

Tips for a Successful Parent-Teacher Conference

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 – Your time is short.

Make a list of your child's teachers. 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, 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:

- What is my child expected to learn this year?
- How will this be evaluated?
- What are my child's strongest and weakest subjects?
- What are some examples of these strengths and weaknesses?
- Does my child hand homework in on time?
- What types of tests and evaluations will my child have to take this year?
- Is my child participating in class discussions and activities?
- Does my child seem happy at school?
- Have you noticed any unusual behaviors?
- Has my child missed any classes other than his/her excused absences?
- Do you think my child is reaching his/her potential?
- What can I do at home to help support his/her academic progress?

During the conference

Arrive as early as possible

Remember that other parents will also be at the conferences; if you arrive late, you may have to wait your turn in line.

Introduce yourself by using your name and your child's name.

Your child's teacher will be talking to many parents during the conferences; your introduction will allow them to focus immediately on your child.

Be respectful of the time you have

There will be many parents wanting the teacher's time during the conferences. His/Her time is limited for the evening. If after the allotted time, you still have questions or concerns, please make arrangements with the teacher to meet again.

Be yourself

Relax and be yourself. Remember that you and the teacher both 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.

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. Keep track of your child's grades and assignments in PowerSchool. 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.