



32nd Annual Downstate Conference on Child Abuse

September 23-24, 2026

**Walker's Bluff Casino Resort
777 Walkers Bluff Way
Carterville, IL 62918**

www.downstateconference.com

CONFERENCE AT A GLANCE

Time	Day 1 - Sept. 23	Day 2 - Sept. 24
8:30 - 10:00	Keynote Session	Breakout Session D
10:00 - 10:15	Break	Break
10:15 - 11:45	Session A Workshops	Breakout Session E
11:45 - 12:45	Lunch	Lunch
12:45 - 2:15	Session B Workshops	Breakout Session F
2:15 - 2:30	Break	Break
2:30 - 4:00	Session C Workshops	Breakout Session G

ACCOMMODATIONS



Walker's Bluff Casino Resort

777 Walkers Bluff Way
Carterville, IL 62918
(618) 993-7777

There is a block of rooms reserved at Walker's Bluff Casino resort.

Reference "Downstate Conference on Child Abuse" while booking.

Reservations must be made by September 8th to get the rate of \$109 + taxes and fees.

CONFERENCE INFORMATION

CONFERENCE PLANNING COMMITTEE

Perry-Jackson CAC
The Guardian Center, Inc.

Madison County CAC
The Amy Center
Franklin-Williamson CAC

St. Clair Co. CAC
Two Rivers CAC



Every child deserves to grow up feeling safe and loved.

SPONSORS INCLUDE

IL Dept. of Children and Family Services Children's Justice Fund,
Southern Illinois Child Death Investigation Task Force, and Poshard
Foundation

KEYNOTE SESSION: WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 23, 2026



The Silent Epidemic: Exposing Human Trafficking in Our Communities

Speaker: Alexis Dykes

This keynote provides an overview of human trafficking and its impact on individuals and communities. Participants will learn the difference between labor trafficking and sex trafficking and explore common myths and misconceptions that can make human trafficking difficult to recognize. The presentation will examine key risk factors, recruitment tactics, and indicators of potential human trafficking encountered in both community and professional settings. Emphasis will be placed on recognizing signs of exploitation and understanding how traffickers use force, fraud, coercion, and manipulation to exploit vulnerable individuals. The session will conclude by discussing trauma-informed, survivor-centered approaches to responding to suspected human trafficking, highlighting strategies that prioritize safety, dignity, trust, and appropriate referral while promoting compassionate, coordinated support for survivors.

Downstate is a paperless conference. If provided by the presenter, handouts are available at www.downstateconference.com

Day 1 Sessions:

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 23, 2026

A1

Conversations with a Child Abuse Pediatrician: The Sexual Abuse Medical Evaluation – Dr. Adrienne Atzemis

This session provides MDT partners with a comprehensive overview of the medical response to child sexual abuse. Participants will explore the step-by-step medical evaluation process, which includes obtaining a history, performing physical exams, collecting forensic trace evidence, determining diagnoses, and planning follow-up care.

A2

Helping Ourselves After We Help Others – Jason Plichta

This program incorporates aspects of mental health, crisis intervention and critical incident debriefings, and the functionality and utilization of a therapy K-9. The program focuses on ways first responders and front-line workers can proactively and reactively address their own mental health issues and those of family and friends. Participants will learn about critical incident stress debriefings and their effects on those who attend. Lastly, the program will identify how to start and utilize a therapy K-9 program, detailing the benefits for the handler and the people they assist, and explaining how those benefits stem from the K-9's use.

A3

Childhood Disclosure – Kate Watson

This course is designed to help child and family advocates deepen their understanding of what families go through after a child discloses abuse. You won't find step-by-step manuals or scripted procedures here – this training goes beyond the formal to focus on real life. Through powerful personal storytelling, emotional insight, and honest reflection, you'll be invited to develop your own emotional intelligence, empathy, and communication awareness. The goal? To help you show up in your role as an advocate with more presence, humanity, and clarity.



B1

Conversations with a Child Abuse Pediatrician: Bruises – Dr. Adrienne Atzemis

Differentiating between abusive and accidental skin injuries, particularly bruises, is crucial for investigators to ensure the safety and well-being of children. This presentation will cover the medical and forensic aspects of identifying patterns and characteristics of skin injuries that suggest abuse versus those that are likely accidental. By understanding the biomechanics of injury, common locations and patterns of bruising, and the context of reported incidents, investigators can make informed decisions and provide appropriate interventions.

