

# A SAFE Program's Approach to Increasing Resilience in Adolescent Survivors

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# Objectives:

1. Apply trauma-informed and community-centered approaches to supporting adolescent survivors of sexual assault and abuse
2. Demonstrate the ability to assess the unique mental health needs of adolescents
3. Design and implement effective support groups tailored to the needs of adolescent sexual assault/abuse survivors



# What All Do We Do?

**Sexual  
Assault**

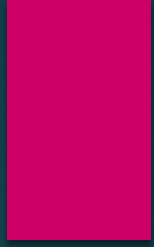
**Human  
Trafficking**

**Advocacy**

**Outreach &  
Education**

**Domestic  
Violence**

**Child Abuse**



# Why develop a support group?

## 2013-2023

- The percentage of youth experiencing forced sex and sexual violence increased
- The percentage of youth persistently feeling sad or hopeless increased

## 2023

- Nearly 2 in 10 female students experienced sexual violence
- More than 1 in 10 had been forced to have sex
- 4 in 10 students reported persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness during the past year
- Nearly 3 in 10 students reported having poor mental health during the past month
- 2 in 10 individuals seriously considered attempting suicide during the past year and 1 in 10 attempted suicide

"Female students are faring more poorly than male students across almost all measures of substance use, experiences of violence, mental health, and suicidal thoughts and behaviors."

# Why develop a support group?

- The majority of individuals who receive a SAFE exam do not receive mental health services after their assault
- Early interventions of counseling and fostering connections to other survivors are extremely important to help a person heal from the effects of trauma
- Survivors need their emotions and reactions post-assault normalized

# Why a *Group*?

## Group Therapy:

- Instills hope for change
- Reduces feelings of isolation while enhancing connectedness and a sense of belonging
- Vicarious learning through others experiences
- Giving and receiving of validation, support, encouragement, and guidance about healing

Support groups provide emotional support to individuals who share a common concern and provide benefits of enhancing empathy, validating experiences, and sharing ways to empower one another.

# Why develop a support group?

Trauma recovery is a multi-stage process that requires:

- a. Establishing emotional and physical safety
- b. Stabilizing post-traumatic effects and related mental health symptoms
- c. Retelling and integrating the trauma narrative into one's identity
- d. Experiencing grief and mourning of various losses consequential to the trauma
- e. Reclaiming power
- f. **Building and rebuilding connections, trust, and intimacy with others**

# Why develop a support group *at GBMC*?

- No in-person services available
  - COVID-19 Pandemic
- Trauma Symptoms
- Benefits of peer support during adolescence
- Barriers to engaging in therapy
  - Qualified Therapist
  - Patient Readiness
  - Availability
  - Financial/Cost
  - Transportation





# The Basics:

- Adolescent support group for female-identifying survivors of sexual violence
- SUPPORT Group: not therapy, less pressure
- FREE
- Arts, Crafts, & Creative Expression based
- Meet 1x/month from 6-8pm
- Dinner is provided
- Transportation is provided
- 10 Group Members

# More About Group:

Promote connectedness  
Teach positive coping skills

- Help mitigate:
  - negative trauma effects
  - feelings of isolation
  - stigmatization
  - secrecy
  - shame
- Safe space for teens to feel:
  - Accepted
  - Heard
  - Understood
  - Supported



# SAFE Group Referral Sources

- SAFE exams: FNE or Advocate can refer
- Child Advocacy Center
- Emergency Department
- Local Therapists



An illustration on the left side of the slide shows several hands in various shades of teal and dark blue. Some hands are pointing at documents, while one hand is holding a pen over a document with a red 'X' mark. The background is a dark teal color with a vertical pink bar on the right side.

# Legal Details

- Parent/Guardian Consent
  - Food allergies
  - Emergency Contact
  - Mandated Reporting/Confidentiality
- Consent for Rideshare/Lyft services
- Hospital legal team reviewed/approved all consent forms

**Group Parent/Guardian Consent Form**  
*GBMC SAFE Program*  
6701 N. Charles Street, Towson, MD 21204

Your permission is requested for your child, \_\_\_\_\_, to participate in an art-based support group. This event is voluntary, and your child has been invited to attend the 2026 group sessions.

