

EARLY INTERVENTION AND PRESCHOOL CONFERENCE

OCTOBER 19-21, 2026

BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA

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MONDAY, OCTOBER 19, 2026

9:00-9:30 A.M. - ANNOUNCEMENTS & WELCOME

9:30-10:30 A.M. - KEYNOTE (60 MINUTES)

Becoming Shatterproof

Lauren Sisler

Becoming shatterproof is a keynote centered on resilience, ownership, and the power of presence in high-pressure environments. Through personal storytelling and practical frameworks, attendees will explore how adversity shapes performance, how shame and silence impact decision-making, and how to lead with authenticity in both personal and professional settings. Participants will leave with actionable tools to strengthen resilience, improve emotional awareness, and show up more fully in the moments that matter most.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES – Participants will be able to:

1. Identify how personal experiences and adversity influence performance, decision-making, and leadership.
2. Analyze the impact of shame, stigma, and internal narratives on personal and professional growth.
3. Apply practical strategies to build resilience in high-pressure or unpredictable environments.
4. Demonstrate techniques for increasing presence and focus on critical, real-time situations.

10:30 -11:00 A.M. - BREAK AND EXHIBITORS

11:00 A.M. -12:00 P.M. - BREAKOUT A (60 MINUTES)

Developing Functional Outcomes

Debra Florea - Early Intervention Coordinator for the Alabama Department of Mental Health

Shannon Foster - Comprehensive System of Personnel Development Coordinator, Alabama Early Intervention System

This session will explore how Early Intervention Service Coordinators can develop and implement functional Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) outcomes that align with family priorities, daily routines, and evidence-based practices. Participants will learn strategies to move beyond deficit-based goals toward outcomes that promote engagement, independence, and social relationships.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES – Participants will be able to:

1. Explain why functional IFSP outcomes matter.
2. Identify and define functional outcomes.
3. Demonstrate how to develop functional outcomes.

Nourishing Development: Building Healthy Eating Habits in Early Childhood

Casey Willis - Alabama Healthy Kids, Healthy Future Coordinator with the Alabama Partnership for Children and Early Intervention Developmental Specialist

Emily Campbell, MPH, CHES - Alabama Healthy Kids, Healthy Future Director at the Alabama Partnership for Children

Early childhood is a critical window for establishing lifelong eating habits, yet many families struggle with picky eating, mealtime stress, and how to support healthy nutrition. Early intervention providers, home visitors, and early care professionals are uniquely positioned to guide families in creating positive, developmentally appropriate feeding environments. This interactive session explores the role of nutrition in early brain development and introduces Ellyn Satter's Division of Responsibility to reduce mealtime power struggles and support healthy relationships with food. Participants will also learn practical strategies such as family-style meals, consistent routines, and involving children in food preparation to increase acceptance and independence. Through real-life scenarios, role-playing, and discussion, attendees will gain tools they can immediately use to support families and promote healthy eating habits.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES – Participants will be able to:

1. Describe the connection between early childhood nutrition and physical, cognitive, and social-emotional development.
2. Explain the key principles of Ellyn Satter's Division of Responsibility in feeding.
3. Identify strategies to support family-style meals, consistent routines, and positive mealtime environments.
4. Demonstrate how to coach families through picky eating using responsive feeding practices.
5. Apply practical strategies to involve children in meal preparation to increase engagement and food acceptance.

Developmentally Responsive Practices: Moving Beyond Misconceptions to Authentic Learning

Jennifer L. Kilgo, EdD - Professor of Early Intervention/Early Childhood Special Education, University of Alabama at Birmingham

This session will examine commonly held misconceptions about developmentally responsive practices for young children with delays and disabilities. Participants will explore persistent misconceptions that can shape early learning experiences and limit meaningful engagement. Through practical examples, the session will demonstrate how to reimagine classroom rituals and routines such as circle time and morning meetings, as well as widely used content and strategies like "letter of the week," themes, and calendar activities. Emphasis will be placed on designing contextually relevant approaches that support authentic learning, participation, and inclusion for all young children.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES – Participants will be able to:

1. Identify common misconceptions related to developmentally responsive practices for young children with delays and disabilities and explain how these misconceptions can limit meaningful engagement.
2. Analyze classroom rituals, routines, and instructional strategies and determine specific ways to modify and increase relevance and participation.
3. Design contextually relevant learning activities and routines that promote authentic learning, active participation, and inclusion for young children with diverse abilities.

My Feelings Toolbox: Tools to Empower Emotional Regulation in Little Learners

Kimberly McAnnally – *Early Childhood Specialist, Child Care Central*

Do you know how to handle every emergency that arises in your classroom? How do you help the children in your care feel safe and secure in their environment so they can relax and learn all they need to learn? Teachers need a "toolkit" they can pull out when they have a child dealing with big emotions. Learn how to teach children what that big feeling is by naming emotions but also giving them tools that will allow them to handle those emotions. It is important that children understand that having emotions and big feelings are okay, but there are appropriate ways to handle them without hurting others in the process.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES – Participants will be able to:

1. Define emotional regulation and explain why it matters.
2. Identify typical emotional behaviors in young children.
3. List effective strategies to support emotional regulation in the classroom.

Building Bridges Between Home and Preschool: Strengthening Family Partnerships to Support Early Development

Brandy Black - *Home Visiting Coordinator, Coastal Family Partners*

Strong partnerships between families and early childhood professionals are essential to supporting young children's development and school readiness. Drawing on experience in home visiting and parent education, the presenter will share approaches that help professionals better understand the family perspective, build trust with caregivers, and empower parents to support developmental learning through everyday routines. Participants will learn how to strengthen communication with families, reduce barriers to engagement, and create collaborative relationships that promote positive developmental outcomes for young children.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES – Participants will be able to:

1. Identify common barriers that prevent families from fully engaging in early childhood programs and services.
2. Apply strength-based communication strategies to build trust and foster meaningful partnerships with families.
3. Identify everyday routines and activities that support language, cognitive, and social-emotional development at home.

4. Develop strategies to strengthen connections between home environments and preschool or early intervention services.

ABLE Accounts and Special Needs Trusts: What Practitioners and Parents Need to Know

Jennifer McInerney, JD, LL.M. in Taxation, MA, BA - Attorney

Parents and professionals working with families will learn the importance of ABLE Accounts and Special Needs Trusts in protecting eligibility for SSI, Medicaid, and other means-tested benefits while giving individuals with disabilities greater financial security and autonomy. The presentation outlines the key differences between ABLE accounts and SNTs, including contribution limits, permissible uses, and long-term planning considerations. The session also covers when each tool is most appropriate and how families can use them together to build a comprehensive, flexible benefits-preservation strategy.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES – Participants will be able to:

1. Explain the purpose of ABLE Accounts and Special Needs Trusts and how each tool protects eligibility for SSI, Medicaid, and other means-tested benefits.
2. Distinguish the key legal and financial differences between ABLE Accounts and SNTs, including contribution rules, permissible expenditures, and tax treatment.
3. Identify when an ABLE Account, an SNT, or a combination of both is most appropriate based on an individual's disability, resources, and long-term planning needs.
4. Explain how to coordinate ABLE Accounts and SNTs within a broader estate and benefits-preservation plan for individuals with disabilities.
5. Describe common pitfalls, compliance requirements, and best practices for establishing, funding, and administering these tools.

Unlocking Possibilities: Play, AT, and AAC for Children with Visual Impairment

Rebecca Harris, M.S., CCC-SLP, CLC – Speech-Language Pathologist, United Ability

Katherine Seal, M.S., CCC-SLP – Speech-Language Pathologist, United Ability

This session will begin with identification of common characteristics of visual impairment. We will explore how to adapt home and daycare environments and materials to support engagement in play. We will discuss strategies to integrate Assistive Technology (AT) and Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) into everyday routines, supporting meaningful opportunities for communication and participation. This session aims to provide practical, play-based strategies that can be immediately applied in early intervention contexts.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES – Participants will be able to:

1. Identify common characteristics of visual impairment.
2. Describe ways to adapt a child's environment to support play.
3. Explain how to use AT and AAC to provide ways for the child to communicate and participate in daily routines.

What's New in the Follow-Up Care for Premature Infants (11:00 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.)

Kimberly Stringer, MD, MPH - Associate Professor of Pediatrics and Developmental-Behavioral Pediatrics at UAB Civitan Sparks Clinics

Amelia Schuyler, MD, MPH - Assistant Professor of Pediatrics and Neonatologist at the University of Alabama at Birmingham

Chantel Jno-Finn, PT, DPT - Pediatric Physical Therapist, UAB Newborn Follow-Up Clinic, Lifespan Down Syndrome Clinic, and Alabama Early Intervention System

Maegan Guven, MS, RD - Registered Dietician, UAB Newborn Follow-Up Clinic

Margaret Summersell, MS, RD - Registered Dietician, UAB Newborn Follow-Up Clinic

This presentation will include the latest medical and developmental issues facing infants born prematurely. We will describe how early medical and developmental interventions can improve the trajectory of infants born prematurely. A panel of speakers from the UAB Newborn Follow-up Multi-Disciplinary Team (e.g. medical, psychology, nutrition, physical therapy, and audiology) will describe their role in our team clinic and how they address common issues facing infants with prematurity.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES – Participants will be able to:

1. Identify common medical issues facing infants born prematurely.
2. Identify common developmental issues facing infants born prematurely.
3. Describe how Early Intervention can improve medical and developmental issues facing infants born prematurely.
4. Describe what is involved in the NICU graduate clinic, particularly UAB Newborn Follow-up Clinic.

12:00-1:30 P.M. – LUNCH (ON YOUR OWN)

1:30 -2:30 P.M. - BREAKOUT B (60 MINUTES)

Feeding Therapy Before the Food: A Look at Precursors for Beginning Feeding Intervention

Fran Frost, OTR/L – Occupational Therapist, United Ability Outpatient Clinic

In this session, we will discuss the basic elements of readiness for feeding intervention including aspects of motor control and necessary positional supports, sensory regulation and ideas for providing necessary supports, and developmental skills like attention and engagement that are all crucial in effective feeding intervention. We will also include some appropriate questions to ask regarding mealtime structure, schedule, and overall nutritional status.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES – Participants will be able to:

1. Identify basic motor skills necessary for effective feeding intervention, as well as, how to offer your child support in these areas.
2. Identify basic sensory processing and regulation needs necessary for effective feeding intervention, as well as, how to offer your child support in these areas.
3. Identify development and play skills necessary for effective feeding intervention, as well as, how to offer your child support in these areas.

