

AUTISM CONNECT 2026

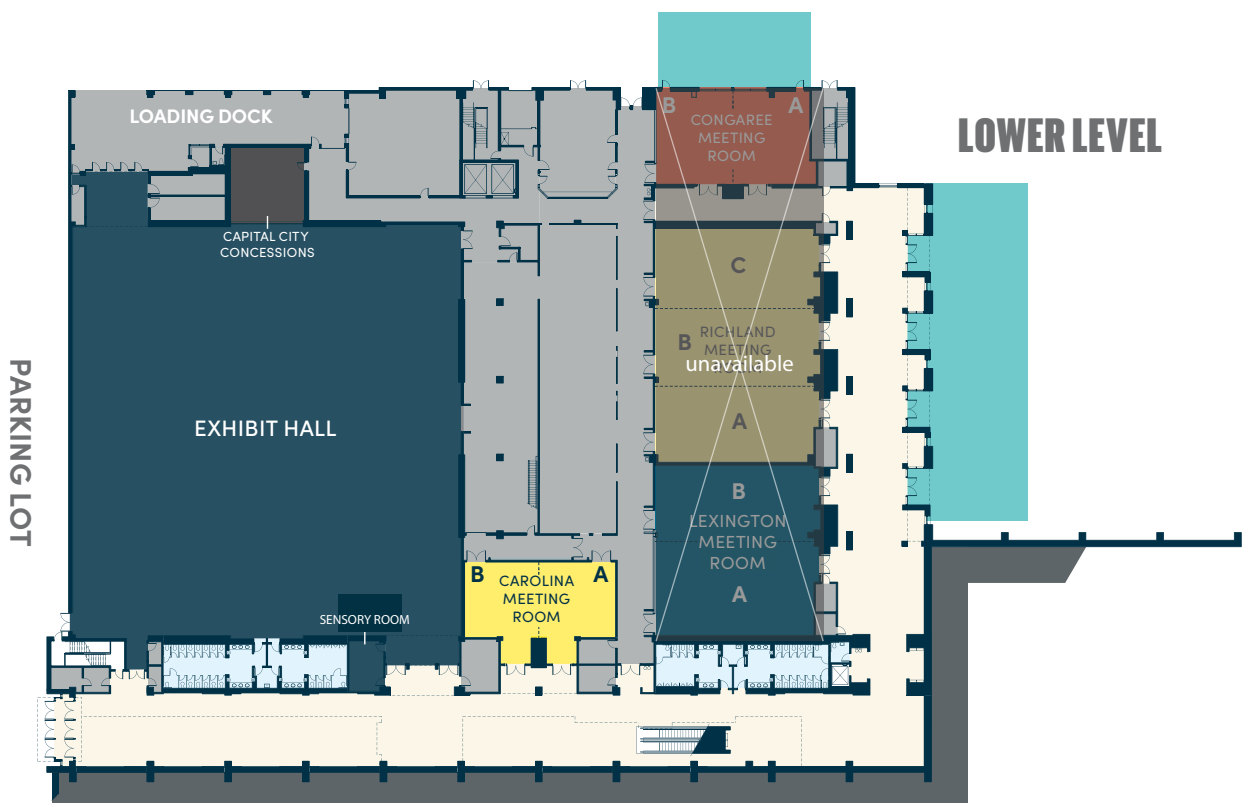
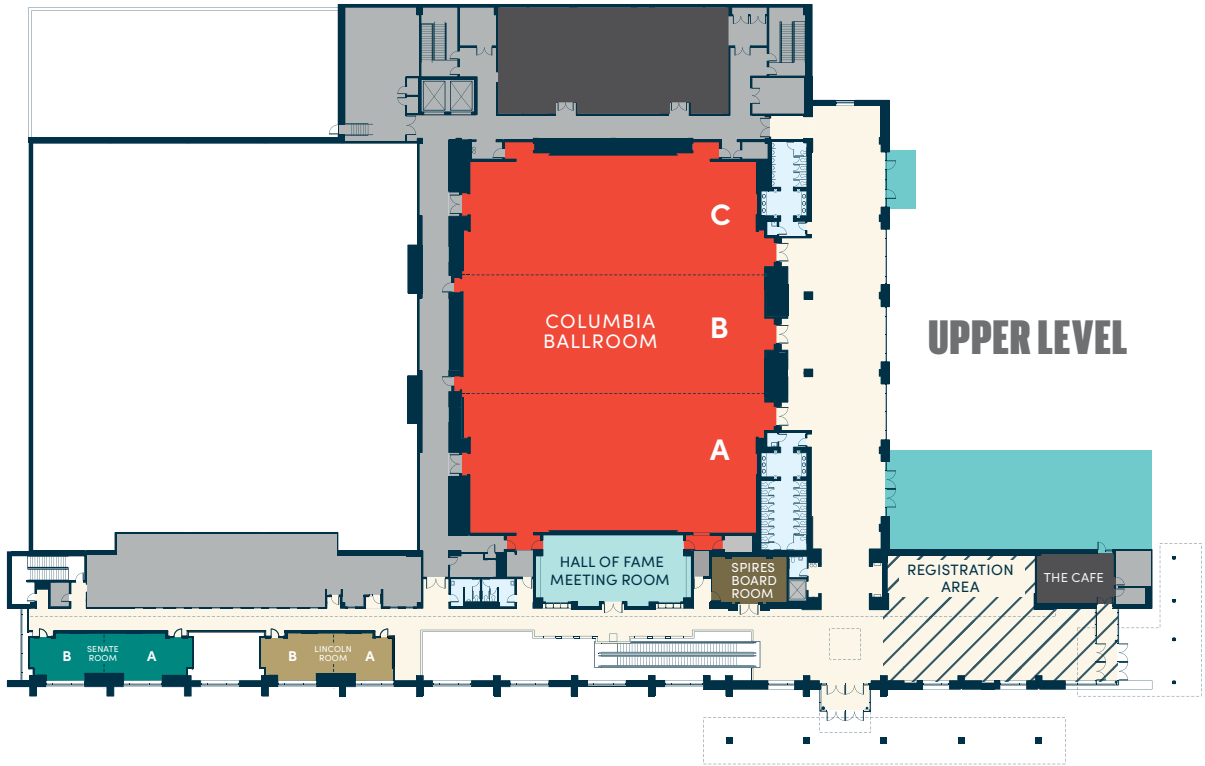
Bringing together the autism community for a day filled with connections, support, and understanding!

