

Preparing for Parent/Teacher Conferences

By Judith Wainwright, from Lauri Summer 1995.

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Not so long ago, parents regarded parent/teacher conferences with dread. Surely, a "call to school" meant their child was in trouble, and the school needed parents' help to solve the problem. Today's parents regard parent/teacher conferences as a forum for exchanging valuable information about their children; i.e., the teacher needs information about the child that only the parents can provide, and the parents receive helpful suggestions from the teacher.

Don't be intimidated by the appearance of a large group of teachers sitting around a table waiting to talk with you. That large group is the very diversity of skills that attracted you to our program; the collective wisdom of so many educators is a valuable resource for you and your child. The teachers also welcome conferences as a time to learn from you - and from each other.

Still, some parents are apprehensive about meeting with their child's teacher - an obstacle that is easily overcome by planning ahead. If you find yourself in that group, here are some hints on how to get ready for, and what to do, at your parent/teacher conference:

- Tell your child you are going to meet with his teacher. Ask him where to look to see things he has done. Find out if there are questions he wants you to ask.
- Be on time. Your conference will be only 10 to 15 minutes long, and you'll want to make the most of it. If time runs out, you can arrange for a follow-up conference. Don't spend valuable minutes on small talk.
- Arrive with a prepared list of questions ("Does my child follow directions?" or "Does she get along with her classmates?" etc.) and any information you think the teacher should know. If your child is grieving because of the loss of a pet, that is important information to the teacher. Listen carefully to the teacher's responses - and take notes. They'll refresh your memory later.
- Listen Carefully. Almost all parents hear (at least once) that their child isn't working to capacity or is behaving immaturely. If this is the case, resist the urge to defend your child. Instead, listen carefully and try to understand the problem. Ask for suggestions on how you can help.

By customizing these suggestions to your particular situation - whether your child is in preschool, kindergarten or elementary school - you can emerge from your parent/teacher conference as a confident partner in your child's well-being.