Tiny Steps, Big Progress: Tracking Growth in Early Childhood

Barbie Jones, M.Ed. - Director of Curriculum and Instruction for Early Childhood, UCP of Central Florida

Stephanie De Bear - Early Childhood Curriculum and Instruction Specialist, UCP of Central Florida

This session will showcase how early childhood educators can use data cards and interactive data walls to organize student information, monitor progress, and support instructional decision-making in meaningful ways. Participants will explore practical strategies for creating visual systems that help teachers track individual student's developmental growth, identify student needs, and strengthen collaboration among staff and families. Real examples, tools, and implementation ideas will be shared to help programs build a positive data culture that supports student success in early learning environments.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES – Participants will be able to:

1. Identify key components of effective data cards, data walls, and benchmark binders used to monitor student growth in early childhood settings.
2. Demonstrate how to organize and display student data in ways that support instructional planning and progress monitoring.
3. Explain how visual data tools can be used to guide intervention decisions and support student achievement goals.

Ensuring a Seamless Transition from Early Intervention (Part C) to Preschool Special Education (Part B)

Katrina Lipscomb, M.Ed. - State Monitor, Alabama Early Intervention System

Kathy Wilkins - Education Specialist, Alabama State Department of Education in Special Education Services

Stephanie Bear, Ed. S. CCC-SLP - Education Specialist and Speech-Language Pathologist, Alabama State Department of Education in Special Education Services

This session focuses on creating a smooth and effective transition from Early Intervention to Preschool Special Education. Participants will review required transition planning meetings documentation, and communication processes critical to timely and compliant transitions. Alabama Early Intervention Systems (Part C) and Alabama State Department of Education, Special Education Services (Part B) preschool team will share how teams can collaborate in alignment with IDEA requirements to support a positive and smooth transition experience for children and families, and ensure the child has no disruption in services.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES – Participants will be able to:

1. Describe the required transition meetings, timelines, and documentation from Part C to Part B.
2. Explain the roles of Early Intervention and Preschool Special Education teams in the transition process.
3. List collaboration strategies that support continuity of services for children and families.

The Inner Child is Speaking

Sabrina Robinson - Child Care Central Professional Development Director, TCR Child Care Corporation

In this session, we will explore how early wounds shape adult patterns and how compassion, awareness, and gentle inner work can begin to restore what pain once silenced. Through trauma-informed guidance and

practical tools, participants will learn to listen inward, honor their stories, and take meaningful steps toward emotional freedom and wholeness.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES – Participants will be able to:

1. Explain how early experiences shape current emotional patterns and identify unmet needs that may still influence their thoughts, behaviors, and relationships.
2. Demonstrate grounding, breathwork, and body-awareness practices that help calm the nervous system and create internal safety for healing.
3. Demonstrate gentle reflection and creative expression to connect with their inner child, fostering empathy, validation, and emotional understanding.
4. Define a clearer sense of hope, agency, and personal intention for continuing their healing journey beyond the session.

Life in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit: Where the Earliest of Interventions Begin

Jane Burton Keith, MSPT, CNT, NTMTC - Neonatal Physical Therapist, UAB Hospital

Alicia Peeples, DPT, CNT, NTMTC - Neonatal Physical Therapist, UAB Hospital

During the session we will discuss therapy care in the NICU. We will cover the various populations we serve and the diagnoses we address. We will discuss various treatment modalities that are used and the various tests/assessments utilized and their outcome meanings. We will discuss the problems we are identifying and the ways we are intervening to optimize long-term outcomes. Finally, we will open discussion for common concerns the early intervention therapist is seeing that affect development and ways we can intervene to improve outcomes.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES – Participants will be able to:

1. Identify three concerns of babies in the NICU that affect long term developmental outcomes.
2. Identify three different assessments used in the NICU and what the results indicate for long term prognosis.
3. Identify three treatment modalities/techniques used in the NICU to positively impact long term outcomes.

Proceed With Care: Ethics and the Use of AI in Early Intervention and Preschool Practice

Danielle Rich PhD, CCC-SLP, ASDCS - Interim Associate Dean of the School of Speech-Language Pathology, Pepperdine University's College of Health Sciences

Artificial intelligence (AI) is already in our workplaces — whether we realize it or not. This practical, evidence-informed session cuts through the hype and helps professionals who work in EI and preschool settings to answer the questions that actually keep us up at night: Can I use AI to write my documentation? What about HIPAA? Do I have to tell families? Grounded in professional Code of Ethics and current federal guidelines, participants will leave with a clear, ready-to-use framework for deciding when, where, and how AI is appropriate in early childhood practice — and the confidence to use it well.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES – Participants will be able to:

1. Identify ethically appropriate and ethically problematic uses of AI tools in early intervention and preschool settings, using professional Code of Ethics and HIPAA guidelines as a decision-making framework.
2. Apply a 5-question ethical decision-making framework to real-world clinical scenarios involving AI use in documentation, assessment, parent communication, and treatment planning.
3. Develop a personal action plan for integrating AI responsibly into their practice — identifying at least one tool they will use differently and one boundary they will commit to maintaining.

Threats to Healthy Early Brain Development

Joseph D. Ackerson, PhD - *Pediatric Neuropsychologist and Clinical Director, Ackerson & Associates Cognitive and Behavioral Services*

Greta Conlon - *UAB Medical Psychology Graduate student*

Dr. Ackerson will inform attendees regarding the long-term outcomes from gestational and perinatal complications including intrauterine exposure to toxins, prematurity, very low birthweight, inadequate oxygen flow, infectious processes, and medical misadventure. Associated brain changes may include intraventricular hemorrhage, hypoxic ischemic injury, stroke, and periventricular leukomalacia. Proper identification and quantification of early brain injury can allow for appropriate interventions that may improve long-term trajectories, as well as provide families with the knowledge they need for long-term planning.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES – Participants will be able to:

1. List at least three different causes and mechanisms of perinatal brain injury.
2. Identify the uses and limitations of common infant and preschool measures of cognitive functioning.
3. Demonstrate knowledge of the variables impacting long-term neurocognitive outcomes of perinatal brain injury, as well as the interventions that can impact these outcomes.

2:30 - 2:45 P.M. - BREAK AND EXHIBITORS

2:45 -3:45 P.M. - BREAKOUT C (60 MINUTES)

Engaging Diverse Families: Building Responsive and Respectful Partnerships

Jennifer L. Kilgo, EdD - *Professor of Early Intervention/Early Childhood Special Education, University of Alabama at Birmingham*

Families come to early childhood settings with a wide range of experiences, identities, and needs, including teen parents, grandparents serving as primary caregivers, families experiencing housing instability, and those navigating concerns related to immigration, culture, or family structure. This session explores practical, respectful strategies for building authentic partnerships with diverse families across settings. Emphasis will be placed on understanding family contexts, recognizing strengths, and responding in ways that promote trust, communication, and meaningful relationship development. Participants will also consider strategies for connecting families with relevant supports and resources while maintaining a strengths-based, culturally responsive perspective.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES – Participants will be able to:

1. Identify key characteristics and strengths of diverse family structures and circumstances, including multigenerational caregiving, housing instability, and culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.
2. Apply culturally responsive and strengths-based strategies to build trust and foster meaningful relationships with families across varied contexts.
3. Demonstrate approaches for engaging all family members, including fathers and nontraditional caregivers, in collaborative relationships.
4. Utilize professional and community resources to support families with diverse needs and experiences.
5. Develop practical strategies to address barriers to family engagement and address them in respectful and responsive ways.

Service Provision for Families with Minimally Verbal Children

Blaklie H Blevins, MS, CCC- SLP – *Speech-Language Pathologist and Owner, Talk2Me, Inc.*

Autumn M. Bobo, OTR/L – *Occupational Therapist and Owner, TEAM Rehabilitation, Inc.*

This session will explore strategies that can be utilized to assist families who have children with minimal verbal skills. It will assist the learner in exploring the difference in receptive and expressive language skills. We will explore a variety of communication strategies that the child may be utilizing and how we can assist the family in building off of these strategies. We will further discuss activities/play routines that we can utilize within our sessions and leave with families.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES – Participants will be able to:

1. Describe receptive/expressive language.
2. List ways the child is communicating.
3. List ways to help families build from the communications they are seeing with their child.
4. Demonstrate activities and play routines to utilize in sessions that can be left with parents.

Let Them Lead Through Learning Centers

Tara Carr, Ed. S – *Director of Pre-K Programs, Montgomery Public Schools*

LaTonya Sibley, PhD, NBCT - *Pre-K Education Specialist, Montgomery Public Schools*

Join us to explore how Montgomery Public Schools (MPS) First Class Pre-K classrooms use interactive learning centers to support young children with diverse learning needs in inclusive, developmentally appropriate environments. Participants will experience practical strategies that promote child choice, engagement, and meaningful participation aligned with early intervention best practices. This session demonstrates how intentional center design strengthens communication, social-emotional development, and early academic skills for all learners. Attendees will leave with ready-to-use strategies for creating responsive learning environments where every child can actively participate and succeed.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES – Participants will be able to:

1. Identify key components of inclusive learning centers that support diverse learners in early childhood classrooms.

2. Demonstrate strategies for facilitating child-led learning centers that increase engagement and participation for all children.
3. Describe how intentional center design supports early intervention goals across developmental domains.
4. Complete modifications to learning centers that support children with varying developmental needs and abilities.

Introduction to Teaming in Preschool: A Collaborative Approach between Teachers and Therapists

Kate Stribling, PT, DPT, PCS – *Physical Therapist, Portland Public Schools*

Interprofessional collaboration provides the safe, high quality and student-centered care desired by all, but consistently practicing this in a preschool setting can be challenging. This session will outline the interdisciplinary process used to plan and implement inclusive adapted programming in one urban preschool environment. The presentation will describe different teaming approaches as well as the challenges versus benefits of each as supported by research. Examples of adapted activities as well as guidance in initiating similar interdisciplinary programs will be provided. Case studies will be available to enhance understanding and provide an interactive opportunity for attendees.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES – Participants will be able to:

1. Describe the collaborative process across the disciplines of PT, OT, SLP and Early Childhood Special Education to plan adapted activities for preschoolers.
2. Summarize the importance of teaming and collaboration in the natural environment.
3. Apply evidence-based strategies to create an activity plan that will allow successful implementation of collaborative programs in their educational setting.

Pause, Perceive, Play: Deepening Your Connection Through a Nervous System Perspective

Emily Tester LPC, NCC – *Licensed Professional Counselor, Emily Tester Counseling, LLC contracted at Kaleidoscope Therapy*

This session will provide space to explore how “showing up” and having a developmentally appropriate framework shape attachment and felt-sense of safety. The goal of this presentation is to guide participants in understanding how relationships are the core of connection and development. Participants will learn about tuning in to self, others, and the environment. How our bodies experience the world around them encodes more than the words spoken, so let’s make it playful, loving, and attuned.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES – Participants will be able to:

1. Identify developmentally appropriate expectations and how they shape the felt-sense experience within a relationship.
2. Identify their own nervous system activators and what it means to be responsive rather than reactive.
3. Implement playful strategies that facilitate connection, collaboration, and co-regulation.

