



# Disability-Inclusive Prevention Strategies for Youth-Serving Organizations

**Meg Stone, MPH** Executive Director  
IMPACT Boston

**“Just don’t  
touch the  
kids.”**





## HER CHOICES

- Ignore or dismiss the training
- Not teach her sport effectively

## WHAT GOT LOST

- Useful, clear conversation about what types of touch are appropriate in a contact sport

## IMPACT'S WORK

- Adaptive Sports Abuse Prevention (ASAP)
- Disability-specific Schools
- Disability Service Agencies
- Performing Arts Organizations



[Adaptive Sports Abuse Prevention]

# EVERYDAY ABLEISM

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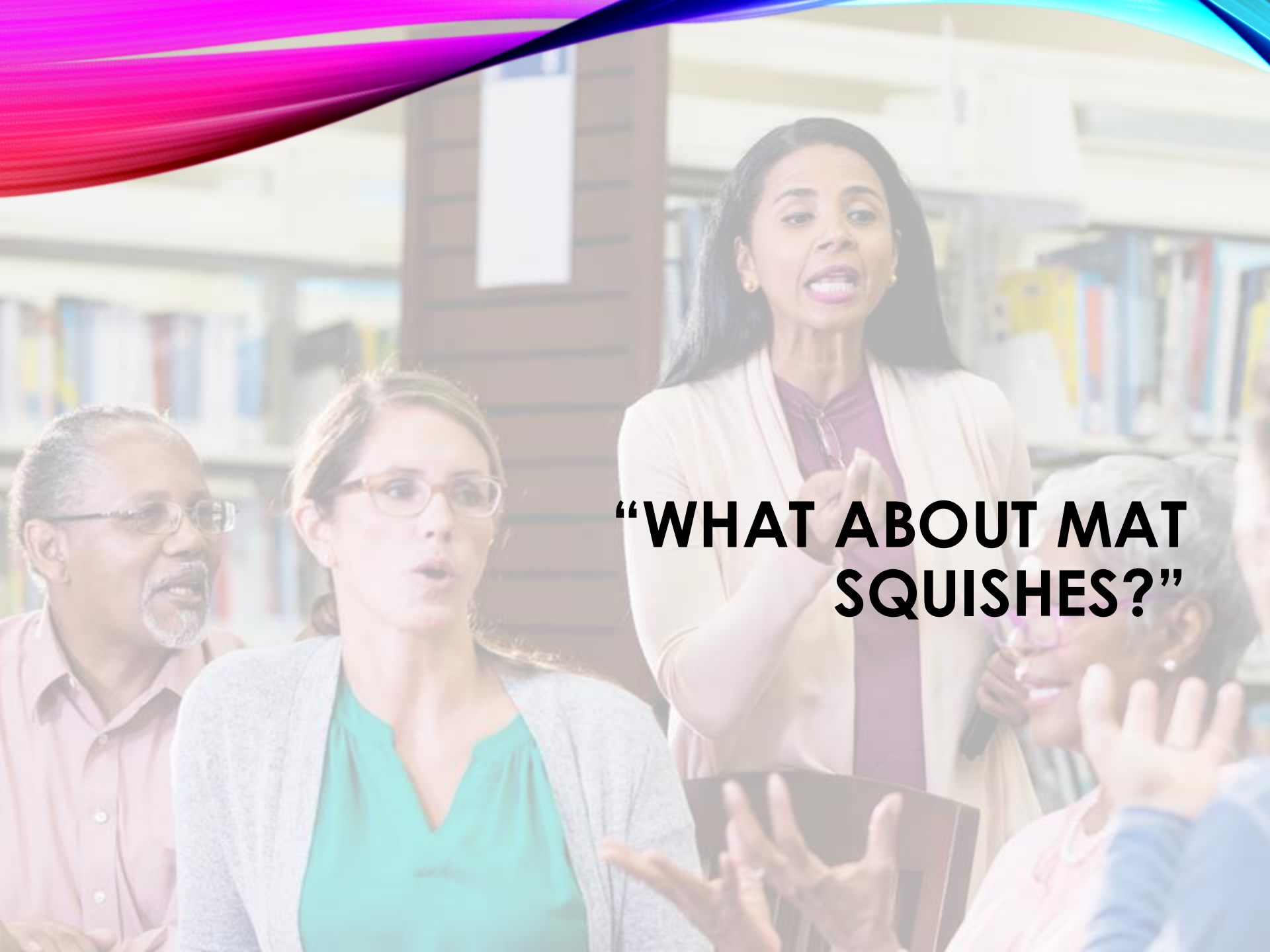


Top executives at one of America's most prominent Olympic organizations failed to alert authorities to many allegations of sexual abuse by coaches – relying on a policy that enabled predators to abuse gymnasts long after USA Gymnastics had received warnings. [Read more...](#)

# EXAMPLE: APPROPRIATE BEHAVIORS FROM **SAFE KIDS THRIVE**

- High fives
- Handshakes
- Fist bumps
- Side hugs
- Pats on the back or shoulder
- Tending an injured child/youth



A group of diverse people are gathered in what appears to be a library or community center. In the center, a woman with long dark hair, wearing a white cardigan over a purple top, is speaking and gesturing with her hands. To her left, a woman with glasses and a teal top looks on with an attentive expression. Further left, a man with glasses and a goatee, wearing a pink shirt, is also looking towards the speaker. In the foreground, the hands of other people are visible, some raised as if in discussion. The background shows bookshelves filled with books. A decorative graphic of overlapping red, purple, and blue curved shapes is at the top of the image.