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Floorplan

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|--|--|---|---|--|
| ■ BALLROOM | ■ SENATE ROOM | ■ KITCHEN/ CONCESSIONS | ■ LEXINGTON MEETING ROOM | ■ OUTDOOR SPACE |
| ■ SPIRES BOARDROOM | ■ LINCOLN ROOM | ■ EXHIBIT HALL | ■ RICHLAND MEETING ROOM | ■ PREFUNCTION SPACE |
| ■ HALL OF FAME MEETING ROOM | ▨ REGISTRATION AREA | ■ CAROLINA MEETING ROOM | ■ CONGAREE MEETING ROOM | ■ SERVICE |
| | | | | ■ RESTROOMS |



Program at a Glance

Room	Session One 9:30AM - 10:30AM	Session Two 11:00AM - 12:00PM	Session Three 1:30PM - 2:30PM
Carolina A	Helping Caregivers Support Emotion Regulation in Toddlers who may have Autism 	Transition Support to High School and Beyond 	Palmetto ABL: Saving for the Future and Protecting Benefits 
Carolina B	Occupational Therapy Strategies for Neurodivergent Students with Mental Health Challenges 	Caring for the Caregivers: Bridging the Support Gap in Kinship Care 	Exploring Inclusive College Options 
Ballroom A	Executive Functioning Success at School and Home 	Behavior is Communication: Understanding and Responding to Students' "Needs" 	What You Can't See Hurts Us: Assessing the Mental Load of Autistic Learners 
Ballroom B	My child has been diagnosed... Now what? 	Elopement Management Strategies 	Understanding IEP Accommodations & Behavior Supports for Students with ASD 
Ballroom C	Libraries are Ausome: Free Community Resources at Your Local Library 	A Therapeutic Melody: Music Therapy for Autism 	Preparing for Adulthood: What to Know About Life After High School 
Hall of Fame	Making Connections through Special Olympics 	Autism Water Safety Must Haves 	Equine-Assisted Activities to Build Regulation, Communication, and Engagement 
Lincoln	Trauma and Autism Strategies for Connection & Regulation 	Supporting Parents to Change Behaviors 	Neurodiversity-Informed Autism Interventions: Best Practices for Clinicians and Educators 
Senate A	Managing Caregiver Burnout 	Supporting Growth, Self-Advocacy, and Independence in Young Adults 	How can a Genetic Evaluation help? 
Senate B	Chat & Connect 	Chat & Connect 	Chat & Connect 

