
Event Agenda

2026 VTAEYC Annual Early Childhood Education Conference

Wednesday, October 21, 2026

Conference Check-In & Welcome Coffee

8:00 AM – 9:00 AM | Location: Oscar Ballroom

Start your day by checking in, grabbing coffee or tea, and connecting with fellow attendees and Leadership Day exhibitors before the Opening Keynote begins.

Opening Plenary: Conversations That Matter! Developing Strengths-Based Communication Skills

9:00 AM – 10:30 AM | Location: Oscar Ballroom

KEYNOTE

We'll begin with opening remarks and a warm welcome to Leadership Day before transitioning into our Opening Plenary.

Every interaction is an opportunity to inspire, connect, and lead. In this dynamic keynote, you will discover how to transform everyday conversations into powerful moments that strengthen relationships, elevate practice, and build a positive, growth-focused culture. You will gain practical, easy-to-apply strategies for engaging educators in meaningful dialogue, including Appreciative Inquiry, strengths-based questioning, and reflective practices that make feedback more impactful and actionable. Walk away energized, with fresh ideas and a clear path for leading conversations that spark motivation, deepen engagement, and create lasting change.

Speaker



Susan MacDonald

Professional Speaker, Author, and Leadership Coach | Inspiring New Perspectives

Break

10:30 AM – 11:00 AM

Workshop Block 1

11:00 AM – 12:30 PM

IGNITE! Strategies for Fueling a Growth Culture

11:00 AM – 12:30 PM

CONNECTED LEADERSHIP

KEYNOTE

When professional growth is not intentionally supported, programs can lose momentum, and educators may feel disconnected or uncertain in their practice. Over time, this can impact relationships, collaboration, and overall program culture. Now imagine a program where educators feel inspired, supported, and engaged in continuous growth, where both educators and children can truly flourish.

This workshop will inspire you to bring a new way of working together to life in your program. You will explore how to cultivate a growth-oriented culture through strengthsbased approaches to professional learning and communication. Discover strategies to strengthen relationships, foster collaboration, set meaningful goals, and support shared accountability in ways that feel empowering and sustainable. Grounded in practical tools and reflective practices, this workshop will support you in leading positive change and creating programs where educators feel valued, confident, and motivated to grow.

Speaker



Susan MacDonald

Professional Speaker, Author, and Leadership Coach | Inspiring New Perspectives

Ask Licensing: Building Connections Through Conversation

11:00 AM – 12:30 PM

CONNECTED LEADERSHIP

Strong relationships begin with open communication. Join Vermont Child Care Licensing supervisors and representatives from Children's Integrated Services (CIS) for an interactive panel discussion focused on your questions. Guided by questions submitted by attendees, we'll explore topics such as variances, frequently misunderstood regulations, incident reports, self-reported serious violations, supporting children with challenging behaviors, and how Licensing and CIS work together to support children, families, and early childhood programs. Come ready to ask questions, gain clarity, and strengthen connections with partners who support your work.

[Click here to submit your questions in advance.](#)

Speakers



Beth Maurer

Director of Child Care Licensing | Child Development Division, Vermont Department for Children & Families



Keith Williams

Child Development Division, Vermont Department for Children & Families | Director of Children's Integrated Services

Trauma Informed Leadership for Uncertain Times

11:00 AM – 12:30 PM

CONNECTED LEADERSHIP

At its core, trauma-informed leadership is relational. In this workshop, leaders will explore what it means to grow and sustain a trauma-informed culture that fosters resilience in the face of uncertainty. Based in the neuroscience of trauma response, this workshop invites participants to identify their own leadership styles, role-modeling, and learn to foster psychological safety for their teams. Leaders will leave with tools to assist them in creating a workplace culture of regulated connection through relationship, communication, vulnerability, and action.

Speaker



Auburn Watersong

CEO and Founder | Watersong Consulting

Connected Leadership Starts Here: Leveraging Your Vermont Early Childhood Network

11:00 AM – 12:30 PM

CONNECTED LEADERSHIP

Many early childhood educators are encouraged to join a Vermont Early Childhood Network (VECN), but may be unsure of its value or how it can meaningfully support their work. This session shares the transformation of one network—from declining membership and uncertainty to a thriving, educator-driven community grounded in shared leadership, relationship-based practices, and connection.

Participants will explore how a “many hands make light work” approach supported the development of committees, co-leadership structures, and increased member engagement. Through guided reflection and structured dialogue, participants will consider their own experiences with networks and identify opportunities to strengthen connection, communication, and collaboration within their communities.

This interactive session will also highlight how the Vermont Association for the Education of Young Children and Vermont Early Childhood Networks can serve as powerful supports for educator well-being, leadership development, and sustainable professional practice.

Participants will leave with practical, relationship-based strategies they can immediately implement to deepen engagement, build shared leadership, and strengthen the systems that support educators, children, and families.

Speaker



Tammie Hazlett

Early Childhood Educator | Tammie's Early Care & Education

Co-speaker



Sherry Boudro

NAEYC

Leadership Day Lunch

12:30 PM – 1:45 PM | Location: Oscar Ballroom

Workshop Block 2

1:45 PM – 3:15 PM

Beyond Hiring for “Fit”: Strategies to Reduce Bias and Increase Diversity in the Hiring Process

1:45 PM – 3:15 PM

CONNECTED LEADERSHIP

Join Becky Millard, Director of Northern Lights at CCV for an interactive discussion of concrete strategies to reduce bias and increase diversity in your hiring process. Through use of structured interviews, competencies, rubrics, and behavioral-based interview questions, you can actively remove some of the bias inherent in traditional hiring processes and prioritize candidates with the right set of skills and demonstrated experience. Participants will receive and explore a hiring toolkit detailing use of structured interviews, behavioral-based interview questions, competencies, and rubrics as part of an anti-bias hiring process. Participants will also practice using these strategies in small groups to select candidates in a mock hiring process.

Speaker



Becky Millard

Director of Northern Lights | Northern Lights at the Community College of Vermont

(Beyond Buy-In) Building Program Culture that Connects Staff, Systems, and Student Outcomes

1:45 PM – 3:15 PM

CONNECTED LEADERSHIP

Many early childhood programs struggle not because of lack of effort, but because culture, staff, expectations, and daily practices are not fully aligned. This session explores how to intentionally build a positive, inclusive program culture that supports strong relationships, staff engagement, and meaningful outcomes for children.

Participants will examine how culture is shaped through daily interactions, communication, and shared expectations, and how alignment across staff and systems can improve consistency and impact. Through guided reflection, real-world scenarios, and collaborative discussion, attendees will explore strategies to strengthen team culture, increase staff ownership, and create programs that effectively meet the needs of their communities.

Participants will leave with practical, actionable tools they can immediately apply to strengthen culture and support long-term program success.

Speaker



Colin Hanley

Statewide Direct Services Coordinator | Southwestern Child Development Commission

Co-speaker



Jon Williams

Statewide School Age Project Manager | Southwestern Child Development Commission

Rooted in Place: Building Sustainable Early Childhood Programs Through Community Connection

1:45 PM – 3:15 PM

CONNECTED LEADERSHIP

Early childhood programs are increasingly challenged by low or inconsistent enrollment, high staff turnover, and the ongoing pressure of balancing budgets. This interactive session explores how place-based education and intentional community connection can serve as practical strategies to address these issues while strengthening program sustainability.

