

## ***Having High-Quality Parent-Teacher Meetings and Conferences***

“One of the most important factors in a child’s success in school is the degree to which his or her parents are actively involved in the child’s education.”—James Coleman, educator

You can better help your child succeed in school when you take the time to get to know your child’s teachers. This becomes more challenging once your child gets into the higher grade levels and has many teachers instead of one or two, but it’s still essential to make these connections. Joyce Epstein, the Director of the Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships, says children whose parents are more involved with their education are much more likely to do well in school. Here’s how to get the most out of parent-teacher meetings and conferences.

### ***Try it...***

#### ***For all parents***

- Make it a priority to attend all parent-teacher conferences, even if your child appears to be doing well in school. This shows that you value your child’s education, and it also helps you get more specific information about what’s happening with your child in the classroom. A helpful book is [\*Straight Talk about Schools Today\*](#) by Judy Molland.
- If the timing of a parent-teacher conference doesn’t work with your schedule, call the teacher and schedule another time instead of missing the meeting altogether. Most teachers are open to doing this.
- Come prepared. Have questions ready. Create a list of questions that address the overall development of your child, not just her academic achievement. Questions might include: What are my child’s strengths and weaknesses at school? How does my child behave at school? What do you observe about my child’s friends? Is my child working up to her ability? How can I support you and my child more?
- Share information about your child. Teachers will be able to make a more personal connection and play to your child’s strengths if they know him on a deeper level.
- Let your child’s teachers know that they can contact you whenever something arises. Be clear that you would like to have open lines of communication.
- Ask teachers which specific skills would help your child do better in school. Maybe your child would benefit from the help of a tutor, or maybe the teacher has a workbook or specific exercises that can help your child.

#### ***For parents with children ages birth to 5***

- Some child-care centers and preschools offer parent-teacher conferences, but not all of them do. If yours doesn’t, set up a formal meeting with a teacher every six months to find out how your child is developing and how you can support your

child's development at home. On an informal level, make a point of having a brief chat when you pick your child up at the end of each day. Let the teacher or caregiver know that you would like to be updated as often as milestones or problems occur.

- Get to know the child-care providers and teachers by name. Be intentional about thanking them for the good work they do. As relationships build, you'll both pass along information about your child, which will help all of you.
- Take your child to the scheduled well-child checkups with your pediatrician. Many have checklists and information about typical childhood development for your child's age. (If it's not offered, ask for it.) This can help you know which skills you can teach at home and what's normal—and what's not.

### ***For parents with children ages 6 - 9***

- If parent-teacher conferences aren't scheduled until the third or fourth month of school, call your child's teacher. Ask for a short meeting to introduce yourself. Even though teachers are busy, it helps to make contact early on in the school year.
- If conferences are only for parents and teachers, ask your child what questions he has for the teacher. Bring those questions with you to the conference.
- Arrive early. Most teachers have things for parents to look at while they wait. Look at the art on the wall. See if there are any notebooks or school work samples displayed. This will give you more information about how your child is doing in school.

### ***For parents with children ages 10 - 15***

- Attend meetings with an open mind. This age group can easily get into trouble, and it's easy to become defensive or to act intimidating when you're called to the school to deal with an issue. Try to relax (which isn't always easy), and find out how to remedy the situation by working with the school instead of *against* the school.
- Don't wait for conference time to talk to a teacher. Even if your concern isn't major, it's better to set up a meeting sooner rather than waiting until later.
- As your child enters middle school and junior high, encourage him to seek out a teacher when he is having trouble understanding something in class. Although it's important for you to be involved in your child's education, your child can also start working directly with a teacher about certain questions and issues.

### ***For parents with children ages 16 - 18***

- Continue to attend parent-teacher conferences, even if your teenager is more independent and doing well. You can often learn something new about your teenager, and your attendance shows that you value your child's education.
- Thank teachers. Send an e-mail or a note. Teachers work hard, and they greatly appreciate it when parents notice.
- Take notes. During the high school years, there is a lot of information you need to help your teen succeed in school, such as taking tests for college, keeping track of graduation requirements, applying for financial aid for college, school trips, weeks when standardized tests are given, and so on.