

Parent / Teacher Conference Tips

Parent/Teacher conferences might make you a little nervous. Relax. Teachers do not want to make parents uncomfortable. They just want to meet with the parents from time to time to discuss how to help students do their best in school.

All children learn in different ways. They have their own individual personalities and their own work habits. To help their students learn new knowledge and skills, teachers must know as much as they can about each child's likes and dislikes. No one knows more about these things than you, the parents. And no one has more influence over your children than you. That is why teachers need your help. Working together, you and the teacher can help your child have a successful school experience.

Prepare ahead of time: Why is preparing ahead of time is so important?

- Both parent and teacher gain maximum benefits.
- Demonstrates that parent cares enough to think about conference ahead of time.
- Shows respect for teacher's time.
- Think of one or two compliments that you can sincerely give to the teacher.

Steps to take before the conference

- **Schedule your appointment early** – if you sign up early, you are more likely to get an appointment that works for both you and your husband/partner.
- If possible, go to the conference together. Single parents might ask a relative, friend or someone who shares responsibility for the child to accompany them. This lets your teacher know that you both are involved in your child's education.
- You can compare notes on what you heard and look over how to deal with the information when you get home.

Ask your child how things are going at school. (The teacher may ask you to conference with your child present.)

- Make sure your child does not worry about the meeting. Help him understand that you and their teacher are meeting together in order to help.
- Find out what they think are their best subjects and what subjects they like least. Find out why?
- What do you like best about school?
- If you could change anything about school, what would it be?
- Are there any kids in school you have trouble getting along with?
- What would you like me to ask your teacher?

Write down your questions

- There is a lot to talk about, in a very limited time.
- It may be hard to remember what you wanted to say once you are there.
- Make notes about your child's life at home-anything that will help the teacher know your child better.
- Send your questions to school beforehand.
- If our spouse cannot attend the conference with you, ask for his/her concerns and questions.
- It's a good idea to ask your most important questions first, just in case time runs out.
- Ask the teacher for specific suggestions on ways to help your child do better. This is the most important part of the meeting. It will become your action plan.

Start the conference right:

- **Be on time:** Plan not to run over the amount of time that has been set aside.
- **Relax and stay calm:** The best conferences are those in which both teachers and parents stay calm and try hard to work together for one purpose –to help your child do well. Arguing or blaming each other for problems helps no one.
- **Take a notepad and a pen:** Write down notes that will jog your memory later.

How to make the most of your conference

- Stick to talking about your child.
- Conferences last only minutes. Avoid using the time to ask questions about basic school policies. Use the school handbook, the web site, or someone in the office for this.
- This is your chance to get detailed feedback on your child. If you have a specific question or issue that doesn't come up, don't hesitate to ask. The teacher may not realize that you are concerned about a specific issue. You know your child best, so take the initiative.

Establish a rapport with the teacher:

- Make a connection early in the year. Volunteer to help out by preparing things at home for the classroom or working in class or chaperoning on a field trip.
- Ask about any questions or concerns when you first notice them. Call or send in a note.
- At the conference, get off on the right foot- first listen to what the teacher has to say. Base your questions on what is said.

Try not to get defensive.

- Every parent wants to hear how wonderful his or her child is – and the teacher should tell you about your child’s special skills and achievements.
- The main function of conferences is to point out areas where your child has room to develop. The teacher may even suggest testing, special classes, or some changes behavior. Keep in mind that this is a part of all parent/teacher conferences.
- Fight the urge to argue with the teacher or dismiss her comments. The point of this meeting is to get an assessment of how your child is doing in school and to look for ways you can help him.
- Remind yourself that the teacher is on your side and the two of you have the same goal.... To help your child learn all that he can.

Size up the social scene

- How well your child fits in socially can have an affect on how well he learns.
- Ask the teacher how your child gets along with other students and other staff.

Give the teacher relevant information:

- Hobbies, special interests and abilities
- Child’s responsibilities at home
- The type of discipline that works best with your child a home
- Let the teacher know of any changes in the home. A new baby, a divorce, or a death in the family could affect the way your child behaves in the classroom.
- Resist the urge to talk about his successes outside of school. As much fun as it is to tell cute stories, this meeting is about assessing your child’s academic progress.

Leave with an action plan

Before you shake hands and say goodbye, find out the best way to follow up with the teacher. You may think of other questions later, so find out the best way to ask them.

- Can you call her?
- Does he have an e-mail address you can use?
- As the conference ends, review any decisions that you’ve made together.
- If you feel it’s necessary, request another meeting.

What to do after the conference

- Tell your child how it went. Pass on praise – yours and the teacher’s, before bringing up any issues of concern.
- Follow up on anything your child talked about before the meeting. Following up like this gives your child a sense that he is heard and that you will take his concerns seriously. Laying the groundwork now will make it easier for him to confide in you as he gets older.
- Stay in touch with the teacher. Now that you have opened the door to communication, don’t wait for the next conference to talk. Call her in a few weeks and update her on something you talked about during the conference. Just like any budding relationship, this one needs to be nurtured.
- Start immediately on the action plan you and the teacher worked out together. Discuss the plan with your child. Make sure he/she knows that you and the teacher care. To see if the action plan is working, watch your child’s behavior and check your child’s classwork and homework.

Meeting with your child’s teacher should help build strong parent-teacher partnerships – partnerships that are needed if you and your child’s teachers are to reach your common goal of helping our child get the best education possible.

You can help your child learn by showing an interest. Parent-teacher conferences give you the chance to show you care what your child is learning.