

Tips for Successful Parent-Teacher Conferences at Your Child's School

By: Colorín Colorado (2007)



Frequently asked questions

What is a parent-teacher conference?

A parent-teacher conference is a meeting between you and your child's teacher to discuss your child's progress in school. Parent-teacher conferences happen in elementary, middle, and high schools. This meeting may take place as part of the regularly-scheduled conferences held by the school each year, or your child's teacher may contact you to schedule a meeting at other times during the school year.

You can also request a conference with your child's teacher if you have questions or concerns about your child by contacting the teacher to set up a meeting.

Why does my child's teacher want to meet with me?

In the U.S. educational system, teachers believe that a strong partnership between the home and school will help children succeed in school. If your child's teacher schedules a meeting with you, it does not necessarily mean that your child is in trouble. Teachers welcome input from the parents about their children, such as information about what the child likes to do or what they are good at. Teachers also understand that each student is different and learns differently, and that no one knows your child better than you do. You may provide some insight that will help the teacher work more effectively with your child at school.

It is also helpful for teachers to know if a child is experiencing a difficult situation outside of school, such as a divorce, the death of a relative, a medical problem, or anything else that may affect the child's mood or behavior. Knowing of such changes will help the teacher provide the child with the necessary support in the classroom.

What information will my child's teacher give me?

Your child's teacher will probably show you some samples of your child's work, and may discuss your child's progress, grades, homework, and behavior. The teacher may also ask you about any concerns that she has about your child, as well as questions about his study habits. These questions are intended to help the teacher provide your child with any additional support needed in the classroom, and are not intended to make you feel uncomfortable or defensive.

Why is it important to go to a parent-teacher conference?

Going to the parent-teacher conference provides you and the teacher an opportunity to work together as a team in order to help your child. You each have an important perspective to share — as the parent, you know your child's personality, habits, strengths, and weaknesses. The teacher, on the other hand, has been trained professionally in the best methods of teaching, meeting individual student's needs, how to control classroom behavior, and how to help your child succeed in school. Working together you will be able to find ways that each of you can provide the appropriate and necessary support for your child.

The conference is also an opportunity for you to ask questions about your child's progress, to learn more about the class and what the students are studying, and to find out if your child is having difficulty with anything in particular. In addition, the more you know about your children's school and classes, the more likely they will be to talk about daily experiences with you. They will appreciate your concern and involvement, and they will be more likely to approach you when they have problems.

Before the conference

The conference with your child's teacher will be more efficient and productive if you do some preparation beforehand. To prepare for the conference:

Talk with your child

Ask your child what his/her strongest and weakest subjects are, and which subjects he/she likes most and least. Ask your child if he/she would like you to speak about anything particular with the teacher. Make sure that your child understands that you and the teacher are meeting to help him, so that he doesn't worry about the conference.

Prepare a list of notes

Make a list of topics that you want to discuss with the teacher and that you think the teacher should know, such as your concerns about the school, the child's home life, any major changes in your family, habits, hobbies, part-time jobs, religious holidays, or anything that is worrying your child. Be sure to ask for input from your spouse or other adults that are caring for your child as well.

Prepare a list of questions

Preparing a list of questions will help you have a productive conversation with your child's teacher. Prioritize the questions in case you run out of time during the conference.

The following questions are examples that will help you learn more about your child's progress in school:

1. What are my child's strongest and weakest subjects?
2. What are some examples of these strengths and weaknesses?
3. Does my child hand homework in on time?

4. What types of tests and evaluations will my child have to take this year?
5. How are my child's test-taking skills?
6. Is my child participating in class discussions and activities?
7. How are my child's social skills?
8. Does my child seem happy at school?
9. Have you noticed any unusual behaviors?
10. Do you think my child is reaching his/her potential?
11. What can I do at home to help support his/her academic progress?

If your child receives special services (gifted programs, special education, English classes, speech or occupational therapy, or support for a learning disability), ask about the frequency of these services and about your child's progress with them.

During the conference

Be on time

Get off to the right start: come to the conference on time. Remember that other parents may also have conferences scheduled for that day; if you arrive late, you have may missed your conference altogether. You should also plan on ending the conference at the scheduled time so that other parents can start their conference on time.

Be yourself

Relax and be yourself. Remember that you and the teacher both the want the same thing: the very best for your child.

Stay calm

Stay calm during the conference. Respectful communication will be the most effective way to work together with your child's teacher. Getting angry or upset during the conference will make it very difficult to have a positive conversation.

Ask for explanations of anything you don't understand

Listen carefully to what the teacher says. If you don't understand something that the teacher talks about (such as an educational term or an explanation of a school policy), don't be afraid to ask for clarification. It is important for you to understand what your child's teacher is telling you.

Ask the most important questions early in the conference

Ask the most important questions first as you may run out of time, especially if other parents are waiting to have their conference after yours. You can always schedule another meeting with the teacher to cover any points you didn't cover.

Respectfully discuss differences of opinion

If you disagree with the teacher, respectfully explain why you disagree. If you don't let the teacher know about your differences of opinion, the teacher may think that you agree and will move on to the next topic. Discussing your differences with the teacher may help both of you find a more effective way to help your child.

Create an action plan

Ask your child's teacher for specific suggestions of ways that you can help your child at home with homework, reading, organization, routines, behavioral issues, etc. Make sure you understand the teacher's suggestions, and ask for clarification if you don't. This list of suggestions will become the action plan. Establish a way to keep track of the child's progress, as well as the best way to stay in touch with your child's teacher — through phone calls, emails, notes, or meetings. Review the action plan with the teacher as you end the conference to make sure that you both have the same expectations.

Thank the teacher for meeting with you

Thank the teacher for her time and support of your child, as well as for anything specific that she has done to help your child.

After the conference

Talk with your child

Talk about the conference with your child. Emphasize the positive points, and be direct about problems that were discussed. If you and the teacher created an action plan, explain it to your child. Make sure that your child understands that you and the teacher created this plan to help him.

Start working on the action plan

Set the action plan in motion. To ensure that it is working, check your child's behavior and schoolwork on a regular basis. Ask your child how he feels about school and his schoolwork.

Keep in touch with the teacher

Stay in touch with your child's teachers. This will help you strengthen the parent-teacher partnership, and will be an important part of the child's success in school. When a child sees that parents and teachers are working together, the child will understand that his/her education is a top priority at school and at home.

References

Click the "References" link above to hide these references.

"Making Parent-Teacher Conferences Work for Your Child." The National PTA, National Education Association of the United States, Stock No. 5174-2. Copyright © 1987. <http://www.nea.org/parents/ptconf.html>

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<http://www.lake.k12.fl.us/LCSPortal/ForParents/Informaci%C3%B3nParaLosPadres/Qu%C3%A9EsLaConferenciaPadresMaestros/tabid/206/Default.aspx>

"Familias aprenden más sobre el rendimiento de sus estudiantes en las conferencias de maestros y padres." Bellevue School District. <http://www.bsd405.org/default.aspx?tabID=1426>

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