



**Naomi Ruth Cohen**  
Institute for Mental Health Education  
at The Chicago School

**2026**  
**Community Mental Health Conference**

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**Alone  
Together**

Confronting Loneliness  
Across the Lifespan

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**Saturday, May 16th, 2026**

**9:00am-5:00pm**

Evanston Township High School  
1600 Dodge Ave, Evanston

# Conference Schedule

9:00am – 10:00am	<b>Registration / Continental Breakfast / Exhibit Hall</b> (Location - Cafeteria)
10:00am – 12:00pm	<b>Panel Presentation</b> (Location - Auditorium)
12:00pm – 12:50pm	<b>Lunch / Exhibit Hall</b> (Location - Cafeteria)
1:00pm – 2:00pm	<b>Breakout Sessions - Round 1</b> (Location - Classrooms)
2:15pm – 3:15pm	<b>Breakout Sessions - Round 2</b> (Location - Classrooms)
3:30pm – 4:15pm	<b>Community Connection Circles</b> (Location - Classrooms)
4:15pm – 5:00pm	<b>Connection Reception</b> (Location - Main Lobby)

# Breakout Session Schedule

*(Sessions are listed in this booklet in alphabetical order)*

<b>ROOM</b>	<b>ROUND 1 - 1:00pm - 2:00pm</b>	<b>ROUND 2 - 2:15pm - 3:15pm</b>
<b>TBA</b>	Alone at Work: Why Organizational Systems Must Confront Workplace Loneliness	Balancing Independence AND Connection by Tapping the B.R.A.K.E.S. <sup>SM</sup> : A Practical Strategy to Combat Loneliness at Any Age
<b>TBA</b>	Loneliness Lives in the Body: How Nutrition Supports Safety, Belonging, and Connection	Belonging as Prevention: Addressing Loneliness in Hispanic/Latino Communities
<b>TBA</b>	Social Isolation and Loneliness in Late Life	Recognizing Concerning Patterns: Isolation Within the Pathway to Violence
<b>TBA</b>	Solitude and Substance Use: Understanding Loneliness in Addiction and Opportunities for Intervention	The Hidden Grief of Professional Helpers: Isolation, Identity, and Connection
<b>TBA</b>	The Hidden Cycle: Loneliness and Mental Health in Children and Young Adults	The Loneliness of Masking: How Late-Identified ADHD & Autism Shape Connection Across the Lifespan
<b>TBA</b>	Unseen and Unsupported: Understanding Grief and Loss in Adoption	

**Please see individual program pages  
for session-specific CE information.**

### **CONTINUING EDUCATION INFORMATION**

Not all sessions qualify for all CE types.

Please see individual program pages for session-specific CE information.

**Participants must attend 100% of the program time  
(documented by signing in and out) in order to obtain a  
continuing education certificate or certificate of attendance.**

Up to 4.0 CEs can potentially be earned by attending this conference  
(2.0 CEs for the panel and 1.0 CE for each breakout session, when attended in full).

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**Disclaimer for all programs:** If participants have special needs, we will attempt to accommodate them. Please address questions, concerns, and any complaints to [OfficeofCE@thechicagoschool.edu](mailto:OfficeofCE@thechicagoschool.edu). There is no commercial support for this program nor are there any relationships between the CE Sponsor, presenting organization, presenter, program content, research, grants, or other funding that could reasonably be construed as conflicts of interest.



