

Successful Parent-Teacher Conferences:

A GROUP EFFORT





Parent-teacher conferences are a fact of life in every school - and have great importance. When well-planned and well-conducted, they serve as one of the most effective communication tools a school has with its families. Parents, teachers, and administrators all have a share in making conferences a success. When everyone does his or her part, conferences run smoothly and the end result is always positive.

Tips for Parents



1. **Contact the teacher** prior to the conference. Ask who will attend and what issues will be discussed.

2. **Prepare.** Write down topics you would like to discuss, and specific questions you would like to have answered. Number

the questions based on their importance and ask your most important questions first, just in case time runs out before you have a chance to discuss them all.

3. **Ask your child** if there are topics he or she would like to have discussed. If so, remember that the "facts" about the situation relayed to you by your child are coming through a child's perspective.

4. **Be on time** and respect time limits. Teachers have tight schedules; arrive five minutes early so you can collect your thoughts and begin the conference on time. Avoid wasting time with subjects that have nothing to do with your child.

5. **Don't bring the student** or other children to the conference unless this is a special request made by the teacher.

6. **Be honest** with teachers and make your concerns fully known. Relax and remain calm.

7. **Try to be open-minded** to comments or suggestions that the teacher makes. Listen first, reflect, and then act.

8. **Keep your emotions under control.** It's okay to feel defensive on behalf of your child, but act as an advocate, not an excuse-maker.

9. **Ask for specific suggestions.** Take notes so that you can share this information with your child.

10. **Remember that you and the teacher are on the same side!**

11. **Express appreciation** for the teacher's time and energy. Saying "thank you" can go a long way! Show your appreciation by asking what you can do to help continue the learning process at home.

Tips for Teachers



1. **Encourage both parents to attend** conferences when possible. Misunderstandings are less common when both parents hear what you have to say.

2. **Prepare parents.** Avoid surprises (especially unpleasant ones) by contacting parents in advance through letters, e-mails, or phone calls to inform them of the topics that will be discussed. Ask them if there are specific problems or situations they wish to address.

3. **Be prepared.** Prepare a mutual agenda for parents (based on what you both want to cover), and have your papers organized in advance: grade book, test papers, samples of the student's work, attendance records, and other pertinent data. Spend a few moments brainstorming questions the parents may ask, and prepare answers ahead of time.

4. **Schedule enough time.** Usually 20 to 40 minutes is sufficient. Allow a 10-minute break between conferences in case you run over a couple of minutes. Make sure the parents are well aware of the time limit so they won't waste any time with idle talk.

5. **Get the name right!** Just because little Joey's last name is Brown, doesn't mean that Brown is the last name of either of his parents (or guardians). Find out the name and the proper pronunciation before you meet with the parents.

6. **Be honest,** especially when you are struggling with a child, and encourage parental honesty.

7. **Use descriptive language** and be specific. Instead of saying "He has a problem accepting responsibility," pin down the problem by pointing out that "Joey has turned in homework assignments late four times in the last two weeks."

8. **Avoid judgmental terms.** Refrain from offering "parenting tips" or suggestions on how the parents could better raise their child. Pay close attention to

your words, as you don't ever want to sound like you're judging a parent's ability.

9. **Ask for parents' opinions.** Let them know you're interested in their opinions and are eager to answer their questions!

10. **Be a good listener.** If you ask questions and then seem uninterested in the response, parents will grow frustrated. Remember that body language can also show whether or not you're truly interested in what a parent has to say.

11. **Choose a comfortable, circular arrangement.** Avoid sitting behind a desk. This can make the parents feel less comfortable, and can create an unnecessarily rigid atmosphere.

12. **Stress collaboration.** Let the parents know you want to work together in the best interests of the child. A statement like "You need to see me as soon as possible to discuss Jessica's poor study habits" only arouses hostility, while "I'd like to discuss with you how we might work together to improve Jessica's study habits" gets the relationship off on the right foot.

13. **Focus on solutions.** Ideally all parent conferences would concern only positive events. Realistically, many conferences are held because there's a problem. Focusing on solutions rather than on the child's problem will help the conference to remain positive. Discuss what you and the parents can do to help improve the situation. Plan a course of action together.

14. **Don't judge.** It may not always be possible to react neutrally to what parents say, but communicating your judgments of parents' behaviors can be a roadblock to a productive relationship with them.

15. **Summarize.** Before the conference ends, summarize the discussion and what actions you and the parents have decided to take.

16. **End on a positive note.** Thank the parents for their time and effort.

Tips for Administrators



Help make Parent-Teacher conferences a success - and everyone happy!

1. Brief new faculty before parent conferences, and debrief them after.

2. Educate parents right from the start. Ask the Admission Office to begin the

process of educating parents about the nature of the school and about the expectations of the parent-teacher relationship from the earliest stages of acceptance.

3. Request that teachers report complaints about other faculty members to the Head. If intervention between parents and a teacher is necessary, it should be handled by the Head of School, and not the teacher himself.

4. "Red flag" chronically angry or critical parents. An administrator should regularly attend parent-teacher conferences with "red flag" parents.

5. Encourage teachers to prepare and rehearse for conferences, especially if any potentially negative issues are on the agenda.

6. Educate teachers, parents, and administrators about the chain of command and communication in your school. Repeat every year!

For more information on conferences:

Parent-Teacher Conference Tips by TeacherZone.com.

27 Tips for Parent Communication by Inspiringteachers.com.

Suggestions for Successful Parent Conferences by the Kansas National Education Association