Target Audience

Icons represent the target audience for each session as follows:



- Individuals on the Spectrum



- School Professionals



- Caregivers



- Direct Care Providers

Session One (9:30am - 10:30am)

Helping Caregivers Support Emotion Regulation in Toddlers who may have Autism

Sarah Edmunds, PhD, LP - University of South Carolina

Carolina A

Emotion dysregulation (e.g., frequent or unpredictable tantrums and aggression), is a common family concern, a prominent aspect of autism in toddlerhood, and can limit children's daily inclusion and learning. This workshop will introduce the Minding Meltdowns project and present example strategies from an evidence-based intervention that supports young children's emotion dysregulation and is designed for toddlers with autism or social communication delays.



Occupational Therapy Strategies for Neurodivergent Students with Mental Health Challenges

Moni Keen, OTD, OTR/L, Abigail Compton, & Madeline Gilstrap - Presbyterian College

Carolina B

Learn how occupational therapy can support individuals with neurodivergence by addressing mental health challenges, improving daily engagement, and meeting the unique social and emotional needs of adolescents with autism, including those involved with child protective services.



Executive Functioning Success at School & Home

Veronica Primus MS - The Stronger Thread Network, Inc.

Ballroom A

Gain practical tools and strategies to support executive functioning skills—such as working memory, flexible thinking, and self-control—and learn how these skills affect daily success at home and at school. the unique social and emotional needs of adolescents with autism, including those involved with child protective services.



Making Connections through Special Olympics

Barbara Oswald & Travis Luthren - Special Olympics South Carolina

Hall of Fame

This interactive session will explore the many opportunities through Special Olympics for programming, on and off the playing fields, that not only promote more active lifestyles, but also foster healthy relationships and meaningful inclusion.



My child has been diagnosed... Now what?

Silvia Pereira-Smith, M.D. - MUSC

Ballroom B

Learn about the services, supports, and resources available in South Carolina for children diagnosed with autism, including educational services, therapies, medical recommendations, family support organizations, online tools, and research opportunities.



Libraries are Ausome: Free Community Resources at Your Local Library

Caroline Smith MLIS, Jordan David MLIS, Janice Surginer MLIS, & Cassie Welch MLIS - South Carolina State Library, Laurens County Public Library, & Charleston County Public Library

Ballroom C

Learn what services libraries across South Carolina have to offer—for free—to support individuals with autism of all ages.



Trauma and Autism Strategies for Connection & Regulation

Kandice Hunt MED, TBRI® & Patricia Hazim TBRI® - Flourishing Families of South Carolina

Lincoln

Explore how trauma can impact individuals with autism and learn practical, trauma-informed, attachment-based strategies to support safety, connection, regulation, and behavior, while applying compassionate tools for communication, co-regulation, and problem-solving.



Managing Caregiver Burnout

Leah Doberne-Schor EdS, LPC - Compass Rose Counseling SC

Senate A

Join this supportive session to understand caregiver burnout, learn strategies to manage stress, and connect with others to feel less isolated in the caregiving experience.



Chat & Connect

Experts across disciplines - University of South Carolina's Center for Autism and Neurodevelopment Research

Senate B

Attendees will have the opportunity to meet and chat informally with a rotation of autism professionals available throughout the day.



Session Two (11:00am – 12:00pm)

Transition Support to High School and Beyond

Angela McGinty MEd & Octavia Graham MEd. – BHDD–OIDD

Carolina A

Come learn about transition supports and how the Office of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities helps students, families, and school teams plan for adult services.



Caring for the Caregivers: Bridging the Support Gap in Kinship Care

Dr. Kimberley A. Janha, CEO – Kindred Hearts

Carolina B

This session explores how Kindred Hearts of SC addresses the unique challenges faced by kinship caregivers by providing the essential resources, advocacy, and community connections needed to stabilize alternative family units.



Behavior is Communication: Understanding & Responding to Students' "Needs"

Sandrene Foster MA, QASP–S – Hope ABA

Ballroom A

Learn how you can support students with autism by coaching challenging behaviors, teaching functional communication and self-regulation skills, and creating inclusive classrooms where all students can thrive.