# PANEL PRESENTATION: Alone Together: Confronting Loneliness Across the Lifespan

<p><b>CE/CEUs</b></p>	<p>When attended in full, this program offers 2.0 CEs for Psychologists, 2.0 IL CEUs for Counselors and Social Workers, 2.0 BBS California CEUs for LPCCs, LPSWs, and LMFTs, or 2.0 NBCC Clock Hours.</p>
<p><b>Panelists</b></p>	<p>Nell Compernelle, PhD – Senior Research Scientist at The Bridge at NORC at the University of Chicago  Sarah Bier, PMHNP-BC, CNM-FPA, APN – Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioner at Psychiatry Studio  Erin Arnheim, MEd – Founder, Lense Advisory (Fractional COO)</p> <p><b>Moderator:</b> Alisha DeWalt, PhD – Dean of the College of Graduate and Professional Studies, The Chicago School</p>
<p><b>Workshop Description</b></p>	<p>Loneliness is one of the most urgent challenges of our time, affecting people across the lifespan and in every role. It may surface in childhood, during major life transitions, amid caregiving and workplace demands, through family strain, or in response to rapid social and technological change. In 2023, the U.S. Surgeon General identified loneliness and social isolation as significant public health concerns, citing strong evidence associating persistent social disconnection with increased risk of depression, anxiety, substance use, physical health concerns, and reduced overall well-being. (Murthy, 2023; Bruss et al., 2024; Luhmann et al., 2023). Loneliness is not simply being alone; it is the distress that arises when there is a gap between the connection we need and the connection we experience.</p> <p>This interdisciplinary panel brings together research, clinical expertise, and lived experience to explore how loneliness is experienced, how it affects mental and physical health, and how it is shaped by broader social forces. Panelists will distinguish loneliness from social isolation, examine current trends and disparities across age and identity, and consider the influence of family structures, workplace norms, and digital environments on connection. Participants will leave with practical, evidence-informed strategies to strengthen belonging and promote healthy connection in schools, clinical settings, workplaces, and communities.</p>
<p><b>Learning Objectives</b></p>	<p>After attending this introductory-level program, participants will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Differentiate loneliness from social isolation and describe current research on prevalence, risk factors, and protective factors across the lifespan.</li> <li>• Describe the impact of chronic loneliness on mental, emotional, and physical health, including implications for prevention and early intervention in school, clinical, and workplace settings.</li> <li>• Examine how cultural, socioeconomic, and structural factors, including technology and changing family systems, contribute to experiences of connection and disconnection.</li> <li>• Apply evidence-informed strategies to promote belonging, resilience, and meaningful connection within professional and community settings.</li> </ul>
<p><b>More</b></p>	<p><b>For full CE information, please visit:</b>  <a href="https://tcsppofficeofce.com/nrci-conference-2026-additional-ce-information">tcsppofficeofce.com/nrci-conference-2026-additional-ce-information</a></p>



# Alone at Work: Why Organizational Systems Must Confront Workplace Loneliness

<b>CE/CEUs</b>	When attended in full, this program offers 1.0 CEs for Psychologists, 1.0 IL CEUS for Counselors and Social Workers, or 1.0 BBS California CEUs for LPCCs, LPSWs, and LMFTs.
<b>Presenter</b>	Urvi Sharma, MA Psychology – Pursuing PhD in Business Psychology (Industrial-Organizational Psychology)
<b>Workshop Description</b>	<p>Workplace loneliness is often treated as an individual experience rather than a structural concern with organizational consequences. Research suggests that workplace loneliness can deplete key psychological resources, including hope, optimism, confidence, and resilience, and this depletion is associated with decreased employee well-being, engagement, and organizational commitment (Firoz &amp; Chaudhary, 2021; Jung et al., 2021). From an organizational psychology perspective, this session highlights how workplace loneliness functions as a systemic issue, particularly during periods of change such as leadership transitions, restructuring, burnout, high turnover, or remote work environments. Emerging research on modern work structures, including remote and hybrid environments, suggests that organizational demands, support systems, and workplace culture can significantly shape employees' experiences of connection or isolation (Walz et al., 2024).</p> <p>Attendees will gain practical insights into why addressing loneliness at the organizational level, not solely through individual resilience training, is critical for fostering connection, belonging, and sustainable performance.</p>
<b>Learning Objectives</b>	<p>After attending this introductory-level program, participants will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Describe workplace loneliness as a significant organizational issue that impacts employee well-being beyond individual emotions.</li><li>• Explain how persistent workplace loneliness can strain psychological resources such as hope, optimism, confidence, and resilience.</li><li>• Identify organizational-level strategies that address workplace loneliness beyond individual-focused resilience or well-being programs.</li></ul>
<b>More</b>	<p><b>For full CE information, please visit:</b> <a href="https://tcsppofficeofce.com/nrci-conference-2026-additional-ce-information">tcsppofficeofce.com/nrci-conference-2026-additional-ce-information</a></p>



# Balancing Independence AND Connection by Tapping the B.R.A.K.E.S.<sup>SM</sup>: A Practical Strategy to Combat Loneliness at Any Age

