



BCSCA

British Columbia School
Counsellors Association

Online Conference
Registration Guide
Oct. 23, 2026



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Counsellors Association

Opening Plenary: Flourishing in spite of everything

The world feels like a lot these days. This interactive opening session will introduce you to a group of folks who each have a role in supporting people who support people (just like you!). Join this group of compassionate systems leadership master practitioners from around the world for an informative and uplifting conversation about what it means to flourish and ideas to help make things better for yourself and the people in your life during these challenging times. Do you have a question or a topic that you might like to see included? Share it at the form linked to the QR code and we will do our best to include it in the time we spend together as a group.



Before October 9, 2026, use this QR code or visit <https://forms.gle/QMax1fUw2i9Y6JE76> to submit any questions you might have for the plenary speakers.



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BCSCA online conference agenda

9 - 10:15 am Opening Plenary

10:15 - 10:30 am Break

10:30 am - noon

Morning sessions & start of 3-hour options

- *Motivational Interviewing runs 10:30-1:30*
- *Exploring trauma & play therapy runs over both sessions (10:30-12 and 1:30-3)*

12 - 1:30 Lunch

- *BCSCA AGM (livestreamed) 12:45-1:30*

1:30 - 3 pm

Afternoon sessions

Email Shirley Giroux at shirley@compassionorth.ca with questions



Morning sessions (10:30 am-12 pm)

SEL as Suicide Prevention

Dr. Alex Gist & Dr. Paweena Sukhawathanakul

Wearing Every Hat: The Pan-Canadian Substance Use Standard for Rural & Remote School Counsellors + An Overview of the IPM

Wellstream project team (10:30-11:15)

Dr. Erica Koopmans (11:15-12:00)

Continuing the Conversation: Compassionate Systems Leadership to Support Flourishing in Schools

Dr. Shirley Giroux (BCSCA VP of Wellbeing) & friends

Motivational Interviewing in Schools

Dr. Ali Cloth

This 3-hour session runs from 10:30 am - 1:30 pm

Exploring Trauma and Play Therapy: Integrating Polyvagal Theory into School-Based Counselling

Monica Bhatara

This 3-hour session runs all day (in both blocks of time)

Beyond Awareness: Autism-Affirming School Counselling in Practice

Alisha Stubbs, MSW, RSW

This 3-hour session runs all day (in both blocks of time)



SEL as Suicide Prevention (10:30 am - 12 pm)

Session description:

This workshop will explore the role of SEL as part of a comprehensive approach to suicide prevention. Evidence-based social-emotional learning (SEL) programs are grounded in research and principles of child and adolescent development and have been linked to a variety of positive outcomes including better academic performance, fewer emotional and behavioural problems. In particular, SEL programs have the potential to mitigate risk factors related to suicide by strengthening up-stream social and emotional skills to cope with challenges before a crisis emerges. The workshop will explore the individual and contextual risk and protective factors related to suicidal thoughts and behaviours, and how specific components of SEL can be used to target these risk and protective factors. It will also explore school-based mental health promotion programs that can help address these risk and protective factors.

Presenter bios:

Dr. Paweena Sukhawathanakul (she/her) is an Assistant Professor of Lifespan Health and Development in the Department of Psychology at the University of Victoria. Her research focuses on injury prevention in children and adolescents including evaluating school-based programs that promote social and emotional development.

Dr. Alex Gist (he/him) is a Health Promotion Specialist with the BC Children's Hospital Health Promotion and Health Literacy team. He holds a PhD in Human Development, Learning and Culture from the UBC. He has worked in education for almost 25 years in a variety of roles including teaching high school English Arts, teaching English and life skills to immigrant and refugee youth, managing SEL-based out-of-school time programs, and supporting school districts to move from data to action for the UBC Human Early Learning Partnership.



Wearing Every Hat: The Pan-Canadian Substance Use Standard for Rural & Remote School Counsellors + An Overview of the IPM (10:30 am - 12 pm)

Session description:

This two-part session will bring together overviews of two national youth substance use prevention projects that are happening in BC and are connected to the work of school counsellors.

Part One is on the new Canadian Standard for substance use prevention and is facilitated by four members of the Wellstream team at UBC: Dr. Emily Jenkins, Dana Dmytro, Dr. Tonje Molyneux, and Owen Miaskowski .

Part Two is on the Icelandic Prevention Model and is facilitated by Dr. Erica Koopmans, Regional Coordinator - Northern Health, Child Health BC, Provincial Health Services Authority.