Embracing the Unexpected: One Parent's Journey through Early Intervention Services and Beyond

Hallie Thuenen, MSN CPNP-PC SANE-P – Parent & Pediatric Nurse Practitioner

You've been told—or maybe you've started to suspect—that your child may have developmental delays. Suddenly, terms like early intervention, occupational therapy, speech therapy, and physical therapy enter your world, often without much explanation. What follows can feel overwhelming: unfamiliar medical language, uncertain or even frightening diagnoses, subtle societal pressures, and the realization that your child's path may look different than you once imagined. It's a lot—and it's completely normal to find yourself asking, "What do I do now?" This session is designed to meet you in that exact moment. From one parent to another, we'll walk through what this journey really looks like—beyond the clinical terms and into real life. Our goal is to ease uncertainty, answer the questions you may not even know how to ask yet, and help you feel more grounded and confident moving forward. Most importantly, this is about empowerment. You are your child's greatest advocate, support, and source of strength. While the path may feel unpredictable, you don't have to navigate it alone—and you are more capable than you may feel right now.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES – Participants will be able to:

1. Identify and validate emotional responses to concerns about your child's development, understanding that feelings of uncertainty and fear are normal and shared by other parents.
2. Describe early intervention, therapy services, and educational jargon and resources in practical, real-life terms, connecting clinical and legal language to everyday experiences.
3. Identify common challenges and pressures (medical, social, and internal) that families may face and reflect on how these influences shape your perceptions and decisions.
4. Demonstrate asking questions and seeking support, including identifying what information you need and where to find trustworthy guidance.
5. Describe your role as a primary advocate for your child and articulate at least one way you can actively support your child's development moving forward while noting the importance of community connections and support throughout your family's journey.

Bridging the Gap from Screening to Intervention

Mary Ellen Whigham, ADN, RN - Early Hearing Detection and Intervention (EHDI) Coordinator, Alabama Department of Public Health

Amy Williamson, AuD, CCC-A - Audiology Program Specialist, Children's Rehabilitation Service (CRS)

The Joint Committee on Infant Hearing (JCIH) has established the following guidelines for states: 1-month initial hearing screens completed in the hospital or outpatient setting; 3-months diagnostic testing completed; and at 6 months the baby is enrolled in early intervention to improve language acquisition. How can we bridge gaps in 1-3-6 in Alabama between the hospital, Early Hearing Detection and Intervention (EHDI), audiologist, and Early Intervention? Identifying your role in 1-3-6 and closing gaps in systems will be discussed. Collaboration is the key to everything!

LEARNING OBJECTIVES – Participants will be able to:

1. Identify barriers to timely early hearing detection and intervention.

2. Discuss successful facilitators of timely diagnosis and early intervention (EI).
3. Implement evidenced-based quality improvement measures in programs to facilitate EHDI.
4. Discuss three components of the EHDI system.

Neuropsychological Outcomes in Common Diagnoses

Joseph D. Ackerson, PhD - *Pediatric Neuropsychologist and Clinical Director, Ackerson & Associates Cognitive and Behavioral Services*

Greta Conlon - *UAB Medical Psychology Graduate student*

(Part 2 to earlier session “Threats to Healthy Early Brain Development”.) Dr. Ackerson will inform attendees regarding the long-term outcomes from gestational and perinatal complications including intrauterine exposure to toxins, prematurity, very low birthweight, inadequate oxygen flow, infectious processes, and medical misadventure. Associated brain changes may include intraventricular hemorrhage, hypoxic ischemic injury, stroke, and periventricular leukomalacia. Proper identification and quantification of early brain injury can allow for appropriate interventions that may improve long-term trajectories, as well as provide families with the knowledge they need for long-term planning.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES – Participants will be able to:

1. List at least three different causes and mechanisms of perinatal brain injury.
2. Identify the uses and limitations of common infant and preschool measures of cognitive functioning.
3. Demonstrate knowledge of the variables impacting long-term neurocognitive outcomes of perinatal brain injury, as well as the interventions that can impact these outcomes.

3:45 -4:00 P.M. - BREAK AND EXHIBITORS

4:00 -5:00 P.M. - BREAKOUT D (60 MINUTES)

Compassionate Conversations: Communicating with Families About Sensitive Topics

Kimberly Hile, PhD - *Associate Professor of Early Childhood Education/Early Childhood Special Education and Child, Family, and Community Development, University of Alabama in Huntsville (UAH)*

Fan Yang, PhD - *Associate Professor in the Department of Communication Studies, University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB)*

Engaging families in conversations about developmental concerns, diagnoses, and sensitive histories is a critical, yet often challenging, part of early intervention/early childhood special education practice. This session will explore practical, relationship-centered strategies for approaching these discussions with empathy, clarity, and cultural responsiveness. Participants will learn how to recognize verbal and nonverbal cues that signal family stress, resistance, or readiness, and how to adjust their communication in real time. Through real-world examples and guided reflection, attendees will build skills in using supportive language that maintains dignity while conveying essential information. By the end of this interactive session, professionals will feel more confident navigating difficult conversations in ways that strengthen partnerships and promote positive outcomes for young children with disabilities and their families.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES – Participants will be able to:

1. Identify key verbal and nonverbal cues that indicate family emotions such as feeling overwhelmed, confusion, or disengagement.
2. Apply at least three communication strategies that promote empathy, clarity, and respect during sensitive discussions.
3. Differentiate between moments that call for gentle persistence and those that require pausing or redirecting the conversation.
4. Use strengths-based and culturally responsive language when discussing developmental concerns or diagnoses.
5. Reflect on their own communication style and its impact on family engagement and trust.

More Play, Less Screen: Practical Strategies for Home Visitors to Promote Healthy Habits in Early Childhood

Casey Willis - *Alabama Healthy Kids, Healthy Future Coordinator with the Alabama Partnership for Children and Early Intervention Developmental Specialist*

Emily Campbell, MPH, CHES - *Alabama Healthy Kids, Healthy Future Director at the Alabama Partnership for Children*

Screen time is a common part of early childhood, but excessive use can impact physical activity, sleep, language development, and social-emotional growth. Home visitors are uniquely positioned to support families in creating balanced routines that prioritize movement, connection, and hands-on learning. This interactive session provides realistic, family-friendly strategies to reduce screen time and replace it with meaningful alternatives such as active play, music and movement, shared reading, outdoor exploration, cooking, and daily routines. Participants will also learn current physical activity recommendations for children ages 0–5 and simple, low-cost ways families can incorporate movement into everyday life. Attendees will leave with practical, ready-to-use tools and activities they can immediately implement during home visits to help families build healthier habits.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES – Participants will be able to:

1. Describe the impact of excessive screen time on young children’s physical, cognitive, and social-emotional development.
2. Identify age-appropriate physical activity recommendations for children ages 0–5.
3. Demonstrate at least 3 interactive, low-cost activities that promote movement and reduce reliance on screens.
4. Explain how everyday routines (mealtime, chores, transitions) can be used as opportunities for learning and physical activity.
5. Support families in creating realistic, screen-free alternatives that fit within their daily lives and environments.

Setting the Stage for Inclusion: Classroom Design, Routines, and Supports

Hannah Kennedy, PhD - Assistant Professor in Teacher Education, Samford University

Kate Scarborough, PhD - Assistant Professor in Teacher Education, Samford University

In this interactive session, presenters will share practical, evidence-based strategies to support preschool teachers in creating inclusive early childhood classrooms. Grounded in research-based frameworks such as Conscious Discipline and Universal Design for Learning (UDL), this session will highlight proactive approaches to classroom management, guidance, and inclusive practices. Participants will gain actionable tools for collaborating with interdisciplinary professionals, establishing effective classroom routines and procedures, and differentiating instruction to meet the diverse needs of all learners in early childhood settings.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES – Participants will be able to:

1. Identify key components of inclusive preschool classroom design using research-based frameworks such as Conscious Discipline and Universal Design for Learning (UDL).
2. Apply practical strategies for establishing proactive classroom management systems, including routines, procedures, and positive guidance techniques that support diverse learners.
3. Develop a plan for implementing inclusive practices through collaboration with interdisciplinary professionals and differentiation of instruction within early childhood settings.

Planning for Transition from Early Intervention to School-Based Services for the Child with Complex Motor Needs

Kate Stribling, PT, DPT, PCS – Physical Therapist, Portland Public Schools

We know that the transition between Early Intervention and school-based services can be stressful for many families and especially for those with children who experience complex motor needs. But what can be done to help decrease stressful factors and improve outcomes? Join us as we explore evidence guided transition planning when moving from Part C (Early Intervention) to Part B (school-based) services. We will also hear from a family about their experience during this process.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES – Participants will be able to:

1. Describe the process of planning for a successful transition from Early Intervention (EI)/Part C to school-based/Part B services.
2. Reference evidence-based resources to assist EI and school-based teams, especially physical and occupational therapists, with developing and following through with a plan of care before, during and after transition.
3. Recognize and integrate family priorities and feedback regarding the transition process.

Achieving Infant Regulation: Calm is Contagious

Mary Beth Moses, PT, MS, PCS, NTMTC – Physical Therapist, The Bell Center

Christy Moran, OTD, OTR/L – Occupational Therapist, The Bell Center

Cindy Florence, MA, ECSE – Special Education Teacher, The Bell Center

Kristen Wilhite, MA, CCC- SLP – Speech-Language Pathologist, The Bell Center

Through a transdisciplinary model, we will provide Early Intervention providers with tools they can use to educate families and caregivers on the importance of infant regulation. Infant regulation is key to infant learning and development. Providers and families will learn practical strategies to achieve a calm, regulated state for interaction. Providers will learn to identify situations when additional referrals may be beneficial for the family and child.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES – Participants will be able to:

1. Define what regulation vs. dysregulation looks like in infants and why regulation is important for development.
2. Identify three or more strategies to help promote regulation for infants and caregivers.
3. Implement routines-based, practical strategies for achieving infant regulation across settings.
4. Problem-solve when additional resources or referrals may be beneficial to help infants and caregivers achieve regulation.

Developmental Differences Birth to Age Three: Detection and Advocacy

Allison Cavender, MD – Pediatrician, Cahaba Medical Care

In this session, we will discuss the early signs and symptoms of developmental differences and the importance of referring early for evaluation and services. We will also discuss red flags in development that should prompt immediate referral. Additionally, we will talk about building a team of advocates to support the child and their caregivers.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES – Participants will be able to:

1. Identify risk factors and red flags for developmental disorders.
2. Explain the benefits of early referral for further evaluation.
3. List team members who can be advocates, their roles, and the rights granted under IDEA.
4. Describe how to help families know what to expect and how to access resources.

Start Strong: Transforming Outcomes for Deaf/Hard of Hearing Students

Kathryn C. Duncan, Ed.S - School Psychologist/Outreach Provider for Deaf/HH, Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind (AIDB)

Kimberly Moon, M.A. - Outreach Provider, Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind (AIDB)

Linnea Elliott, Ed.S - Outreach Provider, Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind (AIDB)

“Start Strong: Transforming Outcomes for Deaf/Hard of Hearing Students” explores how early intervention, guided by meaningful data, can significantly improve developmental and educational outcomes for deaf and hard of hearing (Deaf/HH) learners. This session highlights current data collected on Deaf/HH students.

