The 30th Annual Northern New England Conference on Child Maltreatment

Continuing the tradition of state-of-the-art, practical, and evidence-based education for all professionals working with abused and neglected children

November 5, 2026 & November 6, 2026

Portland Sheraton at Sable Oaks
200 Sable Oaks Drive
South Portland, Maine

Presented by:

SPURWINK

About Spurwink

Spurwink is a mission driven non-profit organization of almost 1,000 Maine people, providing behavioral health and education services to over 8,500 people each year. Founded in Portland in 1960 as a single group home for 8 boys, today Spurwink provides a wide array of critically needed services statewide.

Through an evidence-based therapeutic model and an entrepreneurial approach, Spurwink provides access to care in areas of great need in Maine: mental health, trauma, autism, and intellectual and development disabilities.

About the Spurwink Center for Safe and Healthy Families

The Spurwink Center for Safe and Healthy Families was developed in response to the need for expert diagnostic and treatment services for Maine children who may have been abused. This diagnostic program provides specialized medical evaluation of children suspected of abuse and comprehensive evaluation of children in foster care.

The Cumberland County Children's Advocacy Center (CCCAC) is co-located at the Spurwink Center for Safe and Healthy Families. The CCCAC provides a coordinated response to the investigation of sexual abuse including a child friendly forensic interview of a child that is observed by a team of investigating professionals and advocacy support to access appropriate medical, mental health and/or advocacy services.

The main office is located at 778 Main St., South Portland, Maine and can be reached via phone 1-800-260-6160 or 207-879-6160. Spurwink' s Center for Safe and Healthy Families also provide medical examinations at Satellite clinics which are in Augusta, Bangor, and Lewiston, Maine.

Audience

The Northern New England Conference on Child Maltreatment is intended for a multi-disciplinary audience, including professionals from the fields of nursing, mental health, law, child welfare, law enforcement, child advocacy, emergency services, medicine, and education.

Conference Goals

The goal of the conference is to provide multi-disciplinary training to increase professional skills and knowledge to professionals who are involved in prevention, recognition, evaluation, reporting, investigation, prosecution, and treatment of all forms of child maltreatment.

PROGRAM AGENDA

Thursday, November 5, 2026

8:45 Introduction: Eric Meyer, LCSW, MBA & Joyce Wientzen, LCSW

9:00 **How Parentification and Adultification Bias Affect Child Abuse Investigations Involving Teens**
Caitie Dahl
There are many myths and stereotypes about how, when, and why children disclose abuse and the behaviors they will display when they present in our process. When our community, team and jury members are asked to describe a "typical" child abuse victim, they often imagine a young, naïve child who understands that what is happening to them is wrong and expresses discontent or anger towards their alleged perpetrator. While it is possible that a child abuse victim may display these attributes, the identities of child abuse victims, their process of disclosure and how they cope and/or accommodate to the experience of on-going abuse may be much different. This is particularly true for child abuse victims that have been cast into adult roles, display "adult-like" behavior, have been parentified or are the target of adultification bias. While our child advocacy centers and multidisciplinary processes are "child-centric," they aren't always designed with the parentified child in mind. This training will examine practice when working with parentified youth, youth displaying "adult like behavior" and/or youth that are the target of adultification bias.

10:15 Break

10:30 **Intent versus Impact: Examining and Improving Interactions with Child Victims and Their Non-Offending Caregivers**
Caitie Dahl
This presentation will examine the various types of interactions MDT professionals may have with child victims, non-offending caregivers and the community throughout the course of a child abuse investigation. It will highlight the differences in approach, intent and strategies employed during each of these varied interactions. Using case studies, concrete examples and research, this presentation will provide strategies for engaging with these populations in an intentional way, with a focus on balancing investigative needs and the benefits of rapport-building and affirmative interactions. Other topics that will be covered include examining intent versus impact in interactions with children and families and suggestions for improving communication amongst MDT professionals and forensic interviewers.

11:45 Lunch break

1:00 **Often Mistaken for Rivalry: Sibling Aggression and Abuse as Important but Overlooked Forms of Family Violence**

Corinna Jenkins Tucker, PHD

Current conceptions of family violence do not capture the full spectrum of experiences, resulting in unidentified instances of sibling aggression and abuse (SAA), the most common forms of family violence. This presentation will begin with an overview of research on sibling aggression and abuse, including prevalence, definitions, impacts, and associated family conditions. We will present a classification of sibling dynamics, distinguishing sibling rivalry and conflict from sibling aggression and abuse. We will also provide evidence-based practical recommendations for parents and professionals to prevent and stop sibling aggression and abuse and promote positive sibling relationships. Excerpts from lived experiences will be infused throughout the presentation

2:15 Break

2:30 **Online Exploitation: Recognition and Response**

Joyce Wientzen, LCSW

This workshop will examine the various forms of online exploitation, including grooming, child sexual abuse material (CSAM), sextortion, and sadistic exploitation. Participants will review current research on the prevalence and scope of online exploitation, as well as the implications for prevention, identification, and response. The workshop will highlight key indicators of exploitation and provide professionals with practical strategies to support effective intervention and promote online safety.

