



Parent-Teacher Conferencing Module

Getting the Most Value from Your Time with Parents: A Guide for the Teacher

What:

Handout 1

“The evidence is consistent, positive, and convincing: families have a major influence on their children’s achievement in school and throughout life. When schools, families, and community groups work together to support learning, students tend to do better in school, stay in school longer, and like school more.” (*A New Wave of Evidence*, Henderson and Mapp, p. 7) A partnership between the home and school is critical for encouraging students to achieve at their maximum level. Processes for building this partnership are multi-faced.

So What:

One time-tested, well established strategy which provides a foundation for building partnerships between parents and teachers is the parent-teacher conference. Conferences encourage home-school linkages and help support children’s learning when:

- Parents and teachers engage in dialog about the student’s learning and development on a regular basis.
- Parents and teachers are willing to listen and learn from each other.
- Parents and teachers come to the conference table prepared to ask questions and share information that will benefit the student.

Now What:

The teacher’s goals for a conference with the parents undoubtedly include the following:

- To inform the parent regarding the child’s growth and progress
- To learn important information about the child from the parents
- To plan for the child’s future success
- To build a trusting, honoring relationship with the parents

If these goals are to be realized, the teacher will want to be well prepared for the conference. This module suggests ways the teacher might plan ahead, set the stage, conduct a conference, and reflect on the results – a conference at which the parents will feel welcomed in the school environment and honored for their contribution to the education of the child. The following narrative along with accompanying transparencies will guide the facilitator through the presentation. This module could also serve as a self-study guide.



Audience: Teachers

Materials: Set of Transparencies
Journal article by Holly Seplocha, "Partnerships for Learning, Conferencing with Families" from *Beyond the Journal, Young Children on the Web*, P. 1-4, September, 2004. (Handout is downloadable at <<http://www.journal.naeyc.org/btj/200409/seplocha.pdf>>

Goal: To understand how to prepare and conduct a productive, professional conference with parents.

Segments:

1. Offer a flexible conferencing schedule.
2. Allow enough time.
3. Provide a welcoming atmosphere.
4. Be prepared and organized.
5. Be culturally appropriate.
6. Stay focused on the child.
7. Start by describing the child's strengths, interest, or abilities.
8. Encourage parents to share ideas and information.
9. Refrain from responding to seemingly hostile or threatening comments.
10. Avoid using jargon and loaded words such as *immature* or *problems*.
11. Share suggestions for at-home activities.
12. End the conference on a positive note.
13. Take a moment to reflect and document the discussion and plans.



Note to Facilitator:

Words in italics are appropriate for reading or paraphrasing. Other bold words are for headings.

Facilitator Guidelines

Module Introduction

What: Share the research from *A New Wave of Evidence* on the first page of this module under the bold **“What.”** (See **T#1**)

The evidence is consistent, positive, and convincing: families have a major influence on their children’s achievement in school and throughout life. When schools, families, and community groups work together to support learning, students tend to do better in school, stay in school longer, and like school more (New Wave of Evidence, p.7)

So What: *One time-tested, well established strategy which provides a foundation for building partnerships between parents and teachers is the parent-teacher conference. (See T#2-4)*

T#2 *Conferences encourage home-school linkages when...*

.....Parents and teachers engage in dialog about the student’s learning and development on a regular basis.

T#3 *.....Parents and teachers are willing to listen and learn from each other.*

T#4 *.....Parents and teachers come to the conference table prepared to ask questions and share information that will benefit the student.*

Now What: T#5 (See Handout #1- last section)

Using information in the **“Now What”** introduction to this module, discuss the goals and the purpose of this presentation. Even veteran teachers could benefit from reviewing some of the suggestions given for preparing and conducting conferences of quality.

Teacher’s Goals for Conferencing

- ***To inform the parents regarding the child’s growth and progress.***
- ***To learn important information about the child from the parents.***
- ***To plan for the child’s future success.***



- **To build a trusting, honoring relationship with the parents.**

Stop to think for a minute: What has to happen if these goals are to be realized?