Participants will examine how building authentic relationships with local organizations, families, and community resources can increase program visibility, support enrollment and retention, enrich curricula, and create shared opportunities that reduce costs. The session will also highlight how place-based approaches can deepen staff engagement and job satisfaction by fostering meaningful, connected work.

Beyond individual programs, this work contributes to stronger, more resilient communities. Early childhood programs can serve as hubs of connection that support local economies, strengthen family networks, and create opportunities for intergenerational engagement.

Through real-world examples and guided activities, participants will identify actionable strategies and leave with a personalized plan to integrate place-based practices that benefit children, programs, and the broader community.

Speaker



Julie Koehler

Executive Director | Beaver Brook Children's School, Inc

Stewardship as Legacy: Passing the Torch in Child Care Organizations

1:45 PM – 3:15 PM

CONNECTED LEADERSHIP

If you are an upcoming leader of a program or a leader thinking about making a plan to transition out of a current leadership/ownership position, join us for this session about how to develop a plan to prepare for this transition. Vermont benefits from many established child care businesses that are being led by strong leaders. As is typical for most businesses, child care or not, leadership of these programs will shift over time. Ownership of individually owned, for-profit programs and family child care programs will change, and non-profit program leadership will transition. Child care businesses that are prepared will navigate change in leadership with fewer disruptions and more stability for the families, business and staff. Preparing for transitions should be an early and ongoing part of business operations and not to be addressed when a change is imminent. A successful business transition happens through being prepared, leaders' objectivity and clarity.

Speaker



Jen Severance

Business Development Manager | First Children's Finance

Co-speaker



LouAnn Beninati

FCF Consultant | First Children's Finance

Break

3:15 PM – 3:30 PM

Closing Plenary: Looking Back, Leading Forward

3:30 PM – 4:30 PM | Location: Oscar Ballroom

CONNECTED LEADERSHIP

As we celebrate NAEYC's Centennial, join national and statewide early childhood leaders for a conversation reflecting on Vermont's journey in advancing high-quality early childhood education. Together, we'll explore the milestones and innovations that have shaped our work. We'll celebrate the progress we've made and consider the opportunities that lie ahead. We'll connect Vermont's story to the broader early childhood movement, bringing national perspectives home as we look ahead together.

Early Childhood Educator and Candidate Mix and Mingle

4:45 PM – 6:00 PM | Location: Northstar I

Join us for a special event featuring Vermont's candidates and a conversation focused on issues that matter to Vermont's early childhood community. Attendees will have the opportunity to hear directly from candidates about their perspectives, priorities, and vision for the future of early childhood education in Vermont.

Thursday, October 22, 2026

First Tracks Breakfast Buffet

8:00 AM – 9:00 AM | Location: Oscar Ballroom

Start your conference day with the First Tracks Breakfast Buffet, featuring freshly brewed coffee and tea, juice, freshly baked muffins and breakfast pastries, Vermont Greek yogurt, and seasonal sliced fruit. Enjoy breakfast, connect with fellow early childhood professionals, and explore the Exhibit Hall before the day's learning begins.

Opening Plenary: Looking Beneath the Behavior

9:00 AM – 10:30 AM | Location: Oscar Ballroom

KEYNOTE

We'll begin with opening remarks and a warm welcome to the 2026 VTAEYC Annual Conference before transitioning into our Opening Plenary, *Looking Beneath the Behavior*.

When a child pushes during circle time, refuses a transition, or melts down at snack, we often see behavior. But beneath that behavior lives a nervous system story.

In this opening keynote, Alyssa Blask Campbell invites educators into the deeper truth about children's behavior: it's rarely about defiance or willfulness. Instead, behavior is communication from a child's sensory and nervous system. When we shift from managing behavior to understanding it, we step into the work of truly connecting with and supporting the whole child.

Drawing on the nine sensory systems and the Collaborative Emotion Processing (CEP) method, this session explores how sensory input, nervous system state, and emotional regulation shape the way children show up in our classrooms and programs. Participants will discover how to recognize the sensory story beneath behavior, respond with attunement rather than reaction, and build environments where every child feels safe, seen, and capable of growth.

Whether you're supporting infants, toddlers, or preschoolers, this keynote offers a framework for shifting the conversation from "What's wrong with this behavior?" to "What does this child's nervous system need right now?" That single shift changes everything about how we show up for children and families.

Speaker



Alyssa Blask Campbell

Founder/CEO | Seed & Sew

Break

10:30 AM – 11:00 AM

Take a break, grab a refreshment, and explore the Exhibit Hall! Visit our exhibitors, make new connections, and get your exhibitor bingo card stamped along the way.

Workshop Block 1

11:00 AM – 12:30 PM

From Chaos to Community: Building Connections with Children, Families, and Colleagues

11:00 AM – 12:30 PM

SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING AND BEHAVIOR

Caring for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers can sometimes feel like joyful chaos. Beautiful, messy, and demanding all at once. Whether in family child care, early learning programs, or mixed-age environments, educators often balance multiple needs, emotions, and developmental stages.

This session celebrates the art of working with young children while offering realistic, strengths-based strategies for balance, calm, and connection.

Grounded in the Triple R Framework Relevance, Relationships, and Reflection, participants will explore how small, intentional shifts can transform daily challenges into opportunities for growth and joy. Through storytelling, reflection, and humor, we'll reframe everyday challenges with young children, discover the power of mindshifts, and explore how consistency and connection build trust across ages.

Participants will leave with practical tools to support communication, strengthen relationships, and nurture resilience in themselves and the children they care for. When we slow down, notice what's working, and reconnect with our "why," chaos can begin to transform into community.

Speaker



Ellen Drolette

Account Manager, Author, Professional Development | Seed and Sew

Balancing Group Needs and Individual Support Through a Nervous System Lens

11:00 AM – 12:30 PM

SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING AND BEHAVIOR

In early childhood classrooms, educators are often faced with a constant tension: how to support the needs of the whole group while also responding to individual children who need more. When one child is dysregulated, it can shift the rhythm of the entire classroom, leaving educators feeling pulled between maintaining structure and offering support.

This session introduces a nervous system-informed approach to understanding behavior as communication. Participants will learn how to recognize patterns across the group, identify underlying sensory and connection needs, and implement proactive strategies that support regulation for all children. Rather than choosing between the individual and the group, educators will leave with tools to create environments where both can be supported at the same time.

Speaker



Alyssa Blask Campbell

Founder/CEO | Seed & Sew

Warmth as Pedagogy: Relationship-Centered Responses to Meeting Children

11:00 AM – 12:30 PM

SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING AND BEHAVIOR

Grounded in lived Waldorf classroom experience, this workshop translates the concept of pedagogical warmth -- intentional, attuned, attentive, observing, non-reactive presence -- into practical strategies for early childhood care settings. This workshop explores what it means to meet children, and challenging behavior, first with relationship, and how that relational stance shapes the capacities for self-regulation over time. Presenters bring direct classroom experience of working with challenging behavior through the Waldorf education's foundational principle that the quality of the teacher's inner life and relational presence is the most powerful tool available to any educator. This approach is increasingly supported by neuroscience and trauma-informed research. This workshop will make these connections concrete and explicit and accessible for all early care providers regardless of their school setting.