**“WHAT ABOUT MAT  
SQUISHES?”**

**“IT’S THE  
EXCEPTIONS  
THAT MAKE  
ADAPTIVE  
SPORTS  
ADAPTIVE.”**






“There’s a lot of touching in our field—it’s way different than an able bodied sport; there’s no way you could have written policies saying ‘you can’t touch this or you can’t touch that.’”



**Why do youth-serving organizations have specific, consistent rules about touch or who can be alone together?**





**How can those goals  
be accomplished in  
more nuanced,  
inclusive ways?**

# BOUNDARY VIOLATIONS ON A CONTINUUM

**Missed Social  
Cues**

**Inappropriate  
Behaviors**

**Abusive  
Behaviors**

# STAYING AWAY FROM THE EXTREMES

Avoiding hard  
conversations  
because we assume  
good intentions.

Constant suspicion  
that erodes  
goodwill.



# SOME STRATEGIES

- Challenging Conversations
  - Building skills
  - Support from organizational leadership
- Policies Based on Principles and Core Values
  - Thorough, inclusive process
  - Well-defined processes



# WHAT IS A CHALLENGING CONVERSATION?

- Asking questions that are uncomfortable for you or the other person
- Communicating a concern or problem you see with someone else's actions
- Questioning a common practice or widely held organizational belief
- Bringing attention to actions you see as inappropriate

# WHY WE MAY AVOID THEM...

- Not wanting someone who is otherwise great at their job to feel criticized
- Not wanting to make an already stressful job more stressful
- They are uncomfortable and overwhelming for us
- We may second guess ourselves
  - Am I overreacting? Is it really a problem?



# BUT WHEN WE SAY NOTHING...

- A person who is not using good judgment doesn't get an opportunity to learn and improve.
- An important philosophical challenge or difference of opinion doesn't get addressed.
- A person who is at risk to perpetrate sees boundary violations going unchallenged.
- A person who is engaging in problem behaviors doesn't get support.



# STRATEGIC CHOICES

- Speaking directly to the person or reporting to a supervisor
- Interrupting an interaction in the moment or talking to the person later
- Having a casual or serious tone

Your choices may be based on your personality, your experience, or your relationship to the organization.

# AWARENESS OF BIASES

- Cultural biases
- Disabled students facing stigma for being sexual beings
- Staff in certain types of positions
- People who are well-respected & established vs. those who are new or unknown
- Differences in power or authority within the organization
  - It may be a bigger risk to speak to a supervisor or administrator than a person you supervise
  - People in **ANY** position can be crossing boundaries

# WHEN WE OBSERVE BOUNDARY-VIOLATING BEHAVIOR


- Try to understand the behavior
- Communicate a concern
- Communicate a message about shared values
- Identify next steps based on
  - Reaction in the moment
  - What changes after the fact

Addressing the behavior can help us determine where it falls on the continuum



# COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

- Clear, Concise, Concrete
- Focus on the behavior
- Appeal to shared values or expectations
- Say what you want, not just what you don't want
- Pay attention to what changes as a result of the conversation



I saw (or I heard) \_\_\_\_\_

It concerns me because \_\_\_\_\_

I think we all agree/believe/value \_\_\_\_\_


So I hope you will \_\_\_\_\_

**IN BOUNDS**

**OUT OF  
BOUNDS**


**REVIEW THE  
TAPE**






A 16 year old with an intellectual disability is at a summer camp cookout that involves campers of all ages. She notices some 8 year olds playing with Peppa Pig toys. She says she loves Peppa Pig and asks if she can join them. When they say yes, she joins them.





A basketball player who has autism struggles with the noise on the court. An assistant coach gives the athlete physical squeezes to help him remain calm during the game.



A teenage camp counselor tries to get one of his campers to hike with him through the woods to the summit of the mountain. The rest of the group is tired and needs to stop, but this counselor tells the camper that it's important to take on new challenges even if others aren't up to them.

**POLICY EXAMPLE:  
DISABILITY-SPECIFIC  
SCHOOL**



# TOUCH POLICY EXAMPLE

“Any time a staff member is touching a student the touch must be intended to serve the student. The staff member must be able to articulate the reason for the touch. Staff are also expected to be mindful about potential negative effects of touch, given the large number of students who are survivors of abuse and trauma who may be upset or confused by touch from staff...”



**The following are recognized reasons why it is acceptable for staff to touch students:**

- Education
- Therapeutic
- Safety
- Hygiene and Medical
- Instructional”



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