

Business Better (Season 2, Episode 15): Trauma-Informed Investigations, Part Five: The Investigation Continues With Forensic Interviews of Minors

Speakers: Jill Steinberg, Katharine Manning, and Rachel Booker

Steve Burkhart:

Welcome to Business Better, a podcast designed to help businesses navigate the new normal. I'm your host, Steve Burkhart. After a long career at global consumer products company BIC – where I served as Vice President of Administration, General Counsel, and Secretary – I'm now Of Counsel in the Litigation Department at Ballard Spahr, a law firm with clients across industries and throughout the country. This is episode five of the "Trauma-Informed Investigations" series. In today's episode, we discuss Children's Advocacy Centers, forensic interviews of children, and the multidisciplinary team approach to helping child victims of abuse. We're joined by special guest Rachel Booker, who serves as the Forensic Services Program Director at Safe Shores, D.C.'s only Children's Advocacy Center. Speaking with Ms. Booker is my Ballard Spahr colleague Jill Steinberg, a Partner in Ballard's Philadelphia Office; and Katharine Manning, author of "The Empathetic Workplace: Five Steps to a Compassionate, Calm, and Confident Response to Trauma on the Job," and the President of Blackbird DC. So now let's turn the episode over to Jill Steinberg.

Jill Steinberg:

This is Trauma Informed Investigations, a podcast from Ballard Spahr. I'm Jill Steinberg, a partner at the firm, and I'm joined by Katherine Manning. Hey, Katherine.

Katharine Manning:

Hi, Jill.

Jill Steinberg:

How are you?

Katharine Manning:

I'm great. How are you?

Jill Steinberg:

I'm wonderful. I'm going to tell you something that you know, which is about this podcast. But anybody who might be tuning in to this episode, having not heard the prior episode, we're going to bring you up to speed real quickly. The intention of this podcast is to examine organizational responses to sexual abuse allegations from the perspective of individuals like us who've handled these types of matters, for me as an attorney who investigated and prosecuted these cases for many years, and for Katherine as an attorney and expert on trauma and victims' rights.

Jill Steinberg:

In prior episodes we used a hypothetical to facilitate our discussion. That fictional scenario involves the sexual abuse of a teenager at a camp that's being held on a college campus. We discussed how to identify suspect behavior, the role of witnesses to these events, and how they should respond. We also talked about the first disclosure of the abuse to a high school counselor, and how that person should respond.

Jill Steinberg:

In episode three we engaged an expert to address trauma in the brain, and how trauma impacts disclosure and memory among other things. In the last episode we discussed the further and final disclosures to others, including the college that hosted the camp, and the investigatory steps that should take place once the information becomes known to all relevant parties.

Jill Steinberg:

Today, we are going to focus on working with children who are victims of abuse, and in particular conducting proper interviews with children under these circumstances. We have with us, Rachel Booker. Rachel is the forensics services program director, conducts forensics interviews at Safe Shores, Washington DC's only children's advocacy center.

Jill Steinberg:

Rachel has conducted hundreds of forensic interviews with children regarding sexual abuse, physical abuse, and the witnessing of violence. Rachel completed the internationally recognized National Children's Advocacy Center Forensic Interview Training, and the NCAC Advanced Forensic Interview Training.

Jill Steinberg:

She has enhanced her skills through training provided by the National Criminal Justice Training Center and the FBI on topics relating to her work, including child sex trafficking forensic interviewing, presenting evidence in child forensic interviews, and the multidisciplinary team response to child sex trafficking. Additionally, Rachel is certified in Stewards of Children Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Training.

Jill Steinberg:

Rachel has provided trainings about child abuse and forensic interviewing to the United Nations, the United States Army, and DC Bar Association, as well as other local state and federal organizations. So, basically, Rachel knows what she's talking about. Welcome, Rachel. Thanks for being here.

Rachel Booker:

Thanks so much for having me.

Jill Steinberg:

So, let's start out with talking about what is a child advocacy center, because I think folks like us who've been working in this space, we take for granted that these things exist and they're really important, but someone who's listening to this from outside of the field, they might not have any idea what it is. So, let's just start with the basics. What is it, and what's the history behind it? Why did it come to be?