Speaker



Stephanie Hoelscher

Lead Teacher & Waldorf Mentor | Rainbow Gardens

Co-speaker



Peggy Roche

Program Director | Rainbow Gardens

Finding Your Voice: Supporting Emerging Presenters in Early Childhood

11:00 AM – 12:30 PM

CONNECTED LEADERSHIP

Many early childhood educators carry deep knowledge and insight from their years in the field, yet hesitate to step into leadership roles or share their work beyond their own classrooms. This interactive session is designed to support emerging workshop presenters in finding their voice and building the confidence to lead professional learning experiences.

Grounded in the idea of connected leadership, participants will explore how authentic relationships, reflective practice, and lived experience can become the foundation for meaningful presentations. We will unpack common barriers such as imposter feelings, fear of being seen, and uncertainty about where to begin, while offering practical strategies for developing and facilitating workshops.

Through reflection, small group discussion, and guided activities, participants will begin to shape their own presentation ideas, identify topics rooted in their daily work, and practice sharing in a supportive environment. Emphasis will be placed on approachable, accessible ways to get started, whether within your local community, online, or statewide conference setting.

Participants will leave with increased confidence, a clearer sense of their unique perspective, and concrete next steps for stepping into leadership and sharing their voice with the field.

Speaker



April Zajko, M.Ed.

Speaker, Author & Mentor | Nature Inspired Teacher

Language and Literacy Strategies for Infant and Toddler Teachers

11:00 AM – 12:30 PM

DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE ENVIRONMENTS AND CURRICULUM

Reading with infants and toddlers doesn't look like sitting quietly and listening to a book, and that's ok! In this training you will learn the benefits of reading with children, literacy milestones from ages 3 months to 3 years, and walk away with simple evidence based strategies you can use right away to foster language and literacy development. This session also provides realistic solutions to common challenges when reading with infants and toddlers (like ripping pages or losing interest) and tips for creating a print-rich environment that supports every child.

Speaker



Kelly Goldberg

Pediatric Speech Language Pathologist and Early Intervention Specialist | Bridging Child Development

UDL for Me and You: An introduction to Universal Design for Learning in ECE

11:00 AM – 12:30 PM

NEURODIVERSITY, INCLUSION, AND BELONGING

Have you heard of Universal Design for Learning, and are you curious how this framework can be incorporated into an early childhood classroom? This is the training for you. The UDL framework guides teachers in creating a learning environment where everyone thrives and feels they belong. We will explore how support strategies for children with diverse abilities are typically implemented and how, by using the UDL framework, you can transform your classroom into a space that doesn't rely on child-specific modifications but instead on design elements and strategies that support all children at the same time, ultimately creating a space in which all children feel a sense of belonging.

Speaker



Kim Freeman

ECE Instructor | Windham Regional Career Center

Connecting Through STARS: Supporting Children, Families, and Staff with the Elements of Quality

11:00 AM – 12:30 PM

CONNECTED LEADERSHIP

The STARS application and Annual Update processes are ways for programs to reflect on the high-quality practices that they are already implementing and how they can continue to strengthen and support connection, inclusiveness, responsiveness, and community-building each day. In this workshop, the STARS team will offer an interactive discussion highlighting the Elements of Quality: Responsive Practices and Responsive Practice Knowledge Areas, Family & Youth Engagement, and Adult -Child Interaction, as well as the Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) Plan, to show how these areas are meant to be points of connection for staff, families, and children. Each of these areas can bring about ways to build teamwork in staff, create welcoming practices for children and families, and support equitable and affirming programming. We will provide concrete examples of how programs can reflect on their current practices and evidence that they can provide in their STARS application. This workshop is meant for current STARS programs and for programs that are interested in getting started with STARS.

Speaker



Jessica Burns

Early Childhood and Afterschool Systems Specialist | CDD - STARS Team

Co-speaker



Meredith Bartolo

Early Childhood and Afterschool Systems Specialist | CDD - STARS Team

Soup and Sandwich Board Lunch

12:00 PM – 1:00 PM | Location: Oscar Ballroom

Enjoy a Soup and Sandwich Board featuring roasted tomato red pepper bisque, Caesar salad, field greens, a quinoa-crusted black bean wrap, turkey and smoked bacon sandwiches, Italian subs, assorted cookies, and double fudge brownies. Take time to connect with fellow attendees and visit the Exhibit Hall during the lunch break.

Workshop Block 2

1:30 PM – 3:00 PM

From Chaos to Calm: Proactive Strategies That Transform Early Childhood Classrooms

1:30 PM – 3:00 PM

SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING AND BEHAVIOR

Challenging behaviors in early childhood classrooms are often met with reactive responses—but what if the key to lasting change is prevention? This engaging session focuses on practical, proactive strategies that help educators create structured, supportive environments where young learners can succeed.

Participants will explore how to identify the root causes of behavior, implement clear and consistent routines, and teach developmentally appropriate expectations that reduce disruptions before they begin. Designed specifically for early childhood educators, this session bridges the gap between research and real-world application, offering strategies that are simple, effective, and immediately usable.

Educators will leave with a clear plan for creating calmer, more responsive classrooms, along with access to a comprehensive resource guide filled with ready-to-use materials they can implement the very next day.

Speaker



Melissa Davis

Founder/CEO | Education Advisors LLC

Developing Friendship Skills in Early Childhood

1:30 PM – 3:00 PM

SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING AND BEHAVIOR

The expertise that is required to be a good playmate doesn't come quickly or easily to some children. Many mistakes need to be made for most children to start to understand how a relationship works.

From making first contact to handling disagreements, from taking turns to being too dominant, adults can help children learn the skills to become successful friends. This presentation looks at the specific strategies children will need to discover to care for themselves and others.

Speaker



Scott Noyes

Presenter | Empowering Programs

Practical Strategies for a Neuro-Inclusive Early Education Classroom

1:30 PM – 3:00 PM

NEURODIVERSITY, INCLUSION, AND BELONGING

This interactive session supports early childhood educators in moving beyond compliance-based approaches toward neurodiversity-affirming, relationship-centered practices that foster inclusion and belonging. Grounded in justice, equity, and responsive teaching, presenters share practical strategies for rethinking everyday classroom routines.

Participants will engage in a brief overview of neurodiversity-affirming principles and strengths-based language, followed by guided reflection. Through discussion and real-world examples, they will examine common components of circle time (e.g., greetings, regulation supports, shared reading) and identify embedded ableist expectations. Presenters will model inclusive alternatives that support diverse communication, regulation, and participation.

The session then shifts to child-led play, where participants identify barriers to access and explore strategies to increase autonomy and engagement. Presenters will introduce process art as a tool for fostering collaboration, exploration, and problem-solving in inclusive classrooms. Participants will engage in a hands-on process art experience with embedded modeling of inclusive supports. The session concludes with reflection and application to support meaningful changes in practice.