Day 1 Sessions:

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 23, 2026 (CONT.)

B2

An Overview of Preventing & Responding to Problematic Sexual Behavior in Children – Rhiannon Reaves

During this presentation, attendees will develop an understanding of typical sexual behavior as well as guidelines for determining when sexual behaviors are problematic. The presentation will review potential origins in the development of problematic sexual behavior as well as protective factors that prevent these behaviors from occurring. Attendees will learn about important characteristics of evidence-based practices for children with problematic sexual behaviors. The presentation will also cover introductory strategies for engaging professionals in responding to problematic sexual behavior.

B3

Ambiguous Loss – Kate Watson

Not all losses have closure. Ambiguous loss—when someone or something important is physically absent but psychologically present, or physically present but emotionally absent—can leave people stuck in cycles of grief, confusion, and longing. This course explores how ambiguous loss shows up in the lives of those impacted by violence and trauma. We'll consider examples such as a survivor of domestic violence mourning the loss of the relationship they hoped for, or a survivor of sexual assault grieving the loss of safety and trust in their own body. Participants will learn to recognize the signs of ambiguous loss, understand its emotional impact, and discover strategies to foster resilience and meaning amid uncertainty—for both clients and themselves.



C1

Conversations with a Child Abuse Pediatrician: Fractures – Dr. Adrienne Atzemis

Distinguishing between abusive and accidental bone fractures is an essential skill necessary to ensure accurate diagnoses. This presentation will explore the medical and forensic aspects of identifying fractures that suggest abuse versus those likely caused by accidents. By examining fracture biomechanics, patterns, locations, and the context of reported incidents, multidisciplinary team members can make informed decisions and provide appropriate interventions.

C2

Engaging Families & Systems in the Treatment of Problematic Sexual Behavior in Children – Rhiannon Reaves

During this presentation, attendees will explore best practices for engaging families in the treatment of problematic sexual behavior in children. This presentation will cover ways to assess for safety as well as important elements of safety planning for children with problematic sexual behavior. Attendees will identify strategies for educating systems and enhancing professional responses to problematic sexual behavior in children. The presentation will include case examples for discussion and illustration of best practice interventions for families impacted by problematic sexual behaviors.

Day 1 Sessions:

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 23, 2026

C3

Reconnecting to Joy & Purpose in Your Work

– Kate Watson

Child advocacy is meaningful work, but it can also be emotionally heavy, urgent, and exhausting. In the midst of supporting children and families through trauma, advocates may find themselves disconnected from the sense of purpose, hope, and joy that first brought them to the field. This 90-minute workshop invites child advocates to pause, reflect, and reconnect with the parts of the work that are life-giving, sustaining, and deeply human. Participants will explore how exposure to trauma, systems challenges, compassion fatigue, and constant responsibility can make joy feel distant or even inappropriate. Through reflection, discussion, and practical strategies, advocates will identify small but meaningful ways to notice progress, celebrate connection, reconnect with their values, and protect moments of joy without minimizing the seriousness of the work. This session offers a compassionate space for advocates to remember that joy is not a denial of suffering; it is a source of resilience, meaning, and continued commitment.

Day 2 Sessions:

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 24, 2026

D1

Bad Grandpa-A Multi-Disciplinary Approach to Generational Sexual Assault – Cloee Frank and Larry Rayburn

Case study exploring an investigation of a grandfather who had been sexually assaulting young girls in his family for over 50 years. This presentation outlines the importance of a multi-disciplinary approach to these investigations, and demonstrates how this approach can help obtain successful prosecutions.

D2

Accommodating Child Victims in the Courtroom – Mary Boland

Illinois has long recognized that children experience anxiety surrounding court appearances that can impact their ability to participate and “the welfare and protection of minors has always been considered one of the State’s most fundamental interests.” *People v. Huddleston*, 212 Ill. 2d 107, 133 (2004). Children can freeze or refuse to respond due to the stress and anxiety of the courtroom experience. Some courts have special rooms for children that are designed to reduce anxiety. Judges have a duty to balance a defendant’s due process rights against the need to provide an atmosphere in which all child victims and witnesses can testify and provide the truth reliably, fully and completely. A court has inherent discretion to permit supportive aid or otherwise assist or accommodate a child victim or witness to facilitate a child’s testimony. Over the last few years, Illinois has made many changes in laws applicable to child victims and witnesses who appear in Illinois courts. This presentation will address how the law and courts have evolved to accommodate children in court.

