

# TOGETHER WE CAN CONFERENCE 2026

A STATEWIDE CONFERENCE FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES, THEIR FAMILIES, AND THE PROFESSIONALS WHO SUPPORT THEM.

## KEYNOTE SPEAKER: Chris Ulmer

Chris Ulmer is the founder of the leading neurodiversity movement, SBSK (Special Books by Special Kids). Chris travels the globe meeting friends with a diagnosis and sharing their stories on social media. He believes that when we take the time to hear someone's story and view life from their perspective, we learn and grow as humans, making the world a better place. Together Chris and the SBSK community are promoting conversations on acceptance and inclusion around the world.

## CONFERENCE AGENDA

8:15 am - 4:00 pm

### EXHIBITORS LOCATED BEHIND MAIN LOBBY

See the Exhibitor Raffle form in your conference packet and find out how you can enter to win from over \$2,000 in prizes!

### SENSORY ROOM LOCATED NEAR BOX OFFICE WINDOW

See the Registration Desk Attendant for access to the Sensory Room.

8:15 am - 9:00 am

Lobby

### REGISTRATION/CHECK-IN, CHILDCARE DROP-OFF, RESOURCE FAIR

Sign in and pick up your conference packet and name badge. To ensure exhibitors have adequate time for setup, early entry will not be permitted for attendees, except for those utilizing childcare services. Those registered for childcare, you are allowed to enter early at 8am to check your child(ren) in.

9:00 am - 9:15 am

Upstairs

### OPENING REMARKS & KEYNOTE INTRODUCTION

9:15 am - 10:15 am

Upstairs

### MORNING KEYNOTE

#### The Power of Acceptance and Positivity

*Chris Ulmer*

I have made it my life's mission to normalize the diversity of the human condition by showcasing how understanding, positivity, and acceptance can make a better world for all. Together, we will explore these concepts and more through my experiences with the worldwide acceptance movement, Special Books by Special Kids (SBSK). ([Facebook.com/specialbooksbyspecialkids](https://www.facebook.com/specialbooksbyspecialkids))

10:15 am - 10:45 am

CONFERENCE BREAK

10:45 am - 11:45 am

## BREAKOUT SESSIONS

<b>ROOM A-1 SIPSHOP</b>	<b>Sibshops</b> <i>Andrea Carlson; ASK Resource Center Family Support Specialist Lead, Shibshop Facilitator</i>
<b>ROOM A-2 SIBTEEN</b>	<b>Sibteens</b> <i>Tara Conley, Iowa SIBS; Sibteen Facilitator</i>
<b>ROOM B EDUCATION</b>	<b>Get in the Know: What Iowa's Director of Special Education Wants Families to Know</b> <i>Leisa Breitfelder; Iowa Director of Special Education Bureau of Special Education Finance, Data and Accountability</i>
<b>ROOM C POSTSECONDARY TRANSITION</b>	<b>Where will They Live? Exploring Living Options After High School</b> <i>Craig Barnum, Jena Luksetich, Brenda Langstraat-Janisch Parents with experience transitioning a child into a group home, independent living, and living at home.</i>
<b>ROOM D HEALTH AND WELLBEING</b>	<b>Understanding School Health Services: What Families Need to Know</b> <i>Melissa Walker, MSN, ARNP, FNP-C, Administrative Consultant, Bureau of Special Edu- cation Finance, Data and Accountability</i>
<b>UPSTAIRS YOUTH/YOUNG ADULT LEADERSHIP</b>	<b>Round table Sessions</b> <i>How to Pay the Bills: Judy Warth, Center for Disabilities and Development Being a Life Long Learner: Presenter invited Learn about Voc Rehab: Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Team Member</i>

11:45 am - 1:00 pm

## LUNCH BREAK

<b>ROOM A-1 SIPSHOP</b>	<b>Sibshops will eat lunch together.</b> <i>Andrea Carlson; ASK Resource Center Family Support Specialist Lead, Shibshop Facilitator</i>
<b>ROOM A-2 SIBTEEN</b>	<b>Sibteens will eat lunch together.</b> <i>Tara Conley, Iowa SIBS; Sibteen Facilitator</i>
<b>ROOM B ASK EACH OTHER SUPPORT GROUP</b>	<b>12:00-12:45 pm- Optional, 45-Minute ASK Each Other Support Group</b> <i>ASK Resource Center staff</i>
<b>ROOM C ASK EACH OTHER MENTOR NETWORK</b>	<b>12:00-12:30 pm- Optional, 30-Minute ASK Each Other Mentor Network Information Session</b> <i>Kasey Vermillion, ASK Each Other Mentor Network Coordinator;</i>
<b>UPSTAIRS YOUTH/YOUNG ADULT LEADERSHIP</b>	<b>Youth will have lunch and learn session.</b> <i>Brad Gerard; CHASE Program Director</i>

**Make sure to check out the resource fair during the lunch break!**

1:00 pm - 2:00 pm

1:00 PM BREAKOUT SESSION

<b>ROOM A-1 SIPSHOP</b>	<b>Sibshops</b> <i>Andrea Carlson; ASK Resource Center Family Support Specialist Lead, Shibshop Facilitator</i>
<b>ROOM A-2 SIBTEEN</b>	<b>Sibteens</b> <i>Tara Conley, Iowa SIBS; Sibteen Facilitator</i>
<b>ROOM B EDUCATION</b>	<b>From Challenge to Change: Behavior Support at School from the Family Perspective</b> <i>Kindra Smith and Brenda Langstraat-Janisch</i> <i>Parents of people with disabilities</i>
<b>ROOM C POSTSECONDARY TRANSITION</b>	<b>Exploring College Life: Pathways, Programs &amp; Possibilities</b> <i>Speaker Invited</i>
<b>ROOM D HEALTH AND WELLBEING</b>	<b>You're Not Alone: Where to Turn for System Support</b> <i>Disability Access Point and Behavioral Health Systems staff members</i>
<b>UPSTAIRS YOUTH/YOUNG ADULT LEADERSHIP</b>	<b>Finding Your Rhythm: 5 Lessons in Leadership</b> <i>Brad Gerard, CHASE Program Director</i>

2:15 pm - 3:15 pm

BREAKOUT SESSIONS

<b>ROOM A SIBSHOPS AND SIBTEENS TOGETHER</b>	<b>Mic Check: Share Your Story with Podcasting</b> <i>Brad Gerard, CHASE Program Director</i>
<b>ROOM B EDUCATION</b>	<b>What Changed? A Year in Review of Iowa Special Education Law</b> <i>Stephanie Petrillo, B.A., J.D., Staff Attorney, Disability Rights Iowa</i>
<b>ROOM C POST SECONDARY EDUCATION</b>	<b>Stronger Together: A Journey in Family and Self-Advocacy</b> <i>Bella Arenas, Grace Nelson, Emmalynn Matthies; self-advocates</i> <i>Laura Perez Salcedo, Elizabeth Matthies, Rebecca McMahon; parents</i>
<b>ROOM D HEALTH AND WELLBEING</b>	<b>HOME Updates</b> <i>Speaker Invited</i>
<b>UPSTAIRS YOUTH/YOUNG ADULT LEADERSHIP</b>	<b>Building Independence: What It Looks Like for Each Individual</b> <i>Michael Biermann; person with a disability</i> <i>Laney Beadle; person with a disability</i>

3:15 - 4:00 pm

CLOSING REMARKS- UPSTAIRS