Speakers



Arielle Powers



Alex Dezenzo Kindlon

Speech-Language Pathologist | South Burlington School District / Vermont Pediatric Communication Services

Move, Sweep, Splash! Big Body Visual Art for Young Children

1:30 PM – 3:00 PM

DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE ENVIRONMENTS AND CURRICULUM

Young children are wired to move, yet many art experiences ask them to sit still and work within a small space. In this workshop, early childhood educators will explore how to design visual art experiences that invite children to use their whole bodies as creative tools.

Participants will learn how to create large-scale art invitations that encourage sweeping brush strokes, rolling paint across big surfaces, splashing color with varied tools, and collaborating on shared murals. Through practical examples, educators will discover simple ways to transform indoor and outdoor environments into spaces where movement, creativity, and joyful expression unfold.

This session highlights how big body art fosters connection between children, educators, and the environment. These experiences support social-emotional learning and collaboration by honoring different ways of moving, sensing, and expressing.

Participants will explore practical strategies for using affordable materials, organizing space, and facilitating art experiences that prioritize process, exploration, and child-led creativity. Educators will leave with actionable ideas to support motor development, sensory exploration, collaboration, and imaginative thinking. Come ready to rethink what art can look like when children are free to move, experiment, and create on a bigger canvas.

Speaker



April Zajko, M.Ed.

Speaker, Author & Mentor | Nature Inspired Teacher

What To Do When You Don't Understand What A Child Says: Tips from a Speech Therapist

1:30 PM – 3:00 PM

NEURODIVERSITY, INCLUSION, AND BELONGING

When young children are hard to understand, it can be frustrating for both you and the child. In this session, you will learn what sounds to expect and when and how much of a child's speech should be understood at different ages. Through real examples, you will learn what to do (and what to avoid) when children make sound errors or when their speech is unclear, so you reduce frustration and encourage continued communication. We will also review common FAQs such as causes of speech delays, how to support multilingual learners, and the impact speech delays and disorders have on literacy development.

Speaker



Kelly Goldberg

Pediatric Speech Language Pathologist and Early Intervention Specialist | Bridging Child Development

Venting Vampires: Protecting Your Energy & Encouraging Positivity

1:30 PM – 3:00 PM

SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING AND BEHAVIOR

This interactive training helps early childhood educators and administrators recognize how chronic venting, complaining and gossip can drain energy, damage relationships, and contribute to burnout. Participants will explore the difference between healthy venting and toxic negativity, and those referred to as "venting vampires" (individuals with patterns of behavior that pull individuals into stress and survival mode.) Participants will learn how emotions spread, why adult regulation matters, and how to provide boundaries that protect both connection and professionalism. Through real life scenarios, reflection and hands-on practice, participants will gain practical tools to redirect conversations, reduce emotional overload, and maintain a positive, supportive workplace climate.

Speaker



Tracy Cheney

Consultant | Three Cheers Consulting with TLC

The ECE Profession

1:30 PM – 3:00 PM

CONNECTED LEADERSHIP

What does it mean to establish a profession? To be a member of a profession? **What does it mean for a profession of early childhood educators to lead itself?**

Vermont's Legislature plans to take up the ECE Profession Bill again in 2027. Meanwhile, other states are taking similar steps. This ECE-led, interactive workshop is designed to help early childhood educators and early childhood education students understand what a profession is, and what it means to lead ourselves. We'll discuss:

- The components of a profession
- The knowledge, skills, and ethics shared by members of a profession
- The benefits of creating and belonging to a profession
- How Vermont's proposed legislation to create an early childhood educator profession may impact members of our field
- How we can ensure everyone in our field is included in and supported by formal professional recognition

Speakers



Rachel Hunter

Child Care Provider | Safe N' Sound Daycare



Kim Freeman

ECE Instructor | Windham Regional Career Center

Break

3:00 PM – 3:30 PM

Take a break, grab a refreshment, and explore the Exhibit Hall! Visit our exhibitors, make new connections, and get your exhibitor bingo card stamped along the way.

Workshop Block 3

3:30 PM – 5:00 PM

Places for Us: Co-creating Multisensory Environments for Neurodivergent/inclusive Social Thriving

3:30 PM – 5:00 PM

NEURODIVERSITY, INCLUSION, AND BELONGING

What do we remember best about the places we have loved? How do we know when a setting really works?

This workshop explores the complex relationships between environment, behavior and memory for children and ourselves. It will include (totally optional) hands-on and reflective opportunities for participants to consider, discuss and try out. Specifically, we will use expanded frameworks of mental health/neurodiversity/collective thriving to rethink our own experiences and expectations of play areas.

Speaker



Morgan Leichter-Saxby

Pop-Up Adventure Play

Angry Toddlers Book Club

3:30 PM – 5:00 PM

SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING AND BEHAVIOR

Anger is one of the first emotions that humans are able to experience and convey, and yet as educators we can sometimes still struggle with how to support our littlest learners through their own angry moments. In this session, we will explore how children's books about anger can be used to support emotional regulation and emotional competence. We will dive into the brain science of why toddlers have such a short fuse, and discuss how we can use children's books to support their learning before, during, and after those big-anger moments.

Speaker



Abigail LaBounty

Educator | Turtle Island Children's Center

Small Moments, Big Impact: Using Simple Interactions and Attachment Theory to Transform Early Childhood Practice

3:30 PM – 5:00 PM

SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING AND BEHAVIOR

This presentation explores how early childhood educators can use the research of John Bowlby and Junlei Li to strengthen relationships with young children through everyday interactions. It highlights how secure attachment is built through consistent, responsive care and shows how "serve and return" interactions—supported by research from the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University—literally shape brain development. Educators will leave with practical strategies to turn small, intentional moments into powerful opportunities for connection, emotional support, and learning.

Speaker



Sarah Tousignant

Clinical Psychologist | Tiller Psychological Services

The "Yes" Environment: Cultivating Care and Autonomy through Nature-Based Play

3:30 PM – 5:00 PM

DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE ENVIRONMENTS AND CURRICULUM

Early childhood is a period of intense sensory exploration and a growing need for agency. Too often, outdoor time is spent managing "disruptive" behaviors rather than facilitating learning. This workshop reframes challenging behaviors, like stick-throwing and heavy work, as vital sensory-seeking actions. By decoding these through a lens of relationship and care, educators move from behavior management to deep connection. We will explore how nature acts as the "Third Teacher," providing a foundation for self-regulation and autonomy. Participants will learn the Risk vs. Hazard distinction, the "Golden Question" for child-led risk assessment, and how to stage "Loose Parts" to create a responsive environment that honors the child's natural curiosity.

Speaker



Colleen Christman

Owner | Educator | Wonder Roots LLC

Taming the Temperament; Those Terrible Twos

3:30 PM – 5:00 PM

SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING AND BEHAVIOR

The "terrible twos" don't have to feel so terrible. This engaging workshop explores temperament and how children's unique traits influence behavior, learning, and relationships. Participants will learn how understanding temperament and creating a strong goodness of fit can reduce power struggles, (eek) challenging behaviors, support emotional regulation, and make everyday teaching more effective and enjoyable.

Speaker



Cheryl Hovey EdD

Early Childhood Consultant, Trainer, Keynote Speaker | Ez Ed 2 Go

Weight, Worth & Wellbeing: How do weight-based bullying and anti-fat attitudes shape our youth, and what can we do about it?