Rachel Booker:

So, child sexual abuse is a universal issue that affects children across race, gender, and socioeconomic status. One out of 10 children will be sexually abused by their 18th birthday, and those are just the reported cases. But there's hope, and this is the reason children's advocacy centers now exist.

Rachel Booker:

The purpose is to really center the child in the context of the investigation. So, children's advocacy centers, or as you'll hear me call them, CACs, are safe and child friendly environments where a multidisciplinary team of professionals come together to discuss and make decisions about the investigation, treatment, intervention, and prosecution of child abuse cases.

Rachel Booker:

So, the CAC model was created to bring all of these professionals together in order to ensure that they get the information they need, while also ensuring that children don't have to retell their stories over and over, so that they can reduce the trauma of going through this process while also encouraging that these joint investigations occur.

Rachel Booker:

So, the CAC that I work for is called Safe Shores, which is DC's only children's advocacy center. And our mission is to provide intervention, hope, and healing for children and families that are affected by abuse, trauma, and violence in DC. And it also works to prevent child abuse through education and training.

Rachel Booker:

So, Safe Shores' programs that you'll hear a bit about today, include the Forensic Services program, our Client Advocacy Services program, Clinical Services that provides therapy to children and caregivers, and then the Prevention and Outreach program, and lastly, our MDT Advancement and Support program that works with that multidisciplinary team of professionals I spoke about earlier.

Jill Steinberg:

You talked about Safe Shores where you work as being the district's only child advocacy center. Are there CACs, as you call them, all around the country, and generally speaking, what is the geographic reach of the child advocacy centers, and how are they funded?

Rachel Booker:

Children's advocacy centers are located all over the country, and the model's starting to be known internationally as well. CACs can all look different, but they all follow the same child-friendly and trauma-informed model. This is the case whether the CACs are located within hospitals, child protection agencies, or are a completely separate organization like Safe Shores.

Rachel Booker:

In terms of Safe Shores' funding, Safe Shores budget is made up of private and public funding, with the majority of our government-funding coming from competitive grant processes. We work with individual and corporate donors, small and large foundations, and our government partners to maintain a diverse and sustainable funding stream. We also accept individual donations because we cannot do this work alone.

Jill Steinberg:

How is it that a child typically makes his or her way to you? Are there typical paths that a matter might take or a person might take to end up at Safe Shores or at another children's advocacy center?

Rachel Booker:

Yeah. So, the CAC receives referrals in a few ways. Our forensic services program receives referrals from our MDT, specifically from the police and child protective services. But our other programs who provide therapy and advocacy services also receive some referrals from the community. So, that can come from caregivers or other people who may work with the children who make those referrals to Safe Shores.

Katharine Manning:

Rachel, I'd like to talk just a bit about MDT's or Multidisciplinary Teams. I think they are such a fantastic concept because they really are aiming to try to minimize trauma to the child and make sure that all of the different people and departments that

need information from this child are able to get it without the kid having to go through multiple interviews by multiple different people. So, can you describe a bit about the MDTs, who all is participating in that, and how you work together?

Rachel Booker:

Yes, of course. So, the MDT, or Multidisciplinary Team, is the group of professionals that work together in these child abuse cases. So, in DC, our MDT consists of Child and Family Services Agency, which is CPS, that's how most people know it, the hospital. So, our local hospital is the Children's National Health Center, and we specifically work with CAPC the Child and Adolescent Protection Center.

Rachel Booker:

We also work with the police. So, in DC it's the DC Metropolitan Police Department, the Youth and Family Services Division. Then, we work with two prosecuting agencies, the Office of Attorney General and the United States Attorney's Office. And lastly, the CAC is also part of the MDT. So, ours in DC is Safe Shores. So, all of these agencies come together to work together in joint investigations for the child abuse cases.

Katharine Manning:

I just love that. Obviously, all of those different agencies need information, whether it's CPS or the doctor or the police or the prosecutor, they all need information from the child about what it is that happened. And in an adult case, that adult would be getting interviewed by a lot of different people. But in a child case, we realized, systemically, that was not going to be effective or fair, healthy, to the child. So, this other system was developed.

