

EDUCATION AND CONSULTATIVE SERVICES

of UPMC Western Psychiatric Hospital

UPMC | WESTERN PSYCHIATRIC
HOSPITAL

2026 Annual Services for Teens at Risk (STAR) Suicide Prevention Conference

“Artificial Intelligence + Human Connection” (EC39)

(Virtual Event on Zoom)

***Friday, May 15, 2026
8:30 a.m. to 3:30 PM EST***

*Login opens at 8:15 AM.
(Zoom link will be sent to registered participants May 14, 2026)*

Course Directors

*Tina Goldstein, PhD, Director, STAR Center
David A. Brent, MD, Co-Director, STAR Center
Paula McCommons, EdD, Director, STAR Outreach*

***Recovery and Wellness: The Journey Starts Here
A Joint Effort Sponsored by Community Care Behavioral Health Organization and
UPMC Western Psychiatric Hospital***

Description

STAR Center is a suicide prevention program for teens and young children within the UPMC Western Psychiatric Hospital, Department of Psychiatry. From its inception in 1986, the program has been primarily funded through an appropriation from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to the University of Pittsburgh.

STAR Center combines clinical and outreach services designed to combat the problem of child and adolescent suicide. We provide outpatient assessment and treatment for depressed and anxious children and teens and offer acute treatment to depressed and suicidal teens via our Intensive Outpatient Program (IOP).

Our annual conferences strive to disseminate what we have learned about best practice clinical care into practical guidelines for educational and community settings. STAR Center is devoted to providing training opportunities for students and psychiatric residents as well as contributing to the future development of research designed to study the pressing issues related to child and adolescent suicide.

Course Objectives:

At the completion of this conference, participants should be able to:

1. Describe how ecological momentary assessment (EMA) and intervention (EMI) operate in suicide research
2. Understand the function of suicide risk prediction models and how they might be further improved
3. Recognize key considerations and challenges for implementing machine learning in clinical settings, specifically with individuals at elevated risk for suicide
4. Explain why it is important to shift from exclusively a medical model toward a system of universal support to promote resilience as the primary response to major community crisis events
5. Outline the common adjustment reactions to anticipate among children after a crisis and the unique challenges when the crisis involves a death by suicide
6. Describe why guilt is a common response to a crisis in general and suicide in particular

Target Audience:

This program is appropriate for clinical and educational personnel.

Cost:

- Registration Fee - \$40
- UPMC/University of Pittsburgh Employee Registration Fee - \$20
- Student Fee - \$10

The registration fee includes continuing education credits. Additional certificates can be purchased for \$10 by contacting Nancy Mundy (mundnl@upmc.edu).

PLEASE NOTE: PowerPoints will be made available electronically a few days prior to the conference. To print copies of the presentations, please visit the STAR Center Website – www.starcenter.pitt.edu or go to <https://www.oerp.pitt.edu/conference-materials/> for additional information.

For additional information regarding presenters or presentations, please go to www.starcenter.pitt.edu, or contact Jamie Sebby at sebbyj@upmc.edu.

2026 Virtual STAR-Center Conference Agenda

8:15 AM **LOG ONTO ZOOM**

8:30 to 11:30 AM **CONFERENCE OVERVIEW**

KEYNOTES

Dr. Matthew Nock, PhD

Edgar Pierce Professor of Psychology, Harvard University

Professor of Epidemiology, Harvard TH Chan School of Public Health

Director of the Laboratory for Clinical and Developmental Research, Harvard University

There will be a brief break between Keynotes

Dr. David Schonfeld, MD, FAAP

Professor of Clinical Pediatrics, Keck School of Medicine, University of Southern California

Director, Nat'l Center for School Crisis and Bereavement, Children's Hospital Los Angeles

11:30 AM **LUNCH (On Your Own)**

12:45 PM **SKILL DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOPS - GROUP 1**

2:00 PM **BREAK**

2:15 PM **SKILL DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOPS – GROUP 2**

3:30 PM **ADJOURNMENT**

STAR Center is funded by an appropriation from the Pennsylvania General Assembly. The University of Pittsburgh is an affirmative action, equal opportunity institution.

