2026

Wisconsin Adoption Professionals Conference

September 29-30, 2026











Wilderness Resort

45 Hillman Rd.

Wisconsin Dells, Wi 53965

The fee is $50 for in-person or virtual attendance

Questions?

Contact Kim Eithun at keithun@wisc.edu

WCWPDS

Wisconsin Department of Children and Families

Conference Information

The 2026 Wisconsin Adoption Professionals Conference, sponsored by the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families, brings together national and Wisconsin experts to share innovative practices, research, and practical strategies that strengthen adoption services and support children, youth, adoptive families, birth families, and the professionals who serve them. Through engaging keynote presentations and interactive workshops, participants will explore topics such as preserving important family connections, understanding and healing developmental trauma, and supporting children and youth in developing a strong sense of identity and belonging. Each session is designed to provide evidence-informed practices, practical tools, and opportunities to build skills that can be applied in everyday practice. Whether you join us in person or virtually, we look forward to learning, connecting, and advancing the important work of supporting Wisconsin's children and families together.

Dates

Tuesday, September 29th
8:30 am - 4:30 pm
Networking reception
4:45 pm - 6:00 pm

Wednesday, September 30th
8:30 am - 1:00 pm
Ethics and Boundaries

Location

Wilderness Resort
45 Hillman Rd
Wisconsin Dells, WI

Registration Deadline: September 15th

There is a fee of $50 for both virtual and in-person attendance.

Advance registration is required to participate either in-person or virtually.

Registration is first-come, first-served. Cancellations must be received at least two weeks in advance of the conference. Otherwise, you will be responsible for paying the $50 conference fee.

Conference Information *(continued)*

Virtual Attendance

All conference presentations are being offered virtually via live Zoom meetings. Virtual attendees may participate via monitored chat as each presentation allows.

Conference Materials

Conference materials will be provided to attendees in electronic format only. These materials will be made available prior to the conference in the Cvent app. Additional information and instructions will be sent to the email address provided as part of your registration.

Continuing Education Credits

Continuing Education Hours (CEH) for social workers will be offered to attendees for in-person and live virtual attendance. Credit hour tracking and reporting for this event is the responsibility of individual attendees. Conference organizers will maintain sign-in sheets through QR codes scanned in the rooms and virtual attendance logs for confirmation purposes.

Hotel Reservations

A hotel room block has been established with the Wilderness Resort at the state rate of $101.00/per night. In-person attendees are responsible for making their own lodging reservations. To do so, please call the Wilderness Reservation Center at 1-800-867-9453 and state that you are with **Leader #B09711.**

Reservations must be made prior to August 28th to receive the discounted rate. If applicable, please provide tax-exempt information prior to checking in.

Questions?



Please contact Kim Eithun at keithun@wisc.edu

Agenda at a Glance

Tuesday, September 29th

7:30 AM - 8:30 AM	Registration
7:30 AM - 8:30 AM	Breakfast
8:30 AM - 8:45 AM	*Welcome*
8:45 AM - 9:30 AM	*Search and Reunion: A Personal Journey Home* Chauncey Strong
9:30 AM - 9:45 AM	Break
9:45 AM - 11:00 AM	*Workshop A*
11:00 AM - 11:15 PM	Break
11:15 PM - 12:15 PM	*Panel* *Jonisha Neita, Elyse Harvey*
12:15 PM - 12:45 PM	Lunch
12:45 PM - 1:30 PM	*The Ties that Bind: Navigating First Family Relationships* Ed Morales
1:30 PM - 1:45 PM	Break
1:45 PM - 3:00 PM	*Workshop B*
3:00 PM - 3:15 PM	Break
3:15 PM - 4:30 PM	*Workshop C*
4:45 PM - 6:00 PM	Networking Reception

Wednesday, September 30th

7:30 AM - 8:30 AM	Breakfast
8:30 AM - 10:30 AM	*Ethics and Boundaries - Building the Trellis: Ethics as the Structure that Supports Growth* Ed Morales
10:30 AM - 10:45 AM	Break
10:45 AM - 1:00 PM	*Ethics and Boundaries - Building the Trellis: Ethics as the Structure that Supports Growth (continued)* Ed Morales

Day 1 Agenda

Tuesday, September 29th

7:30 AM - 8:30 AM	**Registration and Breakfast (provided)**
8:30 AM - 8:45 AM	***Welcome*** **- Wisconsin Department of Children and Families**
8:45 AM - 9:30 AM	***Search and Reunion: A Personal Journey Home*** ***Chauncey Strong*** This plenary invites participants to rethink child welfare by centering trust, connection, and dignity, showing how honoring relationships with parents and youth is the foundation for lasting safety, healing, and well-being.
9:30 AM - 9:45 AM	**Break**
9:45 AM - 11:00 AM	***Workshop A***
11:10 AM - 11:15 AM	**Break**
11:15 AM - 12:15 PM	***Panel***
12:15 PM - 12:45 PM	**Lunch**
12:45 PM - 1:30 PM	**Rooted Together: The Case for Ongoing First Family** ***Ed Morales*** This plenary offers a chance to slow down and focus on the why: why connections to birth families matter to children's identity and well-being.
1:30 PM - 1:45 PM	**Break**
1:45 PM - 3:00 PM	***Workshop B***
3:00 PM - 3:15 PM	**Break**
3:15 PM - 4:30 PM	***Workshop C***
4:45 PM - 6:00 PM	**Networking Reception**

Workshop A – September 29th

9:45 AM - 11:00 AM

A - 1

Family Connections: Adoptive and Birth Parents Working Together

Chauncey Strong

This interactive workshop highlights the exciting work in child welfare related to building and maintaining relationships and communication between foster/adoptive parents and birth families. The goal of the workshop is to help child welfare professionals better understand the importance of families working together. We will examine the benefits and challenges of these working relationships and explore strategies to ensure success.