<p><b>CE/CEUs</b></p>	<p>When attended in full, this program offers 1.0 CEs for Psychologists, 1.0 IL CEUS for Counselors and Social Workers, 1.0 BBS California CEUs for LPCCs, LPSWs, and LMFTs, 1.0 ISBE CPDUs for Illinois Educators, 1.0 NASP CPDs for School Psychologists, or 1.0 NBCC Clock Hours.</p>
<p><b>Presenter</b></p>	<p>Sandra Clavelli, PsyD -- Co-Owner/President/Treasurer, S &amp; P Consulting Services, L.L.C.; Senior Director, Clinical and Outpatient Services/Chief Psychologist of APA Internship Program</p>
<p><b>Workshop Description</b></p>	<p>In an increasingly digital world, marked by remote work, AI, screens, online gaming, constant connectivity, and schools relying on tablets, many individuals report feeling alone while technically more connected than ever. Research suggests that heavy digital engagement and social media use are associated with greater perceived social isolation in some populations (Primack et al., 2017). At the same time, social and emotional competency development plays a key role in shaping how individuals navigate independence, relationships, and belonging across developmental stages (Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2025). Efforts to connect with others can sometimes result in over-accommodating and losing a sense of self, or alternatively, becoming so independent that connection feels overwhelming. Both extremes may contribute to loneliness, isolation, depression, and other mental health concerns.</p> <p>One solution to combating loneliness is finding a balance between independence AND connection that works for you. By building resiliency and using the “Tapping the B.R.A.K.E.S.<sup>SM</sup>” method for problem solving, participants will learn practical steps for connecting with others while maintaining a strong sense of self. Grounded in trauma-informed principles and cultural humility (Mosher et al., 2017), this presentation helps participants understand what their emotions are communicating and how to manage those feelings in order to create a plan that supports both independence and meaningful connection. Participants will leave with tools to feel more grounded, authentic, and less lonely, regardless of how much in-person time they have with others.</p>
<p><b>Learning Objectives</b></p>	<p>After attending this introductory-level program, participants will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describe how balancing independence and connection can reduce experiences of loneliness.</li> <li>• Explain how resilience can enhance a sense of connection to others.</li> <li>• Identify practical ways to incorporate 'Tapping the B.R.A.K.E.S.<sup>SM</sup>' method into daily life.</li> </ul>
<p><b>More</b></p>	<p><b>For full CE information, please visit:</b>  <a href="https://tcsppofficeofce.com/nrci-conference-2026-additional-ce-information">tcsppofficeofce.com/nrci-conference-2026-additional-ce-information</a></p>



# Belonging as Prevention: Addressing Loneliness in Hispanic/Latino Communities

<p><b>CE/CEUs</b></p>	<p>When attended in full, this program offers 1.0 CEUs for Psychologists, 1.0 IL CEUs for Counselors and Social Workers, 1.0 BBS California CEUs for LPCCs, LPSWs, and LMFTs, or 1.0 NBCC Clock Hours.</p>
<p><b>Presenter</b></p>	<p>Cristina Castillo, MS in Educational Psychology -- Program Coordinator at the Center for Rural Health and Social Service Development</p>
<p><b>Workshop Description</b></p>	<p>Loneliness is increasingly recognized as a significant public health concern across the lifespan, yet it is often experienced quietly and misunderstood as an individual struggle rather than a reflection of broader social conditions. Within Hispanic and Latino communities, migration experiences, economic stress, discrimination, and limited access to culturally responsive services can contribute to chronic stress and social disconnection that affect emotional and behavioral health (Alegría et al., 2017; Mohebbi et al., 2024).</p> <p>This workshop examines how Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and Social Drivers of Health (SDOH) intersect to influence stress exposure, mental health outcomes, substance use risk, and chronic disease across the lifespan (Loria &amp; Caughy, 2018; Suglia et al., 2018). Grounded in research and culturally responsive practice, the session shifts from deficit-focused narratives to a strengths-based perspective, highlighting belonging, family cohesion, cultural identity, and community connection as protective factors. Participants will explore practical, culturally informed strategies that foster environments in schools, healthcare settings, homes, and community spaces where belonging supports prevention, resilience, and lifelong wellness.</p>
<p><b>Learning Objectives</b></p>	<p>After attending this introductory-level program, participants will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describe how Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and Social Drivers of Health (SDOH) are associated with loneliness and health outcomes among Hispanic/Latino individuals across the lifespan.</li> <li>• Explain the relationship between chronic stress, belonging disruption, and increased risk for mental health challenges and substance use.</li> <li>• Apply culturally responsive strategies that strengthen belonging as a prevention and harm reduction approach across educational, clinical, or community settings.</li> </ul>
<p><b>More</b></p>	<p><b>For full CE information, please visit:</b>  <a href="https://tcsppofficeofce.com/nrci-conference-2026-additional-ce-information">tcsppofficeofce.com/nrci-conference-2026-additional-ce-information</a></p>



