



Connecticut
Children's
Collective

present the

2025

**CHILDHOOD CONVERSATIONS &
PARENTING CONVERSATIONS CONFERENCE**

***Spaces for All: Creating a Future
Where Everyone Thrives***

MAY 2ND & 3RD

8:30 AM - 4:00 PM

HARTFORD MARRIOTT DOWNTOWN

200 COLUMBUS BOULEVARD, HARTFORD, CT 06103

SCHEDULE AT-A-GLANCE

Friday, May 2, 2025

8:30 Registration/Breakfast/Exhibitors

9:00 Welcome & Keynote

Inclusion not Exclusion: Developing a TRUE Space for All to Thrive, Dr. Ingrid M. Canady, SERC

10:15 Session I

1. Including all Children: Making the Environment Work for your Classroom Community
2. The Power of Play to Teach SEL, Build Community, and Honor Individuality
3. Being Your Brand: Levering Social Marketing to Engage Families, Create Inclusion, and Deepen Community Connections
4. STEM is for Everyone! Building STEM Identity
5. Meeting the Needs of a Neurodiverse Generation in a Screen-based World
6. Commitment to Pedagogical Partners in Early Childhood: Local and Global Perspectives on the Rights of the Child

11:45 Lunch/ Networking/ Exhibitors

12:45 Session II

1. Creating Behavior Guidance Policies that Support Programs, Children, and Families
2. All Children Can Play
3. Say What You Mean and Mean What You Say: The Magic of Intentional Language
4. Restorative Conversations
5. Secure Attachments through the "Circle of Security" Lense
6. Creating Inclusive Classrooms: Universal Pyramid Model Practices

2:30 Session III

1. The ABC's of Special Education: Understanding the Process
2. Connecticut's Birth to Three System; What It Is and How to Refer
3. Sitting in the Struggle: Supporting Emotional Regulation in Young Children

4. Building Stronger Communities Through Collaboration: The Power of Connection in Early Childhood Education
5. Is My Program Neuro Affirming?
6. Engaging Routines, That Move and Sing!

Saturday, May 3, 2025

8:30 Registration/Breakfast/Exhibitors

9:00 Welcome & Keynote

If You Are Not at The Table, You Are on The Menu!, Althea Marshall Brooks, Waterbury Bridge to Success

10:15 Session I

1. Understanding Challenging Behavior in Young Children
2. Play & STEM: Play-based Strategies to Nurture Young Thinkers
3. Empowered Parents, Thriving Children: Becoming Your Child's Best Advocate
4. Supporting Your Children through Alternative Strategies

11:45 Lunch/ Networking/ Exhibitors

12:45 Session II

1. You Got STEM in My Literacy! Hands-On, Multisensory Learning for All
2. Favor's Program Orientation
3. Navigating the Unique Journey of Every Family,
4. Playful Parenting: Growing Your Child's SEL Skills Through Fun & Games

Closing

The Power to React, Anne Marie "Jedda" Williams

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FRIDAY SESSION I WORKSHOPS

- 1. *Including all Children: Making the Environment Work for your Classroom Community***, Michelle Levy, Karen Pascale, Renee Kleinman; CT Office of Early Childhood and the CT State Department of Education – Tips and tools for creating a more inclusive early learning environment! This session will focus on strategies and tools for creating early childhood spaces that support children with a range of skills and needs. By planning and adapting the environment, materials, and schedule, you can support all children to access, participate, and benefit from early learning experiences. (Meaningful Inclusion, Play-Based Learning/Multiple Modalities, infants – preschool)
- 2. *The Power of Play to Teach SEL, Build Community, and Honor Individuality***, Cara Zelas, Big World of Little Dude – This interactive session explores how play-based learning serves as a powerful tool for fostering social-emotional learning (SEL), building inclusive communities, and celebrating the individuality of every child. By leveraging the universal language of play, educators can promote equity, inclusion, and a sense of belonging in their classrooms while helping children develop critical SEL skills. Attendees will leave with valuable takeaway tools: (SEL, Family Engagement, Play-Based Learning/Multiple Modalities, toddlers-10 years)
 - o Participation in hands-on activities that can be easily implemented in their learning environments.
 - o Play Environment Checklist for evaluating and creating inclusive play spaces that celebrate each child's individuality.
 - o Step-by-step guide for inclusive, SEL-based games designed for use in classrooms or at home.
- 3. *Being Your Brand: Levering Social Marketing to Engage Families***, Create Inclusion, and Deepen Community Connections, Brianna Beckstrand and Jennefer Ryan, Enfield KITE – Families are searching for information and resources online now more than ever. They are using social media platforms and seeking meaningful ways to be connected through their community. Connecting to families online for event/program outreach can be expensive and time consuming-but it doesn't have to be! In this informative and engaging workshop, you will learn some "tricks of the trade" for branding your events, creating more equitable access, and bringing in families to elevate their perspective and leadership. Enfield KITE has vast experience in social media platforms, social marketing, and reaching hundreds to thousands of people. We are here to help your team and organization strengthen your outreach and collaborative efforts, allowing you more time to make meaningful impact in your community. (Family Engagement, Community, DEI, infants – 10 years)
- 4. *STEM is for Everyone! Building STEM Identity***, Khadija Bshara, CTNCY – STEM is everywhere and for everyone but how do we teach that? And STEM isn't just for big kids so how do we empower our younger children? In this workshop we will explore and share ways to successfully cultivate a strong and enduring STEM Identity through hands-on exploration and fun. This will include activities and resources you can bring back to your program! (STEM, SEL, DEI, Play-Based Learning/Multiple Modalities, preschool-tweens)
- 5. *Meeting the Needs of a Neurodiverse Generation in a Screen-based World***, Aubrey Schmale, Sensational Achievements, LLC – In a world filled with technology, the children entering classrooms are increasingly struggling with self-regulation, play, and engagement with learning. As a teacher working with neurodiverse children in an integrated classroom, it is critical to understand how to use sensory-informed movement to meet the needs of all learners. You will learn strategies grounded in sensory integration theory that can be embedded into classroom activities to foster attention and engagement. You will also gain a better understanding of commonalities in neurodiverse children that can be used to enhance the universal design of your classroom set up and teaching strategies. In a screen-based world, more than ever children need adults who can understand their unique needs and give them the foundations to help them succeed. (Meaningful Inclusion, Play-Based Learning/Multiple Modalities, Classroom Design, preschool-10 years)

