

Conference Session Details:

25th Annual Southern Utah EC Conference – April 10th & 11th, 2026

Key to Sessions

IT= Infant/Toddler topics, PS= Preschool topics, SA= School Age Topics, LD= Leadership Topics, ALL= All Participants, CCQS= Session will help with the Quality System



Friday, April 10th, 6:00-7:00 pm

The Children's Center Utah- Connection over Perfection: Creating a Ripple Effect

Be inspired by the Children's Center Utah! Learn how to use coaching skills for everyday connections to create ripple effects of positive changes in your early childhood program.

After, join us for line dancing with Utah's own Eric Dodge from 7-8 pm

Saturday, April 11th Keynote begins at 8:00 am

Happy Trails to You: Finding Joy in the Journey	Teresa Byington Speaker, Author	Saddle up for an inspiring ride through the heart of the Wild West. Discover how to find joy from within as you ride tall through challenges and leave a trail of positivity. Joy isn't a destination; it's the ride itself. Choose to ride boldly as you spread joy and blaze a trail for others to follow.
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Session 1: 10-11am

Session 2: 11:15-12:15pm

Blaze Your Own Trail of Joy: Living Boldly from Within (Session 1) *ALL	Teresa Byington Speaker, Author	Will you follow the herd or blaze your own trail of joy? Dig deep into your own sources of joy and map bold steps to live and lead from within. Learn about the BIG JOY project and how you can engage in daily micro-acts of joy. Explore how you can carry more joy into your work, relationships and community by taking joy breaks. Together, we'll kick up the dust, claim our courage, and commit to leaving boot prints of joy wherever we go!
CCQS Panel Discussion and Q & A (Session 1) *ALL, LD, CCQS	Carlene Hanson Care About Childcare- Western	Join us for a panel discussion with REAL providers participating in the Child Care Quality System! Our CCQS Specialist will facilitate a Q & A session where you can ask questions and clarify any apprehension you may have about participating in this program! Our panel will consist of active FAMILY and CENTER CCQS participants and Early Childhood Specialists.
Elevating Quality: Key Updates to the Child Care Quality System (Session 2) *CCQS, LD, ALL	Karrie Phillips Office of Child Care	Come and learn about new changes to Utah's Child Care Quality System (CCQS) and its benefits for programs, families, and children. Programs will have more flexibility to decide what areas to focus on to enhance the quality of care for children and families.
It's a Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood-How community kindness and service can help an early childhood program thrive! (Session 2) *ALL	Carrie Sigler CCRA- Western	Children, alongside the adults who guide them, truly have the power to change the world. Sometimes all it takes is one kind word, a smile, or a simple act of compassion. Kindness plays a vital role in children's social-emotional development, supporting empathy, building stronger relationships, and nurturing healthy self-esteem. It also boosts their overall well-being by increasing happiness, lowering stress, and even triggering positive physical responses that support heart health and activate the brain's reward centers. This class will show you how to intentionally teach kindness and weave it naturally into your daily routine. Come to discover how one provider uses simple, meaningful practices to make a lasting difference in the world around them.