Katharine Manning:

And what happens with the MDT is, questions are funneled to one interviewer who sits with the child and actually asks all those questions. And Rachel, am I right that you're one of those people, you're one of those child forensic interviewers-

Rachel Booker:

Yes.

Katharine Manning:

... Who asks all those questions? Yeah. Thanks. So, can you describe a bit how that process works?

Rachel Booker:

Yeah. So, when a family walks into Safe Shores on the day of their forensic interview, they're greeted by a client advocate and are welcomed into a child friendly space. So, they see colorful children's art, from fresh artists located in Philadelphia, they're great if you want to check them out, and fish tanks. And all the CACs are child-friendly environments.

Rachel Booker:

Our client advocates will then give a tour of the forensic interview room if the family would like to see the space, and they're the client advocates are there to answer any questions they might have about the process before we begin. But the forensic interviewer will then come introduce themselves and bring the child back to the forensic interview room.

Rachel Booker:

And the interview is a conversation that a trained forensic interviewer has with the child about an abusive event or multiple abusive events in an open-ended manner and non-suggestive and non-leading way that's legally defensible. So, the forensic interview is video and audio recorded, and the MDT sits in a separate room and watches the interview in live time to get the information that they need for their investigations.

Rachel Booker:

So, this way, the child only has to talk to one person, who is a trained forensic interviewer and is a professional that's been trained in child development, trauma-informed care, and nationally recognized and research-based forensic interviewing protocols. The purpose of a forensic interview is to obtain the most accurate statement from a child that will support the decision making of the multidisciplinary team and the criminal legal and child protective systems.

Rachel Booker:

But we don't make children talk about anything that they're not ready to talk about. So, when a child is unable or unwilling to provide information regarding any concern about abuse, that's when other interventions to assess the child's experience and safety are required.

Rachel Booker:

So, it's important for adults who aren't trained forensic interviewers to know that they should not force children to talk if they're not ready. If a child does come to you and share information, you can thank them for sharing the information. And if you need to ask questions, it's important that you ask questions in an open-ended way.

Katharine Manning:

Thanks for pointing that out. One of the things we talked about on an earlier episode was being the person who receives the first report of child abuse and how that can be a really challenging situation. As somebody who is receiving that report, you obviously have your own emotional response to it and fear and a lot of worry and concern about the child and what happens next. So, do you have any advice on that front? What are some things that you hope people will do when a child first comes to them and indicates that they may have been a victim of abuse?

Rachel Booker:

Well, I have a couple of things I can share, but I would suggest that adults take the Stewards of Children Training by Darkness to Light, because this training actually addresses this very thing. But some of the things you'll learn when you take this training is the importance of staying calm. Also, affirming the child, thanking them for telling you, and letting the child know that it's not their fault.

Rachel Booker:

And as I mentioned earlier, try to only ask open-ended questions that you have. So, maybe say something like, "Tell me more about that." We don't expect you or want you to be a forensic interviewer. The way our executive director, Michelle Booth Cole, describes forensic interviewing is that it's something that takes such a complex skill set.

Rachel Booker:

She explains that because of the level of mental agility that's required to hold space with a child who's never met you before, to develop a rapport, to make yourself accessible to the child, while also trying to carry the information that the team shared at pre-conference that they need for their investigations, and then asking questions and communicating in a way that you don't introduce vocabulary into the interview, and making sure you're staying present with the child and listening.

Rachel Booker:

We want people to understand that just because you're good with kids doesn't mean that you're a trained forensic interviewer. And we only want you to ask questions that you need to know to keep the child safe, and to make a report in that open-ended manner, but try not to continue questioning the child about the events. If they openly share, then you can definitely listen, but avoid asking questions and having the child repeat the traumatic details over and over.

Rachel Booker:

We also suggest trying not to get angry or having any strong emotional reactions, even though we understand that can be difficult. And try to avoid making any promises that can't be kept. You don't want to say something like, "I'll make sure they go to jail," but instead, say something like, "I'm gonna be here to support you for whatever happens next."