Elopement Management Strategies

Silvia Pereira–Smith MD – Medical University of South Carolina

Ballroom B

Elopement, also called wandering, is when an individual leaves a safe place unexpectedly. It can be stressful for families and at times even dangerous or life-threatening, especially with autistic youth since rates are higher in this population. In this session, Dr. Silvia Pereira–Smith will share



A Therapeutic Melody: Music Therapy for Autism

Jennifer Gossett MT–BC, NICU–MT & Sarah Pregnall MMT, MT–BC, NMT – Noteworthy Music Therapy LLC

Ballroom C

Explore how music therapy can support the social, emotional, physical, and cognitive well-being of individuals with autism, with interactive music-making, practical techniques for home use, and resources from professional music therapists.



Autism Water Safety Must Haves

Cindy Freedman OTR – Swim Angelfish

Hall of Fame

Ready to improve water safety for swimmers with Autism and other special needs? Join Swim Angelfish as we share our successful time-tested strategies, FREE downloads and video library along with examples of Community Water Safety Events.



Supporting Parents to Change Behaviors

Adrianna Shoemaker M.A.T, BCBA, Trenae Johnson M.A.T., BCBA, & Katie Wolfe PhD, BCBA–D – University of South Carolina

Lincoln

Gain practical tools from a family training program designed to help caregivers reach family-centered behavior goals.



Supporting Growth, Self-Advocacy, & Independence in Young Adults

Troy Hall – able South Carolina

Senate A

Learn about disability-related resources, peer support programs, and training opportunities that help young adults build self-advocacy, strengthen emotional regulation, and engage meaningfully in their communities, while supporting families and partners in promoting growth and independence.



Chat & Connect

Experts across disciplines – University of South Carolina's Center for Autism and Neurodevelopment Research

Senate B

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Session Three (1:30pm – 2:30pm)

Palmetto ABLE: Saving for the Future & Protecting Benefits

Karen Crider, BA – South Carolina Treasurer’s Office

Carolina A

Learn how Palmetto ABLE accounts help individuals with disabilities and their families plan and save for the future, protect benefits eligibility, open and manage an account, and understand recent program updates that benefit account holders.



Preparing for Adulthood: What to Know About Life After High School

Jodie Jones – Disability Rights South Carolina

Ballroom C

Learn what to expect after high school and how to prepare for adulthood by exploring transition supports, services, and resources available to students with disabilities and their families.



Exploring Inclusive College Options

Rebecca Smith Hill PhD, MSW & Erica Milliron M.S. – SCISEC & USC

Carolina B

Discover the benefits of two and four-year inclusive Postsecondary Education (IPSE) programs in South Carolina, learn about all seven state IPSE options, and gain the tools needed to navigate the SCIPSEC website and identify key predictors of student success.



Equine-Assisted Activities to Build Regulation, Communication, and Engagement

Isabella Burwell CEO, Julia Mari Colon SLP, Julia Scherbaum PATH-Certified CTRL, Lauren Cherrier PATH-Certified ESMHL – Sun Horse Ranch & Greenville Bilingual Therapy

Hall of Fame

Explore practical equine-inspired strategies that support regulation, communication, and engagement for children through connection-based activities, and learn how to apply these approaches safely and ethically in therapeutic, educational, or group settings.



What You Can’t See Hurts Us: Assessing the Mental Load of Autistic Learners

Stewart Lee MEd – Mr Lee Teaches

Ballroom A

Learn how educators and caregivers can recognize and reduce the invisible cognitive load that individuals with autism experience, using a practical audit framework and environmental strategies to support regulation, access, and authentic participation in school and home settings.



Neurodiversity-Informed Autism Interventions: Best Practices for Clinicians and Educators

Lindsay McCary PhD – University of South Carolina

Lincoln

Explore strategies to apply neurodiversity-informed and trauma-sensitive practices in your work, and learn how these approaches improve interventions and support for individuals with autism.



Understanding IEP Accommodations & Behavior Supports for Students with ASD

Shaunita Grase MS – Lexington County School District One

Ballroom B

Learn how IEP accommodations and behavior supports help students with autism succeed in school, exploring available services, and gain practical advocacy tools – including sample language and questions – to participate confidently in IEP meetings and school discussions.



How Can a Genetic Evaluation Help?

Wesley Patterson, PhD, MSPA, PA-C, CAQ-Peds – Greenwood Genetic Center

Senate A

This session will provide a practical overview of what a genetic evaluation for autism spectrum disorder involves and how it can benefit individuals and families through informed care and support.



Chat & Connect

Experts across disciplines – University of South Carolina’s Center for Autism and Neurodevelopment Research

Senate B

Attendees will have the opportunity to meet and chat informally with a rotation of autism professionals available throughout the day.