Part One: Rural and remote counsellors often are the mental health system — bridging school and community across thin referral networks, long distances, and the few specialized services nearby. This session opens with a brief orientation to Anchoring Change's new pan-Canadian Standard for substance use prevention, education, and intervention, including its tiered, developmental framework. We then situate it within the realities of rural practice: how the framework adapts when “refer to a community provider” isn't simple, and how its emphasis on belonging, harm minimization, and care-based responses can anchor practice where resources are scarce. Through a short, structured discussion, participants will begin mapping their local referral ecosystem, name a shared coordination challenge, and identify a first step toward using the Standard in their own context.

Part Two: This session will introduce participants to the Icelandic Prevention Model (IPM) for youth substance use prevention and how it is being implemented in northern British Columbia. The driving idea behind the IPM is that substance use is prevented and reduced by changes to the social environment so that young people are more likely to make choices that do not include substance use. This community-led primary prevention approach includes schools as a core component and presents potential opportunities for school counsellors to engage in key roles in growing these social and environmental conditions. Time will be provided for questions and discussion about how participants might get involved with this work in their own communities and how it fits with other provincial and national youth health initiatives.



Wearing Every Hat: The Pan-Canadian Substance Use Standard for Rural & Remote School Counsellors + An Overview of the IPM (10:30 am - 12 pm)

Presenter bios (part 1):

Dr. Emily Jenkins is a Registered Nurse and Professor in the School of Nursing at the University of British Columbia. She is also the Scientific Director of Wellstream: The Canadian Centre for Innovation in Child and Youth Mental Health and Substance Use and holds a Canada Research Chair in Population Health Approaches to Mental Health and Substance Use. Her research is responsive to emergent, priority health and social issues and includes interventions to promote mental health and well-being for children, youth, and their communities, as well as programs to minimize the harms of substance use across the lifespan. Dr. Jenkins co-leads the Anchoring Change initiative, which recently released Canada's new standard for school-based substance use prevention, education, and intervention. (Part One)

Dana Dmytro is a school psychologist, third-year doctoral student in School and Applied Child Psychology at the University of British Columbia, and a trainee with Wellstream. She brings extensive experience supporting children, youth, families, and school teams who are navigating complex challenges. As an advocate and person with lived experience, she is passionate about mental health and substance use harm prevention. Her work is informed by a relational and social-justice oriented lens, reflecting the belief that individuals are shaped through their experiences, relationships, and environments. Her doctoral research focuses on school-based staff's perspectives on substance use education and intervention for youth at increased risk of substance use related harms. She is committed to working collaboratively with other change-makers to inspire and empower children and youth to reach their full potential. (Part One)

Dr. Tonje Molyneux is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at Wellstream: The Canadian Centre for Innovation in Child and Youth Mental Health and Substance Use at the University of British Columbia. A CASEL Weissberg Scholar, she brings over twenty years in education spanning classroom teaching, the design of social and emotional learning programs, and mixed-methods research. Her research program bridges school belonging, social and emotional learning, implementation science, mental health promotion, and risk prevention. Dr. Molyneux co-leads the Anchoring Change initiative, which recently released Canada's new standard for school-based substance use prevention, education, and intervention, and helped develop the suite of resources supporting its uptake across K-12 schools. She is committed to translating evidence into practical, care-based approaches that strengthen the everyday work of educators and school-based mental health professionals. (Part One)

Owen Miaskowski is a Research Assistant with Wellstream and a Bachelor of Science in Nursing student at the University of British Columbia. He previously completed a Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Sociology at Queen's University, where he developed his interest in substance use, health inequities, and social justice. Owen brings both academic and lived experience perspectives to his work, having grown up in a family affected by substance use. His experiences have shaped a commitment to reducing stigma and supporting compassionate, person-centered approaches to care. Through his research and nursing education, he is passionate about helping create informed systems that better support youth, families, and communities impacted by substance use. (Part One)

Presenter bio (part 2):

Dr. Erica Koopmans works in health system planning and quality initiatives with Child Health BC at the Provincial Health Services Authority. Across this work she collaborates with health services, schools, government, and Indigenous and community partners to improve outcomes for children and youth through collaborative, prevention-focused approaches. Her research and practice interests include social determinants of health, rural health systems, and community-led solutions that support child, youth, and family wellbeing. Erica is currently co-leading implementation of the Icelandic Prevention Model in Northern BC and advancing provincial efforts to understand how the model can be adapted for the local context and grown into a sustainable approach across diverse rural and remote BC communities.