This is a *FREE* group event for invited participants. Event participants will have the opportunity to learn new coping skills and behaviors that may help their personal development and adjustment, improve social skills, reduce stress & anxiety, and increase self-esteem. Other potential benefits to participation include improving individual artistic skills, enhancing creativity, improvements in mood, relationships, self-awareness, problem solving, self-expression, meaningful engagement, and overall emotional well-being.

**Event Expectations:**

We will provide all group participants with materials, so all your child needs to bring is their creativity! Participants will receive instruction from a trained trauma-informed instructor and be able to keep their creations. The purpose of this group is to help participants reduce stress, improve mood, and increase connection to self, and others.

**Event Timeline:**

**6pm-6:30pm**-Eat & Greet Time! Your child will have a chance to meet new members, staff and cultivate relationships within the group. Dinner/dessert will be provided for group members.

**6:30pm-7:45pm**- SAFE Squad Group Activity

**7:45pm-8pm**- Clean-Up and Dismissal -Participants will clean up their workstations and be dismissed for pickup by their parent/guardian or authorized adult.

**Confidentiality:**

All participants are expected to keep the identity and discussions of other members confidential. All information shared by group members will be kept confidential except in certain situations in which there are ethical and legal responsibility to limit confidentiality. In these circumstances, you will be notified. They include the following:

1. If the child reveals information about harm to themselves or another person
2. If the child reveals information about unreported child abuse
3. If agency records are subpoenaed by the courts

Please note that this group will follow Baltimore County Government for any weather-related closures. If there are questions or concerns, please contact any of the group leaders.

By signing below, I give my informed consent for the above-mentioned child to participate in the support group as it has been described above.

Parent/Guardian Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent/Guardian Signature \_\_\_\_\_

**GROUP LEADER:**

Danielle Nickles, LCPC- 410-961-6687/ [DLNickles@gbmc.org](mailto:DLNickles@gbmc.org)

**TRANSPORTATION**

\_\_\_\_ I will be providing transportation to and from group for my child. All parents/guardians or authorized adults providing transportation to group members will receive free parking vouchers. Adults can wait in the lobby area or GBMC cafeteria/food court.

- o My child's driver will be \_\_\_\_\_ and can be reached at \_\_\_\_\_  
(phone #)

\_\_\_\_ I will not be providing transportation to and from group for my child. I authorize GBMC to utilize Lyft concierge services to transport my child. If child is under 16 years old, a guardian must accompany your child during Lyft ride.

Parent/Guardian Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent/Guardian Signature \_\_\_\_\_

**HEALTH HISTORY INFORMATION**

We require some additional information to keep you child safe and healthy while attending groups:

- 1) We are planning on serving dinner and dessert for group participants before the group activity session. Please list any food allergies or prohibited foods:
- 2) Please list the name of an **emergency contact**:

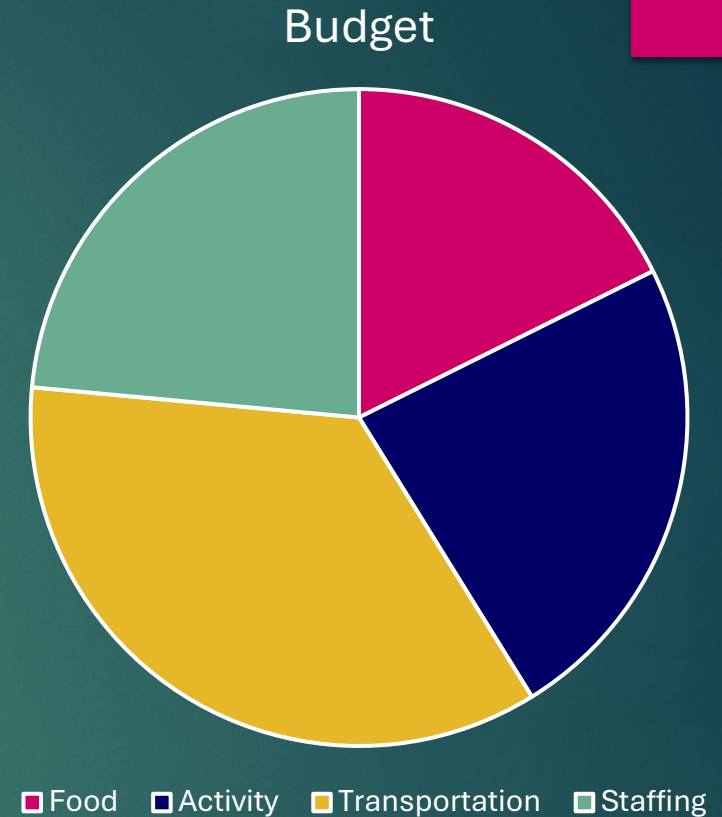
\_\_\_\_\_  
**Name/relationship** (\_\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_  
**phone #**

