**10 Tips to Make the Most of Your Parent-Teacher Conference**

****

Most parent-teacher conferences only last 10 or 15 minutes. That’s not a lot of time to connect with your child’s teacher. But with a little preparation and planning, you can make the most of this time. Here are 10 tips that can help.

**Before the Conference**

**1. Look over schoolwork.**

Take some time to look over your child’s homework, essays, reading logs, and other schoolwork. How does it look like your child is doing? Is the homework too easy or too hard? Does your child need help?

Review report cards, too. What are your child’s grades like? You can also look over any emails or newsletter updates the teacher has sent.

**2. Talk with your child.**

Get a sense from your child about how school is going. What’s most and least enjoyable? Does your child feel unsure about school? Who are the kids your child talks with most in class? (For more ideas, see this list of [**questions to ask your child**](https://www.understood.org/en/learning-thinking-differences/understanding-childs-challenges/talking-with-your-child/how-to-say-it-questions-to-ask-your-child-about-school).)

Ask your child if there’s anything you should talk to the teacher about. Mention that every family has a conference, so your child doesn’t worry about what this meeting means.

**3. Make a list of questions.**

Now that you’ve talked with your child and reviewed schoolwork, make a list of questions. If you’re stumped, use this [**list of questions to ask teachers**](https://www.understood.org/en/school-learning/partnering-with-childs-school/working-with-childs-teacher/checklist-questions-to-ask-at-your-parent-teacher-conference).

Think through anything you want to make sure the teacher knows. Are there specific things that helped your child thrive in school in the past? Have there been any big changes in your family or living situation? Are there holidays you’ll be away? Talk with other family members to make sure you cover everything.

Once you have your list, put questions and concerns in order of importance, so you can cover the biggest things first. Use this [**parent-teacher conference worksheet**](https://www.understood.org/en/school-learning/partnering-with-childs-school/working-with-childs-teacher/download-parent-teacher-conference-worksheet) to get organized.

**At the Conference**

**4. Be on time.**

Double-check the time slot for your conference. Then plan to be ready about five minutes before your assigned time. This way, you won’t miss any of your time with the teacher.

**5. Skip the class overview (unless you need it).**

Teachers often begin the conference with some general class information. While this can be helpful, it takes up valuable conference time. If you already know this information, politely say something like: “I’ve been reading your newsletter. If it’s OK with you, can we spend more time on the questions I have about my child?”

**6. Stay calm.**

It’s important to keep your emotions in check during the conference, even if your child is struggling with something. Taking a few deep breaths can help. Using a respectful tone will also help you and the teacher work together to find solutions for your child.

At the same time, if you disagree with the teacher, be sure to speak up. If you don’t say something, the teacher may assume you don’t have concerns.

**7. Ask the most important questions first.**

Remember that you only have a short time. Try to cover your most important questions and concerns first. (Use your list of questions if you had time to make one.)

But try not to worry if you don’t get to everything. You can still ask for a follow-up meeting with the teacher to discuss anything you couldn’t get to. And if you don’t understand something the teacher says, ask for an explanation.

**8. Figure out next steps.**

Save a few minutes at the end of the conference for next steps. Depending on what you’ve talked about, here’s what you might suggest:

* Staying in touch: “How can we keep talking about this? Could I get weekly feedback for the next month—maybe a quick email on Fridays?”
* In-class help: “We talked about giving my child more support in class. What should we look for in the coming weeks to decide if it’s working or not?”
* School services: “I’d like to meet with the school to talk about extra reading instruction. What information should we gather before that meeting?”

**After the Conference**

**9. Update your child.**

Talk to your child about what happened. It’s important to share anything positive that you and the teacher discussed. But it’s also important not to shy away from problems or challenges. If there are next steps, make sure your child knows what they are.

**10. Follow up.**

If you and the teacher agreed on next steps, follow up in the next week or so to see how things are working out. It’s useful to have check-ins before the next conference. At each check-in, ask for an update. Also, be ready to share what you’ve been doing on any action steps.

Although parent-teacher conferences are short, they’re a good time to learn more about your child’s school experience.

**Questions to ask your child:**

If your child is on the quieter side or is very private, there are ways to ask questions that will open up a conversation instead of shutting one down. Here are some key things to keep in mind.

**1. Ask open-ended questions.** If you ask a question that can be answered with one word — *yes*or *no*— that’s what you’ll get. A one-word answer. Try asking open-ended questions instead.

**Example:** “What was the best thing you did at school today?”

**2. Start with a factual observation.** Kids often have a hard time answering questions that seem to come out of the blue. Making an observation gives your child something to relate to.

**Example:** “I know you have a lot more kids in your class this year. What’s that like?”

**3. Share something about yourself.** When someone tells you about themselves, it’s natural to want to do that in return. Share something with your child and see what you get back.

**Example:** “We always played dodgeball at recess. What do you and your friends like to do?”

**4. Avoid negative questions.** If you think something isn’t going well, your questions may come out in a negative way, with emotion-packed words like *sad* or *mean*. Asking in a positive way lets your child express concerns.

**Example:** “I heard that you sat with new people at lunch today. What did you talk about?”

**List of questions to ask the teacher**

1. What is my child expected to learn this year?
2. How will this be evaluated?
3. What are my child’s strongest and weakest subjects?
4. What are some examples of these strengths and weaknesses?
5. Does my child hand homework in on time?
6. What types of tests and evaluations will my child have to take this year?
7. How are my child’s test-taking skills?
8. Is my child participating in class discussions and activities?
9. How are my child’s social skills?

10.Does my child seem happy at school?

11.Have you noticed any unusual behaviors?

12.Has my child missed any classes other than excused absences?

13.Do you think my child is reaching his or her potential?

14.What can I do at home to help support my child’s academic progress?