Continuing the Conversation: Compassionate Systems Leadership to Support Flourishing in Schools (10:30 am - 12 pm)

Session description:

Continuing on from the morning's plenary, this session will start with a brief overview of how wellbeing is embedded in BC's Mental Health in Schools strategy through compassionate systems leadership. Participants will then be invited to use a pair of compassionate systems leadership tools (the mandala compassionate systems awareness and the four pillars of wellbeing) to reflect on their own wellbeing with a particular focus on healthy boundaries. In addition to individual work, participants will be invited to debrief in small groups and as a large group to consider the many ways this learning connects to work as a school counsellor.

Facilitator bios:

Shirley Giroux (she/her), PhD, RCC-ACS is vice-president (Wellbeing) of the BC School Counsellors' Association. She is a rural school counsellor, local lead for a Public Health Agency of Canada project on youth substance use prevention, and an adjunct professor of psychology at UNBC. Her doctoral research focused on resilience strategies of teaching mothers in BC. Her interest and research in educator wellbeing led her to compassionate systems leadership for which she completed certification as a master practitioner in 2021. In 2025, she completed training as a certified Circles of Trust retreat facilitator to further deepen her understanding of and facility with group approaches to educator wellbeing. Shirley integrates and shares her learning as practical offerings such as the BCSCA's *intervision* peer clinical supervision groups.

Sylvie Mazerolle (she/they) is a settler-Acadian educator who has spent over a decade disrupting colonial and ableist norms within education by cultivating learning communities rooted in radical care, artistic expression, and equity. She is also an award-winning dance artist featured in a National Film Board documentary. As a dancer-turned-certified teacher, Sylvie designs un/learning experiences and human rights-based curricula that invite creativity, connection, and critical reflection. Her consulting work has included developing and delivering professional development courses at Queen's University, creating facilitator training for francophone women-identified entrepreneurs in BC, and enhancing gender-affirming care workshops with Université de l'Alberta. She also sits on the Kootenay Restorative Justice Steering Committee and the Nelson Museum Archives & Gallery Board of Directors. A lifelong learner and passionate advocate, Sylvie is a certified Compassionate Systems Leadership Master Practitioner (MIT, 2022) and the recipient of a SSHRC grant (MA Curriculum Studies, UBC, 2019). Sylvie co-leads [L'agence Osa Consulting](#) as co-founder and creative director.



Motivational Interviewing in Schools

(3-hour session from 10:30 am - 1:30 pm)

Session description:

Motivational Interviewing (MI) is a communication approach useful in conversations about behaviour change. MI originated in substance abuse and addiction counselling and in the last 35 or so years its usefulness has blossomed in other fields such as medicine, behavioural health, education and criminal justice/corrections. William Miller and Stephen Rollnick recently completed the 4th Edition of MI: Helping people Change and Grow. MI is a person-centred and strengths based approach that engages people in what can be challenging conversations. Using basic MI skills and techniques, and getting into an MI mind-set/‘heart-set’, encourages supporting others’ autonomy to engage in change and focusing on others’ intrinsic motivations about making change happen. It also empowers others to take responsibility for their change. Dr. Cloth is a member of the Motivational Interviewing Network of Trainers (MINT); her research is focused on school professionals’ use of MI with youth who are disengaged or disengaging from secondary school. This workshop will introduce school professionals to MI basics and provide time to practice. Cameras are required to be on as much as possible during this session.

Presenter bio:

Ali is an assistant professor of School and Applied Child Psychology at the University of British Columbia. Ali’s research focuses on school engagement and, training and coaching school professionals to use Motivational Interviewing and Needs Based Mentoring (NBM) approaches with marginalized, at-risk youth and those struggling in traditional education systems and settings. She is a member of the Motivational Interviewing Network of Trainers.

Please note: this is a 3-hour session that runs from 10:30am - 1:30pm with a different break schedule than the rest of the conference (i.e., you will not get the general lunch break)



Exploring Trauma and Play Therapy: Integrating Polyvagal Theory into School- Based Counselling (All Day 10:30 am - 3 pm)

Session description:

Trauma profoundly affects a child's nervous system, influencing their sense of safety, emotional regulation, and social engagement—key factors for success in a school environment. This workshop explores the intersection of child/youth therapy, trauma, and Polyvagal Theory, offering participants an understanding of how these three elements can be integrated to facilitate healing and recovery in children and youth who have experienced trauma. Polyvagal Theory, pioneered by Dr. Stephen Porges and made widely accessible by Deb Dana, provides a neurobiological framework for understanding how the autonomic nervous system responds to stress and trauma, emphasizing the role of the autonomic nervous system in shaping adaptive survival behaviours and social engagement. By incorporating a Polyvagal framework, school counsellors can better attune to students' autonomic states and support their emotional and social development, helping them feel safe and connected within the school community. **Max. 35 registrants.**

