MS STATEWIDE AUTISM TRAINING INITIATIVE

11th Annual Creating Your Own Path Conference

Thursday, September 11, 2025
MS Dept. of Rehabilitation Services
Madison, Mississippi

AGENDA

Continuing education and attendance certificates awarded only to those with corresponding evaluation sheets.

Time	Session	Location
7:30 am - 9:00 am	Registration/Vendor Exhibits Open	Lobby
9:00 am - 9:15 am	Welcome and Introduction	Auditorium
9:15 am - 10:45 am	**Featured Speaker – Rick Daynes**	Auditorium
10:45 am - 11:00 am	Break – Vendor Exhibits Open	Lobby
11:00 am - 12:15 pm Breakout Sessions	When Social Is Sensory: Supporting Autistic Connection Without the Mask *Tarea Stout, M.S., LPC, Chris Webb Counseling Group*	Auditorium
	Home & Community Based Services, IDD Services *Pamela Harkins, Director, IDD Community Support Program, MS Department of Mental Health*	Cafeteria
	Sensory Foundations *Kecia Ray, OTR/L, SIPP, OT Solutions*	Third Floor Training Room
12:15 pm - 1:15 pm	Lunch (provided)	
1:15 pm - 2:30 pm Breakout Sessions	Understanding Autism in the Inclusive Classroom *Denise Harrison, M.S., Special Education Professional Development Coordinator, Mississippi Department of Education*	Auditorium
	Redirection that Works *Lucy Kay Jones, BCBA, LBA, Blue Sky Behavior Therapy*	Cafeteria
	Communication First: Practical strategies to support connection through AAC *Sarah Myers, M.S., CCC-SLP, The Children's Center for Communication and Development*	Third Floor Training Room
2:30 pm - 2:45 pm	Break – Vendor Exhibits Open	Lobby
2:45 pm - 4:00 pm	Transition for Persons with Autism Discussion Panel *Facilitator – Pam Dollar, Executive Director, MS Coalition for Citizens with Disabilities*	Auditorium

Session Descriptions

When Social Is Sensory: Supporting Autistic Connection Without the Mask
This presentation explores the complex relationship between sensory processing, social behavior, and emotional regulation in autistic individuals. Drawing from current research and clinical practice, it challenges traditional deficit-based models of social skills and behavioral interventions. Attendees will gain a deeper understanding of how sensory processing differences shape social engagement, the emotional toll of masking, and how behavior often reflects attempts to self-regulate in overstimulating environments. The session offers practical, neurodiversity-affirming strategies to support authentic connection, communication, and well-being across the lifespan. By centering sensory awareness as a foundational factor in social success, this presentation empowers professionals and families to foster environments that promote safety, autonomy, and relational growth.

Home & Community Based Services, IDD Services
This presentation will cover the Intellectual Disability/Developmental Disability (ID/DD) Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS) in Mississippi. The ID/DD Waiver and IDD Community Support Program provide Medicaid-funded services for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and/or Autism. The presentation will discuss each program, eligibility, and services offered through each program.

Sensory Foundations
This presentation will define and discuss Sensory Integration theory and the various sensory systems. Sensory Processing Disorder will be explained, discussed and demonstrated. Methods of intervention will be included.

Understanding Autism in the Inclusive Classroom
This session addresses inclusion by emphasizing the need to remove barriers that limit access and participation for students with autism. Educators can better meet diverse learning needs and create environments where all students can engage meaningfully by focusing on evidence-based practices such as visual supports, instructional strategies, and peer-mediated supports. The session also highlights the importance of empathy, collaboration, and creativity in teaching, which are critical components for reducing exclusion and fostering a sense of belonging. Aligning with IDEA (2004), it reinforces the goal of educating students alongside their neurotypical peers, thus promoting equity, accessibility, and full participation in the learning process.

Redirection That Works
When managing a behavior that is disruptive or potentially harmful, caregivers and educators are often told to attempt to “redirect” the behavior. Often, redirection is a good temporary solution, but it requires constant supervision. With a working understanding of behavior functions, caregivers and educators can identify the function of a behavior of concern and identify a specific behavior to redirect the child to that meets the same need. This combined with evidence-based teaching strategies can provide a more permanent behavioral solution and empower the child to get needs met independently.

Communication First: Practical strategies to support connection through AAC
Communication strategies that promote inclusive participation and social connection are vital for children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Evidence-based intervention strategies using multiple communication modalities will be discussed, demonstrated through case studies and videos, and practiced together. Simple modifications and accommodations to augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) supports will be shared to ensure that all Autistic children have access to learning and connection throughout the course of their day.

Transition for Persons with Autism Discussion Panel
This presentation will include discussion of transition of persons with Autism throughout the lifespan. Participants will gain an understanding of the transition processes and what that may look like for each individual with Autism and how this plan may vary. They will be able to identify communication and behavior skills that may be a barrier to transition and discuss tools or strategies available to guide families, caregivers, etc. through a more appropriate transition plan. Participants will hear from panel members who have lived the experience and what has helped them to be successful.