



2025

EASTERSEALS MIDWEST VIRTUAL AUTISM SUMMIT

NOVEMBER 6, 2025 | 8:30 AM - 12:00 PM

NOVEMBER 7, 2025 | 8:30 AM - 12:00 PM

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REGISTRATION INFORMATION

Scan the QR code to register.



Conference Dates:

November 6, 2025 | 8:30 AM - 12:00 PM

November 7, 2025 | 8:30 AM - 12:00 PM

Cost for Attendees:

Professionals: \$55 for both days | Families and Individuals: Free

Group Rate (6 or more professionals): \$275 for both days

Larger groups can contact Ashley Hartmann for a quote at 573.339.9300 or ashley.hartmann@esmw.org.

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SCHEDULE

November 6

Welcome and Opening Keynote | Dr. Samantha Hiew 8:30 AM – 9:30 AM

Neurodiversity & Integration: From Boardroom to Classroom to Community

Break 9:30 AM – 9:45 AM

Special Guest | Rick Gutierrez 9:45 AM – 10:45 AM

PERMA+: A Framework for Prioritizing Caregiver Wellbeing

Break 10:45 AM – 11:00 AM

Breakout Session 1 11:00 AM – 12:00 PM

Session A: Autism Spectrum Disorder in the Female Population

Session B: Augmentative and Alternative Communication and Autism

November 7

Breakout Session 2 8:30 AM – 9:30 AM

Session A: Planning on Puberty: Proactive interventions to support youth during a time of change and new demands

Session B: Managing your Child's Home and School Programs

Break 9:30 AM – 9:45 AM

Breakout Session 3 9:45 AM – 10:45 AM

Session A: Ease Into Employment: Building Independent Work Systems for Students with Significant Disabilities

Session B: ASCEND (Autism Support Can Empower New Directions)

Break 10:45 AM – 11:00 AM

Closing Keynote | Dave Finch 11:00 AM – 12:00 PM

"So, Are We Supposed to Hug Now?" Best Practices for Neurologically-Mixed Relationships



Neurodiversity & Integration:

From Boardroom to Classroom to Community

Opening Keynote

Presented by: Dr. Samantha Hiew, Founder of ADHD Girls and Neurodiversity and Women's Empowerment Speaker

Thursday, November 6 | 8:30 AM - 9:30 AM

BIOGRAPHY

Dr. Samantha Hiew is a keynote speaker, lived experience researcher, and founder of ADHD Girls, a social impact platform transforming how society sees and supports neurodivergent women and underrepresented communities. Diagnosed with ADHD at 40 after years of feeling unseen, Sam created the space she longed for, where science meets lived experience, and personal truth becomes a catalyst for cultural change.

Sam has spoken to over 100,000 people, trained 100+ FTSE companies, mental health professionals on AuDHD in women, and led the UK's first large scale event spotlighting the lives of AuDHD women and diagnostic gaps we face.

Named a Difference Maker by PBS America and Positive Role Model for Gender by the National Diversity Awards, Sam brings heart and academic credibility to every stage and page. Sam's debut book, *Tip of the ADHD Iceberg*, is a compassionate guide for late-diagnosed neurodivergents to navigate life after diagnosis and find their voice.

With a PhD in medical science and a background in communications, Sam translates research into real-world relevance- helping neurodivergent people feel seen, supported, and empowered.

SESSION DESCRIPTION

No two brains are the same. But what if you were born with a brain that constantly makes you feel like everything you do differentiates you from everyone else. Sam's talk will introduce Neurodiversity and Autism and how those experiences impact our whole-person reality, including in the workforce, community, and the classroom. It will cast light on the misconceptions of neurodiversity and illustrate our neurodiverse experiences of Autism, as well as other co-occurring conditions. She will provide updates in the field of Autism as well as providing actionable insights to build a neuroinclusive and compassionate culture, promoting psychological safety. And, through it all she will reinforce the idea: You don't have to change the person, you have to change the environment and connections between environments.



PERMA+: A Framework for Prioritizing Caregiver Wellbeing

Special Guest Speaker

Presented by: Dr. Rick Gutierrez, Ph.D., BCBA

Thursday, November 6 | 9:45 AM - 10:45 AM

BIOGRAPHY

Rick Gutierrez is a Board Certified Behavior Analyst and Licensed Psychologist in California. He has a Doctorate in Industrial/Organizational Psychology as well as a Masters in Psychology with an emphasis in Applied Behavior Analysis. He has over 25 years of applied experience working in the clinical, community, and school settings. He has provided numerous workshops on Applied Behavior Analysis across Europe, Asia, Africa, North and South America. Further, he has provided international consultation to clinics serving individuals diagnosed with a developmental disability around the globe.