***I know of no reason other than the information indicated on this form why my child should not participate in prescribed activities except as noted.***

Parent/Guardian \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

# Monthly Group Expenses

- Food and Group Activity: \$300/month
  - \$100-150 for the meal
  - \$150-200 for activity supplies
- SAFE Unit Budget
  - Staff Salary
  - Rideshare/Lyft Concierge
- Funding Sources
  - Grants, Philanthropy, and Private Donors fund annually



# Group Activities

DIY Tote Bags

Self Defense Class

Ornament Making-Clay &  
Oyster/Seashells

DIY Sugar Scrubs

Friendship Bracelets

Pressed Flower Art

Build A Bouquet

Mini Clay Magnets

Paint & Pot a Planter

New Year Vision Boards

Diamond Art

Slime

Bedazzle Sunglasses

Modpodge Glass Lanterns

Paint a Wooden Crate

Positive Affirmations Frame

DIY Jewelry Box

Paint by Number

Freestyle Canvas Painting

Pumpkin Painting/Modpodge



# Benefits of Adolescent Support Groups:

- Shared lived experience
  - Court
  - Post-Assault Life
    - Disclosure/Healing timeline
  - Survivor Perspective
- Peer Support
  - Teen drama
  - Celebrations



# The Literature Says...

- National Health Interview Survey- Teen Report
  - 58.1% reported they had the social and emotional support they needed
  - 19.5% reported they had mental health care needs that went unmet
- Per CDC YRBS: When young people **feel connected**, the feeling of belonging protects them from poor mental health, suicidal thoughts and behaviors, substance use, violence, and sexual risk behavior
- Validation and universality are essential and empowering components of healing
  - Knowing they are not alone
  - Being around other survivors

# What has group meant to you?

what does group mean to you? what has it done for you? Thoughts on group

Group means a lot to me it's someone i feel safe to talk about things and also to forget things that's going on in life.

Group has helped me find myself again, the feel me. It has helped me overcome <sup>my</sup> fears of mine and helped me to also help others.

what has group meant to you? has it been helpful? how?

Group has helped me with so much. Where I can be myself, a distraction from everything going on in life. But also having a support system and girls that understand me and I can talk about my traumatic past. With. I have fun here, feel safe, loved, included! I always look forward to group :)

what has group meant  
to you? what has ~~to~~  
it done for you?

What group has ~~meant~~  
meant for me

is a feeling of not being  
~~alone~~ alone and it has  
done me ~~well~~ well  
mentally since I feel  
glad to go here

what has group meant for  
you? done for you?

for me, group has given  
me a place to talk about  
anything on my mind, as well  
as given me so many  
friendships. group means  
sharing our worries, thoughts,  
feelings, and favorite flavors  
of pizza. group has taught  
me how to trust again  
while also giving me  
the support and validation  
through this tough time.  
group has also given me lots  
of yummy food + fun crafts!

what has group meant  
to you? is group  
helpful?

For me, group is my escape from every-  
thing I have to deal with in my day-to-day  
life. Like for example, family issues and  
school.