Jill Steinberg:

That's great advice. Some of the things that you just mentioned brought to mind a question, actually, a two-part question. First is, the age range of the children that you're working with, what is that age range? Then, depending on the age of the child, how is it that you might adjust your approach?

Jill Steinberg:

Because one of the things you talk about is vocabulary and being present, mental agility, all these things, I'm sure, will be variable depending on the age of the child that you're dealing with, and a lot of other factors. So, I know it's not susceptible to one answer, but to the best you can, how can you describe how you might adjust your approach with different ages of children?

Rachel Booker:

So, I have interviewed children who are three years old, and the interview was about 20 minutes long, and I've interviewed 17-year-olds, and it was about two and a half hours long. So, this is going to really depend on a number of factors. It can depend on age, a child's developmental level, their attention span, and the level of detail a child is able and willing to give. Also, something to consider is whether the child's in the active disclosure process, or if the abuse was discovered in some way.

Rachel Booker:

The length of an interview can also depend on whether we're talking about a one-time incident or if it was chronic abuse. But depending on the age and the developmental level of the child, questions also may need to be more simplified. The biggest thing I would say is that our expectations will need to be different depending on the level of detail that we're expecting the child to provide.

Rachel Booker:

For example, on a good day, with a five-year-old, getting information about who, what, and where is great, but for a teenager who's operating at a typical developmental level for their age, we might hope for some additional information like the context around the disclosure, or more information about body positions, maybe some more information about what happened before the abuse and after the abuse, or understanding more about the conversations. So, more detail and a wider variety of information from a child who can recall and communicate that information.

Rachel Booker:

And when we talk about developmental level, this also touches on the degrees of vulnerability. So, overall, kids are vulnerable, period. Then, if there's any disability or delay, they're at an even higher risk of being abused. Therefore, the adults that care for them will need to be even more vigilant about the situations that they place them in.

Rachel Booker:

And this is also why Safe Shores will conduct forensic interviews for developmentally delayed adults, because there are people who are at an adult age but function at a different age level. And along the human spectrum, there are going to be varying capacities. And although there is a forensic interview structure, it's flexible enough for the interviewer to tailor their question to the person that's in front of them.

Jill Steinberg:

And are there ever times that you've used ... I've seen in cases where there are drawings, where the child might mark on a drawing. Are there other external tools, you could say, that might be used to help the individual express things that maybe they don't have words for? Can you describe that process a bit as to, do you guys use those tools, and in what context are they appropriate?

Rachel Booker:

So, in our forensic interviews we always have paper and crayons or colored pencils in the room so that children can write or draw if they want. Sometimes children prefer to write a word down that they're uncomfortable saying out loud, or they might draw a picture to help them explain something. In order to aid children in giving specific details about abuse, forensic interviewers can also present evidence in the forensic interview.

Rachel Booker:

So, our forensic interviewers have been trained to do this by the FBI and NCJTC in a trauma informed way. So, it's not like what you see on crime television. Additionally, one of the other things we do is, we take pictures of the children who come to the CAC for interviews, because some of these cases don't get prosecuted for years, and it's helpful to have a reminder of the child and what they looked like on the day of their interview.

Katharine Manning:

Rachel, when you just said that you might present evidence during the interview, do you mean, for instance, if there are photographs taken of the abuse, that those might be shown during the interview?

Rachel Booker:

Yes. It can be photographs of the abuse like child sexual abuse material, but sometimes it's also maybe a journal that a child wrote in and was discovered, and they may have made a disclosure in their journal, and so we might use that to get more information about the disclosure in the journal. But one thing is that we can't introduce any evidence into the forensic interview that's not externally verifiable.

Rachel Booker:

We would avoid saying something like "I heard you told your mom that your dad touched your private part" because that's too specific and leading. But if we had maybe some information that the child was at a doctor's office and there's a medical report, that's information where we could say, "I understand that you went to the doctor. Tell me the reason you went to the doctor," and get at it that way.

