

APRIL 2024

# Mental Health Matters

## *Everyone Has A Story*



APRIL IS NATIONAL  
**CHILD ABUSE**  
PREVENTION MONTH



APRIL  
**STRESS**  
AWARENESS  
MONTH

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# April is Child Abuse Prevention Month

April is child abuse prevention month. The Baldwin County Child Advocacy Center (BCCAC) serves all children who have suffered or witnessed severe physical and sexual abuse. The BCCAC has two locations, in Summerdale and Bay Minette. The mission of the BCCAC is “to provide resources and services to child victims of sexual abuse and severe physical abuse, their supportive family members, and the community through a multidisciplinary team approach while empowering all towards child abuse prevention.” The BCCAC provides counseling services, forensic interviews, family advocacy, court school, prevention education, TransParenting classes, and Rollercoasters program. Last year, the BCCAC served 417 children in Baldwin County through direct service programs (counseling, forensic interviews, medical exams, and advocacy) and 6,042 children through the prevention programs.



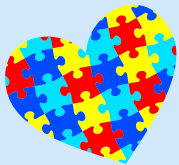
[www.baldwincountycac.org](http://www.baldwincountycac.org)



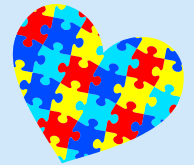
[Click here](#)

## ***Warning signs of possible child abuse/neglect:***

- Withdrawal from friends and/or usual activities
- Depression, anxiety or unusual fears, or an abrupt loss of self confidence
- Sleep disturbances
- Changes in behavior such as aggression, anger, and hyperactivity
- Changes in school performance
- Lack of supervision
- Frequent absences from school
- Defiant and delinquency behaviors
- Wearing clothing that is not weather appropriate
- Self-harming behaviors



## AUTISM AWARENESS



April is Autism Awareness Month. Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a broad range of behaviors such as repetitive behaviors, challenges with social skills, speech and nonverbal communication, all of which are most influenced by a combination of genetic and environmental factors. In 2013, the American Psychiatric Association merged four distinct autism diagnoses into one umbrella diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder (ASD). They included autistic disorder, childhood disintegrative disorder, pervasive developmental disorder-not otherwise specified (PDD-NOS) and Asperger syndrome. In 2021, The CDC reported approximately 1 in 44 children in the U.S. is diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). In 2018, data showed 1 in 27 boys and 1 in 116 girls identify with ASD, boys being four times more likely to be diagnosed than girls. For more information, visit [www.autismspeaks.org](http://www.autismspeaks.org).

The American Autism and Rehabilitation Center, located in Daphne, AL, provides speech, occupational, physical and behavioral therapy. Their mission is “Providing Hope for Your Special Needs Child.” For more information, visit [www.americanautismcenter.com](http://www.americanautismcenter.com)

# Stress Awareness Month

April is recognized as National Stress Awareness Month to bring attention to the negative impact stress has on our lives. Managing our stress is a central component of our overall wellness. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, the below chart helps to identify when we should seek help when experiencing stress versus anxiety.



## Stress

- Generally is a response to an external cause, such as taking a big test or arguing with a friend.
- Goes away once the situation is resolved.
- Can be positive or negative. For example, it may inspire you to meet a deadline, or it may cause you to lose sleep.

## Both

Both stress and anxiety can affect your mind and body. You may experience symptoms such as:

- Excessive worry
- Uneasiness
- Tension
- Headaches or body pain
- High blood pressure
- Loss of sleep

## Anxiety

- Generally is internal, meaning it's your reaction to stress.
- Usually involves a persistent feeling of apprehension or dread that doesn't go away, and that interferes with how you live your life.
- Is constant, even if there is no immediate threat.