PROGRAM AGENDA

Friday, November 6, 2026

8:45 Introduction: Nicholas Miles, MD

9:00 **Strengthening Kinship Families: Putting Research into Action**
Rohanna Buchanon & Joel Davis

Kinship families play a critical role in providing safe, stable, and nurturing homes for children and youth in both formal and informal placements. This presentation explores research on kinship family experience, highlighting the benefits and positive outcomes associated with kinship care for both caregivers and young people. Participants will gain insights into how child behavior data can be used to identify and assess caregiver support needs, helping practitioners deliver responsive and effective services. The session feature strategies for engaging kinship families in services and supports and conducting peer-led discussions to help caregivers identify, access, and navigate community resources. Drawing on findings from two recent Administration for Children and Families (ACF) studies, presenters will share key lessons learned, practical implications for service delivery, and evidence-based approaches for strengthening caregiver skills and resources networks. Attendees will leave with actionable knowledge and skills to support kinship families and improve outcomes for children and youth.

10:15 Break

10:30 **Strengthening Kinship Families: Putting Research into Action Cont'd**
Rohanna Buchanon & Joel Davis

12:00 Lunch break

1:00 **Understanding the Impact of Trauma on Children: What We See, What Helps, and Why It Matters**
Sasha Svendsen, MD
This presentation explores how trauma can affect children's development, behavior, emotions, relationships, and overall well-being. Participants will learn how the effects of trauma may present differently across children and developmental stages, why children exposed to similar experiences may have very different outcomes, and how positive relationships and other evidence-based protective factors can promote resilience. The session will also highlight practical ways that adults and child-serving professionals can strengthen protective experiences and support children who have experienced adversity.

2:15 Break

2:30 **The Intersection of Poverty and Child Welfare**
Bobbi Johnson & Melissa Hackett
This presentation will provide information and context around growing efforts to distinguish conditions of family poverty from child abuse and neglect. This will include the research and evidence base, national and state trends, and local efforts here in Maine to disentangle poverty from neglect. The presentation will focus on the recent collaborative efforts in Maine to pass and implement changes to the definition of child abuse and neglect to distinguish it from poverty, and other related initiatives to ensure children and families are directed to the most appropriate support or intervention.

3:45 Adjourn

The Speakers

Rohanna Buchanan is a Research Scientist at the Oregon Social Learning Center (OSLC). Her research, funded by the National Institutes of Health, the Administration for Children and Families, and the Institute of Education Sciences, focuses on the development, adaptation, and evaluation of evidence-based parenting interventions for families involved in child welfare, special education, and mental health systems. With more than 25 years of experience in behavioral and mental health services for children and adolescents, Rohanna holds an MS in Special Education and a PhD in School Psychology. She serves as Clinical Director of the KEEP Program at OSLC, an evidence-based parenting program, where she leads clinical training and fidelity monitoring for large-scale implementations across Oregon, Chicago, New York City, and Australia. Over the past eight years, Rohanna has led cultural and developmental adaptations of the KEEP Program for diverse populations, including informal kinship families, birth families involved with child welfare, foster parents caring for LGBTQ+ youth, Native children and families, and transcultural families parenting children from different racial or cultural backgrounds. Her work is driven by a commitment to translating research into practical strategies that strengthen outcomes for children, families, and the professionals who support them.

Caitie Dahl is a Forensic Interview Specialist and Trainer at Zero Abuse Project, where she develops training materials and publications on forensic interviews, best practices in child abuse investigations, child abuse dynamics, and support for special populations. Committed to enhancing the professional response to child maltreatment, Caitie creates educational resources that empower practitioners to better assist children and families during the investigative process.

Previously, Caitie served as a Forensic Interviewer, Forensic Program Coordinator, Trainer, and Multidisciplinary Team Facilitator at First Witness Child Advocacy Center in Duluth, Minnesota. Her experience has deepened her understanding of trauma-informed practices, and she provides victims of abuse with a safe, legally defensible environment to share their experiences.

Caitie holds a Bachelor's Degree in Psychology from the University of Wisconsin-Superior, where she focused on research in coercive interviewing, false confessions, wrongful convictions, and the complexities of suggestibility and memory errors. Additionally, her role as Program Manager at the campus Gender Equity Resource Center fueled her passion for recognizing and addressing the unique needs of LGBTQIA+ youth who have experienced maltreatment.

With a collaborative spirit, Caitie enjoys training professionals across disciplines to enhance their responses to reports of child maltreatment, fostering effective partnerships that prioritize the well-being of children and families.