All workshops are introductory to intermediate instruction level.

KEYNOTE PRESENTATIONS

Keynote Address #1: Using Novel Technology and AI to Advance the Prediction and Prevention of Suicide

Matthew Nock, PhD

Edgar Pierce Professor of Psychology, Harvard University

Professor of Epidemiology, Harvard TH Chan School of Public Health

Director of Laboratory for Clinical and Developmental Research, Harvard University

Recent advances in machine learning (ML) and artificial intelligence (AI) offer unprecedented progress in suicide research and intervention but also pose new challenges to the field. Dr. Nock will present on methods like ecological momentary assessment (EMA) to measure suicidal/self-injurious thoughts and behaviors as they naturally occur in real-time, as well as prediction algorithms that designed to identify patients at elevated risk for suicide through their electronic health records (EHR), self-report, and/or clinical assessment. Dr. Nock will also discuss novel approaches that use new technologies to provide just-in-time interventions to those at risk. Considerations and challenges like patient safety, clinicians' perspectives, and the responsibility of real-time risk assessment will also be shared.

At the completion of this session, participants should be able to:

1. Describe how ecological momentary assessment (EMA) and intervention (EMI) operate in suicide research
2. Understand the function of suicide risk prediction models and how they might be further improved
3. Recognize key considerations and challenges for implementing machine learning in clinical settings, specifically with individuals at elevated risk for suicide

Keynote Address #2: Supporting Children, Families, and Communities After a Death by Suicide

David Schonfeld, MD, FAAP

Developmental-Behavioral Pediatrician

Founder and Director, National Center for School Crisis and Bereavement, Children's Hospital of Los Angeles

Professor of Clinical Pediatrics, Keck School of Medicine, University of Southern California

Crises have the potential to cause short- and long-term effects on the psychological functioning, emotional adjustment, health, and developmental trajectory of children. This session will provide practical suggestions on the common adjustment difficulties in children in the aftermath of a crisis and how to promote effective coping strategies, including incorporating the principles of psychological first aid, and outline the unique challenges when there is a death by suicide. The session will also highlight the differences between trauma and loss and the implications for supporting children in the aftermath of both. He will draw on over 35 years of experience in pediatric bereavement and school and community crisis response to provide examples and answer questions from participants.

At the conclusion of this session, participants should be able to:

1. Explain why it is important to shift from exclusively a medical model toward a system of universal support to promote resilience as the primary response to major community crisis events
2. Outline the common adjustment reactions to anticipate among children after a crisis and the unique challenges when the crisis involves a death by suicide
3. Describe why guilt is a common response to a crisis in general and suicide in particular

SKILL DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOPS

Please note that participants will select two workshops – one from Group 1 and one from Group 2.

GROUP #1 - 12:45 – 2:00 p.m. (SELECT ONE WORKSHOP FROM GROUP #1)

A. Workshop Title: Evidence-Based Strategies for Treating Adolescents Who Engage in Self-Harm

- **Maria Anderson, LCSW**

Behavioral Health Supervisor, Service for Teens At Risk (STAR) Center

Non-suicidal self-injury (NSSI) is defined as harming oneself without suicidal intent. This interactive workshop (intermediate) will review risk factors for NSSI in teens, review common motivations leading teens to self-injure and will review the use of CBT and DBT strategies in the treatment of NSSI in teens. Lastly, this workshop will include tips on the use of psychoeducation with caregivers around NSSI.