Katharine Manning:

Excellent. Thank you. And what you were just saying highlights something that I think is quite common in cases involving child victims and witnesses, which is that the child is sometimes really reluctant to participate and doesn't want to say anything that might get somebody in trouble. Sometimes the story changes from one telling to the next. And I know that for people who are less familiar with kids testifying, that can be a stressful thing, that you don't know.

Katharine Manning:

I'm thinking in particular around parents or caregivers whose children might be involved in a case who might be feeling anxious about, "Well, he said this to me, but now he won't say it again," or, "He's kind of ... He's saying something different than he said before." So, can you talk a bit about the range of normal when it comes to kids testifying?

Rachel Booker:

Yeah. Well, various studies report that due to specific characteristics of sexual abuse, youth often delay disclosing, deny abuse when asked, or recant abuse. And all of this is a normal part of the disclosure process. What's important to understand is that disclosure is a process, it's not a one-time event.

Rachel Booker:

And forensic interviewers utilize skills to attempt to mitigate these issues, but we know that the way a youth is treated during the initial forensic interview can significantly impact the youth's understanding of and ability to respond to the intervention process and the criminal legal system.

Rachel Booker:

But trauma shows up differently in different children. And some people think that children are supposed to be screaming or angry, but there may be kids who do everything right and get great grades and exercise too perfect behavior, so nobody will think that anything's wrong. So, there's no one way that a person acts or looks after being victimized.

Rachel Booker:

When interviewers talk to children who are nervous about speaking, we ask questions around reasons for reluctance, we try to provide reassurances, and also assess for any possible barriers, and seek to eliminate those barriers when it's possible. But again, if a child's not ready to talk or doesn't want to make a disclosure, we don't force them to speak.

Rachel Booker:

And in these moments, we rely heavily on our other MDT partners and other colleagues at Safe Shores. For example, our family advocates or client advocates, as they're called now, spend a lot of time making sure that the families have what they need, and they deal with some of this crisis intervention after a disclosure of abuse occurs.

Rachel Booker:

So, on the day of the interview, they can provide meals or snacks, they help with the Emergency Victims Crisis Fund so they can provide families things that they need. It's really addressing families basic needs, including the siblings as well. But that would be offering clothing or toiletries or food. Then, our advocates also can provide psycho education and victims' rights information.

Rachel Booker:

On the day of the interview, they spend time orienting the family to the children's advocacy center and to the process, and they can provide them with referrals, for housing, for legal aid, benefits, therapy, support group, really what the family needs, and they can provide ongoing support to the family. So, that can be assistance with filing for protective orders or even some emotional support in court.

Katharine Manning:

That's so great, Rachel, that there is that role of the advocate. Is that something that is available in every instance or is it something that families should ask for?

Rachel Booker:

So, at Safe Shores, every child that comes in for a forensic interview is connected with an advocate, but if families don't come through the forensic interview process, they can still request to have an advocate. So, they can just make a referral immediately to the advocacy program.

Katharine Manning:

That's really fantastic. And am I correct that in DC, in addition to the family advocate, there's also a teen advocate now?

Rachel Booker:

Yes, that's correct. So, because of a law that was created, all of the teens are now assigned an additional advocate, or offered an additional advocate. So, the law says that teens in DC now have the right to an advocate. And the teen advocates can accompany teens to sane exams or other appointments, and can be there for all law enforcement interviews.

Rachel Booker:

They also provide teens with crime victims' rights information and implement safety planning, offer other referrals, emotional support, and can also provide transportation. So, we really depend on our teen advocates to assist as well.

Katharine Manning:

It just seems like such a great show of respect for the autonomy of the teen, recognition that the family has needs, but also you want to make sure that the teen has somebody specific that they can talk to about what it is that they need. It's a really great program.

Jill Steinberg:

And I have a question for you about how you continue to support the child through the case, assuming that there is a case that goes forward after the initial interview and intervention, and we talked a bit about the expected hesitancy and evolving level of cooperation, and the narrative that the various individuals on the team might hear from the victim.

