

# Keeping Our Youngest Children Safe: A Softer Approach to a Tough Topic



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# Problem...



- Abuse and neglect are tough topics.
- As a result, most adults try to avoid the topic.
- Avoidance results in a lack of awareness and understanding of risk factors and prevention strategies.
- When adults don't talk, children experience more abuse: more frequency, longer length and greater severity.

- While conference presentations, newspaper articles, and Webinars help, the learning opportunities are simply:
  - too infrequent,
  - too brief, &
  - often too disconcerting to meet their goal: effectively inform and involve parents and professionals in maltreatment prevention efforts.



# Solution...



## Rather than Abuse and Neglect

- Less scary statistics
- Less focus on guilt
- Less focus on helplessness
- Less focus on “it’s other people’s kids
- “Experts” must give presentation

## Focus : Child Safety & Success

- Use a visually engaging process or “product” that invites dialogue
- Conveys a sense of warmth, comfort and trust
- Shares critical concepts for both kids and adults
- Shares important resources

# Guiding Concept...

- Quilts are common within most cultures.



- Noncommercial quilts are developed via a collaborative, sustainable process that often involves family and community members.
- The resulting quilts are visually engaging, tangible, and often convey a sense of community, comfort and trust.

- Completed quilts can be used for a variety of purposes, including warmth, decorations, family heirlooms, art and teaching.



- Hands & Voices has begun using the quilting process to engage and inform parents and professionals about preventive practices and safety enhancements for our kids – or kids with any disability, or all kids. They all apply!
- Trial “test of change” – three chapters, three quilts. Was it feasible? Was it effective?

- This presentation will share how the design, creation and sharing of quilts can provide an:
  - informal,
  - ongoing,
  - visually rich, and
  - emotionally comfortable context to discuss, learn, and share how to enhance the safety and success of our children.



# Strategy...



- **"What"...** design concepts:
  - We created a quilt to be used as a tangible entry point for discussions on child abuse and neglect.
  - The 5 uniform quilt blocks were created to represent support systems:
    - H&V HQ and chapter, ChildHelp hotline, OUR Children project info and guiding concept:



- 4 blocks are open for creation by chapter members: discussion can come from the following themes:

- **"IFSP"** ...idea = build safety into the educational documents of our children as the CEC now recommends

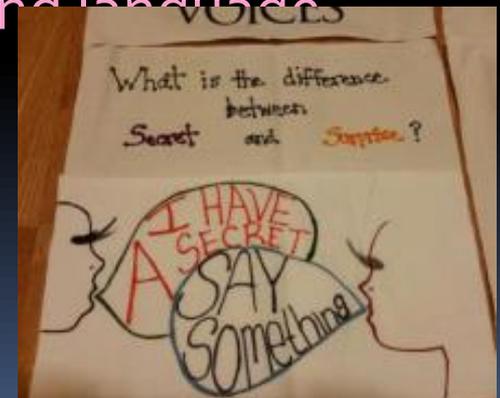
- **"What is a Loving Family"**

- ...idea = families are to love and help children grow



- **"Right to say No"** ...idea = children know that they have the right to say "NO" + why, how, when and where this right can be used + changes over time + what to do if that right is not respected

- **"Friends"** ...idea = friendships and how to make and keep them healthy friendships: reduce loneliness, enhance social knowledge and involvement in age-appropriate activities
- **"Language"** ...idea = Children learn more vocabulary with targeted support to share their emotions/experiences AND how to get an adult's attention if safety is in danger. Tell and keep telling until an adult listens.
- **"Children's Literature"** ...idea = parents read stories with child exploring holistic knowledge and languages they need to be safe
- **"Secrets vs. Surprises"** ...idea = children learn the key concept between keeping "surprises" vs. "secrets"



# Birth to Three Considerations

Building Trust: responding to signals, understanding “safe” as early as 6 months

Attachment: “Not the Mother” and checking in

Vocabulary: Feelings, Boundaries, Figuring out the Social World

Knowing Caregivers: asking questions

Simple safety rules: Hygiene, Be Gentle, Check First, Stay Together, Hold My Hand, and what we want to teach about bodies

Adult Modeling: Can I ask questions? Can I avoid situations? Incidental Learning



- **"Why" ...purpose:**

- Create another modality for teaching and discussing the issue of child abuse and neglect.
- Making this discussion visual and tactile can make a necessary topic more approachable for families, providers and eventually kids.
- Creating a friendly group process to allow for information sharing, tools, tips and stories among parents and providers.