Attendees will gain insights into how early language impacts academic success and strategies for translating data into action to strengthen early intervention programs, school-based programs, and long-term success.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES – Participants will be able to:

1. Identify key data related to language development, and early school outcomes for deaf and hard of hearing (D/HH) students.
2. Apply data-informed strategies to improve individualized early intervention planning and service delivery.
3. Evaluate current practices and determine opportunities to use data more effectively to enhance outcomes for D/HH learners.

Transdisciplinary Perspective on Early Feeding Milestones

Rachel Kassel MD, PhD - *Pediatric Gastroenterology, Children's of Alabama & UAB*

Lynzee Head, DO – *General Pediatrician, Children's of Alabama & UAB*

Kelli Chaviano, DO - *Pediatric Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation Physician, Children's of Alabama & UAB*

We will share our approach to diagnosis, evaluation, and treatment of infants with developmental delays, highlighting how global development impacts feeding and swallowing. Presenters are subspecialists from multiple specialties who see patients in transdisciplinary settings, both inpatient and outpatient.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES – Participants will be able to:

1. Identify early signs of cerebral palsy and other developmental conditions and explain how global development impacts feeding and swallowing.
2. Describe a multidisciplinary evaluation approach, including feeding and swallowing assessment within the context of overall development.
3. Apply evidence-based early intervention and care coordination strategies to support functional feeding, participation, and developmental outcomes.

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 20, 2026

8:00-8:45 A.M. - EARLY TUESDAY BREAKOUT (45 MINUTES)

The Many Hats of Service Coordination: Practical Tips, Resources and Encouragement for Service Coordinators!

Abby Hicks, M.A. CO – *Director, Service Coordinator and Developmental Specialist, Village Early Intervention*

Lindsey Dean, LBSW – *Service Coordinator Supervisor, Village Early Intervention*

Early Intervention Service Coordination can be a complicated job. At many points throughout the week we can feel like counselors, data entry specialists, project managers, and billing clerks all at the same time! This session is intended to provide practical support, tips, and encouragement for Service Coordinators and will include topics about building relationships, staying on track, involving the team, and accessing resources. Join the conversation because we carry it better together--it takes a village.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES – Participants will be able to:

1. Explain how to build relationships by connecting with families and each other.
2. Describe resources for tracking and managing deadlines and duties.
3. List ways to involve the team to include collaboration and unity between SC's, families, and providers.
4. Describe how to access other resources to empower the parent and facilitate community connections.

Signal in the Static: Supporting Caregivers Through Parenting Evolution, Digital Clutter, and Information Overload

Kimberly Hile, PhD - Associate Professor of Early Childhood Education/Early Childhood Special Education and Child, Family, and Community Development, University of Alabama in Huntsville (UAH)

Loretta Hayslip, PhD - Executive Director, University of Alabama in Huntsville's Early Learning Center

Caregivers today are caught in a generational "squeeze," navigating a massive shift from traditional, compliance-based parenting to modern, empathy-driven approaches. For families of young children with disabilities, this transition is often complicated by a 24/7 stream of digital "perfection," viral misinformation, and the heavy weight of unmet expectations. This interactive session explores how the move from "stopping the behavior" to "understanding the why" has increased the mental load on families, often leaving them paralyzed by conflicting advice and cultural pressures. Professionals will gain practical coaching strategies to help caregivers quiet the noise, manage the "comparison trap" of social media, and build confidence in evidence-based, developmentally appropriate practices that fit their unique child.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES – Participants will be able to:

1. Identify the primary external drivers of "caregiver stress" in the current landscape, including social media comparison and conflicting cultural attitudes toward disability.
2. Identify the psychological impact of "Comparison Culture" on caregivers, specifically how curated social media feeds distort expectations for children with disabilities.
3. Apply a "critical-thinking framework" to help caregivers distinguish between evidence-based developmental information and anecdotal online opinions.
4. Formulate supportive coaching scripts to help caregivers navigate unsolicited advice and pressure from extended family or peers regarding cultural perceptions of disability.

Creation and Implementation of a Disability-Inclusive Children's Literature Database

Katie Beth Sharp Staggs, OTD, OTR/L - Occupational Therapist, Alabama Pediatric Therapy Services

K. Megan Carpenter, OTD, OTR/L, SCFES – Occupational Therapist Assistant Professor and; Doctoral Capstone Coordinator, University of Alabama at Birmingham

A major gap exists in children's literature. Although 1 in 6 children have developmental disabilities (CDC, 2025), only 3.4% of books feature a main character with a disability (Tyner, 2020). To address this gap, a free, centralized database of disability-inclusive children's books (DICB) for ages 0-18 was developed and hosted by the University of Alabama at Birmingham, containing over 500 titles. Each entry includes age ratings, disability categories, summaries, and access links. Early user feedback showed strong engagement and suggested the database promotes inclusion, awareness, and understanding of diverse experiences among children.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES – Participants will be able to:

1. Describe the gap of representation for individuals with disabilities in children's books.
2. Access the created literature database for future utilization.
3. Understand future directions related to the database.

Connecting the Dots: From Early Signs of Autism to Everyday Support

Laura Hansen, PhD - Director of the UA-ASD Clinic and Associate Clinical Professor in the Department of Psychology, University of Alabama

Rebekah Whitt, M.S., CCC-SLP - Speech-Language Pathologist and Clinical Educator, University of Alabama Autism Spectrum Disorders Clinic

Current research shows that 1 in 31 eight-year-olds are identified as having Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) (Shaw, 2025). Action signs for ASD include but are not limited to delayed communication, limited pretend play, and decreased interest in other children. While these traits are indicative of ASD, they may also reflect other diagnoses such as Global Developmental Delay and Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). In this session, attendees will distinguish between diagnoses that may present as similar to ASD, create a process for how to talk to caregivers about ASD, and discover behavioral and communication supports to help autistic children thrive.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES – Participants will be able to:

1. Discuss typical development and action signs for autism spectrum disorder and other developmental delays.
2. Identify ways to collaborate with caregivers and other agencies to support neurodiverse children.
3. Name at least three basic behavioral or communication strategies to help neurodiverse students in daycare/preschool settings.

Little Moments, Big Discoveries: STEM in Everyday Early Childhood Routines

Savannah Loudin - Childcare Enhancement with a Purpose Inclusion Consultant, UCP Huntsville

STEM learning in early childhood does not require special materials or complicated experiments—it can be naturally embedded into everyday routines. In this session, educators will explore how moments like mealtimes, transitions, and daily classroom activities can become meaningful opportunities for science, technology, engineering, and math learning. We will challenge common misconceptions about early STEM and highlight its importance in building critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Participants will gain practical, easy-to-implement strategies that turn ordinary interactions into engaging learning experiences for young children.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES – Participants will be able to:

1. Identify at least three common misconceptions about STEM in early childhood settings.
2. Explain how everyday routines, including mealtimes and transitions, can be used to support STEM learning.
3. Demonstrate how to incorporate STEM-based questioning and language into daily interactions with young children.
4. List the developmental benefits of introducing STEM concepts during the early years.

5. Apply at least two strategies for embedding STEM learning into routine classroom activities.

Traumatic Brain Injury - Identifying Supports Along the Road of Recovery

Scott Powell - Executive Director, Alabama Head Injury Foundation (AHIF)

In this session we will discuss the causes and prevalence of Traumatic Brain Injuries (TBIs), especially within children, and how nonprofit organizations or other agencies can complement the existing support structures available. Participants will learn what resources are available in the community to families living with the effects of TBI, how caregivers can find unique supports for themselves, and what the continuum of care looks like for TBI survivors as they grow and develop alongside their recovery from injury.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES – Participants will be able to:

1. Participants will be able to describe causes of traumatic brain injuries in young children.
2. Participants will be able to list community resources available for families who have a child with a TBI.
3. Participants will be able to describe the continuum of care for TBI survivors.

9:00-9:15 A.M. - ANNOUNCEMENTS & WELCOME

9:15-10:15 A.M. - KEYNOTE (60 MINUTES)

From Challenge to Possibility: Early Intervention Strategies for Infants and Toddlers with Prenatal Substance Exposure (PSE)

Christy Isbell, PhD, OTR/L

Infants and toddlers with prenatal substance exposure (PSE) are a growing and important population in early intervention, and they bring both unique challenges and powerful potential for growth. We will explore how prenatal substance exposure (PSE) can influence early brain development, self-regulation, and participation. Through practical examples and applied strategies, this keynote will highlight how EI professionals can use simple, powerful tools within daily routines to support Development and caregiver confidence. Participants will leave with shared Understanding and renewed confidence in their ability to make a lasting impact on the development of infants and toddlers with PSE and their families.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES – Participants will be able to:

1. Recognize common types of prenatal substance exposure (PSE) and their potential impact on early learning and behavioral development.
2. Interpret developmental patterns and behavioral responses infants and toddlers with PSE through a strength-based, family-centered lens.
3. Apply evidence-based, practical strategies to support regulation, engagement, and participation within everyday routines.

10:15-10:45 A.M. - BREAK AND EXHIBITORS

10:45 A.M.-12:00 P.M. - BREAKOUT E (75 MINUTES)

Child Outcomes Summary (COS)

Tabitha Perry, MS - State Monitor, Alabama Early Intervention System

Amy Fisher, MS - State Monitor, Alabama Early Intervention System

Katrina I Lipscomb, M.Ed. - State Monitor, Alabama Early Intervention System

Participants will accurately describe the Child Outcomes Summary (COS) process in Early Intervention, analyze child functioning using multiple sources of information, and assign justified ratings on the 7-point scale through collaborative team discussion. The COS process requires input from all Early Intervention team members as they work together to reflect on and discuss the child's development and functioning across settings and situations.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES – Participants will be able to:

1. Explain the key features of the Child Outcome Summary process.
2. Describe the information needed to complete the process.
3. Demonstrate how the Child Outcomes are measured through the process.
4. Identify accurate Child Outcome Summary ratings using a team-based approach.
5. Explain how to measure progress in the three Child Outcome areas.

Access Creates Communication: Using Assistive Technology and APT AT to Expand Environmental Interaction in Early Intervention

Lynn Roebuck, M.S., CCC-SLP – Speech-Language Pathologist, United Ability and Consultant, Accessing Potential Through Assistive Technology (APTAT)

Access to the environment creates opportunities for engagement, exploration, and communication. This session will demonstrate how assistive technology can help young children interact with toys, activities, and routines in ways that support participation and communication development. Participants will learn practical strategies for embedding assistive technology into early intervention settings to expand environmental interaction and engagement. The session will also highlight resources and services available through APT AT: Alabama's Assistive Technology Act Program to support families and providers.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES – Participants will be able to:

1. Describe how assistive technology can support environmental interaction and participation for young children with disabilities in early intervention settings.
2. Identify strategies for integrating assistive technology into play, routines, and daily activities to increase engagement and create opportunities for communication development.
3. Explain how early intervention providers and families can access assistive technology services, demonstrations, and resources through APT AT: Alabama's Assistive Technology Act Program.