3:30 PM – 5:00 PM

SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING AND BEHAVIOR

Weight bias and anti-fatness are embedded in our culture and show up early in children's lives. In environments shaped by diet culture, disordered eating behaviors are often normalized. This makes eating concerns difficult to identify and address. Early childhood educators play a critical role in shaping how children understand bodies, and belonging. This interactive session explores how bias and body-based harm appear in early learning settings and offers practical, developmentally appropriate tools to interrupt harmful narratives, support children and families, and create body-inclusive environments grounded in dignity and care.

Speaker



Annie Valentine

Founder- Annie Valentine Mental Health Education, Coaching and Consulting | Independent Educator/Consultant

The Blueprint for Belonging

3:30 PM – 5:00 PM

CONNECTED LEADERSHIP

What if every policy, procedure, and practice in your program strengthened families? Join us for an interactive session where we'll explore how to weave the Strengthening Families Protective Factors Framework into every aspect of your program. We will include hiring and onboarding to family handbooks, enrollment, and daily operations including how to get staff fully immersed in the framework. Through discussion, real-world examples, and hands-on activities, you'll reflect on your current systems, identify opportunities for growth, and leave with practical strategies you can put into action right away.

Speakers



Victoria Ward

Director of Program Quality | VTAEYC



Brenda Schramm

Director for ECE Career Advancement | Vermont Association for the Education of Young Children

Fireside S'mores Social

7:30 PM – 8:30 PM | Location: Outdoor Fire Pit

Join us at the outdoor fire pit for a casual Fireside S'mores Social, an opportunity to relax, connect, and continue conversations with fellow early childhood professionals. Roast a s'more, enjoy the outdoor pool, or simply unwind after a full day of learning.

Please note: This gathering is not intended to serve as dinner. Attendees are encouraged to make their own dinner plans before joining us.

Friday, October 23, 2026

VTAEYC Member Breakfast

7:15 AM – 8:30 AM | Location: Oscar I

Current and prospective VTAEYC members are invited to start the final day of the conference together at our special Member Breakfast! Celebrate the work and impact of Vermont's early childhood community, hear highlights from the past year and exciting updates about what's ahead, and learn more about being part of VTAEYC. Plus, attendees will receive some special VTAEYC swag!

Enjoy a full breakfast buffet featuring freshly brewed coffee and tea, juice, freshly baked muffins and breakfast pastries, bagels with assorted spreads, seasonal sliced fruit, Vermont Greek yogurt, scrambled eggs, honey-cured bacon, maple country sausage links, and Lyonnaise bliss potatoes.

Killington Sunrise Breakfast Buffet

7:15 AM – 8:30 AM | Location: Oscar II & III

All conference attendees are invited to start the morning with the Killington Sunrise Breakfast Buffet in Oscar II & III. Current and prospective VTAEYC members may choose to attend the VTAEYC Member Breakfast taking place at the same time in Oscar I.

Enjoy a full breakfast buffet featuring freshly brewed coffee and tea, juice, freshly baked muffins and breakfast pastries, bagels with assorted spreads, seasonal sliced fruit, Vermont Greek yogurt, scrambled eggs, honey-cured bacon, maple country sausage links, and Lyonnaise bliss potatoes.

Break

8:30 AM – 8:45 AM

Take a few minutes to wrap up breakfast and make your way to your first session of the day. Morning sessions begin at 8:45 AM.

Workshop Block 1

8:45 AM – 10:15 AM

Building Connected Classroom Communities: A new lens on Relationships, Regulation and Belonging

8:45 AM – 10:15 AM

SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING AND BEHAVIOR

Strong classroom communities are not built through strategies alone—they emerge from educators' ability to understand themselves and foster meaningful connections across the group.

This highly interactive session focuses on the capacities that underlie healthy group dynamics—including self-awareness, balance between receptive (listening, observing) and directive (initiating, leading) ways of engaging, and a growing capacity to care for oneself and others—through A Framework for Wise Education, a whole-child approach that offers a practical lens for this work.

Participants will reflect on their own patterns in group dynamics and apply this lens to better understand the children in their care. Together, they will explore strategies that support co-regulation, strengthen connection, and foster balanced participation. The session also highlights the importance of adult modeling.

Participants will leave with strategies to build more connected, responsive, and inclusive classroom environments, and an understanding of how early interaction patterns can be strengthened over time.

A Framework for Wise Education® draws on the work of Ellen Tadd and an understanding of the human energy system (often called the chakra system) and its role in development. The Framework has been successfully applied in early childhood settings across Vermont and aligns with PBIS and the Strengthening Families Protective Factors.

Speaker



Maureen Burford

Director | Creative Lives

Co-speakers



Caitlin Gagner

Facilitator Intern, Nature School Director | Creative Lives



Sandy Bailey

Director and Lead Teacher/Mentor Educator | Stoneledge Stables and Hampshire Cooperative Nursery School

How to Read to Young Children: Using Trauma Responsive Strategies

8:45 AM – 10:15 AM

SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING AND BEHAVIOR

This workshop will address the importance of reading to young children and how to make that reading engaging and fulfilling with strategies that parents and educators can learn and then use immediately at home and in schools and childcare facilities. The research shows reading to young children enriches their vocabulary, prepares them to read on their own and activates their creativity. Using trauma responsive strategies, reading can also provide comfort, safety and connection. In this workshop through active and fun demonstrations, Karen Gross will share how to improve one's reading to young children, including through easily accessible costumes and props.

Speaker



Karen Gross

Educator | LLQ; VTL; Rutgers University

Transition Songs for Toddlers: Using Music, Rhythm, and Melody to Build Cooperation and Confidence

8:45 AM – 10:15 AM

SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING AND BEHAVIOR

Music is more than fun! It is a neurological shortcut to calm, connection, and cooperation. In this melody infused interactive workshop, participants will explore how rhythm, melody, and movement activate the emotional and motor centers of the young brain, helping children regulate emotions, follow directions, and move smoothly through transitions. Participants will sing, move, and write (or re-write) songs packed with sensory stimuli and intentional language to support daily classroom routines such as cleanup, circle time, lining up, and more. Attendees will leave with a toolkit of intentional transition songs, strategies for adapting music to meet diverse needs, and confidence in using rhythm as a bridge from chaos to calm for both small and large groups.

Speaker



Cara Tyrrell, M.Ed.

Founder, Parent Educator and Teacher Trainer | Core4Parenting

Story Adventures In The Connected Classroom

8:45 AM – 10:15 AM

DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE ENVIRONMENTS AND CURRICULUM

Every child has a story, and when we make intentional space for those stories in the classroom, something remarkable happens. Children feel seen. Connections form. Self-regulation improves. Learning deepens.

This interactive session explores mindful, child-led storytelling as an inclusive curriculum practice to bridge social emotional learning and early academic development. It can also be used to enhance child observations and documentation for additional curriculum planning.

Drawing on the work of Vivian Paley, the principles of Reggio Emilia, multiple research sources, and my own evidence, participants will experience mindful storytelling as a tool for fostering belonging and connection, supporting creativity and skill acquisition, encouraging self- and co-regulation, and honoring the diverse voices, needs, and experiences of children.