Joel Davis is a Coach and Trainer at the Oregon Social Learning Center (OSLC), where he supports the implementation of the KEEP Program, an evidence-based parenting intervention. Joel holds a BS and has more than 30 years of experience training, coaching, and delivering evidence-based programs for youth in the child welfare, juvenile justice, and special education systems across the United States and internationally. In his current role with KEEP, Joel

specializes in developing the facilitation skills of child welfare case workers, therapists, parent mentors, and paraprofessionals who work with foster, kinship, adoptive, and birth families. Joel currently trains and coaches KEEP practitioners in Oregon, Chicago, New York City, and Australia, with a focus on ensuring high-quality program delivery, effective group facilitation, and meaningful parent engagement. Joel has played a key role in adapting the coaching and training materials for two federally funded evaluations of KEEP Connecting Kin, a program designed to support informal kinship caregivers by strengthening parenting practices, increasing access to resources, and helping prevent child welfare system involvement. Throughout his career, he has been dedicated to empowering parents to use positive parenting strategies that improve outcomes for children, youth, and families.

Melissa Hackett is a Policy Strategist with the Maine Children's Alliance (MCA), a statewide organization focused on state policy advocacy efforts to improve outcomes for children and families. In her role at MCA, she also serves as the Coordinator for the Maine Child Welfare Action Network, a group of individuals and organizations working together to ensure the safety and well-being of all children, youth, and families in Maine. She is a core team member of Maine's Child Safety and Family Well-Being Plan, which articulates a statewide framework to keep children safe by keeping families strong. She also serves as a co-chair of the Maine Child Welfare Advisory Panel and as a member of the Maine Recovery Council.

Melissa holds a Master's Degree in Public Health from the University of New England. She is passionate about engaging collaboratively in policy and systems change efforts, centering the experiences of families closest to the challenges, and promoting equitable outcomes. She is deeply focused on promoting upstream efforts to improve child health and safety by strengthening families and the community conditions that children and families need to thrive.

Bobbi Johnson has served as Director of the Maine Office of Child and Family Services (OCFS) since January 2024, providing leadership for child welfare and early care and education services. A dedicated public servant with over three decades of experience, she has devoted her career to improving outcomes for Maine's children, youth and families. Director Johnson holds a master's degree in social work from the University of Maine.

Director Johnson is a collaborative leader who champions child safety and well-being as a shared responsibility among the State, families, and community partners. Throughout her career, she has been actively involved in regional and state committees, including the Overdose Review Panel, the Juvenile Justice Advisory Group, and the New England Association of Child Welfare Commissioners and Directors, demonstrating her deep commitment to system transformation, maximizing resources, and promoting the voices of individuals with lived expertise.

Sasha Svendsen, MD is a Child Abuse Pediatrician and Division Chief of the Child Protection Program at the University of Massachusetts Children's Medical Center. She completed her Child Abuse Pediatrics fellowship at Children's Hospital Colorado and the Kempe Center and is board certified in both General Pediatrics and Child Abuse Pediatrics.

Dr. Svendsen is also an Associate Professor of Pediatrics at the University of Massachusetts Chan Medical School, where she is deeply committed to medical education, interdisciplinary collaboration, and strengthening systems of care for children and families. Her professional

interests include advancing trauma-informed approaches to clinical care, fostering collaboration among multidisciplinary teams, and promoting more comprehensive responses to the complex needs of children who have experienced adversity. She also has an interest in addressing problematic sexual behavior in children within the clinical setting and supporting caregivers in navigating these challenging concerns.

Across her clinical, educational, and collaborative work, Dr. Svendsen is committed to building stronger systems of care that support healing, resilience, and healthy relationships for children and families

Corinna Jenkins Tucker, PhD, CFLE, is the Director of the Sibling Aggression and Abuse Research and Advocacy Initiative (SAARA) at the Crimes against Children Research Center and Professor Emerita, Human Development and Family Studies, at the University of New Hampshire. Dr. Tucker has conducted research and published extensively on sibling relationships, parenting, and mental health. She is particularly interested in sibling conflict, sibling aggression and abuse experiences, and promoting positive sibling relationships across the lifespan. She has received research and teaching awards, serves on multiple editorial boards, has had her work featured across multiple media outlets, and co-authors the "Science of Siblings" blog on *Psychology Today.*

Joyce Wientzen, LCSW is the Senior Director of Child Welfare Programs at Spurwink Services. She has over thirty years of experience working collaboratively with multi-disciplinary partners to strengthen organizational responses to child safety concerns. She was a forensic interviewer for fifteen years and currently provides consultation and supervision to forensic interviewers. In addition, she has expertise in the provision of trauma focused treatment for children with abuse histories. She has presented and published on multiple topics including forensic interviewing, secondary traumatic stress, mandated reporting and problematic sexual behaviors of youth.

Registration and Cost

The registration fee includes daily light breakfast, full lunch, and refreshment breaks. If you have special dietary needs, please contact sally@seaglassevents.com.

$150.00 a day or $300 for both days
$75 a day for students or $150 for both days

Conference Materials

All conference materials, handouts, PowerPoints, will be available at the online registration site about 10 days before the conference.

Professional Contact hours/CME'S

Contact hours will be provided after the conference. For information regarding receipt of CME's please contact sally@seaglassevents.com.

Refund and Cancellation Policy

Refund and Cancellation Policy: Participants who cancel their registration will incur an administrative fee of $25.00. NO REFUNDS will be given if cancellation is less than ten business days prior to the conference.

Contact Us:

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going the distance

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