At the conclusion of this session, participants should be able to:

1. Identify who is at higher risk for engaging in NSSI
2. Be able to identify at least two EBP strategies to use with teens who self-harm
3. Be able to identify strategies when engaging caregivers in providing psychoeducation

B. Workshop Title: Overview of Emotion Regulation for Autistic and Neurodivergent Youth

- **Kelly Beck, PhD, LPC**

Assistant Professor, University of Pittsburgh

Director, Pittsburgh Adult Autism Research Community Collaborative (PAARCC) and Schools Unified in Neurodiversity Collaborative (SUN)

This session will provide an overview of emotion regulation for autistic and neurodivergent youth with and without intellectual disability. Specifically, participants will learn unique signs of emotion dysregulation in neurodivergent youth and strategies for preventing and responding to distress. The session will also provide an overview of the Emotion Awareness and Skills Enhancement (EASE) program (Conner et al., 2019; Beck et al., 2020; White et al., 2025) as well as school-based strategies from the Schools Unified in Neurodiversity (SUN) program.

At the conclusion of this session, participants should be able to:

1. Understand emotion regulation and the challenges that autistic and other neurodivergent people experience that contribute to heightened risk for emotion dysregulation and mental health challenges
2. Understand contributors and mechanisms of poor mental health and suicide risk among autistic youth
3. Recall evidence-based interventions and programs designed to improve mental health among autistic and other neurodivergent youth

C. Workshop Title: Considering Social Media Use & Experiences in the Assessment and Treatment of Adolescents with Suicide Risk

- **Candice Biernesser, PhD, LCSW**
Assistant Professor of Psychiatry, University of Pittsburgh
Director of Digital Interventions, University of Pittsburgh
- **Giana Teresi, MS**
Doctoral Student of Clinical Psychology, University of Pittsburgh
Andrew W. Mellon Predoctoral Fellow

Through this presentation we will a) provide an update on social media usage trends, b) review the empirical literature on social media-related risk and protective factors for adolescent suicide and social media-based interventions, and c) use case examples to convey practical guidance for strategies for considering social media use and experiences within the assessment and treatment of youth suicide risk.

At the conclusion of this session, participants should be able to:

1. Participants will gain an updated understanding of social media trends and the current state of evidence for social media-related risk and protective factors for youth
2. Participants will gain knowledge of strategies for effective discussion of social media use and experiences with youth with suicide risk factors
3. Participants will learn strategies for addressing social media-related concerns in the assessment and treatment of youth with suicide risk factors

D. Workshop Title: Supporting Parents as Active Agents of Change: Using a DBT Framework to Target Parental Emotion Regulation and Strengthen Validation in the Treatment of Suicidal Youth

- **Amy L. Byrd, PhD**
Licensed Clinical Psychologist
Assistant Professor of Psychiatry and Psychology, University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine
- **Stephanie D. Stepp, PhD**
Licensed Clinical Psychologist
Professor of Psychiatry and Psychology, University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine

Youth suicide risk often unfolds within emotionally intense family contexts, where parental responses to distress can either exacerbate or buffer risk. Grounded in Linehan’s biosocial model, this workshop positions parents as active agents of change and highlights parental emotion regulation and validation as core mechanisms within a DBT framework for supporting suicidal youth. Clinicians will examine how invalidating family interactions contribute to emotional escalation and suicide behavior, and why supporting parent emotion regulation is a critical first step in effective intervention. This training will provide DBT-informed parent coaching strategies to help caregivers regulate their emotions, deliver validation during moments of high distress, and improve parent–child interactions as an essential component of care for suicidal youth.

At the conclusion of this session, participants should be able to:

1. Describe Linehan’s biosocial model and explain how invalidation functions as a core mechanism in the development, exacerbation, and persistence of emotion dysregulation and suicidal behavior in youth.
2. Define key components of emotion regulation and validation, differentiate validating versus invalidating parental responses, and link these behaviors to emotional escalation versus regulation during parent–child interactions.
3. Apply DBT-informed parent coaching strategies designed to help caregivers regulate their own emotional responses and deliver validation during emotionally intense parent-child interactions.

