



Parenting Priorities

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Parent-Teacher Conferences

A guide for parents from TeachersAndFamilies.com

Preparing for A Parent-Teacher Conference

At least once per year, and frequently each semester or more often, parents receive a notice of a parent-teacher conference. Perhaps you have requested the conference yourself. There are many steps you can take to assure that the conference is productive and positive:

- **Assemble relevant materials** to help prepare for the conference. This could 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** to see if anything important is missing, and then see if you can find the missing material. Once you have started a collection of your child's records, it is easy to add new material each year. At conference time, if you or the teacher have specific concerns, you can then find whatever might be important to share with the teacher.
- **Talk with your child** before the conference. Children should understand why the conference is taking place (is it due to a problem or is it a routine meeting held for all parents?) and be assured that parents are seeking ways to help and learn about what their children are doing in school. Find out if your child has any specific concerns about schoolwork or relationships with classmates.
- If your district, school or classroom has a handbook for students, **be sure to obtain a copy** well ahead of the conference and review it. In particular look for listings of expectations for behavior and attendance so that you might anticipate some questions from teachers or so that you might consider questions you want to ask.
- If your child has brought home homework, **be sure you are familiar with the assignments** and how your child has been performing. 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 expectations for learning and behavior? How has my child performed on daily class assignments, on tests, on homework assignments? How does my child compare to others in basic skills? Does my child follow

school rules or does he/she exhibit any behavior problems? If my child is struggling in any area, what has been tried to improve performance? Does my child pay attention in class? What else can be done at home or at school? What are my child's strengths? Are there any concerns about my child's health, adjustment? Are there materials or resources that you would recommend?

- If you or the teacher have concerns about referral to special education, **find out about your rights** ahead of time. State and community agencies and advocate organizations can provide this information, and all schools should also have a printed copy of parents' rights under state and federal law.

- **Be ready to collaborate**, not attack or defend! Generally teachers will give parents bad news because they want to help the child do better, not to place blame on the parent or child. But sometimes the message does not come across that way and parents naturally become defensive and protective, maybe even angry. Assume the teacher has your child's best interests in mind and respond calmly and tactfully. Indicate that you are most concerned with solving the problem and helping your child succeed. Offer to meet further to discuss the problem and work out a solution. Remember that teachers are often as afraid to deliver bad news as parents are to hear it!

- **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?") And remember that teachers often hear only negative comments too. Be sure to try to offer a compliment, a thank-you, etc. to let the teacher know you appreciate what they are trying to do to help your child-even when it doesn't seem to be working.

- **Don't be afraid to ask questions** if you don't understand something or feel your concerns are not being addressed. Teachers and other educators easily slip into jargon and forget that many parents are not familiar with the terms they use every day. Ask what test scores mean and what the results mean for your child. Stop and ask for explanation of unfamiliar terms or programs. Not understanding can quickly lead to misunderstanding!

Prepared for the National Association of School Psychologists by Andrea Canter, Ph.D., NCSP. In part based upon Martin and Waltman-Greenwood, Solve Your Child's School-Related Problems (chapter 2, A Parent's Primer).

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