

HELPING SCHOOLS HAVE DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

A **FREE** planning guide to help schools bring families, community partners and meaningful conversations together



Practical ideas, resources and planning tools to help you create an event that fits your School and Community.

One conversation can change everything

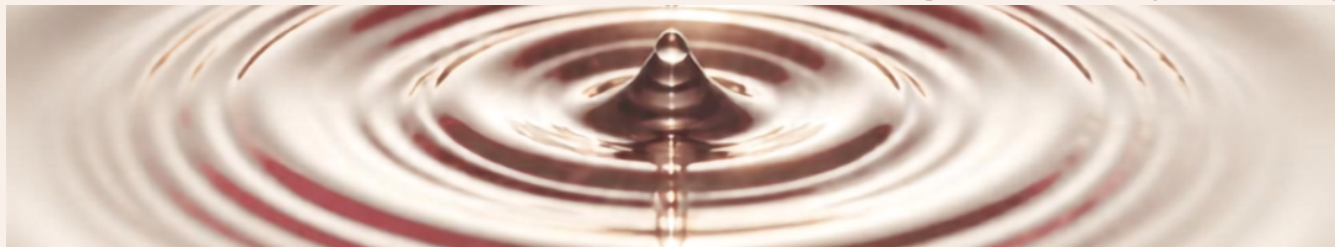


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A MESSAGE TO SCHOOL LEADERS

For many years, I believed that if a child came from a good family, attended a good school and was surrounded by caring adults, they would naturally be protected from many of the challenges we hear about today.

I was wrong.

Not because I didn't care.

Not because I wasn't paying attention.

But because I didn't know what I didn't know.

Through personal experience, advocacy and years of prevention education, I came to understand that many challenges facing young people are not caused by a lack of caring adults. Often, they begin with gaps in awareness.

Most parents are doing the best they can with the information they have. Most educators are doing the best they can with the resources available to them. And most communities care deeply.

What if we could create more opportunities to have these conversations before challenges become crises?

The desire to belong, be accepted and feel understood is part of being human. But those same needs can sometimes create vulnerabilities. Awareness can help us recognize them—and respond with care.



WHY THIS MATTERS

Schools are being asked to support students through an increasingly complex world.

Families and young people are navigating:

- Mental health
- Anxiety and stress
- Social media pressures
- Online safety
- Cyberbullying
- Consent and boundaries
- Healthy relationships
- Grief and loss
- Substance awareness

Many of these challenges do not begin in the classroom.

Yet they often show up there.

- ◆ Teachers see the effects.
- ◆ Guidance staff see the effects.
- ◆ Administrators see the effects.
- ◆ Families see the effects.

I don't believe families need another evening where they are told everything that can go wrong. They need an opportunity to learn, ask questions, meet people who can help, and leave knowing where to turn if they ever need it.

**Awareness Creates Opportunity
Conversation Creates Connection
Connection Creates Strong Communities**



A Story Many School Communities Will Recognize

A parent can be deeply involved in their child's life and still wonder if they are missing something.

They may know their child's friends. They may know where they are going and who they are spending time with. They may think they understand social media, bullying, consent, relationships and the pressures young people face.

But the world our children are growing up in is changing quickly.

Sometimes the signs are easy to see. Often, they aren't.

A child may be struggling and not know how to ask for help. A teenager may be dealing with pressure they have never talked about. A parent may recognize that something has changed but not know what to do next.

That doesn't mean the parent has failed. It means they may need information they haven't had before.

That is why these conversations matter.

When schools create a place where parents can learn from professionals, ask questions and discover resources within their own community, they are giving families something incredibly valuable:

That is the purpose behind *Helping Schools Have Difficult Conversations*.



THE OPPORTUNITY

Helping Schools Have Difficult Conversations is more than an event.

It is a framework for bringing the right people together around the conversations that matter to families.

Schools can adapt the framework to their own needs, resources and community.

The goal isn't to add another responsibility to educators. It's to create an opportunity for schools, families and community partners to share knowledge, resources and support.



RESULT:

Families leave informed.

Schools strengthen relationships.

Organizations connect with the people they serve.

Communities become stronger.



WHAT DOES THE EVENT LOOK LIKE

Four workshops. Four groups. One rotating schedule.

Attendees are divided into four groups when they register. Each group begins in a different workshop and then rotates to the next room at the scheduled time.

Everyone has the opportunity to attend all four workshops.

Allow approximately 5 minutes between workshops for participants to move to their next room.