E. Workshop Title: Evidence-Informed Approaches to Reducing Access to the Lethal Means of Suicide

- **Kurt Michael, PhD**

Vice President, Prevention & Crisis Response Consulting, The Jed Foundation

Aeschleman Distinguished Professor Emeritus, Appalachian State University

Adjunct Professor of Child Psychiatry, Huntsman Mental Health Institute, University of Utah Spencer Fox Eccles School of Medicine

Research Professor, University of Oregon

This is an intermediate workshop on evidence-informed approaches to reducing access to the lethal means of suicide. The presenter will discuss the importance of developing safety plans across clinical settings with tangible behavioral steps to measurably reduce a patient’s access to some of the most common methods of attempt (medications) and lethal means of suicide (firearms). The presenter will also discuss the logic and implementation of systemic approaches to reducing access to lethal means, including multi-pronged approaches in the built environment.

At the conclusion of this session, participants should be able to:

1. Describe some of the leading methods of suicide attempts and deaths in the United States.
2. Describe some of the known limitations of not accounting for the “how” of suicide when completing suicide risk assessments or providing suicide-focused intervention.
3. Utilize evidence-informed approaches to reducing the risk of suicide (e.g., Counseling on Access to Lethal Means)

GROUP #2 - 2:15-3:30 p.m. (SELECT 1 WORKSHOP FROM GROUP #2)

F. Workshop Title: Engagement That Works: Practical Approaches for Transition-Aged Youth (TAY)

- **Erin Belback, MS, LPC**
Research Operations Coordinator, UPMC, CABS, STAR, CoSTAR Centers and University of Pittsburgh Department of Psychiatry
- **Memphis Kastner, CPS**
Youth and Young Adult Coordinator, UPMC, STEAM Project

This workshop will give participants a grounded, real-world look at how Peer Specialists build authentic relationships with transition-aged youth. We'll start by outlining what makes the peer role distinct which is bringing lived experience into the work in a way that normalizes struggles, reduces shame, and builds trust in ways that complement clinical care. From there, we'll dig into purposeful disclosure and how peers share their experiences in a way that is helpful, timely, and proportionate. Participants will review concrete examples of when disclosure supports engagement and when it can become unhelpful, like oversharing or trauma dumping. We'll also showcase practical engagement tactics peers use effectively with TAY: conversational styles, "walk-and-talks", strategic use of humor, and checking in through non-traditional means like text. We'll highlight how peers translate clinical language into something relatable while staying professional and aligned with treatment goals. Overall, this session will demonstrate how intentional peer practices lead to stronger engagement, better rapport, and more meaningful support for young people navigating mental health services.

At the conclusion of this session, participants should be able to:

1. Understand the unique contributions of the Peer Specialist role and how lived experience, normalization, and trust-building support engagement with transition-aged youth
2. Identify when and how to use purposeful disclosure effectively, including recognizing examples of helpful disclosure versus oversharing or trauma-dumping
3. Apply practical engagement strategies tailored for TAY, such as conversational approaches, walk-and-talk techniques, use of humor, text-based check-ins, and translating clinical language into relatable terms.

G. Workshop Title: Screening and Safety Planning for Autistic Clients

- **Caitlin M. Conner, PhD, LCP**
Assistant Professor of Psychiatry, University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine

Research in the past decade has shown that autistic children, teens, and adults are at higher risk for suicidal thoughts, behaviors, and deaths. This presentation will discuss the shared and unique risk factors for suicidal thoughts and behaviors in autistic people. The majority of the presentation will discuss how to adapt common screening questionnaires and tools for autistic people and review newer research on how to adapt and implement safety plans with autistic clients.

At the conclusion of this session, participants should be able to:

1. Identify risk factors for suicidal thoughts and behaviors in autistic people.
2. Understand how to adapt suicide screening tools for autistic people.
3. Apply safety planning tools flexibly with autistic clients and understand current knowledge and limitations of existing safety planning methods.

