

2025 DEC CONFERENCE

Session Descriptions and Objectives

MORNING KEYNOTE

Drugs, Brains, and Behavior: Advocacy and Safety in the Age of Fentanyl

Presented by Fred Rottnek, MD

In this era of increased drug-related overdoses, poisoned drug supplies, and challenges for individuals and families seeking health care, Dr. Fred Rottnek brings a common sense, accessible discussion of the impact of drugs, trauma, and environment on brain chemistry and associated behavior. Participants will leave the session with a basic understanding of these concepts and the why behind these problematic behaviors. Participants will also gain tools to interact more effectively with individuals they serve, maintain their own well-being in their professional lives, and promote safety in everyone's household.

At the end of this session, attendees will be able to:

1. Recall where we are in 2025 with the opioid overdose epidemic
2. Describe pathways in the brain that are affected by substance use disorders (SUDs) and trauma
3. Recall protective and vulnerability factors for SUD Identify the impact of SSDOH in risky use and development of SUDs
4. Differentiate among fact and fiction of street fentanyl and other synthetic opioids
5. Describe the basic actions of medications used in the treatment of individuals with OUDs
6. Educate individuals and families on ways in increase medication and drug safety in the home

BREAKOUT SESSIONS

A) Understanding Stress & Self-Care: Getting Back Some Control

Presented by Jim Harris, Ed.D. LICSW

There is no doubt that we find ourselves in unprecedented times. In this session, Dr. Harris will explore the potential impact of recent events, personally and professionally. Dr. Harris will pay specific attention to such topics as trauma, toxic stress, relational poverty, and regulatory fatigue. During this challenge and uncertainty, he will also explore self-care strategies to improve our overall functioning.

At the end of this session, attendees will be able to:

1. Identify how trauma and stress can affect our personal and professional lives
2. Identify effective self-care strategies

B) Developing a Statewide Drug Endangered Children-Handle with Care Collaborative

Presented by Tabatha Curtis, BS, CPSII & Evangeline Watanabe MSW

Participants will have the opportunity to learn from the TN Alliance for Drug Endangered Children and TN Handle with Care statewide coordinators on how they utilized existing substance abuse prevention coalitions in the development of DEC/HWC response communities. Coordinators will share lessons learned from the development of their response communities at the grass roots level. Coordinators will discuss the importance of cross sector collaboration in reducing trauma, enhancing access, and reducing barriers to children and families suffering from substance abuse issues. Coordinators will discuss the importance of data collection, creating awareness and building of local capacity and statewide capacity. Insights and tips will be provided that will assist in advancing communities and their partners to a new level of expertise.

At the end of this session, attendees will be able to:

1. Understand how to identify key stakeholder in developing a drug endangered children's communities and Handle with Care Program
2. Understand how to reduce barriers and enhance access to local resources by leverage existing partners to improve the lives of children and families at the local level utilizing the Handle with Care and Drug Endangered Children models
3. Identify how a community coalition can be the hub of developing a Handle with Care program, prevention efforts and treatment and recovery support at the grassroots level for children and families

C) (Two-part presentation)

Become a Voice for Change

Presented by Deric Kidd, President & Co-Founder

This presentation highlights the critical connection between mental health and addiction, exploring the roles and responsibilities we each hold within society. It will examine both the positive and negative impacts of our actions, shedding light on how we contribute to either support or stigmatize others.

At the end of this session, attendees will be able to:

1. Understand that everyone is susceptible to addiction and the impact of trauma, loss, grief and abuse
2. Challenge preconceived ideas and develop a more open informed perspective
3. Recognize the unique value each individual brings and how their role contributes to the opportunity for recovery

Living with the Unbearable: Losing a Child to Fentanyl

Presented by Laurie Arwine

The loss of a child is an unimaginable tragedy and losing a child to fentanyl poisoning adds a layer of trauma. It only takes one pill to change a family's life forever. Awareness and education about the danger of fentanyl needs to happen to prevent families from the heartache and pain of losing a child.

At the end of this session, attendees will be able to:

1. Give voice to the devastating impact of fentanyl on families
2. Encourage open conversations about drug use and its risks among young people
3. Highlight the deceptive nature of counterfeit drugs laced with fentanyl

MORNING KEYNOTE

DRUG TRENDS AND INVESTIGATIONS

Presented by Bryant Strouse Special Agent in Charge

The presentation will address current drug trends in Iowa, conducting drug investigations, the challenges to drug enforcement, the impact of Mexican drug Cartels and the ongoing fentanyl epidemic. Join Bryant Strouse from the Iowa Division of Narcotics Enforcement (DNE) with the Iowa Department of Public Safety (DPS) as he provides attendees with information on drug distribution and abuse and the significant impact they have on children throughout Iowa.

