Harvard Family Research Project





Parent–Teacher Conferences: A Tip Sheet for Parents

As a parent, you are your child's first and most important teacher. You and your child's school have something in common: You both want your child to learn and do well. When parents and teachers talk to each other, each person can share important information about your child's talents and needs. Each person can also learn something new about how to help your child. Parent–teacher conferences are a great way to start talking to your child's teachers. This tip sheet suggests ways that you can make the most of parent-teacher conferences so that everyone wins, especially your child.

What should you expect?

- **A two-way conversation.** Like all good conversations, parent–teacher conferences are best when both people talk *and* listen. The conference is a time for you to learn about your child's progress in school: Ask to see data about your child's attendance, grades, and test scores. Find out whether your child is meeting school expectations and academic standards. This is also a time for the teacher to learn about what your child is like at home. When you tell the teacher about your child's skills, interests, needs, and dreams, the teacher can help your child more.
- **Emphasis on learning.** Good parent–teacher conferences focus on how well the child is doing in school. They also talk about how the child can do even better. To get ready for the conversation, look at your child's homework, tests, and notices before the conference. Be sure to bring a list of questions that you would like to ask the teacher.
- **Opportunities and challenges.** Just like you, teachers want your child to succeed. You will probably hear positive feedback about your child's progress *and* areas for improvement. Be prepared by thinking about your child's strengths and challenges beforehand. Be ready to ask questions about ways you and the teacher can help your child with some of his or her challenges.

Checklist: Before the conference

- ✓ Schedule a time to meet. If you can't go at the scheduled time, ask the teacher about other times.
- ✓ Review your child's work, grades, and progress reports.
- ✓ Talk with your child about his or her progress in school.
- ✓ Talk with others—family members, after school staff, mentors, etc.—about your child's strengths and needs.
- ✓ Make a list of questions to ask during the conference.
- ✓ Think about ways you would like to be involved in your child's learning so that you can discuss them with the teacher.

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What should you talk to the teacher about?

- **Progress.** Find out how your child is doing by asking questions like: Is my child performing at grade level? How is he or she doing compared to the rest of the class? What do you see as his or her strengths? How could he or she improve?
- **Assignments and assessments.** Ask to see examples of your child's work. Ask how the teacher gives grades.
- **Your thoughts about your child.** Be sure to share your thoughts and feelings about your child. Tell the teacher what you think your child is good at. Explain what he or she needs more help with.
- **Support learning at home.** Ask what you can do at home to help your child learn. Ask if the teacher knows of other programs or services in the community that could also help your child.
- **Support learning at school.** Find out what services are available at the school to help your child. Ask how the teacher will both challenge your child and support your child when he or she needs it.

"BE HEARD"

Keep these principles in mind for a great parent–teacher conference:

Best intentions assumed

Emphasis on learning

Home–school collaboration

Examples and evidence

Active listening

Respect for all

Dedication to follow-up

How should you follow up?

- **Make a plan.** Write down the things that you and the teacher will each do to support your child. You can do this during the conference or after. Write down what you will do, when, and how often. Make plans to check in with the teacher in the coming months.
- **Schedule another time to talk.** Communication should go both ways. Ask how you can contact the teacher. And don't forget to ask how the teacher will contact you too. There are many ways to communicate—in person, by phone, notes, email. Make a plan that works for both of you. Be sure to schedule at least one more time to talk in the next few months.
- **Talk to your child.** The parent–teacher conference is all about your child, so don't forget to include him or her. Share with your child what you learned. Show him or her how you will help with learning at home. Ask for his or her suggestions.

For more resources on family involvement, visit www.hfrp.org.

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