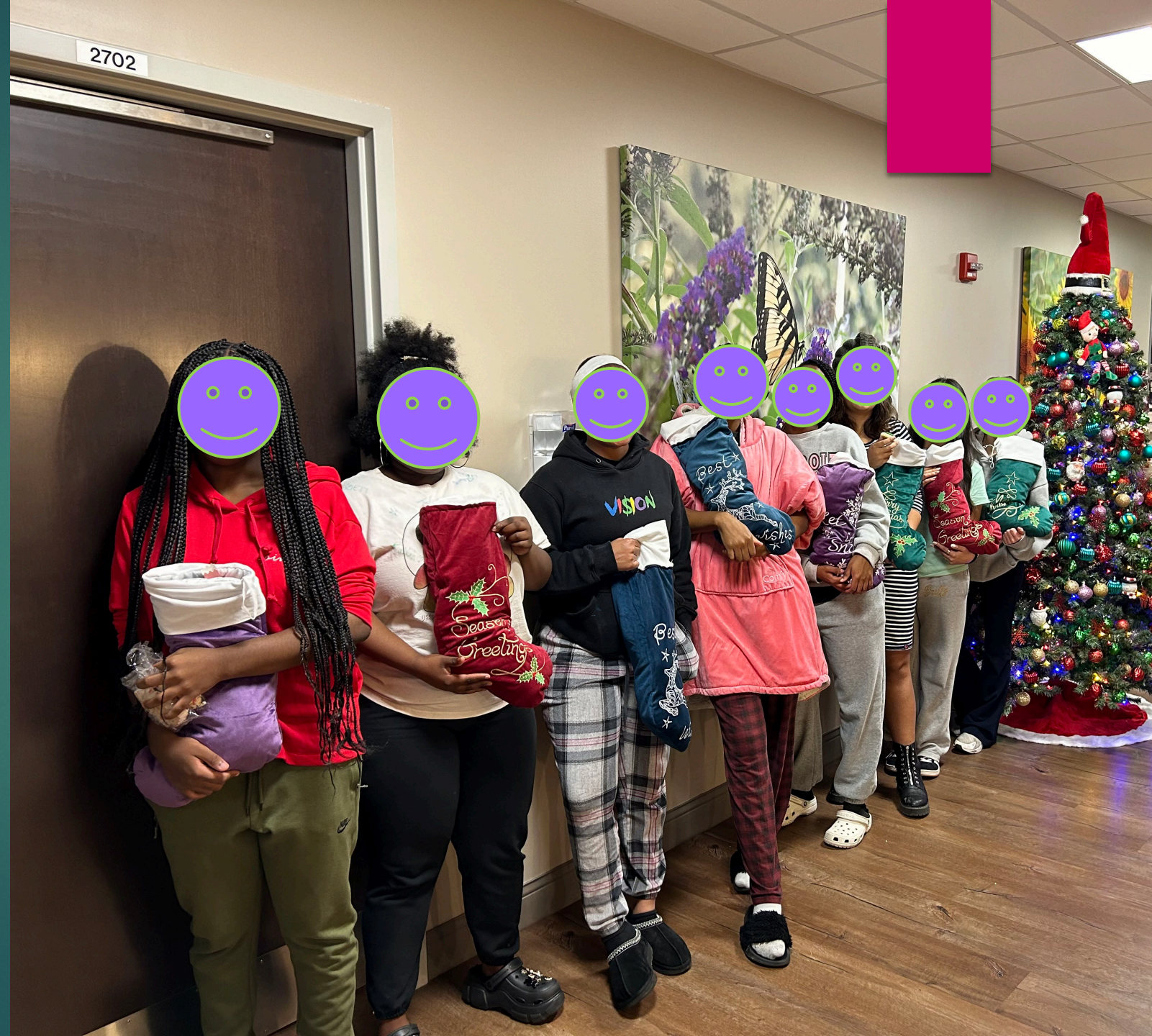
Yes, group is ~~well~~ helpful.

# Our Dilemma

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The girls don't want to leave group!