- **“How”...the process:**

- Convene a group of parents to discuss the quilt project and the four topics open to each chapter.
    - Note: Colorado’s plan
  - How will we represent these four topics in a simple way for a varied audience? We want a “thousand word” picture!
  - Goal: realistic expectations for time and ability of volunteers.
  - Final: Decided on some iron-on images and buttons from the children of parent leaders (OUR Children) gathered during the 2014 Leadership Conference for a tee shirt quilt feel.
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## Texas:

- Nine square blocks, 12x12 squares finished.
- Sashing goes from a dark bottom left corner to gradually to the lighter top right corner.
- The Texas quilt is machine pieced and quilted.

# Lessons Learned...

## 1. Guidebook needed:

- Talking points, reflections, resources, etc.
- Travels with each quilt.
- Sign in area to gather more feedback.



## 2. Degree of difficulty perception:

- Who, me, quilt??
  - How to include members with a variety of skillsets
  - Generating ideas, creating blocks, piecing, quilting, presenting all needed.



## Once we got going:

- Had a hard time limiting ideas to space available.
- Focusing on future sharing of topics with adults made design easier.
- During the design or quilting sessions: we are active listeners with resources, not professionals or police.
- Future quilts with elementary through high school themes are possible, but more intensive training would be needed.

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- *Making the quilt took less time than making all the choices for thread, sashing, fabric, etc.*
  - *It is hard to believe that it has been almost a year in the making (literally and figuratively) but I have enjoyed and valued this process very much. Parent Guide in Texas*
  - When we share the quilt, the universal reaction is “Wow! That brings the safety concepts straight to the heart.”

# Request...

- "when"...we hope the quilts will be used:
  - We hope the quilts will be included in the OUR Children's booth materials.

## Training needed:

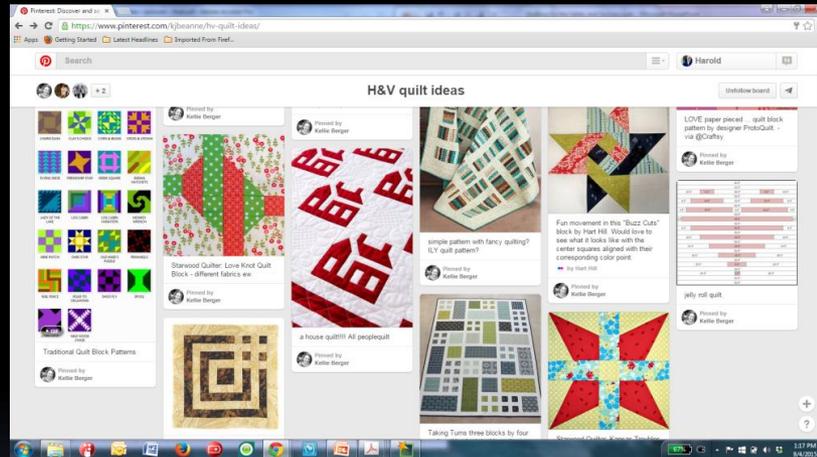
- Talking points on sharing quilts
- What to do if discussions are too personal/sad/urgent :  
Be ready for disclosure
- How to draw people in to the discussion without overwhelming them.
- Closing on a good note.

# Next steps: Expectations...

- Prior to the 2016 Hands & Voices Leadership Conference, chapters have been asked to commit to one or more of the following:
  - Share OUR Children material at a local, state, or regional event;
  - produce one to two thematic quilt squares;
  - Identify a local/regional resource (i.e., individual or organization) with expertise in both children with disabilities **and** maltreatment to learn from.

# Resources...

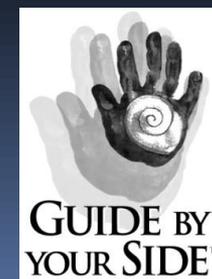
- Pinterest page:
  - Kellie Berger created a page to collect ideas on blocks , tutorials for rookies and more.



Wiki page: where we amass all our presentations,  
Bright Spot videos, and more  
Google: *Deaf Child Abuse Wiki*



- A child can't learn without feeling safe.
- Because of you, maybe one more child will escape maltreatment today.
- Join with your chapter in creating a teaching quilt today!



# Contact Information..

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