We'll discuss how to nurture creativity, classroom community, and learning, while remaining joyful, inclusive, and child-driven. Participants will also explore unique materials, examine mindful developmentally-appropriate practices, and learn how to differentiate these tools for diverse learners, including children with varying language abilities, developmental profiles, and cultural backgrounds.

Participants will leave with practical, ready-to-use strategies and a deeper understanding of how mindful stories — told, dictated, drawn, and acted out — can foster connection, cognition, and creativity.

Speaker



Meredith Bartolo

Teacher | Story Adventures With Meredith

Mind, Brain and Education Science: The Application of CLASS Strategies

8:45 AM – 10:15 AM

NEURODIVERSITY, INCLUSION, AND BELONGING

Early childhood educators play a powerful role in shaping the developing brain. This interactive workshop bridges the research on how young children's brains grow and learn with the everyday practices measured in the CLASS tool. Grounded in the work of David A. Sousa and current neuroscience, participants will explore how brain development unfolds across infancy, toddlerhood, and preschool—and how these developmental changes connect directly to the domains and dimensions of CLASS.

Participants will unpack the concept of “serve and return” interactions and how these responsive exchanges strengthen neural connections, particularly in the areas of language, self-regulation, and social-emotional development. The session emphasizes how intentional, language-rich interactions and meaningful connections to children's everyday experiences support deeper learning and long-term retention.

Designed to be practical and empowering, this workshop provides educators with clear, simplified takeaways and strategies they can immediately implement. Participants will leave understanding not only *what* to do, but *why* it matters—recognizing their role as “brain changers” and learning how to intentionally plan for and create moments that maximize children's development.

Speaker



Nichole Bearor

Program Manager Lead Assessor | VTAEYC

Co-speaker



Brenda Windhausen

Assessment Specialist | VTAEYC

Child Care Conversations: A Vermont Educator Listening Session

8:45 AM – 10:15 AM

CONNECTED LEADERSHIP

Building Bright Futures is hosting a Child Care Conversation as part of our ongoing Act 76 monitoring work, an informal, facilitated discussion where we ask questions and listen directly to the early educators and partners in the room.

Topics will include what is working and what is not in the current child care system, how recent policy changes are showing up in daily practice, where gaps remain in staffing, compensation, or program supports, and what educators need most going forward. We will also make space to hear direct feedback on the proposed ECE licensure changes and what they could mean for the field.

By participating, attendees will gain exposure to the range of perspectives held by early childhood partners across Vermont, build a fuller understanding of the different roles within the child care system, and see firsthand how qualitative feedback from the field informs policy decisions under Act 76.

Your responses will be documented as qualitative data and shared, without identifying individuals, with Vermont's policymakers to help shape future decisions. Open to all early childhood educators and providers.

Speakers



Anna Brouillette

Policy and Program Director | Building Bright Futures



Kelly Hayes

Regional Manager for Lamoille Valley and Central Vermont | Building Bright Futures

Curious, Capable, and Confident: Constructing a Portrait of an Early Learner

8:45 AM – 10:15 AM

CONNECTED LEADERSHIP

Join us for the first in a series of interactive sessions to help shape Vermont's Portrait of an Early Learner—a shared statewide vision for what every child should know, understand, and be able to do as they transition from prekindergarten to kindergarten. It will serve as a "North Star" that guides teaching, learning expectations, and systemic changes, ensuring that early education focuses on the holistic development of each and every child. The Portrait will honor the many ways children develop and learn while recognizing the essential role that relationships, experiences, environments, and opportunities play in helping every child thrive. The Portrait of an Early Learner will articulate a distinct, developmentally appropriate vision for early learning while creating meaningful and coherent connections across [Vermont's broader vision](#) for learning and development. Your expertise and insights will help ensure this vision reflects the strengths, experiences, and priorities of Vermont's early childhood community.

Speakers



Pat Fitzsimmons

Vermont State Director of Early Education | Vermont Department of Education



Dawn Rouse

Director of Statewide Systems | State of Vermont Child Development Division



Morgan Crossman

Executive Director | Building Bright Futures, Vermont's Early Childhood State Advisory Council & Vermont's Early Childhood Dat...

Break

10:15 AM – 10:30 AM

Take a quick break, grab a refreshment, and visit the Exhibit Hall! Stop by exhibitor booths, make progress on your exhibitor bingo card, and get ready for your next session.

Workshop Block 2

10:30 AM – 12:00 PM

Caregiving as Curriculum: The RIE philosophy

10:30 AM – 12:00 PM

SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING AND BEHAVIOR

RIE, or Resources for Infant Educators, is an approach to early childhood education founded by Magda Gerber. It emphasizes respectful and mindful interactions between caregivers and infants and toddlers. Key principles include:

1. **Respect:** Treating infants and toddlers as capable individuals and involving them in caregiving activities.
2. **Observation:** Carefully observing infants and toddlers to understand their needs and development.
3. **Trust:** Trusting infants and toddlers to be active participants in their own development.
4. **Uninterrupted Play:** Allowing infants and toddlers to explore and play without unnecessary intervention.
5. **Consistency:** Providing a predictable environment to help infants and toddlers feel secure.

RIE aims to foster independence, confidence, and self-awareness in infants and toddlers, acknowledging that each is a capable person with a voice in their care. Adults serve as respectful and responsive partners in the building of trust and security. Adults support and facilitate the autonomy and problem-solving skills by allowing them to take the lead in their activities.

Come learn about the gift of becoming "Unbusy". Come and perhaps be challenged by your assumptions or beliefs about how to care for our youngest citizens.

Speaker



Dawn Rouse

Director of Statewide Systems | State of Vermont Child Development Division

Intention: The Difference Between Free Play and Chaos

10:30 AM – 12:00 PM

DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE ENVIRONMENTS AND CURRICULUM

Play is the most important part of early childhood. It sets children up to find success in language development, trial and error, social and emotional connections, creativity, and foundational cognitive skills. However, the concept of "free play" does not mean the same thing to every educator. Educators that have committed to keeping play as the focus want free play to be meaningful and deeply engaging. We want children to feel empowered—we do not want a classroom that feels rigid and adult-directed. Finding the balance can be tricky, often resulting in a classroom that feels chaotic, loud, and disconnected from learning goals. This presentation will explore the difference between intentional free play and free play that feels chaotic. Attendees will leave with strategies for creating and implementing purposeful play experiences that support children's development while staying committed to a child-led, free play pedagogy.

Speaker



Katy New

Faculty, Assistant Department Chair of Early Childhood Education | Ivy Tech Community College

Compassionate Classroom Management: Words that Build Strong Bonds and Boundaries

10:30 AM – 12:00 PM

SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING AND BEHAVIOR

Effective classroom management in post-COVID early childhood programs depends on two pillars: strong teacher-student relationships and the ability to set and hold boundaries with compassion and empathy. In this interactive session participants will explore how subtle, everyday language unintentionally weakens authority and intentional language sentence starters that strengthen it. Participants will learn and practice a five-step framework for setting, holding, and reinforcing boundaries while validating emotions, maintaining connection, and encouraging cooperation. Using hands-on demonstrations, reflection exercises, and group discussion, attendees will leave equipped with science-backed communication strategies that build trust, prevent power struggles, and create calm, structured, and responsive classrooms.

Speaker



Cara Tyrrell, M.Ed.