When Words Don't Come Easily: Supporting Social Communication in Young Children

Kendall Hampton - Early Language and Literacy Facilitator, Alabama Partnership for Children's Feed Me Words program

Strong communication develops through warm, responsive interactions, but some children need extra support to engage, connect, and communicate. This session introduces the FACTS framework from Project ImPACT and offers play-based strategies caregivers and professionals can use during everyday routines. Participants will learn how to follow a child's focus, adjust their communication, create opportunities for interaction, and support new skill development in natural, supportive ways. Strategies such as talking, reading, singing, and playing are woven throughout to support social communication in toddlers and preschoolers at home or in the classroom.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES – Participants will be able to:

1. Describe key components of the Project ImPACT FACTS framework.
2. Identify strategies that support engagement, communication, imitation, and play during everyday interactions.
3. Apply strategies to create opportunities for communication within daily routines, such as play, meals, and transitions.

"Can't Wait to Regulate": The Sensory System as the Foundation to Therapeutic Success in Toddlers

Mary Laura Day, OTR/L, Occupational Therapist, The Bell Center

Angela Anselmo M.A.Ed, Early Childhood Special Education Teacher, The Bell Center

Lori Williamson, OTR/L, - Occupational Therapist, The Bell Center

Noelle Nicholson, M.S., CCC-SLP, Speech-Language Pathologist, The Bell Center

In this session, we will discuss the significance of achieving toddler regulation in order to thrive across multiple settings. The sensory system is the groundwork for children to connect, engage, and learn. By learning about the sensory system and practical strategies, participants will be able to support children's regulation and growth.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES – Participants will be able to:

1. Explain how the sensory system impacts regulation, connection, and engagement, to achieve joy and learning.
2. Identify the impact of sensory regulation on all areas of development (cognitive, communication, and fine and gross movement).
3. List practical strategies for regulation in any environment.

Ghosts in the Classroom: Transforming Trauma Through Reflective and Relationship-Based Educational Systems

Johnece Smith, MS, Eds, LPC, NCC, IMH-E - Early Childhood Mental Health Consultant

Behind every behavior is a story—and often, that story began long before a child entered the classroom. “Ghosts in the Classroom” explores how intergenerational trauma and lived experiences shape children’s behavior, relationships, and capacity to learn.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES – Participants will be able to:

1. Define " Ghost in the Classroom" within a systems framework.
2. Explain how intergenerational trauma impacts classroom dynamics.
3. Identify reflective practices at individual, classroom, and system level.

Neurologic Music Therapy® in Early Intervention: Clinical Applications

Lydia Lowery, MT-BC, NMT™ - *Neurologic Music Therapist™*

Abby Whitlock, MT-BC, NMT™ - *Neurologic Music Therapist™*

Early childhood is a period of unparalleled neuroplasticity, where the brain is uniquely primed for growth through multisensory engagement. This session explores the transformative impact of Music Therapy (MT) and Neurologic Music Therapy® (NMT™) within birth-to-five settings. While often grouped under the same umbrella, MT and NMT™ offer distinct clinical pathways, ranging from social-emotional development and communication to the targeted "hard-wiring" of motor and cognitive pathways through a neuroscience-based model.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES – Participants will be able to:

1. Differentiate modalities by clearly distinguishing between the Social Science model of traditional Music Therapy (focusing on emotional and social milestones) and the Neuroscience model of Neurologic Music Therapy® (focusing on functional, brain-based changes).
2. Explain Neural Engagement by describing how rhythmic and melodic stimuli activate widespread areas of the brain, facilitating "cross-talk" between the auditory and motor systems to improve developmental outcomes.
3. Identify at least three specific NMT techniques (e.g., DSLM™, MACT™, or TIMP™) and their application in helping young children reach communication, cognitive, and physical milestones.
4. Target CP-specific support by recognizing how Rhythmic Auditory Stimulation® (RAS™) can be used as a stabilizing tool for children with Cerebral Palsy to improve gait, balance, and motor coordination.
5. Demonstrate 1–2 "musical cues" (such as melodic phrasing for speech or rhythmic pacing for movement) that can be immediately implemented in a preschool or home-based setting.

Snow Globes and Airport Codes: Amplifying Autistic Voices through Special Interests

Rebekah Whitt, M.S., CCC-SLP - *Speech-Language Pathologist and Clinical Educator, University of Alabama Autism Spectrum Disorders Clinic*

Laura Hansen, PhD - *Director of the UA-ASD Clinic and Associate Clinical Professor in the Department of Psychology, University of Alabama*

Client-centered care is a critical component of evidence-based practice and should prioritize clients’ personal preferences (Gaddy, Crow 2023). Special interests are prominent in autistic children, and it is estimated that

between 75 and 95% of autistic individuals exhibit special interests (Grove et al., 2018; Klin et al., 2007; Uljarevic, Alvares, et al., 2021). Accounts from autistic individuals indicate the importance of these interests on their livelihood (Davey, 2020). Through education and case studies, this session will demonstrate how professionals and families can practice cultural responsiveness to consider the learning styles and motivation of autistic children and incorporate meaningful treatment materials related to clients' special interests to drive momentum to participate, engage, and excel in intervention and daily life.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES – Participants will be able to:

1. Define culturally responsive practice.
2. Associate client-centered care in autism with the importance of using special interests in treatment.
3. Develop at least three strategies to incorporate special interests in interventions or daily routines with autistic individuals.

Fostering Positive Feeding Experiences Using Supportive Cues

Candace H. Cook, M.S. CCC-SLP - Clinical Assistant Professor and Speech-Language Pathology Clinical Educator, University of Alabama

Mary H. Bryan, M.Ed. CCC-SLP - Assistant Clinical Professor, Clinical Educator, and Clinical Placement Coordinator, University of Alabama

Using the diagnostic framework for pediatric feeding disorders, basic characteristics of feeding challenges and contributing factors will be briefly reviewed. Case scenarios will be utilized to help participants identify variables leading to both positive and negative feeding experiences for clients. Supportive cues for facilitating positive feeding experiences will then be presented according to the subcategories of visual, verbal, and tactile cues, with hands-on materials for participants to explore. Finally, participants will work within small groups to identify which types of supports are utilized in various case studies provided to them.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES – Participants will be able to:

1. Contrast positive and negative feeding experiences by highlighting impacting variables.
2. Describe supportive cues to advance eating and drinking.
3. Associate clinical examples with treatment strategies to support children with pediatric feeding disorders.

Partnering with Families: Interprofessional Strategies to Support Infants with Prenatal Substance Exposure (PSE) Through Everyday Routines

Christy Isbell, PhD, OTR/L - Professor and Director of the Center of Excellence for Early Childhood Learning and Development, East Tennessee State University (ETSU)

This interactive session engages EI professionals in a case-based learning experience focused on supporting infants with prenatal substance exposure (PSE). Participants will explore how everyday caregiving routines and learning environments can be used to promote motor, cognitive, and emotional development. Participants will work in small interprofessional groups to analyze a detailed case of an infant with PSE and their family. Attendees will actively examine the infant's routines and environment, and family perspectives and understanding of development to design family-centered strategies. Participants will leave with practical

strategies and tools for collaborative decision-making that can be immediately applied in home and childcare settings.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES – Participants will be able to:

1. Use interprofessional perspectives to develop coordinated, family-centered strategies embedded in routines for families of infants with PSE.
2. Apply evidence-based approaches to support young children’s motor, cognitive and emotional development.
3. Problem solve family beliefs and knowledge of developmentally appropriate practice to use in coaching and family-guided practices.

12:00-1:30 P.M. – LUNCH (ON YOUR OWN)

1:30-3:00 P.M. - BREAKOUT F (90 MINUTES)

Why Early Intervention: What It Is and Why It Works

Marc Hultquist, DO. FAAP - *Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrician*

In this session, we will discuss where the Early Intervention program fits in the big picture (responsibilities, funding, and service models). We will also talk about how having an awareness of the system and its policies allows providers to create the appropriate and comprehensive treatment plan for patients. Illustrating the important impact Early Intervention has on families at the operational level will also be covered. We will also discuss how Early Intervention works in the gray area between healthcare and non-medical intervention to optimize child development and outcomes—Early Intervention's unique capabilities other services can't match. Finally, we will discuss how to help families understand Early Intervention's role and their own role in their child's development.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES – Participants will be able to:

1. Describe how states implement Early Intervention services.
2. List key developmental moments in young children.
3. Explain the impact of Early Intervention on development.

Positive Parenting and the Brain: What Helps, What Hurts, and What We Often Miss

Joy Winchester - *Innovative Director, Innovative WORKS Collaborative LLC and Founder, Wired for Success: The Joy of Neuro*

What we say and do with young children shapes brain development—but not always in the ways we think. This session explores the neuroscience behind common parenting and caregiving responses, examining both the positive and negative impacts on a child’s developing brain. Participants will move beyond surface-level ideas of “positive parenting” to understand how predictability, clarity, emotional tone, and environmental context influence behavior and regulation. Through a brain-based lens, attendees will learn to evaluate everyday interactions more intentionally. This session provides a deeper understanding of how adult responses shape both immediate behavior and long-term development.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES – Participants will be able to:

1. Identify how common caregiving and parenting responses impact brain development, behavior, and regulation in young children.
2. Differentiate between responses that support development and those that may unintentionally increase stress, confusion, or dysregulation.
3. Apply a brain-based lens to make more intentional, effective decisions in everyday interactions with children.

Fine Motor Activities on a Budget (Limited to 50 participants)

Katasha Hughes, MAECEL - *Childcare Enhancement with a Purpose Project Coordinator, UCP of Mobile*

During this training participants will learn the importance of fine motor skills in early development, as well as hands on activities that can be utilized at little to no cost for their program. Participants will also have the opportunity to create a make-and-take fine motor activity to take home with them. We will be utilizing materials that you may already have access to but are unsure of how to incorporate with children to help with their development. The presenter has added new ideas and activities for an updated, more engaging training.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES – Participants will be able to:

1. Describe the importance of fine motor skills in early development.
2. List that can be used in the classroom for fine motor skills.
3. Apply their creativity to make a fine motor skill activity using provided material.

Alabama State Department of Education Preschool Updates

Stephanie Bear, Ed. S. CCC-SLP - *Education Specialist and Speech-Language Pathologist, Alabama State Department of Education in Special Education Services*

Kathy Wilkins - *Education Specialist, Alabama State Department of Education in Special Education Services*

This presentation will focus on sharing the most recent information from the Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE), Special Education Services, on topics geared specifically toward preschool special education service providers, including IEP development, eligibility considerations, the transition of students from Early Intervention to Preschool Special Education, SMARTTEACH™ GOLD® implementation, monitoring, and more!

LEARNING OBJECTIVES – Participants will be able to:

1. Complete the Teaching Strategies GOLD® tool appropriately for preschoolers with disabilities, according to ALSDE policy and procedures.
2. Identify updates in policies, processes, and/or procedures used in the special education process in the public schools.
3. Explain how to select the least restrictive, most appropriate environment for preschool-aged students with disabilities.
4. Describe updates and changes to procedures and practices for transitioning preschool-aged students with disabilities from Early Intervention to preschool.

