



Vanessa Elias

Mental Health Activist and Certified Parent Coach
NAMI Parent Support Group Facilitator
The Aspen Institute's Weave Speakers Bureau
Founder of Thrive with a Guide and Block Party USA

BIO

Vanessa is a mental health activist, certified parent coach, speaker, and writer featured in the WSJ, NPR, PBS, and in the NYT best seller *Never Enough: When Achievement Culture Becomes Toxic—And What We Can Do About It*. She is the founder of Thrive with a Guide and serves as a parent support group facilitator for the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI). In 2023, she founded Block Party USA as a free and simple cure for our country's loneliness, social isolation, divisiveness, and the youth mental health crisis. As part of Dr. Vivek H. Murthy's "Recipes for Connection" initiative, the Office of the U.S. Surgeon General features Block Party USA as a resource that supports building social connection through gathering. To help end the phone-based childhood and restore the play-based childhood, Block Party USA was named an Aligned Organization of Jonathan Haidt's NYT best seller *The Anxious Generation*. Vanessa is a member of The Aspen Institute's Weave Speakers Bureau.

EXPERIENCE

Thrive with a Guide, LLC, Wilton, CT — *Founder and Principal*

2019 - PRESENT

Specializing in whole-family synergy and well-being, Vanessa works with parents to problem solve, shift their lens, and develop actionable steps to change and improve life in their home. Services offered include one-on-one coaching, writer and columnist, workshop facilitator, panelist, and speaker. Learn more about Vanessa's services [here](#).

Block Party USA, Wilton, CT — *Founder*

2023 - PRESENT

Block parties encourage free play for children, offer social connectedness, and cultivate a culture of showing up for one another in countless ways. When we get together face-to-face, we realize that we have more in common than we are different. [See the ripple effect of just one block party](#). Vanessa hosts free Block Party USA Zooms. Each one is 30 minutes and brings new faces, questions, and strategies.

Weave: The Social Fabric Project at The Aspen Institute, Washington, DC — *Speaker*

2023 - PRESENT

Share stories to inspire others to shift our culture and create belonging and connection across differences.

National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), CT — *Parent Support Group Facilitator*

2015 - PRESENT

Provide free support through monthly meetings and calls with parents and caregivers of children and adolescents with behavioral, emotional, and mental health concerns. Vanessa shares her work in [2018 Wilton Bulletin article](#) and [2023 CT Region 1 conference: Mental Health in a Post-Covid World: How to Ensure Emotional Health and Resilience in our Youth/Teens](#).

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Thrive with a Guide thrivewithaguide.com

Block Party USA blockpartyusa.org

PURPOSE

Help people build relationships and community both within their home (Thrive with a Guide) and outside their home (Block Party USA).

STATE OF CONNECTICUT

Advisory Committee Member to the Office of the Behavioral Health Advocate (ACOBHA)

2023 - PRESENT

BOARD POSITIONS

Authentic Connections Groups, Tempe, AZ *Steering Committee*

2022 - 2023 Dissolved due to Dr. Suniya Luthar's passing.

Wilton Youth Council, Inc., Wilton, CT *Board President*

2015 - 2019

SELECT SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS, WRITING, and PRESS

Building Stronger Neighborhoods, One Block Party at a Time [The Epoch Times](#) (2024)

Weaving in 400 Seconds [Vanessa shares her story and how it led to Block Party USA](#) in a PechaKucha-style presentation with 20 slides, 20 seconds on each. (2024)

Let's Talk Mental Health panel discussion [hosted by Wilton Mental Health Task Force, Wilton Public Schools, and the Wilton Youth Council](#). (2023)

Navigating the Complexities of the Mental Health System and Strategies for Sourcing the Right Help for your Family's Needs [hosted by Kids in Crisis](#). (2022)

Are You Raising Kids in Captivity, then Expecting Them to Survive in the Wild? [Let Grow](#). (2021)

Quit Tracking Your Kids' Phones When They Head Off to College [Wall Street Journal](#). (2021)

Why Helicopter Parenting May Jeopardize Kids' Health [PBS NewsHour](#). (2018)

The Perils Of Pushing Kids Too Hard, And How Parents Can Learn To Back Off [NPR](#). (2018)

EXPERIENCE (cont.)