(Parents have to be at conferences and an attitude of partnership between the parents and teacher for the benefit of the child has to prevail.)

Module Goal: (T#6) Project and explain the goal of the module: *To understand how to prepare and conduct a productive, professional conference with parents* (so you get an A+ for your performance!)

Opener: Ask the participants how many of them have experienced parent-teacher conferences either as a teacher or a parent. Reflect on the conference scene and think of problems related to conferencing with parents. Have participants share with others, either as a whole group if numbers are not large, or in small groups. Listen in and be ready to close the conversation by drawing attention to some of the comments you heard.

Introduction: After the sharing, ask how many remembered positive experiences and how many remembered “night mares.”

Comment regarding their stories, the nature of them, and the possibility that better preparation could have prevented some disasters. (If time allows, ask participants to reflect on what could have been done before the conference to avoid the nightmare.)

Journal Article-handout: reference the journal article, Handout 3, which can be found at: <http://www.journal.naeyc.org/btj/200409/seplocha.pdf>

Explain the format of the article and that your presentation will guide them through the article. Start by sharing the following three transparencies showing the 13 segments of the article and the presentation.

Proceed through the 13 segments using these notes, the transparencies provided, and the points in the article as your content.

1. Offer a flexible conference schedule. (T#10)

Why is this important? (Discuss busy schedules, over commitments, etc., and we want parents there.)

Battle Creek, Michigan, reported that in their district nearly 100% of the parents attended conferences in the elementary, 66-90% in middle school, and 34-51% in high school. If these statistics are similar in your district and if this is an indication of parent involvement or lack thereof, shouldn't we be interested in changing this trend so parents stay involved throughout a child's years in school?



Accommodate: How do you do that? In two ways: By offering conferences at “Various Alternative Times” if parents cannot come at the regularly scheduled time and by going to where the parents are, which may include “Various Unique Places.”

2. Allow enough time. (T#11)

How many minutes? How much control do you as an individual teacher have over the time spent in a conference with a parent? If conferences are scheduled in 15-20 minute blocks, probably not very much. What can you do if more time is needed for a conference.....if you suspect it before the conference? (Perhaps schedule a double block of time.)....if you discover it during or at the end of the conference? (Reschedule with the parents for another time.)

Time between conferences: Why is the suggestion made to leave 5 minutes between each conference? To make notes about the previous conference; if parents are late your whole schedule will not be thrown off; and, if you run overtime with a parent, you can more readily get back on track.

You may notice that conferences tend to fill up the time allotted, so your schedule will have to be followed as closely as possible out of respect for the parents coming next.

3. Provide a welcoming atmosphere. (T# 12) *You are undoubtedly aware of some of the ways you might do that.*

Sit next to the parents on adult-sized chairs. Primary teachers - Repeat after me-“ I will always have adult-sized chairs in my room for any adult who comes into my room.” That goes for all elementary teachers. It is not easy trying to wedge an adult body into a thir- or fourth-grade desk or having to pry oneself out. If you sit beside the parent rather than across from him or her, you can share printed materials right-side-up and in a friendly manner. The message is that you are all on the same side, which is the child’s side.

Refreshments? Some schools offer refreshments for all parents on conference days. If this is not true in your school, you might consider doing it yourself. Conference days are busy times, so adding another thing to your schedule may not be wise. If you have volunteers or room parents who will do this for you, consider taking advantage of that.

Check Parents Names. Gone are the days when you can count on Jenny Smith’s parents being Mr. and Mrs. Smith. Be sure you know how to address the parents before the conference to avoid “putting your foot in your mouth” and offending anyone.



Non-Verbals: Greet the parents with a genuine smile, make eye contact, welcome them, invite them to look around the room as time permits, and invite them to sit at the conferencing table.

