






Conference Time!


Talking to Your Child's Teacher or Caregiver



Many parents feel nervous about parent-teacher conferences or other talks with their children's teachers or caregivers. Here are some parent-tested hints to help you have good meetings with the people at your child's program.

-  **Get to know teachers and other school people long before conferences.**
 - Keep in mind that most teachers like to meet parents as well as other family members.
 - Be sure to tell the staff how to reach you: "My spouse has the night shift, so use my cell phone number during the day." "I can come to school Thursday mornings."
 - Find out if the program has a list of activities for parents. Maybe you can do home learning activities or volunteer to help in a classroom from time to time.
 - Find out when the program has parent-teacher conferences. Then watch for the notes inviting you to sign up for a time to meet with the teacher.
-  **Make and keep your parent-teacher conference appointment.**
 - Reply quickly when you get the note from school inviting you to conferences.
 - Find out ahead of time if it's okay to bring children to the conferences. Some programs provide free child care for parents who are attending conferences.
 - If you are running late to your conference, call to let the teacher know.
-  **Be ready for a two-way conversation.**
 - Expect the teacher to tell you many things about your child, and to show you samples of work that your child has done in the program.
 - Expect the teacher to also ask for your ideas, suggestions, and concerns.
-  **Ask some questions yourself. Here are some suggestions.**
 - *What does my child do that surprises you?* This question can help you find out what the teachers expect of your child and what they notice about him.
 - *What is my child reluctant to do?* This question may start an important discussion about your child's interests and dislikes.
 - *What are some things you would like to see my child do?* Even if your child is having a positive school experience, this question may help you and the teacher to think of something new your child could try.
 - *What can I do at home to support what you do in your program?* This question shows your family's concern for your child's education. The teacher may have some good ideas for fun, educational home activities.
-  **Stay calm if the teacher feels that your child has some difficulties.**
 - Keep in mind that most teachers would like to hear your ideas about what may be going on. The teacher may also ask you to suggest some ways to help your child.
 - Don't feel that you are being blamed for any problem. Instead, let the teacher know you want to work with the staff to help things go well for your child.

(Parts of this tip sheet were adapted from the ERIC Digest "Parent Teacher Conferences: Suggestions for Parents" by Ann-Marie Clark, available at <http://ceep.crc.uiuc.edu/eearchive/digests/1999/clark99.html>.)

-  **For related Web resources, see "Conference Time! Talking to Your Child's Teacher or Caregiver" at <http://illinoisearlylearning.org/tips.htm>.**

Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this tip sheet are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Illinois State Board of Education.



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