

Tips for Successful Parent-Teacher Conferences

Throughout the school year, parents have the opportunity to meet with their child's classroom teacher. Some of these opportunities will be casual, while others will be more formal, such as those following the distribution of report cards. In order for the conferences to be valuable, it is important that parents understand that these are opportunities to give and receive information about their child. Here are some tips that you can share to help parents prepare for successful parent-teacher conferences.

Why are parent teacher conferences important?

- Conferences give you a chance to get to know your child's teacher, learn about the program your child will be studying (the curriculum) and discuss the strengths and weaknesses of your child with the person who will be helping him/her to learn this year.

As a parent, what should you do to prepare for a parent-teacher conference?

- Talk to your child beforehand. Have a good understanding of the expectations of the teacher, the curriculum, homework assignments and any issues that you should raise with the teacher.
- Be prepared to share specific examples if you have concerns about any aspect of the classroom or program.
- If applicable, bring your child's latest report card with you so that you can discuss it in more detail.
- Make a list of things that will help the teacher better understand your child, such as any special health or medical needs, outside interests and hobbies that may have an impact on school, and events occurring at home that may affect your child's learning (such as the sickness or death of someone close, change in your home life or past school experiences.)
- Share approaches that have worked for you when dealing with your child that the teacher might find useful.
- Put together a list of things you would like to find out from the teacher such as services and programs the school offers, discipline policies, how your child will be assessed and graded, homework expectations of the teacher, or extra curricular activities that your child can take part in.

What can you expect to learn in a parent-teacher conference?

Although all conferences will be different since they are about individual students,

most conferences will give you information related to:

- Your child's progress to date in the required courses
- Recent test results and what they mean
- Your child's strengths and weaknesses in school
- Any observations about your child that may be affecting his/her school work (such as difficulty seeing the board, distractibility or requiring more sleep)
- Your child's current reading and math levels and how they compare to the grade expectations
- Recent work your child has completed
- Any issues related to behaviour, discipline or work completion
- How your child is getting along with other students
- Suggestions or ideas that you can use at home to help your child in school.

Helpful Hints for Conferences:

- If possible, both parents should attend the conference. See if you can exchange babysitting with another parent or find out whether the school offers child-minding services during the interview period. In most cases, you and the teacher will be able to speak more frankly if your child is not present.
- Be on time. Most conferences will be held on a day when teachers are meeting with parents back-to-back throughout the day. When one parent is delayed, it backs up the meetings of all other parents and creates more pressure for the teacher.
- If you aren't available to meet with the teacher during the designated period, call and see if there is another time that could be arranged. Most teachers will work hard to ensure they can find a mutually convenient time for you to get together. A phone interview, while not optimal, may be another option.
- If you feel there is a need, ask about extending the time of your conference beforehand or scheduling the meeting at another time, instead of running late and causing delays for other parents.
- Follow-up with the teacher if there are areas discussed during the conference that require further action.
- If you feel your child's progress warrants a discussion with the principal or vice-principal, either call ahead to plan a meeting on parent's night or schedule a follow up meeting at another time.

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