4. Be prepared, organized. (T#13) *Ask yourself, “What will parents want to know?” and “What do I want to tell the parents?” How will I prepare to do that? Most elementary teachers prepare a work folder showing samples of the student’s work for the parents. A wise teacher will involve the students in a process of collecting work samples, selecting those for the folder, and reflecting on why each work sample was selected. For example: A child might write: “This paper shows how I struggled to learn three-digit multiplication, but now I can do it well”; “This is a sample of my best writing. I learned to use a topic sentence and support it with details.”*

5. Be culturally appropriate. (T#14) *If you are not aware of the cultural backgrounds of your students that differ from your own, you would be wise to increase your understanding. Knowing about and understanding others’ cultures help one to respect the cultural values, attitudes, and expectations.*

In addition to doing some research, you need to listen and learn. You may learn from the parents about the norms of the culture, expected behaviors, communication preferences and possibilities, and even the role that family members may take in educating the child. So, listen to the parents and learn from them. What do they expect from their child? What do they expect from the school? How do they wish to be involved in their child’s education?

The more you know the more you can appreciate and understand diversity issues which will help you suspend judgment. If you truly want to be partners, you will want to come to consensus on what is best for the child.

6. Stay focused on the child. (T#15) *A parent-teacher conference exists for two main purposes: for sharing information about the child and for planning for the future of the child. Don’t let the conference get “off track” by discussing issues that are not directly related to the child. If other family needs arise, be aware of counselors, social workers, or other professionals who may need to become involved.*

7. Start by describing the child’s strengths, interests, or abilities. (T#16) *By sharing something positive about the child at the beginning of the conference, you are creating a comfortable atmosphere, putting the parents at ease. You are trying to establish a relationship with the parents, and the connecting link is the child. You may choose to share a positive story, a photo, or the child’s work sample to “get off on the right foot.”*

8. Encourage parents to share ideas and information. (T#17) *“Successful partnerships encourage sharing and learning.” (Last sentence in this paragraph in the*



referenced article.) *Make sure there is time in the conference to listen to what the parents have to say about their child. Ask them what they think or what they have noticed about their child. Solicit ideas about how you can partner realizing that parents can be involved in many forms.*

9. Refrain from responding in the negative to the negative. (T#18) *(Refrain from responding to seemingly hostile or threatening comments.) Of course, parents have concerns about their child, and at times they become quite emotional. Generally parents have a perception of the role of the teacher; the parents' own past school experiences may have a huge influence on their own attitudes toward school in general and the teacher, in particular. We need to remember that parenting can be difficult, just as teaching can be difficult at times. If you feel the conference is "out of control," gracefully end the conference with a comment about needing time to think and talk more about the issue. Schedule another time to meet when both of you are "fresh," perhaps even away from the school and with the principal present.*

10. Avoid using jargon and loaded words such as immature or problems. (T#19) *Many words we use in our educational lingo have little or no meaning to anyone outside our field. Think of some of these expressions: cognitive development, gross motor skills, phonemic awareness, ITEDs and ITBS. How do you react when a mechanic or a doctor uses terms you are not familiar with or have only a vague idea what they mean? Keep that in mind as you communicate with your parents.*

11. Share home suggestions (T#20) *(Share suggestions for at-home activities.) Be specific. Parents appreciate suggestions of ways they can help their child with learning at home. Keep it simple so it is easily understood and doable. Emphasize that everyday activities such as doing the laundry, cleaning one's room, or going grocery shopping can be vehicles for learning. Try to understand differing cultures by asking what they might choose to do to provide learning experiences at home. Be considerate of family budgets, and do not ask parents to make new purchases. Rather than give parents long lists of things to do which can be confusing, keep the suggestions to a minimum. Remember that your purpose is to build a partnership for working together.*

12. End on a Positive Note (T#21) *Thank all parents for coming to the conference. It may have taken a great deal of effort for them to be there. Stress the importance of partnering for the child's education and the importance of communication in that process. Ask parents to be in close contact with questions or over issues affecting their child. Show that you value parent support and their willingness to plan together for the future success of their child. Focus on the child's ability and express confidence that he/she will continue to grow, learn, and develop. End the conference with encouragement; share a positive comment about the child and your wish to partner for his or her success.*



13. Reflect and document (T#22) If you are fortunate enough or have carefully planned for a few minutes to be available after each conference, take time to *reflect and document* the most important components of the conference. Ask yourself these questions and take *notes*, “*How did it go?*” and “*What follow-up is needed?*” If your conferences tend to take up all the time allotted, be sure to make notes as you and the parents are conferencing so you remember what you and they agree to do, set a date to check in with them regarding your plans, and make sure you do it.