Founder, Parent Educator and Teacher Trainer | Core4Parenting

How We Speak Shapes How They See: Exploring Language in Early Childhood Education Classrooms

10:30 AM – 12:00 PM

SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING AND BEHAVIOR

This workshop brings linguistic relativity theory—the idea that language shapes thought and relationships—to life in the classroom. Through a mix of presentation, dialogue, slides, and video, participants will explore how language influences children's thinking, communication, and social connections from infancy onward. The session highlights how these dynamics already appear in classrooms and offers strategies to identify, engage, and use them to strengthen relationships with children, teachers, and their environment.

Hands-on activities include reflecting on language used in classrooms, considering its impact on children, and sharing insights in small groups and, optionally, with the whole group. The workshop concludes with participants identifying one actionable change to implement in their teaching and reflecting on its potential effects on relationships. Presenter contact information is provided for an optional remote follow-up.

Speaker



Christine Birong-Smith

Classroom Teacher | Lincoln Cooperative Preschool

Growing Self-Awareness & Regulation Through Mindful Practices

10:30 AM – 12:00 PM

SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING AND BEHAVIOR

Young children develop self-awareness and self-regulation through movement, relationships, and repeated experiences, not through verbal instruction alone. In this interactive session, participants will explore how brief, developmentally appropriate practices can be embedded into everyday classroom routines to support attention, emotional readiness, and engagement without adding another item on the daily schedule.

Grounded in developmental neuroscience and aligned with the CASEL framework, this workshop introduces practical strategies that integrate mindful movement, mindful breathing, and attention practices into transitions and other naturally occurring classroom experiences.

While the developmental principles discussed are relevant across early childhood, the classroom practices and examples are designed primarily for children ages 3 through Grade 1. Participants will experience the practices firsthand, reflect on instructional language and pedagogy that foster agency and co-regulation, and leave with classroom-ready tools that support emotionally responsive, inclusive learning environments.

More than a collection of activities, this session explores how mindful awareness supports healthy human development by helping children recognize that, while they cannot always control what happens around them, they can become aware of and gradually learn to influence their inner experience. This understanding lays the foundation for learning, resilience, empathy, and lifelong well-being.

Speaker



Kelly Bulk

Educator, Consultant | Emory University: SEE Learning, Northern Lights Master Instructor, Pathways to Learning LLC

Beyond the Family Tree: Creating Belonging for Children in Foster Care and the Educators Who Support Them

10:30 AM – 12:00 PM

NEURODIVERSITY, INCLUSION, AND BELONGING

Children in foster care often experience transitions, multiple caregivers, and complex family systems, which can make traditional classroom activities, like “Family Trees” or “All About Me Boards” feel incomplete or alienating. Early educators are uniquely positioned to transform these activities into opportunities for belonging, connection, and identity affirmation.

Drawing on my experiences as a foster and adoptive parent, as well as professional expertise in early childhood education and program leadership, I will guide participants through reflection, hands-on exercises, and scenario-based discussions to explore how to make classroom activities inclusive, trauma-informed, and relationship-centered. Participants will examine common practices, identify potential gaps in belonging, and practice reimagining activities, like family trees-walls, so that every child sees their story reflected, feels connected, and experiences emotional safety.

By combining lived experience with practical strategies, participants will leave with concrete tools to strengthen belonging for children, families, and themselves, fostering stronger collaboration across the adults who support children in care.

Speaker



Anne Simonds

Quality Support Specialist | Vermont Association for the Education of Young Children

Engaging Adult Visitors as Partners in Supporting High Quality Early Learning Environments

10:30 AM – 12:00 PM

CONNECTED LEADERSHIP

Early childhood classrooms regularly welcome a wide range of adult visitors, including families, service providers, substitute teachers, and volunteers. Even when these visitors arrive with the best intentions to support the classroom community, they may lack essential knowledge about classroom expectations, schedules, routines, and individualized supports for children because they are not present in the classroom every day.

The goal of this session is to extend participants' knowledge of best practices for promoting children's positive development into strategies that guide adult visitors in supporting high-quality learning environments. By intentionally creating environments that support adult visitors, visitors are guided to engage in practices that promote young children's learning and well-being, while minimizing the managerial burden placed on teachers when visitors are present in the classroom.

In this interactive session, participants will develop child-centered guidelines they want all adults in their learning environments to follow; examine classroom visuals to identify their dual purpose in supporting both children and adults; generate ideas for additional tools that may be especially important for supporting both children and adult visitors; brainstorm effective ways to communicate guidelines and key classroom information; and develop practical scripts for addressing challenges when adult visitor behaviors do not align with classroom expectations.

Speakers



Erin Shoulberg

Clinical Assistant Professor | University of Vermont



Caroline McGlinchy

Co-speaker



Lori E. Meyer

Associate Professor | University of Vermont

Awards Ceremony Luncheon

12:00 PM – 1:30 PM | Location: Oscar Ballroom

Join us for the VTAEYC Awards Ceremony Luncheon as we celebrate the remarkable individuals helping to shape the early childhood education landscape in Vermont. Together, we will honor the 2026 Early Childhood Educator of the Year and recipients of VTAEYC's Annual Awards, recognizing their dedication, leadership, and impact on children, families, educators, and communities across our state.

Enjoy a buffet featuring minestrone soup, kale salad, field greens, tequila lime chicken, roasted butternut pasta, assorted cookies, and double fudge brownies. Lunch begins at 12:00 PM, with the awards ceremony starting at 12:35 PM.

Break

1:30 PM – 1:45 PM

Take a few minutes to stretch, refresh, and make your way to your afternoon breakout session. Sessions begin at 1:45 PM.

Workshop Block 3

Using Children's Literature to Promote Social and Emotional Development and Wellness

1:45 PM – 3:15 PM

SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING AND BEHAVIOR

Relationship building is an essential part of classroom teaching. When teachers and students come together to create communities that are built on cultural responsiveness, inclusion, and empathy, students are more available to learn. Among other things, relationships are built when children are self-aware of their own needs, strengths, emotions, and overall identities and when they can exhibit empathy, compassion, and social norms. Teachers can help support children's social and emotional development, and therefore, wellness, by using read-alouds and activities to help students learn the "knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities [and] feel and show empathy for others" (CASEL, para. 1, n.d). Among various methods, reading aloud to young children has been found to be effective in fostering children's social and emotional development (Britt et al., 2016; Heath et al., 2017; Fetting et al., 2018). This program shares research and resources on how children's literature can support young children's social and emotional development and wellness by offering book titles paired with developmentally appropriate activities that address the self and social awareness components of the CASEL 5 framework. Participants have the opportunity to actively engage in many of the practices presented while learning about specific titles that can be included within collections, for read-alouds, and incorporated into early childhood classrooms.

Speaker



Stacy Simonyi

Assistant Professor | Saint Michael's College

Learning in Motion: Physical Development, Relationships, and Meaningful Learning

1:45 PM – 3:15 PM

DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE ENVIRONMENTS AND CURRICULUM

Developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) attends to all areas of children's development, yet physical development is often overlooked as a foundation for learning. Drawing on evidence-based research, national scholarship, and Vermont-based practice, this interactive session explores how movement, physical development, and embodied learning support children's thinking, social-emotional growth, and engagement across domains.