# Loneliness Lives in the Body: How Nutrition Supports Safety, Belonging, and Connection

<p><b>CE/CEUs</b></p>	<p>When attended in full, this program offers 1.0 CE for Psychologists, 1.0 IL CEUS for Counselors and Social Workers, 1.0 BBS California CEUs for LPCCs, LPSWs, and LMFTs, or 1.0 NBCC Clock Hours.</p>
<p><b>Presenter</b></p>	<p>Meg Bowman, MS in Nutrition &amp; Integrative Health – Co-Founder, Lead Clinician for Mental Health at NutriHive</p>
<p><b>Workshop Description</b></p>	<p>Loneliness is more than a feeling, it affects the body as well as the mind. Research shows that ongoing social disconnection can influence immune functioning and increase stress in the body (Lee et al., 2021). At the same time, growing evidence on the gut-brain connection demonstrates that what we eat plays an important role in mood, stress response, and overall mental health (Berding et al., 2021).</p> <p>This session explores how loneliness can show up physically, through fatigue, inflammation, digestive changes, or heightened stress, and how nutrition can become a practical tool for supporting emotional steadiness and connection. Using principles from polyvagal theory, which explains how our nervous system responds to safety and threat (Porges, 2022), we will discuss how food and daily eating patterns can help the body feel more regulated and secure.</p> <p>Participants will learn accessible, evidence-informed strategies to use nutrition as a way to support nervous system balance, increase feelings of safety, and strengthen the foundation for belonging and meaningful connection. The goal is not perfection or restrictive eating, but simple, sustainable shifts that support both physical and relational well-being.</p>
<p><b>Learning Objectives</b></p>	<p>After attending this introductory-level program, participants will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describe how loneliness is experienced physiologically, including common nervous system, appetite, and digestive responses.</li> <li>• Explain how nutrition and eating patterns can support nervous system regulation and increase access to connection and belonging.</li> <li>• Apply practical, trauma-informed food strategies to support regulation, co-regulation, and reconnection across life stages and levels of social support.</li> </ul>
<p><b>More</b></p>	<p><b>For full CE information, please visit:</b>  <a href="https://tcsppofficeofce.com/nrci-conference-2026-additional-ce-information">tcsppofficeofce.com/nrci-conference-2026-additional-ce-information</a></p>



# Recognizing Concerning Patterns: Isolation Within the Pathway to Violence

<b>CE/CEUs</b>	When attended in full, this program offers 1.0 CEs for Psychologists, 1.0 IL CEUS for Counselors and Social Workers, 1.0 BBS California CEUs for LPCs, LPSWs, and LMFTs, 1.0 ISBE CPDUs for Illinois Educators, 1.0 NASP CPDs for School Psychologists, or 1.0 NBCC Clock Hours.
<b>Presenter</b>	Ana Belmonte, PsyD, Clinical Forensic Psychology – Assistant Professor and Division Chair of Forensic Psychology and Department Chair of Forensic Psychology Department (Chicago), The Chicago School; Clinician at Private Practice
<b>Workshop Description</b>	<p>Research has identified social isolation and perceived grievance as factors that commonly appear in cases of targeted violence (Petersen &amp; Densley, 2021; Meloy et al., 2021). This presentation will review the pathway to intended violence (Meloy et al., 2021), associated warning behaviors, and findings from comprehensive databases examining mass violence perpetrators. Importantly, loneliness and social isolation alone do not cause violence. The vast majority of individuals who experience social disconnection are not violent. However, in some cases of targeted violence, perpetrators have demonstrated patterns of escalating despair, grievance, and isolation prior to their actions (Petersen &amp; Densley, 2021). Given the recurrence of these factors among some perpetrators, it is critical for mental health practitioners, educators, community members, family members, and other stakeholders to recognize early warning signs associated with progression toward targeted violence.</p> <p>This presentation will review evidence-informed warning signs, discuss intervention strategies grounded in threat assessment research, and explore practical prevention approaches that promote early identification, support, relational engagement, and community-based response.</p>
<b>Learning Objectives</b>	<p>After attending this introductory-level program, participants will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Identify eight types of warning behaviors that indicate risk for future violence.</li><li>• Describe signs of crises, including patterns of social isolation, that may indicate elevated risk for targeted violence.</li><li>• Apply evidence-informed intervention strategies to respond to warning behaviors associated with elevated risk.</li></ul>
<b>More</b>	<p><b>For full CE information, please visit:</b> <a href="https://tcsppofficeofce.com/nrci-conference-2026-additional-ce-information">tcsppofficeofce.com/nrci-conference-2026-additional-ce-information</a></p>