Day 2 Sessions:

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 24, 2026 (CONT.)

D3

Interviewing Children of Chronic Abuse – McKenzie Price

This training will take an overview look of memory storage and retrieval and how trauma effects memory retrieval. We will then look at how to most effectively question children when there are multiple events.



E1

Overview of Statewide Efforts to Address Human Trafficking of Minors & Youth in IL – Karen Maher

Efforts to address human trafficking in Illinois are not new. A number of task forces, organizations, and survivors have done extensive work raising awareness, spearheading legislative advances, training professionals, and providing services to trafficked populations in the state over the past 20 years. This session will look at recent initiatives to connect these efforts statewide and fill gaps in order to create a uniform, trauma-informed, victim-centered response to cases of both sex trafficking and labor trafficking involving minors and youth (18-24 y/o).

E2

Victim Focused, Victim Centered, Trauma Informed. Shaming the Blaming Game – McKenzie Price

Let us start placing the blame where the blame belongs. Victims carry their own burdens of shame and blame; we should not be adding to it. This presentation will help investigators, prosecutors and forensic interviewers understand how slight changes in how we phrase things can make a huge difference in the victim's statement and cooperation in the investigatory and prosecutorial process. Through lecture, video and examples, this presenter will provide victim-centered approaches to rethink, reword, and rework the way we interact with victim in a non-blaming and shaming manner.

E3

Where We Come From Matters: Cultural Trauma, Bias, & the Professional Perspective – Ginger Meyer

Our personal histories, cultural identities, adverse experiences, family narratives, and professional training all influence how we perceive, interpret, and respond to the individuals and families we serve. Early childhood adversity, cultural trauma, systemic inequities, and implicit bias can shape not only the experiences of our clients but also the beliefs, assumptions, and reactions of providers.

This interactive session explores how personal and collective experiences influence professional practice through the lens of trauma-informed care, relational neuroscience, and cultural humility. Participants will examine how early adversity, historical and intergenerational trauma, social identity, and professional conditioning contribute to biases, emotional responses, and decision-making within healthcare, behavioral health, education, and child-serving systems.

Day 2 Sessions:

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 24, 2026 (CONT.)

Using case examples, reflective exercises, and experiential activities, participants will develop greater awareness of how their own stories intersect with the stories of those they serve. The session emphasizes curiosity over judgment, promotes culturally responsive practice, and provides practical strategies for increasing self-awareness, reducing bias, and strengthening trauma-informed relationships.



F1

Way Beyond the ABC's: Preventing Sleep-Related Infant Death - Dr. Gina Lowell & Dr. Kyran Quinlan

Every 3 days in Illinois, an infant dies during sleep. Sleep-related infant death is the leading cause of death for infants once discharged home from the hospital after birth. Though safe sleep practices can prevent these deaths, there has been little progress in their prevention for the last thirty years. The Cook County SUID Case Registry uses local data to understand the circumstances surrounding these deaths to drive innovative approaches to prevent them.

F2

37 Days: From Disclosure to Sentencing A Granite City, Police Dept. Case Study - Det. Jerod Henderson & ASA Rebecca Buettner

On 02/10/2025, a juvenile victim wrote a note to her teacher about her mother's boyfriend being "creepy". On 3/27/2025, just 37 days later, the case had already made it through the court system. This case study examines the successful collaborative efforts of multiple partners who serve on the Madison County Child Advocacy Center's Multiple Disciplinary Team (MDT) as they walk through this case from disclosure, to investigation, forensic interview, search warrants, suspect interview, a guilty plea, and 40 year sentence.

F3

The Complexity of Complex Trauma - Ginger Meyer

Complex trauma resulting from early childhood adversity can profoundly influence neurodevelopment, attachment, emotional regulation, behavior, physical health, relationships, and lifelong functioning. Children exposed to chronic abuse, neglect, household dysfunction, caregiver impairment, violence, or other adverse experiences often present with symptoms that cross traditional diagnostic categories, creating challenges for healthcare, behavioral health, educational, and child-serving professionals.