Presenter bio:

Monica Bhatara is a seasoned trauma therapist, trainer and consultant with nearly three decades of experience in front-line, clinical, and leadership roles. Based in Chilliwack, BC, she offers trauma recovery services to children, youth, and adults through her private counselling practice. Monica's integrative approach is body-based and relational, drawing on somatic, play, and expressive therapies to support children and youth in reconnecting with safety, regulation, and resilience. Informed by Indigenous Psychology and Polyvagal Theory, Monica understands trauma as the nervous system's adaptive response to threat—shaped and transmitted across generations. This perspective grounds her intergenerational and body-based practices, helping clients reconnect with safety, regulation, resilience, and survivance. Monica recognizes that trauma is never experienced in isolation — her practice is intersectional and rooted in anti-oppression and decolonizing values. Monica is also a dedicated trainer and consultant, passionate about supporting clinical and community practitioners in building nervous-system informed confidence, clarity, and skill in trauma-responsive care.

Please note: this is an all-day session that runs from 10:30-12 & 1:30-3



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Beyond Awareness: Autism-Affirming School Counselling in Practice (All Day 10:30 am - 3 pm)

Session description:

School counsellors are increasingly supporting autistic students with complex social, emotional, and educational needs, yet many report limited training in autism-specific counselling approaches. This introductory session explores emerging research and practical strategies for supporting autistic students through a neurodiversity-affirming lens. Drawing on my doctoral research examining competencies for school social workers and counsellors supporting autistic students, participants will gain insight into common gaps between traditional school-based mental health practices and the lived experiences of autistic youth. Topics will include relationship-building, adapting counselling approaches, understanding autistic communication and emotional expression, supporting student self-advocacy, and collaborating effectively with families and school teams. Participants will leave with concrete strategies they can begin implementing immediately, while gaining an overview of a broader competency framework designed to strengthen autism-affirming practice in educational settings. This session serves as an introduction to more advanced training opportunities focused on translating research into sustainable school-based practice.

Presenter Bio:

Alisha Stubbs, MSW, RSW, is a social worker, educator, researcher, and organizational leader with more than 15 years of experience across education, mental health, disability, and community-based services. She is a PhD Candidate in Social Work at Wilfrid Laurier University and is in the final stages of completing her doctoral research examining the competencies needed to effectively support autistic students in school settings. Her work has culminated in the development of a research-informed competency framework designed to strengthen autism-affirming practice among school-based professionals. Alisha has worked within Ontario school boards, providing direct support to students, families, and school teams, and has taught social work and human services courses at both college and university levels. She currently serves as Executive Director of Kootenay Kids Society, a multi-service early years organization in British Columbia, while also maintaining a private counselling and consulting practice focused on autism, neurodiversity, parenting, and professional training. Known for translating research into practical, actionable strategies, Alisha brings a unique perspective that bridges lived experience, clinical practice, education, leadership, and systems change. Her presentations focus on helping professionals move beyond awareness toward meaningful, evidence-informed approaches that improve outcomes for autistic children, youth, and families.

Please note: this is an all-day session that runs from 10:30-12 & 1:30-3



Afternoon sessions (1:30 pm-3 pm)

Preventing and Reducing Harms from Screen Use: Guidelines for Action

Dr. Jacquie Mahoney & Dr. Alex Gist

NormShift: Seeing and Shifting the Alcohol Norm with Young People

Kristina Sperkova & Angélica María Claro Gálvez, PhD

Leadership Opportunities for School Counsellors in Canada

Dr. Janice Graham-Migel

Exploring Trauma and Play Therapy: Integrating Polyvagal Theory into School-Based Counselling

Monica Bhatara

This is a continuation of the morning session.



Preventing and Reducing Harms from Screen Use: Guidelines for Action (1:30-3 pm)

Session description:

Screen use has become an important part of our lives that comes with both risks and benefits. BC Children's Hospital has been working together with the Ministry of Health to develop Safer Screen Use Guidelines and resources for schools and also parents/caregivers as part of a larger provincial strategy to prevent and minimize harms of screen use for children and adolescents. Drs. Jacquie Maloney and Alex Gist will share research on the influence of screen use on physical, mental, and social health, and learning. They will also provide an overview of guidelines to help school counsellors prevent, recognize, and address screen use-related harms in school settings

Presenter bios:

Dr. Jacquie Maloney (they/them) is a Health Promotion Specialist at BC Children's Hospital. They have been working together with the Ministry of Health, youth, parents and caregivers, and subject matter experts to create the Provincial Safer Screen Use Guidelines. Jacquie has spent the last 15 years conducting research and creating resources to promote health and well-being in school settings from a systems perspective.