When all conferences are completed, consider taking time to reflect to *assess your own performance*. Consider your *preparation*. Was it appropriate and adequate? (Did you create a welcoming *atmosphere*? Did you *use the time* to the best advantage? Did you *start on a positive note*? Did you *involve the parents* by inviting them to question and comment and plan for the future? Ask, “*How could the conferences have been better? What information that you and the parents shared was helpful? How might you interact with the parents the next time to improve the quality of the information sharing?*”

In a workshop setting, participants may be asked to complete the following statements See (T23 and Handout 5)

:

- ◆ My most significant learning today was
- ◆ As a result of being here today, I plan to



What! (T#1)

The evidence is consistent, positive, and convincing: families have a major influence on their children's achievement in school and throughout life. When schools, families, and community groups work together to support learning, students tend to do better in school, stay in school longer, and like school more. (New Wave of Evidence, p. 7)



So What: T#2

Conferences encourage home-school linkages ...

When parents and teachers engage in dialog about the student's learning and development on a regular basis.



So What: T#3

Conferences encourage home-school linkages when...

Parents and teachers are willing to listen and learn from each other.



So What: T #4

Conferences encourage home-school linkages when...

Parents and teachers come to the conference table prepared to ask questions and share information that will benefit the student.



Teacher Goals for Conferences T#5

- ◆ **To inform the parents regarding the child's growth and progress.**

- ◆ **To learn important information about the child from the parents.**

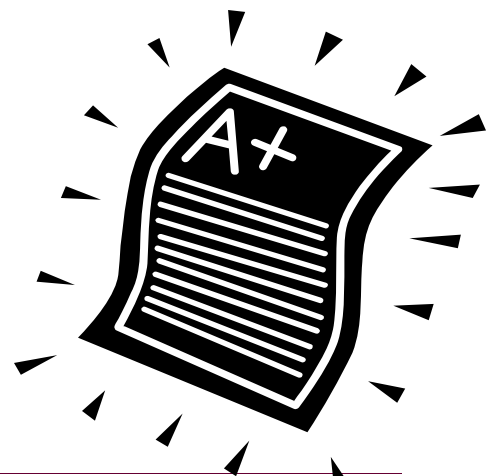
- ◆ **To plan for the child's future success.**

- ◆ **To build a trusting, honoring relationship with the parents.**



Module Goal: T#6

**To understand how to
prepare and conduct a
productive,
professional
conference with
parents.**





Conferencing with Parents

T#7

1. Offer a flexible conferencing schedule.
2. Allow enough time.
3. Provide a welcoming atmosphere.
4. Be prepared & organized.
5. Be culturally appropriate.



6. Stay focused on the child.
T#8
7. Start by describing the child's strengths, interests, or abilities.
8. Encourage parents to share ideas and information.
9. Refrain from responding to seemingly hostile or threatening comments.



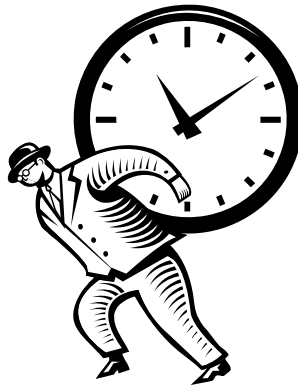
10. Avoid using jargon and loaded words such as *immature* or *problems*.
11. Share suggestions for at-home activities.
12. End the conference on a positive note.
13. Take a moment to reflect and document the discussion and plans.