# Social Isolation and Loneliness in Late Life

<p><b>CE/CEUs</b></p>	<p>When attended in full, this program offers 1.0 CE for Psychologists, 1.0 IL CEUS for Counselors and Social Workers, 1.0 BBS California CEUs for LPCCs, LPSWs, and LMFTs, or 1.0 NBCC Clock Hours.</p>
<p><b>Presenter</b></p>	<p>Sharon Dornberg-Lee, MSW -- Clinical Director of Community Services at CJE SeniorLife</p>
<p><b>Workshop Description</b></p>	<p>The health impacts of loneliness and social disconnection among older adults are well documented and concerning (Donovan &amp; Blazer, 2020; Murthy 2023). This session will explore what current research tells us about these effects, including diminished quality of life and mental health outcomes associated with prolonged social separation (Newman-Norlund et al., 2022) and introduce strength-based approaches to fostering connection. Evidence supports the effectiveness of psychosocial interventions in improving well-being for older adults living in the community (Keane et al., 2025).</p> <p>The presenter will draw on her extensive experience providing clinical services for this population and highlight several approaches that CJE SeniorLife has adopted to address these needs, including a support group for those aging alone, individual psychotherapy to address relational patterns that contribute to loneliness, and wraparound services that help older adults navigate aging while remaining meaningfully connected. These approaches align with emerging research and national guidance emphasizing social connection interventions, community-based supports, and relationship-centered care as important strategies for reducing isolation and improving well-being among older adults (Murthy, 2023; Keane et al., 2025).</p>
<p><b>Learning Objectives</b></p>	<p>After attending this introductory-level program, participants will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describe the health impacts of loneliness and social disconnection among older adults.</li> <li>• Apply strengths-based clinical interventions when working with older adults experiencing loneliness.</li> <li>• Identify holistic strategies to address the needs of socially disconnected older adults.</li> </ul>
<p><b>More</b></p>	<p><b>For full CE information, please visit:</b>  <a href="https://tcspofficeofce.com/nrci-conference-2026-additional-ce-information">tcspofficeofce.com/nrci-conference-2026-additional-ce-information</a></p>