A - 2

Wired for Connection: Understanding Attachment Wounding and How to Support Adopted Youth and Their Families

Amy Wilkerson

This workshop examines the impact of attachment disruption and developmental trauma on adopted children, focusing on how early attachment wounds shape nervous system development, behavior, and relationships. Participants will deepen their understanding of the neurobiology of trauma and explore how adoption experiences influence regulation, connection, and resilience. Through a trauma-informed and attachment-centered lens, professionals will gain practical tools and strategies to better support adoptive families, strengthen caregiver-child relationships, and promote healing through safe, connected interactions.

A - 3

Searching for Connections: Understanding Wisconsin's Adoption Records Search Process

Jacy Boldebuck and Kerry Lenzendorf

Whether supporting an adoptee, birth family member, or adoptive family, understanding the adoption record search process is essential. Learn how Wisconsin's Adoption Record Search Program works. Explore the legal considerations and rights of everyone involved and discover practical resources to help individuals navigate their search for information and connection.

Workshop B – September 29th

1:45 PM - 3:00 PM

B - 1 Tending the Roots: Growing Your First Family Engagement Strategy

Ed Morales

This hands-on session builds directly on Rooted Together, moving from theory and framework to application and practice. Working individually and together in small groups, we will bring real family situations from the work into the space as we explore strategies, leaving with a concrete, individualized plan for tending first family relationships over the long-term. Expect discussion, structured exercises, and problem-solving, not slides and lecture.

B - 2 Developing Sense of Self: Supporting Adoptee Identity Across the Lifespan

Amy Wilkerson

This workshop explores how adoption influences identity development from childhood through adulthood and highlights the lifelong nature of the adoptee experience. Participants will gain insight into the unique developmental, relational, and emotional factors that shape adoptee identity while learning practical strategies to support adopted youth and their families. Through evidence-informed practices, discussion, and real-world resources, professionals will leave with actionable tools to foster belonging, strengthen resilience, and promote secure identity development across the lifespan.

B - 3 Blocked Care: What to Do When Parents Run Out of Compassion - Part 1 of 2

Melissa Corkum

Blocked care is a self-protective mechanism in a parent's nervous system activated by excessive stress. This suppresses the higher brain functions needed for caregiving, causing the parent's nervous system to develop a defensive stance toward their child. Adoptive and foster parents are at higher risk of blocked care due to parenting a child with a history of adversity. With support and good care, parents can regain compassion for themselves and their child.

Workshop C – September 29th

3:15 PM - 4:30 PM

C - 1

Underneath the Surface: Fear, Grief, and the Search for Belonging

Dr. Samantha Wilson

Families formed through adoption and guardianship often experience unique strengths, opportunities, and challenges that benefit from trauma-responsive support. In this session, Dr. Wilson will share practical tools and insights that participants can use to understand the impact of early adversity, grief, and loss while strengthening their ability to support families.

C - 2

Screening Adoptive Families: Navigating Sensitive Conversations with Confidence

Patricia Parker

Screening prospective adoptive families requires balancing thorough assessment with empathy, respect, and transparency. This workshop will explore practical strategies for having difficult conversations about topics such as trauma history, parenting readiness, family dynamics, and concerns identified during the home study process. Participants will gain communication tools to build trust, address challenging issues with compassion, and support families while maintaining the integrity of the assessment process

C - 3

Blocked Care: What to Do When Parents Run Out of Compassion - Part 2 of 2

Melissa Corkum

Continued from morning session A-5 Blocked Care: What to Do When Parents Run Out of Compassion-Part 1.
Blocked care is a self-protective mechanism in a parent's nervous system activated by excessive stress. This suppresses the higher brain functions needed for caregiving, causing the parent's nervous system to develop a defensive stance toward their child. Adoptive and foster parents are at higher risk of blocked care due to parenting a child with a history of adversity. With support and good care, parents can regain compassion for themselves and their child.

Day 2 Agenda

Wednesday, September 30th

7:30 AM - 8:30 AM	**Breakfast (provided)**
8:30 AM - 10:30 AM	***Ethics and Boundaries - Building the Trellis: Ethics and the Structure that Supports Growth*** ***Ed Morales***
10:30 AM - 10:45 AM	**Break**
10:45 AM - 1:00 PM	***Ethics and Boundaries - Building the Trellis: Ethics and the Structure that Supports Growth*** ***Ed Morales***