

Making the Most of Parent Teacher Conferences: Tips for Parents

The most important goal of parent-teacher conferences is to help children succeed in school. These conferences allow you to meet with teachers to *share information* about your child's strengths and discuss any areas of concern. They allow you the opportunity to work together with the teacher to help strengthen your child's skills and address any concerns. The conference can also be used to strengthen your relationship with your child's teacher. A strong relationship allows you to work together more effectively to help your child do well in school.

Since the typical parent-teacher conference often lasts no more than 15-30 minutes, you need to prepare ahead of time to make the best use of this time. The last page of the handout is a "*Parent-Teacher Conference Notes*" sheet that you can use to write down questions to take into the conference and write down information discussed during the conference.

Listed below are some tips on how you can make the most of parent-teacher conferences. These tips are divided into three sections: (1) What to do before the conference; (2) What to do during the conference; and, (3) What to do after the conference.

BEFORE THE CONFERENCE

Talk with your child about school

- Talk with your child before the conference to identify any areas of concern. You might want to tell your child you'll be meeting with his/her teacher soon. Then you could ask questions such as:
 - *What do you like most about the class/teacher?*
 - *What do you like least about the class/teacher?*
 - *What are your favorite subjects in school?*
 - *What subjects are hardest for you?*
 - *What do you think your teacher is going to tell me?*
 - *Is there anything you think I should discuss with your teacher?*

- *Are you having any specific problems in the class?*
- If your child talks negatively about the class or teacher remember you have only heard half of the story. Could your child be overreacting? Try not to overact yourself.

Review your child's schoolwork

- Look over any progress reports, schoolwork, and notes the teacher has sent home.
- Try to identify areas of strength and weakness for your child regarding his/her schoolwork prior to the meeting. This can help you be able to better discuss your child's strengths as well as areas in need of improvement with his/her teacher.

Make a list of questions to ask the teacher

- Prepare a list of questions you want to ask your child's teacher. Write the questions down so you don't forget them. You can use the "Parent-Teacher Conference Notes" sheet at the end of this handout to list questions that you want to ask the teacher. It can be helpful to list the questions in the order of their importance so when you get to the conference you start at the top of the list and work your way down. That way if time runs out you will have asked the most important questions.
- Listed below are examples of some questions you might want to consider asking the teacher:
 - *What do you see as my child's strengths and weaknesses?*
 - *What are my child's strongest and weakest subjects?*
 - *What are the skills and knowledge your students will be expected to master this year?*
 - *How do you evaluate your students?*
 - *Is my child working at grade level in math, reading, and writing? If not: What can I do to help? What school resources are available to help?*
 - *Is my child doing the best he/she can?*
 - *How has my child been doing with daily class work?*

- *How has my child been doing on homework assignments? Are they completed regularly?*
- *How often and for how long should my child be doing homework?*
- *How has my child been doing on tests?*
- *How will I know if my child is doing well? Do you send home progress reports?*
- *What concerns do you have about my child?*
- *How does my child get along with classmates?*
- *How is my child's behavior in the classroom?*
- *Are there any special school programs to suit my child's needs and interests?*
- *What information can I share with you about my child?*
- *I want to be involved in my child's education. How can we best work together?*
- *How can I best support my child's learning at home?*

List issues related to your child that are important for the teacher to know

- No one knows your child better than you do. Let the teacher know information about your child that might help her better understand and teach your child. Important information for you to share with the teacher might include learning style, learning problems, health issues, family changes, and significant stressors that your child has been exposed to (e.g., abuse, a death in the family). You can use the “*Parent-Teacher Conference Notes*” sheet at the end of this handout to write down issues so you won't forget to bring them up during the conference.

Plan ahead how to best raise areas of concern

- Think about how to best bring up areas of concern. Role play or discuss with a family member or friend how you plan to bring up the concern. Ask for their honest feedback on how you might better address the concern with the teacher.

Before leaving for the conference

- Make sure you know the exact location and time.