This session explores the developmental, neurobiological, relational, and behavioral effects of complex trauma through a trauma-informed and healing-centered lens. Participants will examine how adverse childhood experiences alter stress-response systems, attachment patterns, cognition, and emotional regulation while increasing risk for physical and mental health conditions across the lifespan.

Day 2 Sessions:

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 24, 2026 (CONT.)

Using case examples, current neuroscience, and practical intervention strategies, attendees will learn how to recognize trauma adaptations, avoid pathologizing survival behaviors, and respond with approaches that promote safety, regulation, connection, and resilience. The presentation emphasizes interdisciplinary collaboration and highlights evidence-based and emerging approaches that support healing in children, adolescents, and families.



G1

Illinois Murderer & Violent Offender Against Youth Registration Act & Illinois Sex Offender Registration Act and Related Laws – Casey Bloodworth

The Ins-and-outs of the Illinois Murderer and Violent Offender Against Youth Registration Act. Learning Objectives include: 1) The law related to the MVOAY Registration Act; 2) The Courts' Interpretation of the Act; and 3) The interplay between the MVOAY Registration Act and the Illinois Sex Offender Registration Act and the transfer of cases between both registries.

G2

Violent Extremists & Our Youth – Jake Griffin

This presentation describes the global threat of “Nihilistic Violent Extremism” (“NVE”) and the impact it has had in the United States, to include the central and southern Illinois area. NVE groups focus recruitment efforts on children and teenagers through online platforms, using certain recruitment methods to introduce them to their ideology with a focus on radicalizing and eventually mobilizing them to violence. The presentation will provide an overview on the history of NVE ideology, current NVE groups, their recruitment methods, and how to identify those who may be in these groups. The presentation will also discuss different social media applications and review how they may be used by NVE groups to target victims.

G3

Intergenerational Trauma: Understanding Why Parents With Kids in Care Don't Just Do the Right Thing – Ginger Meyer

Professionals working with children involved in child welfare systems often ask difficult questions:

- “Why doesn’t the parent follow through?”
- “Why do they keep returning to unsafe relationships?”
- “Why don’t they prioritize their children?”
- “Why can’t they simply make better choices?”

This presentation examines these questions through the lens of intergenerational trauma, early childhood adversity, attachment disruption, toxic stress, and neurobiology. Parents whose children enter foster care frequently have their own extensive histories of abuse, neglect, violence exposure, substance use within the home, poverty, community violence, and unresolved traumatic loss. Using trauma-informed and healing-centered frameworks, participants will explore how adverse childhood experiences shape brain development, attachment systems, emotional regulation, executive functioning, and relational capacity across generations. The session will highlight how survival adaptations that once protected individuals may later interfere with parenting, treatment engagement, and reunification efforts.

Day 2 Sessions:

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 24, 2026 (CONT.)

Through case examples, neuroscience, and practical strategies, participants will learn to move from judgment and frustration toward curiosity, compassion, accountability, and effective intervention. Emphasis will be placed on maintaining child safety while understanding the complexity of trauma transmission and promoting healing for both children and caregivers.

ABOUT OUR SPEAKERS



Alexis Dykes

Alexis Dykes, LCSW is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker and a recognized advocate in the anti-human trafficking field. She earned her Master's degree in Social Work from Southern Illinois University Edwardsville (SIUE). Alexis began her career on the front lines as an anti-human trafficking advocate, providing direct support to survivors while addressing the profound impacts of complex trauma. Her work quickly expanded beyond individual advocacy to systems-level engagement, where she delivered specialized human trafficking trainings to professionals across Illinois, including the Illinois State Police. She later advanced into a leadership role, directing a crisis response team and strengthening coordinated responses to

those experiencing a crisis within the community. Today, Alexis practices clinically, walking alongside individuals as they navigate distress, crisis, and long-term healing in her private practice. In addition to her clinical and advocacy work, Alexis has returned to Southern Illinois University Edwardsville as an instructor and Program Coordinator for individuals pursuing certification as Recovery Support Specialists, equipping the next generation of professionals with trauma-informed, survivor-centered approaches.