Exhibitor Info

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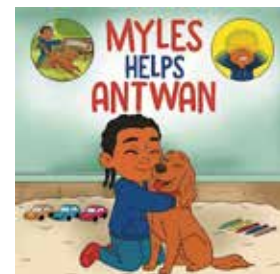
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Exhibitor Info



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Exhibitor Info



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We extend a heartfelt thankyou to our generous donation sponsors for their incredible support of AutismConnect. Your thoughtful BINGO gifts added excitement, joy, and meaningful engagement to our event, helping create a fun and inclusive experience for everyone involved. Because of your kindness, our participants were able to connect, celebrate, and make lasting memories. Your support truly makes a difference, and we are deeply grateful for your partnership. **Click each logo to learn more!**

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Get Started

Questions? Contact me!

Erin Steelman, M.S., BCBA



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Stop by our table at AutismConnect to learn more!

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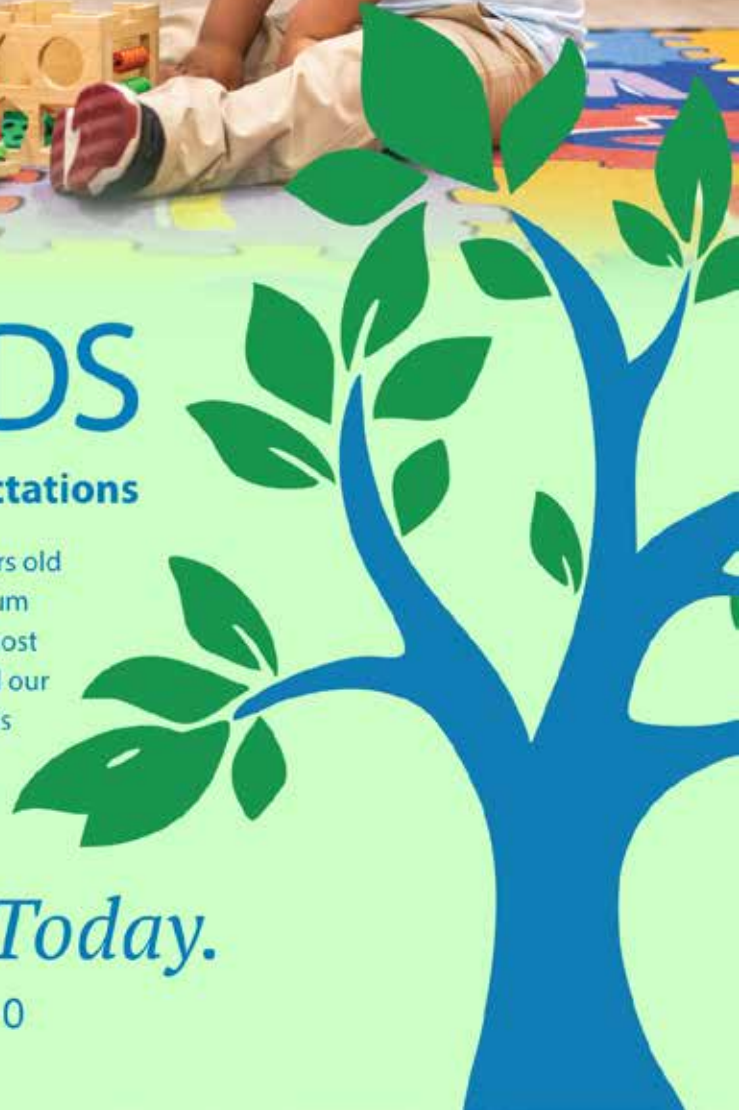
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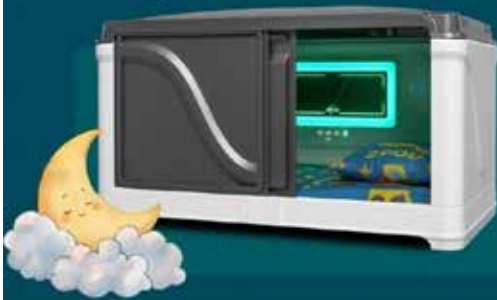
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The right evaluation can provide more than you think...

An evaluation can help diagnose:

- ADHD
- Learning Disabilities
- Autism Spectrum Disorder
- Executive Functioning Deficits

A diagnosis may offer school-based support:

- Sensory Breaks
- Alternate testing locations
- Assistance with note-taking
- Extended time on tests & assignments



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Thank you for attending!

AUTISM CONNECT 2026

April 7th

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