# Solitude and Substance Use: Contextualizing Loneliness in Addiction and Opportunities for Intervention

<p><b>CE/CEUs</b></p>	<p>When attended in full, this program offers 1.0 CEs for Psychologists, 1.0 IL CEUS for Counselors and Social Workers, or 1.0 BBS California CEUs for LPCCs, LPSWs, and LMFTs.</p>
<p><b>Presenter</b></p>	<p>Mahalia Jackson, MPH, Epidemiology -- Prevention &amp; Early Intervention Specialist at PEER Services, Inc. Natalie Larson, BA, Biology and Psychology -- Coalition Coordinator at PEER Services, Inc.</p>
<p><b>Workshop Description</b></p>	<p>In 2023, the U.S. Surgeon General declared a “loneliness epidemic” in America, highlighting social isolation as a major public health concern. While loneliness is widely viewed as a situational experience, research suggests it plays a far more central role in individuals with substance use disorders, both contributing to the development of addiction and emerging as a defining feature and outcome of the disorder (Ingram et al., 2020; Wesselmann &amp; Parris, 2021).</p> <p>This breakout session will explore how loneliness and social isolation uniquely manifest in individuals with substance use disorders. The goal of this session is for participants to leave with a detailed understanding of the presentation of loneliness in substance use disorders and feel confident in supporting individuals struggling with addiction through evidence-informed, connection-focused prevention and intervention strategies. The session will begin by establishing a framework of the concept of loneliness, the clinical definition of substance use disorders, and the bidirectional relationship between substance use and loneliness (Bonar et al., 2021). Subsequently, we will explore how loneliness manifests differently between nonclinical populations and those with substance use disorders, and how social isolation presents uniquely in those communities. In tandem, the presentation will address preexisting strategies and current gaps in traditional clinical recovery programs that focus primarily on individual recovery rather than community connection. Finally, participants will be introduced to emerging connection-based approaches designed to reduce loneliness among individuals with substance use disorders and will have the opportunity to reflect on how they can incorporate these strategies into their personal and professional roles.</p>
<p><b>Learning Objectives</b></p>	<p>After attending this intermediate-level program, participants will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify evidence-informed strategies that address loneliness in individuals with substance use disorders and describe how to apply them in professional roles.</li> <li>• Explain how loneliness uniquely manifests in individuals with substance use disorders and differentiate its presentation from nonclinical populations.</li> <li>• Develop action plans based on case scenarios involving clients in substance use treatment who are experiencing loneliness.</li> </ul>
<p><b>More</b></p>	<p><b>For full CE information, please visit:</b> <a href="https://tcsppofficeofce.com/nrci-conference-2026-additional-ce-information">tcsppofficeofce.com/nrci-conference-2026-additional-ce-information</a></p>



# The Hidden Cycle: Loneliness and Mental Health in Children and Young Adults

<p><b>CE/CEUs</b></p>	<p>When attended in full, this program offers 1.0 CEs for Psychologists, 1.0 IL CEUs for Counselors and Social Workers, 1.0 BBS California CEUs for LPCCs, LPSWs, and LMFTs, 1.0 ISBE CPDUs for Illinois Educators, 1.0 NASP CPDs for School Psychologists, or 1.0 NBCC Clock Hours.</p>
<p><b>Presenter</b></p>	<p>Mojgan Makki, MD – Child and Adolescent Psychiatry Residency Program</p>
<p><b>Workshop Description</b></p>	<p>Loneliness affects approximately one in five children at any given time and is especially prevalent among youth with mental health and neurodevelopmental conditions, including ADHD and autism. Research demonstrates a bidirectional relationship between loneliness, anxiety, and depression, where loneliness both contributes to and results from emotional distress (Loades et al., 2020; Alnaher et al., 2024). Children with ADHD may be at heightened risk due to challenges with peer relationships, social rejection, and comorbid internalizing symptoms. Low peer acceptance, bullying, social anxiety, limited engagement in prosocial activities, excessive non-social screen time, parental stress, family conflict, and low socioeconomic status have been identified as potential risk factors (Maiyuran et al., 2024). Left unaddressed, loneliness is associated with depressive symptoms, poorer social development, reduced quality of life, and long-term mental health consequences (Loades et al., 2020).</p> <p>This presentation highlights loneliness as a critical yet often overlooked risk factor in childhood mental health across home, school, and pediatric care settings. Emphasis will be placed on early identification through routine screening, strengthening protective factors such as supportive family relationships and school connectedness, and implementing developmentally appropriate, culturally responsive interventions. Participants will gain practical insight into recognizing loneliness and supporting meaningful connection through collaboration with families, educators, and youth to reduce isolation and promote emotional well-being.</p>
<p><b>Learning Objectives</b></p>	<p>After attending this advanced-level program, participants will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify key risk factors and clinical indicators of loneliness in children, with particular attention to youth with ADHD, Anxiety or Depression.</li> <li>• Explain the bidirectional relationship between loneliness and mental health symptoms, including how social isolation both contributes to and results from emotional distress in children and adolescents.</li> <li>• Apply evidence-informed strategies for early identification and intervention, including routine screening and strengthening protective factors across family, school, and pediatric care settings, to reduce loneliness and improve child mental health outcomes.</li> </ul>
<p><b>More</b></p>	<p><b>For full CE information, please visit:</b>  <a href="https://tcsppofficeofce.com/nrci-conference-2026-additional-ce-information">tcsppofficeofce.com/nrci-conference-2026-additional-ce-information</a></p>



