



THE MELISSA INSTITUTE'S 29TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE

The Social Media Challenge:

Research-Based Strategies to Protect Minds and Strengthen Communities

VIA Zoom
May 2, 2025
9am-4pm

The Melissa Institute's 29th Annual Conference:

The Social Media Challenge:

Research-Based Strategies to Protect Minds and Strengthen Communities

Join us via Zoom on Friday, May 2, 2025 9 a.m.–4 p.m. EST

About the Conference:

Social media plays a far-reaching role in shaping mental health, relationships, and public trust. The U.S. Surgeon General warns that social media "poses a profound risk of harm to the mental health and well-being of children and adolescents," while the World Economic Forum has identified misinformation as "one of the greatest threats to democracy and public trust." Excessive social media use, exposure to harmful content, and the rapid spread of misinformation and disinformation contribute to anxiety, fear, division, isolation, and high-risk behavior, disrupting brain development and damaging interpersonal relationships.

This conference brings together leading experts from the United States, United Kingdom, and Canada to address these urgent challenges. The day begins with a keynote address on "Social Media, Technology, and Adolescent Mental Health" Subsequent sessions will explore misinformation and disinformation, presenting real-world case studies and highlighting Project Real—an innovative community strategy being implemented in the United Kingdom to protect young minds and create safer digital environments. The day concludes with a session on collaborative solutions to social media-related challenges, equipping participants with actionable tools to foster a more informed and resilient youth.

This conference provides practical, evidence-based strategies for promoting mental health and online safety, making it essential for educators, mental health professionals, parents, and policymakers. Featuring expert-led sessions and interactive discussions, it offers strategic guidance on implementing evidence-based approaches that improve mental health and social media safety, ultimately fostering a safer, healthier, and more informed society.

Learning Objectives:

- 1) Enhance Understanding of Social Media's Impact on Mental Health:** Participants will explore the latest research on the effects of social media use on adolescent brain development, mental health, and interpersonal relationships, gaining insights into how excessive use and exposure to harmful content contribute to anxiety, fear, and isolation.
- 2) Equip Professionals with Practical Strategies for Social Media Safety:** The conference will provide participants with evidence-based tools and strategies to mitigate the risks of social media on youth, including approaches for combating misinformation and fostering resilience.
- 3) Foster Collaborative Efforts for Safer Digital Environments:** Through expert-led discussions and case studies, attendees will learn how to build a collective movement for social media safety and mental health, with a focus on creating safer online spaces and fostering stronger community resilience against the negative effects of digital media.

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Agenda

9:00 AM – 9:15 AM | Welcome & Opening Remarks – Dr. Etiony Aldarondo & Lynn Aptman

9:15 AM – 10:15 AM | Keynote: Social Media, Technology, and Adolescent Mental Health – Dr. Mitch Prinstein

10:15 AM – 10:45 AM | Panel Discussion: The Role of Parent–Child and Peer Relationships in Digital Well–Being – Dr. Debra Pepler (Moderator), Dr. Donald Meichenbaum, & Dr. Mitch Prinstein

10:45 AM – 11:00 AM | Break

11:00 AM – 12:00 PM | Tackling Misinformation: How Project Real Equips Youth to Think Critically Online – Dr. Yvonne Skipper

12:00 PM – 12:30 PM | Panel Discussion: Building Social Media Resilience in Youth – Strategies for Parents and Educators – Dr. Annette M. La Greca (Moderator), Dr. Sherry Hamby, & Dr. Yvonne Skipper

12:30 PM – 1:30 PM | Lunch Break

1:30 PM – 2:30 PM | Developing and Implementing a Social Media Safety Program in Your Community: The Project Real/Glasgow Model – Dr. Yvonne Skipper

2:30 PM – 3:15 PM | Panel Discussion: Building a Collective Movement for Social Media Safety and Mental Health – Dr. Debra Pepler (Moderator), Scott Hunter, Alasdair Penny, Dr. Yvonne Skipper, Dr. Etiony Aldarondo

3:15 PM – 3:30 PM | Closing Remarks & Call to Action: The Social Media Safety and Mental Health Global Network – Dr. Etiony Aldarondo

