



Parent-Teacher Conferencing

Getting the Most Value from Your Time with the Teacher

What:

“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-faceted.

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:

Often the responsibility for a successful conference rests with the teacher and his or her preparation. However, parents are one half of the formula for a successful parent-teacher conference. This module was designed as a workshop for parents to inform them how they might approach a conference with the teacher to get the most value from their time together.

The following 8-page narrative and 25 accompanying transparencies will guide the facilitator through the presentation. The workshop handout for distribution to parents was obtained from an article by Holly Seplocha, “Partnerships for Learning, Conferencing with Families” from *Beyond the Journal - Young Children on the Web*, p. 3, September, 2004.

<<http://www.journal.naeyc.org/btj/200409/seplocha.pdf>>



Parent Teacher Conferencing: Getting the Most Value from Your Time with the Teacher

Pre-Module Presentation Requirements:

Desire to increase parent involvement in the child's education by improving parent-teacher conferences.

Intended Audience:

Parents

Goals:

- To inform parents about their role in conferencing.
- To help parents prepare for a conference.
- To help parents feel valued and empowered in the conferencing process.
- To build positive home-school partnerships

Materials:

- Transparencies (See Attached)
- Handout for participants:
 - “We’: The Most Important Feature of a Parent-Teacher Conference,” page 3 of the article “Partnerships for Learning – Conferencing with Families” by Holly Seplocha; *Beyond the Journal – Young Children on the Web*; September, 2004. Download at <http://www.journal.naeyc.org/btj/200409/seplocha.pdf>
- 2-5 3x5 notecards for each parent/participant
- Bookmarks for each parent/participant: Parenting, Advocating, Mathematics

Opening: (Transparency #1)

That's Me! Activity: This warm up activity will help people become acquainted with each other and feel more comfortable in the group setting.

Directions: If what I say is true about you, you must wave your hand in the air and say, “That’s me!”



Start with an item to which all will have to say, “That’s me!” *For example: If I say, I have a child in this school, all of you would stand up/wave an arm and say “That’s me!”*. Invite everyone to *look around to learn about the other parents, who is responding, whom might you want to connect with later to compare notes.*

1. I live in ___(school district name.)
2. I am a parent. I have 1 child..., 2 children..., 3..., 4....
3. I am a busy parent.
4. I have little time to myself.
5. I have a child in college.
6. I’ve been to parent-teacher conferences before.
7. This will be my first parent-teacher conference.
8. I am looking forward to conferencing about my child.
9. I want to learn as much about my child as possible.
10. I would like to share information about my child with his/her teacher.
11. I was my child’s first teacher.
12. I know my child better than anyone else.
13. I want to know how my child is doing in school.
14. I want to be prepared to get my questions answered.

I’d like you to think about one more question (Transparency #2):

Who were your child’s first teachers?

Parents are a child’s first teachers. (Transparency #3)

So, why should you even take the time - make the time - to be involved? After all, you were your child’s first teacher, so now isn’t it someone else’s job?

Before we talk specifically about conferences, let’s take a look at the new information we have about the importance of family involvement in a child’s education.

The research makes clear the critical role parent involvement plays in a child’s school achievement.



Ten Great Reasons Why You May Want to be Involved in Your Child's Education (Transparency #4)

Students with involved parents are more likely to: (New Wave of Evidence, p. 7).

(Transparency #5)

10. **Earn higher grades and test scores**
9. **Enroll in higher-level programs**
8. **Pass their classes and earn credits**
7. **Be promoted**
6. **Attend school regularly**

(Transparency # 6)

5. **Have better social skills**
4. **Show improved behavior**
3. **Adapt well to school**
2. **Graduate and go on to postsecondary education**

(Transparency #7)

1. **Make a comfortable living, on their own! ☺**

Attending Parent-Teacher Conferences is just one of many ways you as parents can be involved with your child's education.

Share the Handout: "We" The Most Important Feature of a Parent-Teacher Conference by Holly Seplocha. Source: *Beyond the Journal, Young Children on the Web*. September 2004, p. 3. Download from

<http://www.journal.naeyc.org/btj/200409/seplocha.pdf> (Transparency #8)

Promote: Be willing and ready to share information about your child and family. (Transparency #9)

Because you are your child's first teacher, you know your child better than anyone else. You are also your child's best advocate. Be passionate about your child and his/her success. Be ready to share information that might help the teacher better understand your child:

personality traits, challenges, habits, friends, hobbies, talents



(Point out questions at the bottom fourth of this section starting with “What kinds of things....”) (Transparency #10)

Pick one of the questions and think about what you might say to the teacher to let him or her know more about your child. Note: If the parents seem comfortable with sharing, you might ask them to share with a partner, and have a few of them share their response for all to hear. Do not, however, press parents to participate.