H. Workshop Title: Family-Based Interpersonal Psychotherapy (FB-IPT) for Depressed Preadolescents

- **Laura Dietz, PhD**

Associate Professor, University of Pittsburgh Department of Counseling and Behavioral Health

Over the past 25 years, there has been an increase in the number of children under 12 years of age who are presenting for evaluation and treatment of suicidality, self-injury, and depression in outpatient and emergency settings. However, there are few psychosocial interventions for depression in preadolescent children that have demonstrated superior outcomes when compared to active treatment conditions and include important developmental adaptations for this age group.

Family Based Interpersonal Psychotherapy (FB-IPT) for Depressed Preadolescents is a primary intervention to reduce the burden of early-onset depressive disorders in children between the ages of 8-12 years, with a secondary focus on preventing or delaying depression recurrence in adolescence for this high-risk group. FB-IPT directly addresses two domains of interpersonal impairment associated with preadolescents' depressive symptoms: parent-child conflict and peer impairment. FB-IPT focuses on improving communication and problem solving skills in the parent-child relationship, the primary context for children's social and emotional development to improve the quality of the parent-child relationship and to buffer depressed preadolescents from the effects of peer stress, as well as to rehearse effective interpersonal behavior with peers.

Adapted from IPT-A, FB-IPT includes several developmental modifications for 8-12 year-olds: 1) increased parental involvement and structured dyadic sessions, with individual meetings with parents and parent-child sessions for teaching and role-playing communication and problem solving skills, 2) structured meetings to shape parental expectations for depressed preadolescents' performance across contexts and provide parenting strategies for decreasing conflict, and 3) an increased focus on comorbid social anxiety, to decrease depressed preadolescents' interpersonal avoidance and to enhance their communication and interpersonal problem solving skills with peers. As in adult and adolescent protocols, FB-IPT structures treatment around an identified "problem areas" temporally associated with the onset of depressive symptoms (loss, disputes, transitions, and interpersonal deficits) and structures treatment into 3 phases.

To date, FB-IPT is one of the few psychosocial interventions for depression in preadolescent children that demonstrates promise as an efficacious intervention with readily measurable targets and mechanisms of action.

At the completion of this session, participants should be able to:

1. Describe the conceptual framework and three developmental adaptations in Family Based Interpersonal Psychotherapy (FB-IPT) for Depressed Preadolescents.
2. Identify strategies and techniques for conducting individual and dyadic meetings with preadolescents and parents in all three phases of FB-IPT.
3. Summarize the efficacy of research on FB-IPT and opportunities for future implementation and dissemination.

I. Workshop Title: Real-World Violence on Social Media: Implications for Youth Mental Health and Suicide Risk

- **Mary Woody, PhD**
Assistant Professor of Psychiatry, University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine
- **Nermin Toukhy, PhD**
Postdoctoral Associate, University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine

Today's adolescents have grown up with ubiquitous access to mobile devices with cameras capable of recording traumatic, often violent events. They also have unprecedented access to media platforms broadcasting crowd-sourced videos of violent events as they unfold across the country. Consequently, adolescents are regularly exposed to violent media coverage across multiple mediums, and emerging research suggests that this exposure increases risk for anxiety, depression, and suicidal thoughts and behaviors. This workshop will examine the prevalence and clinical impact of exposure to real-world violence via social media and explore similarities and differences between youth exposure to offline vs. online violence, consistent with transformational theories of social media use. Finally, the presentation will focus on recent research demonstrating how online violence exposure influences mental health trajectories, with an emphasis on youth with marginalized identities, concluding with evidence-based strategies to support clinicians and educators in discussing this component of modern adolescence with youth and families.

At the completion of this session, participants should be able to:

1. Describe the prevalence and types of real-world violence exposures encountered by youth online.
2. Understand the clinical impact of online exposure to real-world violence on youth mental health and suicide risk.
3. Apply evidence-based strategies to discuss the impact of online exposure to real-world violence with youth and their parents.

All presentations are introductory to intermediate instruction level.