6. ***Commitment to Pedagogical Partners in Early Childhood: Local and Global Perspectives on the Rights of the Child***, Dr. Paige M. Bray and Dr. Erin M. Kenney, Center for Montessori Studies at University of Hartford – The care and attention given to early childhood education has traditionally been occupied by inequities and apathy in the United States. Given recent societally altering events, there is renewed attention to early childhood as a necessary component of “workforce development” in CT. With the commodification of early care and education too often culturally sustaining, developmentally appropriate learning opportunities are neglected in favor of one-size-fits all educational practices. There is a need for a variety of early care and education options for families and funding of equitable investment in humanity and our collective future. Given this year’s national and state actions, join this session to explore community models and take informed action towards what equitable practice looks like at the global, national, state, and local community levels. (Community Collaboration, All Ages)

session will emphasize how children develop self-regulation and social skills through facilitated play, while addressing language, math, science and social studies. (SEL, DEI, Play-Based/Multiple Modalities, preschool – 10 years)

3. ***Say What You Mean and Mean What You Say: The Magic of Intentional Language***, Tracy Cheney, Three Cheers Consulting with TLC – It is important to consider what type of language is best suited to work with children in order to be our most effective. We will discuss the differences between assertive vs. passive or aggressive language and also learn to help children find their own voices, in appropriate ways. (SEL, Special Needs, Play-Based Learning/Multiple Modalities, toddlers-10 years)
4. ***Restorative Conversations, LaToya Fernandez and Kris Wraight, Beyond Circles*** – In this interactive workshop, participants will explore restorative conversations as a powerful tool for fostering inclusion, connection, and emotional well-being in early childhood and educational spaces. Through guided discussions and experiential learning, attendees will gain practical skills in facilitating dialogue that nurtures belonging, accountability, and shared understanding among children, families, and educators. We will examine how restorative practices can be used to address conflict, strengthen relationships, and create psychologically safe environments where all children can thrive. This session will provide concrete strategies for integrating restorative conversations into daily routines, classrooms, and community interactions. Whether you are an educator, parent, or child advocate, you will leave with the knowledge and confidence to build spaces where every child feels heard, valued, and empowered. (SEL, Family Engagement, Community, Mental Health, DEI, LGBTQ+ Support, preschool-tweens)

FRIDAY SESSION II WORKSHOPS

1. ***Creating Behavior Guidance Policies that Support Programs, Children, and Families***, Michele Levy (CTOEC), Bethanne Vergean (UConn UCEDD), Jola Borta (ECCP) – When challenges related to behavior exist, it is stressful for everyone involved. Behavior Guidance Policies serve as a roadmap for everyone involved, providing a process for teachers to gain support and clear steps agreed upon by program administrators and families. This roadmap can help reduce stress and uncertainty and promote positive, proactive approaches for everyone. This session will introduce resources that can guide programs to review and update policies in a thoughtful and thorough manner that includes staff and families. We will begin the reflection process, discuss key features of a positive behavior guidance policy, and share resources that programs can access and include in their plans. (SEL, Family Engagement, Mental Health, Program Admin, infants – preschool)
2. ***All Children Can Play***, EA Aschenbrenner – Play is an equity issue! All children need to play in order to develop their skills in all areas of development. This