Currently, Dr. Gutierrez is the Chief Executive Officer at Behavior Analysts International, LLC. and has consulted with A Child Can Foundation in the Philippines for the past 12 years. Dr. Gutierrez has extensive experience in staff training, employee retention, employee engagement, as well as the treatment of individuals diagnosed with autism and other developmental disabilities. He is an emotional intelligence trainer and prioritizes the wellbeing for people served. He has published research in The Analysis of Verbal Behavior. His research interests are in social skills, verbal behavior, problem behavior, and organizational behavior management.

SESSION DESCRIPTION

This talk will highlight the PERMA+ model used to help caregivers achieve personal wellbeing and to enhance their support of family members with developmental disability. This talk will review the skills of reframing, identifying & activating character strengths, gratitude, jolts of joy, and active constructive responding. Practical examples will be provided on how these skills can enhance the wellbeing of caregivers and their family members. Participants will be provided opportunities to reflect on their current views and relationship and learn how to recalibrate their perspective to align with their purpose.



Autism Spectrum Disorder in the Female Population

Session A

Presented by: Dr. Megan Tregnago, Ed.D., BCBA-D, LBA

Thursday, November 6 | 11:00 AM - 12:00 PM

BIOGRAPHY

Megan Tregnago is a licensed and doctoral level board certified behavior analyst (LBA, BCBA-D). She is the Manager of ABA Services for Easterseals Midwest's Central office. Megan is a Certified ESDM Therapist and oversees three Early Start Denver Model classrooms in the Columbia office. Over the last 20 years, she has provided services and workshops based upon Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) to families and professionals in the central Missouri region. Megan recently earned her doctorate in educational leadership and also serves as an adjunct instructor in the University of Missouri's special education department.

SESSION DESCRIPTION

This workshop will review common characteristics of autism in females and why females are often missed in the diagnostic process. The topic of camouflaging will be covered and resources will be shared.



Augmentative and Alternative Communication and Autism

Session B

Presented by: Emily White

Thursday, November 6 | 11:00 AM - 12:00 PM

BIOGRAPHY

Emily earned her degree in clinical speech-language pathology from Northern Arizona University in 2013. She has nine years of experience in public schools and two years in community-based therapy. She is currently the program coordinator for the ETC and ATR programs at Missouri Assistive Technology in Blue Springs, Missouri. These programs provide Missourians with opportunities to borrow devices for short-term loans and for school districts to be reimbursed for assistive technology that they purchase for students.

SESSION DESCRIPTION

This session will provide an overview of Augmentative and Alternative Communication systems including light tech and high tech devices, iPad apps, and dedicated devices. The session will also cover implementation strategies in home and school settings, funding opportunities, and other assistive technologies that can be used to support independent living.



Planning on Puberty:

Proactive interventions to support youth during a time of change and new demands

Session A

Presented by: Kerry Prout, PhD, ABPP

Friday, November 7 | 8:30 AM - 9:30 AM

BIOGRAPHY

Dr. Prout is a Clinical Child Psychologist at Children's Mercy Kansas City and an Assistant Professor of Pediatrics at UMKC School of Medicine. She is a native of Kansas City and a KU Jayhawks fan. She completed graduate training at Utah State University, residency at Nemours/A.I. duPont Hospital for Children, and postdoctoral fellowship at St. Louis Children's Hospital. Clinically, Dr. Prout works with children with a variety of neurodevelopmental differences and their families providing outpatient psychotherapy, consultation, and evaluation. She is involved in outreach, training, program evaluation, and advocacy work and is passionate about supporting kids and families with behavioral health needs.

SESSION DESCRIPTION

Puberty is a given. Education for kids about puberty is not. For autistic youth, it is especially important that caregivers actively teach what to expect, what is acceptable and safe behavior, and promote skill development in key areas. This talk will help guide caregivers to think proactively about what their child needs to understand to navigate puberty successfully and learn strategies for how to educate and support their child through the process of physical changes, new self-care skills, need for privacy, and more.



Managing your Child's Home and School Programs

Session B

Presented by: Mary Anne Hammond

Friday, November 7 | 8:30 AM - 9:30 AM

BIOGRAPHY

Mary Anne Hammond has a Bachelor of Science in Communications from Iowa State University. She has spent most of her career in the healthcare setting. Since 2008, Mary Anne has been the Community Education Coordinator for Autism for the Division of Developmental/Behavioral Health at Children's Mercy Kansas City. Kailey, the oldest of the 3 Hammond children, is 32 and has severe autism and a profound intellectual disability. Mary Anne and her husband, Dan, also helped start the FIRE Foundation, a non-profit organization that has raised over 8 million dollars for inclusive education in the Catholic Diocese of Kansas City/St. Joseph.