Play is the Work of the child: creating and exploring in meaningful ways (Session 1) *ALL	<u>Karla Palmer</u> The Children's Center Utah	In this presentation we will discuss some of the importance of supporting and Enhancing Creativity, Art Activities in Early Childhood, Sensory Play and Exploration and How Might These Activities Influence Children's Behavior?
/El juego es el Trabajo del niño: Crear y explorar de manera significativa (Sesión 2) *ALL- En Español	<u>Karla Palmer</u> El Centro Infantil de Utah	En esta presentación hablaremos de algunas importancias sobre como Aumentar y apoyar la creatividad. Actividades Artísticas de la Primera Infancia. Juego Sensorial y Exploración, ¿Cómo podrían estas actividades influir en el comportamiento de los niños?
Using the Ages and Stages Questionnaire: Unlock the Power of Early Childhood Screening (Session 1) *ALL	<u>Sarah Armknecht & Kathleen Brown</u> Help Me Grow Utah & The Office of Child Care	This presentation will take an in-depth look at the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ). We will discuss what the ASQ is and how it is used to screen children for developmental milestones in key areas like communication, motor skills, social-emotional development, and problem-solving. We will discuss how using the ASQ can benefit childcare programs by improving outcomes for children and fostering relationships with parents, as well as the process for participants to receive the ASQ screening tools for their program at no cost through the "Celebrate the Stages" program.
Making Licensing Your Partner! *ALL, LD	<u>Crystal Knippers</u> DLBC- Child Care Licensing	You might think of child care licensing as a challenge or even a headache, but it doesn't have to be! The truth is, you and your licensor are a team working together to keep the kids in your program safe and well cared for. In this session, we'll talk about how to make licensing work for you. We'll show you how to use all the tools and resources available so that when the licensor visits, your program is running smoothly. Think of it as finding the key to smooth sailing with your licensing requirements!
Childhood experiences & Strategies for Preventing Child Abuse & Neglect with Prevent Child Abuse Utah *ALL	<u>Miles Graff, Jessica Montes</u> Prevent Child Abuse Utah	We will be discussing ACE's (Adverse Childhood Experiences), and Positive Childhood Experiences.
Won't You Be Our Neighbor? PBS KIDS Education Tools for Early Educators *ALL	<u>Annie Frazier, Melanie Pehrson-Noyce</u> PBS Utah	Join the PBS Utah Education team to learn about the many FREE educational tools PBS provides for teachers to help students have bright futures. PBS Learning Media, PBS KIDS for Parents, local PBS Utah Kids & Education Initiatives, and much more! We will spend time discussing PBS KIDS as a resource and allow for practical, technical practice exploring these activities. These tools help us live by the mantra that the world is full of possibilities and so is each child.
Improving Speech and Literacy Through Structured and Independent Play with Puppets *IT, PS	<u>Alisa Petersen</u> SUU Elementary Arts Education	We will begin by discussing research about the benefits of puppetry on language development in young children. Next, we will create small hand puppets and use them to practice the three fundamentals of puppetry. Finally, we will explore how to use puppets in whole-group instruction and both structured and independent play.
Thinking in Space and Time: Geometry as a Pathway to Executive Function Development *PS, SA	<u>Grace Ash, Brionne Neilson</u> SUU Family Life & Human Development	This session examines the relationship between geometry and executive function (EF) development in early and elementary mathematics. Drawing from Dr. Neilson's 2021 doctoral research, which identified geometry as predictive of later EF growth, we will explore how spatial reasoning tasks engage working memory, inhibition, and cognitive flexibility through practical classroom examples like mental rotation, pattern design, and spatial visualization. We will highlight geometry's role as a bridge between mathematics learning and executive function development. Participants will gain insight into designing lessons that foster both spatial understanding and executive control in early grades.

<p>The Top 5 List: Top 5 skills Children Can't' do!! (And skills they can do!) *ALL</p>	<p>Heidi Petersen The Children's Center Utah</p>	<p>We need to rethink what children can and can't do based on their stage of development. Children are not "aggressive" because they push, take from others, or bite. They are not "bad" because they leave activities not interesting to them or say "no". Children are showing behaviors that are developmentally appropriate. We need to remember what children are good at and what their behavior is communicating! Come learn the top five skills that young children can't do and how to support the skills they can do in the classroom.</p>
<p>Talking to School Age Kids: Communication Tools for Activating Youth Potential *SA</p>	<p>Marlin Taylor Utah Afterschool Network</p>	<p>How we talk with young people shapes how they see themselves as learners and problem-solvers. In this interactive workshop, explore two powerful communication tools (non-evaluative encouragement and open-ended questions) that help children reflect, take initiative, and build confidence. Through quick, hands-on activities, you'll experience the difference between praise and description, and practice turning yes/no questions into prompts that spark deeper thinking. Leave with practical language strategies you can use right away to help youth feel truly seen, heard, and supported in your program.</p>
<p>Lunch: 12:15-1:45 pm</p>		
<p>Session 3: 1:45-2:45 pm</p>		
<p>Session 4: 3-4 pm</p>		
<p>Let Them Be Wild! How to incorporate outdoor play and adventure into your program. *ALL</p>	<p>Kelly Goonan, Brionne Neilson SUU Health Sciences, Family Life & Human Development</p>	<p>Research has demonstrated the developmental, physical, and emotional benefits of both unstructured play and spending time outdoors for children. However, many children spend very little time outside, and childcare providers face a variety of challenges when they try to plan and implement outdoor activities. This session will provide attendees with actionable steps and resources to introduce and expand outdoor play and adventure in their programs. Whether you're a novice wanting to spend more time outside or you want to build up to a bigger adventure, this session will give you the tools and confidence you need to embrace the wilder side of unstructured play! Topics include the benefits of unstructured play and spending time outdoors; taking learning outside; risk management; trip planning; equipment; and outdoor classroom management.</p>
<p>Explain and Explore: Challenging Behavior as a Symptom of Director Burnout *LD</p>	<p>Hannah Bluhm The Children's Center Utah</p>	<p>Have you ever considered that reducing your overwhelm, never-ending list of tasks, and number of days without a lunch break could reduce challenging behavior across your entire center? Rethink challenging behavior – director wellbeing is child wellbeing. In this session, you will learn about the research behind this inextricable link as well as practical strategies to support director wellbeing.</p>
<p>Best Practices for Afterschool Activities *SA, CCQS</p>	<p>Verlina Adame Utah Afterschool Network</p>	<p>In this hands-on workshop, designed for those working with school-age youth, participants will learn techniques to engage youth in activities. You'll leave this session with practical strategies on how to prepare and present engaging activities, including how to support youth through conversations before, during, and after the activity time. This session will focus on many best practices that are key to earning a high-quality observation. Come ready to participate, collaborate, and transform your approach to after-school programming!</p>
<p>Guided Play: Where learning meets joy! *ALL</p>	<p>Lisa Reeder CCRA- USU</p>	<p>Guided play combines the best of child-led exploration with purposeful adult support. In this session, we'll explore how early childhood educators can use intentional language, responsive interactions, and thoughtful environments to spark learning through play. While keeping the joy of discovery!.</p>
<p>Back to the Basics *PS, ALL</p>	<p>Paula Kerchenski</p>	<p>A successful school year starts with intentional planning. It sets the foundation for success for both teachers and children. This session will guide participants through effective strategies for setting up the</p>