For additional information regarding presenters or presentations, please go to www.starcenter.pitt.edu, or contact Jamie Sebyy @ sebyyj@upmc.edu.

CONTINUING EDUCATION CREDIT

Psychologists



As a Jointly Accredited Organization, University of Pittsburgh is approved to offer psychology continuing education by the American Psychological Association. University of Pittsburgh maintains responsibility for this course. Psychologists completing this course receive 5.25 continuing education credits.

Counselors



Education and Consultative Services of UPMC Western Psychiatric Hospital has been approved by NBCC as an Approved Continuing Education Provider, ACEP No. 5059. Programs that do not qualify for NBCC credit are clearly identified. UPMC Western Psychiatric Hospital is solely responsible for all aspects of this program. This program is being offered for 5.25 continuing education hours.

Licensed/Clinical Social Workers, Licensed Professional Counselors, Licensed Marriage and Family Therapists: LSW/LCSW/LPC/LMFT

As a Jointly Accredited Organization, University of Pittsburgh is approved to offer social work continuing education by the Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB) Approved Continuing Education (ACE) program. Organizations, not individual courses, are approved under this program. State and provincial regulatory boards have the final authority to determine whether an individual course may be accepted for continuing education credit. University of Pittsburgh maintains responsibility for this course. Social workers completing this course receive 5.0 continuing education credits.

Other Professionals

Other professionals are awarded .525 Continuing Education Units (CEU's). One CEU is equal to 10 contact hours.

Peer Specialists: This program fulfills requirements for Certified Peer Specialist continuing education.

PA Educators (Act 48):

UPMC Western Psychiatric Hospital is recognized by the Pennsylvania Department of Education to offer Continuing Education Credits under the Act 48 guidelines. UPMC Western Psychiatric Hospital adheres to the Act 48 Continuing Education Guidelines. PA educators will receive 5.25 hours of Act 48 credit for completing this program.

- *Upon completion of the evaluation on the CCEHS registration site, you will be able to obtain your APA and LSW/LCSW/LPC/LMFT certificate from this site. Additional certificates beyond two are \$10.*
- *NBCC and General CEU certificates will come from Education and Consultative Services. Please allow four-to six-weeks for this process.*
- *Act 48 continuing education credit hours will be uploaded into the PERMS system via the University of Pittsburgh Department of Education. Please include your PERMS number in the evaluation where requested. Your credit hours will be available in the PERMS system four weeks after the program.*
- ***Replacement cost for NCC and General CEU certificates is \$30.***

Registration Information

Please register by **May 2, 2026** at: [2026 Annual Services for Teens at Risk \(STAR\) Suicide Prevention Conference | UPMC - Center for Continuing Education in the Health Sciences](#)

Non-UPMC	\$40
UPMC/University of Pittsburgh	\$20 (with a UPMC or Pitt e-mail address)
College or University Student	\$10 (with a school or university email address)

Tuition includes:

- * Registration and conference materials
- * Continuing education and credits (not included in student rate)

The registration fee includes continuing education credits. Two certificates per participant. Additional certificates can be purchased for \$10 by contacting Nancy Mundy (mundnl@upmc.edu).

UPMC employees who would like to be sponsored by their department can request this from their manager. Please have your manager complete the form found [here](#) . Participants paying through this Departmental Transfer still need to register online with the code found on the form, which will bring your conference fee to \$0 when registering, but your department will be charged. Your work e-mail address will need to be used when registering. All registrations with this code will be matched against the department transfers that are sent to us.

Full tuition must accompany registration. A \$10 administration fee will be deducted from all refunds for cancellations. All refund requests must be in writing and received in the office no later than Thursday, May 9, 2025. There will be no refunds if a cancellation occurs on the date of the event.



*We encourage participation by all individuals. If you have a disability or require special accommodations, advance notification of any special needs will help us better serve you. Please notify us of your needs at least **two weeks** in advance of the program by contacting Nancy Mundy at mundnl@upmc.edu*