



Make parent-teacher conferences work for you and your child

You've been invited to confer with your child's teacher. Is your first reaction, "What's my child done wrong?" In all probability she or he has done nothing wrong.

Schools today are relying more and more on conferences to supplement report cards and other written forms of communication between parents and teachers. Teachers realize that they cannot do the best possible job of educating each child without the help of the child's parents.

Two-way communications are very valuable. The parent can supply information about the child that is very important to the educational process. The teachers can offer suggestions on how parents can help with that process at home. The best way to discuss such matters is in an informal face-to-face meeting. It gives both you and the teacher an opportunity for full exploration of your child's progress at school.

Is your next reaction uncertainty? "What will I be asked? What should I ask?" Or, do you put the whole thing out of your mind until the conference, letting the chips fall where they may?

Teachers spend considerable time preparing for the conference. They gather records, select samples of work, and analyze how best to maximize your child's success. You, too, should prepare for the conference by knowing what to expect and then following-up with actions afterwards. Here are some suggestions for making your parent-teacher conference successful.

Before the Conference

Once you have responded to the teacher's invitation, you should prepare yourself in the following manner:

Decide what you want to ask the teacher.

Discuss the forthcoming conference with your child to see if there is anything she/he would like you to talk about with the teacher. Check with your spouse about additional questions or concerns. Ideally, both parents should attend the conference.

Determine what you want to tell the teacher about your child.

The teacher sees only one side of your child. There may be things you know about your child that could help the teacher better understand and teach her/him.

If you have young children, please get a baby-sitter.

Normally, don't bring younger brothers or sisters to the conference. They may not only be disruptive, but they may repeat what they hear.

Be on time.

Write down the time of your appointment and arrive on time. The teacher may have many other appointments after yours.

The individual conference

Some conferences are of a problem solving nature. They are held to seek ways of improving your child's success in school. But, in many schools, teachers schedule conferences with parents as a routine procedure, regardless of whether the child is having problems. The individual conference provides a chance for you and the teacher to discuss the progress and potential of your child. You might ask:

- Is my child working up to her/his ability? (more)

- What materials are being used?
- May I see an example of some of her/his work? Is she/he prepared for class?
- Has she/he shown any special interest or ability?
- How does the child get along with her/his peers?
- What about participation in group activities?
- Does she/he show any leadership qualities?
- Are there discipline problems?
- How can I help?

The teacher, too, may have some questions - not trying to pry, but trying to obtain information that will help her/him work better with your child. Be ready to discuss such areas as:

- Your child's reaction to school.
- Health and emotional problems.
- Hobbies, special interests, and abilities.
- Homework - when and where.
- Rules and responsibilities at home.
- The type of discipline that works best at home.

Ask the teacher how you can help at home with any problem areas. Jot down notes at the conference or immediately after. If you know another parent conference follows yours, please leave promptly when the teacher indicates the conference is concluded. If you feel additional time is needed, make an appointment to continue the conference.

After the Conference

If you forget about what was discussed during the conference when you leave the school, it isn't likely to have any positive results. The most important part in your role in the conference begins now!

Discuss the conference with your child.

First point out her/his strengths. Then talk about the areas that need improvement.

Start immediately on any action to be taken.

Did the teacher recommend books for your child to read? Did she/he suggest a better arrangement for studying at home? Did she/he propose getting outside

help in a special area? Begin at once to follow through with the plan you and the teacher discussed.

Call the school for advice, help or just information.

If you wish to check on your child's progress or if you think another conference is necessary, call your child's teacher. Teachers value such interest on the part of parents.

Make sure your child understands that you and the teacher are working together in her/his interest.

The child should know that you and the teacher are in a partnership with the sole aim of helping her/him get the best education possible.

Your caring makes a teacher's caring mean so much more. Caring is more than a matter of love and dedication. Your child's teachers have plenty of both. But a teacher's caring alone is not enough.

You need to be involved, interested, and concerned. Then, and only then, can your children get the most out of the caring their teachers give them.

*Teachers and parents:
The more we work together,
The more we help our children!*



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