Be positive: Stay focused on the child. (Transparency # 11)

I'd like you to think for a minute about something that happened to you when you were in school. You won't have to share your thought(s) with anyone. (Note: Wait until everyone is “thinking” about an experience.) Ask them to now ***raise their hands if it was a good, positive experience....*** Look around and draw attention to the number of hands raised.... ***A negative experience?*** Again observe. ***What did you learn?***

(Usually, the negatives far outweigh the positives.)

If you had some negative experiences, it is so easy to dredge up those old feelings you had at that time. (Display: “Every child who walks through these doors sees his or her future; every parent sees his or her past,” shared by Greg Reault, in *Perspectives for Partnership*.) (Transparency #12)
Do you agree with this statement?

Participate: Never miss a parent-teacher conference. (Transparency #13)

If given a choice, select a time that works for you and the teacher. Most teachers are willing to schedule individually to accommodate your availability. Just remember, they have many other conferences to schedule, as well.

If open times are set and you just need to show up (often the case in middle or high school), put it on your calendar like you would a doctor's appointment. Plan to go and then do it! This is a golden opportunity for you to talk to your child's teacher one on one, and to advocate for your child.



What message does your child get when you do not attend a conference? I had a child say to me, “My parents don’t even care enough about me to go to my conferences. My grandmother has to go instead.” Hooray for the grandmother ... better she than no one ... but even better that the parents be there!

I’ve known teachers who have gone to the child’s home or the parents’ place of work to have the conference. If you cannot connect in any other way, you may even settle for a telephone conference. Copies of the student’s work would be made and sent to the parents so you could refer to them as you were conferencing.

Be prompt: Arrive on time. (Transparency #14)

Typically, conference times in the elementary are set ahead of time, one right after the other. So if someone is late that puts the teacher off schedule and may affect lots of parents who are scheduled after that. So, be on time, and if something comes up, which can happen, call the school with a message for the teacher. Then, reschedule later for another conference.

Middle schools and high schools generally have large blocks of time scheduled for conferences and parents go at a time that is convenient for them. Sometimes a suggested time is given to the parents to balance the number of parents attending at any one time. My experience has been that teachers are more than willing to work with me to find a time that works for them and me.

Plan ahead for child care: Children can hear and remember what is said, especially when they should not. (Transparency #15)

Unless the child is expected to be at the conference, plan for his/her care while you are conferencing. If you can’t get a sitter, maybe you can trade childcare time with a friend or neighbor. If you must take the child with you, take along a book or toy for the child to play with in another part of the room.

When students are either invited or expected to be at the conference, your only concern would be for siblings. It is not appropriate for siblings to listen in on a conference that does not pertain to them.



Be pleasant: Listen with an open mind. (Transparency #16)

It's fun to hear others talk about your child when they are saying good, positive things. (Yep! That's my child! A chip off the old block!) But it is not as easy to listen and accept the negative things, the things that aren't going so well. But by knowing about them and working together with the teacher, you can make a real difference for your child.

If you disagree with something the teacher says, say so. (Transparency #17) You can say, "I don't agree" or "I see it differently," or "My child says," Remember also that sometimes children behave very differently at school than they do at home.

You can disagree in a pleasant voice without being a Grinch or an Eeyore! Let's practice. Find someone to talk to. Now one of you take the first turn. Turn to your partner and say, "I just love (pick a season). It is the best time of the year." Partner, now I want you to disagree. Say, "I disagree" in an acceptable voice, and explain why.

Have you ever been in a doctor's office and heard words you did not understand? Think of your own example. (I was at the ophthalmologist's having my eyes examined and he said, "We have to consider the quantity and the quality of your tears." Now I understood quantity, how much my eyes teared, but I certainly did not know anything about the quality of tears. Are there good tears and bad tears? So I asked him what that meant. He explained that one way to talk about the quality of tears was to evaluate their evaporation time. Now that made sense to me.)