The Six Needs of Mourning: Special Needs Parents

Belinda Kock, LPC, FT - Licensed Professional Counselor

This presentation explores the unique grief experiences of parents raising children with special needs through the framework of Dr. Alan Wolfelt's Six Central Needs of Mourning. Participants will examine how chronic sorrow, identity shifts, fear, helplessness, and ongoing emotional losses impact caregivers across the lifespan of parenting a child with disabilities or complex needs. Using a companioning model of grief support, this training encourages compassionate understanding, emotional validation, meaning-making, and healthy support systems for parents navigating both visible and invisible losses. Attendees will leave with practical reflection tools and a deeper understanding of how grief and resilience can coexist in the journey of special needs parenting.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES – Participants will be able to:

1. Identify the Six Central Needs of Mourning and explain how they apply to the ongoing grief experiences of parents raising children with special needs.
2. Recognize common emotional, psychological, and identity-related responses associated with chronic grief, including helplessness, fear, role changes, and meaning-seeking in caregiving parents.
3. Apply companioning-based support approaches that encourage emotional validation, healthy mourning, connection, and long-term support for special needs families.

Science of Reading: What Does It Look Like for Children Birth to Age 3

Gay Finn - Early Language and Literacy Coordinator, Alabama Partnership for Children

This session explores the foundational stages of early literacy development and the Science of Reading as it applies to children from birth to age 3. Participants will examine how the reading brain develops during these critical years, the role of phonological sensitivity, early oral language, social interaction, sound play, and positive, language-rich reading experiences lay the groundwork for later reading success. Practical strategies for supporting early literacy will be shared.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES – Participants will be able to:

1. Define the Science of Reading as it relates to birth to age three.
2. Explain how early brain construction supports reading development from birth to three years.
3. Describe key early literacy experiences that build foundational language and print awareness skills.
4. Identify practical experiences to support early reading readiness in young children.

Sleep Strategies for Children with Autism

Karen Lea Martin (Hyche), OTD, OTR/L – Occupational Therapist and Owner, The Hyche Center for Sensory & Motor Learning

This presentation will address sleep concerns in children with Autism and other neurodevelopmental conditions. Current research regarding sleep concerns and sleep disorders will be reviewed. Strategies to address poor sleep will be addressed in detail.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES – Participants will be able to:

1. Identify three common sleep disorders in neurodivergent children.
2. Explain how sleep affects child development.
3. Identify strategies to assist with sleep concerns.

Meet Them Where They Live: Culturally Responsive Strategies for Behavior Challenges in Early Childhood

Danielle Rich PhD, CCC-SLP, ASDCS - Interim Associate Dean of the School of Speech-Language Pathology, Pepperdine University's College of Health Sciences

Every behavior tells a story — but are we reading it through the right lens? This evidence-based, hands-on session invites early interventionists, preschool teachers, and SLPs to examine how cultural background shapes the way young children express needs, regulate emotions, and respond to adults. Grounded in current research, participants will explore the critical distinction between behavior that is different and behavior that is disordered, reflect on their own cultural lens, and practice concrete strategies for building trust with families across cultural differences.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES – Participants will be able to:

1. Identify at least three ways cultural values and family norms influence behavioral expectations in young children.
2. Apply a culturally responsive problem-solving framework to distinguish culturally different behavior from disordered behavior.
3. Demonstrate at least two evidence-based communication strategies for partnering with families across cultural differences around behavior concerns.

Seeing Beyond the Eyes: Understanding Cerebral Visual Impairment

Karen Harpster, PhD, OTR/L – Occupational Therapist and Clinician Scientist, Cincinnati Children's Hospital

This session will introduce Cerebral Visual Impairment (CVI), the most common cause of childhood visual impairment in developed countries, with a focus on brain-based differences in visual processing and their functional impact. The presenter will review the neurological foundations of CVI, characteristic visual behaviors, and associated medical risk factors. The session will outline assessment approaches for visual function and functional vision, including caregiver questionnaires, clinical observations, and standardized tools.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES – Participants will be able to:

1. Describe the neurological basis of Cerebral Visual Impairment (CVI) and explain how brain-based differences in visual processing affect functional vision in children.

2. Identify common visual behaviors and medical risk factors associated with CVI that may support early recognition and referral.
3. Discuss assessment approaches used to evaluate visual function and functional vision in children with CVI, including caregiver questionnaires, clinical observation, and standardized assessment tools.

3:00-3:15 P.M. - BREAK AND EXHIBITORS

3:15-4:45 P.M. - BREAKOUT G (90 MINUTES)

Safety in the Field (Session will be repeated on Wednesday)

Johnny Lee – Director, *Peace@Work*

This workshop focuses on equipping field workers with practical safety protocols for conducting home visits in potentially unpredictable environments. The emphasis is on proactive risk assessment, situational awareness, and personal safety strategies — from pre-visit preparation and route planning to in-home positioning and safe exit techniques. Key learning objectives include building habits around thorough destination research, coded communication systems for emergencies, cautious interpersonal interactions, continuous environmental scanning, and the critical importance of trusting one's instincts to recognize and respond to red flags. Overall, the training aims to foster a safety-first mindset that empowers workers to maintain control, minimize vulnerability, and confidently navigate challenging situations while still effectively performing their duties.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES – Participants will be able to:

1. Apply proactive safety strategies, including thorough pre-visit preparation, destination research, and coded communication systems, to minimize risks during field work and home visits.
2. Demonstrate skills in situational awareness, such as continuous environmental scanning, strategic positioning, cautious interpersonal interactions, and recognizing red flags like intoxication or domestic issues.
3. Explain the importance of trusting their instincts and executing safe exit techniques to maintain personal control and confidently navigate potentially unsafe situations while performing their professional duties.

When Sleep Becomes a Struggle: Coaching Families Toward Better Sleep

Kendall Hampton - Developmental Specialist and Certified Pediatric Sleep Consultant, *Rested Families, LLC*

Sleep challenges are one of the most common concerns families share with early childhood professionals. This session focuses on practical ways to support families during conversations about sleep, with an emphasis on toddlers and preschool-aged children. Participants will learn how to identify common sleep challenges, ask meaningful questions to better understand each family's situation, and guide them toward manageable next steps. The session also introduces high-impact strategies that promote healthy sleep habits, including routines, environment, and ways to build independent sleep skills. Participants will leave with tools and resources to support families with confidence while recognizing when referrals for medical or specialized support may be needed.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES – Participants will be able to:

1. Identify common sleep challenges in toddlers and preschool-aged children and describe potential contributing factors.
2. Apply key questions to assess sleep concerns and guide conversations with families.
3. Demonstrate how to provide simple, actionable guidance using high-impact strategies that support healthy sleep habits.
4. Determine when to continue supporting families within their role and when to refer for additional medical or specialized support.

Move, Move, Move Your Body but Which Way (Session Limited to 50)

Katasha Hughes, MAECEL - *Childcare Enhancement with a Purpose Project Coordinator, UCP of Mobile*

During this training session participants will learn the importance of moving through the day in all ways and not just when the music is on. Movement in the classroom is key to having an engaging classroom and can help with challenging behaviors as well. Many children with disabilities love the movement and it can help them concentrate more throughout the day.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES – Participants will be able to:

1. Describe the impact of excessive screen time on young children’s physical, cognitive, and social-emotional development.
2. Identify age-appropriate physical activity recommendations for children aged birth to five years.
3. Demonstrate at least three interactive, low-cost activities that promote movement and reduce reliance on screens.
4. Explain how everyday routines (mealtime, chores, transitions) can be used as opportunities for learning and physical activity.
5. Support families in creating realistic, screen-free alternatives that fit within their daily lives and environments.

Picture This: Using Visuals to Support Early Learners (make and take)

Barbie Jones, M.Ed. - *Director of Curriculum and Instruction for Early Childhood, UCP of Central Florida*

Stephanie De Bear - *Early Childhood Curriculum and Instruction Specialist, UCP of Central Florida*

This interactive session will provide early childhood educators with practical strategies for creating and using visual supports to strengthen classroom management, student engagement, and daily routines. Participants will explore tools such as focus walls, first/then boards, token boards, choice boards, and core communication boards while learning how to design visuals that meet the diverse needs of young learners. Real classroom examples and ready-to-use ideas will help attendees implement visual systems that promote independence, communication, and positive behavior in early learning environments.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES – Participants will be able to:

1. Identify the purpose and appropriate use of visual supports such as Red and Green Choices, First/Then boards, Token boards, Choice boards, Core boards, and visual schedules in early childhood classrooms.

2. Demonstrate how to create and implement visual supports that promote positive behavior, communication, and student independence.
3. Explain how visual systems can be used to support classroom routines, transitions, and student engagement throughout the school day.
4. Develop classroom-ready visual tools that align with the developmental and communication needs of young learners.
5. Describe strategies for using visual supports to increase participation and reduce challenging behaviors in early childhood settings.

Supporting Children's Mental Health Through Literature

Gwendolyn Miniard, MS, CAMS-I, CGP, ALC - Associate Licensed Professional Counselor and Owner, Bright Horizons Family Resource Center, LLC

Books can play a key role in supporting children's mental health by helping them understand emotions, become more resilient, and develop empathy, especially through approaches like bibliotherapy. Stories offer a safe space to talk about feelings, worries, grief, and social skills, allowing kids to better recognize and manage their feelings.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES – Participants will be able to:

1. Describe how to support children in demonstrating emotional awareness by identifying their feelings and thoughts through literacy.
2. Explain how to support children in learning ways to vocalize their feelings to a trusted adult, which helps reduce the power of big feelings.
3. Identify ways to support children by recognizing that feelings are temporary and that they can feel better again.

Cracking the Code: Understanding Why Young Children Engage in Challenging Behavior

Savannah Loudin - Childcare Enhancement with a Purpose Inclusion Consultant, UCP Huntsville

Young children often communicate their needs through behavior when they do not yet have the words or skills to express themselves. This session helps participants learn how to look beyond the behavior and identify the reason it is occurring. Participants will explore common reasons children engage in challenging behaviors such as seeking attention, escaping difficult tasks, gaining access to preferred items, or meeting sensory needs. The session will include real classroom examples and practical strategies for responding in ways that support skill development and reduce frustration. Participants will leave with tools that promote positive behavior while strengthening communication and relationships.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES – Participants will be able to:

1. Identify the most common functions of behavior in early childhood settings, including attention, escape, access to items, and sensory needs.
2. Analyze real-life behavior scenarios to determine the likely function of a child's behavior.
3. Demonstrate strategies for teaching replacement skills that support communication and reduce challenging behaviors.

