

# Childhood Conversations Conference

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*Windsor Public Schools  
Windsor, Connecticut*

**W**hat started out as one conversation turned into a daylong conference, filled with many conversations. Parents and teachers from the Windsor Public Schools talked about how important it is that they talk to their children and shared tips for talking about challenging subjects, such as safety, stress and grief.

To build community connections that benefit children, the Windsor Public Schools Family Resource Center organized the day-long Childhood Conversations Conference that put parents and educators in touch with vital information on best practices for supporting their children. Collaborators included the Windsor Early Childhood Council and Windsor Start Smart. A representative of each group made up the planning committee.

Originally, the plan was to conduct “a community conversation on the importance of birth-to-five programs for student success later in life,” said the district’s center coordinator. But as the center looked for partners, the idea expanded to a full-day conference.

The day started with a morning keynote speaker who talked about the important role that adults play in children’s lives. Following the presentation, participants chose from multiple sessions. Topics included:

- ✦ Safety
- ✦ How boys and girls learn differently
- ✦ Stress management for children
- ✦ The importance of fathers in children’s lives
- ✦ The needs of grieving children
- ✦ Children’s rivalry
- ✦ The power of play

A parenting expert spoke at lunch on the importance of the words we use with children. “He made me think about how I will talk to my own children differently. It is the simple phrases that make the difference,” said one of the 15 teachers who attended. About 65 parents and caregivers joined the teachers, district administrators and community members.

To publicize the conference, the committee created a brochure that it distributed directly to parents through the schools, e-mailed to all school system employees, listed on the Internet and posted in public locations both in and outside of Windsor.

More than 20 Windsor High School students volunteered at the conference, adding some young voices to the conversations. A large group of students from the medical emergencies class conducted the safety workshop. The students took part in the workshops as well as volunteering.

Participants received notebooks, a conference bag, and a water bottle, plus all the information they could carry. Most of them said they were taking home ideas and suggestions that they could apply immediately. One parent was fascinated by the presentation on how boys and girls learn differently. “It is something that we thought about, but never talked about in depth,” he said.

The four sponsoring organizations received a grant to cover some of the expenses and divided the rest. The day cost about \$10,000.

The district plans to expand the conference into a two-day regional meeting that offers parents and professionals more workshops. The district will try to attract more partners to help with costs, and put together multiple tracks (e.g., an in-depth educator/professional track and a parent-track) to attract a larger audience.

This year’s organizers made filling out the evaluation form a particularly sweet experience. Anyone returning a completed survey received a coupon for free Cold Stone Creamery ice cream. Talk about leaving a good taste in your mouth . . .

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