The same thing that happened to me at the ophthalmologist's (replace with your doctor) can happen at a conference with the teacher. If you don't understand something the teacher says, say so. Ask for a further explanation. Keep asking until it makes sense.

A family invited a young pastor to their home to have dinner with them to talk over a touchy problem. Since their eight year old was also at the table, the pastor searched for words to talk about the issue but not "let the girl in on" the conversation. Finally the girl looked up from her plate and said, "What language are you talking?"



Teachers work with a vocabulary that may sound like a foreign language to parents. Don't hesitate to ask, "What does that mean?"

Be prepared. (Transparency #18)

Teachers prepare for conferences in various ways. Usually they spend time organizing a child's work and reflecting on the areas of strength and those needing improvement.

As a parent, you, too, need to spend some time preparing for the conference. Ask yourself, "What do I want to learn from this conference?" Many times parents say they just want to know how their child is doing, and that's O.K., but if you are interested in learning something more specific, write your questions down before you go to the conference.

Let's do a little preparing right now. (Transparency#19) (Distribute 2-5 3x5 cards to each parent.) Ask them to take a minute to *think*, "If you are face-to-face with your child's teacher, what would you ask? About what are you curious? Jot down a question on each note card. Examples might include the following: Why does my child have so much homework? Why doesn't my child have homework? Is he/she turning in the homework or other school work? On time? How does he/she behave? What can I do at home to support the school? What skills and knowledge will my child be expected to master this year? How will my child be evaluated? What kinds of information do you use to evaluate students and how are grades determined in your classroom? How do you accommodate differences in learning? What if my child doesn't learn as quickly as the other students and falls behind – or What if my child is a faster learner and is bored?"

Did you think of two or three things you might ask the teacher?

You might ask a few parents to share what they wrote.

Be a Partner: Keep the conversation focused on what you and the teacher can plan for your child. (Transparency #20)

Share the diagram of three inter-locking circles marked "School, Home, Community" with the "Child" in the center. *Everyone wants what is best for your child. The goal is to come to an agreement about what that is. If you cannot do*



that during the conference, schedule another time to meet with the teacher. You may even wish to have another person there to support you in the conversation, a friend or the principal, for example.

Be Passionate: Stay involved. (Transparency #21)

Look for opportunities to stay involved. If your child needs a boost in a specific class, make sure additional time and effort is spent on that class. Ask the teacher to let you know if things are not going well, and ask what your child needs to do and what you can do to help. The thing you can do that has the most effect on your child's progress in school is paying attention to the child's learning outside of school, homework, and other learning opportunities. (Share the bookmarks designed for parents: Parenting, Advocating, Mathematics)

Do you have time to volunteer at school? Most schools have multiple ways for parents to be involved in this way. Some teachers prepare packets of work the parent can do at home, like cut out patterns in the primary grades. Parents can do the work while monitoring homework or watching T.V., for example. Imagine how proud the child feels when he/she can be the carrier pigeon, taking the packet home and returning it to school when it is completed.

One more "P" word:

Paraphrase: Share the conference content with your child. (Transparency #22)

Children are curious about what was said during the conference. Go over any information you brought home with the child. Use discretion with sensitive information that might harm the child. Remember to start and end with positive comments, and put the areas needing improvement in the middle, like a sandwich. Encourage your child and design a plan for what you and your child will do to improve the weak area. Stick to it!

Remember these parenting tips! (Transparency #23)

- *Provide a quiet time and place each evening so that your child can complete homework assignments and develop good study skills.*
- *Let your child know you want to be a partner with the school.*
- *Look at the school work your child brings home and respond to it. Notice what is done well as well as what needs to be improved. Try to get your*



child to talk about his/her work by saying things like, “Tell me about this? What did you learn here? Teach me what you learned.”

- *Stay in touch with the teacher and with your child.*

What will you take away from this session? What is your take-away?

(Transparency #24) Listen in as parents discuss this and pick up a few examples to share with the group or you might ask for some of the ideas you heard to be shared. Allow time for partners to exchange ideas and have a few ideas shared with the large group. This provides a review of what was learned during your time together and gives you a perspective on what parents valued.

Closure: Parents and teachers are very aware of how important it is to work together for the good of the child. This poem summarizes this invaluable concept. Share the poem: “I dreamed I stood in a studio. . . .”

(Transparency #25)



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That's Me!

T#1





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Who were ^{T#2} your child's first teachers?



