

MAY 6, 2026

ANNISTON, AL



MINI-CONFERENCE SCHEDULE & WORKSHOP DESCRIPTIONS

8:00A

CHECK-IN

9:00A – 10:30A

**From Play to Peril:
Understanding the
Influences Shaping
Youth Behavior**

10:30A – 10:45A

BREAK

10:45A – 12:15P

**From Warning Signs
to Lifelines:
Supporting Youth at
Risk Through Early
Identification**

12:15P – 1:30P

LUNCH BREAK
Explore Nearby
Dining

1:30P – 3:00P

**Gangs, Guns, & Drugs:
Understanding Youth
Exposure and
Behavioral Outcomes**

3:00P – 3:15P

BREAK

3:15P – 4:15P

**The Message in the
Music: Understanding
What Lyrics
Communicate and Why
it Matters**

4:15P – 4:30P

**Turning Insight
into Action:
Next Steps
Q&A/Wrap Up**

**YELLOW BRICK ROAD YOUTH VIOLENCE PREVENTION
MINI-CONFERENCE
ANNISTON, ALABAMA
MAY 6, 2026**

WORKSHOP DESCRIPTIONS

From Play to Peril: Understanding the Influences Shaping Youth Behavior

Often referred to as “Games Children Play” to simplify the intentions of the content to be shared, participants are left with an overwhelming feeling of, “Man, I had no idea!” This presentation is designed to enlighten participants about activities youth may engage in, which can sometimes be deadly. Youth risk behaviors rarely emerge in isolation. They develop within the context of social norming (exposure on social networking sites), neurological maturation, social learning, trauma exposure, peer influence, media consumption, family systems, and community stressors. When early warning signs are overlooked, experimentation can progress toward more destructive behavior, including substance misuse, high-risk sexual behavior, self-harm, and suicidal ideation. What may have started as thrill seeking or a means to escape can lead to more serious consequences.

This workshop provides an evidence-informed examination of the developmental, environmental, and psychosocial factors that influence shifts in youth behavior. Participants will explore current patterns in prescription drug misuse, alcohol use, and co-occurring behavioral health concerns, while gaining tools to distinguish normative developmental exploration from behaviors that signal elevated risk. Special emphasis is placed on identifying early indicators of risk-related behaviors (even those that appear to be innocent games), including suicidal ideation, accidental overdose risk, and maladaptive coping patterns. Through applied scenarios representing diverse youth populations, attendees will strengthen their ability to assess warning signs, intervene appropriately, and integrate suicide prevention and substance misuse prevention strategies into existing clinical, educational, juvenile justice, faith-based, and community frameworks.

This workshop promotes cross-sector collaboration, reduces stigma through informed dialogue, and equips professionals with practical prevention and intervention strategies that can be implemented immediately within their respective roles.

Note: *Due to clinical content related to suicide, substance misuse, and sexual risk behaviors, this session is designed for adult professional audiences.*

From Warning Signs to Lifelines: Supporting Students at Risk Through Early Identification

Today we see youth violence affecting families in a variety of tragic ways. Recently we've seen an increase in self harm, including dating violence and murder suicides. This workshop equips professionals with practical tools to identify suicide risk in children and adolescents and respond appropriately. Participants will learn how to recognize behavioral, emotional, and verbal warning signs; understand common risk and protective factors; and take informed action when concerns arise.

Emphasis is placed on **early identification, appropriate response, and clear referral pathways** within school, community, and behavioral health systems. Attendees will leave with increased confidence in having difficult conversations, documenting concerns, and connecting youth and families to timely, appropriate support.

This workshop is designed for educators, school administrators, counselors, behavioral health professionals, youth-serving organizations, and frontline staff committed to prevention and early intervention.

Gangs, Guns, and Drugs: Understanding Youth Exposure and Behavioral Outcomes

Youth are increasingly exposed to gangs, firearms, and substances—not always by choice, but sometimes by environment. For educators, counselors, clinicians, and youth-serving professionals, these exposures often show up indirectly as behavior challenges, academic disruption, emotional dysregulation, and/or mental health concerns.

This workshop reframes gangs, guns, and drugs not as labels or moral failings, but as environmental stressors that influence youth behavior, development, and decision-making. Using behavioral health and prevention-focused lenses, participants will examine how exposure—whether direct, witnessed, or community-based—can shape trauma responses, risk behaviors, and long-term outcomes for children and adolescents.

Rather than focusing on fear or enforcement, this session emphasizes early identification, protective factors, and practical intervention strategies that can be applied in schools, clinical settings, and community programs. Participants will leave with a clearer understanding of how to recognize exposure-related behavioral patterns, respond in trauma-informed ways, and support youth toward safety, resilience, and healthier trajectories. The overall objective is to interrupt the cycle of teen violence thereby reducing youth violence in our schools and communities.

The Message in the Music: Understanding What Lyrics Communicate and Why It Matters

Music is one of the most influential forms of media in youth culture. Across genres and platforms, lyrical content can reflect, reinforce, or challenge attitudes related to identity, relationships, substance use, violence, resilience, and belonging. This interactive workshop does **not** promote censorship or discourage creative expression. Instead, it equips professionals with practical media literacy tools to better understand the messages young people are consuming and discussing every day.

Designed for educators, school administrators, counselors, behavioral health clinicians, prevention specialists, and juvenile justice professionals, this session explores how both explicit and subtle lyrical themes can influence youth perceptions, normalize certain behaviors, and shape social norms. Participants will examine samples across multiple music genres and media formats, identifying themes related to risk behaviors as well as protective factors.

Grounded in research on media influence, social learning theory, and adolescent brain development, the workshop provides a framework for analyzing content without judgment while maintaining cultural competence.

The workshop also highlights how music can serve as a therapeutic bridge by opening dialogue about mental health, trauma, substance use, peer influence, and identity development.

Rather than asking, “Should youth listen to this?” the workshop reframes the question to, “What is being communicated, and how do we help youth process it?” Participants will leave with practical tools to strengthen engagement, prevention efforts, and culturally responsive practice in school, clinical, and community settings.