At the end of this session, attendees will be able to:

1. Identify current drug trends in Iowa
2. Gain an understanding of drug investigations and the role non-LE agencies serve in those investigations
3. Utilize updated drug distribution and drug abuse information for individualized professional applications

BREAKOUT SESSIONS

A) Talking to Youth about Substance Use

Presented by Fred Rottnek, MD

Promoting healthy behaviors often involves difficult conversations. And our discomfort as adults cannot get in the way of the trust and rapport, we need to build with youth to do our work. In this interactive session, Dr. Fred Rottnek brings his decades of experience as a family physician practicing correctional health care and addiction medicine to build off his plenary session with a more focused discussion of the impact of drugs, social media, and other external factors on the adolescent brain. He will share best-practice screening tools and conversational prompts to help professionals facilitate necessary discussions to gain information they need to be effective in their work.

At the end of the session, attendees will be able to:

1. Build on their knowledge gained from today's plenary
2. Discuss brain development and impact of early substance use on the developing brain
3. Recall protective and vulnerability factors for SUD Identify the impact of SSDOH in risky use and development of SUDs
4. Discuss the role that social media and media habits can play in mood, resilience, and behavior
5. Use common screening tools to assess mood and substance use/exposure
6. Ask the next question in a conversation about substance use

B) The DEC Approach: Moving from Awareness to Action

Presented by Nikki Romer, LMSW & Kevin Brownell

This training focuses on how to implement the DEC Approach, which is a strategy based on a common vision, ongoing collaboration between various disciplines and agencies, and ongoing changes in practice. The DEC Approach is effective in improving the likelihood of better outcomes for drug-endangered children. This training provides insights about how all professionals are in a position to identify, protect, and serve drug endangered children and their families.

At the end of the session, attendees will be able to:

1. Understand the components, benefits, and challenges of the DEC Approach
2. Understand the importance and benefits of sharing a common vision in the DEC Approach and in DEC efforts at various levels
3. Gain insight about how our own experience, attitudes, values, and emotions impact effective efforts under the DEC Approach
4. Gain insight about our collaborative partners to decrease frustrations when utilizing the DEC Approach
5. Be able to implement changes in identification of children, mandatory reporting, evidence and information collection, and other changes in our respective practices on behalf of drug endangered children

C) Community Solutions for Supporting Drug-Endangered Children

Presented by Nicholas Pietrack, Founder/Director

This session will explore the importance of establishing and sustaining a local Drug Endangered Children (DEC) team to better serve vulnerable children and families impacted by substance use. Participants will learn how local DEC teams can create meaningful change by fostering collaboration among law enforcement, child welfare, healthcare, and community organizations.

The session will also highlight the work of Open Arms Foundation of Jasper County, showcasing how a community-driven approach can provide critical resources, crisis intervention, and wraparound support for families in need. Attendees will gain practical insights on developing a local DEC team, leveraging partnerships for greater impact, and implementing support strategies to protect drug-endangered children.

This session aims to equip participants with the knowledge and inspiration to strengthen their own communities and enhance statewide efforts to support children and families affected by substance use.

At the end of the session, attendees will be able to:

1. Identify the resources and services provided by Open Arms Foundation of Jasper County and understand how these organizations support drug-endangered children and families in crisis
2. Gain insights into the creation, development, and operational strategies of community-based organizations that address the needs of vulnerable populations
3. Develop actionable ideas and strategies to establish or enhance similar initiatives in their own communities, fostering collaboration and support for families affected by substance use and related challenges

Afternoon Keynote

Support Children in Complicated World: State, Story, & Strategies

Presented by Jim Harris, Ed.D. LICSW

In this presentation, Dr. Harris will explore the importance of state, story, and strategy in our work. He will discuss the impact our own mental and physical status has on our ability to understand and solve problems. He will speak about the importance of analyzing and challenging our belief systems and the questions we ask ourselves. Lastly, he will explore the importance of knowing strategies and the underlying challenges the strategies seek to address. You will walk away from this session with helpful information for your personal and professional lives.

At the end of this session, attendees will be able to:

1. See the connection between self-care strategies and the ability to support co-regulation
2. Explore how our thoughts and beliefs about a problem or challenge impacts our ability to identify solutions
3. Explore the rationale behind the use of certain types of strategies to support children and families