

A Teacher Guide to Family-Teacher Conferences

What should happen at an ideal family-teacher conference?

An ideal family-teacher conference is a conversation between you and your student's family about their child's progress at school. They can help strengthen relationships with individual families and support student learning. Conferences supplement the casual, daily conversations that you have with families by providing more comprehensive information about children's progress and allowing time for deep conversation. By making time for family-teacher conferences and sharing content that is informative and helpful with families, you are showing families that their child is important, your relationship with them is also important and you respect them.

Goals of the conference

- Share how their child is learning and what their child is learning
- Share authentic assessment information
- Share information about their child's transition to school
- Share how their child gets along with friends and teachers
- Strengthen relationships with families
- Share resources that families can use to support learning at home

Preparation for the conference

- A few weeks before the conference, send notices and invitations about when and where family-teacher conferences will be happening
- Schedule appointments, if possible to minimize family wait times
- Schedule alternative appointment times for families that are not able to meet during designated conference times
- Have materials such as student work samples, rubrics and assessment information handy to discuss

Flow of the conference

Allow approximately 20 minutes with each family to talk about their child's progress. Below is a suggestion for how the conference might flow:

- Welcome the parent, thank him/her for coming to the conference
- Share the purpose of the conference, ask the parent if there is anything else he/she wants to get out of the conference
- Share some concrete examples of the child's learning (e.g. work samples, photographs, etc.); discuss the child's areas of strength, growth, and progress over time
- Ask the parent what he/she notices about the child's learning and development at home
 - What have you observed about your child?
 - What do you think are your child's strengths? Where do you think your child needs to grow this year?
- Share strategies that you are using to support the child's learning in the classroom
- Share concrete strategies that the parent can use to extend the child's learning at home
- Discuss any lingering questions and next steps; thank the parent for participating in the conference

Tips for facilitating conversation

- Emphasize that you want their child to be successful in school just like they do
- Reinforce that what families do with their child *outside* of school is just as important as what is happening *in* school
- Consider your community and the needs of individual families when you share ideas for extending learning at home; some families might want websites, others might like a list of library books, others might benefit from on-the-go activities, and others might be interested in community events
- Thank families for committing their valuable time to meet with you

Tips for making families feel welcome

- Create a welcoming space for families that is physically comfortable, including space to sit and wait if needed
- Recognize that for some families, coming into schools can be an uncomfortable experience particularly if they have had negative experiences with schools in the past or don't know what to expect
- Listen carefully and be ready to share meaningful information about their child
- Have questions you may want to know about their child or the family prepared and ready

Tips for following up after the conference

- Contact families that missed appointments to set up another time
- During drop off and pick up, ask families how their extending learning at home activities are going with their children
- Let families know how children are progressing on certain knowledge and skills that you discussed during the conference

Questions that parents may ask

You may want to think through some of these questions in advance of the conference and come prepared with thoughts about each.

- Is my child's progress developmentally appropriate?
- How is my child doing compared to the rest of the class?
- What do you see as his or her strengths?
- How could he or she improve?
- In what areas could he improve?
- Can I see examples of my child's work?
- Can I see rubrics used to assess the work?
- How will my child be challenged and supported?

Content adapted from *Parent-Teacher Conference Tip Sheets for Principals, Teachers, and Parents*, June 2009, Harvard Family Research Project.