***According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, the following are healthy ways to cope with stress:***

- Take breaks from the media
- Take care of your body (eat healthy, get enough sleep, and move more)
- Limit alcohol intake
- Avoid using illegal drugs or prescription drugs (other than prescribed)
- Avoid smoking, vaping, and use of other tobacco products
- Continue with annual health appointments, screenings, and vaccinations
- Make time for down time
- Connect with others





# Prevention & Support Staff Spotlight

## Mrs. Meagan Weaver

Mrs. Meagan Weaver is the fourth-sixth grades counselor at Florence B. Mathis Elementary School. This is her first year with Baldwin County Schools and her 20th year as a school counselor. She previously worked for Marshall County AL schools where she has served as a school counselor for all grade levels and alternative school. She began her career as a therapist for a psychiatric hospital and group home. Mrs. Weaver earned her bachelor's degree in psychology and criminal justice from Jacksonville University. She earned her master's in community counseling, specializing in marriage and family therapy, from the University of Alabama. She earned her Education Specialist degree in school counseling from the University of West Alabama. Mrs. Weaver is currently working on earning her PhD from Liberty University. Mrs. Weaver and her two daughters (Evelyn, 12th grade and Geneva, 6th grade) live in Foley, AL. They enjoy shopping, visiting the beach, and spending time with their pets. When asked what she loves most about being a school counselor at Florence B. Mathis Elementary School, she describes the loving students and staff that create a loving and kind community.

## Florence B. Mathis Elementary School Dedicated To Excellence In Education



Mathis Elementary ignites a passion for learning in an environment where all are nurtured and inspired for a successful future.

## Mrs. Beth R Dupuis

Mrs. Beth Dupuis is the Kindergarten-third grade counselor at Florence B. Mathis Elementary School. This is her 3rd year with Baldwin County Schools. Prior to then she worked in central Florida for twenty years. She was a science and dance teacher before becoming a school counselor in 2016. Mrs. Dupuis grew up in Mobile, AL. She earned her bachelor's degree in dance from Huntington University in Montgomery. She earned her master's in school counseling from American Public University. Mrs. Dupuis has two adult children. Her son, Brandon, is a mechanical engineer in San Antonio, Texas and her daughter, Mia, is a music education teacher in Lakeland, Florida. Mrs. Dupuis loves to dance, visit the beach, and spend time with her family. When asked what she loves most about being a school counselor at Florence B. Mathis Elementary School, she described the loving environment and the joy she feels when the students greet her each morning. Mrs. Dupuis has recently earned the RAMP Award. The RAMP Award is the highest honor a school counseling program can receive in the nation. This prestigious award will be celebrated at a special Awards Gala this summer.

*pictured left to right, Mrs. Dupuis and Mrs. Weaver*



# Youth Violence Prevention Week is April 22-26

Youth violence is a significant problem that affects thousands of young people each day, and in turn, their families, schools, and communities. The Prevention Week was established in 2001. Youth violence and crime affect a community's economic health, as well as individuals' physical and mental health and well-being. Homicide is the third leading cause of death for youth in the United States. In 2016, more than 530,000 young people ages 10-24 were treated in emergency departments for injuries sustained from violence. Youth violence typically involves young people hurting other peers and it can take different forms. Examples include fights, bullying, threats with weapons, and gang-related violence. A young person can be involved with youth violence as a victim, offender, or witness. Sandy Hook Promise is a national nonprofit organization founded and led by several family members whose loved ones were killed at Sandy Hook Elementary School on December 14, 2012. Based in Newtown, Connecticut, the mission of Sandy Hook Promise is to honor all victims of gun violence by turning the tragedy into a moment of transformation. According to [www.sandyhookpromise.org](http://www.sandyhookpromise.org), "By empowering youth to 'know the signs' and uniting all people who value the protection of children, we can take meaningful actions in schools, homes, and communities to prevent gun violence and stop the tragic loss of life." The safety and protection of students and staff of Baldwin County Schools is of the highest priority. Each school is served by a School Resource Officer. We are grateful for each of them and the partnership with our local law enforcement agencies.

