

Prepared for Parent-Teacher Conferences?


Tips for Making Your Conference a Smooth One


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The new school year has begun. That means it's time to plan for upcoming parent-teacher conferences. Not only are children anxious about what will be said to their parents, but also most parents are nervous. While most parent-teacher conferences are less than 20 minutes long, they are very important in building a collaborative team for the educational support of your child. The parent is the expert of their child, while the teacher is the expert of their designated grade-level.


Parents, you need to be prepared to spend some conference time talking about what you know about your child and building a partnership with the teacher. Preparing for this conference takes more than just showing up on time. Use the following tips as you plan for this important event.


Pre-conference:

 Throughout the first nine-weeks of school, keep a list of questions, concerns and comments to discuss with the teacher. Plan to bring this to your parent-teacher conference.


 Keep a file of the work your child is bringing home, organized by subject. When conference time gets closer, you can easily look through it for patterns, improvement trends, areas of weakness, etc. Use post-its to mark areas of concern.


 Talk to your child daily about school. Listen carefully to his/her academic and/or social struggles. Pay careful attention to the social component. While the school year is new, you should see continuing improvements in his/her social well-being. Make sure you note any concerns your child has voiced, including problems with the teacher. Add these to the list you are keeping.


 Make note of accommodations, if any, that were made last year for your child that seemed to work well to improve academic or social struggles. What suggested accommodations did the prior classroom teacher make? Be prepared to discuss these.


 If your child receives special education services or if you are exceptionally concerned

about your child's social health in the classroom, you should request appropriate personnel to attend your conference (school counselor, speech therapist, ESL teacher, etc). Note: IEP's can be reviewed any time during the school year.


 Think about words to describe how your child has learned best in the past and what you do at home to support his/her education.


 If your child has a tutor, make sure to provide the tutor's contact information at the start of school so that the teacher can communicate with him/her throughout the year. In order for the teacher to communicate with outside support personnel, provide written permission along with the contact information. Make an appointment to meet with the tutor prior to your conference to get a tutoring update. Plan to bring this information to your conference.


 Make note of the most important things about your child that would be vital for the teacher to know. For example, any emotional struggles in the past (divorce, death of a family member, etc.). Add these to the list, as this is the time to let the teacher know about your child.


 Now organize your notes into what to discuss regarding your child's education, putting the most important items at the top. Take extra paper and be prepared to take notes on what the teacher says. Also be ready to listen as well as talk. The teacher will have a lot of information to share during your limited time together.

Conference:


 Listen carefully as the teacher discusses areas of strengths and weaknesses. Write down things you feel are important to keep track of. Also note positive remarks from the teacher so you can reiterate them to your child when you return home.


 Be truthful and honest with the teacher regarding your child's needs or concerns. Discuss the best ways you can work together to support your child's needs. Set goals, write them down, and determine how they will be followed up.


 Work as a team with the teacher and other support personnel to provide the best educational support for your child. If differences arise, remember, like any positive relationship, disagreements should be met with mutual respect and a cordial tone.

 Before you leave, be sure to set expectations of communication. Provide the teacher with the best way of communicating with you (email, work phone, etc.).

Post Conference:

 Your child will be anxious about the conference. Be honest with your child about what was discussed, including strengths and weaknesses, areas of progress and concern. Be sure to include the positive. If there are areas of concern, let your child know that you and the teacher are working together as a team in his/her best interest.

 Send a follow-up email or phone message within a week thanking the teacher for the conference. Summarize any follow-ups that were discussed. Do your best over the course of the school year to keep up with communication. Often, parents wait until the end of each quarter to voice concerns. Be sure you pay careful attention to any concerns you might have early on, so that any precautionary actions can be dealt with immediately.

 Also remember, if you have concerns, you do not have to wait for the school scheduled conferences. As a parent, you can request a conference at any time of the year. ♦

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