



# Six Questions to Ask Your Child's Teacher at Conference Time

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Your child has been in school for several weeks now. Parent/teacher conferences are fast approaching. Will you go in clinching your teeth and holding your breath, hoping not to hear news of your child's poor performance? Will you conjure up feelings from when you were a child and your parents returned home with news from the teacher? Have you considered what you want to learn from that meeting? Will you sit quietly and listen? Or will you ask questions? If so, what will they be?

Remember that conference time is an opportunity for you to gather information about both your child and the teacher. The six questions below will help you make the most of the few moments you have with him or her.

## **Question 1: What are my child's strengths?**

The goal of this question is to get feedback to take back to your child to foster feelings of accomplishment. If the only news you return with is about his or her deficits, your child can be left with feelings of failure and inadequacy. This question also gives you valuable information about how the teacher sees your child. That can tell you as much about the teacher as it does about the child. Does she see his strengths and can she articulate them by providing specific examples? Or is she always looking at problems and limitations? How the teacher sees your child can have a significant impact on his performance and feelings toward school. Why not check it out?

## **Question 2: What is my child's best learning style?**

You may already know if your child is more of an auditory learner or a visual learner. You may have some clues about whether she learns best if information is provided in a sequential manner or whether she prefers seeing the whole picture. It might be helpful to know whether her teacher uses varied learning styles to accommodate the needs of many students. Is the material being presented in a variety of ways so that your child has the opportunity to learn through her primary learning style? Does she have opportunities to practice her weaker learning styles in an emotionally safe environment?

## **Question 3: Other than academics, what are the major goals that are addressed in the classroom?**

Does this teacher have an agenda other than reading, writing, and arithmetic? Is there a focus on something besides test scores, academic benchmarks, and grades? Is this classroom simply a test-prep lab or are other significant learning opportunities being offered, including higher level thinking, cooperation, leadership, responsibility, application, appreciation for diversity, in-depth analysis, and the ability to see several sides of an issue? How are these topics that are often left out because of the craze to increase achievement scores being handled in your child's classroom? And where is she in regard to them?

**Question 4: How are my child's social skills?**

You see your child interact at home with peers, but how does he or she interact with other students at school? Does he make friends easily? Do people like him or is he seen as a bully? How does she handle adversity and social conflict at school? Ask for specific examples of what the teacher is seeing. Don't accept generalizations or judgmental labels. You want to know how the teacher really views your child when grades are set aside.

**Question 5: What would you like to know about my child that would be helpful to you as his teacher?**

Don't be intimidated by the teacher. You know your child better than anyone else does. You have information about his or her skills, knowledge, and growth that can assist the teacher. Although the teacher may be an expert at teaching eighth grade or third grade or kindergarten, you're the primary expert on your child. Together you make a team of caring adults. Consider yourself an important part of that team.

**Question 6: What can we do at home to support you?**

Discuss what you are able and willing to provide as home support for your child. Share your feelings about homework and the ways in which you support and encourage your son or daughter in doing the work they bring home. Be clear with the teacher about what you are unwilling to provide. Your role at home should not be one of homework scrooge or soldier on the front lines of a battleground.

With these six questions you send a strong message to the teacher that you are serious about raising a responsible, caring, confident child who is well rounded in his or her academic experience. You proclaim yourself an active participant in your child's education. You are challenging the teacher and asking to be challenged as a parent as you enter a partnership in teaching your child. These six questions can make this the best parent/teacher conference ever.