## Preventing Teen Dating Violence

Teen Dating Violence is an adverse childhood experience (ACE) that affects millions of adolescents in the US. Intimate partner violence includes physical violence, sexual violence, psychological aggression, and stalking.

According to the CDC, Teen dating violence is common. Data from CDC's Youth Risk Behavior Survey in 2019 indicate that among U.S. high school students who reported dating during the 12 months before the survey:

- About 1 in 12 experienced physical dating violence.
- About 1 in 12 experienced sexual dating violence.



Image credit: The Centers for Disease Control & Prevention

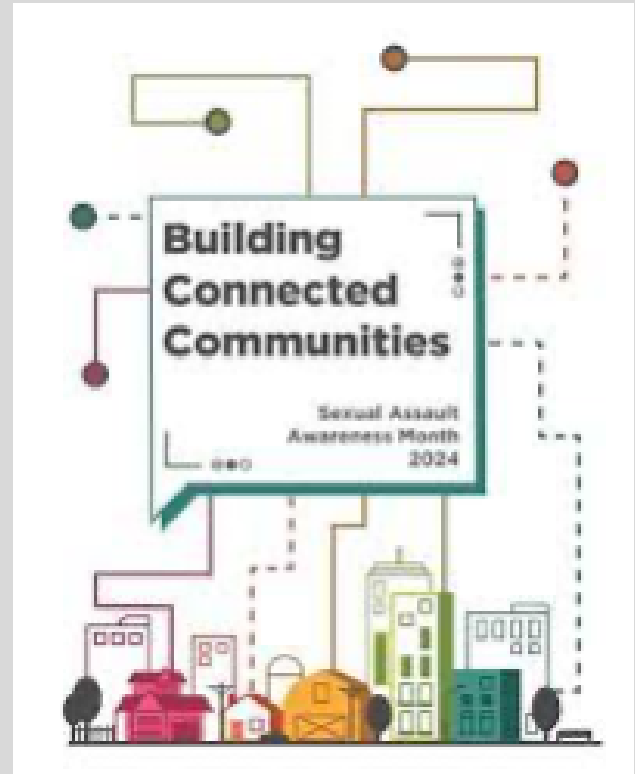


Some teens are at greater risk than others. Female students experienced higher rates of physical and sexual dating violence than male students. Students who identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer (LGBTQ) or those who were unsure of their gender identity experienced higher rates of physical and sexual dating violence compared to students who identified as heterosexual.

# April is Sexual Assault Awareness Month

April 2024 marks the 23rd anniversary of Sexual Assault Awareness Month. This year's theme is "Building Connected Communities." According to the National Sexual Violence Resource Center, 81% of women and 43% of men reported experiencing some form of sexual harassment and/or assault in their lifetime. 1 in 5 women in the U.S. experienced rape or attempted rape in their lifetime. 24.8% of men in the U.S. experienced some form of sexual violence in their lifetime. 1 in 3 female victims of rape or attempted rape, experienced it for the first time between the ages of 11 and 17.

On March 29, 2024, President, Joe Biden signed a proclamation which in part states, "More than half of all women and nearly one-third of all men in America have experienced sexual violence. The rate of sexual violence is even higher for people of color. Survivors have faced this violence wherever life happens — at work, at school, at home, and online. It can upend people's jobs and contribute to mental health issues like depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder. It is an insult to our most basic humanity and everything we stand for as a Nation."



For more information, visit [www.nsvrc.org](http://www.nsvrc.org)



## The Lighthouse

The Lighthouse, a non-profit agency founded in 1994, provides domestic violence services to Baldwin, Monroe, Conecuh and Escambia counties in Alabama. The Lighthouse also provide sexual assault services to Baldwin and Escambia counties.

The mission of The Lighthouse is the elimination of family violence and sexual assault through education, intervention services, and collaboration with the community.



*"I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it. The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid, but he who conquers that fear."*

*-Nelson Mandela*