Dr. Alex Gist (he/him) is a Health Promotion Specialist with the BC Children's Hospital Health Promotion and Health Literacy team. He holds a PhD in Human Development, Learning and Culture from the UBC. He has worked in education for almost 25 years in a variety of roles including teaching high school English Arts, teaching English and life skills to immigrant and refugee youth, managing SEL-based out-of-school time programs, and supporting school districts to move from data to action for the UBC Human Early Learning Partnership.



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NormShift: Seeing and Shifting the Alcohol Norm with Young People (1:30-3 pm)

Session description:

Every young person deserves to grow up in an environment that supports their health, their wellbeing, and a real sense of belonging. Yet the alcohol industry works strategically to embed their harmful products in the norms, environments and most private spaces of children and young people, shaping what young people, and the adults around them, come to perceive as socially expected and "normal". NormShift is a structured prevention intervention for adolescents aged 15 to 18. Its design is grounded in evidence, shaped by what young people themselves identified as relevant and informed by experts in alcohol prevention and in youth work, and it is now being tested in practice. NormShift helps young people see how the alcohol norm is constructed and who constructs it, and it builds capacities and empowerment for young people to question the alcohol norm and shift social norms towards health and inclusion. Rather than focusing on individual choice, NormShift empowers young people to examine the commercial and structural drivers that shape their environments, norms, and behaviours. In this 90-minute online session, Kristina Sperkova and Angélica María Claro Gálvez of Movendi International will share two things. The first is the thinking behind NormShift and why it differs from traditional prevention. The second is a guided look at the intervention in practice: two complementary resources, a guidebook that adolescents can work through on their own and a set of facilitated sessions for youth workers and peer facilitators, organised as an introductory workshop and four modules that move young people from spotting alcohol marketing to understanding the system that keeps it in place. To keep this concrete, the session moves beyond description, as participants will experience parts of the intervention firsthand and see how it works with young people, leaving with a clear picture of what NormShift offers and how it could complement the prevention work already underway in British Columbia

Presenter bios:

Kristina Sperkova is a psychologist and global advocate with over 20 years of experience in health promotion and substance use prevention. She is President at Movendi Sverige and Movendi International, the first woman to hold the International Presidency, and a Planet Youth ambassador.

Angélica María Claro Gálvez is a psychologist with a PhD in Public Health and Advocacy Manager at Movendi International. She has nearly two decades of experience in alcohol prevention and in policy advocacy grounded in public health and human rights.



Leadership Opportunities for School Counsellors in Canada (1:30-3 pm)

Session description:

This session will provide an overview of leadership opportunities for school counsellors in Canada. The session will include an overview of a comprehensive approach to school counselling that was outlined in the recently published textbook, “School Counselling in Canada: A Comprehensive Guide” (Berynets, Porter, Peluso & Stella, 2025). Participants will then have time to learn about and discuss how leadership initiatives by the School Counsellors Chapter of the Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association (CCPA) might work for them in their contexts. These initiatives include:

- collaboration with professional associations across Canada;
- Canadian School Counselling Week held annually the first week of February;
- advocacy for the profession through the CCPA Advocacy Leads;
- presentations at CCPA conferences in Canada;
- peer-reviewed publications through a special issue of the Canadian Journal of Counselling and Psychotherapy;
- research and publication in a Canadian context on supervision in school-based settings;
- upcoming networking and online professional development.

Attendees will be provided with information on how they can be involved in the above leadership opportunities through the CCPA School Counsellors Chapter and time to discuss what kinds of initiatives would work for them and what kinds of supports they might want.

Presenter bio:

Dr. Janice Graham-Migel, PhD, RCT, CCC, CCS is Past President of the School Counsellors Chapter and Chair of the Chapter’s National School Counselling Committee. She is a Canadian Certified Counsellor and a Canadian Clinical Supervisor through CCPA. Janice worked on the CCPA Ethics Committee, is a member of the CCPA Advancement of Clinical Supervision Committee, as well as one of two guest editors of an upcoming special issue of the Canadian Journal of Counselling and Psychotherapy. Janice worked as a school counsellor in Halifax at all levels in public education (elementary, junior high, and senior high) and served eight years on the Executive of the Nova Scotia School Counsellors Association (Director, Vice President, President, Past President). Janice completed her PhD at the University of Toronto and holds an Adjunct Professor appointment at Acadia University. Janice’s research and practice concentrate on comprehensive school counselling programs and distributed leadership, as well as national research on the school counselling profession in Canada.