don't understand why you want me there
- Being with other parents help motivate me and gives me support
- See my child as a child and give them confidence they can make better choices

## COMMON QUESTIONS ABOUT CHILDREN WITH PSB

- Can children with PSB live with other children?
  - Do the caregivers have the parental capacity to provide supervision and safety?
  - Does the child with PSB respond to adult supervision and guidance?
  - Who are the other children in the home?

## COMMON QUESTIONS ABOUT CHILDREN WITH PSB

- Do children with PSB need intensive residential treatment?
- Will children with PSB grow up to be adult sexual offenders?

## CONCLUSIONS

- Sexual behavior of youth range from typical to concerning to problematic
  - Consider factors such as frequency, duration, consistency with development and harmfulness of the behavior
- No set profile or pattern of youth with problematic sexual behavior.
  - Origins are wide ranging
- Efficacious treatment directly involves caregivers in teaching supervision, safety, and other parenting skills
- Treatment, policies, and practices should be based on facts, rather than fear and myths about these children



# WHAT HAPPENS NOW

## Facing Sexual Behavior Problems With Your Child

Discovering that your child has a problematic sexual behavior can be overwhelming. It can bring about a flood of emotions, from anger to sadness, denial, shame and guilt. Having the right help and support is vital to helping your child and assisting you in gaining a sense of hope for the future. You are not alone. Help is available.



NATIONAL  
CHILDREN'S  
ALLIANCE®

# WHAT WE CAN DO

## Understanding Children and Youth with Problematic Sexual Behaviors

The process of identifying and responding to problematic sexual behaviors (PSBs) among youth and children is often fragmented and inconsistent across the country. Children's Advocacy Centers (CACs) are leaders in supporting families impacted by child abuse through coordinated multidisciplinary response and care. This uniquely

# Effective Treatment for Youth with Problematic Sexual Behaviors



Problematic sexual behavior (PSB) is more than kids playing doctor or showing curiosity about private parts. PSB involves sexual body parts and is outside of typical development. A clear indication of a problem is when the behaviors are aggressive, intrusive, or coercive, and there is harm to the youth and others. The term is also used when youth display sexual behaviors that do not respond to parental intervention, or are frequent, intrusive, or occur among youth of disparate ages or abilities. There is hope through treatment. The first step is a clinical evaluation to examine sexual behavior, functioning and other needs.

## Best Practices for PSB Treatment for Youth

**NCSBY**

NATIONAL CENTER ON SEXUAL BEHAVIOR OF YOUTH  
July 2003

Number 2

## NCSBY Fact Sheet

### Children with Sexual Behavior Problems: Common Misconceptions vs. Current Findings

# NATIONAL CENTER ON THE SEXUAL BEHAVIOR OF YOUTH

The mission of NCSBY is to promote better lives, through better choices by youth, caregivers, and professionals for healthier responses to and prevention of problematic sexual behavior of youth. NCSBY provides national training and technical assistance to improve the accuracy, accessibility, and strategic use of accurate information about the nature, incidence, prevalence, prevention, treatment, and management of youth with problematic sexual behavior.



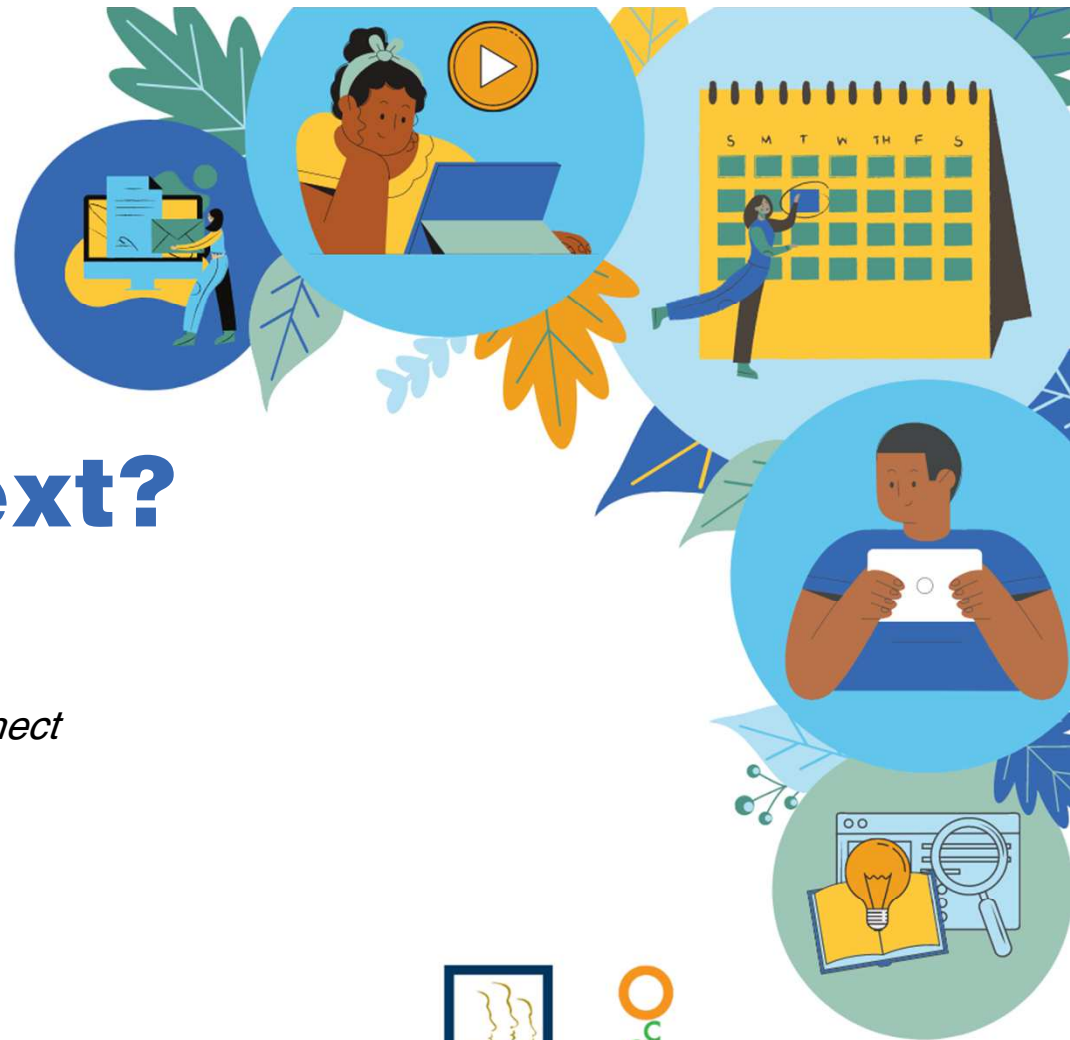
**[www.NCSBY.org](http://www.NCSBY.org)**



# THE NATIONAL CHILD TRAUMATIC STRESS NETWORK

- NCTSN Mission: To raise the standard of care and improve access to services for children, their families, and communities throughout the United States.
- Publications and other information for parents and caregivers as well as professionals on trauma
- Fact sheets on children with PSB collaboratively developed with NCSBY





# What Happens Next?

- Survey and certificate in the chat now
- Recording and resources available within two days
- Watch your inbox for the next issue of *CalTrin Connect*

Stay connected for more free training & resources

 [www.caltrin.org](http://www.caltrin.org)

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