Jill Steinberg:

Sometimes, at least what I've experienced, sometimes what happens is you'll initially have a certain level of cooperation. You'll see that natural ebb and flow of interest and anxiety. But sometimes they'll say something like, "Well, I don't ever wanna testify about this though. I don't wanna ever wanna go to court." And it's almost like a bargaining, "I'll tell you this now, but like, then I'll be done."

Jill Steinberg:

Of course, you can't really promise what's going to ultimately happen. So, as the case is going forward, if there is in fact one, what is it that folks like you or other people on the team are communicating, or what advice and support can you give to the victim and the family to help deal with the fact that some of these things are now moving forward and not entirely within their control?

Rachel Booker:

So, in the majority of the cases, the forensic interviewers only talk to the child once. However, if there are additional allegations or if they just need more time to build rapport and feel comfortable, we may do what we call a follow-up interview. We'll never do a re-interview, but we really just pick up where we left off.

Rachel Booker:

Sometimes kids aren't ready to talk about everything just because we scheduled the forensic interview for that day, and sometimes there's so much information that a child benefits from a follow-up interview. But typically, the child's interaction with the interviewer ends when the interview ends.

Rachel Booker:

But the forensic interview is a tool of the investigation, whereas the CAC is not exclusively geared toward the investigation. So, our model is holistic so that we're dealing with the continuum of the issues in this family's life. So, this is different for our family advocates and our therapists, who I mentioned before can continue to support families throughout the investigation or as long as needed.

Rachel Booker:

So, sometimes they work with families for 30 days, sometimes it's for three years. And our Clinical Services program doesn't accept insurance, and is free to families. And this allows the therapist to provide services for as long as they need. There's also caregiver support group that families can be involved in for extended periods of time as well.

Rachel Booker:

But we really look to also try to support our team and support the families through the investigative process, and answer any questions that they may have along the way in case there are some barriers or some reasons that the family doesn't feel comfortable moving forward with the investigation.

Katharine Manning:

I also want to mention now that, in general, the investigators and prosecutors who are working on cases involving kids are people who have chosen to do that work and have been specially trained to work with children. And in addition, there are a lot of protections available to children in the court process. Almost every jurisdiction has some law similar to the Federal Law 3509 that provides additional privacy protections for children.

Katharine Manning:

So, children's names, for instance, are not supposed to be ever used in open court or appear in any public filings. Kids are often able to access additional supports if they do have to testify in court. For instance, they might be able to have an adult attendant come and sit with them or bring a favorite toy with them. They might be able to use additional aids like a doll or something like that to help them with their testimony.

Katharine Manning:

So, there are a lot of protections built into proceedings with kids from the very beginning and really throughout the case. Is that your experience as well, Jill?

Jill Steinberg:

Yes. And I think that's a part of what I call it the bargaining process, the process that sometimes you have to go through when people are resisting and they feel they've done enough, and frankly, they have done enough. But sometimes things just, they keep going because the system has decided that it's in the interest of the community at large to prosecute someone, for example.

Jill Steinberg:

Or there could be a number of other reasons why things continue to be unresolved as a result of the underlying abuse. So, that's certainly something that I would try and do in my role as a prosecutor, which is just one of many people who are operating in this environment is, here are all the things I can do to protect you, to protect your privacy, to ensure that discovery isn't floating around out there, your name isn't floating around out there.

Jill Steinberg:

And, again, you can never tell somebody they're never going to have to testify, and that's a hard thing because they always want that. And you can't promise it. And Rachel, as you say, you don't want to make a promise that you can't follow through on. That's the worst. But what you can do is saying, "Well, here's what I can do. And I'll do everything I can."

Jill Steinberg:

And certainly, having an open conversation about, if it is a criminal case, for example, how you could resolve the case short of the person having to testify and having them be a part of a dialogue about how it is that the matter could be resolved. They may or may not be happy with it, but at least they feel they're having an opportunity to have a say and to have some level of control over the situation, at least in terms of voicing their opinions.

Jill Steinberg:

So, that was what I did is, I tried to give as much information, be as protective as possible, but still be honest about the level of control that the person could have over the situation.

