

Getting the Best For Your Child During Parent-Teacher Interviews



When teachers and parents work together with mutual caring and respect, children achieve more at school and are happier to be there.

What are parent-teacher interviews?

Parent-teacher interviews are a valuable tool to help you and your child's teacher(s) work together for your child's school success. This is a wonderful opportunity for parents to ask questions and gather information that will help you encourage your children to achieve.

Effective and regular two-way communication between home and school through parent-teacher interviews, report cards, agenda books, telephone calls, Individual Education Plan (IEP) conferences, team meetings, and parent involvement in the classroom and school all support this partnership.

Parent-teacher interviews are short face-to-face sessions between you and your child's teacher(s), often only 10-15 minutes, that are formally arranged by the school once or twice a year. They are usually held outside school hours at the school and are arranged by appointment. Sometimes the student is asked to participate.

How are parent-teacher interviews set up?

Schools send a notice home with information on how the school will be scheduling parent-teacher interviews. Interviews may be held in the teacher's classroom, or all interviews may be scheduled to take place in the gym. If the location of the interview is not suitable for the discussion you wish to have, notify your child's teacher so that other arrangements can be made.

If you are not available at the times the interviews are planned, talk to your child's teacher so that other arrangements can be made. When you attend your parent-teacher interview, be considerate of others. Be on time and stay within the allocated time so that others can meet at their scheduled time. If you need more time to discuss a concern, schedule a further meeting with your child's teacher.

Parents, teachers, principals, or special education personnel may also ask to meet at different times during the year depending on what is needed to best support your child.

Why are parent-teacher interviews important?

By attending the interview, you are showing your child that you value their learning and are interested in what they do. You are also showing your child's teacher that you are interested and prepared to participate in and support your child's learning.

This is your chance to find out how your child is getting along in school and what is going on in the classroom and playground. It is also the teacher's chance to learn more about your child and report to you about your child's progress at school.

Parents often remember feelings and fears from their own school days when they come to their children's school. Educators now acknowledge that parents are a primary partner in education and have much to contribute to the discussions and decisions of their child's progress. So come prepared to be a positive part of your child's learning team.

What questions do you have about your child at school?

It is useful to think ahead of specific questions and suggestions on how everyone can best meet your child's needs. By sharing your questions in advance, the teacher can be prepared to offer more time or gather more information.

The interview is a time to ask direct questions about your child's progress based on what you know of their work so far. With this information, you have a better chance to get involved and help your child learn.

This is a good time to find out from your child what he or she enjoys most about school and if they have any concerns. Does your child seem happy about school?

Are you concerned about a particular area of learning such as reading, math, or social skills? How is your child getting along with other children? What are the children working on right now in class? Is there anything the teacher feels your child needs extra help or practice with at home?

Sharing information between home and school?

Consider what special things you would like the teacher to know about your child. Families are the experts on their children and have insight that will help the school better support learning. If you need a translator to fully communicate, arrange this with the school ahead of time.

Does your child have any worries or concerns about school you want to raise? Does your child have any special interests or hobbies? Has anything important happened that may be useful for the teacher to know about? This information must remain confidential.

Helpful Hints

Before the interview:

- Be positive! Remember, both of you are working towards the same goals. Work together on ideas for implementing changes that will help your child succeed.
- Determine what you need from the interview to support your child. Talk about one issue at a time. Focus the conference on the student.
- We care about our children very much and may be emotional, but try to stay calm and focused on what will help the child the most.

During the interview:

- Be clear about what you want out of the interview at the beginning. For example: *"Thank you for meeting with me. I would like to discuss my daughter's progress in math."*
- Refer to your list of questions to make sure you haven't left anything out.
- Don't hesitate to make notes while the teacher is talking so that you will remember what he or she said once you get home.
- Ask the teacher about the classroom rules and discipline, homework procedures, and overall expectations for students.
- Ask about your child's work habits, behaviour, participation, and learning style.
- Highlight your child's strengths. We all have weaknesses, but we build from our strengths. Share knowledge and experience about your child.
- Listen carefully and be open to other points of view. It is difficult to stay focused on your child, the student, if either of you is defensive.
- If the conversation veers off in a direction that is not about your child, be prepared to re-focus it.

"I know that this may be important for you, but I would like to talk about [insert your child's name]."

"I would like to hear about that another time, but can we discuss my [son or daughter]"

After the interview:

- End the interview on a positive note and keep in regular contact with the teacher to follow up on the mutually agreed plan.
- Talk with your child about what was discussed and how you and the teacher will work together at improving the child's learning.
- Stay involved in the life of the school and classroom to better support both your child and others in the school.

Other Resources:

- www.bctf.ca/parents/communication/interviews BCTF Guide to Parent Teacher Interviews
- <http://www.bctf.ca/Parents/communication/index.html> BCTF Guide for Parents on Home and School Communications
- <http://www.startingschool.tas.gov.au/atschool/interview.htm> Starting School: A guide for Parents in Tasmania. Parent-teacher interviews.
- http://www.memphischools.k12.tn.us/admin/studentprogs/pla_parent_resources/parent_frames.htm Memphis Guide to Parent Teacher Interviews. (Great checklist!)
- <http://www.mbteach.org/ptmeet.htm> - Manitoba Teachers Society
- Ministry of Education Website
- Learning Disabilities Association, Victoria: *Making Parent Teacher Interviews Work for You*
- Rocky Mountain DPAC Parent Teacher Progress Interviews Brochure
- SD #68 Nanaimo: *Questions for parents to prepare for Parent Teacher Interviews*



To improve public education for all students
by including and supporting parents