

How to make the most of Parent-Teacher conferences

Parent-teacher conferences are an important part of a school's reporting system. It is one of the few opportunities parents and teachers have to discuss student progress in a structured setting. Experienced teachers and parents know how to make the most of the short time allowed for a conference. Here are some tips:

- Try to be relaxed. Teachers don't want to put you on the spot or make you feel you are being judged. They want a useful discussion that will help them teach better and your child learn better.
- All children learn in slightly different ways, but the elements of good education remain pretty much the same. Of course, your child is special and unique to you and all good teachers want to see each student as an individual. But most children will do well at school if they master the basics, pay attention and try to co-operate.
- When you and the teacher are united, that's a powerful message from the most important adult team in your child's education. Children will happily play one adult off against another if they can get away with it. When they know you and their teacher respect each other and communicate regularly, children soon accept they just have to settle down to their schoolwork.
- Try to be on time and keep to the allotted time. If you cannot make the appointment, arrange one at a time that suits you better. If you know you need longer than the allotted time, arrange to meet the teacher outside the conference timetable.
- Ask your child if there are any matters that you should raise at the conference.
- If your child is not making progress, ask teachers for specific suggestions about how you can help your child do better.
- Stay in regular touch with the teacher to discuss the progress your child is making. Meeting with your child's teachers helps build the strong parent-teacher partnerships that are needed if you and your child's teachers are to reach your common goal of helping your child get the best education possible.

Some good questions to ask:

- Is my child in different groups for different subjects? Why?
- How well does my child get along with others?
- What are my child's best and worst subjects?
- Is my child working up to his or her ability?
- Does my child participate in class discussions and activities?
- Has my child missed any classes other than ones I contacted the school about?
- Have you noticed any sudden changes in the way my child acts? For example, have you noticed any signs of physical or other problems? • What kinds of tests are being done? What do the tests tell about my child's progress?
- How does my child handle taking tests?

Try asking your most important questions first, just in case time runs out before you and the teacher have a chance to discuss them all.

