



## **Tips for Parent-Teacher Conferences**

Parent-teacher conferences need not be the nerve-wracking, conflict-provoking experiences they sometimes turn out to be. In fact, these conferences are much more successful when both parent and teacher prepare properly and share a common goal: to help the student succeed. Here are some suggestions for parents as they prepare for the conference.

### **Before the conference**

1. Talk to your child. Determine his attitudes and perceptions of school. Ask him how he thinks he is doing, what his best subjects are, what subjects he likes least, how he gets along with the teacher and other students. Ask him if there is anything he would like you to ask his teacher.
2. Write down your questions and/or concerns. You may want to ask about school practices or policies, curriculum content, your child's performance and progress, her attitude and behavior in class, and how you can support her schoolwork. In addition, jot some notes about your child's home life, her temperament, habits, interests and problems. Be prepared to share relevant information about your child and family with the teacher.
3. Discuss your questions and concerns with your spouse. If you plan to attend together, reach some agreement about the key issues. (You don't want to be arguing with each other about these issues during the conference,) If your spouse can't attend, ask for his or her questions and concerns.
4. Be on time. A teacher's schedule for conferences limits each parent to a set amount of time. Try not to stay longer than the allotted time. It may cut into another parent's time.
5. Relax. While it's natural to be nervous, there is no reason to be afraid of or anxious. Some parents have unpleasant memories about school that make them uncomfortable in the presence of teachers. Remember, the two of you share the same goal: to help your child succeed in school.

### **During the conference**

1. Ask the teacher for specific suggestions how you can help your child do better.

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2. Share any information about your child that you think the teacher should know. It is especially important that you inform the teacher of any family crisis or other stressful event that may be affecting your child's disposition or behavior.
3. Listen respectfully.
4. If you don't understand something the teacher has said, don't be shy about asking for an explanation.
5. Try not to become defensive or argumentative.
6. Don't put your child down and don't let the teacher do it. Focus on his strengths even if there are obvious shortcomings.
7. Show appreciation for the teacher's efforts. Mention specific instances when the teacher has been helpful or positive. Too often, teachers only hear complaints or problems.
8. Conclude the conference by summarizing the decisions you made together. Agree to contact the teacher in the near future to review progress.

#### **After the conference**

1. Start your action plan right away.
2. Share your plans with the child. Let him know that you and his teacher care.
3. Monitor your child's progress.
4. Stay in touch with the teacher.

#### **Questions to ask**

- How well does my child get along with others?
- What are his strongest and weakest subjects?
- Is she working up to her ability?
- Does he participate in class discussions and activities?
- Have you noticed any sudden changes in the way she acts?
- What kinds of tests are being used? How does he handle test taking?
- What will she be learning in different curriculum areas during the year?
- Is he performing at or above grade level?
- Does she need special help in any subject? Where can I get the help needed?
- Are there any discipline problems?
- How are his work habits and attitudes?
- Does she seem to enjoy school?
- What should my role be in regard to homework?
- May I visit the class?
- In what other ways can I become involved?

Source: Tim Jahn, Human Development Specialist, at Cornell Cooperative Extension of Suffolk County. **Parent Pages** was developed by Cornell Cooperative Extension of Suffolk County.