5. ***Secure Attachments through the “Circle of Security” Lense***, Lori j Borysewicz, EdAdvance – This professional development session introduces Circle of Security, a relationship-based approach that helps educators and caregivers support young children’s emotional regulation—an essential foundation for developing executive functioning skills. Participants will explore how secure, responsive connections with early care providers

foster children's engagement, exploration, and learning in both home and classroom settings. Designed for both educators and parents, this session will provide practical strategies for responding to challenging behaviors in ways that strengthen secure relationships. Educators will also gain insight into managing these behaviors within group settings, ensuring a balanced and supportive learning environment. (SEL, infant – 10 years)

6. ***Creating Inclusive Classrooms: Universal Pyramid Model Practices***, Elizabeth Chambers and Rachel Vannatta, University of Connecticut, Innovations Institute – This training is designed for educators who want to create inclusive learning environments where all children—regardless of their background, abilities, or needs—feel welcomed, valued, and empowered. Highlighting Pyramid Model Tier 1 strategies, this training provides educators with practical approaches to support social-emotional development, promote positive behavior, and encourage success for all children. (SEL, Special Needs, Meaningful Inclusion, Mental Health, DEI, preschool)

FRIDAY SESSION III WORKSHOPS

1. ***The ABC's of Special Education: Understanding the Process, Michelle Fitzgerald, CT Parent Advocacy Center*** – Parents of children with disabilities will learn how to become more active participants in their children's education. This session will include information on: Evaluations, Planning and Placement Team (PPT) Meetings, Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), and Dispute Resolution. (Family Engagement, Special Needs, preschool – 10 years)
2. ***Connecticut's Birth to Three System; What It Is and How to Refer***, Rebecca Smith and Nicole Cossette, Connecticut Birth to Three System – Overview of Connecticut's Birth to Three System (Connecticut's Part C System). What services look like, how to support families within our system, how to talk to families about concerns with a child's development, and how to refer to our system. (Family Engagement, Community, Special Needs, Meaningful Inclusion, infants – toddlers)
3. ***Sitting in the Struggle: Supporting Emotional Regulation in Young Children***, Jennifer DeLancery Agro and Jessica Vigliotti, King School – In this workshop, we will discuss the importance of allowing children to sit with the discomfort which comes from doing hard things. This may include conflict negotiation, navigating transitions, and dealing with disappointment. In addition to presenting facts and research, we will work through real-life scenarios as we hone strategies to support children and the adults who have to help them manage. (SEL, Mental Health, DEI, Play-Based Learning/Multiple Modalities, toddlers – preschool)
4. ***Building Stronger Communities Through Collaboration: The Power of Connection in Early Childhood Education***, Elizabeth Whitney – Join us to explore how authentic partnerships with families and businesses can drive growth for your daycare and community. Gain practical strategies to build meaningful connections and foster mutual support. Whether you're a daycare provider, educator, or community leader, you'll leave inspired and ready to make an impact! (Family Engagement, Community, infants – 10 years)
5. ***Is My Program Neuro Affirming?***, Jona Shook, MT-BC, Infinity Music Therapy Services – Is your program designed to be inclusive with equitable opportunities or are there barriers limiting access to education for the children you work with? Together we will discuss neurodivergence, sensory friendly opportunities in the classroom, and reframe a traditional "behavioral" approach to be more mindful of all children. Mental health, neurological needs, and developmental disabilities will be explored in this workshop. (SEL, Special Needs, Meaningful Inclusion, Mental Health, DEI, Classroom Design, toddlers – 10 years)
6. ***Engaging Routines, That Move and Sing!***, Jeddalarue, K La Rue Educational Arts in Motion – Teachers will learn creative and classic technics to develop speaking and listening skills, which will impact classroom rules and routines, through the performing arts. Teachers will learn how to select and use developmentally appropriate songs, finger plays, circle games, chants and 8 locomotive steps to dance as a toolkit for teachable moments, enhance lessons plans and a creative classroom

management environment to use with their students. (SEL, Family Engagement, Meaningful Inclusion, DEI, Classroom Design, toddlers – preschool)