# The Hidden Grief of Professional Helpers: Isolation, Identity, and Connection

<p><b>CE/CEUs</b></p>	<p>When attended in full, this program offers 1.0 CE for Psychologists, 1.0 IL CEUs for Counselors and Social Workers, 1.0 BBS California CEUs for LPCCs, LPSWs, and LMFTs, 1.0 ISBE CPDUs for Illinois Educators, 1.0 NASP CPDs for School Psychologists, or 1.0 NBCC Clock Hours.</p>
<p><b>Presenter</b></p>	<p>Julie Fanning DSW -- Program Services Director, Turning Point Inc.; LCSW, Holding Hope Services; Therapist, Private Practice</p>
<p><b>Workshop Description</b></p>	<p>This session explores the personal and professional grief that helpers carry as a result of ongoing exposure to trauma, systemic barriers, and human suffering. Research highlights the impact of chronic stress and burnout in helping professions (Mack, 2022) and the effects of vicarious trauma on those who work closely with people who have experienced harm (Kim et al., 2022). Together, we will differentiate experiences such as vicarious trauma, compassion fatigue, moral injury, and burnout, and examine how these realities shape professional identity, sense of purpose, and long-term sustainability. Professional grief will be discussed as a frequently hidden and unspoken experience that can quietly contribute to isolation, particularly for those practicing independently or with limited collegial support.</p> <p>Grounded in a grief-informed framework adapted for social work practice (Yousuf-Abramson, 2021), this session invites participants to reflect on self-talk, boundaries, and realistic everyday self-care. We will also explore the role of peer connection, consultation, and intentional community as protective factors across practice settings. Participants will leave with a personalized sustainability statement outlining practical strategies to remain grounded, values-aligned, and meaningfully connected in their work over time.</p>
<p><b>Learning Objectives</b></p>	<p>After attending this intermediate-level program, participants will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Differentiate forms of professional grief—including vicarious trauma, compassion fatigue, moral injury, and burnout—and describe their impact on professional identity and long-term sustainability.</li> <li>• Assess personal patterns of self-talk, boundaries, and everyday self-care to identify practices that support grounded and ethical engagement.</li> <li>• Develop an individualized sustainability statement outlining practical strategies for maintaining resilience, values alignment, and continued engagement in the field.</li> </ul>
<p><b>More</b></p>	<p><b>For full CE information, please visit:</b>  <a href="https://tcspofficeofce.com/nrci-conference-2026-additional-ce-information">tcspofficeofce.com/nrci-conference-2026-additional-ce-information</a></p>



# The Loneliness of Masking: How Late-Identified ADHD & Autism Shape Connection Across the Lifespan

<p><b>CE/CEUs</b></p>	<p>When attended in full, this program offers 1.0 CEs for Psychologists, 1.0 IL CEUs for Counselors and Social Workers, 1.0 BBS California CEUs for LPCCs, LPSWs, and LMFTs, or 1.0 NBCC Clock Hours.</p>
<p><b>Presenter</b></p>	<p>Samantha Willi, LPCC-S, MS – Owner and Clinical Director, CLE Counseling and Wellness Center; Owner, Once Upon a Practice, LLC</p> <p>Halle Schelb, LPCC-S, MEd – Course Instructor, Once Upon a Practice, LLC; Clinical Mental Health Counselor (LPCC-S), CLE Counseling LLC; Front of House – House Manager, Lorain County Community College</p>
<p><b>Workshop Description</b></p>	<p>Loneliness does not always present as visible isolation. For many late-identified autistic and ADHD adults, it may manifest as years of masking, performing, blending in, and not fully feeling known. Even when surrounded by others, individuals may experience a persistent sense of being “alone together,” reflecting a disconnect between authentic identity and perceived social expectations. Empirical literature has documented elevated rates of loneliness among autistic adults and individuals with ADHD, with significant associations to depression, emotion regulation difficulties, and overall mental health outcomes (Umagami et al., 2022; Shi et al., 2020).</p> <p>This presentation explores the emotional and relational impact of chronic masking, misdiagnosis, and misunderstood neurodivergence across childhood, adulthood, and older age. Participants will examine how early experiences of social difference, sensory overwhelm, social inconsistencies, and unmet support needs may contribute to enduring patterns of internalized loneliness. Research suggests that loneliness may function as a mechanism associated with depressive symptoms in autism (Hedley et al., 2018), underscoring the clinical importance of early recognition and supportive intervention. Attendees will gain an expanded understanding of how loneliness intersects with identity development, mental-health symptoms, burnout, and belonging for neurodivergent individuals. Practical, neurodiversity-affirming strategies will be presented to assist clinicians, educators, and caregivers in fostering authentic connection, reducing masking pressures, and supporting clients in developing relationships that feel safe, reciprocal, and sustainable.</p>
<p><b>Learning Objectives</b></p>	<p>After attending this intermediate-level program, participants will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Define masking and describe its impact on loneliness and emotional well-being across the lifespan.</li> <li>• Recognize developmental patterns that contribute to chronic disconnection in autistic and ADHD individuals.</li> <li>• Apply at least three neurodiversity-affirming strategies to support authentic connection and reduce isolation in clinical and community settings.</li> </ul>
<p><b>More</b></p>	<p><b>For full CE information, please visit:</b>  <a href="https://tcsppofficeofce.com/nrci-conference-2026-additional-ce-information">tcsppofficeofce.com/nrci-conference-2026-additional-ce-information</a></p>