1. Offer a flexible ^{T10} conferencing schedule.

Accommodate:

- Various alternative times



- Various unique places





2. Allow enough time^{T#11}

- How many minutes?
- Time between conferences
 - To make notes...
 - If parents are late...
 - If you run over time...





3. Provide a welcoming atmosphere. T#12

- Sit next to parents *on* Adult-sized chairs.



- Refreshments?



- Check parents' names.



- Non-verbals

Smile

Eye Contact

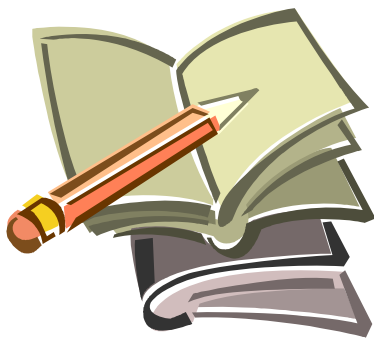
Lean forward





4. Be prepared & organized^{T#13}

- What story do you want to tell?
- What will help you tell it?
- How will you select items to tell about the child's progress?



- Work Folders
 - Content
 - Collect
 - Select
 - Reflect



5. Culturally appropriate.

T#14

- Respect cultural values, attitudes, expectations.
- Listen and learn: norms, behavior, communication, and role relationships.
- Appreciate and understand diversity issues.
- Suspend judgment - come to consensus on what is best for the child.



6. Stay focused on the child. T#15

- Purpose
Sharing
Planning



- Be aware of...
Counselors
Social workers
Other Professionals





7. Start with strengths, ^{T#16} interests, or abilities.

To put parents at ease,

establish a connection by...



- Sharing a story
- Showing a photo
- Looking at
work samples





8. Encourage parent ^{T#17} sharing: learn about the child and family

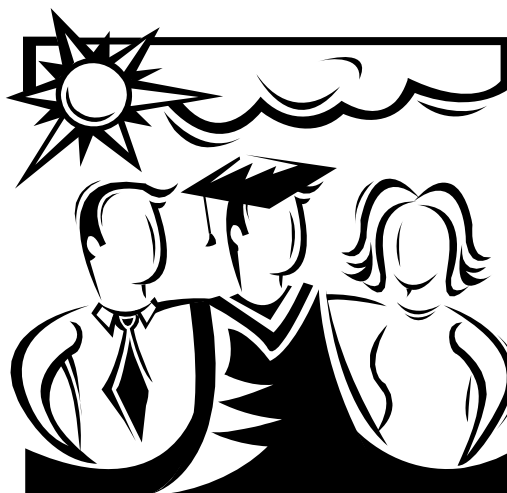
➤ Listen



➤ Solicit ideas

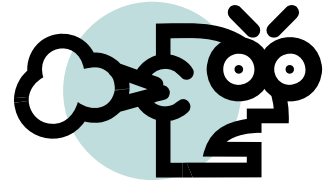


➤ Involve in many forms

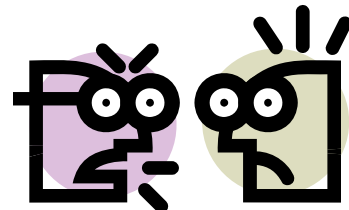




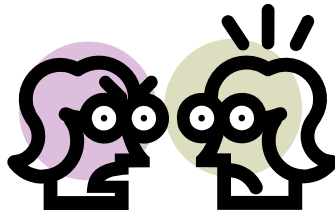
9. Refrain from responding in the negative to the negative. T#18



