

Parent-Teacher Conference Workshop

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How to prepare for the conference

How to handle the conference

How to follow-up on the conference

Preparation for the Conference

1. Determine the type of conference: goal-setting, progress report, or special need (social, emotional, or academic concerns).
2. Determine the teacher you want to meet with for the conference.
3. If possible, schedule the conference when both parents are able to attend.
4. Determine the time allotted for the conference – some schools assign a 20 minute or 30 minute period for initial conferences.
5. Determine if the student is to be present.
6. Before the conference write down any questions you have for the teacher. If both parents are attending the conference, review and discuss your questions together prior to the meeting.
7. If it is a goal conference, take the time to write three goals you have for your child.
8. Remember a conference is a learning experience – a time to listen and understand the teacher and a time for the teacher to listen and understand you and your concerns.
9. If the child is going to be present for the conference, review some guidelines with him/her: sitting still, maintaining eye contact with the person speaking, listening carefully, and speaking clearly if asked a question. Remember many students are very nervous having a teacher conference.

The Parent Conference / The Parent and Student Conference

1. Be on time – Do not delay the conference if spouse is late.
2. Introduce yourselves.
3. Share a positive comment about how your child feels about school, the teacher, or the grade level.
4. Have a notepad ready for notes.
5. Let the teacher take the lead unless you have requested the conference for a specific reason. Listen very carefully to what the teacher shares.
6. If there is something you don't understand, ask the teacher to please clarify.
7. If the teacher has concerns over an area or behavior, ask for examples to help you understand.
8. Ask what actions or strategies the teacher recommends using in school or at home to address the concern.
9. Remember – The conference is about your child. Stay focused on your child's agenda.

10. Don't make excuses for your child. Instead explain to the teacher your child's schedule, concerns, etc. and ask for guidance.
11. Do not share anything that would embarrass your child.
12. If you are uncomfortable about sharing any information, always ask the teacher if he/she will keep the information confidential. Do this before you share the information.
13. If the teacher gives the promise of confidentially, it can be very helpful to share any difficulties at home – separation, loss of job, death, illness of close family member.
14. Don't discount comments made by your spouse. You both need to be on the same page.
15. Keep asking – “What do you suggest?”
16. Keep communication cordial and collaborative.
17. End the conference with a specific action plan (if needed).
 1. Is there a need for a follow-up conference, a conference with the child present, or a telephone conference?
 2. Is everyone clear on the actions to be taken?
 3. If you are asking for weekly or biweekly feedback, decide on a method that is easy for the teacher. A telephone call initiated by parent, etc.
18. At the end of the conference thank the teacher for his/her time.

Follow-up after Conference

Ask for follow-up, if you feel it is necessary.

Parent initiated follow-up:

1. Parent offers to call in two weeks to check on progress in area discussed.
2. Parent sends in a note or form the teacher can easily check off to respond.
3. Give the teacher two days to respond and then follow-up with a telephone call.
4. Don't ask the teacher for a progress report in all areas. It is difficult to do and very time consuming.

Follow-up conference with child present:

1. Invite your child to be present if there are any areas of miscommunication – homework, report due dates, test dates, etc.
2. Include your child if there are organizational issues.
3. Acknowledge your child may be nervous and/or scared. Explain you, the teacher, and student are a team who works together to make school a safe place to learn. Acknowledge your child's courage for being present and responding.
4. Ignore behaviors you cannot change. Example: nervous behavior
5. When strategies or plans have been given, have your child verbally explain to you and the teacher exactly what he/she is to do.
6. Take notes to help your child remember.
7. When conference ends, praise your child for being part of the conference.
8. Thank the teacher for his/her time.

Additional guidelines for Parent Conferences

Research the school's policy for parent conferences.

If you have a concern always go to the teacher first. It is important to understand the situation and hear the teacher's perspective. If you are still not satisfied, ask the school who you should talk to after the conference with the teacher.

If you have a specific question regarding homework or academic achievement, contact the subject teacher.

If your child is afraid to talk to the teacher, offer your child the opportunity to go with you and then you can model the healthiest way to address a concern. Try to help your child express how he/she feels. Remember to be specific.

Never Forget

You are your child's greatest advocate.

and

If your child is struggling in any way, it is not a sign that you are a failure as a parent.