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**Parents are a
child's first
teachers.**



10 Great Reasons Why^{T#4} You May Want to be Involved in Your Child's Education

**Students with involved
parents were more likely
to...**



- 10. Earn higher grades and test scores. ^{T#5}**
- 9. Enroll in higher-level programs.**
- 8. Pass their classes and earn credits.**
- 7. Be promoted.**
- 6. Attend school regularly.**



- 5. Have better social skills. T#6**
- 4. Show improved behavior.**
- 3. Adapt well to school.**
- 2. Graduate and go on to postsecondary education.**



And the # 1 reason you may want to be involved in your child's education is: students with involved parents are more likely to..... T#7

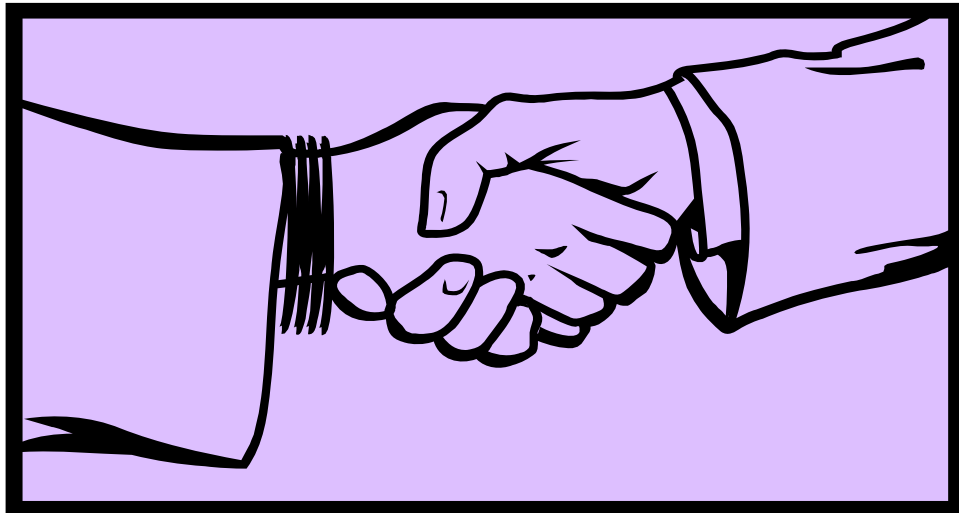
1. Make a comfortable living, and be on their own! 😊



“We”

T#8

**the most important
feature of a parent-
teacher conference!**





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Promote: Be willing and^{T#9}



*ready to share information
about your child and family.*



Promote: Consider... T#10

- **What kinds of things do you enjoy doing with your child?**
- **How do siblings relate to their brother/sister?**
- **What kind of discipline do you use?**
- **What are your dreams for your child?**
- **What are your concerns?**



**Every child who walks T#12
through these doors sees his
or her future; every parent
sees his or her past.**

Greg Reault



***Do you agree with
this statement?***



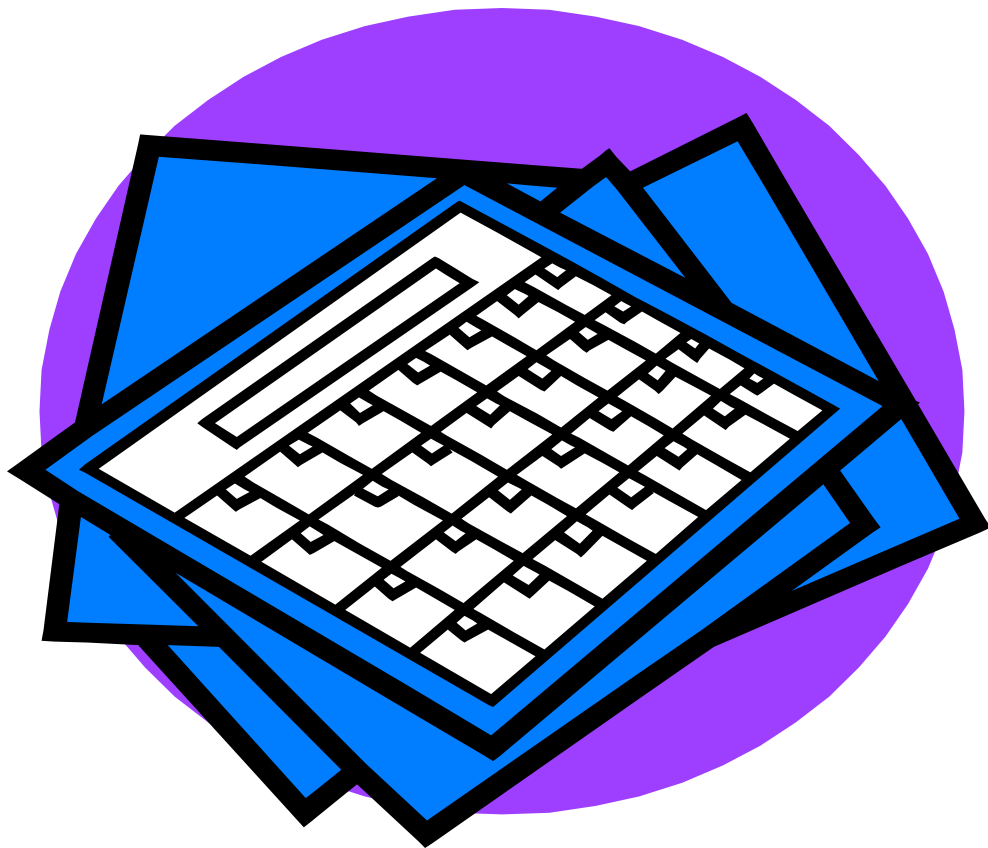
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*Participate: Never
miss a ^{T#13} parent-
teacher conference.*