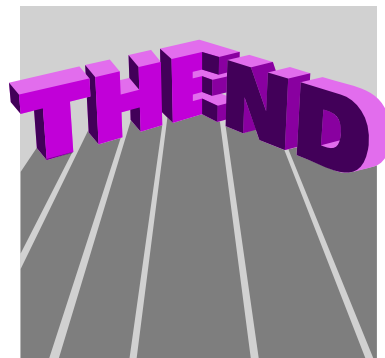
- Past School Experience



- Parenting is difficult



- End if out of control





10. Avoid using jargon and loaded words.^{T#19}



cognitive development
gross motor skills

problems immature

lazy

phonemic awareness

ITBS

ITEDs



11. Share home suggestions

T#20

Be specific: Keep it simple

➤ Everyday activities



➤ Understand cultures

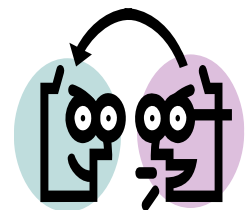
➤ No new purchases



➤ Keep to a minimum



➤ Work together



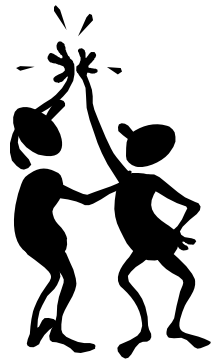


12. End on positive note

T#21

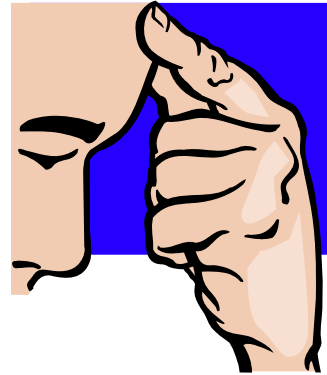


- Thank you's
- Stress partnerships
- Stress communication
- Value parent support
- Plan together for future
- Focus on child's ability
- End with encouragement





13. Reflect and document^{T#22}



Notes:

How did it go?

Follow-up needed?

Assess own performance

Preparation

Atmosphere

Use of time

Positive beginning

Parent involved

How could it be better?

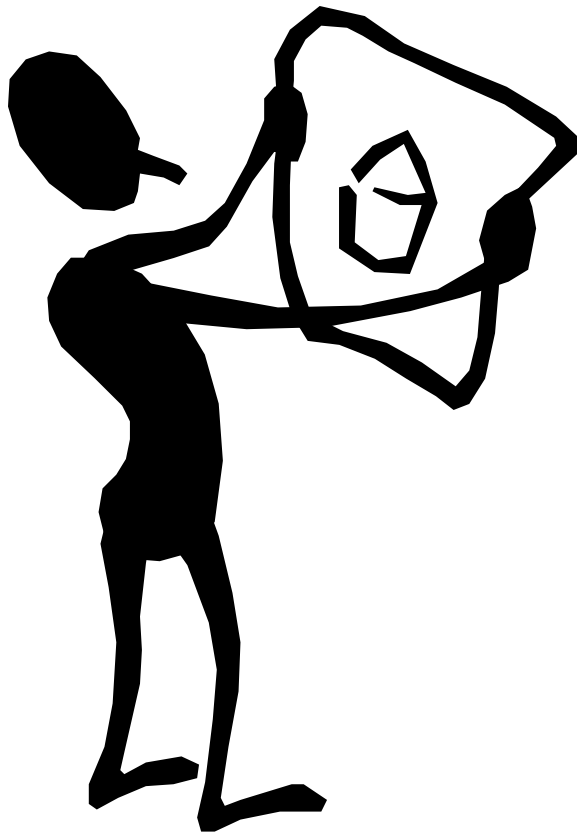
What info was helpful?



T#23

My most significant learning today was.....

As a result of being here today, I plan to





Workshop Segments Handout 2

1. Offer a flexible conferencing schedule.
2. Allow enough time.
3. Provide a welcoming atmosphere.
4. Be prepared and organized.
5. Be culturally appropriate.
6. Stay focused on the child.
7. Start by describing the child's strengths, interests, or abilities.
8. Encourage parents to share ideas and information.
9. Refrain from responding to seemingly hostile or threatening comments.
10. Avoid using jargon and loaded words such as *immature* or *problems*.
11. Share suggestions for at-home activities.
12. End the conference on a positive note.
13. Take a moment to reflect and document the discussion and plans.



Handout 5

My most significant learning
today was.....

As a result of being here today,
I plan to