SESSION DESCRIPTION

Essentially, you are the CEO of your child's life. And when that includes managing their home and school programs for children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), it's easy to feel overwhelmed. This training will help in practical ways such as knowing what records to keep, effective ways to communicate with the professionals involved in your child's care, as well as give you some tools to navigate the process.



Ease Into Employment:

Building Independent Work Systems for Students with Significant Disabilities

Session A

Presented by: Shannon Wess, MSW, BCBA

Friday, November 7 | 9:45 AM - 10:45 AM

BIOGRAPHY

Shannon Wess is the Manager of Program Development and Training at Easterseals serving Chicagoland and Greater Rockford, IL. She is a dedicated professional with an extensive background in autism service delivery and special education coaching, as well as experience in staff leadership and management, coordination of adult programming, and wraparound case management.

With a proven track record in designing and implementing impactful training and staff development programs, Wess excels at energizing and engaging participants in lifelong professional learning. She is passionate about fostering a culture of continuous growth and development, believing that empowered educators and service providers are essential to driving positive change in the lives of those served. In addition to training special education professionals, Wess developed and launched First Response, an autism awareness training program for first responders and emergency medical personnel. Wess has also brought her expertise to the professional conference circuit, having been selected to present at regional, national, and international conferences.

Wess is a Board Certified Behavior Analyst that holds a master of social work with an emphasis

in behavioral health from Park University and a post-masters certificate in applied behavior analysis from Purdue University Global.

SESSION DESCRIPTION

This session will explore how structured work systems promote independence and engagement for transition-aged students with significant support needs. Participants will learn how these systems help build the foundational skills necessary for future employment. The presentation will include practical implementation strategies and video demonstrations to support application in both classroom and community-based settings.



ASCEND (Autism Support Can Empower New Directions)

Session B

Presented by: Justin Wade

Friday, November 7 | 9:45 AM - 10:45 AM

BIOGRAPHY

Justin is the ASCEND Director, Neurodiversity and Austim Center, Missouri State University-West Plains. He is deeply passionate about advocacy, particularly in amplifying the voices of individuals who are frequently marginalized or underestimated within society. Justin believes that every person-regardless of their background or neurodivergence-was created for a purpose and possessed unique strengths and the potential to achieve ambitious goals. His commitment lies in fostering equity and inclusion by challenging societal biases and systemic barriers that limit opportunities. Through advocacy, he strives to create environments where all individuals are recognized as capable and empowered to pursue their aspirations with confidence and support.

SESSION DESCRIPTION

Through the ASCEND program our goal is to empower students-particularly those on the autism spectrum and within the broader neurodiverse community-by providing the support, resources, and encouragement necessary for long-term success. We are committed to helping students develop the skills, confidence, and independence needed to thrive in college, transition successfully into the workforce, and lead fulfilling, self-directed lives into adulthood.



“So, Are We Supposed to Hug Now?”

Best Practices for Neurologically-Mixed Relationships

Closing Keynote

Presented by: Dave Finch, Autism Consultant, Speaker, New York Times Best-Selling Author on Neurodiversity and Relationships.

Friday, November 7 | 11:00 AM - 12:00 PM

BIOGRAPHY

Dave Finch is a senior-level business development and content marketing professional, New York Times bestselling author and technical writer, principal and founder of a successful content marketing studio, and creative and technical consultant to Hollywood studios including Disney, Twentieth Century Fox, Sony Pictures Television, and Netflix. He has forged a rather unique career comprising semiconductor market development engineering, mass-market components distribution, firmware and software development, technical content marketing, neurodiversity consulting, and public speaking. Dave's book, *The Journal of Best Practices: A Memoir of Marriage, Asperger Syndrome, and One Man's Quest to Be a Better Husband*, was featured in *O the Oprah Magazine*, *People*, *Elle*, *Marie Claire*, *Chicago Tribune*, *New York Times*, and *NPR's All Things Considered*.

His work as a writer and consultant has been seen on ABC, CBS, NBC, CNN, NPR, SiriusXM, *The New York Times*, *Rolling Stone*, *This American Life*, *The Howard Stern Show*, *Psychology Today*, *Slate*, *NBC.com*, *EETimes*, *EDN*, *Wireless Design*, and the popular television series *NOT DEAD YET* (ABC / Hulu) and *ATYPICAL* (Netflix).

SESSION DESCRIPTION

Five years into his marriage with Kristen, the love of his life, Dave Finch was diagnosed with autism – a diagnosis which explained his ever-growing list of quirks and compulsions, but didn't make him any easier to live with. Determined to change, Dave set out to understand autism and his wife's non-autistic way of life and learned to be a better husband with hilarious yet endearing zeal. Excessive note-taking, Husband Performance Reviews, and his own *Journal of Best Practices* were just some of the methods Dave employed to become the husband he wanted to be. Join Dave for this entertaining and inspiring keynote packed with relevant, actionable strategies for making relationships thrive.