

IT'S CONFERENCE TIME!

A conference with your child's teacher is similar to a visit to the doctor's office. You have a lot that you want to talk about, and a limited amount of time. The better prepared you are going in, the more beneficial the meeting will be for both you and the teacher. Here are some tips for a productive parent/teacher conference, along with a list of good questions for you to ask the teacher

Steps to take before the conference

Ask your child how things are going at school

Several days before the conference ask your child some very specific questions about school. What would he/she like you ask the teacher? What does he/she like best about school? Are there any subjects at school that he/she is having trouble with? If he/she could change anything about school what would it be?

Write down your questions

Once you're in a meeting with the teacher it may be hard to remember what you wanted to talk about. Jot down your questions beforehand and bring them to the conference.

Stick to talking about your child

Most parent/teacher conferences last only 20-25 minutes. Don't use this time to ask questions about basic school policies. That kind of information can usually be found in the school's handbook, on its Web site, or by calling the office during business hours. This is your chance to get detailed feedback on your child, so grab it while you can. If you have a specific question or issue that doesn't come up, don't hesitate to ask. You know your child better than anyone, so take the initiative.

Establish a rapport with the teacher

The first parent/teacher conference is a chance to get to know the teacher. If you're both on the same page from the start, your child will get more out of his year in this teacher's classroom. If you can make a connection earlier in the year, it will be easier to talk to the teacher in the future about any questions or concerns. To get off on the right foot, first listen to what the teacher has to say, and then base your questions on what is said.

Try not to get defensive

Every parent wants to hear how wonderful his or her child is – and the teacher should tell you about your child's special skills and achievement. But one of the main functions of these conferences is to point out areas where your child has room to develop. The teacher may even have some suggestions. Keep in mind that this is a part of all parent-teacher conferences. Resist the urge to argue with the teacher or dismiss the comments. The teacher is not blaming you or your child. The point of this meeting is to get an assessment of how your child is doing in school and to look for ways you can help him do even better. Remind yourself that the teacher is on your side and the two of you have the same goal: To help your child learn all that he can.

Consider asking about your child's spiritual and social development

How well your child is doing spiritually and fits in socially can affect learning. Ask the teacher how he/she is doing spiritually? Is there something specific you should be praying about? Does your child get along with the other students? Do they regularly participate in class? How does your child interact with the other students at lunch and recess?

Take a notepad and pen

After the meeting is over you may forget some of what you discussed. Jotting things down as you go along will help jog your memory later. Taking notes is also a good way to let the teacher know you're really paying attention.

Give the teacher relevant information

Let the teacher know of any changes at home. A new baby, a divorce, or a death in the family can all affect the way your child behaves in the classroom. Resist the urge to talk about his successes outside of school, though. As much fun as it is to tell cute stories, this meeting is about assessing your child's academic progress.

Leave with an action plan

Before you shake hands and say goodbye, find out the best way to follow-up with the teacher. Can you call her? Which email address works best? You may think of other questions later so find out the best way to ask them. As you end the conference, review any decisions that you've made together. And if you feel it's necessary, request another meeting.

Communicating with your child's elective teachers

If you think it is needed, email the elective teacher to make a conference appointment.