Wilton Youth Council, Inc., Wilton, CT — *President*

2015 - 2019

Established the Wilton Youth Council as a trusted leader and sought-after resource for mental health advocacy and programming. Vanessa was named a "Wilton 25" in 2017, celebrating 25 extraordinary Wilton residents for their talent, entrepreneurial spirit, generosity, expertise, and philanthropy.

VOLUNTEER

Wilton Mental Health Task Force — *Co-Founder and Lead*

2022 - PRESENT

Build awareness of mental health needs, bring together the resources that already exist, and collaborate to expand current services. Task force members include clinicians, school administrators, and parents.

Kids In Crisis — *Member, Programming Committee*

2021 - PRESENT

Kids in Crisis provides emergency shelter, crisis counseling, and community education programs for children and families facing a crisis. The Kids In Crisis Helpline is staffed 24 hours a day with trained crisis counselors and provides free, confidential phone and face-to-face intervention, counseling, and referrals.

Wilton Coalition for Youth — *Founding Member*

2020 - PRESENT

Strengthen connections among organizations that serve Wilton youth and families. Coalition meetings are a forum for learning and sharing ideas. Expert speakers present information on timely topics and lead discussions about how member organizations can support those they serve.

Wilton Public Schools, Wilton, CT — *Community Partner*

2015 - PRESENT

Collaborations include district staff trainings, parenting workshops, and book groups with the superintendent, as well as Privileged and Pressured, a research-based collaboration that assessed the well-being of Wilton youth by Suniya Luthar, Ph.D. and was covered in national media.

Wilton Free Play Matters Task Force — *Co-Founder and Co-Chair*

2017 - 2023 Task Force dissolved due to completed objectives.

Educated the community about the critical importance of free play and facilitated more free play opportunities for children of all ages. Testified in CT legislature in support of a bill to remove the threat of police or child protective services involvement when a child is enjoying unsupervised play. On June 27, 2023, Gov. Ned Lamont signed Senate Bill 1133 into law. [Wilton Youth Orgs Laud Gov. Lamont Signing Bill Increasing Childhood Independence — An Effort with Wilton Roots.](#)

EDUCATION

Boston University, Boston, MA — *B.A. Psychology*

1993

CERTIFICATIONS and TRAININGS

NARCAN® Training, The Hub: Behavioral Health Action Organization for Southwestern CT (2024) and Silver Hill Hospital (2017)

Supportive Parenting for Anxious Childhood Emotions: Applications for ARFID and Failure to Launch (SPACE-Expanded), Yale Child Study Center, Anxiety and Mood Disorders Program (2022)

Parenting Coach Certification, Center for the Challenging Child (2020)

Supportive Parenting for Anxious Childhood Emotions (SPACE), Yale Child Study Center (2020)

Mental Health First Aid, National Council for Behavioral Health (2020, 2014)

Radically Open DBT with Lori Prado, LPC's, LMHC and Hope Arnold, LCSW, MA (2019), **DBT Skills with Multi-Problem Adolescents** with Jill Rathus, Ph.D. and Alec Miller, Psy.D. (2016), **Applying DBT Principles in Therapy Training**, with Charles R. Swenson, M.D. (2016), and **Mindfulness in DBT Training** with Alan E. Fruzzetti, Ph.D. (2014), Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT) program, Silver Hill Hospital

How To Talk So Kids Will Listen, Faber/Mazlish Workshops (2019)

QPR Suicide Prevention Gatekeeper, QPR Institute (2018)

Emotional Dysregulation in Families - Treatment and Support (2018) and **Global Alliance for Prevention and Early Intervention for Borderline Personality Disorder (GAP)** (2017), Yale National Education Alliance for Borderline Personality Disorder Conferences, Yale School of Medicine

Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT) Skills Training for Emotional Problem Solving for Adolescents STEPS-A, with James Mazza, Ph.D. and Elizabeth Dexter-Mazza, Psy.D. (2017)

NAMI Basics for Parents, Caregivers, and Family (2017) and **NAMI Family Support Group Facilitator** (2015), National Alliance on Mental Illness, Connecticut

National Education Alliance for Borderline Personality Disorder Family Connections™ (2014)