Presented by Vermont authors published in NAEYC's seminal book *The Intentional Teacher* and the *Young Children* journal, this session bridges research to practice by highlighting connections among brain, body, relationships, and learning. It emphasizes approaches particularly supportive for neurodiverse children, children with trauma histories, and learners who benefit from hands-on, active experiences. Participants will explore key concepts from DAP and how intentional physical activity fosters belonging, engagement, and meaningful learning across early care & education settings.

Participants will engage with adaptable strategies and tools, including *Kiddie CATs on the Move*, a developmentally appropriate, inclusive physical activity curriculum for preschoolers grounded in a Plan–Do–Review framework. Through reflection, discussion, and concrete examples, participants will leave with actionable ideas to integrate movement throughout the day, strengthen relationships, foster inclusion and belonging, and support joyful learning for every child and educator.

Speakers



Lori E. Meyer

Associate Professor | University of Vermont



Caroline McGlinchy

Co-speaker



Erin Shoulberg

Clinical Assistant Professor | University of Vermont

Reflective Leadership

1:45 PM – 3:15 PM

CONNECTED LEADERSHIP

This workshop will explore the role of reflective practices in fostering a healthy and effective organizational climate. Participants will examine key elements such as interpersonal communication, the parallel process, and learning from conflict as essential components of professional growth. The session will engage attendees in meaningful dialogue around conflict resolution, establishing and maintaining healthy boundaries, and understanding the distinction between dialogue and debate. Additionally, the workshop will address critical topics including microaggressions, implicit biases, and their impact on workplace dynamics.

Speaker



Dr. Amy Scott

Manager of School Partnerships & Support and Professor | Children's Literacy Initiative & Quincy College

Engaging Fathers: Developing Strategies for Increasing Participation from Dads

1:45 PM – 3:15 PM

NEURODIVERSITY, INCLUSION, AND BELONGING

Early childhood education teachers are experts in all things child related: human development, emotional regulation, conflict resolution, learning styles, empowerment, and much, much more. Most educators have years of hands-on experience, college degrees in early childhood, and heaps of professional development from their workplaces, conferences, trainings, etc.

But what about dads? Fathers are spending more time with their children than ever before, yet very few of them have taken any early childhood classes, participated in any workshops on human development, or have worked in an early childhood education setting. In fact, when Dad Guild hosted a workshop for 100 dads with VT author Alyssa Blask Campbell, 69% of attendees said they had never attended a class or workshop or engaged in much learning around social emotional intelligence.

When thinking about the overall well-being of children, we need to ensure that all of the adults in their lives are supported and prepared to help children succeed and reach their fullest potential. In order to support healthy development in children, we need to engage dads in their roles as caregivers.

In this workshop, participants will deepen their understanding of why engaging dads in their roles as caregivers is so important, reflect on practices their own schools/sites engage in to actively involve fathers, and collaborate with one another to develop strategies for engaging fathers that can be replicated in their own programs.

Speaker



Keegan Albaugh he/him

Executive Director | Dad Guild

A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood: Building a Foundation for Connection

1:45 PM – 3:15 PM

DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE ENVIRONMENTS AND CURRICULUM

This proposal outlines a session exploring the fundamentals of Fred Rogers' pedagogical principles and how they connect to teachers and caregivers of today. Fred Rogers' work was grounded in the child development theory of Erik Erikson and Margaret McFarland. His philosophy during his time as a serious scholar of child development focuses on 6 fundamentals: trust, wonder, curiosity, looking and listening, solitude, and self-worth. Together, these elements help to build a solid foundation for any learning institution, classroom, or family neighborhood seeking to create a framework of lifelong learning and growth.

This presentation will include research-backed examples highlighting the effectiveness of prioritizing these fundamentals, and will also address the important goals of engagement when connecting with young children. Strategies and tested techniques of developmentally appropriate practices will be shared to ensure successful communication, trust, and the building of emotional strength in students and teachers. Attendees will leave with practical strategies and hands-on experiences to foster intrinsic motivation, create a safe and happy learning environment, and connect with students in ways that promote responsiveness and support.

Speaker



Cindy Michelini

First Grade Teacher / Department Chairperson / Doctoral Student at IUP | Indiana University of Pennsylvania / BASD

Caring for & Protecting Marginalized Children: Honesty, Accountability, & Partnership through Equity-Based Early Childhood Education

1:45 PM – 3:15 PM

NEURODIVERSITY, INCLUSION, AND BELONGING

This training explores the critical role early childhood educators play in caring for, supporting, and protecting marginalized children and families. Grounded in JEDIB (Justice, Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging), the session moves beyond theory to practical, reflective application within early childhood settings. Participants will examine how systemic inequities and personal bias shape experiences for children and families, and how educators can actively disrupt harm through intentional, relationship-based practice.

Through real-world examples and guided reflection, the training emphasizes knowing each child and family as individuals rather than relying on generalized or culturally assumed practices. Participants will deepen their understanding of equity versus equality, recognizing that fair, responsive care requires meeting children where they are and providing differentiated support.

The session also highlights values-based leadership and decision-making. Educators will be encouraged to name and align their personal and organizational values with practices that promote safety, belonging, and dignity. Practical strategies for building authentic partnerships with families, addressing bias, and embedding equitable practices into daily routines will be shared.

By the end of the training, participants will leave with a clearer understanding of how to translate JEDIB principles into actionable, everyday practices.

Speaker



Tessa Dearborn

Executive Director | Red Clover Children's Center

Driving Impact Through Intentional CQI with CLASS

1:45 PM – 3:15 PM

DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE ENVIRONMENTS AND CURRICULUM

- Programs are moving beyond simply giving educators access to Learning Resources and focusing on how those resources are implemented to improve teaching practice. Directors are key to this shift, using myTeachstone not just to monitor progress but to lead continuous quality improvement through data-driven decisions and targeted support. By turning CLASS observation insights into personalized professional development, programs can address specific areas for growth. Lasting impact comes from building educator habits of short, consistent engagement with resources, creating ongoing learning that drives meaningful and sustainable change.

Speaker



Stephanie Colosimo

Partnership Development Manager | Teachstone LLC

Break

3:15 PM – 3:30 PM

Take a few minutes to stretch, refresh, and make your way to the Oscar Ballroom as we come together for the Closing Keynote. The closing program begins at 3:30 PM.

Closing Plenary: Be the One

3:30 PM – 5:00 PM | Location: Oscar Ballroom

KEYNOTE

We'll begin with closing remarks and reflections as we celebrate our time together before transitioning into our Closing Plenary *Be the One*.

What if making a difference in a child's life didn't require doing more, but simply being there?

Based on research from Harvard University and the CDC, this keynote explores the powerful role of a single trusted adult and the lasting impact they can have on a child's success, resilience, and well-being.

Through humor, storytelling, and real-world application, Mister Stu breaks down:

- The five characteristics of a trusted adult
- Why consistency matters more than perfection
- How small, steady actions create lasting impact

This keynote inspires educators, parents, childcare professionals, and community leaders to see their influence differently and walk away reminded that they don't have to fix everything to matter deeply.

Speaker



Stuart Perry

President and CEO | Bad Kids Don't Exist