Workshop Format	What Parents Experience
Four rotating sessions	Parents attend four 20-25 minute workshops throughout the evening
Expert facilitators	Learn from trained professionals and community experts
Resource tables	Connect with local organizations and discover support services
Take-home materials	Receive practical guides and resource lists

Sample Evening Schedule

6:00–6:20 — Workshop 1

6:20–6:25 — Transition

6:25–6:45 — Workshop 2

6:45–6:50 — Transition

6:50–7:10 — Workshop 3

7:10–7:15 — Transition

7:15–7:35 — Workshop 4

7:35–7:50 — Community Booths / Resource Tables

7:50–8:00 — Closing & Door Prizes

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

A few important things to consider

Because these events may involve sensitive subjects, a little preparation beforehand can help create a safe and respectful experience for everyone.

✓ **Approval**

Confirm any school-board, church leadership, organizational or venue approvals required before inviting presenters or promoting the event.

✓ **Presenters**

Choose knowledgeable, qualified presenters and review their topics and materials in advance.

✓ **Sensitive Conversations**

Know how your organization will respond if an attendee raises a serious concern or discloses something that requires support.

✓ **Referral & Crisis Resources**

Have appropriate local crisis, mental health, abuse and support resources available for anyone who may need them.

✓ **Privacy**

Only collect registration information you genuinely need, explain how it will be used, and keep it secure.

✓ **Photography & Recording**

Let attendees know if photographs or recordings will be taken and obtain appropriate consent.

✓ **Age-Appropriate Participation**

If children or youth are participating, ensure activities, discussions and materials are appropriate for their age and needs.

✓ **Accessibility**

Consider accessibility, language, transportation, dietary needs and other accommodations that may help families participate.

✓ **Community Tables**

Ask participating organizations to focus on education, resources and connection rather than sales or solicitation.

✓ **Have a designated person or team available during the event**

Designate a quiet/private space and identify in advance who will respond if an attendee needs to step away or requests additional support.

When in doubt, involve the appropriate professional, organization or authority before moving forward.



EVENT REGISTRATION & WORKSHOP SIGN-UP

A simple registration process can make the evening run smoothly.

Consider using an online registration form to collect:

- Name
- Email address
- Number attending
- Age/grade of children, if applicable (to assist in the child care planning)
- Workshop preferences
- Accessibility or accommodation needs
- Any questions attendees would like addressed

Workshop Registration

Because workshops have limited space, participants can select their preferred sessions when registering.

A simple registration system can help organizers:

- ✓ Plan room sizes
- ✓ Balance workshop attendance
- ✓ Prepare materials
- ✓ Organize workshop rotations
- ✓ Follow up with attendees afterward

At the Door

Have a registration/check-in table where attendees can:

Check in • Receive their schedule • Pick up a name tag (optional) • Ask questions •
Check out vendor/community info tables • Find their rooms

Keep It Simple

A free online form such as Google Forms can be enough to get started. You do not need an expensive registration system.

Privacy.

To be professional and responsible: because you're collecting names and email addresses, add:

Privacy Note: Only collect the information you genuinely need, explain how it will be used, and store it securely.



TOPIC IDEAS FOR YOUR COMMUNITY

**We've done the groundwork for you.
Explore these ideas and choose the conversations
that best fit your community.**

For a single evening, consider choosing 3–6 topics that best fit your community.

Other topics can become future workshops or events.

Mental & Emotional Well-Being

- Mental Health Awareness
- Anxiety & Stress
- Building Resilience
- Self-Esteem & Self-Worth
- Grief & Loss
- Recognizing When a Young Person May Need Support

Digital Life & Online Safety

- Online Safety
- Social Media Pressures
- Cyberbullying
- Online Relationships
- Digital Footprints
- Online Manipulation & Grooming Awareness
- Helping Parents Understand the Digital World

School & Community Connection

- Building Strong School-Family Relationships
- Creating a Culture of Belonging
- Connecting Families With Community Resources
- Supporting Students Beyond the Classroom
- Knowing When to Refer to Community Services

Relationships & Healthy Development

- Healthy Relationships
- Boundaries & Respect
- Age-Appropriate Consent
- Peer Pressure
- Healthy Friendships
- Recognizing Controlling Behaviour
- Asking for Help



TOPICS MAY INCLUDE con'd

Choose the conversations that best fit your community.

Youth Development

- Identity & Belonging
- Building Confidence
- Developing Independence
- Making Healthy Decisions
- Finding Trusted Adults
- Handling Rejection & Failure
- Preparing for Adulthood

Substance & Risk Awareness

- Substance Use Awareness
- Vaping & Nicotine
- Alcohol & Cannabis Awareness
- Peer Pressure & Risk-Taking
- Recognizing Signs of Concern
- Building Protective Factors

Family & Community

- Parenting in a Digital World
- Talking With Children & Teens
About Difficult Topics
- Building Communication & Trust
- Setting Healthy Boundaries
- Recognizing When a Child Needs
Support
- Supporting Growing Independence

Education & Community

- School Boards
- School Councils
- Public Libraries
- Colleges & Universities
- Adult Learning Programs
- Community Education
Organizations

Not sure where to begin?