4. Design a simple behavior support response plan based on the identified function of behavior.

How Full Is Your Bucket? - Practical Strategies for Self-Care and Nervous System Regulation

Jessica D. Strickland, BSE, LICSW – Counselor, Ability Clinic & Cahaba Medical Care

Ever feel like you're running on empty - physically, mentally, emotionally, and even spiritually? When your internal bucket is empty, performance and well-being suffer. Whether you're a parent or a provider, you cannot pour from an empty cup. Join this practical breakout session to discover how true nervous system regulation can reset your capacity for stress. We will clarify why "self-comfort" isn't always "self-care" and explore immediate, actionable strategies to calm your mind and body. Finally, you will design your own customized self-care plan to ensure you leave equipped to handle life's daily demands with sustainable energy and clarity.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES – Participants will be able to:

1. Explain the difference between self-care and self-comfort.
2. Identify several practical strategies for self-care and nervous system regulation.
3. Create your own self-care plan.

Partners in Progress: Understanding Parent Perspectives in Early Intervention

Kelli Ellis, MS CCC-SLP, LSLS Cert AVT - Speech-Language Pathologist and Listening and Spoken Language Specialist (Cert AVT), Woolley Institute for Spoken-Language Education (WISE)

Tammi S. Dahle, Ph.D., NCC, LPC, LPC-SC – Parent

This presentation highlights the evolving relationship between families and professionals. We will reflect on our stories and experiences, which emphasize the importance of trust, communication and education for building successful partnerships. Parents will share their perspectives on navigating early intervention (and beyond!) with their children who are Deaf or Hard-of-Hearing. Attendees will gain insight into ways to support and empower parents and caregivers, promote child development and improve outcomes through collaborative, family-centered care.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES – Participants will be able to:

1. Identify key components of family-centered care for children who are Deaf or Hard-of-Hearing, which may also be applied to other special needs.
2. Describe the successes and challenges of family experiences and gain insight into what parents may value most as we seek to create more responsive, compassionate care.
3. List specific ways to provide support for families during or following a diagnosis and reflect on the power of collaboration as parents move from uncertainty to empowerment.

Supporting Functional Vision: Engagement, Exploration, and Participation in Children with Cerebral Visual Impairment (CVI)

Karen Harpster, PhD, OTR/L – Occupational Therapist and Clinician Scientist, Cincinnati Children's Hospital

This presentation will focus on treatment strategies that support visual development across early, middle, and later stages in children with Cerebral Visual Impairment (CVI). Presenters will describe common functional

challenges observed at each stage of visual development and outline developmentally appropriate goals that emphasize participation in meaningful daily activities. The sessions will highlight practical, evidence informed intervention strategies to “turn on” and strengthen visual engagement, including environmental modifications, graded use of light, color, and movement, and systematic approaches to managing visual complexity. Case informed examples will illustrate adaptations for self-care, play, leisure, mobility, learning, and social participation across home, school, and community settings. Together, these presentations underscore the role of occupational therapy in promoting functional vision, increasing independence, and enhancing access and participation for children with CVI across environments.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES – Participants will be able to:

1. Identify common functional challenges associated with various stages of visual development in children with Cerebral Visual Impairment (CVI).
2. Apply evidence informed intervention strategies, including environmental modifications and graded use of light, color, movement, and visual complexity, to support visual engagement and participation.
3. Select developmentally appropriate adaptations to promote functional vision, independence, and access in self-care, play, learning, mobility, and social participation across home, school, and community settings.

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 21, 2026

8:00 A.M. – 12:00 P.M. –AUTISM LEARNING COLLABORATIVE TRAINING (210 MINUTES)*

*Two 15-minute breaks will be provided

**Pre-registration required, and class size limited to 40

Practical Early Intervention Strategies for Young Children with Autism: An Interactive Learning Collaborative

Training conducted by the Alabama Community Autism Mentors

Facilitator: Mary Beth Vick

This interactive session is designed for professionals working in early intervention, preschool programs, home visitation, and speech-language services who support young children with autism (or suspected autism) and their families. The session will focus on practical, relationship-based strategies that can be embedded into daily routines and natural environments. The session will also address how to have supportive, family-centered conversations with caregivers when developmental concerns arise.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES – Participants will be able to:

1. Describe effective early intervention strategies for young children with autism (or suspected autism).
2. Describe five key intervention strategies that can be embedded into daily routines and service delivery.
3. Apply the five intervention strategies through guided small-group discussion and case-based examples.
4. Explain how to support caregivers in becoming active play and communication partners using naturalistic developmental behavioral strategies.
5. Identify autism resources and community supports available to families.

8:00-9:00 A.M. - BREAKOUT H (60 MINUTES)

A Father's Perspective: Strengthening Father Engagement in Early Intervention

Attendees will hear from three fathers as they share their personal experiences of having a child in Early Intervention. Through their unique perspectives, these dads will discuss their involvement throughout the EI journey, the challenges and successes they encountered, and the impact of being actively engaged in their child's services. Participants will gain insight into how service coordinators and providers can intentionally include, engage, and support fathers throughout the Early Intervention process, helping to strengthen family-centered practices and improve outcomes for children and families.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES – Participants will be able to:

1. Describe strategies for more intentionally addressing the unique needs and strengths of fathers within Early Intervention.
2. Apply effective approaches to engaging fathers as active partners in goal setting and ongoing discussions of child progress.
3. Identify opportunities and resources that help fathers build meaningful peer relationships and strengthen their connections to community support.

Pump Up the Play: Loose Parts Edition

Raeyna Woodside-Howard - Mentor Coach, Early Care Coach, PD Specialist, and CLASS observer

This session invites educators, caregivers, and early childhood professionals to explore the power of loose parts play in supporting creativity, problem-solving, and holistic development in young children. Participants will discover how open-ended materials—such as natural objects, recycled items, and everyday household materials—can inspire curiosity, imagination, and independent thinking in children from birth to five years old.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES – Participants will be able to:

1. Identify loose parts play and its function in early childhood settings.
2. Analyze the connection between loose parts play and cognitive development.
3. Evaluate scenarios and create activities using tangible loose parts and pieces.

Fine Motor Skills Task Boxes

Leanna Stephens - Preschool Special Education Teacher, Bibb County School District

Attendees will learn the science behind how fine motor skills influence later reading success, the hierarchy of fine motor development, how to design fine motor task boxes for their classrooms/therapy, and how to use data to drive instruction. They will leave with ideas for new activities and ways to use their own materials. Finally, attendees will brainstorm accommodations and modifications for their own students.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES – Participants will be able to:

1. Explain the science of how fine motor skills influence later reading success.
2. Demonstrate the hierarchy of fine motor skills in three- to five-year-old students.
3. Demonstrate the ability to create their own task box system.
4. Apply data to plan task boxes, monitor progress, and assess student understanding.

5. Explain how to make accommodations and modifications for specific students.

Seeing Through Their Eyes: Understanding Belonging from a Child's Perspective Through Photo Elicitation

Loretta Hayslip, PhD - Executive Director, University of Alabama in Huntsville's Early Learning Center

Belonging is often defined by adults through environment, inclusion policies, or participation, but young children experience belonging in deeply personal, relational, and often unspoken ways. This session explores findings from photo-elicitation research, in which children share their daily experiences to reveal what makes them feel included, valued, and connected. Through these visual narratives, participants will gain insight into how preschool children, especially those with disabilities, interpret belonging beyond surface-level inclusion. The session highlights key themes from the research and translates them into actionable strategies for educators and caregivers to foster authentic belonging rooted in relationships, agency, and identity.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES – Participants will be able to:

1. Identify key indicators of belonging from a child's perspective, based on photo-elicitation research findings.
2. Analyze how children communicate feelings of inclusion and exclusion through behavior, interaction, and environment.
3. Apply research-based strategies to create classroom environments that promote relational belonging, not just physical inclusion.
4. Develop intentional practices that elevate child voice, choice, and identity as central components of inclusive learning environments.

An Inverted Pyramid: The 2025–2030 Dietary Guidelines for Americans and Implications for Early Intervention Practice

Aida Miles, EdD, MMSc, RDN, LD, CSP, FAND - Associate Professor of Pediatrics, University of Alabama Birmingham School of Medicine

The January 2026 release of the 2025-2030 Dietary Guidelines for Americans generated significant national attention and discussion across news and social media outlets due to significant differences from prior iterations, including a new inverted pyramid visual. This presentation will introduce EI professionals to the structure, development, and public health role of the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, with specific attention to pregnancy, infancy, and early childhood. We will compare historical guidance with the current edition, highlighting key changes and examining the strength of the evidence underlying selected recommendations. Emphasis will be placed on translating guideline-level recommendations into developmentally-appropriate, family-centered feeding guidance for diverse populations.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES – Participants will be able to:

1. Compare and contrast key differences between previous editions of the Dietary Guidelines and the 2025–2030 guidelines, with emphasis on recommendations relevant to pregnancy, infancy, and early childhood.
2. Apply evidence-based nutrition guidance to early intervention practice by translating guideline level recommendations into developmentally appropriate, family centered feeding support.
3. Evaluate the strength and limitations of the scientific evidence supporting selected early life nutrition recommendations.

A Deeper Path to Understanding: How Hearing Loss May Be Overlooked in Children

Heather Jackson, AuD, CCC-A - Audiologist, Civitan-Sparks Clinic

Ashley Campbell, AuD, CCC-A - Audiologist, Civitan-Sparks Clinic, Newborn Follow-up Clinic, Lifespan Down Syndrome Clinic

This session will help participants better understand how different types of hearing losses in children can affect their ability to learn, communicate, and stay engaged. It will explore how temporary issues, such as fluid in the ears, as well as mild or unilateral hearing losses, can impact speech development, attention, and classroom performance. Participants will learn how to recognize signs that a child may be struggling and when it is appropriate to refer them for a full hearing evaluation, even if they passed their newborn hearing screening. The session will also explain how listening with one ear differs from using both ears together and why supportive devices can be helpful in certain cases. Attendees will leave with practical guidance to support early identification and timely intervention for children with hearing concerns.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES – Participants will be able to:

1. Describe the impact of persistent fluid, transient or ongoing conductive hearing losses in children and when to make appropriate referrals.
2. Explain mild hearing losses and their impact on development, speech and attention difficulties the present.
3. Identify when and who they should refer for a full audiological evaluation with an audiologist even if the child passed their newborn hearing screening (NBHS).
4. Recognize the difference between binaural vs. unilateral listening and why amplification is beneficial for unilateral hearing losses.

Children's Rehabilitation Services and Community Resources for Equipment Billing and Coverage

Billy Ronilo, MS, PT – Physical Therapist, Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services/Children's Rehabilitation Services

Choosing the right piece of equipment for a child and their family is a complex task for any treating therapist. Getting that piece of equipment covered by insurance can be even more complex and frustrating. Come learn about the adaptive equipment billing process and go in-depth regarding covered equipment, equipment coding, and alternative community resources.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES – Participants will be able to:

1. Identify common pieces of equipment utilized in Early Intervention (EI) settings.

2. Identify insurance coverage options for equipment commonly used in EI and the necessary paperwork needed to obtain the equipment.
3. Identify alternative funding options available in Alabama to assist families in obtaining adaptive equipment not covered by third party payers.