# Unseen and Unsupported: Understanding Grief and Loss in Adoption

<b>CE/CEUs</b>	When attended in full, this program offers 1.0 CEs for Psychologists, 1.0 IL CEUS for Counselors and Social Workers, 1.0 BBS California CEUs for LPCCs, LPSWs, and LMFTs, or 1.0 NBCC Clock Hours.
<b>Presenter</b>	Alexis Del Campo Eyer, MSW – Executive Director, Birth Parent Support Alliance
<b>Workshop Description</b>	<p>Adoption touches the lives of millions of individuals and families in the United States, yet the experiences of many members of the adoption constellation, particularly birthparents, remain underrepresented in research and support systems. This session examines adoption through a whole-triad lens, exploring how birthparents, adoptees, and adoptive parents may each experience forms of loss, identity disruption, and relational ambiguity that are often unrecognized or insufficiently supported. Research suggests that these experiences can be better understood through frameworks such as ambiguous loss and disenfranchised grief, which help explain why adoption-related grief may persist across the lifespan (Boss, 2016; Bolsby et al., 2024). The presentation will also explore differences across members of the triad, including the historically marginalized experiences of birthfathers and the identity-related information needs frequently reported by adoptees (Bolsby et al., 2024; Wrobel &amp; Grotevant, 2019). The session will further examine how adoption-related grief and relational disruption may emerge emotionally, behaviorally, and relationally over time, including associations with long-term mental health challenges following separation (Zubov, 2026). Particular attention will be given to gaps in post-placement support, including the ways birthparents may experience mental health vulnerabilities following relinquishment while remaining largely outside traditional postpartum screening and care pathways (Landers et al., 2023).</p> <p>Participants will leave with a deeper understanding of how adoption-related loneliness and grief unfold across the lifespan and considerations for strengthening more responsive and inclusive support systems.</p>
<b>Learning Objectives</b>	<p>After attending this introductory-level program, participants will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Define ambiguous loss and disenfranchised grief and explain how these frameworks apply to the lived experiences of birthparents, adoptees, and adoptive parents across the adoption triad.</li><li>• Identify common emotional, behavioral, and relational indicators of unresolved adoption-related grief among triad members and recognize how these experiences may present differently across the lifespan and by triad role.</li><li>• Describe at least two practice approaches that support adoption-competent, trauma-informed engagement with members of the adoption triad and identify barriers that may limit access to grief-informed care.</li></ul>
<b>More</b>	<p><b>For full CE information, please visit:</b> <a href="https://tcsppofficeofce.com/nrci-conference-2026-additional-ce-information">tcsppofficeofce.com/nrci-conference-2026-additional-ce-information</a></p>



**Naomi Ruth Cohen**  
Institute for Mental Health Education  
at The Chicago School



**Alone Together**  
Confronting Loneliness Across the Lifespan

**SATURDAY, MAY 16TH, 2026**  
**9:00AM-5:00PM**

**EVANSTON TOWNSHIP HIGH SCHOOL**  
1600 DODGE AVE  
EVANSTON, IL 60201

**FOR QUESTIONS, PLEASE CALL**  
**(312) 467-2552**