Katharine Manning:

Rachel, I just have to ask you, how have you been able to conduct these interviews during COVID? Has it continued or did you have to stop them?

Rachel Booker:

That's a great question. So, Safe Shores was one of the first CACs to move towards using tele-forensic interviews during the pandemic. We helped develop the guide with National Children's Alliance that other CACs can use. And at the beginning of the pandemic, Safe Shores implemented the use of tele-forensic interviews. And these tele-forensic interviews were so that the child and the interviewer could be in a separate room, but they could still talk to each other and the child could still be interviewed.

Rachel Booker:

Although now, we do the majority of our interviews in-person again, this setup has actually given us additional options to reach children who may be located in detention centers, residential treatment facilities, or even hospitals. And where we may not have had access to interviewing them as quickly before, we are able to now.

Katharine Manning:

That is fantastic. I remember, in my time at the Justice Department, the challenges around kids in rural areas, sometimes kids living on Indian reservations, for instance, it would be very difficult to get a trained child forensic interviewer to them quickly enough when there was a report of abuse. So, I'm just thrilled to hear that you are having success with the tele-forensic interviews.

Jill Steinberg:

So, we've been talking a bit about, well, a lot about all the things that happen when there's a report of abuse, and the hypothetical situation that we set up and explored in the last few episodes, talked about this type of situation that happens at a camp hosted on a college campus to a teenager, all of these things, as you talked about at the very beginning, Rachel, they happen often, unfortunately, more often than people even recognize because so much of it goes unreported.

Jill Steinberg:

In ideal situation, of course these things wouldn't happen. So, let's pivot a bit and talk about prevention. You talked a bit about a prevention program that you have been trained on and you trained others on. Maybe you can talk a bit about that. Then, for

those people who may not have time to do those things, what is it that you recommend to people in terms of prevention activity or prevention knowledge?

Rachel Booker:

So, our prevention director always says that prevention works in partnership, meaning that we all have a role and can play a role when it comes to prevention. For prevention to succeed, there needs to be a partnership between child welfare professionals, health, community, and faith-based organizations, law enforcement and families.

Rachel Booker:

Communities must be provided with the resources. And we need to work together to increase awareness and contribute to promoting the social and emotional wellbeing of children and families in a safe environment. So, like I mentioned earlier, one suggestion would be to take the Stewards of Children training created by Darkness to Light. Safe Shores provides this training, and you can visit our website, SafeShores.org for more information.

Rachel Booker:

But what we know is adults are the first line of defense. And this training teaches adults how to recognize, respond to, and prevent child abuse. So, if adults want to help, you can take the training. It's not expensive, and you can do it online. But some other things that adults and caregivers can do is talk with your children, develop really good communication and loving relationships where they know they're not judged. They can tell you anything, so that when the hard issues come, they might be more likely to talk.

Rachel Booker:

Start talking to kids early about body safety. Teach them the names of their body parts. As a forensic interviewer, I hear children call things so many different names. And if parents can start teaching kids to get comfortable using the correct language, it also gives kids power.

Rachel Booker:

And it's important to create a culture where issues like this can be openly discussed. So, in organizations you want to offer training. We want people to feel comfortable knowing what to do if they see something, because it's a culture of silence, that is what allows abuse to persist.

Jill Steinberg:

Well, Rachel, thank you so much for joining us. This is incredibly informative, and I actually just want to thank you also for your service. What you do is incredible, enormously important to the community, and incredibly hard. I don't even know that there's a word that I could put to how difficult the everyday must be. So, thank you so much for spending this time with us, and thank you so much for your service.

Rachel Booker:

Thank you for having me and for sharing this information.

Steve Burkhart:

Thanks again to Jill Steinberg, Katharine Manning, and Rachel Booker. Make sure you visit our website, www.ballardspahr.com where you can find the latest news and guidance from our attorneys. Subscribe to the show on Apple podcast, Google Play, Spotify, or your favorite podcast platform. If you have any questions or suggestions for the show, please email podcast@ballardspahr.com. Stay tuned for a new episode coming soon and thank you for listening.