

## “We”: The Most Important Feature of a Parent-Teacher Conference

The foundation for constructive parent-teacher relationships is frequent and open communication and mutual respect. When you are positively involved in your child's education, your child will flourish. Teachers prepare for conferences by reflecting on each child's interests and progress. Here are some ways you can prepare to actively participate in parent-teacher conferences.

**Be willing and ready to share information about your child and family.** Families are the most important influence and resource in a child's life. You know your child better than anyone else and have valuable insights to share with the teacher. Advocate for your child. Share things about your child's life at home—personality traits, challenges, habits, friends, hobbies, and talents—that you feel are important for the teacher to know. What kinds of things do you enjoy doing with your child? How do siblings relate to their brother/sister and vice versa? What kind of discipline do you use? What are your dreams for your child? What are your concerns?

**Stay focused on your child.** You are no longer the shy student who avoided the teacher's gaze. Nor are you the active four-year-old who seemed to always need the teacher's help to stay on task. It is natural for your ideas about teachers and their role to be shaped by your own school experiences. Being aware of these

views can help you stay focused on your child and his/her unique temperament, individual needs, and special interests.

**Never miss a parent-teacher conference.** Use the conference as an opportunity to exchange information with the teacher and discuss ways to work together to enhance your child's education. If your work schedule makes it difficult to meet during regular hours, make this clear to the teacher and try to set up a meeting time that is good for both of you. If you can't visit in person, schedule a telephone call to discuss your child's progress.

**Arrive on time.** Teachers usually have a tight schedule for conferences—typically 20 minutes per child and family. If you would like additional time to talk, ask for it ahead of time so you and the teacher can discuss your ideas, concerns, and suggestions. Be considerate of other parents whose conferences will take place after yours. Remember that the teacher needs a few minutes between conferences to record and reflect on the information shared and to prepare for the next family.

**Remember, children can hear and remember what is said.** Young children often get mixed messages when they hear adults talking about them, no matter how positive the conversation may be. Arrange for a caregiver for your child or bring a family member to occupy him or her during the

conference. If this is not possible, bring a favorite toy or activity to engage the child in another part of the room. Unless a child is expressly invited to take part, the conference is a time for you and the teacher to discuss your child.

**Listen with an open mind.** Concentrate on what the teacher is saying instead of what you are going to say next. Ask questions when you don't understand. If you disagree with a strategy, say so and tell the teacher why. Voice your concerns, but be open to suggestions. Stay on the subject: your child's progress.

**Be prepared.** Think about or write down one or two questions to ask the teacher. It's a good idea to ask the most important question first, in case time runs out. Remember, while teachers have specialized education, they don't have answers for everything. Teaching just isn't that simple.

**Keep the conversation focused on what can be done for your child.** When there are problems, parents and teachers need to stay calm and work together for the best interest of the child.

**Stay involved.** Try to visit the center or school frequently, not just for conferences and Back to School Night. Ask the teacher to suggest activities you can do at home to reinforce your child's learning. Look for opportunities to take part in your child's education.