

## **MAKING YOUR PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCE MORE EFFECTIVE**

The parent-teacher conference can be an efficient tool with which to communicate with your child's teacher. Below are a few tips on how to make that meeting more productive:

1) Show up: My wife recently retired from teaching fourth grade for 28 years. She often said that the parents with whom she most needed to talk rarely scheduled a conference. The research clearly indicates that children perform best in school when their parents are involved in their children's education.

2) Come with a positive attitude. Parents should recognize that most teachers are hard-working, caring educational professionals who toil for little pay. Most teachers, my wife included, teach because they love kids and love to see kids learn and develop. Complaining, whining or taking your child's word against the teacher during a conference is not going to be productive. Be positive but try to address the issue(s). Teachers are human; you will not do your child much good if you are openly critical of and to their teacher.

3) Make your point. Don't leave the conference without getting to discuss your top concern. Let the teacher run the meeting but ensure in that meeting you have an opportunity to express your primary issue.

4) Speak in concretes. Telling a child that he/she is "not working up to his/her potential" or "he/she is behaving in an immature manner" provides little direction as to what the child needs to improve. During the conference try to speak concretely. The comments should answer the question, "What does it look like?" For example, "Billy must remain in his seat during the entire math period." Or, "Billy will complete his seat work on time." Or "Billy must raise his hand and wait to be called upon before he speaks in class." With goals stated concretely and specifically, the parent, teacher, and the child can clearly understand what is the problem and what is to be done to correct it.

5) Determine what each of you do. Once the goals are concretely defined, the parent and teacher must decide what they will do to achieve the stated objectives. For example: The teacher will praise Billy when he remains in his seat or raises his hand. If Billy fails to complete a piece of homework the teacher, that day, will have Billy redo that work during recess or after school. The parent will reinforce Billy with praise and tokens toward a fun experience when Billy brings home a good paper or test. The parent will consistently reinforce a routine in which Billy completes his homework to earn access to "electronics."

6) Follow up. Set a date to communicate, by phone or email, to discuss your child's progress. If the child needs more help, set another appointment.

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