HOW TO MAKE PARENT TEACHER CONFERENCES WORK FOR YOUR CHILD

You've been asked to attend a regularly scheduled "report card" conference with your child's teacher. Or you've gotten a special note from your child's teacher asking to see you. In either case, you might be a little nervous.

Well, relax. Teachers don't want to put parents on the spot. They just like to meet with parents from time to time to discuss how to help students do their best in school.

All children learn in different ways. They have their own individual personalities, and their own listening and work habits. To help their students learn new knowledge and skills, teachers must know as much as they can about each child's likes and dislikes. No one knows more about these things than you, the parents. And no one has more influence over your children than you.

That's why teachers need your help to do a first-class job. Working together, you and the teacher can help your child have a successful school year.

Here Are Some Things To Keep in Mind

- Start the conference right: be there on time, and plan not to run over the amount of time that has been set aside, usually about 40 minutes.
- If you are a working parent who can't arrange to meet during regular hours, make this clear to the teacher and try to set up a time to meet that is good for both of you. The best conferences are those in which both teachers and parents stay calm and try hard to work together for one purpose and one purpose only: to help your child do well. Arguing, or blaming each other for problems your child is having, helps no one. Getting Ready

Each teacher will probably come prepared with samples of your children's work and with ideas to help them do even better in school. You should get ready for each conference, too. Talk to your children before the conference. Find out what they think are their best subjects, and what subjects they like the least. Find out why. Also, ask your children if there is anything they would like you to talk about with their teachers. Make sure your children don't worry about the meeting. Help them understand that you and their teacher(s) are meeting together in order to help them. Before you go to the school, write notes to yourself about:

• things about your child's life at home, personality, problems, habits, and hobbies you feel it's important for the teacher to know,

- your concerns about the school's programs or policies,
- questions about your child's progress, and
- how you and the school can work together to help your child.

If your spouse can't attend the conference with you, ask for his or her concerns and questions.

The Conference

Some good questions to ask are these:

- 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 squinting, tiredness or moodiness that might be a sign 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?

It's a good idea to ask your most important questions first, just in case time runs out before you and the teacher have a chance to discuss them all. Be sure to ask the teacher for specific suggestions on ways to help your child do better. This is the most important part of the meeting. It will become your action plan. If the teacher says something you don't quite understand, don't be shy about asking for an explanation. It's a good idea to end the conference by summing up decisions you've made together. If needed, ask to meet again.

After the Conference

Start immediately on the action plan you and the teacher worked out together. Discuss the plan with your child. Make sure he or she knows that you and the teacher care. To see if the action plan is working, watch your child's behavior and check your child's class work and homework. Stay in regular touch with the teacher to discuss the progress your child is making. Meeting with your child's teachers should help build strong parent-teacher partnerships—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.

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