

Better Parent-Teacher Conferences: A Guide for Parents

A school system without parents at its foundation is just like a bucket with a hole in it ... Jesse Jackson

As a parent, you want the best education for your child. There are many ways you can help. One way is through parent- teacher conferences.

When mothers, fathers and teachers work as a team, each person can share what he or she knows about the child. Each person can help put together the picture of the total child. A child at school can be very different from the same child at home.

In a good parent-teacher conference, parents and teachers learn something new about the child. You have much to share, and this is helpful to the teacher. Your insight and experience with your child is important information that the teacher needs. Here are some things that may be helpful to share:

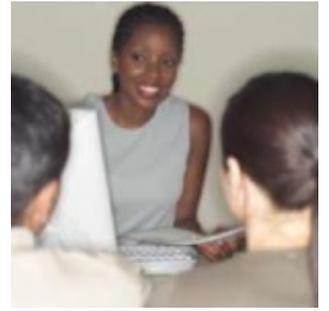
- Your child's favorite activities and interests.
- Three school activities your child has enjoyed in the past.
- Three things your child disliked in school in the past.
- Information you think the teacher should know to make school a more positive experience for your child.

Getting ready

- Try to take another adult along with you to the conference. When a teacher meets only one parent, she may not get a complete picture of the child. Think of what other adult knows your child well (his other parent, a grandparent, aunt, daycare provider, etc.). Ask this person to join the conference. Each person (teacher, mother, grandmother) has a special relationship with the child, and will be able to provide information that will help in understanding your child.
- Take notes during the meeting. During a parent-teacher conference, much is discussed. It may be difficult to remember it all later. Take some paper and a pen with you to jot down what is said. Review what you have written down with the teacher before you leave to make sure you both agree. You may want to offer the teacher a copy of your notes so that you both have a record of what was discussed.
- You may find it helpful to ask the teacher to send home samples of your child's work before the conference. This will give you time to look it over carefully, and make a list of questions before the meeting.



You want to ask questions — But how? You may want to find out more about how your child is doing in school, but feel uncomfortable asking questions of the teacher. Remember, you have the right to know about your child. Asking questions is one of the best ways to find out.



Questions about School Adjustment

Before attending a parent-teacher conference, decide what concerns you most about your child's school behavior. You may want to ask questions about your child's interests, eagerness to learn, and attitude toward school. Can your child get along with other children and adults? Does your child work well in a group?

Write down your questions so you'll remember them. For example:

- Is Jayden confident and friendly with other children? Ask the teacher to discuss examples of this behavior.
- Does Emma work best in a large or small group? How does her behavior change when she is in a large group?
- Does Jose talk with other children often? What does he talk about? Does he seem to stay away from certain children?

Questions about reading

Parents seem most concerned about reading.

You'll probably want to know what your child is learning, how the material is being taught, and how well your child is doing.

Be ready with good questions. The following sample questions can help you get the information you want:

- What kind of reading is easiest for Ava?
- Where is Noah having the most trouble?
- How well does Alesha use her reading skills?



You may want to understand the school's reading program better. For example, you could ask:

- May I see Jacob's reading book?
- What reading skills are stressed in this program?
- How is Mia doing in these areas?
- How do you use this book? What is Bill expected to do?

You might also ask some questions about reading scores:

- How was this test given? What was Tanya supposed to do?
- Has Tony had this test before? How do his scores compare?
- How do Maria's scores compare with how well she actually reads?

Although skill and test scores are important, how well a child actually reads every day is the best sign of reading ability. You might ask:

- Is the work too hard or too easy for Jason?

- Does Erin join in often? Does she volunteer in class?
- Does Madison work well with others in her group?
- Can Jorge work alone?

Helping at Home

If you want to help your child at home, ask the teacher for suggestions about what you can do to be most effective.

It may take more than one meeting to resolve a problem.

Remember you are your child's best advocate and know your child best. If you are not happy with the teacher conference or feel that an issue has not been resolved, you have the right to:

- Ask for a second conference with the teacher to develop a new plan.
- Ask for a conference with the teacher and the principle.
- Ask for a formal evaluation of your child by the school system.
- Ask for referrals for outside help —such as counseling or tutoring.

Keep in touch. Work with the teachers.

After the conference, keep on supporting your child's teacher and school.

- Be sure to follow through on any ideas you got at the conference.
- By working together, you and your child's teachers can help provide the good education and happy school experience you want for your child.



Remember the importance of breakfast

Giving your child a good breakfast each morning is a great way to help him or her do well in school.

A simple breakfast of cereal, milk and fruit really does make a difference.

- Children are able to pay attention better if they have eaten a good breakfast.
- Children who eat breakfast do much better on tests than those children who come to school without any breakfast.
- Children who eat breakfast have fewer weight problems and lower cholesterol levels.
- "Breakfast eaters" seem to be more aware of good nutrition. They choose more nutritious foods for snacks.

Breakfast can make a big difference for your growing child.

Have a good month!

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