SATURDAY SESSION I WORKSHOPS

1. ***Understanding Challenging Behavior in Young Children***, Michelle Fitzgerald, CT Parent Advocacy Center – CPAC – This workshop will help participants change the way they view and react to their children’s challenging behavior. Participants will learn: (SEL, Family Engagement, Special Needs, infants – 10 years)
 - What their children’s behavior is communicating
 - How to use positive behavior supports to encourage the development of new communication skills
 - Practical tips for promoting children’s success
 - The purpose of functional behavioral assessments and positive behavior interventions
2. ***Play & STEM: Play-based Strategies to Nurture Young Thinkers***, Nick Villagra and Nate Gagnon, CT Science Center – Come play and learn with us! In this workshop we will explore research-based practices to incorporate play-based at home, in the community, and in the classroom. Together we will engage in various hands-on STEM experiences that provide play-based learning opportunities for children and families aimed at increasing confidence supporting playful STEM activities, increasing child engagement during play, building critical STEM skills, and increasing interest in STEM and excitement for learning. Everyone will leave with strategies, resources, materials, and activities to bring more STEM and play into your daily lives. (STEM, SEL, Family Engagement, Community, Play-Based Learning/Multiple Modalities, toddlers – tweens)
3. ***Empowered Parents, Thriving Children: Becoming Your Child’s Best Advocate***, Yesenia Rivera-Ortiz, Cubs Learning Hub – Step into your power as a parent and learn how to be your child’s greatest advocate! This workshop offers practical tools and

strategies to help you build strong, collaborative relationships with teachers and schools, effectively communicate your child’s needs, and confidently navigate the education system. Designed for all parents who want to play an active role in their child’s success, this session will leave you feeling prepared, empowered, and ready to make a difference in your child’s educational journey. Free printable journal for parents. (Family Engagement, Community, DEI, infants – 10 years)

4. ***Supporting Your Children through Alternative Strategies***, Nephertiti Amen, Ann Morgan, Dr Alicia Berger Harriman, and Dr Lauren Young, Manchester Early Childhood Collaborative – Panel presentation: Are you looking for strategies to support your young child while on a wait list for services? Or are you looking for supplemental supports for a medical diagnosis or developmental delay? Attend this session to hear from a panel of specialists on looking beyond the mainstream responses. (Special Needs, infants – toddlers)

SATURDAY SESSION II WORKSHOPS

1. ***You Got STEM in My Literacy! Hands-On, Multisensory Learning for All***, Marci Klein, M.D., 3DuxDesign – What happens when you blend STEM and literacy? Roll up your sleeves and get ready to play! This hands-on experience will highlight how we can build collaboration, creativity, and confidence in all learners! In a team-based activity that seamlessly integrates STEM concepts with storytelling and literacy, discover how play-based, multisensory learning reaches diverse learners, strengthens core competencies, and fosters deeper engagement. Through collaborative problem-solving and teamwork, educators and program leaders will experience firsthand how these activities support communication, critical thinking, and social-emotional growth. Walk away with practical strategies, ready-to-use resources, and exciting ways to extend learning beyond the workshop. Get ready to build, problem-solve, and bring learning to life! (STEM, SEL, DEI, Play-Based Learning/Multiple Modalities, toddlers – tweens)
2. ***Favor’s Program Orientation***, Jenny Bridges and Paul Guerrero, Favor, Inc. – This orientation session provides an in-depth introduction to Favor,

Inc. and its mission to support families across Connecticut. Participants will explore Favor's four core program offerings, including Medical Home services, Peer Support, Family Systems Mentorship (FSM), and the Learning & Leadership Academy, which provides free training, workshops, and ongoing development opportunities. The training emphasizes the importance of community partnerships and outlines the developmental journey for families, detailing how Favor supports growth and empowerment at every stage. (Family Engagement, Community, Special Needs, infants – 10 years)

3. ***Navigating the Unique Journey of Every Family***, Kierra Edwards and Tashi Shuler Drakes, Bridgeport Prospers – Join us for an inspiring workshop that celebrates the individuality of each family's journey. Whether you're navigating the highs and lows of parenting, overcoming challenges, or discovering new ways to connect, this session will provide valuable insights and practical tools. We'll explore diverse family dynamics, share stories, and engage in interactive exercises designed to foster deeper understanding and unity. Embrace the uniqueness of your family's path while gaining skills for stronger communication, resilience, and connection. Your journey is one-of-a-kind—let's navigate it together! **(Family Engagement, Special Needs, Meaningful Inclusion, infants – preschool)**

4. ***Playful Parenting: Growing Your Child's SEL Skills Through Fun & Games***, Ashton Gauthier, SEL4CT, CTNCY – Did you know that play is one of the most powerful ways to support your child's social-emotional growth? Join us for an engaging, hands-on workshop to help parents and caregivers discover how everyday play can build essential SEL skills like self-awareness, emotional regulation, teamwork, and decision-making. Through interactive activities, practical demonstrations, and fun games, you'll learn simple, meaningful ways to foster your child's confidence, empathy, and resilience while having fun together! You'll walk away with ready-to-use strategies, take-home resources, and a new appreciation for the role of play in raising socially and emotionally strong kids. (SEL, Play-Based Learning/Multiple Modalities, toddler-age 8)

