

Home-School Conferences - A Guide for Parents

Erin Stark, Ed.S.
School Psychologist

Research has proven that when parents and teachers work together, everyone benefits: Students tend to earn higher grades, perform better on tests, attend school more regularly, have better behavior, and show more positive attitudes toward themselves and toward school. However, if parents have experienced difficulty in school, then they may have to overcome negative feelings that carry over from their own childhood. If parents are new to the community, come from another culture, or do not speak fluent English, then they may feel overwhelmed by the prospect of attending a conference with their child's teacher or participating in a Family Night or School Open House. Even if you have talked frequently with school personnel about your child's failing grades or misbehavior, a conference may be an opportunity to start a cooperative partnership with teachers.

Preparing for the Parent-Teacher Conference

- *Assemble relevant materials.* This can include records from previous schools and school years, such as report cards, test scores, immunization and other health records, and past and current correspondence between home and school.
- *Review these materials.* If anything important is missing, such as a report from your family physician, try to locate it and add to your file.
- *Talk with your child before the conference.* Children should understand why the conference is taking place and be assured that parents are seeking ways to help and learn about what their children are doing in school.
- *Acquire the handbook for students.* Be sure to obtain a copy well ahead of the conference and review it. Look for listings of expectations for behavior and attendance so that you might anticipate what questions the teacher may ask of you.
- *Be familiar with your child's homework assignments.* Is the work getting done? Does your child seem to understand the assignments? Does the work seem too easy or too difficult?
- *Prepare a list of questions you want to ask your child's teacher.* Is my child meeting the expectations for learning and behavior? If my child is struggling in any area, what has been tried to improve performance?
- *Referral to special education.* If you or the teacher has concerns about referral to special education, find out about your rights ahead of time.
- *Be ready to collaborate.* Assume the teacher has your child's best interests in mind and indicate that you are most concerned with solving the problem and helping your child succeed.

During the Conference

- *Listen carefully.* It is perfectly acceptable to take notes. It can help you remember details so that you can ask questions later.
- *Offer your perspective.* Even if the teacher does not ask, speak up and provide your observations and any concerns.
- *You want to hear good news about your child.* If the teacher does not offer any positive comments, ask directly, "What does my child do well?"
- *Do not be afraid to ask questions.* If you do not understand something or feel your concerns are not being addressed, then ask the teacher.

Resources

- Parent Advocacy Coalition for Education Rights (PACER)- www.pacer.org
- The National Parenting Center- www.tnpc.com

Adapted from handout by Andrea Canter, PhD, NCSP based on an article provided by NASP posting in October 2002. For additional resources, please contact your school psychologist or visit www.nasponline.org.