



Guide to Parent-Teacher Conferences: Teacher Tips for Parents

Why Attend a Parent-Teacher Conference?

Parent-teacher conferences are an essential tool that help teachers talk in more depth about the information parents see on report cards and test scores. They give teachers an opportunity to discuss students' specific strengths, weaknesses, and needs with parents so everyone can better work together to help students have a smooth, successful year.

When you are notified that it's conference time, it doesn't mean your child is having problems or is in trouble. Teachers will try to meet with all parents to let them know their classroom expectations and specific homework policies, and to give an idea of the curriculum that will be covered throughout the school year. In addition, conferences give teachers insight into any issues a student might have so they can work more effectively with parents to provide the best learning environment.



Some helpful tips to help parents prepare for a parent-teacher conference:

Before the Conference

1) Talk to your child

This is a great opportunity to get feedback from your child and have him “participate” in the conference (in general, students don't attend the meeting). Ask your child if he likes his teacher, the classroom, and curriculum, and how he likes the school in general. If your child has any questions for the teacher that he hasn't been able to ask directly, write those down and bring them to the meeting. It's perfectly OK if your child's feedback is negative—the teacher needs to know about any issues their students are having so she can make adjustments and provide extra help if needed.

2) Prepare a list of questions

Being prepared for any meeting is essential for effective communication. Have a list of questions ready for the teacher prior to the parent-teacher conference. Such questions could include:

- Is my child turning in homework on time?
- Is my child attentive in class?
- Has my child exhibited any behavioral issues?
- Does my child seem happy in class?
- Is there anything I can or should be doing at home to help?

As well, be sure to include your child's questions on your list.

During the Conference

Arrive for your parent-teacher conference on time or a little early, if possible; most likely, the teacher has multiple conferences scheduled. Try to remain calm and collected during the meeting even if the feedback is at times negative—remember that you're both important parts of your child's "education team," and you need to work together to provide the best possible education for your child. Ask the teacher your most important questions first, and ask for clarification for anything you don't understand. If your child has exhibited any behavioral issues, your teacher may want to know if you have seen similar issues at home, so you can work together to help your child. At the end of the conference, thank the teacher and be sure to follow up with any action items discussed.

After the Conference

When the parent-teacher conference is over, let your child know what was discussed. Make sure to give her any positive feedback from the teacher, but be direct about any problems that her teacher addressed. Let your child know about any plans of action discussed with the teacher and how you plan on helping her from home. If you have agreed to any follow-up actions with the teacher, make it a priority to do so soon after the discussion.

If you have questions for your child's teacher that come up during the school year, you don't have to wait for the next conference to ask them—you can request a meeting with the teacher at any time. Some teachers are open to communicating via email or talking by phone in the afternoon or at night.

When teachers and parents communicate often and well, everybody wins, especially your child. The parent-teacher conference is an important way to build a relationship with your child's teacher. By listening intently, asking pointed questions, and being open to the teacher's point of view, you can gather the information you need to help your child have a strong school year.