Dr. Adrienne Atzemis, MD, FAAP

Dr. Adrienne Atzemis is a Professor of Pediatrics at Washington University School of Medicine and Chief of the Section of Child Abuse Pediatrics at St. Louis Children's Hospital. Board-certified in both General Pediatrics and Child Abuse Pediatrics, Dr. Atzemis has over two decades of experience in diagnosing child maltreatment and guiding multidisciplinary teams in complex abuse investigations. She is a nationally recognized educator and frequent speaker for law enforcement, prosecutors, and healthcare professionals, focusing on accurate abuse diagnosis, medical evidence interpretation, and collaborative approaches to child protection.



Jason Plichta

Jason Plichta has been a police officer for over 18 years in both northern and southern regions of Illinois, spent a year working in juvenile corrections, and has been a therapy K-9 handler since 2021. He obtained his undergraduate degree in psychology from Loyola University Chicago and his master's degree from Lindsey Wilson College. As a police officer, Jason served in many capacities, but his life changed after a double-homicide call. Jason started to notice declines in his attitude and personality, affecting interactions not just at work but also with his family. After working on his mental health, he started the Therapy K-9 Unit and was partnered with Paw-ficer Gary (aka: Dog-tor Gary) at a previous department

focusing on community outreach and mental health. After returning to school Jason decided to focus full-time on counseling first responders, frontline workers and their families. After seeing what it did to his wife of over 14 years, Jason realized that a proactive approach is necessary to protect those who protect others. During his time in all professions, he has encountered the question, "Do we ever truly protect ourselves as we should?"

ABOUT OUR SPEAKERS



Kate Watson

Dr. Kate Watson is the President and Founder of The Advocacy Academy, which is a consulting company focused on the development of skilled victim and family advocates to reduce violence around the world. Through her work with The Advocacy Academy, she has conducted educational workshops in 32 states, 8 countries, and across many fields: healthcare, education, social services, financial advising, victim advocacy, corrections, and leadership. On average, Dr. Watson speaks to 10,000 live audience members each year. Dr. Watson holds a Master of Education in Psychological Counseling from Columbia University, a Doctorate in Health Policy and Social Justice from Drexel University, and a Certificate of Diversity

and Inclusion from Cornell University. She is an on-going consultant to the Department of Defense, the NFL, and to major television networks. In addition to her speaking and consulting work, Dr. Watson sits on the Board of Directors for The Lady Parts Collective, which is a Los Angeles-based theater company specializing in the development of work relevant to women in the United States. She is also a Director Emeritus for the Motivational Interviewing Network of Trainers.



Rhiannon Reaves

Rhiannon Reaves, LCPC, is the Director of Clinical Services at Chicago Children's Advocacy Center. She earned a Master of Science in Clinical Psychology/Community Mental Health from Western Illinois University and is a Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor in Illinois. Rhiannon has 20 years of experience in the mental health field and expertise in working with children and adolescents who have experienced maltreatment and trauma. In her role at ChicagoCAC, she is responsible for providing clinical and administrative supervision of individual and group therapy services in the Family Hope Center. Rhiannon also manages special programming at ChicagoCAC, including treatment for problematic sexual behavior and clinical services for children who

have experienced commercial sexual exploitation and trafficking. She has completed clinical training on the provision of Problematic Sexual Behavior - Cognitive Behavior Therapy (PSB-CBT) for School-Aged Children and Advanced Training for Children Ages 13-14 and serves as a Within-Agency Trainer for these models.



Cloee Frank

Investigator Cloee Frank attended Southern Illinois University- Carbondale, graduating with a Bachelor's degree in Criminal Justice and a minor in Psychology. She has been in law enforcement for over thirteen years. Cloee worked as a police officer for the Carbondale Police Department for several years. She then lateraled to the O'Fallon Police Department, where she ultimately joined the Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) Task Force. She was later hired by the Illinois Attorney General's Office as an investigator where she continues her work with ICAC and violent crimes. Cloee is a member of the Major Case Squad of

Greater St. Louis, as well as the Child Death Investigation Task Force. Cloee has specialized in sexual assault investigations, and is a trained child forensic interviewer.



Larry Rayburn

Investigator Larry Rayburn has been in law enforcement for over twenty years. Beginning his career as a Patrolman for the Staunton Police Department, Larry lateraled to the Macoupin County Sheriff's Office. After approximately eight years as a Patrol Deputy and SWAT Operator with ILEAS SRT, Larry was promoted to Sergeant and later Detective Sergeant. As a Detective, Larry joined the Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force. Larry was hired in 2023 as a Special Investigator for the Office of the Illinois Attorney General where he is assigned to the ICAC Task Force, Major Case Squad of Greater St. Louis and Metro-East Child Death Investigation Task Force.