You could build an evening around one area, such as:

Digital Safety — social media, cyberbullying, online safety and grooming awareness.

Youth Well-Being — mental health, resilience, substance awareness and knowing when to seek help.

Healthy Relationships & Safety — consent, boundaries, healthy relationships and exploitation prevention.



POTENTIAL COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Choose the partners that best fit your community.

Health & Wellness

- Public Health
- Community Health Centres
- Family Health Teams
- Youth Health Services
- Wellness Programs

Mental Health & Crisis Support

- Mental Health Organizations
- Youth Mental Health Services
- Counselling Services
- Family Support Programs
- Bereavement Services
- Addiction & Recovery Services

Family & Youth Services

- Family Resource Centres
- Youth Services
- Youth Mentoring Programs
- Recreation Programs
- Childcare & Early Years Services
- Youth Employment Programs
- Youth Leadership Programs

Safety & Emergency Services

- Police Services
- Fire & Paramedic Services
- Victim Services
- Crime Prevention Programs
- Child & Family Services
- Abuse & Violence Prevention Organizations
- Human Trafficking Prevention Organizations

Service Clubs & Community Organizations

(Excellent Financial supporters for you event as well)

- Rotary
- Lions
- Kiwanis
- Optimist Clubs
- Legion Branches
- Volunteer Centres
- Community Associations
- Community Foundations



POTENTIAL COMMUNITY PARTNERS con't

Community & Family Support

- Libraries
- Community Centres
- Volunteer Centres
- Service Clubs
- Community Foundations

Legal & Advocacy

- Community Legal Clinics
- Legal Aid
- Family & Victim Advocacy
- Settlement & Immigration Services
- Human Rights Organizations

Food, Housing & Financial Support

- Food Banks & Community Kitchens
- Housing Services
- Financial Counselling
- Employment & Job Training
- Emergency Assistance Programs

Other Organizations to think about

- Newcomers
- Cultural Organizations
- Accessibility Organizations
- Seniors



Local Businesses

- | | |
|-------------------------|------------------------------|
| • Restaurants | • Family Businesses |
| • Grocery Stores | • Printing Companies |
| • Pharmacies | • Local Employers |
| • Banks & Credit Unions | • Chambers of Commerce |
| • Local Retailers | • Business Improvement Areas |

Business could also provide items for your event:

Such as food, refreshment, door prizes, supplies, sponsorship, printing, promotional support, volunteers



ENHANCE YOUR EVENT

Choose what fits your community.

These ideas are optional—not requirements. Use them to make your event more welcoming, engaging and useful for families.

Local Media & Community Promotion

Invite local media and community outlets to help promote the event and highlight the resources available to families.

- 🧒 Childcare
- 🎨 Children's Activities
- 🎯 Youth Activities
- 🍕 Community Meal
- ☕ Sponsored Refreshments
- 📦 Family Resource Packages
- 🤝 Community Resource Booths
- 🎫 Door Prize Draws
- 🙏 Prayer Team Availability
- 🎤 Student or Community Performance
- 📚 Take-Home Resources
- 📝 Parent Feedback Forms
- 🗂 Registration table
- 🏆 Youth Leadership Opportunities
- 💬 Question & Answer Session
- 🤝 Volunteer Opportunities
- 💰 Local Business Sponsorships
- 🏢 Community Partner Sponsorships
- 🎤 Additional Guest Speakers
- 🩺 Health & Wellness Stations
- 🧩 Family Wellness Activities
- 📖 Book or Resource Display
- 📧 Community Resource Follow-Up
- 🌱 Ongoing Support or Small Groups

Consider involving Grade 7/8 students or student leadership groups in age-appropriate activities, welcoming guests, assisting with booths or helping create a positive atmosphere for younger children.



GETTING STARTED/BUILD YOUR TEAM

You don't have to do everything yourself.

Start by gathering a few people who believe this could benefit your community. Choose the conversations that matter most, divide the tasks, and begin reaching out.

1.

BUILD YOUR TEAM

Choose an event lead, and a small group to share the work

2.

DECIDE WHAT YOUR COMMUNITY NEEDS

Choose your topics, speakers and community partners

3.

BUILD THE EVENT

Confirm workshops, resource tables, registration, food and activities

4.

BRING EVERYONE TOGETHER

Host the event, connect families with resources and create space for conversation

5.

GET THE WORD OUT

Promote the event, confirm participants and make final preparations

6.

KEEP THE CONNECTION GOING

Thank your partners, follow up and look for opportunities to continue the conversations

IMPORTANT NOTE

This resource is provided free of charge.

