



Vermont Association for the
Education of Young Children

An Affiliate of **naeyc**



MAKING
CONNECTIONS
MINI
CONFERENCE

November 15, 2025 • 8:45 AM-3:00 PM

• Mount Snow Resort •

39 Mount Snow Road, West Dover, VT 05356

• Purchase Your [Tickets Here](#) •

Ticket Information

vtaeyc.org/events/tags/mini

- VECN Members: \$35
- Non-Members: \$40
- VECN Member Dues (Discounted Rate): \$15

WELCOME

8:45 AM - 9:00 AM



Connections Begin Here

Please join Vermont Early Childhood Network Members and others at 8:45 AM to launch the Making Connections Conference, where we'll spend the day strengthening networks, deepening practice, and discovering new ways to make connections.

KEYNOTE SESSION

9:00 AM - 9:45 AM



Their Future is in Our Hands

Jeanine Fitzgerald

Almost every day there are heart wrenching reports and stories about the rising number of children with challenges, such as anxiety, depression and the behaviors that are the symptoms of these. The latest research brings with it the need for a real shift in parenting and early education practices. The critical question is "How are our daily choices and practices affecting a child's ability to make wise choices under stress and their capacity to thrive in the world?" This keynote examines these questions with a focus on the connection of relationships and the regulatory system of children.

Behaviors that Challenge

Jeanine Fitzgerald

We all experience behaviors from children that may be unwanted, frustrating, disturbing and confusing. Looking only at the behavior, rather than at the cause of the behavior fails them. This session examines authentic needs as the motivators of all behavior, with particular focus on the common triggers and the undeniable needs of all children, that when met, have the potential to cultivate a life of thriving rather than surviving.

Brain Development and Technology

Scott Noyes

There are numerous misconceptions and myths regarding the impact of technology on children's brain development. It is essential to view technology as a tool that can be utilized either constructively or destructively. Inappropriate or excessive use of technology poses risks to cognitive, emotional, and physical development. Research indicates that high screen time can affect the prefrontal cortex, leading to issues with attention, executive function, impulse control, and increased dopamine levels. Conversely, mindful and age-appropriate use of technology can offer significant benefits, such as educational opportunities and enhanced social connections, when used in moderation and balanced with traditional activities. This workshop will explore the intricate connections between technology and brain development.

Mini Makers Collaborative Sculptures (Process Art)

Carrie Becker

It's time to rip and tear some paper! Did you know that the precursor to using scissors is to learn to use your hands to rip and tear paper? During this session, participants will learn how to foster fine motor development in their students while creating their collaborative sculptures.

Compassion in Conflict: Caring for Self and Others in Challenging Times

April Brown

Conflict is a natural part of life and work, but few of us have learned healthy ways to navigate it. This interactive session invites participants to reflect on their own responses to conflict, explore compassion and self-compassion as tools for communication, and practice using the RAIN framework (Recognize, Accept, Investigate, Nurture) through guided activities. Attendees will leave with practical strategies to care for themselves during challenging moments and bring greater empathy and balance into their professional practice.

Stop Behaviors Before They Start: Inclusive Strategies for Neurodiverse Learners

Melissa Davis

This interactive session helps early childhood educators prevent challenging behaviors before they escalate. Participants will learn proactive strategies such as staff blocking, intentional language, consistent routines, and tailored supports for neurodivergent learners—creating classrooms where every child can thrive. Educators will leave with practical tools to build positive, predictable environments and gain access to a Padlet of ready-to-use visuals and resources for immediate implementation.

Adventure Playgrounds: Building Spaces for Early Childhood Growth

Morgan Leichter-Saxby

Adventure playgrounds are dynamic, child-directed spaces filled with loose parts, tools, and opportunities for creativity and risk-taking. In this session, Morgan Leichter-Saxby shares global examples and practical guidance on what makes adventure playgrounds unique, why flexible outdoor environments are essential for early childhood development, and how communities can begin creating them today. Participants will leave with both inspiration and concrete ideas for fostering more playful, resilient learning spaces.

Meet Our Trainers

Jeanine Fitzgerald



Jeanine draws on more than 35 years of professional experience to empower teachers and parents to achieve more with children "at risk." With experience as a certified teacher, mental health professional and mother of three grown children, she understands the promise of every child, as well as the diversity of their needs.

Scott Noyes



Scott has spent over 40 years working, teaching, and writing about children. He teaches graduate and undergraduate courses on challenging behaviors, leadership, and positive discipline, and is the author of several books, including Positive Discipline – That Works! and This Child is Driving Us Crazy – What Should We Do?

Carrie Becker



Carrie is the founder of Transforming Early Childhood Education, where she develops teacher trainings, mentors educators, and designs emergent-based curriculum. Drawing on her experiences as both a teacher and mother, she is passionate about creating learning environments that honor children as capable, curious, and eager to lead their own educational journeys.

Meet Our Trainers

April Brown



For over fifteen years, April has worked to heal from and disrupt non-affirming practices while destigmatizing mental health. With experience across multiple countries and educational settings, she has supported hundreds of teachers in adopting trauma-informed practices. She believes schools can be places of healing, connection, and joy—and that creating them requires unlearning harmful systems and embracing compassion.

Melissa Davis



Melissa Davis is the founder of Education Advisors LLC and has more than 17 years of experience in education, special education, and behavior support. As a national presenter, she partners with schools and districts to provide practical, proactive strategies that help educators create positive, well-managed classrooms and stronger learning environments. Her work is grounded in a commitment to empowering teachers with tools that are realistic, effective, and sustainable.

Morgan Leichter-Saxby



Morgan Leichter-Saxby, PhD is a therapeutic and community playworker with more than fifteen years experience supporting children's play and play professionals all around the world. As an independent researcher and Co-Founder of Pop-Up Adventure Play, their areas of interest include culturally relevant and intersectional approaches to play and public mental health, and environments in which people of all ages can practice skills of curiosity, creativity, and connection.

Making Connections Mini-Conference

Hosted by the Vermont
Early Childhood Networks:
Windham Early Childhood
Educators Co-Op &
Bennington Region
Starting Points

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Register Today

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