	Utah Tech Family Studies & Human Development	<p>classroom environment to promote engagement, independence, and a sense of belonging. Participants will explore how thoughtful organization of materials, schedules, and daily procedures can support smooth transitions and foster positive routines.</p> <p>The session will also highlight ways to build family buy-in through strong communication, collaboration, and shared expectations. Finally, attention will be given to preparing for challenging behaviors before they arise by establishing clear behavioral supports, consistent expectations, and emotionally responsive practices. Educators will leave this session with practical ideas and resources to confidently create classrooms that nurture every child's success socially, emotionally, and academically.</p>
Inclusive Classrooms, Bright Futures: Supporting Neurodivergent Learners in Early Childhood *ALL	Veronica Ibarra Fight Like a Mom	<p>Every child deserves to shine, but not every child learns or communicates in the same way. This interactive breakout session equips educators with practical tools and inclusive strategies to support neurodivergent students—including those with Autism, ADHD, sensory processing challenges, and PDA—in early learning environments. Drawing from both professional experience and her journey as a special needs parent, Veronica blends personal stories, evidence-based approaches, and classroom-tested techniques to help educators build confidence, connection, and understanding.</p> <p>Participants will learn how to create sensory-friendly spaces, structure transitions with visual supports, and use documentation tools that track progress without adding extra workload. Through real-life examples and hands-on demonstrations, attendees will leave with strategies they can immediately implement—because when we build inclusion early, we round up brighter futures for all.</p>
Nourishing Potential: The Power of Early Nutrition *ALL	Hannah Nickerson SUU Agriculture & Nutrition Science	<p>Adequate nutrition is one of the best ways we can support children's growth and development. Without the nutrients their little bodies need, everything else becomes more difficult. It has been my experience that nutrition education can make a real difference — when we know better, we do better! This presentation will explore the what, how, and why of feeding children to nurture their safest, healthiest, and happiest lives.</p> <p>Together, we'll discuss practical strategies for child feeding, fostering positive food relationships, and empowering families and caregivers to create nourishing environments that help kids thrive. I am a Registered Dietitian and Lecturer in the Nutrition Department at SUU and I am currently teaching a course on the Nutrition of the Infant and Child. This is a topic I am passionate about!</p>
The Kids Know How You're Feeling: How to Manage Your Own Nervous System in the Classroom *ALL	Nateasa McGuire, Emmalea Moody The Collective Counseling & Coaching	<p>In this presentation, we will examine how an educator's own nervous system impacts classroom management and offer guidance on how to best practice self-regulation skills from a mental health perspective.</p>
Top Star/Health Dept Programs *ALL, LD, CCQS	Savannah Fields Southwest Public Health Department	<p>Learn how to connect Top Star with other CCQS Framework areas in Domains 1 and 2, which is where the Farm to ECE and engage families with the car seat education and other resources that the Health Department has.</p>
Ask an Early Childhood Coach: Growth with Guidance *ALL, CCQS, LD	Emily Todd, Tiffany Raban, Megan Westenskow, Pam Reclosado CCRA- Western	<p>What does coaching really mean in early childhood settings? What might it look like in your center or home-based program, and how can it benefit both you and your staff?</p> <p>In this presentation, you will meet the coaches serving Western Utah and explore how effective coaching supports professional growth. We will examine best practices for successful coaching, including the use of reflective questions and strategies for breaking large goals into achievable steps. Participants will gain a clear understanding of what coaching can look like in daily practice and how it can be thoughtfully integrated into staff support and development.</p>

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*These codes are suggestions. Please register for any session you are interested in!