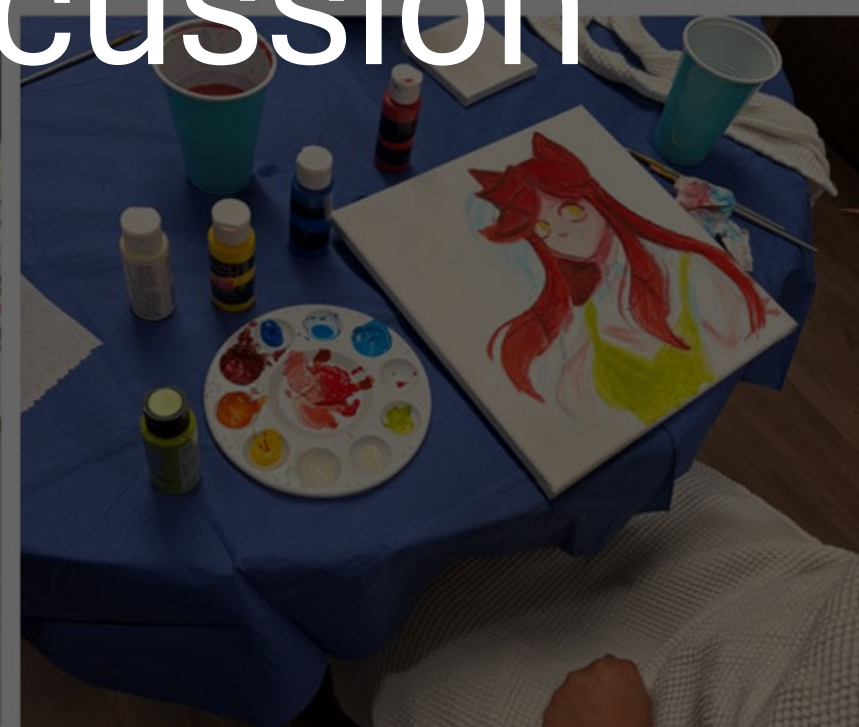
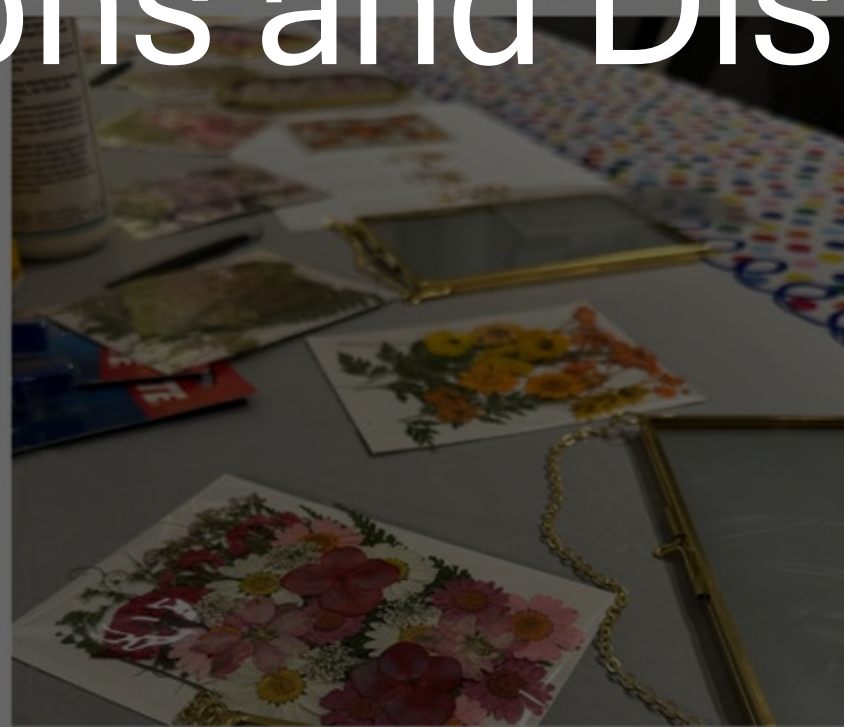
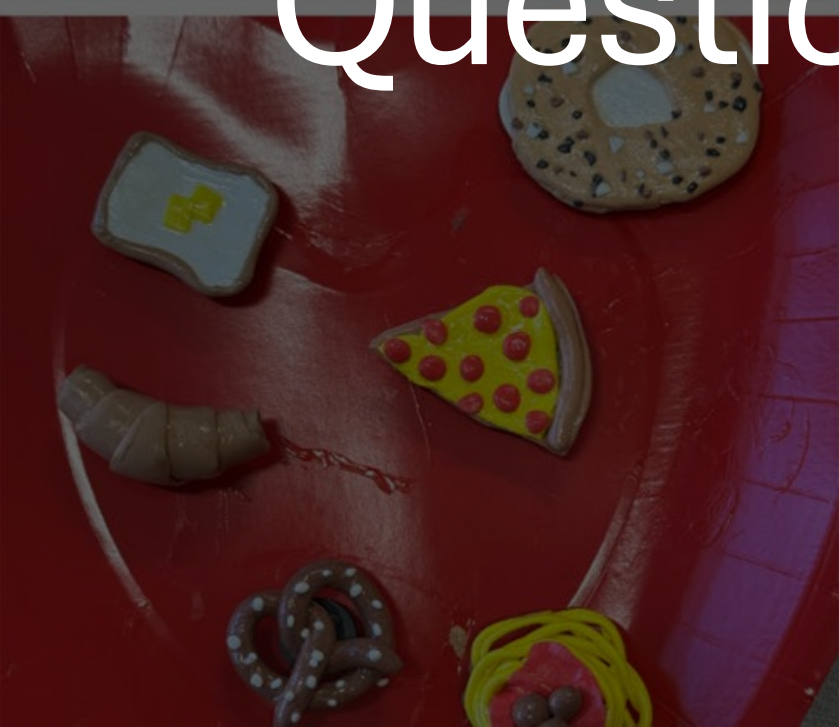
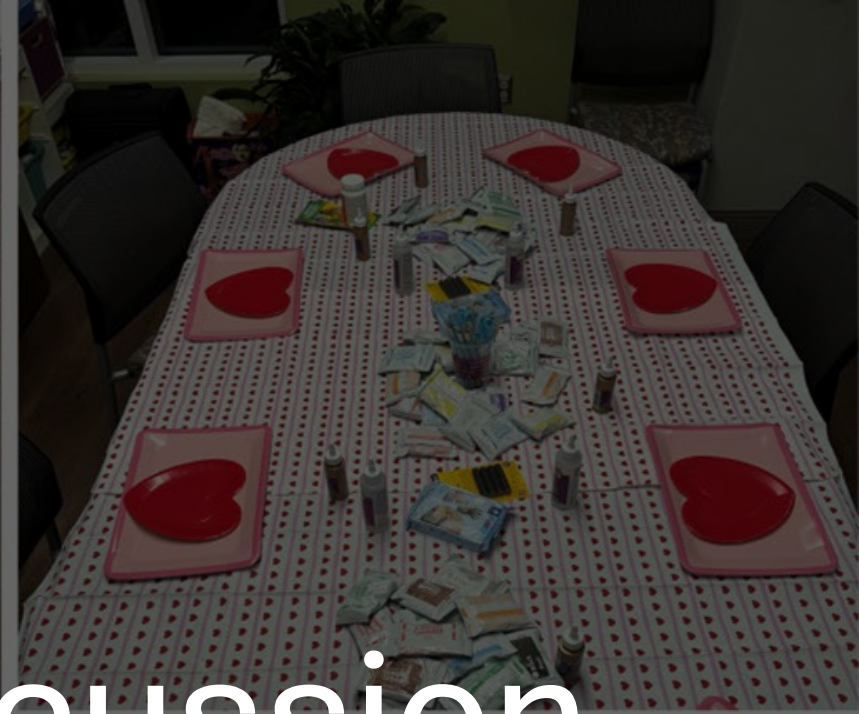
- Transitional Group
  - College-Aged
  - Every other month
  - One year long (we hope!)





# Case Study, Eliza:

- History
- Trauma Symptoms
- Interventions
  - Individual Therapy
  - SAFE Squad Group Member
  - SAFE Squad College-Age Transitional Group Member
- Court Outcome
  - Victim Impact Statement
- Where is she now?



# Questions and Discussion

# Contact Us



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