9:00-9:15 A.M. – BREAK

9:15-10:15 A.M. - BREAKOUT I (60 MINUTES)

Foster Care: Working with Foster Parents to Mitigate Impact Upon Children Birth to Five Years of Age

Sandy Donovan, MSN, RN, CASA

Autauga County District Judge Jessica Sanders

Annually, five to six thousand children experience foster care in Alabama. At any age, the trauma of being separated from their biological family creates developmental challenges. Children age five and younger are exceptionally vulnerable. Foster parents stand in the gap for these children in a unique and special way. This session will discuss the developmental challenges for children in foster care, explain the legal process that occurs when a child enters the system, and assist early childhood interventionists in developing strategies for working with foster children and parents.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES – Participants will be able to:

1. Describe one milestone at each stage of development that may be impacted by foster care placement for children birth to five years of age.
2. Outline the legal process associated with foster care placement and identify three court-associated personnel who may be involved in a foster child's case.
3. List three actions early childhood interventionists can take to assist foster children and foster parents in navigating the challenges of foster care.

Born Ready University: Preparing Parents for the Journey of a Lifetime-Raising Children

Liletta Jenkins, MS, CPM - Director of Community Outreach and Engagement, Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education

Children thrive when they have positive, supportive parents and caregivers in their lives. This session will highlight how the Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education's (ADECE) Born Ready University program partners with community organizations to equip parents with practical tools and resources. Participants will learn how these collaborative efforts support families in raising children who are healthy, happy, and prepared for school success.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES – Participants will be able to:

1. Define the Born Ready University program and its purpose.
2. Describe the program structure and key components.
3. Explain strategies for effective program implementation in community settings.

4. Identify core elements of the Born Ready University curriculum.
5. Explain the grant opportunity and requirements for hosting a Born Ready University program.

Practical Strategies for Social-Emotional Learning in Inclusive Early Childhood Settings

Erica O. Lee, PhD - Assistant Professor of Special Education, University of Montevallo

William Harper-Hooper IV, PhD - Associate Professor of Early Childhood Education, University of Montevallo

Many educators know that social-emotional learning is important, but struggle to find the time to teach it. This session focuses on how to build these skills into what teachers are already doing each day, rather than adding something new. Participants will learn practical ways to support young children in inclusive classrooms through everyday routines like play, read-alouds, and transitions. The session also explores how to adjust these strategies to meet the needs of diverse learners. Attendees will leave with simple, realistic ideas they can immediately use in their classrooms.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES – Participants will be able to:

1. Identify common barriers to implementing social-emotional learning in early childhood classrooms.
2. Describe at least three ways to embed social-emotional skill development into everyday classroom routines.
3. Apply strategies to support young children with disabilities in developing social and emotional skills through adapted instruction.
4. Develop a simple plan for integrating social-emotional learning into classroom practices.

Active Play for All Abilities: Inclusive Movement Ideas for Early Childhood

Sarritha Scales, M.Ed. - Early Childhood Specialist, Child Care Central

Physical play is a cornerstone of early development—but access to movement is not always equitable. This session provides early educators with practical, inclusive strategies that make physical play flexible, meaningful, and developmentally supportive for all young children. Participants will explore the “why” behind active play and practice movement activities they can implement in their program.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES – Participants will be able to:

1. Explain the developmental importance of physical play across motor, sensory, cognitive, and social-emotional domains.
2. Identify and apply a variety of accessible play adaptations that support participation for children with differing motor, sensory, and communication needs.
3. Implement at least three inclusive movement activities that can be modified for diverse abilities using common classroom or home materials.

Becoming an Effective Advocate for Your Child

Glenda Grbac, M. Ed., BCBA, LBA - School Consultant and Parent Advocate

Samantha Pate, M. Ed., BCBA, LBA - Education Director, Mitchell's Place

This presentation empowers parents and caregivers of children with disabilities to become confident, effective advocates for their children across medical, educational, and community settings. It emphasizes that advocacy is not just for conflict situations, but an ongoing, collaborative process grounded in communication, preparation, and informed decision-making. The session will also address how early childhood professionals can support and share advocacy strategies with families to promote collaboration and empowered decision-making. This session is a mixed lecture and panel discussion with participants.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES – Participants will be able to:

1. Identify the importance of effective communication in advocacy.
2. Demonstrate advocacy in key settings.
3. Develop a master plan for their advocacy journey.

Exploring AAC Apps and Tools: An Interactive Roundtable Discussion

Lynn Roebuck, M.S., CCC-SLP – *Speech-Language Pathologist, United Ability and Consultant, Accessing Potential Through Assistive Technology (APTAT)*

This interactive session is designed for early intervention providers interested in augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) tools, apps, and products that support individuals with communication needs. The session will begin with a brief facilitated overview of selected AAC apps, tools, and implementation strategies across a variety of settings and access methods. Following this introduction, participants will engage in a collaborative roundtable discussion to share experiences, ask questions, and explore real-world applications of AAC solutions.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES – Participants will be able to:

1. Identify a variety of AAC apps and tools that support communication across different user needs and environments.
2. Describe at least two practical strategies for implementing AAC tools in early intervention settings including classroom, or home settings.
3. Evaluate the benefits and limitations of different AAC products based on shared experiences.

ABCs of Supported Standing and Stepping

Wendy Harris Altizer PT, ATP - *Physical Therapist and Assistive Technology Practitioner (ATP)*

There are many published research articles that recognize the benefit of supported standing and stepping. This session brings a fresh perspective summary to these research articles and offers knowledge translation that can impact our interventions as practitioners. Evidence-informed practice that focuses on participation-based intervention and incorporates supported stepping and standing will be discussed. Content will include an overview of the research, and attendees will learn simple ways to link research to practice. This presentation bridges the "know-do" gap by translating research into relatable, actionable, and context-specific formats. The attendees will also learn how to share that knowledge with their colleagues and families in a way that is easy to understand.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES – Participants will be able to:

1. Describe the six “F words” and their relation to everyday participation.
2. List four reasons why supported standing and stepping are critical to postural care.
3. Name three researchers who demonstrated that supported standing and stepping in pediatric practice is vital for health.

10:15-10:30 A.M. – BREAK

10:30 A.M.-12:00 P.M. - BREAKOUT J (90 MINUTES)

Why What Works...Stops Working: The Neuroscience of Inconsistent Behavior

Joy Winchester - Innovative Director, Innovative WORKS Collaborative LLC and Founder, *Wired for Success: The Joy of Neuro*

Why does a strategy work one day and fall apart the next? This session explores the neuroscience behind inconsistent behavior in young children, showing how shifts in stress, environment, and brain system activation impact performance in real time. Participants will move beyond strategy-based thinking to understand behavior through a brain-forward lens. By reframing inconsistency as a systems issue rather than defiance, attendees will gain a practical way to interpret behavior and respond more effectively. This session reduces frustration and builds confidence in navigating unpredictable moments.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES – Participants will be able to:

1. Identify key neurological and environmental factors that contribute to inconsistent behavior in young children.
2. Explain how changes in stress, context, and brain system activation impact a child’s ability to access skills and regulate behavior.
3. Apply a brain-forward lens to interpret behavior and adjust adult responses more effectively in real-time situations.

When Practice Doesn’t Make Perfect: Understanding & Treating Childhood Apraxia of Speech in Early Intervention

Shauna Ashley, PhD, CCC-SLP - Assistant Professor, Speech-Language Pathology, College of Health Sciences at Faulkner University

Childhood apraxia of speech (CAS) is one of the most misunderstood diagnoses in early childhood — frequently mistaken for a severe phonological delay, a “late talker,” or ordinary articulation difficulty. Yet CAS is a motor speech disorder with a distinct profile and a distinct treatment path, and identifying it early changes a child’s trajectory. This session gives professionals and families a clear, shared framework: where speech breaks down, how CAS differs from other speech sound disorders, and which early red flags warrant referral. The second half turns to treatment, translating the principles of motor learning into practical, evidence-based strategies — including integral stimulation and Dynamic Temporal and Tactile Cueing, the role of practice intensity, and how

family coaching and AAC support spoken communication. Participants leave able to recognize, refer for, and reinforce effective intervention for the youngest children with CAS.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES – Participants will be able to:

1. Differentiate childhood apraxia of speech from phonological disorder, articulation disorder, and dysarthria using a speech-production framework and the consensus features of CAS.
2. Identify at least three early red flags of CAS in children from birth to five years that warrant referral for a motor speech evaluation.
3. Describe evidence-based, motor-learning-based treatment approaches for CAS and the principles of practice intensity and dosage that support them.
4. Explain at least two strategies for coaching families as practice partners and the role of augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) as a bridge to spoken language.

Safety in the Field (Repeated session from Tuesday)

Johnny Lee – Director, *Peace@Work*

The workshop focuses on equipping field workers with practical safety protocols for conducting home visits in potentially unpredictable environments. The emphasis is on proactive risk assessment, situational awareness, and personal safety strategies — from pre-visit preparation and route planning to in-home positioning and safe exit techniques. Key learning objectives include building habits around thorough destination research, coded communication systems for emergencies, cautious interpersonal interactions, continuous environmental scanning, and the critical importance of trusting one's instincts to recognize and respond to red flags. Overall, the training aims to foster a safety-first mindset that empowers workers to maintain control, minimize vulnerability, and confidently navigate challenging situations while still effectively performing their duties.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES – Participants will be able to:

1. Apply proactive safety strategies, including thorough pre-visit preparation, destination research, and coded communication systems, to minimize risks during field work and home visits.
2. Demonstrate skills in situational awareness, such as continuous environmental scanning, strategic positioning, cautious interpersonal interactions, and recognizing red flags like intoxication or domestic issues.
3. Explain the importance of trusting their instincts and executing safe exit techniques to maintain personal control and confidently navigate potentially unsafe situations while performing their professional duties.

Torticollis: Evidence Based Assessment and Treatment Strategies for Early Intervention

Mary Beth Moses, PT, MS, PCS, NTMTC – Physical Therapist, The Bell Center

Christy Moran, OTD, OTR/L – Occupational Therapist, The Bell Center

A review of current evidence-based assessment and treatment strategies for torticollis including screening for associated diagnoses and secondary conditions that often accompany Torticollis. The focus will be on family-friendly practical treatment strategies to help families improve their infant's head and neck motion and symmetry of movement. Presentation of stretching and strengthening activities that can be implemented by families through play, positioning, carrying positions, and daily routines will be shared. Participants will have an opportunity to practice these strategies on dolls during the session.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES – Participants will be able to:

1. Identify presence of mild, moderate, and atypical presentations of torticollis.
2. Implement evidence-based measurements of motion and strength to document progress.
3. Demonstrate treatment strategies to teach families to help improve their child's head and neck motion and overall symmetry of movement.
4. Discuss strategies to improve home program compliance.
5. Explain the need for screening of secondary conditions and associated diagnoses commonly found in conjunction with torticollis.