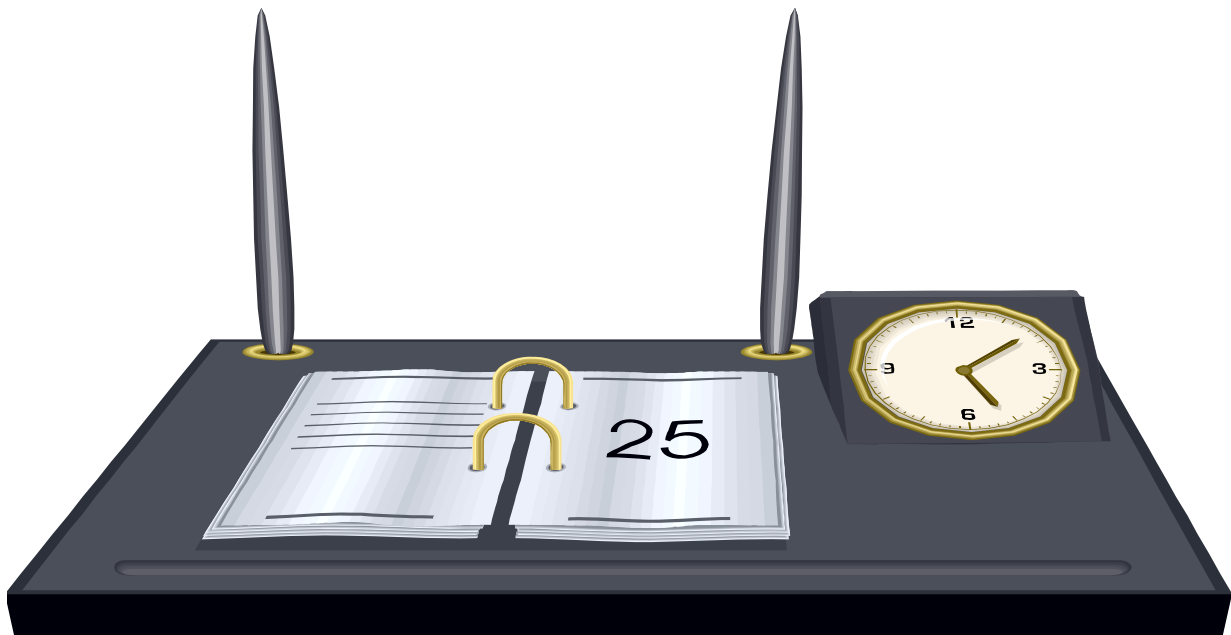


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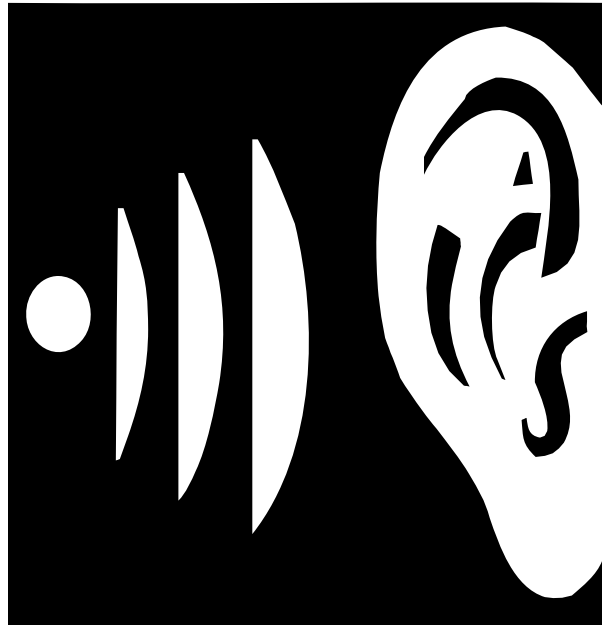
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Be prompt: Arrive on time.^{T#14}





***Plan ahead for child care: T#15
Children can hear and
remember what is said
(especially when they should
not.)***





Be pleasant: Listen with T#16
an open mind.





You can say... T#17

I don't agree...

I see it differently...

My child says...

*Partners: A: I just love _____
(pick a season). It is the best
time of the year.*

*B: I disagree or I don't think
so.... (and why).*

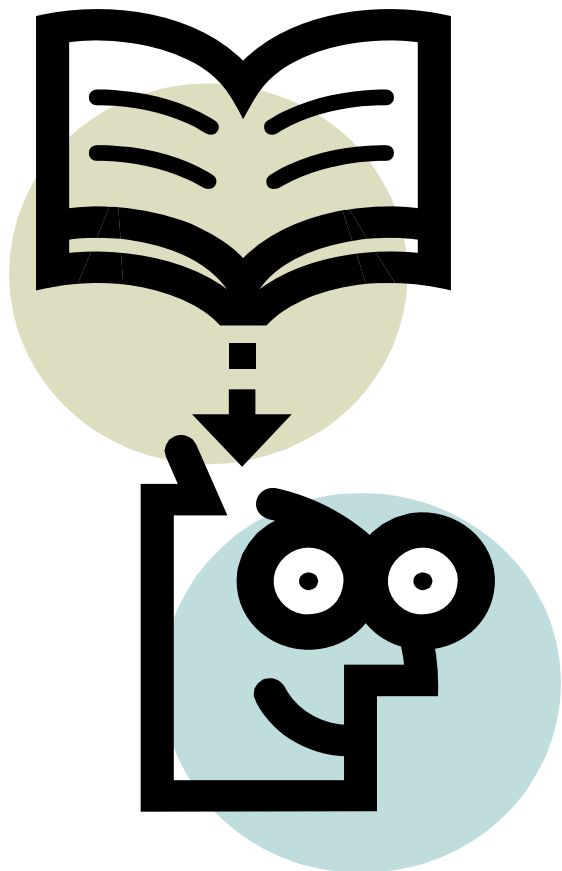


*Switch roles. Repeat.
Be prepared. What do you^{T#18}
want to learn?*





What^{T#19} questions might you ask?





Be a Partner: Keep the ^{T#20} conversation focused on what you and the teacher can plan for your child.





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Be Passionate: Stay ^{T#21} involved.





Paraphrase: Share the^{T#22} conference content with your child.





Parenting Tips: T#23

1. Provide a quiet time and place for homework.
2. Let your child know you are a partner with the school.
3. Look at the homework your child brings home.
4. Stay in touch with the teacher and with your child.



What is your “take-away”^{T#24}
from this session?





T#25

I dreamed, I stood in a studio and watched
two sculptures there.

The clay they used was a young child's
mind, and they fashioned it with care.

One was a teacher and the tools she used
were books and music and art.

One was a parent with a guiding hand and a
gentle, loving heart.

And when at last their work was done, they
were proud of what they had wrought.

For the things they worked into the child
could not be sold or bought.

And each agreed she would have failed if
she had worked alone.

For behind the parents stood the school and
behind the teacher, stood the home.





We: The Most Important Feature of a Parent-Teacher Conference T26

Promote: Be willing and ready

Be Positive: Stay child focused

Participate: Never miss

Be Prompt: Arrive on time

Plan Ahead: Remember children hear

Be Pleasant: Listen

Be Prepared: Be Prepared

Be a Partner: Keep focus on the child

Be Passionate: Stay involved

Paraphrase: Share with your child