

Parent/Teacher Conferences

Suggestions for the Teacher

Building Rapport

Establishing good rapport with parents is just one of the many intangible qualities about good teaching. The challenge is to make parents feel comfortable, show them how to get involved with their child's learning and establish a working partnership. Positive rapport can greatly benefit the home-school relations.

- Be on time and prepared for the conference.
- Meet parents in a non-authoritarian way.
- Provide child care (if necessary) in order to avoid having the child present during the conference.
- Sympathize and empathize.
- Try to see the child from their perspective.
- Help parents feel good about themselves and their child.
- Be positive and enthusiastic.
- Demonstrate your interest in the child as an individual – one who has strengths, weaknesses, and his or her own way of learning.
- Never compare one child with another – especially siblings.
- Avoid getting too personal. If problems at home affect the child's behavior at school, report the behavior and ask parents if they have any ideas about the cause but never press.
- Respond to parents as individuals realizing each has a unique personality and set of concerns.
- Avoid interrogating questions. Parents will be more open if not put on the defensive.
- Discuss; *never* argue, debate, or criticize.
- Offer suggestions to help solve problems.
- Treat parents with the utmost esteem and worth.

"Three roses and a thorn"

When speaking to parents about their child, it is best to always make three positive comments before discussing any problems. If an inappropriate behavior must be addressed, be sure to emphasize the behavior rather than the child. Solicit the parent's help and suggestions when working with problem behaviors.

Be Specific

When telling parents what concepts (academic, behavioral, emotional, physical, social, spiritual) are being targeted for their child, be specific as to the concept area and target or goal. Identify the particular skills in which the child has shown growth before moving to the current skills needing to be mastered. Show samples of the child's work from their portfolio or cumulative file. Share photographs of the class in action, highlighting their child. Be sure to elaborate on how the parents can be involved with the teachers in the educational process through Parent-Child Interaction Activities.

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Listen

Take time to listen to the parent's thoughts, feelings and concerns. Allow time for their questions. Teachers can learn much about their students from what parents share during conferences. Remember: never say "I don't know". Instead, offer "to find out and get back to them". Genuinely ask for suggestions on how to further enrich their child's experiences while at school.

- Maintain polite eye contact.
- Face the speaker and lean forward slightly.
- Nod or give other non-interrupting acknowledgments.
- When the speaker pauses, allow them to continue without interrupting.
- Ignore distractions.
- Wait to add your comments until the speaker is finished. You may find your comments are not necessary.
- Ask for clarification when necessary. Check your understanding by summarizing the essential aspects of what the speaker tried to say or the feelings they attempted to convey.
- Take notes as appropriate.

Most Common Questions

The following questions are listed to help the teacher prepare for individual parent/teacher conferences. If considered with the Parent Conference Summary Sheet, the conference can be an enjoyable experience for both the teacher and parents.

- What is the daily routine in your classroom?
- Can you show me some samples of my child's work?
- In what subjects and activities does my child seem most interested?
- How do you track my child's progress?
- Does my child participate in class discussions and activities?
- Does she/he work well independently?
- How does my child get along with other children and with adults?
- Is my child having any problems?
- What can I do at home to help my child in school?
- What extracurricular activities would help their social or academic development?
- What is the best way for me to keep in touch with you throughout the year?

Communicate Lavishly

Make as much information available as possible. Keep parents informed in a variety of ways. Share with them what happens at school through such means as written notes, posted menus/schedules/reminders, encouraging visitation and participation, offering conferences, and sharing principles of child development, monthly newsletters, phone calls, short daily conversations, photographs and website updates.