

# Clicks, Connections, and Caution: Protecting Young People from Online Exploitation and Harm

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## Session Description:

Vulnerability and safety of youth is a prominent concern for parents, caregivers, and those working with children and young people. Concern about vulnerability and risk has been more recently extended to online activity with cyber-violence posing a new and increasing type of safety risk (Mukred et al., 2024). Cyber-violence refers to the use of technology (particularly the Internet and mobile devices) to harm, threaten, or harass individuals or groups. Existing literature has indicated that individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and developmental disability are at an increased risk for not only being victimized by but also engaging in problematic online behavior (Livingstone et al., 2011; Lough, et al., 2015). The aim of this presentation is to review the existing literature about risk and protective factors for individuals with developmental differences and their engagement in online platforms. We aim to discuss how social vulnerabilities that are common among those with ASD put individuals at heightened risk for being the target of online violence, exploited via cyber-violence, and/or susceptible to engaging in online problematic behavior. In addition to reviewing the literature, we aim to outline behaviors and patterns of online engagement that may be indicative of problematic online engagement. Finally, although empirical data remains limited at this time, we will offer considerations for preventative efforts and intervention if problematic online behavior is detected.

## Learning Objectives:

1. Summarize the existing literature on the unique vulnerabilities for individuals with developmental differences to be involved in problematic online behavior.
2. Identify one individual and one global risk factor for engaging in problematic online behavior.
3. Describe one means of intervention or redirection when individuals engage in problematic online behavior.

**Dr. Kaisa Marshall** is a licensed psychologist and Assistant Professor in the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences and lead clinical supervisor of the youth track forensic postdoctoral fellowship. Her forensic evaluation experience has focused on referral questions related to competency to stand trial, mitigation, amenability to treatment, violence and sexual risk, and sanity. She also provides consultation for the university Threat Assessment Team (TAT) and for a local community crisis prevention and intervention team serving individuals with developmental disability. She has a longstanding interest in working with justice-involved youth, understanding youth developmental psychopathology, and accurate assessment of trauma symptoms in justice involved individuals. She is devoted to educating others about conducting youth forensic evaluations with the overall aim of addressing the lack of available resources for completing these evaluations in New Mexico. She is currently involved in several state-level commissions and committees focused on the intersection of youth mental health and the law.

**Dr. Elizabeth Bryant** is a forensic psychology postdoctoral fellow at the University of New Mexico School of Medicine's Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences. She earned her bachelor's degree in Psychology and Forensic Science from Syracuse University and obtained her PsyD in Clinical Psychology from Indiana University of Pennsylvania. Dr. Bryant completed her predoctoral internship at the Federal Bureau of Prisons, Federal Correctional Institution Englewood. In her current fellowship on the Youth Track, Dr. Bryant primarily conducts juvenile competency, amenability, and mitigation evaluations, as well as adult competency evaluations. She has over five years of experience working in clinical, forensic, and correctional settings under the supervision of licensed psychologists in Pennsylvania, Colorado, and New Mexico. Dr. Bryant has conducted forensic evaluations for juvenile court, family court, and state and federal criminal courts. She is particularly interested in how developmental factors, including autism spectrum disorder, learning disorders, and intellectual and developmental disabilities, influence youth involvement in the justice system.