ABOUT OUR SPEAKERS



Mary Boland, J.D., M.P.A., B.A.

Mary Boland recently retired from a career as an Assistant State's Attorney in the Cook County State's Attorney's Office where she specialized in violent crimes, wrote 1,500+ appeals and did complex/high profile trial work in the Illinois Courts. She has worked on many Illinois legislative initiatives that have been signed into law that improve the treatment of sexual assault and domestic violence victims. Mary is currently a public policy consultant for the Child Advocacy Centers of Illinois. Mary is also an adjunct professor, having taught many courses over the last 30 years at two Chicago universities and a law school. Mary has authored five consumer law books and many legal articles. Mary has a B.A. in political science (high honors), an M.P.A. (concentration in government), and a Juris Doctor degree (with distinction) from John Marshall Law School in Chicago.



McKenzie Price

McKenzie Price is a forensic interview specialist with extensive experience in child abuse investigations and multidisciplinary team collaboration. She began her career in Amarillo, Texas, at a Child Advocacy Center serving a 26-county region, where she worked for 12 years conducting forensic interviews and conducting outreach with both adult and children regarding child abuse, and child safety.

During her tenure, she also served as a contract trainer for Children's Advocacy Centers of Texas, providing instruction to forensic interviewers across the state in the Texas forensic interview protocol. Her expertise has been recognized in the courtroom, where she has testified at the state level in Texas as both a fact witness and an expert witness. In July 2024, McKenzie joined Homeland Security Investigations as a Forensic Interview Specialist, where she continues to apply her specialized skills to support federal investigations.



Karen Maher

Karen Maher has over 20 years of public service experience advocating for vulnerable populations. As an attorney, she has represented children in abuse and neglect proceedings and pursued the recovery of assets for exploited adults through the Cook County Public Guardian's Office; she also provided legal assistance to adults in crisis through Land of Lincoln Legal Assistance Foundation. In the anti-trafficking field, Karen has trained a variety of stakeholders on identification and response, created tools to advance multidisciplinary collaborative initiatives, and consulted for agencies around improving systems' response.

Prior to her current role, she served as the Director of Anti-Trafficking Initiatives for the Indiana Coalition to End Sexual Assault and Human Trafficking where she also coordinated IPATH, Indiana's statewide human trafficking taskforce. Karen currently works for Children's Advocacy Centers of Illinois as the state's first Statewide Human Trafficking Coordinator, focusing on improving outcomes for trafficked children and youth.



Ginger Meyer

Ginger Meyer, MSW, LCSW, CCTP is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker and Certified Clinical Trauma Professional with extensive experience in trauma-informed care, child welfare, and behavioral health. She specializes in working with children, adolescents, and families impacted by complex trauma, abuse, and adverse life experiences, integrating evidence-based approaches such as EMDR, trauma-focused cognitive behavioral therapy (TF-CBT), and somatic and parts-informed interventions. Ginger serves as Clinical Director for the Children's Medical Resource Network, a program of Southern Illinois University School of Medicine, Department of Pediatrics, where she leads multidisciplinary efforts to support

children and families impacted by trauma and complex medical and behavioral health needs. She also serves as Project Director for a federally funded Behavioral Health Workforce Education and Training (BHWET) program, advancing the development of a trauma-informed workforce and expanding access to integrated care across underserved communities.

ABOUT OUR SPEAKERS

In recognition of her leadership and expertise, Ginger was appointed by the Governor to serve on the Illinois Children's Mental Health Partnership, where she contributes to statewide efforts to strengthen systems of care for children and families. She is also the Board Chair of the Academy on Violence and Abuse, supporting national initiatives that advance research, education, and policy addressing the health impacts of violence and trauma.

Ginger is deeply committed to working with schools and educators to create trauma-informed environments that support student regulation and learning. She collaborates with faculty and staff to build practical skills that promote emotional safety, engagement, and academic success for all students.

Known for her passion and dedication, Ginger brings both clinical expertise and authentic commitment to her work. She is driven by a belief in the resilience of individuals and communities and is devoted to advancing systems that foster healing, connection, and long-term well-being.