- Be on time! Make sure you allow enough time to get to the school *before* your scheduled time.
- Try not to bring babies or young children to the conference as they can cause distractions.
- Take a notepad and pen with you to take notes. It may be hard to remember what the teacher says if you don't take notes.
- Remember to take your list of questions!

AT THE CONFERENCE

Ask the questions you think are most important

- Start by asking the teacher the most important questions from your list (take the “*Parent-Teacher Conference Notes*” sheet into the conference with you). You may not have enough time to ask all your questions, so ask your questions in the order of their importance to you.

Share information about your child

- Remember to share the information about your child that you think is important for the teacher to be aware of (remember to write down these issues on the “*Parent-Teacher Conference Notes*” sheet before the conference so you won't forget).

Raise areas of concern

- Be polite and considerate of teachers' feelings if the area of concern involves their teaching. Try to work on solutions to problems rather than placing blame. Let the teacher know you want to work together to find solutions.
- Focus on areas of agreement rather than disagreement. Try to be open-minded about differences you might have with the teacher. Listen to her/his views carefully.

Express your willingness to work cooperatively with the teacher

- Let the teacher know you want to be part of any plan to help your child achieve educational goals.

Ask about the best ways to contact the teacher

- Find out the best way and the best day/time to contact the teacher. Write this information down on the “*Parent-Teacher Conference Notes*” sheet.

Remember the importance of positive communications skills

- Parent-teacher conferences are going to be most successful for your child when the communication between you and the teacher is positive and relaxed. Here are some keys to maintaining good communication.

Relax. Remember both you and the teacher want your child to succeed.

Have a positive attitude. Look for the positives – don’t focus only on the problems.

Have a cooperative attitude. Let the teacher know you want to work together.

Listen carefully. Try to stay focused on what the teacher is saying. Avoid interrupting.

Stay calm. If you get angry the communication with the teacher will break down.

Be solution focused. Avoid being blame focused

Express appreciation. Let teachers know you appreciate their work. It’s not easy.

Develop Action Plans to address areas of concern

- If areas of concern are discussed at the conference also discuss what will help. Develop a specific plan (an Action Plan) with the teacher to address the concern. Try to identify what specific steps can be taken by you, your child, and the teacher. Use the “*Parent-Teacher Notes*” sheet to record what each of you are going to do.

- Discuss with the teacher when you should contact her/him to see if the plan is having a positive impact. Schedule a follow-up conference if needed.

AFTER THE CONFERENCE

Talk to your child

- Discuss with your child what the teacher told you. Focus on the positive things the teacher said. Talk about areas where improvement is needed and the specific steps that need to be taken.

Follow through with your action plan

- If you developed an action plan at the parent-teacher conference, make sure you and your child follow-through with your actions.
- Check with the teacher to see if the action plan is working or if it needs to be changed.

Maintain regular contact with the teacher

- Regular contact will help you monitor your child's progress.
- Don't be afraid to contact the teacher if you have any questions or concerns.



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Parent-Teacher Conference Notes

Date: _____ **Teacher's Name:** _____

Teacher's Contact Information: _____

Questions to ask the teacher: _____

Things I need to tell the teacher about my child: _____

Areas of concern discussed at the conference: _____

Action Plan (for Areas of Concern)

What my child needs to do: _____

What I am going to do: _____

What the teacher is going to do: _____



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For additional resources, visit our website:

www.parenting-ed.org

The Center for Effective Parenting / Arkansas State PIRC is a collaborative project of the Jones Center for Families, University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences/Department of Pediatrics, and Arkansas Children's Hospital. The Center for Effective Parenting serves as the Arkansas State Parental Information & Resource Center (PIRC), which is supported by the U.S. Department of Education (Grant #84.310A).

This publication was produced and/or distributed in whole or in part with funds from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Innovation and Improvement, Parental Information and Resource Center program, under Grant # 84.310A. The content herein does not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Education, any other agency of the U.S. government, or any other source.