

Tips for Parents: Parent-Teacher Conferences

You consult with your doctor about your child's physical health. It's just as important to consult with your child's teacher about academic subjects, social skills and emotional development. Remember, you and the teacher are a team—working together.

- **A conference should not be a confrontation.** A parent-teacher conference is not an opportunity to list all the deficiencies you see in the teacher, the classroom, and the school system. Nor should it be a time when the teacher lists your failings as a parent and your child's failings as a student.
- **The conference is an information exchange.** You bring to the conference information about your child's interaction with people outside of school, his home life, and previous experiences that might affect confidence or interest in school. The teacher brings information about your child's interaction with others in school, performance on tests, and knowledge of learning strategies. Pooling your information gives you both a better picture of your child's strengths and weaknesses, and lets you develop an effective plan for helping your child succeed.
- **Conferences help you become a more effective parent.** If your child is really learning "nothing" and never has any homework, you need to know why. Your child may not understand the class work, she may have vision or hearing problems, or she may be "tuning out" subjects that don't interest her. The "no homework" syndrome may be the result of work that is too easy and quickly done; something more challenging may be called for. Perhaps your child doesn't understand the importance of homework or is avoiding the responsibility of completing it.
- **You may initiate a conference with the teacher.** You don't have to wait for an invitation. If the standard answer to "What did you learn in school today?" is "Nothing", then it's time for a meeting. If your child is fearful of school or is frequently sick, get together with the teacher to find out why.
- **The conference makes the teacher more effective.** Knowing that "my child is fascinated by stars" may give the teacher the means to excite interest in reading. The more the teacher knows about your child, the better the child's needs will be addressed.
- **Parent-teacher conferences let you take part in your child's education.** Knowing what is being taught at school lets you direct the conversation in your family to issues being studied in school. Such reinforcement of school work at home makes a big difference in your child's understanding, motivation, and school performance.

Follow these tips to make your conference more effective:

- **Prepare questions in advance.** What groups has my child been assigned to? Is my child finishing the work assigned in class? The most important question of all is “How can I help my child at home?”
- **Let the teacher know if there is a particular topic you want to discuss.** If you want to talk about your child’s progress in reading, let the teacher know. He’ll be able to have test scores, textbooks, and other material on hand to aid your discussion.
- **Be specific.** Bring with you any work that is of concern. Describe clearly any situations in the classroom that make your child uneasy. Ask the teacher to describe your child’s strengths and weaknesses. Ask to see your child’s work.
- **Exchange information.** Let the teacher know about any situation at home that may affect your child’s school work, such as a death in the family, a new baby, or a change in daycare arrangements.
- **Take notes.** Your conference may result in several actions for both you and the teacher. Taking notes will help you remember what was discussed and what was agreed upon.
- **Start with a positive attitude.** Don’t waste valuable conference time by focusing on the negative. You and the teacher are a team. Positive comments such as “How can we solve this problem working together?” will be the first step in coming up with good solutions.
- **Support yourself.** If you are not confident about your communications skills, bring someone to help. If your understanding of English worries you, bring a friend to translate.
- **Discuss the whole child.** Your child’s social and emotional development is as important as academic success. Include questions about her interaction with other children and willingness to participate in class discussions.
- **Allow enough time.** Take time to do the task well. That may mean freeing up your schedule by taking vacation time to attend the conference.
- **Leave with a plan.** The conference should end with a clear statement of what you will do and what the teacher will do. Schedule follow-up meetings or telephone calls to be sure the plan is working.

For more information:

Web Brochures:

PTA, “Making Parent-Teacher Conferences Work for Your Child”.

<http://www.pta.org/2532.htm>

Rochford, Marilou. “Preparing for Parent-Teacher Conferences.” Rutgers Cooperative.

<http://www.rce.rutgers.edu/pubs/publication.asp?pid=FS923>

Videos:

IOX Assessment Associates. “Talking With your Child’s Teacher: Tips for Parents.”

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