Dr. Gina Lowell, MD, MPH

Gina Lowell MD, MPH is an academic general pediatrician at Rush University Children's Hospital in Chicago with specialty interests in childhood injury prevention, child abuse and neglect, and early relational health. As Director of Community Health for Pediatrics she collaborates with community-based organizations and public health agencies to advance maternal-child health. She is the current Principal Investigator for the CDC-funded Sudden Unexpected Infant Death-Case Registry and Prevention for Cook County, IL, and serves on Child Death Review for Cook County.



Dr. Kyran Quinlan, MD, MPH

Kyran Quinlan MD, MPH is an academic general pediatrician, educator, researcher and advocate in Chicago. He led the founding of the Sudden Unexpected Infant Death Case Registry for Cook County. For the past 8 years, Dr. Quinlan has served on Child Death Review for Cook County. After completing his pediatrics residency at the University of Chicago, he trained in the Epidemic Intelligence Service at the CDC.



Det. Jerod Henderson

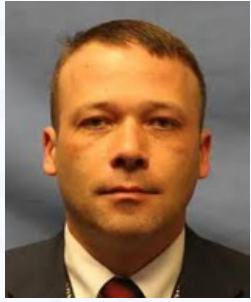
Detective Jerod Henderson has been in Law Enforcement for 15 years, having served seven years with the St. Louis County Police Department; and the remaining with his current employer, the Granite City Police Department. Det. Henderson has been an investigator with his department for five years, currently assigned to Criminal Sex Crimes, and Crimes Against Children. Det. Henderson has also been a member of the Greater St. Louis Major Case Squad, the Metro East Child Death Investigation Task Force, and assists with his departments Special Response Team.



Rebecca Buettner

Rebecca Buettner is an Assistant State's Attorney in Madison County where she is assigned to the Special Victims Unit, prosecuting crimes committed against the most vulnerable populations, children who are victims of physical and sexual abuse and adults who are victims of sexual abuse. She is in her 10th year practicing law. Outside of work she enjoys spending time with her husband and two small children.

ABOUT OUR SPEAKERS



Casey Bloodworth

Casey currently serves as the First Assistant State's Attorney for Jackson County, Illinois. In that capacity, Case prosecutes a number of criminal offenses committed within the county, including First Degree Murder cases and all sexual assault and sexual abuse cases. Additionally, Casey prosecutes all offenses related to the exploitation of children, including Grooming, CSAM related cases, and solicitation cases. Casey has served as an Assistant State's Attorney in Jackson County from 2006-2019, and from 2025 to the present. Prior to his appointment as First Assistant State's Attorney, Casey served as an Assistant

United State's Attorney in the Southern District of Illinois from 2020 to 2025. In that role, Casey prosecuted a number of criminal offenses on behalf of the United States of America. His duty assignments included prosecuting crimes against children and exploitation offenses occurring online and by other means, all part of the National Project Safe Childhood Initiative.



Jake Griffin (FBI)

Special Agent Jake Griffin has been working with the FBI Springfield Field Office for five years and during that time, has investigated numerous cases involving domestic terrorism and crimes against children.

Defender of Childhood Award

The Defender of Childhood Award is an award given to recognize an MDT member who demonstrates extraordinary dedication, courage, and compassion in their role, working tirelessly to ensure every child's voice is heard. Through their professionalism, teamwork, and commitment to this work, they serve as a true defender of childhood.

Nominees must serve on at least one of the Downstate CACs Multidisciplinary Teams*.

Submission link can be found on our website: downstateconference.com or pinned on our Facebook Page: Downstate Conference on Child Abuse

The recipient will be selected by the Downstate Committee Directors and recognized at the 32nd Annual Downstate Conference on Child Abuse.

*Downstate CACs include: Downstate CACs include: Madison County Child Advocacy Center, Perry-Jackson Child Advocacy Center, St. Clair County Child Advocacy Center, Amy Schulz Child Advocacy Center, The Guardian Center, Franklin-Williamson Child Advocacy Center, and Two Rivers Child Advocacy Center.



CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

Wednesday, September 23rd

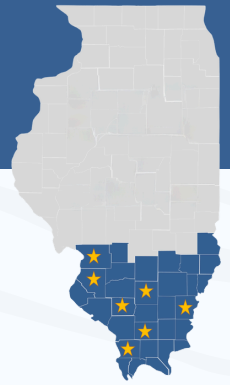
Time	Speaker	Session
8:30-10:00	Alexis Dykes	The Silent Epidemic: Exposing Human Trafficking in Our Communities
10:15-11:45	Dr. Adrienne Atzemis	Medical Evaluation of Sexual Abuse
10:15-11:45	Jason Plichta	Helping Ourselves After We Help Others
10:15-11:45	Kate Watson	Childhood Disclosure
12:45-2:15	Dr. Adrienne Atzemis	Medical Evaluation of Childhood Bruises
12:45-2:15	Rhiannon Reaves	An Overview of Preventing & Responding to Problematic Sexual Behavior in Children
12:45-2:15	Kate Watson	Ambiguous Loss
2:30-4:00	Dr. Adrienne Atzemis	Medical Evaluation of Childhood Fractures
2:30-4:00	Rhiannon Reaves	Engaging Families & Systems in the Treatment of Problematic Sexual Behavior in Children
2:30-4:00	Kate Watson	Reconnecting to Joy & Purpose in Your Work

Thursday, September 24th

Time	Speaker	Session
8:30-10:00	Cloee Frank, Larry Rayburn, & Adam Krack (St. Clair Co)	Bad Grandpa-A Multi-Disciplinary Approach to Generational Sexual Assault
8:30-10:00	Mary Boland	Accommodating Child Victims in the Courtroom
8:30-10:00	McKenzie Price	Interviewing Children of Chronic Abuse
10:15-11:45	Karen Maher	Overview of Statewide Efforts to Address Human Trafficking of Minors & Youth in IL
10:15-11:45	McKenzie Price	Victim Focused, Victim Centered, Trauma Informed. Shaming the Blaming Game
10:15-11:45	Ginger Meyer	Where We Come From Matters: Cultural Trauma, Bias, & the Professional Perspective
12:45-2:15	Dr. Gina Lowell & Dr. Kyrin Quinlan	Way Beyond the ABC's: Preventing Sleep-Related Infant Death
12:45-2:15	Det. Jerod Henderson & ASA Rebecca Buettner	37 Days: From Disclosure to Sentencing A Granite City, Police Dept. Case Study
12:45-2:15	Ginger Meyer	The Complexity of Complex Trauma
2:30-4:00	Casey Bloodworth	Illinois Murderer & Violent Offender Against Youth Registration Act & Illinois Sex Offender Registration Act and Related Laws
2:30-4:00	Jake Griffin (FBI)	Violent Extremists & Our Youth
2:30-4:00	Ginger Meyer	Intergenerational Trauma: Understanding Why Parents With Kids in Care Don't Just Do the Right Thing

REGISTRATION INFORMATION

NOW OPEN!



Register through the link on our [website](#).

Registration Fees

\$195 two-days if received by Sept. 8th – \$225 thereafter.

\$115 one-day if received by Sept. 8th – \$140 thereafter.

Additional Registration Information

Tuition: Includes entry to all workshops, breakfast, lunch, snack and certificate of attendance.

Cancellation Policy: Cancellations after September 15th will be charged a \$40 cancellation fee per day, however registrations are transferable.

Credits: 12 Credits will be provided. CEU (LCSW, LCPC, LMFT) credits will be provided at no cost. MCLE credits are provided at \$10 per person.

Payments: You may pay via credit card or through check. (Please make checks payable to FWCAC). Checks can be mailed to 501 S. 14th Street, Herrin, IL 62948.

Every person must register individually (if you are in a group).

ACCOMMODATIONS REMINDER

Walker's Bluff Casino Resort

777 Walkers Bluff Way, Carterville, IL 62918 | (618) 993-7777

There is a block of rooms reserved. Reference "Downstate Conference on Child Abuse" to make your reservation.

Reservations have to be made by September 8th to get the rate of \$109+ taxes and fees.



DOWNSTATE CONFERENCE

ON CHILD ABUSE

Perry-Jackson CAC
The Guardian Center, Inc.

Madison County CAC
The Amy Center
Franklin-Williamson CAC

St. Clair Co. CAC
Two Rivers CAC

Walker's Bluff Casino Resort
777 Walkers Bluff Way
Carterville, IL 62918

September 23-24, 2026

www.downstateconference.com