Every community event is different. Some presenters may volunteer their time, while others may charge a fee. Food, childcare, venue costs, printing and other expenses may also vary.

While this guide is provided free of charge, hosting an event may involve some costs. The good news is that there are often ways to reduce those costs through community partnerships, donations, sponsorships and potential funding opportunities.



◆ **ONE EVENING**

◆ **MULTIPLE CONVERSATIONS**

◆ **COUNTLESS OPPORTUNITIES TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE**





PLANNING TIMELINE

HOW MUCH TIME DO YOU NEED?

**If you want to host your event in approximately 2 months:
Plan for 4–5 short planning meetings, plus brief check-ins between meetings.**

Week 1:

Form planning team • Choose date • Identify audience • Select 4 topics

Weeks 2–3:

Contact speakers • Contact community partners • Begin sponsorship/funding requests

Weeks 3–5:

Confirm speakers and booths • Arrange food • Arrange childcare/youth activities • Set up registration

Weeks 5–7:

Promote event • Finalize workshop groups • Confirm volunteers • Gather materials

Final week:

Confirm everything • Send reminders • Prepare rooms and registration materials

**If you to host your event in approximately 6 months:
Plan for 5–6 planning meetings, approximately once a month, with additional communication as needed.**

Months 1–2

Build planning team • Identify needs • Choose date • Explore funding

Months 2–3

Select topics • Invite speakers • Contact community partners

Months 3–4

Secure sponsors • Food • Childcare • Door prizes • Registration

Months 4–5

Promotion • Registration • Volunteer coordination • Workshop planning

Month 6

Finalize details • Confirm everyone • Promote heavily • Host the event



◆ **Keep meetings focused.**
Give each person a task, a deadline and a clear next step before you leave.





THE IMPACT

One evening cannot solve every challenge facing families. **But it can change what happens next.**

A parent may leave with a conversation they now feel prepared to have.

A family may discover a resource they didn't know existed.

A school may build a relationship with an organization that can support its families.

A community partner may connect with a family before they reach a point of crisis.

And a difficult subject that once felt uncomfortable to discuss may become a conversation that feels possible.

That is the impact an event like this can make



What can grow from one evening?

Informed Families

Parents leave with information, practical ideas and places to turn.

Stronger School–Community Connections

Schools and local organizations discover ways to support families together.

Earlier Conversations

Families have opportunities to talk about difficult subjects before concerns become crises.

Greater Awareness

People become more aware of risks, vulnerabilities, supports and resources within their community.



FUNDING OPPORTUNITY

Many of the topics included within this event align with funding priorities that support:

Start by looking for funding that supports:

- Youth mental health
- Family wellness
- Prevention education
- Violence prevention
- Human trafficking prevention
- Abuse prevention
- Community safety
- Youth development
- Parent engagement
- Community connection
- Food security
- Community wellness

Search using terms such as:

“Ontario community grants”
“youth wellness grants”
“family support funding”
“violence prevention grants”
“human trafficking prevention funding”
“mental health community grants”
“community engagement grants”
“municipal community grants”
“local foundation grants”

Don't overlook local funding.

Check your municipality, local community foundations, service clubs, charitable foundations and businesses for smaller grants or sponsorship opportunities.



LET'S START THE CONVERSATION

**Every School is Unique
Every Community is Unique**

This resource has been created to give you a starting point, practical ideas and tools to help you create an event that fits your community.

The planning guide is free.

There is no obligation and no cost to explore the possibility.

If questions come up as you work through the guide, I'm happy to help clarify the framework or resources.

◆ **Sometimes all it takes is one conversation to begin building something meaningful for your community.**

Because when schools, families, and communities come together, everyone benefits. Especially our children.

- ◆ You have the tools
- ◆ You have the framework
- ◆ Now make it your own

If questions come up as you work through the resource, I'm happy to help clarify the framework, resources or planning ideas.

-  Email: parentwithpurpose.ca@gmail.com
-  Questions about the resource? Book a 20-minute conversation.
-  parentwithpurpose.ca

**Together, we can help every child thrive in a supportive,
informed community.**



ABOUT PARENT WITH PURPOSE

Parent With Purpose was created from a simple belief: awareness can
change what happens next as
Prevention is easier than Rescue!

Through prevention education, advocacy, speaking and practical
resources, Lynda Harlos works to help adults better understand the
vulnerabilities and challenges facing children and youth.

Helping Communities Have Difficult Conversations grew from that
work — and from a desire to make prevention conversations easier for
schools, churches and community organizations to bring into their own
communities.

The goal isn't to have all the answers.
It's to help people know where to start.

ParentWithPurpose.ca

Scan for More resources & planning support