FREE General Registration

Continuing Education Credits Available for:

- **Psychologists: 6 CE credits (Florida Board of Psychology, APA approved)**
- **School Psychologists: 6 CE credits (Florida Board of School Psychology, NASP approved)**
- **Mental Health Professionals (LCSW, LMHC, LMFT): 6 CE credits (Florida Board approved)**
- **Educators (MDCPS): 7 Master Plan Points (register via PLMS and complete evaluation)**



IMPORTANT DISCLOSURE: None of the planners and presenters for this educational activity have relevant financial relationship(s)* to disclose with ineligible companies* whose primary business is producing, marketing, selling, re-selling, or distributing healthcare products used by or on patients. Financial relationships are relevant if the educational content an individual can control is related to the business lines or products of the ineligible company.

Keynote Speakers:



Mitch Prinstein, Ph.D. – John Van Seters Distinguished Professor of Psychology and Neuroscience and Co-director, The Winston National Center on Technology Use, Brain, and Psychological Development, University of North Carolina–Chapel Hill; Chief Science Officer, American Psychological Association (APA). Expert in adolescent mental health, peer relationships, and the psychological effects of social media.



Yvonne Skipper, Ph.D. – Senior Lecturer in Psychology, University of Glasgow; Melissa Institute Scientific Board Member; Creator of Project Real, an evidence-based program that helps young people detect fake news on social media.

Panel Moderators:



Debra Pepler, Ph.D. – Distinguished Research Professor of Psychology, York University, Toronto; Melissa Institute Scientific Board Member; Co-director of PREVNet, Canada's national bullying prevention initiative. International expert on bullying, youth relationships, and violence prevention.



Annette M. La Greca, Ph.D., ABPP – Distinguished Professor of Psychology and Pediatrics, University of Miami; Melissa Institute Scientific Board Member. Leading expert on trauma, resilience, and the impact of peer relationships on youth mental health. Author of After the Storm and Youth Strong.

Panelists:



Etiony Aldarondo, Ph.D.– Executive Director and Scientific Board Member, The Melissa Institute; Leading program developer and expert on violence prevention, trauma, and community-based clinical practices.



Sherry Hamby, Ph.D.– Distinguished Research Professor of Psychology, The University of the South; Director of the Life Paths Research Center; Melissa Institute Scientific Board Member; Founding editor of the APA journal Psychology of Violence; Internationally recognized expert in victimization, trauma, and resilience



Scott Hunter– Education Officer for Cyber Resilience and Internet Safety at Education Scotland; Expert on enhancing digital literacy and promoting safe online practices among students and educators; Leader in CyberFirst program, which introduces young learners to cybersecurity concepts.



Donald Meichenbaum, Ph.D.– Founding Scientific Director, The Melissa Institute; Founding figure of Cognitive–Behavioral Therapy and creator of Stress Inoculation Training, a widely used approach for building resilience and managing stress and trauma.



Alasdair Penny– Cybercrime Harm Prevention lead at Police Scotland; Contributor to initiatives like the Police CyberAlarm, a tool aimed at helping businesses protect against cyber threats; Dedicated to advancing cybersecurity practices and preventing online harm.

The Melissa Institute is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to the study and prevention of violence through education, community service, research support and consultation. Our mission is to prevent violence and promote safer communities through education and application of research-based knowledge.

On May 5, 1995, Melissa Aptman was murdered in St. Louis. A Miami native, she was just two weeks away from graduating with her bachelor's degree from Washington University.

One year after her death, Melissa's family, friends and violence prevention experts established The Melissa Institute for Violence Prevention and Treatment to honor her memory and make a difference by working to prevent violence and assist victims.



Without the participation, expertise and leadership of our volunteer boards, the Institute could not accomplish its goals. These include the Board of Directors, the Scientific Board and the Honorary Board.

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Continuing Education (CE) Information:

CE Broker Course: 20-1292313

The Melissa Institute for Violence Prevention & Treatment maintains responsibility for this program and its content. All CE credits require additional steps during registration and after the course, including a pre-training survey, a \$60 fee, and a post-evaluation form.



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THE MELISSA INSTITUTE
PREVENTING VIOLENCE THROUGH EDUCATION